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Introduction

This special issue is devoted to modern and contemporary Irish theatre. The editors are delighted to introduce this diverse range of scholarship and one piece of creative writing. The articles deal with work set in different eras and contexts, by writers of varied genders and from distinct cultural and social backgrounds. Further, these texts and performances rely on not just different ways of writing and creating theatre, but rely on dissimilar styles, genres and ideological dispositions. This special issue remains without the anxiety of comprehensiveness and untroubled by the absence of a unifying thematic focus.

Manoel Carlos dos Santos Alves argues for the ways that Oscar Wilde's satirical *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) negotiates between the classical unities (space, time, action) that are found in Aristotle's *Poetics* and Hegel's views on the dramaturgical need for characters to be antagonistic, incompatible and oppositional, based on a "profusion of subjectivities," complicated by internal and external conflicts. Interestingly, there seems to be few traces of Wilde's Irishness in this British-set upper-class comedy. Indeed, Wilde's hugely important play does not provide a template for modern or contemporary Irish theatre set in bourgeois settings. Instead, Irish theatre has been more comfortable in peasant or working-class surroundings, affluent drawing room settings are more noted by their paucity. That said, Wilde's work, read from a Hegelian viewpoint, affords an opportunity to wonder whether characters in Irish theatre are characters innately operating in worlds that can be negotiated, resisted, undermined, or where there are forces that predetermine, invalidate, quarantine, deny, or exclude all possibility of individual or collective action. As Wilde's play astutely and satirically complicates matters; agency is impacted upon by chance, failures prompt success, solidarity is shaped by conniving, and social transgressions incite less freedom and more complicity.

Alexandra Poulain reflects on the meditation of artistic responsibility while asserting the significance of the play *The Player Queen* (1922) to the elaboration of William Butler Yeats's theatrical aesthetics. Produced in the context of the centenary of his award of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Poulain's essay calls attention to the fundamental role that drama played in his work and to this remarkable achievement as a writer. Her analysis is directed towards the importance of paying attention to momentous changes that might happen before the eyes of an artist by reflecting how the poet in the play, Septimus, fails to make himself heard by the townspeople because he is not fulfilling his duty of "translating

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the shapeless chaos of reality into intelligible forms". Poulain also demonstrates that the dynamic of this play drives "a wedge in the patriarchal edifice" through the triumph of the female character who names it. Decima, Septimus's wife, impersonates the real Queen, who escapes fearing the townspeople's urge for revolution. The Player Queen not only acquires a position of leadership and influence but also manages to halt the popular insurrection and uses this new role to rid herself of Septimus. This compelling examination pays close attention to the violence that affects all the interactions of this farce and how the "Biblically-sanctioned misogyny" of the medieval world is depicted in the violent episodes perpetrated against women. Through the lenses of gender politics, Poulain argues that by allowing the Player Queen to ascend to power and neutralise her abusive husband, the play does not dismantle the patriarchal system but manages to show how it could be cracked.

Salomé Paul's article articulates the obligation and necessity to reach back to the past, specifically that of Greek theatre, by way of understanding some of the later works of Marina Carr. Paul applies Fiona Macintosh's notion of "epic tragedy" in relation to Carr's responses to and interrogations of Greek drama, and the myths and politics that substantiate these writings. Reflections by Paul consider the diptych *Hecuba* (2015) and *Girl on an Altar* (2022), the former, which is reliant on Euripides' *Hecuba,* while the latter is a response to Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. The essay also explains how Carr's 2021 play *iGirl* was prompted in part by Carr's earlier experimental work on *Phaedra Backwards* (2011). Accordingly, in Carr's work notions of plot are contested by both a "new form of dramatic speech and dramatization of a narrative." Carr's *Hecuba* is seen as a challenge to the traditional demonisation of Hecuba due to misogyny and the character's breaching of submissive gender norms. As significantly, the analysis of *Girl on an Altar* argues for Carr's need to reach beyond Ireland and to interrogate the "pillar myths of the Western identity by furthering the epicisation of tragedy". Carr's contemporary dramaturgy is very much intertextual, interculturally diverse and fundamentally interrogative. The essay argues that Carr's process of "epicisation" of tragedy –with a degree of indebtedness to Brecht and Shakespeare– is very much a contestation of Aristotle's distinctions between the epic and tragic.

Rachel Fehily's radio play *Grieving Time* is a heartfelt response to the loss of a life partner and family member, just prior to and at the start of the coronavirus global pandemic. The radio play was broadcast by RTÉ (Ireland's National Television and Radio Broadcaster). Grief troubles the play in various ways, as life goes on in the face of death and loss; day-to-day tasks need doing, children grow into young adults, and simple walks in the park with a dog offer a consolation of sorts. Movement in a public space also provides for moments of encounter and reflection. The coronavirus brought death to many globally,

and lockdowns generated much social isolation and resistance. However, an inability to be together with loved ones while they passed away remains a lingering distress for many people, and it was not just a feature of Ireland's lockdowns, but something experienced the world over. There is no good age to die. The writer re-encounters her own grief and loss and gains a degree of distance by having a male character serve as the focus of her drama.

Wei H Kao looks at Frank McGuinness's *Baglady* (1985), which is one of the many monologues written by Irish male and female playwrights over the last 50 years. At one point in the 1990s it seemed as if the Irish playwriting tradition was becoming over reliant on the monologue form, but that is no longer the case. *Baglady* features sexual abuse, child murder, homelessness, gendered violence, the absence of familial and communal support, shame and silence. McGuinness's female character must self-reconcile and embrace her fragility; agency is disclosure and not silence; recovery is about finding self-assurance in the fragments of a memoried past that can be named. This work was first performed in 1985, long before the major awarenesses and disclosures about sexual abuse circulated in the public realm. McGuinness's play is a reminder that activism is not a recent activity amongst theatre artists.

Lisa Fitzpatrick's essay looks at issues of citizenship and gender silencing in a post-Conflict Northern Ireland through the lens of two productions, Vittoria Cafolla's *The Shedding of Skin* (2021) and Rosemary Jenkinson's *Silent Trade* (2023). Both works were directed by Paula McFetridge, Kabosh's Artistic Director. Fitzpatrick identifies two strands to the company's work: "Troubles" and post-conflict writing in relation to violence, and another whose focus is on "LGBTQIAP+ rights, asylum, poverty". Companies like Kabosh facilitate cross-community awarenesses, diversity, and inclusion, accommodating a multiplicity of histories, and endeavour to move beyond a two-community mode of analysis. In both plays, Fitzpatrick identifies a "resistance to neoliberal narratives of peace". A focus on sexual assault and gender-based violence against women and girls and on the trafficking of those not born in Northern Ireland features in Jenkinson's *Silent Trade*. Local and non-local citizens are coerced into prostitution by traffickers, moneylenders and criminals, some of whom are former paramilitaries. Yet, it is a middle-class family that threatens Precious with exposure, prison, deportation, and harm to her the family members back in Nigeria. She is exchanged between trafficker and pimp, extending the trade of woman within the patriarchal economy. However, Precious remains resilient and friendship (solidarity) keeps her spirits up. And while silencing is regarded as an oppressive strategy, Precious variously challenges attempts to keep her invisible.

Cafolla's work is seen by Fitzpatrick as being "constructed of women's testimonies of war, gathered from documentary sources, play texts, novels, and newspaper reports.

The Furies recount snippets, sharing horrors, sometimes laughing as they do so". Rape as a weapon of war is not just local but overlaps with international and historic contexts. The play foregrounds misogyny, gender violence, silencing, and marginalization, which again are countered by challenges, articulacy and resistance to patriarchal and institutional norms. Such defiance is not just consistent with women's dramaturgical practices across the island more generally, but also have many commonalities with women's writing globally, in the face of intersectional inequalities. Fitzpatrick rightly articulates how "Irish Studies has been concerned with previously silenced histories of the Magdalene Laundries, the Mother and Baby Homes, the systemic abuse of children by members of religious orders; rape and sexual violence in the War of Independence, the Civil War, and the conflict in Northern Ireland".

Helena Young analyses Brokentalkers Theatre Company's production of *Woman Undone* (2018), co-written by Mary Coughlan and co-Artistic Directors of the company, Feidlim Cannon and Gary Keegan. Partly inspired by Coughlan's autobiography, *Bloody Mary, My Story* (2009), this work re-imagines seminal early-years life-moments of Coughlan, a renowned Irish Blues singer. As with so many other contemporary plays, audiences encounter sexual abuse, trauma, addiction, suicide ideation, mental breakdown and recovery. Traumatic memories are staged non-realistically; Coughlan is not only present onstage as a performer, but also as facilitator, demonstrator and witness, whilst she guides and directs other performers in the shaping of reenactments, with a dancer, Erin O'Reilly, playing Coughlan's younger self. Cross-gender casting complicates Coughlan's re-encountering four male figures from her early life. Moreover, the piece, as Young argues, exemplifies the more collaborative nature of contemporary Irish theatre making, as performers, scenographers, composers, light, costume, sound and animation artists are collectively involved in developmental work. Furthermore, Brokentalkers are inclined to utilise a performance dramaturgy that is inspired by postdramatic theatre and serves as a challenge to the conventional heavily text-based traditions of Irish theatre. Today, many theatre companies are collectively creating theatre that is not just about contextual engagement but functions as telling and self-conscious activism.

Maha Alatawi's essay looks at two very different plays by Conor McPherson, *The Night Alive* (2013), set in contemporary Dublin, and *Girl from the North Country* (2017), located in Deluth, Minnesota, United States, in 1934. As asserted in the article, the inclusion of music and song in plays by Sean O'Casey, Tom Murphy, Deirdre Kinahan, Brian Friel, Marina Carr and Mark O'Rowe is an essential component to the Irish tradition of writing. Reflecting on the multiple inclusions of songs by Marvin Gaye, Father John Misty, Talk Talk and Villagers in *The Night Alive,* the essay argues how music

not just influences audiences' understandings of and responses to characters and their circumstances, but also defines the nature of the spaces in which they exist and shapes an understanding of time. Considerations of space in McPherson's writing, and within the Irish tradition of writing more broadly, allow issues of belonging, ownership, shelter, sanctuary and eviction to surface. *Girl from the North Country* is inspired by Bob Dylan's music back catalogue, and the initial project was prompted by an invitation from Dylan's record label to McPherson, wondering if he could write something in response to Dylan's music. McPherson's play transports Dylan's songs back to a time before they were first written and recorded. Such music generates mood, sentiment, joy and dissonance. *The Night Alive* is set during the post-Celtic Tiger period of austerity that ran from 2008 to 2015. Such austerity was of course very different to America's Great Depression from the late 1920s and throughout much of the 1930s. Both plays exemplify an Irish tradition of writing which is more comfortable writing from a position of lack rather than plenty, poverty rather than opportunity.

Zixin Huang's essay demonstrates differences between the monologue format and solo performance through the analysis of *Silent* (2011) by Pat Kinevane and Panti's (Rory O'Neill's) *Woman in Progress* (2009). Kinevane has a long and successful history of writing and performing in work directed by Jim Culleton, Artistic Director of Fishamble: The New Play Company. Theirs is a different type of collaborative process to that of Brokentalkers but is nonetheless driven by the awareness of scripts undergoing a long developmental process. *Silent* exposes homophobia, guilt, failures of families to protect or accept differences, and the inability of a health service to deal with the marginalised, particularly the homeless, many of whom have addictions and untreated trauma. Panti's reflections on her own life combines humour, self-evaluation and self-acceptance, defying and overcoming the homophobia that Tino's brother, Pearse in *Silent*, could not achieve. Solo performance, in contrast to monological forms of theatre, or at least monologues as generally performed in Irish theatre, which are more about a low-key form of delivery with the emphasis on storytelling, whereas solo performance relies far more on a heightened sense of theatricality. In addition, often solo performance offers an amplified sense of presence and gives visibility to marginalised experiences, by way of exposing inequality and discriminations associated with class, race, and sexual orientation. *Silent* and *Woman in Progress* are notable not just for their foregrounding of the performativity of gender, but also how both performers engage with audiences by way of shattering the illusion of the fourth wall. Interacting with spectators, asking them to say their names out loud, surveying how many may have had mental health issues in Kinevane's piece, or Panti asking a spectator to read aloud a letter she wants to share with

her younger self, Rory. As Huang argues, with both *Silent* and *Woman and Progress* there are multiple ways of undermining heteronormativity and hegemonic practices. Panti is not just a writer/performer, she is also a very astute and media savvy public advocate, particularly in her public-facing role in the Marriage Equality referendum (2015) and in promoting of LGBTQIA+ rights more broadly.

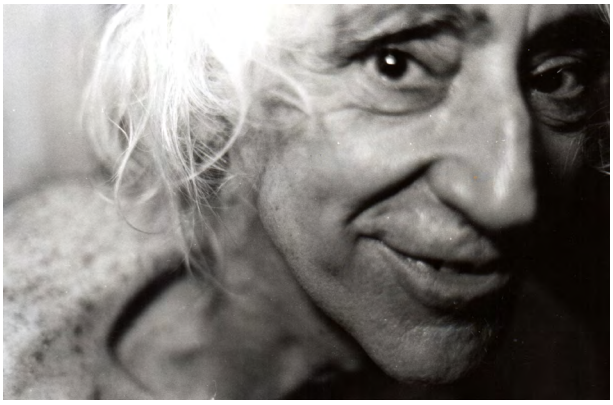
Critical responses to older canonical writers like George Bernard Shaw (as well as Wilde and Yeats) are not just about unearthing the ongoing relevance of such writers to contemporary cultures, and not just about re-engaging with the work with contemporary lenses and awarenesses but are as much about articulating what remains visionary and exemplary about work clearly shaped by a different time period. This is particularly pertinent for a writer like Shaw, who was born and reared in Ireland, who engaged a great deal with Irish culture and politics, but whose international reputation is not fundamentally coupled to the island of his birth. Justine Zapin unpicks *The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman,* the penultimate play of Shaw's five-part play-cycle *Back to Methuselah* (1921), a work that asks specific questions about identity, religion, nationalism and colonialism, territory covered in Shaw's other plays, *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) and *O'Flaherty V.C.: A Recruiting Pamphlet* (1915). Of course, as Zapin notes, landscape in its theatricalization in Irish theatre is invariably political. And just as scholarship more broadly has evolved to reflect on the significance of space, Shaw's work offers something dynamic, using many of the old associations with place and then reconstituting them. Unlike the majority of Irish plays, which are more likely to be set in the past, Shaw's play imagines an absurdist, utopian future in 3000 A.D, where political, national, religious, gender and class distinctions are no longer relevant. Only age distinguishes in complex, hierarchical ways. If Marina Carr's work takes us to Greek precedents, Shaw propels his audiences long into the future. There is something liberating and unsettling in thinking along those lines.

In the section "Voices from Brazil", Ronei Vieira Nogueira explores and Robson Corrêa de Camargo the convergence of Samuel Beckett's literary works with the imagery of the Brazilian particular *khôra*, the Cerrado, in the state of Goias (Mid-west Brazil), through the performances of Máskara –a group from the Federal University of Goiás. Over their 20-year journey, Máskara has staged five productions based on Beckett's texts, infusing elements from Goiânia's landscape and the vibrant colours of the Cerrado. The piece delves into the reflections of Brazilian director Robson Corrêa de Camargo and philosopher/indigenous leader Ailton Krenak, examining how the unique essence of Beckett's creations resonates within the context of Goiás. By interweaving Beckett's literary and dramatic essence with the cultural context of Goiás, Nogueira contemplates the fertile

ground where the idiosyncrasies of Beckett's work find resonance in this Brazilian setting, illuminating the symbiotic relationship between Beckett's themes, such as the setting of ruins, of silence, of the unspeakable. Máskara's performances shed light on how intricately blended with the Cerrado these elements are to create a unique theatrical experience. The discussion encapsulates the interplay of five performances based on Beckett's writings, they are: *Waiting for Godot*, in two versions (2005 and 2023), *Companhia* (2009), *Quê Onde* (2010), *Curta Beckett* (2014) and *CascandoBeckett: Uma Imagem Como Outra Any* (2016 and 2022). When analysing the use of lighting by Máskara, Nogueira emphasises that Beckett is coloured by elements from the Cerrado such as earth red, blood red, shades of sunset and forest fires, sky blue and cesium blue, ipês and graffiti of all colours, meaning simultaneously, oppression and poetry. Through the lens of Máskara's interpretations, this article showcases the translocation of a Becketian spirit into local imagery, contributing to a "glocal" theatre of divergent cultural landscapes.

Each of the contributions here, articles and creative work, variously dramatize trauma, loss, marginalisation, invisibility, rank, authority, and corruption. If characters face systemic silencing and degradation, denial of rights and responsibilities, there is ample evidence of characters, individually and collectively, coping, comforted by resilience, solidarity and resistance.

The Guest Editors
Eamonn Jordan, Alessandra Rigonato and Michelle Alvarenga



In Memory of
Zé Celso Martinez (1937-2023)

Brazilian playwright, actor and director.
Founder of Teatro Oficina.

Articles

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*The Two-Faced Mirror: The Aristotelian-Hegelian Structure of T*he Importance of Being Earnest *by Oscar Wilde*

O espelho de duas faces: A estrutura aristotélica-hegeliana de A importância de ser prudente *de Oscar Wilde*

Manoel Carlos dos Santos Alves

Abstract: *For centuries, classical Greek drama was considered, by playwrights and theorists alike, the greatest influence on the structure of the dramatic text. One of its main features, for example, was the law of three units. Elaborated by Aristotle, the prescriptions oriented the plays to take place in a single place, within twenty-four hours, and exhibit a continuous plot, with a beginning, middle, and end. However, for thinkers such as Hegel, modern drama needed new approaches. In his writings, the German philosopher postulated that modern drama should exhibit narrative speed, and a certain dynamic quality, aligned with the internal and external conflicts of the characters. This article aims at analyzing the way in which Oscar Wilde's* The Importance of Being Earnest *(1895), balanced both Aristotle and Hegel's views by engendering a modern text with classical roots, while simultaneously embedding a comedy satirizing the customs of English society.*

Keywords: The Importance of Being Earnest; *Oscar Wilde; Drama; Theatre.*

Resumo: *Durante séculos, o teatro grego clássico foi considerado, por dramaturgos e teóricos afins, a principal influência na construção do texto dramático. Uma de suas principais características, por exemplo, tratou da lei das três unidades. Elaboradas por Aristóteles, as prescrições orientavam que as peças se passassem em um único lugar, em um período de vinte quatro horas e exibisse uma trama contínua, com começo, meio e fim. Contudo, para pensadores tal qual Hegel, o teatro moderno, com suas demandas artísticas correntes, necessitava de novas abordagens. Em seus*

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escritos, o filósofo alemão postulou que o drama moderno deveria exibir celeridade narrativa, uma certa qualidade dinâmica, porém, alinhada aos conflitos internos e externos dos personagens. Este artigo objetiva analisar o modo com o qual Oscar Wilde, na peça A Importância de ser Prudente, *equilibrou ambas as visões de Aristóteles e Hegel, engendrando, ao mesmo tempo, um texto moderno com raízes clássicas, bem como uma comédia satirizando os costumes da sociedade inglesa.*

Palavras-Chave: A Importância de ser Prudente*, Oscar Wilde, Texto Dramático; Teatro.*

Introduction

In his foundational work of dramatic theory, *Poetics*, Aristotle established three essential elements—the law of three unities; three rules that would govern Greek plays and influence the dramatic text for centuries. The unities concern time (limiting plays to take place within twenty-four hours), space (being performed in a single scenario), and action (valuing a basic and logical plot, with a beginning, middle, and end). Despite the strict neoclassical interest of seventeenth-century French and Italian productions in Aristotelian precepts, theatrical performances began to be involved with commercial needs, resulting in a shift of thinking regarding Aristotle's unities, in particular those related to time and space, which were reviewed and rethought of as guidelines, rather than rules.

The matter of "action", however, gained more and more relevance in theoretical studies. In *Introdução à dramaturgia* (1988), Renata Pallottini analyzes the positions adopted by academics regarding the unit of action, demonstrating how, gradually, the points of view on the aspect have varied, and expanded, sometimes complementing each other or raising new considerations. One of the items pondered by Pallottini is the distinction between an act and an action. Gestures such as walking or eating should be characterized as an act since they do not have dramatic implications, "a certain moral weight" (7, my translation).[1] Using John Dryden's argument, Pallottini claims that the objective of a true dramatic action resides "first in the intention and last in the execution" (7, my translation).[2] Then, it becomes important to observe the factor of will, of deliberation, on the basis of an action: the character must operate according to his feelings, and those feelings need to be externalized.

Such reflections are aligned with Hegel's perspective, who argues that it is a human desire to see its own actions as a journey "through a conflict of circumstances, passions

and characters, which leads to the last outcome" (Pallottini 8, my translation).[3] Therefore, animosity is essential to the development of the dramatic action, which blossoms due to the existence of a "moral person" (Pallottini 8, my translation),[4] the lucid and willful being. The individual who, consumed by his personal desires, hunts his prey. Thus, there is a need for antagonistic personalities: in modern drama, the core of the dramatic action is the collision of opposing ambitions, of individuals pursuing different and conflicting goals. For this reason, it is possible to argue that the assemblage of dramatic actions, fostered by the clash of dissonant interests, provides the mechanisms leading to the final conflict and, then, to its resolution.

Contrary to the characters found in classical theatre, often exhibiting lackluster qualities and an unimaginative spirit, individuals of the modern drama move according to their intimate issues, not prophecies or omens. Rivalries erupt from interpersonal encounters, from the profusion of subjectivities. The modern character, although dissatisfied with his circumstances, has complexities, and secluded concerns. It is then precisely because of his ambiance that he needs to operate by consulting his own feelings, but these same feelings will often collide with the interests of others.

The collision (of internal and external conflicts) is what Hegel concludes as being "the mediated union of the epic genre and the lyric genre" (Pallottini 13, my translation).[5] Modern drama, according to the German philosopher, demands a conciliation between the physicality and diligence of the epic genre and the profound and introspective motions of the lyric genre. It cannot be lethargic or arid, devoid of tangible outcomes, just as its success through exorbitant events that lack depth and substance would become unfeasible. The course of internal and external movements colliding with each other, continually growing to finally consummate at the end, represents the unity of modern dramatic action.

The element of action, or dramatic poetry, as Hegel (2014) calls it, is related not only to the texture of the dramatic text, but also to the fact that its words, its characters, and dilemmas, will be represented, imbued with life, on stage. The theater (a place of bodily expressions) is characterized, therefore, as an important place for the dramatic action to be developed, as it gives the play the aspect of synchronicity to the events of the plot. Thus, the theatrical site presents itself as a unit that adds to the demanding nature of the men and women aligned with their private goals, and divergent desires. The question regarding ethical behavior, so much present in classical drama and functioning as a beating heart, is overlooked in modern drama, where the idiosyncratic constitution of the characters (their ethos) works as a driving notion. Hence, it becomes possible to affirm that the "problem"

(or drama) to be solved starts from the confluence of feelings, which, articulated in dramatic actions (that is, externalized), provokes displacement, struggle, and confrontation.

However, it is worth noticing how little Hegel talks about a theory of comedy or the items that constitute it. Mark W. Roche, Professor of German Language and Literature, as well as Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, argues in *Hegel's theory of comedy in the context of hegelian and modern reflections on comedy* (2002/2003), that similar to the dramatic character, the character of comedy moves according to his own passions, and "in contrast to the world and the substantial sphere such particularity tends to overlook". The individual's subjectivity in the comedy consults itself in terms of authority, acts through particular considerations, and diverges from the prevailing external morality. In comedy, says Roche, it is possible to find "the central role of contradictions". Roche, author of *Tragedy and Comedy: A Systematic study and a Critique of Hegel* (1998), presents the three types of comedy listed by Hegel: in the first one, the characters and their intentions are exhibited as phlegmatic elements, and the result of their mobilization is shown to be "inherently null". In the second type, the hero nurtures distinct purposes but finds himself unable to act due to his surroundings. In the third model of comedy, the fortuitous meeting presents itself as the agent that stimulating events. In this last classification, Roche argues that "the hero achieves harmony through nature and chance, not consciousness". Roche offers as an example for such plays, where "aims and their accomplishment, inner character, and external circumstances, are placed in comic contrast with one another and then they lead to an equally comic solution", with works such as William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Ludvig Holberg's *Masquerade*.

The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People

Despite presenting itself as a solely modern or classic text, a play can contain elements, glimpses, and reflections of both classic and modern drama. An example of the latter is *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), by Oscar Wilde. The work by the Irish playwright, divided into three acts and taking place in the "present", features two English gentlemen, Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff, who roam through London's social scene without preoccupations, until the day Jack heads into town to propose to Algernon's cousin, Gwendolen Fairfax, in marriage. The problem is that, in the city, Jack is known by another name: Earnest. The young man is forced to admit his double life when, after forgetting his

cigarette case at his friend's house, Algernon reads the following inscription on the object: "From little Cecily with her fondest love to dear Uncle Jack" (270). Jack reveals to Algernon that Cecily is the daughter of the family who adopted him after he was found as a baby in a train station. Under the nickname "Earnest" (the name of the fictional brother he claims to take care of whenever he goes to town), Jack performs countless unthinkable actions in the small community of Hertfordshire. While, listening to this account, Algernon is attracted by Cecily's description; and, moments later, after Jack is refused by Gwendolen's mother, Lady Brackwell, due to the obscure nature of his birth, Algernon, pretending to be Earnest, decides to go to the countryside and seduces Cecily.

During his lifetime, Oscar Wilde wrote plays usually divided into comedies of manner (*The Importance of Being Earnest*; *An Ideal Husband*; *A Woman of No Importance*), tragedies (*Salome*; *Vera; or the nihilists*; *The Duchess of Padua*), and some unfinished works (*A Florentine Tragedy* and *La Sainte Courtisane*). Although, for some critics, he did not present himself as a daring artist, experimenting with form and content, Wilde became known for the sui generis grit of his dialogues: agile, paradoxical, astute; real epigrams. The composition of his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, proved to be challenging for the writer, because, as he explained in a letter addressed to Beatrice Allhusen, his characters "sit in chairs and chatter" (277). In the message, Wilde goes on to complain of his inability to deal with certain descriptions common to the novel genre, given that his own life was "full of talk and no action".

Even though unsatisfied with *Dorian Gray*'s unfolding, his eloquence and articulation, especially in *The Importance of Being Earnest,* gave the Wildean dialogue an athletic edge: not only vigorous, lively, but flexible in its ability to argue, rebut, and contradict itself or a previous dialogue. The confrontation between Jack and Algernon, in the first act, can be interpreted as the beginning of the dramatic progression, due to the fact that Jack's confession has "weight" and, in relation to the following events, advances the plot. Back in the country house in Hertfordshire, Algernon moves with purpose, aware of what he wants to achieve. Lady Brackwell's refusal works as an obstacle colliding with Jack's desire, as well as an expression of the character's inability to accept someone asymmetrical to her social parameters.

At this point, it is necessary to bring light into the working conditions of Wilde who, in addition to managing his own artistic concerns, also managed, at each night of theatrical exhibition, technical elements, such as art direction and costumes. Wilde, as a public figure, was aware of the commercial element at the time. In the nineteenth century, London's West

End was home to the most famous and sophisticated theatres, like the St. James's Theater, where "in those days people went to see the ... plays *before* ordering a new gown" (Raby 149).

As the theatre became accepted by the wealthy classes, its modes, rites, and aesthetic parameters began to emerge in some theatrical stagings. During the reign of Charles II, the aristocracy was the main sponsor of the arts, deciding in an elusive manner, what was appropriate and in good taste, and with the prosperity of the bourgeoisie (a social layer composed of those enriched through commerce and industry, rather than family lineage), the relationship between class and art, business and entertainment, became increasingly intertwined: "Theatrical companies became organized on an entrepreneurial basis and offered diverse forms of entertaining, including interludes of music and dancing, in order to attract audiences to theatrical performances" (Wallace 127). Therefore, in addition to a theoretical analysis, it is necessary to study the social transformations in which the plays and their creators were inscribed. In fact, for Peter Szondi, in *Teoria do Drama Burguês* (2004), it is not feasible to discuss theoretically the development of bourgeois drama without mentioning the productions. The theory, as in the cases of George Lillo and Denis Diderot, was conceived by the playwrights themselves. For this reason, stresses Szondi (29, my translation), it is possible to notice what he calls a "terminological problem", since there was no exact formula or abstract definitions.

Although he opposed to Georg Lukács's perspective, regarding the prominence of bourgeois drama as directly linked to the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, Szondi does not shut himself to the capitalistic sensibility surrounding (or, sometimes, structuring) the plays.

One example of such sensibility is the conversion of a drama with "public repercussion" to a drama with a "private" one. Let's take Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for instance. The main character's grief can be considered a universal sentiment, however, the situation acquires a grievous veneer when one realizes the effectuation of a coup d'état: by murdering his brother and becoming king, Claudius interrupts and usurps Hamlet's rightful place as ruler of Denmark. Thus, Hamlet (as a son and next in line to the throne) is not the sole victim of his uncle's misdoing: so are his subjects. Claudius's act victimized the kingdom. Although the murder happens to a single family, "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.100). The state. The whole nation.

On the other hand, the protagonists of bourgeois drama ceased to be mythological or royalty figures. The battlefield became the living room of emerging individuals who, like their spectators, performed routines of relative normality. After all, it is a drama that,

among other things, talked about and was set in clubs, country houses, and garden parties. As Szondi demonstrates, the bourgeois drama placed domestic conflicts and private affairs at the center of the dramatic stage. The characters in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, with their ladyship and lordship titles or family inheritances, may not be considered members of the bourgeoisie, but, as in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson*, it is still possible to find aristocrats starring in middle-class dramas.

The lives of people portrayed in plays were no longer linked to those of public figures, as designated by Greek culture. For the Greeks, few notions held as much significance and were so invaluable, as the concept of eternal glory, *kleos aphthiton*. The latter understanding, however, is at odds with the one nourished in the 21st century. Being famous was the privilege, a heroic deed, of existing beyond one's own time and space. The ancient Hellenistic culture believed that having one's life story told and retold, inspiring other young people, and the children of these young people, was a greatness destined for the selected ones. There is no way to ignore, for example, the pedagogical role of Homeric poetry in the education of Greek youth. Their reports, and the heroes they reported on, demonstrated examples of virtues and bravery not limited to a pedestrian sense: that would be the food of young people, of the men, who would give progress to the nation. Such myths should warm the spirit. Assist in the process of citizenship, in the gain and development of critical thinking. Fame, therefore, involves an expanded perception of circumstances, and a metaphysical effort by the hero to be able to have enough dignity to obtain it. To conquer it. Fame was bestowed, or should be in its classical sense, on those worthy of being remembered by history. Inscribed in history.

It is interesting to notice how the duality of fame was something that Oscar Wilde himself went through in his lifetime. Due to his nationality, public behavior, and clothing style, the Irishman was not the dearest figure to the British establishment. However, the long-run staging and success of his plays show him as a significant element in the profitable enterprise that theatre became. As far as 1895, *The Importance of Being Earnest*'s first staging, Wilde had already published what would become his most famous works (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Happy Prince*), but his achievement as a playwright was like no other:

> *An Ideal Husband* had been playing at the Haymarket Theatre since 3 January, and at the same theatre *A Woman of No Importance* had completed a successful run, having opened on 19 April 1895. On 20 February 1892 *Lady Windermere's*

> *Fan* had been the second play staged by [George] Alexander's new management at the St James's Theatre, running until 26 July of that year (Jackson 161).

Going to the theater was characterized as a solemn point of the London social scene, as well as frequenting private clubs and fashionable restaurants. Wilde attended every staging of his plays, making last-minute changes, and shortening or cutting acts. Following this line of thought, it is possible to consider, in the same way, the influence of the public on the plots. Even in works with a comic bias, it was common for Wilde to insert elements with a dramatic aspect (a woman who abandoned her family, in Lady *Windermere's Fan;* a blackmail capable of destroying the characters' lives, in *An Ideal Husband;* a lost child, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*), without never going so far as to leave those who watched with some feeling of outrage.

Wilde, after all, reflected and commented on the current English society, from the perspective of a playwright, an artist, as well as that of an Irishman. Although his clothes and even his diction, his eloquence, had an English ringing, his parents, Sir William Wilde and Lady Jane Wilde, did not hide their nationalist and anti-colonial principles inside public and private spheres. Sir Wilde, a surgeon, created what would later become the Eye and Ear Hospital in Dublin, while also carrying out anthropological investigations, making an unprecedented discovery of a group of aquatic marine mammals. Ellmann reports that when treating low-class people, instead of fees he collected "superstitions, legends, cures, and charms that might have been lost" (10). His writings, edited by Lady Wilde after her husband's death, had among its readers and supporters the poet and playwright W.B. Yeats, one of the most important figures of the Irish Literary Renaissance. Lady Wilde, also known as Speranza, displayed herself as an artist of "inflammatory" poetry. She was the poetess who, on the verge of revolution, as Ireland was increasingly destitute of material and moral nourishment, had found in art her instrument of protest, shouting that "the long pending war with England has actually commenced" (10).

It is an interesting act to think about the possibility of reading Wilde's *corpus* – with its veiled criticisms and categorical mockery – from an anti-imperialist perspective. Wilde (re)creates in his dramatic works a particular cosmos, as complex in its moral and social values, in the organization and functioning of its codes, as in the tight bodices and extravagant crinolines, granting volume to the dresses.

It is a world (or a fraction of it) made up of schemes and artificialities presented in moments like the second act of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where, after Algernon asks Cecily's hand in marriage, pretending to be Earnest, Gwendolen, who had escaped

from her mother's control, emerges to marry Jack, the man who introduced himself as Earnest. The two young women then talk about their respective suitors. Before concluding that it could be the same person, they emphasize their infatuation with the name "Earnest", for the way in which it conveys elegance and seriousness. Both confess their uncertainty in loving any man without the same sophisticated tone. The interaction denounces the nature of a group that prioritizes the elite, and everything connected (or possible to be connected) to it. Peter Raby states that

> There is something Chekhovian in this study of England, which exposes the immorality and hypocrisy, and the immense self-satisfaction, of the English ruling classes, and which yet contrives to show glimpses of the charm and elegance, the allure, of a way of life which has no future (154).

The second act, taking place entirely in the garden of the country house, concludes with the confrontation between the young women, and with the arrival of Jack and Algernon, who individually sought ways to change their names to "Earnest". Gwendolen and Cecily demand to know the whereabouts of the real Earnest, resulting in Jack admitting that his brother never existed and during all that time it was a ruse to cover up the dual nature of his behavior. The couples then separate.

The third and final act, taking place in the living room, focuses on the resolution of the conflict. The men explain the nature of their actions; they acted on the impulse of love. As the progression of their responses appears to reassure the women, a servant announces the arrival of Lady Bracknell. She had discovered her daughter's location after bribing one of the maids in London. Being informed, again, of the union between Jack and Gwendolen, the matriarch does not accept it. Algernon then reveals his matrimonial bond to Cecily, resulting in an interrogation by Lady Bracknell, and leading her to learn about the young woman's inheritance. Furious, Jack, as Cecily's guardian, forbids the engagement, refusing to consent to the marriage. Lady Bracknell, trying to bypass the situation, argues that the match can be effected at Cecily's age of majority, but Jack points out that, under the terms of her grandfather's will, she does not come of age until she is thirty-five. Lady Bracknell asks him to reconsider the matter, which he admits to doing only if his betrothal to Gwendolen is accepted. She refuses. About to leave the house, taking her daughter with her, she stops. The mention of Miss Prim, Jack's governess, disconcerts Lady Bracknell, who recognizes in her the servant who, twenty-eight years before, disappeared with the baby of her sister, Algernon's mother. Miss Prim confesses. She admits to the loss of the

child at a train station. Jack, perplexed by the revelations, hurries offstage, returning with the exact basket described by the housekeeper, the same container where he was found by Cecily's father. Therefore, he is the missing brother of Algernon, the boy whom their parents named "Earnest."

As the play progresses, it becomes more and more interesting to observe the way in which Wilde twists familiar events into a dramatic axis. *The Importance of Being Earnest* displays critical circumstances, which in the hands of a melodramatic artist, would end in tragedy. Wilde understands the dynamic soul of modern drama. He focuses on the route in which the collision of wills, chained by the actions of the characters, raises tensions, drives events, and causes reactions and more reactions until reaching the end. In a way, the dramatic structure of *Earnest* is similar, but not equal, to the one elaborated by William Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet.* The play, divided into five acts, starts resembling a comedy, which is evidenced by the behavior of characters such as Mercutio and the Nurse. Later, with Mercutio's death, a turning point occurs, and the plot is ruthlessly driven towards a tragedy. Wilde, despite incorporating elements of Shakespearean comedy (misplaced identities, lovers separated by authority figures), refuses to penalize his characters with the same destiny.

Unfolding within a brief period (twenty-four hours) and economical use of spaces (Algernon's living room in London; the garden of Jack's country house and its living room), the dramatic action in *The Importance of Being Earnest* springs from the characters' personal desires that, externalized, diverge with other desires causing conflicts: Jack and Gwendolen long for marriage, but are separated by Lady Bracknell. Algernon, presenting himself under another name and therefore as another person, asks Cecily to marry him. Thus, the young ladies believe they are engaged to the same man. In this web of deception, all the characters eventually meet and the truth is revealed.

The dramatic unit, therefore, has from beginning to end, a conflict, climax, and a conclusion. Comparing the progress of the ideal dramatic text to the movements of an animal, Aristotle had in mind an organic forwardness that, through dialogues and actions, could lead the plot to a neat conclusion. It is also possible to perceive, in the third act, the presence of what Hegel entitles a "great dramatic collision". As the characters become entangled in the outcome of their own actions, they illustrate Hegel's argument summarizing the drama as a kind of intercommunication, the miscellany of events propelling the plot. At the intersection of information and parallel demeanors, the fabric comprising the network of intrigues thickens and, in turn, the development of the dramatic unit becomes more evident. The clash between Jack and Lady Bracknell

happens as both start from different but legitimate positions. Jack, in love, seeks to marry Gwendolen. She, experienced in the serpentine lanes of society, senses the danger in letting her daughter marry a man of obscure origins. Arising from justifiable points of view, Jack and Lady Bracknell try, in their particular way, to defend their own actions. In this collision of interests, not only different but actually colliding with each other, is what Pallottini named the "principle of conflict." Here, one can see the element of will in the dramatic action that ends up driving Algernon's trip to Hertfordshire, as well as the meeting, in the same place, between Cecily and Gwendolen. The lively nature of each character is what impels them to defend themselves and attack the reasons of the other. The actions and dialogues, therefore, are in harmony with the Hegelian view of the characters' actions as an external expression of their internal desires.

Conclusion

When looking at the grand structure of English drama, one notices the way in which Victorian theater displays idiosyncratic characteristics, especially in its *fin-de-siècle* productions. The art of dramatists such as George Bernard Shaw and even the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen (whom Oscar Wilde had revealed to have watched some of his plays) was concerned with social problems and contradictions. In *A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama, 1850-1900* (1946), Allardyce Nicoll reveals the public's growing interest in theater houses. Opera was no longer the only valid entertainment for the wealthy classes, and theatrical performances returned to popularity after being rejected during the monarchical restoration in the eighteenth century. The massive interest in theatre can be read as the result of the high level of commercial power of the British Empire, and, with the height of the Industrial Revolution, the sociocultural transformation that gave the era the designation of *Pax Britannica*. The progressive phase of the English nation, which restored its colonialist system and the prestige of the bourgeois class, was also marked by the rigidity of policies regarding the moral and ethical values of society.

Wilde's triumph is something by itself worth noticing. One should remember that in the act of taking subjects related to good taste and well-living as tools of transcendence, he broke with the religious emphasis that all tangible matters, all physical consumptions, would obstruct the path of spiritual elevation. This notion persisted, especially in Victorian pedagogy, since "the role of the church, regarding the English education in the 19th century, is fundamental; practically all educational institutions were conducted by the church, whether the official . . . or the Protestant" (Morais, 55-56, my translation).[7]

Literature, for example, was contemplated as an institution, and not just art or entertainment. During the nineteenth century, the older relative, with a book in hand, would be surrounded by the younger ones, and read a story in which values such as courage and respect served as a basis, and, also, showing the youth the price to pay for misbehaving. Morais states:

> . . . there was a firm belief in the role of education received at home coming from the father and mother, who tried, always with great rigidity and discipline, to lead their children through the difficult path that leads to the acquisition of what they considered the *great virtues*. ... at the time, to educate was to make the child look like an adult (67, my translation).[8]

Such meetings, nourished, especially in male children, a model of behavior. It would be counterproductive to ignore the civic aspect of reading, serving as an incubator of moral values, so that, by transmitting from one generation to another, the social order (and Christian values) could be maintained. Despite advancing technological and industrial inventions, Victorian England also exhibited an extreme attachment to their notion of morality and the fear of its ruin.

Victorian morality became, in the lexicon of later generations, an expression to designate sexual restraint and extreme rigor in the treatment of public and private conduct, aiming at maintaining Puritan values, austerity, and an acute sense of civic duty. In conclusion, Oscar Wilde, who graduated from Trinity and Oxford universities as a unique classicist, picks up the elements of the current drama (social convention, the dynamics of heteronormative relations, the hypocrisy of the bourgeois class, moral and public values, questionable means of acquisition), to create an Aristotelian-Hegelian structure: taking Aristotle's law of three units and Hegel's idea of dramatic action as a clash between internal desires and external circumstances.

Notes

1 "Certa carga moral."

2 "Primeiro na intenção e por último na execução."

3 "Através de um conflito de circunstâncias, paixões e caracteres, que caminha até o desenlace final."

4 "Pessoa moral."

5 "O princípio do conflito."

6 "A união mediatizada do princípio épico e do princípio lírico."

7 "O papel da igreja, no que se refere à educação inglesa do século XIX, é fundamental, praticamente todas instituições de ensino eram conduzidas pela igreja, seja a oficial ... seja a protestante."

8 "... acreditava-se muito no papel da educação recebida no lar através dos exemplos vindos das figuras paterna e materna, que procuravam, sempre com grande rigidez e disciplina, conduzir suas crianças pelo difícil caminho que leva à aquisição do que consideravam as *grandes virtudes*. ... na época em foco, educar era fazer com que a criança parecesse um adulto."

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"A player, a playwright, and the most famous poet in the world": Highs and Lows in The Player Queen

"Um jogador, um dramaturgo e o poeta mais famoso do mundo": Altos e baixos em The Player Queen

Alexandra Poulain

Abstract: *Yeats published* The Player Queen*, a play he had struggled with for more than a decade, in 1922, just a year before he was awarded the Nobel Prize. This article argues that despite its appearance of complete wackiness,* The Player Queen *constitutes a significant landmark in Yeats's elaboration of his own theatrical aesthetics, as well as a meditation on artistic responsibility—or failure thereof. Why does the poet Septimus fail to communicate his beautiful vision of the Unicorn to anyone, and why does no-one in the play listen to him? On the one hand, the citizens in the play are figures of the incompetent spectators, reminiscent of the audience who rejected Synge at the Abbey. On the other hand, Septimus himself is an incompetent spectator, who is so engrossed in his poetic vision that he fails to pay attention to the momentous change that is really going on before his eyes, although this concerns his own wife Decima, the eponymous Player Queen who comes to replace the real queen. Septimus fails to make himself heard because he is not paying attention to what really matters, he is not fulfilling his duty, as a playwright and a poet, of translating the shapeless chaos of reality into intelligible forms.*

Keywords: *W.B. Yeats; Drama; Nobel Prize;* The Player Queen*; Gender Politics; Responsibility; Farce; Dramaturgy.*

Resumo: *Yeats publicou* The Player Queen*, uma peça com a qual se debateu durante mais de uma década, em 1922, apenas um ano antes de lhe ser atribuído o Prêmio Nobel. Este artigo argumenta que, apesar da sua aparência de completa loucura,* The Player Queen *constitui um marco significativo na elaboração por Yeats da sua própria estética teatral, bem como uma meditação sobre a responsabilidade artística*

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– ou o seu fracasso. Por que o poeta Septimus não consegue comunicar sua bela visão do Unicórnio a ninguém, e por que ninguém na peça o ouve? Por um lado, os cidadãos da peça são figuras de espectadores incompetentes, que lembram o público que rejeitou Synge na Abadia. Por outro lado, o próprio Septimus é um espectador incompetente, que está tão absorto em sua visão poética que não consegue prestar atenção à importante mudança que está realmente ocorrendo diante de seus olhos, embora isso diga respeito à sua própria esposa Decima, a Rainha Jogadora que vem para substituir a verdadeira rainha. Septimus não consegue se fazer ouvir porque não está prestando atenção ao que realmente importa, não está cumprindo seu dever, como dramaturgo e poeta, de traduzir o caos sem forma da realidade em formas inteligíveis.

Palavras-chave: *W.B. Yeats; Drama; Prêmio Nobel; The Player Queen; Políticas de gênero; Responsabilidade; Farsa; Dramaturgia.*

When W.B. Yeats delivered his acceptance speech after being awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1923, he surprised everyone by telling the committee in Stockholm, "Perhaps the English committees would never have sent you my name if I had written no plays" (Yeats 1923)– a suggestion that continues to cause sustained hilarity among the many scholars and critics who tend to dismiss his work for the stage as theatrically inept, incomprehensible and excruciatingly tedious. (The slightly more nuanced but no less condescending variation on this view is that the plays, especially those written in verse, contain some magnificent poetry, despite being terminally unstageable). Yeats was in fact awarded the Prize, in the words of the Nobel Committee, "for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation."[1] With a characteristic mixture of arrogance and self-irony, he seems to have anticipated and playfully sabotaged this consecration in *The Player Queen*, a play on which he had toiled for a decade between 1908 and 1917 and which had finally been published in November 1922, just a year before he received the news that he had been awarded the Nobel and, finding the wine cellar empty, celebrated with George by cooking sausages (Yeats 1999, 392-93). In the first scene of *The Player Queen*, Septimus, who has just arrived in an unnamed small town with a company of actors, introduces himself to the locals as he roams the streets in a drunken stupor at dawn: "I am Septimus, a player, a playwright, and the most famous poet in the world." This self-description briefly elevates him to the heights of success and glory, but he immediately comes crashing down when Second Man responds: "That name, sir, is unknown to me"

(Yeats 2001, 340). Not only has no-one in town ever heard of Septimus, but in the course of the few hours in which the frantic events of the play are condensed, he is at best ignored, at worst repeatedly and more or less violently silenced, and eventually expelled out of the city and kingdom. While Septimus's descent into anonymity continues throughout the play, it is contrasted with the steady elevation of his wife Decima, who rises from Player Queen to real Queen. Despite its appearance of utter wackiness, I argue that *The Player Queen* constitutes a significant landmark in Yeats's elaboration of his own theatrical aesthetics, as well as a meditation on artistic responsibility –or failure thereof. Why is it, I ask, that no-one pays any attention to Septimus? Why is he treated as a complete nonentity, and why does he fail to communicate his beautiful vision of the Unicorn to anyone? On the one hand, the citizens in the play are figures of the incompetent spectators; they are the obtuse, vulgar audience who rejected Synge at the Abbey, the philistines who "fumble in a greasy till" and fail to receive Septimus's otherworldly vision because their imagination won't stretch beyond the limits of the known and familiar. However, I also argue that Septimus himself is an incompetent spectator, that he is so engrossed in his poetic vision that he fails to pay attention to the momentous change that is really going on before his eyes, although this concerns his own wife Decima, the eponymous Player Queen who comes to replace the real queen. Septimus fails to make himself heard, I suggest, because he is not paying attention to what really matters, he is not fulfilling his duty, as a playwright and a poet, of translating the shapeless chaos of reality into intelligible forms.

Yeats started work on *The Player Queen* in 1908, at a time when he was beginning to feel disillusioned with the Abbey and estranged from the Dublin audience who had given such a poor show of themselves a year before during the *Playboy* riots. As Noreen Doody points out in her study of *The Influence of Oscar Wilde on WBY*, Yeats was then reading Wilde's *De Profundis* as well as his essays, and was much impressed with Wilde's emphasis on "the power of image and the necessity for self-creation" (Doody 112) through the assumption of a chosen mask, a notion which also resonated with his reading of Nietzsche. As Yeats began to develop his own doctrine of the mask as anti-self, he initially conceived *The Player Queen* as a tragedy in verse which might express his thought allegorically, but found himself in an impasse. As he wrote in 1922 in his note to the play, "I wasted the best working months of several years in an attempt to write a poetical play where every character became an example of the finding or not finding of what I have called the Antithetical Self; and because passion and not thought makes tragedy, what I made had neither simplicity nor life" (Yeats 2001, 698). After unsuccessfully completing nine scenarios and three extant scripts for the play, he put it aside in frustration in 1910,

but could not quite give it up, and picked it up again in 1915. His own theory of the mask had by then evolved considerably, and he was beginning to theorise it in a highly personal philosophical essay which was to become *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. Again, Yeats struggled with *The Player Queen*, and as Richard Ellmann has revealed, it was Pound who eventually suggested that Yeats rewrite the play as a farce rather than a tragedy (Ellmann 215), finally freeing Yeats from his creative block and allowing him to complete it in a month in 1917.

The Player Queen was first performed by the Stage Society in London in May 1919, with Maire O'Neill (Molly Allgood, *Playboy*'s original Pegeen Mike) playing Decima, the eponymous Player Queen. Yeats had been sceptical of the play's quality but found himself laughing and applauding heartily, amazed that the rest of the audience responded rather less expansively (Yeats 2001, 698.) In December of that year, *The Player Queen* opened at the Abbey Theatre in a staging by Lennox Robinson, who commented that he found it "most delightful, most annoying, and most unsatisfactory", adding that he had "very little idea what the play is about" (qtd. in Becker, 84). In its final version, *The Player Queen* is a wild farce set in a medieval folk-tale atmosphere in a nameless town, over which looms a crenelated royal castle. The play begins as the kingdom is on the verge of an insurrection. The Queen has reigned for seven years but has never shown her face to the people, preferring to live in saintly seclusion and to leave the affairs of the kingdom to the Prime Minister, and the townsfolk no longer trust her. The Prime Minister has invited a company of itinerant players to perform a play about Noah's Ark in the castle in front of all the citizens, thereby hoping to quell the insurrection, but Septimus's wife Decima, who is to play Noah's wife, refuses to don the grotesque mask of an old woman and has gone missing, driving Septimus to drunken despair. While Septimus rants about his "bad wife" and the citizens debate whether or not the Queen is a witch, an Old Beggar appears clamouring for straw to lie upon because, he says, sometimes he is possessed by the spirit of a donkey and when he brays, the current monarch dies and "the crown changes". As the sun rises, the angry mob gathers around the castle and the Queen announces that she is ready for martyrdom, in emulation of her role model Holy Saint Octema. Decima comes out of hiding and Nona, another player in the company, tries to coax her into playing her part. When Decima refuses haughtily, arguing that she was cut out to play the part of a queen, Nona reveals that she is Septimus's lover. As the mob becomes more threatening and all the players escape (most of them dressed as the animals on Noah's Ark), the humiliated Decima stays behind and contemplates suicide, but is interrupted by the Queen who confesses that she is not prepared to suffer martyrdom, after all. Decima offers to take her part and dons the royal dress and crown, while the queen escapes to a convent.

The Prime Minister enters with a Bishop and reveals his plan to marry the Queen and become King in order to pacify the mob. He discovers that Decima has replaced the Queen but marries her anyway. The Old Beggar brays and is condemned to death as an impostor. Decima addresses the mob in queenly fashion and wins them over, and then banishes the unwifed Septimus along with the other players.

Unsurprisingly, many critics have tended to share Robinson's perplexity,[2] or have sought to read the play as a dramatisation of Yeats's theory of mask and of his cyclical conception of history, despite Yeats's confession that this allegorical impulse was precisely what he had to get rid of in order to find a satisfactory shape for the play. Of course, such a reading is at least partly legitimate. Decima, harlot-begotten and, as Nona reveals, "born in a ditch between two towns and wrapped in a sheet that was stolen from a hedge" (Yeats 2001, 352), yearns to play "a great queen", even if this means facing death, and because she dons the mask of her Anti-Self and plays the part to perfection, imitating the image of an ideal Queen, she truly becomes that Queen. Whether or not her access to the throne actually brings about "the end of the Christian era, the coming of a New Dispensation" (358), as Septimus prophesies in terms later systematised in Yeats's apocalyptic doctrine of the succession of primary and antithetical gyres in *A Vision*, is more debatable. Certainly, a new monarch of lowly extraction succeeds to the Queen, but as Daniel Jean points out, the substitution of a simulacrum (the Player Queen) for the real queen is in the interest of preserving social stability, not of revolution: "The apocalyptic Second Coming . . . is replaced in this play by a change imperceptible to the people. The crowd remains unaware of the substitution, verifying the motto that everything must change so that nothing appears to change." (Jean 452) Yet I would argue that the seamless transition from Queen to Player Queen amounts to more than a mere case of "*plus ça change*": a real, momentous change does occur, although Septimus is too absorbed by his own vision of apocalypse to even perceive it, let alone give it adequate expression. This change, which Septimus consistently ignores, concerns Decima's elevation from Player Queen to Queen, and more generally, gender politics.

The play is firmly anchored in the world of farce, and imbued with a violence that affects all interactions in the life of the townsfolk. This is a world of clowns, and when Septimus appears blind drunk and bawling for his fugitive wife, he is rolled over into a street corner, doused with a jugful of water, and knocked out cold by a cantankerous countryman—and we laugh because we know that none of this is really going to hurt him. However, there is another, more sinister kind of violence which suffuses the play. This is a time of generalised frustration and unrest: the people are not happy with their Queen, and

an angry mob is forming to overthrow her. Yet they have no quarrel with the monarchy itself as an institution, and would be happy to have the Prime Minister, who is already ruling the country, ascend the throne. But the Queen fails to play her part properly and refuses to show her face, and therefore is suspected of being a witch. In the first scene, we follow the process by which an outlandish rumour, mediated through multiple, singularly unreliable sources, solidifies into a fact. The Tapster (whose profession it is to provide intoxicating liquor for his peers) testifies that his neighbour, a certain "Strolling Michael", following his goat which is "always going astray" (Yeats 2001, 343), arrived at the castle and glimpsed the Queen "coupling with a great white unicorn" (344). The story resonates with the medieval motif of "the Lady and the Unicorn," as represented in the celebrated late medieval tapestries acquired by the Cluny Museum in Paris in 1882, which Yeats visited in 1897.[3] In the Cluny tapestries, as in later Renaissance and baroque paintings, the unicorn is an emblem of purity and the embrace symbolises the spiritual nature of the virginal Lady, but in the pedestrian world of *The Player Queen* there is no room for spirituality, and the crowd interprets the Tapster's story literally, as an instance of monstrous bestiality, confirming the suspicion that the Queen is indeed a witch. The crowd is divided as to what is to be done, but the most vocal speaker is a Big Countryman who repeatedly points out that he has already strangled a witch with "with [his] own two hands" (342) and readily offers his services to deal with the present case.

The motif of the witch-hunt taps into a medieval imagination in which women who do not conform to a strict set of norms and social expectations and refuse to be controlled by men are constructed as morally perverse and severely punished. Ever since she succeeded her late father on the throne, the timid Queen has declined to act as the Queen and to appear in public; she has also remained single and has failed to produce an heir to the throne, and her religious calling is perhaps to be read as a way of evading patriarchal control. The Prime Minister's solution for the crisis is fairly straightforward: he will marry the Queen and become King himself, using her person and body as a tool to ascertain his personal power. In the meantime, to quell the mob's anger, he has invited Septimus and his players to perform "'The Tragical History of Noah's Deluge' because," he says, "when Noah beats his wife to make her go into the Ark everybody understands, everybody is pleased, everybody recognizes the mulish obstinacy their own wives, sweethearts, sisters" (349). It is striking in this cue that "everybody", repeated three times, does not include women –who are excluded from the body politic and universally assumed to be in need of a sound beating. The chosen play within the play symbolically punishes the Queen for her own "mulish obstinacy", and warns all the women in the kingdom about the violence

that will be unleashed on them should they refuse to board the patriarchal ark. While male profligacy is a given in the play (this is established from the beginning when Septimus encounters two men comparing notes as they emerge from a brothel at dawn), the whole play is steeped in Biblically-sanctioned misogyny. The psychopathic witch-strangling Big Countryman invokes the Scriptures to justify his hobby: "The Bible says, Suffer not a witch to live. Last Candlemas I strangled a witch with my own hands" (342) and the Prime Minister's favourite ejaculation, "Sleep of Adam!", repeatedly makes the point that women are assumed to be responsible for the Fall and everything that subsequently went wrong on earth.

In this context of generalised Church- and State-sanctioned violence against women, Decima's rise to power is remarkable, and signifies at least the possibility of change. Her obsession with the role of the Queen may smack of childish narcissism, yet by the end of the play her performance is so convincing that she conquers the respect of the mob and single-handedly deflects the revolution. She also outwits the Prime Minister in the bargain, who in marrying her confirms her queenly status. Instead of the mystical union of the Virginal Queen and Unicorn which Septimus envisages as the usherer of the New Dispensation, the marriage of Decima and the Prime Minister is a pragmatic matter of realpolitik and Decima's ambiguous final cue, addressed to the players from under the smiling comedic mask of Noah's sister, shows that she is well aware of the risk she has taken in joining her fate to that of a dodgy politician:

> A woman player has left you. Do not mourn her. She was a bad, headstrong, cruel woman, and seeks destruction somewhere and with some man she knows nothing of; such a woman they tell me that this mask would well become, this foolish, smiling face! Come, dance. (368)

This speech, salvaged from earlier tragic versions of the play, reveals both Decima's awareness of the precariousness of her situation at the end of the play (she certainly knows nothing of the man she has just tricked into marriage and may well be heading towards destruction) and her mastery of subtle role-playing. Noah's sister, according to Septimus (who wrote the play), "was drowned because she thought her brother was telling lies" (360) –yet another instance of a woman punished for not complying with the dictates of patriarchy, though it is her foolishness, as imprinted on her mask, rather than her wish for emancipation, which is blamed for her gruesome end. By wearing the mask of the foolish woman, Decima simultaneously hides her real face from the players who could yet

confound her as an impostor, rids herself of Septimus, bidding him a grinning farewell and, in parodying patriarchal discourse which constructs wilful women as "bad, headstrong, cruel" and doomed to "destruction", implicitly warns the Prime Minister that she will not simply submit to patriarchal rule but will fight for her share of power. The final dance evokes the baroque masques which were performed at the court of Elizabeth 1 and ended with a dance in which the queen joined, symbolising her power to ensure harmony and peace in the kingdom. Patriarchy has certainly not been overcome by the end of the play, revolution has been averted, and what change may be wrought by the new royal couple is yet completely undecided, but a wilful woman has come into her own and taken her destiny in her own hands, driving a wedge in the patriarchal edifice.

Although gender politics is at the heart of *The Player Queen*, this aspect has generated relatively little interest among the play's commentators, perhaps because they tend to follow Septimus's cue in looking the other way. Septimus's reaction when he hears the story of the Queen's alleged debauchery is characteristically eccentric:

> First Countryman. And did he say what she was like?
>
> Tapster. He saw more than that. He saw her coupling with a great white unicorn. [*Murmurs among the crowd.*
>
> Second Countryman. I will not have the son of the unicorn to reign over us, although you will tell me he would be no more than half a unicorn.
>
> First Countryman. I'll not go against the people, but I'd let her live if the Prime Minister promised to rout her out of bed in the morning and to set a guard to drive off the unicorn.
>
> The Big Countryman. I have strangled an old witch with these two hands, and today, I will strangle a young witch.
>
> Septimus [*who has slowly got up and climbed up on to the mounting-stone which the Tapster has left*]: Did I hear somebody say that the Unicorn is not chaste? It is a most noble beast, a most religious beast. It has a milk-white skin and a milk-white horn, and milk-white hooves, but a mild blue eye, and it dances in the sun. I will have no-one speak against it, not while I am still upon the earth. (344)

While the people are busy debating (with farcical ineptitude) the pressing matter of the Queen's fate and of the kingdom's future, Septimus steps in like a knight in shining armour to defend the honour—not of the slandered queen, but of the Unicorn. From this moment to the end of the play, Septimus becomes engrossed in his own vision of the

Unicorn, which to him (but to him only) is a symbol of beauty and chastity, such as must unite with a mortal woman to engender the New Dispensation. It is at this point that the play poses a serious challenge to the audience. In an otherwise brilliant reading of the play, William Becker claims that the esoteric subtext of the play is accessible to an uninitiated audience, provided we are willing to listen to Septimus: the play, he insists, "provides its own context of thought within which the action may be seen as fully comprehensible. The only demands made are a certain alertness and a willingness to participate" (Becker 98). I find this claim disingenuous and am sceptical of the capacity (or indeed willingness) of an audience completely unacquainted with Yeats's arcane thought to fully engage with, let alone make sense of, Septimus's prophetic rants such as:

> Septimus: Gather about me, for I announce the end of the Christian Era, the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn; but alas, he is chaste, he hesitates, he hesitates.
>
> Stage Manager: This is not a time for making up speeches for your new play.
>
> Septimus: His unborn children are but images; we merely play with images. (*CW2*: 358)

On the contrary, I would argue that Yeats fully anticipates the audience's failure to understand what Septimus is talking about, and that this failure – which we may rephrase more accurately as Septimus's failure to make himself understood – is at the core of the play's comic DNA. This failure is mediated by the response of the onstage audience – all the characters who interact with Septimus and can't make head or tail of what he is talking about. There is in fact not a single moment when another character actually listens to Septimus and engages with his vision. Certainly, there is an affinity between Septimus's rants about the Unicorn and Yeats's own apocalyptic vision. My contention, however, is that the play is not so much a staging of, or even a mockery of, Yeats's arcane philosophy, as a meditation about the gap between the artist's vision and the public's readiness to receive it.

In "Ego Dominus Tuus", the dialogical poem that serves as an introduction to *Per Amica*, the idealistic "Ille" gives a poignant description of the artist's existential solitude:

> The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours,
> The sentimentalist himself; while art
> Is but a vision of reality.
> What portion in the world can the artist have

> Who has awakened from the common dream
> But dissipation and despair? (*Yeats 1994*, 3)

The passage taps into the classic imagery of the cave allegory in Plato's *Republic* or the Veil of Maya in Hindu philosophy: ordinary people have access only to the "common dream" of illusion, while "reality" lies beyond, accessible only through a transcendent "vision." Yet the artist who accesses this "vision of reality" will likely not be heard and is doomed to lifelong "dissipation and despair": the poem endows the figure of the artist with a tragic aura, and implicitly suggests that in a world ensconced in materialism his voice can never be heard, or his vision shared. In keeping with the romantic tradition, the trope of poetic failure paradoxically serves to magnify the figure of the poet, and to disparage his philistine contemporaries. In *The Player Queen*, however, similar issues are broached in more ambiguous terms. Septimus is the comic version of the *poète maudit*, who fails to share his vision because those he addresses are simply too prosaic to care. His utter redundancy is signified by the fact that there is another apocalyptic prophet in the play: the enigmatic Old Beggar who is feared as much as Septimus is ignored. A grotesque parody of Septimus, the Old Beggar does not put his vision into words but brays like a donkey, a mode of expression clearly more accessible to the crowd than Septimus's complicated flights of rhetoric. While the Old Beggar's prophecy concerns only the affairs of the state, Septimus's vision encompasses a much more momentous event, the demise of one civilisation and the emergence of another, but whether or not this will happen remains beyond the scope of the play: the point is that no-one listens.

This is intimated implicitly in the intriguing dialogue between the two "Old Men" who appear at the beginning and end of the first scene, a clownish duet who reminds me in equal measure of Nagg and Nell, sticking out of their respective dustbins in Beckett's *Endgame*, and of Statler and Waldorf, the two old hecklers in the stage box in the Muppet Show. In proto-Beckettian fashion, the two Old Men appear "*leaning from the upper windows, one on either side of the street*" so that only their respective trunks are visible, and "*wearing grotesque masks*", and they perform a daily ritual of assessing their situation, evaluating each other's ailing bodies in the process: "Can you see the queen's castle? You have better sight than I." "Do you hear anything? You have better hearing than I." (Yeats 2001, 337-38) Evidently this scene must have been an inspiration for the equivalent ritual of mutual auscultation in *Endgame*: "Can you see me?—Hardly. And you?—Hardly . . . Our sight has failed. Can you hear me?—Yes. And you?—Yes. (*Pause*.) Our hearing hasn't failed.—Our what?—Our hearing." (Beckett 99) In *The Player Queen*, the dialogue of

the two Old Men sets the comic tone of the play (with their grotesque masks they gesture towards the *senex iratus* of *comedia dell'arte*) and serves an expository function, giving us basic information about the time and place of the action, but something more important is at stake here. The two Old Men have stepped out of the public arena; they no longer participate in the life of the city, but are mere spectators of the agitation of public affairs which they leave to "the young and the middle-aged" (Yeats 2001, 338). Yet at the close of their first appearance, as action proper is about to start, they leave the stage entirely and commit themselves to darkness again, like jacks-in-the-box, for fear they might be implicated in the violent events which are under way. "We had best pull in our heads", one says, "The world has grown very wicked and there is no knowing what they might do to us or say to us," and the other responds, "Yes, better shut the windows and pretend to be asleep." (339) They reappear very briefly at the end of scene one, once the insurrection has started and the mob has vacated the streets and reached the castle:

> First Old Man. It is all right now. They are all gone. We can have our talk out.
> Second Old Man. The whole Castle is lit by the dawn now, and it will begin to grow brighter in the street.
> First Old Man. It's time for the Tapster's old dog to come down the street.
> Second Old Man. Yesterday he had a bone in his mouth. (348)

The passage makes little sense, except perhaps if we read it as a parable about spectatorship. The two Old Men could have been in the front row while the angry mob assembled and marched towards the Castle, but they have chosen to see nothing of these extraordinary events, and register only the trivial details of daily routine, with its minute, insignificant variations. They would rather remain in the dark, dreaming "the common dream", than take the risk of looking beyond the realm of the known and familiar.

At one level, then, I argue that the two Old Men are figures of the incompetent, reluctant spectator, such as Septimus encounters repeatedly throughout the play. They are the philistine audience who fails to share the artist's vision, condemning him to "despair and dissipation". Yeats was clearly still processing the scathing memory of the *Playboy* riots at the time of writing *The Player Queen*, but the play also paves the way for the dramaturgy of the *Plays for Dancers*, which he started writing in January 1916, as he was still plodding through the later versions of *The Player Queen*. The Noh-inspired dramaturgy of the *Plays for Dancers* rests on the apparition of an otherworldly entity in the everyday world; however, this extraordinary apparition is mediated through a passive figure whose role is to

witness it, to receive the playwright's vision and thus to make it real. In *The Dreaming of the Bones*, for instance, the audience only sees the two ghosts because they appear to the Young Man, who is prepared to receive this vision from the otherworld even though he refuses to sympathise with the ghosts. With the *Plays for Dancers*, Yeats invents an epiphanic theatre, in which something previously unknown and inconceivable is revealed. Crucially, the plays self-reflexively incorporate a figure of the competent spectator, creating the condition for their own viability. With *The Player Queen*, it is as if Yeats had first needed to exorcise his fear of never encountering an audience prepared for the otherworldly vision he had to share, before he realised that such an audience could be created in the plays themselves, as an intrinsic part of his dramaturgy of vision.

However, I would also argue that reading Septimus as a comic transposition of the tragic figure of the *poète maudit* is a bit of an oversimplification. If Septimus fails to share his vision, it is also because he is so wrapped up in his prophetic reverie that *he*, too, fails to see what is actually going on in the world. Like the two Old Men, Septimus sticks to what he thinks he knows (his symbolic conception of the Unicorn) and refuses to attend to the very real change that is happening before his eyes—Decima's emancipation from her role as a muse for Septimus, her transformation into the Queen she always wanted to be, her ambiguous alliance with and deception of the Prime Minister, the ultimate patriarch. Septimus too has been an incompetent spectator to Decima's brilliant performance which has effectively brought about something entirely new in the kingdom, the possibility of somewhat unsettling patriarchal rule and of making space for female desire. Septimus fails to catch the attention of his audience because he fails to pay attention to what is actually going on in the world, preferring to attend to a vision disconnected from earthly affairs—a vision which is, in other words, redundant.

In its glorious wackiness, then, I have argued that *The Player Queen* does a number of things. It stages the transformative journey of one strong woman of lowly extraction who dares to act according to her own desire and makes it to the throne, quietly challenging the Prime Minister and the patriarchal order on which his authority rests in the bargain. It reflects on the conditions of possibility of art and points out that the validity of the artist's vision depends on the public's capacity to receive it, thus anticipating the dramaturgy of the Noh-inspired *Plays for Dancers* which incorporate their own figure of the competent spectator. Finally, it also makes the point forcefully that the artist's vision is redundant if the artist himself is an incompetent spectator, too engrossed in his otherworldly vision to attend to what is going on in the real world. While the fictional poet Septimus is punished for his self-absorption, I am tempted to read Yeats's refusal to let go

of *The Player Queen* until he had finished it (or perhaps the play's refusal to let *him* go) as his way of exorcising the fear of becoming so absorbed with his own budding vision, or *Vision*, that he might become blind to the real world, and irrelevant as a public figure. In its final, farcical incarnation, the play, allowing him to attend both to his vision and to his responsibility as a privileged witness to the affairs of the world, is a decisive step on his way to his consecration in Stockholm.

Notes

1 The Nobel Prize in Literature 1923. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2023. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/summary/ Accessed 28 Nov 2023.

2 Cf. Sumiko Sugiyama, "What is *The Player Queen* All About?", in *Irish Writers and the Theatre*, ed. Masaru Sekine (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1986), 179.

3 W.B. Yeats, letter to Fiona McLeod, undated [12 January 1897?]: "I have just finished a certain speech in 'The Shadowy Waters', my new poem, & have gone to 'The Cafe de Musee du Cluny' to smoke & read the Irish news in the Times." Yeats, *The Collected Letters*.

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From Epic Tragedy to Tragic Epic: Marina Carr's Hecuba, Girl on an Altar, *and* iGirl

Da tragédia épica para a épica trágica: Hecuba, Girl on an Altar e iGirl *de Marina Carr*

Salomé Paul

Abstract: *This article examines the genre of "epic tragedy" in two of the most recent adaptations of Greek tragedy by Marina Carr*, Hecuba *(2015) and* Girl on an Altar (*2022), as well as its reversal to produce a "tragic epic" in* iGirl (2021). *In the* Poetics, *Aristotle establishes a stark distinction between the genres of epic and tragedy. Yet, this distinction has been challenged throughout history in dramatic practices – in Euripides and Shakespeare's tragic plays for instance – and theories – most notably by the emergence of epic theatre coined by Bertolt Brecht. Drawing from all these traditions, this article highlights Carr's process of "epicisation" of tragedy through the implementation of a new form of dramatic speech and dramatisation of a narrative rather than a plot in* Hecuba *and* Girl on an Altar. *These strategies have influenced the creation of* iGirl*, which is a postmodern epic brought on stage through the lens of tragedy.*

Keywords: *Marina Carr; Epic; Tragedy;* **Hecuba***;* Girl on an Altar*;* iGirl.

Resumo: *Este artigo examina o gênero da "tragédia épica" em duas das mais recentes adaptações da tragédia grega por Marina Carr,* Hécuba *(2015) e* Girl on an Altar *(2022), bem como sua inversão para produzir um "épico trágico" em* iGirl *(2021). Na* Poética, *Aristóteles estabelece uma distinção clara entre os gêneros épico e tragédia. No entanto, essa distinção tem sido desafiada ao longo da história em práticas dramáticas – nas peças trágicas de Eurípides e Shakespeare, por exemplo – e teorias – principalmente pelo surgimento do teatro épico cunhado por Bertolt Brecht.*

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Com base em todas essas tradições, este artigo destaca o processo de Carr de "epicização" da tragédia por meio da implementação de uma nova forma de discurso dramático e da dramatização de uma narrativa em vez de um enredo em Hécuba *e* Girl on an Altar. *Essas estratégias influenciaram a criação de iGirl, que é um épico pós-moderno levado ao palco pelas lentes da tragédia.*

Palavras-chave: *Marina Carr; Épico; Tragédia;* Hecuba; Girl on an Altar; iGirl.

Marina Carr has produced an extensive body of work adapting Greek tragedy. The Midlands plays, which propelled her career as one of the leading contemporary Irish playwrights, rely heavily on classical intertextualities. *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998) and *Ariel* (2002) translocate respectively Euripides' *Medea* and the tragic myth of the Atrides in a modern Irish context. Furthermore, the protagonists of *The Mai* (1994) and *Portia Coughlan* (1996) bear significant resemblances with some famous female characters in Greek tragedy: Millie and The Mai appear as Electra-like figures (Chacón 482; Murphy 390), and the character of Portia re-enacts some of the constitutive features of Medea (Murphy 390) and Antigone (Chacón 482). The following play based on a Greek tragedy produced by Carr is *Phaedra Backwards* (2011), which illustrates a new phase in her dramatic work. While the Midlands cycle offers a "misconstructed naturalism" (Jordan 258) as "the myth ... take[s] precedence over the real" (*Ibid.* 245), the new phase of Carr's work seems to focus on "iconic ... figures", mostly women, which include Phaedra and Hecuba (Lonergan 133).

The centrality of the "iconic female figures" does not however constitute a major transformation of Carr's dramatic style since her whole body of work shows a strong interest in the representation of women's positions and situations both in the canon and society.[1] The actual innovations of this new phase concern the construction and dramatisation of the canonical stories that Carr adapts. She uses dramatic strategies developed in the Midlands cycle but goes further in the experimentation to interrogate the influence of the storyteller's identity in the construction and reception of the story. *Phaedra Backwards*, based on Euripides' *Hippolytus*, is the first implementation of that strategy to the adaptation of a Greek tragedy. The temporal "fluidity" (Sihra 260) of *Phaedra Backwards*, which interweaves Phaedra's present with her family's past, echoes the non-chronological construction of *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*. The maze of temporalities[2] positions Phaedra at the centre of the story not only as its protagonist but also as its teller. The

prologue epitomises that dimension as it shows the present through the appearance of the adult character on stage as well as the past through the images of her childhood displayed on a screen. The use of this device shows Carr's first attempt at "epicising"[3] Greek tragedy. In epic theatre, the inclusion of films "effect[s] temporal disjunctions within the dramatic action, resulting in multilayered/multi-perspectival performances" (Macintosh 4). In *Phaedra Backwards*, the screen offers the audience a glimpse at the interiority of Phaedra, thus indicating that her perspective is about to interfere with the canonical version of the myth as she narrates herself into it. Yet, this dimension is explored more clearly and extensively in Carr's following plays based on Greek tragedies, *Hecuba* (2015) and *Girl on an Altar* (2022), as the form of the dramatic speech conveys the "multilayered/multi-perspectival performances" in the play.

Hecuba and *Girl on an Altar* form a diptych. Narratively, the former adapts Euripides' *Hecuba*. Its action is preceded by the events of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and followed by those of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, on which *Girl on an Altar* is based. Formally, Carr shows the characters' "inner feelings as well as [their] external thoughts in ... direct address[es] to the audience" (Sihra 268). Fiona Macintosh has referred to and analysed this experimental form of speech as "epic tragedy" ("Playwright Marina Carr in conversation with Fiona Macintosh"). Yet, there is no in-depth analysis of that concept in *Hecuba* and *Girl on an Altar* to grasp its performability and significance in Carr's body of work. Furthermore, this concept lays the ground to grasp the dramatic strategy of her play, *iGirl* (2021), which does not rely on a single story but interweaves myths and autobiographical elements to elaborate a postmodern tragic epic on death and extinction.

Hecuba: The Foundation of Epic Tragedy

The first lines of *Hecuba* unsettle the audience's expectations regarding dramatic speech. The eponymous character provides a description of the setting in which she stands: "So I'm in the throne room. Surrounded by the limbs, torsos, heads, corpses of my sons. My women trying to dress me, blood between my toes, my sons' blood, six of them, seven of them, eight?" (Carr 2015, 211) The character brings the action to the spectators through her words only as Carr has declared that there "cannot" be "any illustration in this play, it has to be completely on the line" ("Playwright Marina Carr in conversation with Fiona Macintosh"). Yet, as the dramatic action is not enacted but narrated by the characters, Carr breaks the essential distinction between epic and tragedy.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle establishes that both genres are "mimesis of elevated matters", but tragedy relies on "the mode of enactment, not narrative" (Aristotle 47), contrary to epic. However, the line setting the two genres apart is not as rigid as it might seem. Macintosh and Justine McConnell indeed note that "one third of the Homeric epics are in direct speech" (Macintosh and McConnell 4), a feature noticed by Aristotle since he described these works as "combining narrative with direct personation" (Aristotle 34). He does not however consider that combination in tragedy, even though the chorus often narrates myths.[4] Carr has never included this dramatic persona *per se* in her adaptations of Greek tragedies, but she has drawn inspiration from them to coin the form of dramatic speech of *Hecuba* as she considers that "everybody is everybody's else chorus" ("Playwright Marina Carr in conversation with Fiona Macintosh").

In Greek tragedy, the chorus is a collective entity embodied by a group of Athenian citizens. They do not perform any action on stage.[5] Yet, the chorus often concludes the tragedies to reveal their ethical stances as the heroic actions are "the subjects of a debate" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 24). This function appears ostensibly in Carr's epicisation of tragedy in *Hecuba* as the play ends with the eponymous character's daughter Cassandra stating:

> [The Greeks] said many things about [Hecuba] after, that she killed those boys, blinded Polymestor, went mad, howled like a dog along this shore. The Acheans wanted to get their stories down, their myth in stone, their version, with them as the heroes always, noble, fair, merciful. No. They were the wild dogs, the barbarians, the savages who came as guests and left an entire civilisation on its knees and in the process defiled its queen and her memory. (Carr 2015, 259-260)

Yet, this final address shows that it is not the action that is up to debate in the play, but its construction in the canon, which implies that Hecuba has been wrongfully accused of these crimes. The overlap of the two distinctive character types – choral and heroic – of Greek tragedy through Cassandra subverts the mimesis. Not only does she break the fourth wall – like the chorus does in Greek tragedy – but she also steps out of the traditional position of the dramatic character to embrace the status of an "authorial narrator" (Wallace 522) as her conclusive lines bring on stage the playwright's opinion about the dramatisation of the myth by Euripides. During a TEDx talk at DCU, Carr disclosed that she had "never agreed on the verdict on" Hecuba displayed in the classical tragedy, but the Greeks "needed to get certain myths in stone to bolster their sense of themselves and validate their savage conquests" and "it was easy to trash Hecuba" because "she was the enemy" and "a woman"

("That Trojan Queen"). In this regard, Cassandra as a narrator echoes some aspects and purposes of the *Verfremdungseffect* ("the estrangement effect"), which typifies the characters' construction in epic theatre as conceived by Bertolt Brecht. Carr's "response to Euripides" (*Ibid.*) invites the audience to question the ideological tenets in which Western myths are embedded as she implies that the traditional and canonical demonisation of Hecuba is the product of the ancient Greeks' belligerence and misogyny. Despite being created between the archaic and classical periods,[6] the "archetypes of females" displayed in ancient myths are still engrained "in western consciousness", which fuels "the societal need to control and marginalise" women as noted by Carr (Leavy).

In Carr's *Hecuba* like in Greek tragedy, the conclusion is carefully prepared. In classical plays, the action is regularly paused with songs by the chorus. These moments prompt the audience's reflection as they offer comments on the action. The narration of myths fuels these comments "to enlarge . . . [the] vision of human experience, encountered in tragedy ... in claustrophobic confines of time and space" (Gould 411), thus offering a variety of perspectives on the ethical issue at stake in the tragedy. In Carr's *Hecuba*, the multiplication of perspectives stems from the narration of a single action by several characters. This "polyphony . . . challeng[es] . . . the authority of received narratives" (Wang 412) and invites the audience to reconsider the meaning of the action dramatised in Euripides' *Hecuba*. The death of Polyxena epitomises that dimension.

In Euripides' tragedy, the sacrifice celebrates the civilised quality of the Greeks on one hand because, unlike "barbarian peoples", they "hono[ur] those who have died noble deaths, so that Greece may prosper" (Euripides 427), and the submission of women to men on the other hand through Polyxena's willingness to die as she shows "supreme bravery and surpassing nobility" during the murderous ritual (*Ibid.*, 451). This event participates in the construction of Hecuba as a monster. Her action of blinding Polymestor and killing his sons displays excess, which is associated with improper womanhood (Rabinowitz 142) and barbarism, since he is responsible for the murder of only one of her children.

In Carr's *Hecuba*, four characters narrate the sacrifice: the sacrificer, Agamemnon, the sacrificed, Polyxena, the eponymous character, and Odysseus. Polyxena's description of her own gestures highlights her anxiety as her "hands [are] slick with sweat" (Carr 2015, 243). Her death is not brave but "embarrassing" as she discloses her discomfort "to die like this in front of everyone" (*Ibid.*). The three other characters depict the "butchering" of her body, the "blood whistling in her throat" while she "rasp[es]" and "chock[es]" (*Ibid.*, 245). Polyxena's death is not noble but gory. In addition to the physical pain, Carr includes emotional suffering in the scene through Hecuba's speech. While she witnesses her child

dying, Hecuba remembers the day of her birth when "Priam" was "terrified" that she "wouldn't make it or the baby would be harmed", concluding that Polyxena "has come to great harm" (*Ibid.*, 245-246). The horror of the sacrifice is further emphasised by its uselessness as Agamemnon's inner thoughts reveal the theatrics of the ritual. He indeed does not believe that the action will conjure the wind and wonders if the Greek army truly "believe[s] this shit" (*Ibid.*, 241). As the crowd gets "angry" because the wind does not start blowing after the sacrifice, Agamemnon pretends that "the voice of Achilles speaks through" him, which makes "the fuckers . . . quiet" (*Ibid.*, 246). In this regard, the sacrifice of Polyxena is not a celebration of the Greek identity but forecasts the conclusion drawn by Cassandra, according to which "The Acheans . . . were . . . the barbarians" (*Ibid.*, 259).

Besides offering a diversity of perspectives questioning the canonical structure and significance of the myth, the epicisation of tragedy enables the audience's reflection through the characters' critical stance on their own actions. The dramatic speech "switch[es] ... between subjectivity and objectivity" (Macintosh 13) through the overlap of narration and enactment. This places the characters in a situation of "acting as if [they] were spectators of [their] own" actions (*Ibid.*, 11). Euripides' tragedies appear as the ideal source for implementing this feature of epic tragedy. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche indeed blames Euripides for including "a critical distance" in his tragedies, thus producing a "dramatised epic", which would have caused the death of tragedy and yet is used by Carr in her adaptation of *Hecuba* (*Ibid.*). In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche notes that "[t]he actor in [Euripides'] dramatic epic remains at the profoundest level for ever a rhapsode; the consecration of the inner dreaming settles over all his actions so that he is never completely an actor" (Nietzsche 69). A dimension that is fully revealed through the dramatic speech of Carr's *Hecuba* because, besides blending narrative and enactment, it also overlaps "soliloquy and dialogue" (Sihra 268), which enables the dramatisation of the characters' self-reflection, thus preventing their demonisation.

There is no monster in Carr's *Hecuba*. This dimension has been discussed only about the eponymous character's loss of agency contrasting with the source tragedy (Torrance 265; Wallace 523). Hecuba is indeed not responsible for blinding Polymestor and killing his sons, the Greek army is. Subsequently, she does not turn into "a dog with fiery eyes" (Euripides 515), but the Greeks are the "wild dogs" (Carr 2015, 259) who perpetuated a "genocide" (*Ibid.*, 212). Yet, their leader Agamemnon is not demonised. His speeches show self-reflection on his actions as the head of the Greek army as he witnesses the suffering caused to the Trojans by the war and the fall of Troy. The sight of Polyxena's "frail, too thin" half-naked body makes him wonder if they "[h]ave ... been starving"

the Trojans (*Ibid.*, 243). And, as he watches Hecuba crying after her daughter's death, he realises that the army "should've taken her out with Priam" (*Ibid.*, 249) to avoid her further sorrows. These comments manifest Agamemnon's empathy for his enemies on the one hand, and his lack of control over the situation on the other.

Despite being the king of kings, Agamemnon is not omnipotent but is subjected to external forces. Unlike Greek tragedy, fate does not rule over the character's actions, his position within the army does. Agamemnon's remembrance of Iphigenia's sacrifice, which occurred ten years before the action of *Hecuba*, demonstrates that point. He "could've fled with" his daughter to "ke[ep] her alive. But [he] chose" not to (*Ibid.* 232). This enacts the Brechtian conception of characterisation in epic theatre, which relies on the construction of "the human being ... as 'the sum of all social circumstances'" (Brecht 46). In *Hecuba*, Agamemnon must sacrifice young girls to prove he is "the rightful king", "to keep [the rest of the army] off his back" (Carr 2015, 232-233). In doing so, Carr applies one of the key elements of epic theatre to Greek tragedy, which is that "the human being is the object of the inquiry" (Brecht 37). Through the epicisation of *Hecuba*, she turns the mythological characters enacting the myth into subjects of a psycho-social study[7] (Torrance 2022, 201) to grasp the past and present of contemporary Western societies since "we are ... playing out the legacy of Troy, and we are what's left because Troy is in rubble ... they knew a harsher world that would become Greece, . . . that has become us" ("Playwright Marina Carr in conversation with Fiona Macintosh"). At the time of the premiere, a parallel was drawn with the situation in the Middle East where the Iraqi and Syrian populations suffer terrible exactions from the dictator Bashar al-Assad and the terrorist group ISIS. Yet, although "[t]hese wars", which had been enabled by the multiple imperialist Western interventions, are "completely wiping out [these] countries[,] . . . no one in the West batted an eyelid" as noted by Carr (Sihra 2018, 267). In *Girl on an Altar*, Carr pursues the project of questioning the founding myths of the Western identity by furthering the epicisation of tragedy.

Girl on an Altar: The Extension of Epic Tragedy

Girl on an Altar dramatises events happening before and after the action of *Hecuba*. Act One is indeed based on Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, which deals with Iphigenia's sacrifice to allow the Greeks to leave for Troy, while Act Two adapts Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, which shows the return of Agamemnon from Troy and his subsequent murder by Clytemnestra to avenge the death of their daughter.

The action crafted by Carr in *Girl on an Altar* is too extensive to fit the Aristotelian conception of tragedy and thus displays some characteristic features of epic poetry. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle notes that the two genres "differ in length: tragedy tends so far as possible to stay within a single revolution of the sun, or close to it, while epic is unlimited in time span and is distinctive in this respect" (Aristotle 47). The length influences the story produced: while "tragedy is mimesis of an action" (*Ibid.,* 47), which constitutes its "first principle": the "[p]lot" (*Ibid.*, 53), epic poetry "is less unified" and shows "multiple actions" (*Ibid.,*139). Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* illustrate the unity of the tragic action, which is unsettled by Carr's combination of the two plays in *Girl on an Altar*. The subversion of the Aristotelian length and unity of the tragic action must once again be connected to the influence of Brecht. He indeed differentiates "dramatic theatre" based on "plot[s]" from "epic theatre" relying on "narrative[s]" (Brecht 37). In *Girl on an Altar*, Carr's concern does not lie in the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the murder of Agamemnon but in the narrative of Clytemnestra who metamorphoses from a loving wife into a husband-killer throughout the play.

Besides the inclusion of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Carr extends the time of the action of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. In that source tragedy, Agamemnon dies on the day of his return from Troy. In the second act of *Girl on an Altar*, several months, even years, occur between these two events. This new timeline enables Carr to interweave actions from her own creation within the classical narrative, which appeals to another conception of epic. In "Theatre on an Epic Scale", the British director Tim Supple elaborates on his vision of epic performances. Diverging slightly from Aristotle's definition, Supple considers the characteristic magnitude of epic beyond the length of the narrative and applies it to constitutive elements of theatre, including the spaces of production (Supple, 47), the number of spectators, "the words", " the ideas", and "the characters' actions" (*Ibid.*, 51). In this regard, Supple envisions Greek tragedy as "theatre on an epic scale" (*Ibid.*). In terms of "content", classical drama is epic according to him because it encompasses "the vitality and complexity of human action, choice, and experienced outcome" (*Ibid.*). However, Supple notices a conventional feature of classical theatre contradicting his epic vision of Greek tragedy: "the numbers performing, the scale of performance, was not epic" (*Ibid.*). The classical convention of having only three actors – alongside a chorus of fifteen citizens – on stage speaks directly to the "claustrophobic" scope of Greek tragedy, and so to the length of the tragic plot. Yet, such a contradiction vanishes when the theatre of another canonical pillar of Western drama is considered: Shakespeare.

In *Girl on an Altar*, Carr's epicisation of tragedy relies on a reconfiguration of classical drama through the lens of Shakespearean theatre. In Supple's mind, Shakespeare is "an elemental, metaphysical, epic social dramatist" whose work is embedded in "family drama" while simultaneously "concerned with the workings of power, the nature of governance, the ethics of authority, the workings of law, the struggle of humanity to come to terms with fate and to endure life sufferings and disappointments" (*Ibid.*, 59). These themes are entangled in Greek tragedy too, as its focus on kings and queens implies that the hamartia has implications in domestic and political terms. Yet, they are usually addressed through a single action performed by the tragic hero. Free from the restrictions on the length of the plot and the number of actors, Shakespeare multiplies the subplots to explore the consequences of the initial incident on the public and private realms while underlining their interconnections. The length of *Girl on an Altar* gives a similar opportunity to Carr, who examines subsequently the outcome of Iphigenia's sacrifice in a more Shakespearean than classical way. In *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus stresses a direct causal link between the titular character's death and his daughter's, which Carr complicates in her adaptation. Unlike her classical counterpart, Carr's Clytemnestra does not simply feel hate for Agamemnon after his return from Troy as her inner thoughts reveal that she still "love[s] him" (Carr 2022, 34). These conflicting feelings entrench the family drama included in the course of action created by Carr. It shows the gradual estrangement of the couple from one another and the progressive substitution of Clytemnestra by Cassandra at the side of Agamemnon. This new line of events reframes Iphigenia's death as the first of a long series of abuses endured by women at the hands of Agamemnon, which Clytemnestra's detention in the harem epitomises as it causes the death of her youngest child, Leda. Yet, this situation does not speak only to the oppression of women within the family cell but also within the political system set by Agamemnon after Iphigenia's death.

Girl on an Altar opens with Iphigenia's sacrifice, which thus constitutes the founding moment of Agamemnon's rule that comes to a conclusion with his murder by Clytemnestra in the final moment of the play. Such a structure echoes the discussion about histories in theatre – which a substantial part of Shakespeare's work illustrates – in terms of generic innovation as "a fusion of Aristotle's tragedy with the genre of epic, which focuses on the birth and rise of nations and empires" (Hoenselaars 138) as well as their fall. This overlap of the genres could also be applied to some of Shakespeare's tragedies, like *Macbeth* (1606), which shows a king's rise and fall in power over the course of several years. Like Macbeth, Agamemnon's deadly ascension to power defines the ruler he is. He shows through Iphigenia's sacrifice "what the king of the kings is made of" (Carr 2022, 16), which

is a ruthless tyrant whose power stems from the annihilation of women. As Clytemnestra hears about the sacrifice of "another girl before [the Greek army] left Troy", she states: "It's becoming a habit. Soon it'll be normal and before you can turn round it'll be a law" (*Ibid.*, 35). The future proves her right as several months – perhaps years – later "[a]n orphan girl [is] sacrificed" by Agamemnon as his legitimacy over the throne is challenged after his proclamation that he "ha[s] no Queen" anymore (*Ibid.*, 41). The annihilation of women fuelling his autocratic power is indeed not only literal but also symbolic as Clytemnestra's incarceration in the harem marks her erasure from the Argian political scene. This reframes the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra, which concludes the play. The action does not stand as a simple act of revenge but rather appears as a necessary act of survival and liberation for the women in Argos.

Despite dramatising Agamemnon's rise and fall, *Girl on an Altar* focuses more on the victims of his abuses, and more specifically those suffered by Clytemnestra. In doing so, Carr reverses the traditional – patriarchal – characterisation of that figure as "a monstrous androgyne" who "usurps male power and prerogatives" (Zeitlin 89), which necessarily questions the political intentions of the source tragedy. *Agamemnon* is the first instalment of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, a trilogy that "gives voice and form to the social and political ideology of the period" embedded in patriarchy (*Ibid.*, 87) that has moulded the contemporary Western societies. Building on the "symmetry" of Polyxena and Iphigenia's sacrifices (Carr 2015, 231), Carr uses the myths of Greek tragedy to create an epic of patriarchy, and its destructivity is emphasised by the dramatisation through tragedy. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle indeed defines tragedy as dramatising "a change ... from prosperity to adversity, caused ... by a great error of a character" (Aristotle 71). Through Agamemnon's dramatic arc, Carr makes patriarchy fall by its own dismiss.

iGirl echoes the experiments implemented in *Hecuba* and *Girl on an Altar*, which Carr seems to reverse to create a tragic epic.

iGirl: The Reversal of Epic Tragedy

iGirl is a solo performance. Yet, several characters appear on stage. They are associated with a variety of historical eras ranging from the prehistoric to the contemporary periods. And they come from a diversity of materials, including history (Neanderthal and Jeanne d'Arc), Greek tragedy (Antigone, Oedipus, and Jocasta) and mythology (Persephone), and autobiography (Carr herself). The characters do not interact with one another through dialogue. Each of them narrates individually their own stories in one or several dedicated

sections of the play. This dimension coupled with the use of verse rather than prose leads Isabelle Torrance to label the scenes as "poems" (Torrance 2022, 197). In this regard, the style of *iGirl* is reminiscent of classical epic, which is a poetic work of narration.

Although some of the poems deal with the same story – the sections narrated by Antigone, Oedipus, and Jocasta retell the events related in Sophocles' Theban cycle (*Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*) from each of their individual perspectives –, *iGirl* does not dramatise a single cohesive narrative as classical epic does. In Homer's *Iliad*, for instance, the narration includes several subplots but they are connected through a main narrative signalled in the opening line of the epic: "The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son Achilles" (Homer 13). In *iGirl*, however, the tragedy underlying each of the poems unifies the stories, which all deal with the "fall" of the characters in terms of loss, death, extinction, grief, posterity, and memory. The final lines epitomise that dimension as a parallel is drawn between the ancient gods and our species to wonder what will remain after the death and extinction of humanity at an individual as well as collective level:

> Human specimen
> He will record
> Homo sapiens
> Question mark
> Homini
> Possibly
> The old gods
> That vanished tribe
> Stuff of myth
> Barely a trace of them
> Survives. (Carr 2021, 83)

This tragic fate is propelled by the violent appetite of humanity. The first poem asserts blatantly that "The wrong species / Survived" because "We destroyed the Neanderthals / The gentle mute Neanderthals" (*Ibid.*, 4-5). The collection of narratives presented in *iGirl* stands as "Shared stories of carnage / And . . . / Destruction" (*Ibid.*, 11). This history of violence is mapped through the single performer's body[8] who plays the Neanderthal, Antigone – who died because she "argued like a man" (*Ibid.*, 12) –, and Jeanne d'Arc – who was "burned . . . at the stake" (*Ibid.*, 8).

Carr thus appears to apply to tragedy the postmodern experimentations implemented with the emergence of "rhapsodic theatre". This theatrical form has been

coined by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac and shows Homeric as well as Brechtian influences on approaching the dramatisation of stories (Macintosh and McConnell 16-17). In rhapsodic theatre, the "narrative" emerges from "fragmented" stories that are "reassembled into new forms, collage-like" relying on a "combination of forms and genres" (*Ibid.*, 17-18). According to Macintosh and McConnell, "rhapsodic theatre finds its parallel in the syncretization of myths from diverse times and places in a number of recent works, in which both form and content combine to create new collages" (*Ibid.*, 18), which Carr's *iGirl* not only illustrates but also seems to further to some extent.

Contrastingly with the examples provided by Macintosh and McConnell, *iGirl* is a solo performance. In this respect, the single performer – Olwen Fouéré in the 2021 production at the Abbey Theatre – stands as the sole physical carrier of the "new collage" on stage, thus echoing the role of the rhapsode when classical epic was still performed. Yet, the performer is not assimilated with a storyteller since she embodies each of the characters narrating their stories,[9] as underlined by the opening line of several poems: "I Jeanne d'Arc" (Carr 2021, 8), "I Antigone" (*Ibid.*, 10), "I Oedipus" (*Ibid.*, 22), "I Jocasta" (*Ibid.*, 27), "I Neanderthal Prince of the Plains" (*Ibid.*, 51), and "I Girl" (*Ibid.*, 33). This last dramatic persona refers to Carr herself as revealed through the reflection on posterity provided in that specific poem as the narrator imagines the way her descendants will describe her:

> She wrote plays
> Now out of print
> That's where you get
> Your creative bent
> The great-great-granddaughter
> Will say
> To her well loved
> Son or
> Daughter
> When they want to be an actor (*Ibid.*)

Although Carr, who as the playwright of *iGirl* is the storyteller, writes herself into the play, she does not write herself as the storyteller and is thus not embodied as such by the performer who plays her character. This asserts the dramatic dimension of the epic that is *iGirl*.

iGirl brings epic onto the stage, especially considering the specific form of the eighteenth poem. Unlike the other poems of *iGirl*, the eighteenth poem does not show a

narration but a dialogue between two unidentified characters, both embodied by the single performer. This echoes the overlap of narration and enactment in the genre of epic poetry to which Aristotle refers in the *Poetics*. Yet, while this overlap relies usually on the use of some dialogue interwoven in narration, some modernist writers have pushed the overlap further by experimenting with the integration of pieces of dramatic writing into novels. The epic novel *Ulysses* (1920) by James Joyce, which draws inspiration from Homer's *Odyssey* to narrate the peregrinations of the character of Leopold Bloom in Dublin, is an epitome of such experimentation. Indeed, the fifteenth episode – and the episode of Circe – assumes the form of a play, displaying only dialogues and stage directions. *iGirl* is reminiscent of that modern input to the genre of epic, even though it breaks with its modernist foregrounding. The dialogue does not reveal any spatiotemporal elements of context besides the fact that the gods "are all gone", only their "names survive" (*Ibid.*, 62-63), thus pursuing the postmodern epic exploration of the tragic themes of extinction and posterity outside the frame of a grand narrative.

Carr's implementation of epic tragedy in *Hecuba* and *Girl on an Altar* and tragic epic in *iGirl* settles in and compiles a long tradition of blending the genres of epic and tragedy. Although this question seems to be restricted to Brecht's counter-theorisation of Aristotle's conceptualisation of epic and drama as distinctive genres in the *Poetics*, the history of theatre shows that the overlap of these two generic forms is an enduring practice. From Homer's inclusion of dialogue to postmodern "rhapsodic theatre", epic and drama appear to have constantly colluded, especially in the realm of tragedy with Euripides' "dramatised epic" and Shakespeare's epic-length plays. Yet, never has that collusion come across as clearly as in Carr's latest adaptations of Greek tragedy. Through the blending of enactment and narration, dialogue and soliloquy, objectivity and subjectivity in the dramatic speech of *Hecuba* and *Girl on an Altar*, she questions and challenges the founding myths of Western societies. The diversity of perspectives emerging from that strategy reframes the focus on the oppressed rather than the oppressors, thus writing the epic tragedy of the barbaric system that is patriarchy in that diptych of plays. In *iGirl*, Carr reverses the genre implemented in *Hecuba* and *Girl on an Altar* as epic takes precedence over tragedy to write the tragic epic of human extinction, which traces the human history of destruction through a collection of seemingly unrelated stories and the refusal of a grounding narrative.

Notes

1 Sihra examines that question in detail in her monograph *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown*.

2 Sihra considers that the play "offers circuitous pathways which ... open up a maze of possibilities" (Sihra 260).

3 Macintosh mentions Carr's "epicisation" of tragedy only in relation to *Hecuba*.

4 This idea is based on a comment made by one of my students, Mats Van Sluis, during a lecture on Aristotle's *Poetics*.

5 Euripides' *Hecuba* stands as an exception to that rule as the Trojan women composing the chorus help the eponymous character to blind Polymestor and kill his sons.

6 Although Greek tragedy is an art that was developed during the classical time, it adapted myths from epic poetry created during the archaic period.

7 Torrance notes that *Girl on an Altar* "explores the deeper psychologies of the mythological characters and their motivations", but this comment also applies to *Hecuba*.

8 This idea has been inspired by Elin Diamond's comment: "Understanding gender as ideology – as a system of beliefs and behavior mapped across the bodies of women and men which reinforces a social status quo – is to appreciate the continued timeliness of *Verfremdungseffekt*, the purpose of which always is to denaturalize and defamilarize what ideology – and performativity – makes seem normal, acceptable, inescapable" (Diamond 47).

9 Macintosh and McConnell indeed note that "[u]nlike a traditional actor, the storyteller does not embody a character; they are present as themselves" (Macintosh and McConnell 6)

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Grieving Time, *A Radio Play*

Grieving Time, *uma peça radiofônica*

Rachel Fehily

Abstract: *This play called* Grieving Time*, was written from the personal perspective of Rachel Fehily, author and barrister, in 2020 as a response to the Irish Coronavirus lockdown, with a theme based around how small comforts during the lockdown affected people's grieving process. It was created through a process of collaboration and rehearsal between the author, actor, and producer within the constraints of the time. It was written in monologue for an actor with whom the author had worked previously. The completed radio play was broadcast on 17 August 2021 by the Irish public service broadcaster,* Raidió Teilifís Éireann *on the radio programme,* Drama on One*. It is available as a podcast on https://www.rte.ie/radio/dramaonone/1241306-grieving-time-by-rachel-fehily. The intended effect is to create a sense of* communitas *among listeners.*

Keywords: *Radio Play; Irish Playwriting; Monologue; Grieving, Creative Practice-Based Research;* Communitas.

Resumo: *Esta peça, chamada* Grieving Time*, foi escritaem 2020 a partir da perspectiva pessoal de Rachel Fehily, autora e advogada, como resposta ao* lockdown *irlandês devido o Coronavírus, cujo tema é baseado em como pequenos confortos durante o* lockdown *afetaram o processo de luto das pessoas. A peça foi criada por meio de um processo de colaboração e ensaio entre a autora, o ator e o produtor considerando as restrições da época. Escrita em forma de monólogo para um ator com quem a autora já havia trabalhado, a peça de rádio foi transmitida em 17 de agosto de 2021 pela emissora irlandesa* Raidió Teilifís Éireann *no programa de rádio* Drama on One*. Está disponível como podcast em https://www.rte.ie/radio/dramaonone/1241306-griev-time-by-rachel-fehily. O efeito pretendido é criar um sentimento de* communitas *entre os ouvintes.*

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Palavras-chave: *Peça radiofônica; Dramaturgia irlandesa; Monólogo; Luto; Pesquisa baseada em práticas criativas;* Communitas.

Introduction

This short form radio play was chosen by RTE Radio 1, Ireland's national broadcaster, as part of their "Long Story Short Season".

It was written during the first coronavirus lockdown and, as part of the writing process, I met with the Irish actor, Joe Taylor, outdoors, so we could collaborate and rehearse safely. As lockdown ended, then re-began, he was unable to go into the radio studio for personal safety reasons, and its recording was delayed. Joe Taylor suggested I ask another actor to play the part of "Joe" but I wanted to wait for him to play his part as I felt he was the best actor for the role. He had the ability to voice all the characters in the play with veracity and integrity. The play was written in monologue form and its producer Gorretti Slavin, suggested the addition of some wild-track sounds and voices, which enhanced the production.

Its theme centres around how the Coronavirus lockdown, and small comforts, affect grieving time. The character "Joe" is a man struggling to process his grief over the death of his wife five years previously, and then his father, at the beginning of the Coronavirus lockdown. As he walks through an urban park with his dog and meets people along the way, he goes on an emotional journey of memories. He is pulled from the past into the present by the presence of his dog and casual encounters with other people. His grief is intense and vivid and his thoughts wander. As society opens up he reflects on how lockdown time has impinged on grieving time.

I chose to write the play in the male gender as I had previously worked with Joe Taylor on another play and our collaboration was creatively rewarding. Writing in a different gender to my own also gave me an artistic distance from the subject, as it was very close to me at the time of writing. I had experienced the death of my father on the first day of lockdown and my partner some years before in 2016. Having children, kind neighbours and access to an urban park for dog-walking in Dublin were essential to my own grieving process which also coincided with lockdown. Sharing this liminal experience during these unique constraints in the form of a national radio play heightened my sense of *communitas* with co-creators, family, friends, neighbours, and Irish radio drama listeners.

Introdução

Esta peça radiofônica curta foi escolhida pela *RTE Radio 1*, a emissora nacional da Irlanda, e a estação de rádio mais ouvida, como parte de sua "*Long Story Short Season*".

A peça foi escrita durante o primeiro *lockdown* do coronavírus e, como parte do processo de escrita, encontrei-me com o ator irlandês Joe Taylor, ao ar livre, para que pudéssemos colaborar e ensaiar com segurança. Como o bloqueio terminou e começou novamente, ele não pôde entrar no estúdio de rádio por razões de segurança pessoal e a gravação foi adiada. Joe Taylor sugeriu que eu pedisse a outro ator para interpretar o papel de "Joe", mas eu queria esperar que ele interpretasse, pois senti que ele era o melhor ator para o papel. Ele tinha a capacidade de expressar todos os personagens da peça com veracidade e integridade. A peça foi escrita em forma de monólogo e sua produtora, Gorretti Slavin, sugeriu a adição de algumas vozes e sons de natureza selvagem que aprimorou a produção.

O tema da peça é sobre como o período de *lockdown* do coronavírus, e seus pequenos confortos, afetam o tempo de luto. O personagem "Joe" é um homem que luta para processar seu luto pela morte de sua esposa, ocorrida cinco anos antes, e de seu pai, no início do *lockdown* do coronavírus. Enquanto caminha por um parque urbano com seu cão e conhece pessoas ao longo do caminho, ele adentra uma jornada emotiva de lembranças. Ele é trazido do passado para o presente pela presença de seu cão e por encontros casuais com outras pessoas. Seu luto é intenso e vívido e seus pensamentos vagam. À medida que o bloqueio termina, seus turnos emocionais mostram como o tempo de bloqueio tem afetado o seu momento de luto.

Eu escolhi escrever a peça no gênero masculino, pois já havia trabalhado anteriormente com Joe Taylor em outra peça, e nossa colaboração foi criativamente gratificante. Escrever em um gênero diferente do meu também fornece uma distância artística do assunto, pois estava muito próximo de mim na época em que a escrevi. Eu havia vivenciado a morte de meu pai no primeiro dia de *lockdown* e de meu parceiro alguns anos antes em 2016. Ter filhos, vizinhos gentis e acesso a um parque urbano para passear cães em Dublin foi essencial para o meu processo de luto que coincidiu com o *lockdown*. Compartilhar esta experiência liminar durante o tempo singular do *lockdown* do coronavírus e seu final, na forma de uma peça de rádio nacional, aumentou meu senso de *communitas* com co-criadores, família, amigos, vizinhos e ouvintes irlandeses de teatro de rádio.

Grieving Time

Scene 1

FX: Outdoor sounds of park, kids playing

Joe: When my neighbour asks me:

Neighbour: How did you cope with the lockdown?'

Joe: Fine thanks.

Joe: I say. *[beat]* But I'm lying to my neighbour because I'm not fine; Because my Dad died the day after lockdown started and lockdown time has been my grieving time. I'm lying because my dog is about to relieve herself on the grass and I'm trying to concentrate on where she's doing it so I can pick up her mess with my compostable plastic bag and I don't want to talk about it.

Neighbour: Everyone well?

Joe: Yes. You too?

Neighbour: Thank God.'

Joe: She says crossing her fingers, deftly mixing religion and superstition.

FX: Wild track under

Joe: When my wife Caroline was diagnosed five years ago, I called home to tell Mum but she was out and for once in his life Dad answered the phone.

Dad: Is it bad news?'

Joe: he asked gently, he stayed on the phone listening while I cried,

Dad: Oh dear, Oh dear, dear, dear, I'm here for you, we're all here for both of you,'

Joe: While Caroline was ill, I was busy, very busy, and when she died I had to get on with things. I made a list:

FX: Wild track Joe making the list

Joe: One. Collect death cert

Two. Call the solicitor

Three. Go to bank

Four. Sort out pension

Five. Pay funeral expenses,

Six. Do taxes

Seven. Send out letters of appreciation for condolence messages.

Eight. Don't cry in front of the kids

Joe: My whole world shifted and there was so much to do. People were terribly kind around the time of the funeral but it was a relief to get back to work

two weeks later. Zack and Hannah needed a lot of attention; I was there for them as much as I could be.

FX: internal house TV sounds

Joe: Hey guys what do you want for dinner?

Indian' 'Again? Okay. Here's my card.

[beat]

Joe: No sorry I can't watch the match. I've some work to do, I'll be in my office on the computer if you need me.'

FX: Fade out on match on TV

Scene 2

FX: External outdoor park

Joe: I'm letting the mutt off the lead so she can chase a squirrel, and within seconds she's barking aggressively at the base of a tree like she's a big dog. The squirrel sneers down at her. She will never catch one but she never gives up trying. I admire her tenacity. It's a family trait.

[beat]

Joe: The nurse said to me while I was waiting to see Dad:

Nurse: We've run out of PPE, So you can't go in to see him until we get more.'

Joe: I bet you didn't know what PPE was before all this, but now we all do now.

[beat]

Joe: Okay...So when...?'

Nurse: We can't let you in to see him until more gear arrives - I'm sorry.'
(officiously)

Joe: It's obvious Dad isn't dying of Covid. He has a temperature but it's a tumour that's killing him. My mother shouldn't have to say goodbye to him through a mask, they should be able to see each other and hold hands without her being covered in plastic, but they are:

Nurse: . . . only following guidelines

Joe: After a respectable time because I'm afraid to annoy her, I ask her again:

Joe: When do you think the PPE gear will arrive?

Joe: She shrugs her shoulders.

Joe: Soon?'

Joe: My father is dying in a hermetically sealed in a room that's like a scene

from a Hollywood blockbuster. I was out at a very late dinner in the club the night before so I'm hungover and sweating inside the PPE gear. That should be in the Kubler Ross stages of grief shouldn't it? Anger, Hangover, Sweating and Depression.

He's 89, but still holds forth at every family dinner, he has a big birthday to look forward to in November. We haven't been on our trip to Istanbul yet to cross the Bosporus Strait that divides Asia from Europe.

The nurse gives him more morphine and I know from the exact same experience with Caroline, that he won't wake up. Mum knows too and her being her she ignores the rules, pulls down her mask and kisses him goodbye. I'm feel like I'm intruding but it's okay, I'm his son, it's okay to be there.

Joe: There was a little hole on the very top of Dad's Judge's wig, and because he was so tall no one could see it unless he bent down. He used to say to Hannah:

Dad: 'It's there to allow the thoughts of god to flow down into my mind so I will always know to do the right thing'.

Joe: Then he would pretend to run away and hide.

FX: Wild track Hannah 'Come back!' Please let me look!

Joe: Please let me look! Hannah would say when she caught him, knowing he always carried sweets in his pockets for her. Their relationship healed something in me.

Being right was always so important to him, morally right rather than the:

'I know the name of the actor in the film' kind of way, that was fun until it was ruined by google.

Scene 3

FX: Outdoor park

Joe: Where the hell has the dog gone? I don't know what I'd do if something happened to the dog. There she is, over there.

FX: Sound of distant barking

Joe: 'Kyla, come here! Stop begging that nice lady for treats.'

Kyla, Kyla that's not your ball. Give it back now...'

Joe: Sometimes it seemed as if we were having a good time during her illness, out together as a family, walking the dog, sunny day, the four of us, giggling together, almost normal.

Joe: Do you ever forget about your illness when we're out?

Caroline: No, I never do.

Joe: I wish I could do something.

Caroline: You are doing everything, there's nothing more you can do.'

Joe: When Caroline was near the end the dog would curl up next to her and I'd gently close the door leaving them together sleeping.

She was so driven, in control of everything, the house, the kids, her practice. She would have eventually become a judge, like Dad, the two of

them were genuinely interested in law, they never stopped talking about it. Unlike me.

I sort of fell into it. When I came out of Trinity in the 80s there were no jobs, I didn't want to go to London or the States, and it was only when someone said to me: 'Why don't you try the Kings Inns? It's easy enough to get into,' that I actually thought of it.

[beat]

Joe: Dad never got annoyed when people asked him things:

How do you defend someone when you know they are guilty?'

That question bores the hell out of me but he always had the time to start a discussion even with taxi drivers:

'If a defendant tells his legal team he's innocent then the presumption of innocence applies and it is the golden thread that runs through the whole legal system. It's something everyone is entitled to – there's a need for a high standard of proof and a proper balance between the prosecution and the defendant.....'

What a brilliant man, they said about him in the Law Library and I used to pretend that I'd read his books, he never discussed them with me and I'd really only dipped into them, they were full of obscure references, Latin phrases, words I'd have to look up, and honestly I'm more of a John Grisham fan. I wasn't in his league or Caroline's at all.

[beat]

Why them and not me?

Scene 4

Dog owner: They're like children aren't they, without the heartache?'

Joe: The dog's owner says. I'm sitting on the park bench watching Kyla play with another Bichon. It must be a male dog because she's excited and jumping all over him.

Joe: I smile vaguely and look at my phone, afraid to look at a photo that's popping up as a Facebook memory from four years ago. It's the one where Caroline's drinking champagne with us the day Zack got his Leaving Cert results, swollen from the steroids that were delaying the inevitable spread of her disease but she'd dragged herself out of bed that day to celebrate.

I've been grieving and thinking about grieving during the lockdown. It's hard not to. There's nowhere to go to escape it.

My friend Peter who's knows everything about everything said to me:

'In some Buddhist traditions they don't socialise at all for 90 days after the death of a family member.'

Maybe the length of the lockdown gave me a chance to grieve like a Buddhist.

Almost post lockdown now my son Zack did his final exams online, he's out in our fragile economy, working as a delivery driver. He came into my office last week, smiling his shy smile. Half man, half boy. 'Dad I've got some good news'

'Is it....?'

Yes, the 4 year scholarship, to do my PhD - I got it.'

'That's great news, well done Zack, Wow, I'm so proud of you.'

'Thanks.'

We don't go overboard but we do celebrate with Zack's girlfriend and

Hannah that evening. I cook dinner for everyone, Steak and chips and a glass of red wine each.

The next morning I don't want to get out of bed. I ache all over, drag myself through the day, tetchy and jumpy.

I realise. What's wrong with me. [beat] I want to tell Dad and Caroline Zack's news

FX: Sound of dog whining

Joe: 'Come on Kyla, jump in, I'm not lifting you, you're not that old yet.'

Joe: She tilts her head sideways and I look into the dark eyes in her cute little face. I know they're bred to look sympathetic.

She jumps up and onto my lap, and paws at me impatiently, I can't drive off.

I take some time to stroke her and rub under her chin. There's no need to rush.

Joe: Love you. I whisper into the dog's silky soft ear.

She has my attention. For the first time in a long time, I'm not so impatient, I can pay her some real attention. It's okay to be still – and take some grieving time.

End

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Monologue, Woman and Survival in Frank McGuinness's Baglady

Monológo, mulher e sobrevivência em Baglady *de Frank McGuinness*

Wei H. Kao

Abstract: *Although it is true that women have received much attention since the mid-twentieth century and some have held major positions in public domains, not many theatrical works have given women a full spotlight on their less perceivable experiences, particularly those who are disadvantaged or struggling on the social margins. In those works that do indeed do so, descriptions of women's conditions do not always reflect their exact experiences and challenges. This paper will explore Frank McGuiness's* Baglady *(1985), which centres on a woman protagonist who discloses her painful memories and tries to cope with her suffering. In this play, the protagonist, stuck in the past, reveals her dark secrets in a narrative that is not always in a regular time sequence. Incidentally, by hearing how she makes sense of her troubles in everyday life, the audience seems to participate in the process of her self-examination and possible healing. This essay will also investigate how the character struggles with oppression in more radical ways, and how she fails or succeeds in breaking free from her hidden constraints.*

Keywords: *Frank McGuiness;* Baglady*; Monologue; Trauma; Healing.*

Resumo: *Embora seja verdade que as mulheres tenham recebido muita atenção desde meados do século XX e que algumas tenham ocupado cargos importantes em domínios públicos, não são muitas as obras teatrais que dão destaque total às mulheres em suas experiências menos perceptíveis, especialmente aquelas que são desfavorecidas ou que lutam à margem da sociedade. Nas obras que de fato o fazem, as descrições das condições das mulheres nem sempre refletem suas experiências e desafios exatos. Este*

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artigo explorará a peça Baglady *(1985), de Frank McGuiness, centrada em uma protagonista que revela suas memórias dolorosas e tenta lidar com seu sofrimento. Nessa peça, a protagonista, presa ao passado, revela seus segredos obscuros em uma narrativa que nem sempre está em uma sequência temporal regular. Aliás, ao ouvir como ela dá sentido a seus problemas na vida cotidiana, o público parece participar do processo de seu autoexame e possível cura. Este ensaio também investigará como a personagem luta contra a opressão de maneiras mais radicais e como ela falha ou consegue se libertar de suas restrições ocultas.*

Palavras-chave: *Frank McGuiness;* Baglady*; Monólogo; Trauma; Cura.*

Introduction

Although it is true that women have received much attention since the mid-twentieth century and some have held major positions in public domains, not many theatrical works have given women a *full* spotlight on their less perceivable experiences, particularly those who are disadvantaged or struggling on the social margins. In those works that do indeed do so, descriptions of women's conditions do not always reflect their exact experiences and challenges. There are, however, plays that present women experiencing emotional abuse, domestic violence, familial violation and gender discrimination, although the victims are not always able to speak for themselves. Monologue plays, as a type of drama that highlights women struggling to be seen and heard, might potentially counterbalance the tradition in which women's personal predicaments are seen as being less imperative than social or political crises, despite the fact that their hardships and dilemmas are common across cultures and borders.

This essay will focus on Frank McGuinness's *Baglady* (1985), which centres on a woman protagonist who suffers from certain mental conditions as she tries to come to terms with painful memories. In this play the protagonist, stuck in the past, reveals her dark secrets in a narrative that is not always in a regular time sequence. By hearing how she makes sense of her troubles in everyday life, the audience seems to participate in the process of her self-examination and possible healing. This essay will also investigate how the protagonist struggles with oppression in more radical ways, and how she fails or succeeds in breaking free from hidden constraints.

Before the essay enters the mindscape of the protagonist, it should be noted that monologue has been a popular form of choice for many contemporary Irish playwrights,

both emerging and established. They wrote monodramas or plays with extended monologues in different periods of their careers, experimenting with disjointed narrative and stream of consciousness to explore the troubled mind.[1]

To name just a few of those who have contributed to this chapter of Irish theatrical history: Dermot Bolger, Brian Friel, Jennifer Johnston, Marie Jones, Owen McCafferty, Pat Kinevane, Frank McGuinness, Conall Morrison, Conor McPherson, Donal O'Kelly, Mark O'Rowe, Eva O'Connor, Enda Walsh and Michael West, among others. They have all, without doubt, been influenced by their predecessors James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, whereas the social and political contexts in which they created their characters have significantly contributed to the art of playwriting in different styles.[2]

These contemporary Irish playwrights grew up in an Ireland which, as Brian Singleton puts it, "has been a particularly poignant battleground between traditional versions of masculinity and new questionings of gender identity" (287).[3] Their monologue plays outline the difficult process of this rapid transformation thanks to which a growing intellectual awareness has been initiated as regards the status of women and their marginalized experiences. Although not all monodramas feature women's issues and voices, the interior monologues of their characters have disclosed how Irish life has been historically gendered but is yet to be addressed.

Differently from plays that typically involve several characters in which their opportunities for self-expression are often overshadowed by other dominant forces, monodramas can more fully present the complexities of someone's inner life in various ways. The audience is consequently more capable of peering into his or her "internal experience and the realm of subjective perception" through the verbalized stream of consciousness on the stage (Wallace 12). Not only is a protagonist more capable of delivering intimate expressions, as well as being more provocative, but the audience gains access to someone's "revision, reconstruction, the re-making, upgrading and recalibrating of narratives" (Jordan 153). In other words, monologue plays provide "structural freedom" for dramatists to conduct dramaturgical experiments (Bradby 64), while also allowing characters to distance themselves from their given surroundings and troubles so as to challenge and probably deconstruct the *fait accompli* with individual, alternative stories.

Frank McGuinness's *Baglady* (1996): Heal to Hear

Having reckoned that "after Beckett, nothing in the theatre was the same. . . . He gave me license to write about time" (Weber C2), McGuinness has written a number of

experimental works exploring human dilemmas, predicaments and mental conditions. His *Baglady*, in particular, has not only "a sense of *Happy Days*" (Hurtley 59), but has been described as a work to "repay consideration in relation to the work of Samuel Beckett" (Lojek 18). These comments emanate from the way in which the playwright steers the audience into the darkest corners of human nature as Beckett often does. *Baglady* features a woman who has suffered sexual abuse at a very young age and almost failed to survive because of it. However, McGuinness offers the protagonist a way to go beyond her dark days to embrace a happier time, if possible, in which she can trust humanity.

In contrast to Winnie's uplifting love song "I love you so" from *The Merry Widow*, a 1905 operetta, in Beckett's *Happy Days*, the unnamed Baglady's song, "Who's at the window, who?", haunts the protagonist profoundly throughout the play. Being heard at the very beginning of this monologue play, this song depicts someone being spied on by a sex offender through a window: "A, bad, bad man with a bag on his back / Coming to take you away. / Who's at the window, who? / Who's at the window, who? / Go away, bad man, with the bag on your back, / You won't take me with you today" (McGuinness 385). It is noteworthy that this song is often heard alongside the narrator's disjointed, incoherent storytelling in the third-person narration. This prompts some bewildering and absurdist effects that the audience members have to take on board as they piece together bits of information as the play goes on. Put another way, the more the narrator reveals her fear and pain, the more the audience realizes that the victim has been torn asunder and badly traumatized by incest. Moreover, the resulting baby was drowned by her father and she had to witness it all. Even worse, she was forced to tolerate this family shame at the requests of her mother and the Catholic clergy. Ironically, without having a way out of her agony and unable to exorcise her troubled past, she learns to assume her father's and mother's voices to keep the secret. While she is confessing what went wrong, the audience is reminded of the systemic child abuse that has long been neglected in Irish society.[4]

As the audience sees it at the start of the play, the Baglady obscures her gender through her clothing: "The Baglady wears the heavy clothes of a farmer, rough trousers, dark overcoat, boots. She is feminized only by a grey scarf protecting her head, hiding her hair completely" (McGuinness 385). Her camouflage –with hair completely covered up– is to strategically save herself from being sexually violated, which her father had spared no effort in doing, and murdering the resulting baby, when she was young and vulnerable. The horrendous memory has prompted her not only to hide her gender characteristics, consciously or not, but to make herself homeless on account of the incest and infanticide. Losing her home and sense of security, this unnamed Baglady wanders aimlessly while

telling herself sarcastically that she can make everywhere home: "I call one home and the other one here. That way you can't get lost" (McGuinness 386). Her incapability lies in the fact that she is a permanent wanderer by force and has lost the possibility of being a homemaker and is now a lone woman surviving in a wasteland.

It might be argued that the Baglady sets herself against the Cathleen ni Houlihan, who contributed to Irish nation formation as a heroine and an icon on banknotes. As the Baglady recalls, every time when she was raped by her father, it always ended with a money gift to keep her mouth shut. The little victim had not yet learned to recognize the political significance of the woman on the banknotes but remembered "[s]he looked like a mad woman, dressed all strangely, all in green" (McGuinness 389). For the father, money talks to meet his sexual needs and he would show much of it to her daughter as a lure "to buy the colours. . . . Wads of it lying on the table or smelling in his hands. Sometimes there was a picture of a woman in his smell" (McGuinness 389).[5] Presumably, the victim is far too young to understand the value of money but is well aware of the pain and discomfort during the forced sex acts. As an adult, not really pleased to receive banknotes imprinted with Cathleen ni Houlihan, she prefers to "give it away because money is a man's thing . . . I don't want it. It smells. . . . Don't put out the light. Don't leave me in the black room" (McGuiness 389).

The cynical point here is that Cathleen ni Houlihan, as a messianic icon of Irish independence, essentially caters more to her male supporters who look up to her for salvation and guidance than to women under threats of being violated and in desperate need of help. The violence that comes with this stereotype endorses the given roles of women in the conservative Irish cultural context, silencing those who are unable to protect themselves, including the Baglady and her own mother: "His wife and child walked in fear of his body and its strength" (McGuinness 394). It can be conjectured that the mother has no means of stopping the incestuous relationship in her family but tolerates it. Her tolerance, nonetheless, turns her into one of the Baglady's victimizers for failing to protect the daughter and stopping the father from drowning the baby. That is to say, the Baglady's loss of home and mental stability –which are manifest in her fragmented narrative, are not only the consequences of the sexual and emotional abuses within her family but are also results of the gender stereotype that has defined a role model for Irish women. In the case of the Baglady, the sexual violence she endures is acquiesced in by those who do not want to reveal it, either because of the mutual benefits they have gained or from a sense of shame. Cathleen ni Houlihan, playing a function in this institutional crime, casts a long shadow over the victim in many profound ways.

The shadow of violence that hovers over the Baglady lingers into her adulthood and cannot just be forgotten, despite the fact that she has been a nomad for quite a while. In her traumatic memory, her father used to be "a respectable man," but could turn into a black dog that follows her everywhere: "When this man died, the dog lived on. . . . One day this dog grabbed the man's daughter by her throat. She went hysterical but the dog wouldn't let go. It chained her up" (McGuinness 394). This abiding nightmare of being sexually assaulted again and again has deprived her of hopes of becoming a more confident and competent woman but "a dirty girl for ever" (McGuinness 398). As an incest victim, she was taken to "the house of God" but was called "a liar" by "a man in black" and washed by "women in black . . . in fire, not water. They nailed her son to a river" (McGuinness 398-9). Noteworthily, although she has been shattered by the "monstrous apparitions of her father, her mother, and the priests and nuns" (Weaver par. 5), she manages to *repair* herself by opening up her heart to the audience through the disclosure of her forbidden shame. In other words, she is reluctant to entirely fall victim to her haunting memory and would not like the audience to be part of the continuing domestic abuse as much as onlookers.

The retelling of her own stories may be an effective strategy for saving herself from the trauma. Ironically, her salvation cannot be sought elsewhere but within herself before her fear of the "black dog" completely overwhelms her. Having failed to obtain moral support from the clergy in her community, the Baglady has to give absolution to herself through her own means of self-transubstantiation: "*the Baglady takes a slice of bread and a bottle of red lemonade. She sits, eating and drinking*" (McGuinness 389). This act resembles the holy communion in commemoration of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross for human sins, whereas the Baglady has to redeem the crime of others all by herself. Most importantly, she, being isolated with no one to turn to for help, manages to purify herself by self-serving the holy communion, regardless of whether the purification takes effect in the eye of church practitioners.

It is also interesting to note that her account of the incestuous abuse is given through role-play with a pack of poker cards in a third-person narration, rather than "I" as the storyteller. The cards she selects to lay out the misconduct of people in her dysfunctional family and community include the king of diamonds (father), the five of clubs (mother), the queen of hearts (baby), the queen of spades (the Baglady), and the seven of diamonds (priest). Strategically, these five cards are used to illustrate the closed network involving the victimizers among whom are the Baglady's parents, the clergy and perhaps the members of the public who remain as silent as the audience in seeing her ordeal but are unable to help.

It can be argued that the role-play she creates is therapeutic in many ways. Firstly, she can rescue herself from the disastrous impact of incest and the death of the baby. Secondly, the way she tells her story *alone* on stage is consonant with confession to obtain forgiveness from God. However, what she is seeking is not really forgiveness but reconciliation with herself—in private and in public, followed by the symbolic holy communion she performs at the end of the play. She may thus purify the unspeakable shame and ease the tormenting pain. Notably, she is empowered for salvation not by the clergy nor God but by herself, while the poker cards and the role-play effectively alleviate the intangible yet enormous social repression given by the community. As the play goes on, she intentionally tears up her own card and "drops the pieces into the red lemonade bottle" as an ostensible attempt to regain her own power and subjectivity (McGuinness 398). That "she pours the contents [from the red lemonade bottle] on to the chain" represents how much she would like to release herself from the trauma and move to a better future (McGuinness 398).[6] That said, to consciously bid farewell to the past might be the only solution to her mental incapability and enable her to be stronger and more independent in the future.

The Baglady's non-linear monological narrative is also noteworthy for being "cyclical and fluid" (Nally 199). Differently from most storytelling methods that are straightforward and realistic, the Baglady's use of flashbacks and flashforwards allows her to be free of instructional expressions, merging "reality and fantasy . . . in an attempt to overcome the pain" (Nally 199). The fluidity of her narrative also foreshadows the possibility that her trauma might be healed through the use of liquids in symbolic ways, be they red lemonade or sacrament wine. Namely, having confessed to the audience (and herself) about her tragedy, the Baglady "walk[s] into her coffin. . . . tak[ing] the ring from her finger," dropping it and exclaiming "drown" (McGuinness 399). It could be contended that the dropping and drowning of the ring –which is her mother's wedding ring that her father passed on to her as a gift after incestuous sex– suggests her determination to counteract the lie that he had told her: "They say if a girl sleeps with a wedding ring in her bed she will have lovely dreams about the man she'll marry" (McGuinness 396). Meanwhile, her walk into the coffin is not exactly a suicidal act but might be symbolic of the Baptism of Jesus, a Christian ceremony for those who have repented and expected a regeneration.[7] The red lemonade, the fluidity of her narrative, as well as her exclamation of "drown" all facilitate the symbolic baptism and the rebirth. Having done so, she could expunge the sense of shame over her father's wrongdoing, announcing for herself that "God forgive me. I saw" (McGuinness 399). She therefore recovers not only her subjectivity but her sensibility, so

that she could move on to the Promised Land, where her dignity as a woman would be respected and her exiled mind re-anchored.

Although the Baglady seems to be eloquent in demonstrating her ups and downs, the information she delivers is often so disjointed –with flashbacks and flashforwards– that it would puzzle the audience as to what exactly happened, when, and why she is distressed. The challenge in understanding her monologue lies in the fact that her interior landscape is so fragile she cannot be straightforward enough to unveil her traumas and shame. Specifically, her walk often "along the edge of space" suggests that the incest and her father's murder of the baby have been so tormenting that they could cause her downfall at any time, if she fails to rescue herself. The stark simplicity of the staging is, incidentally, illustrative of the Baglady's mental condition consonant to her interior wasteland in desperate need of healing. Interestingly, at the end of the play, after the Baglady exposes all her disturbing secrets, she "removes her scarf, showing her hair" (McGuinness 398). The revealing of her hair and the dunking of the torn-off cards in the red lemonade, as mentioned above, also indicate that she is longing for a change. To some extent, she spares no effort to recover her femininity as a step towards reclaiming her value as a woman.

One notable matter about *Baglady* is that the protagonist owns a bag that seems to be her most intimate and trusted companion. The bag never hurts or betrays her owner, compared to the protagonists' family and community members who hurt them badly. Although the bag functions as personal storage space for physical items, it can also be seen as the reification of the character's individuality, experiences and memories. That said, the Baglady's personal items are either in her "grey, woollen sack" or a pocket of her coat (385). By the end of the play, all her belongings, namely a pack of playing cards, a bottle of red lemonade, an iron chain, a scarf, a white dress, and a ring, have all been taken out and piled in a heap, before she verbally exclaims "drown" (399). Despite the audience not seeing water on the stage to physically drown these props, they carry certain significances relating to her painful days. To part with these items suggests her refusal to carry them indefinitely. It is likely that her future happy days will be built upon independence and her direct faith in God as an individual.

It could be pointed out that McGuinness's characterization of the Bagladys' challenges could result from the social background and historical context in which he grew up and developed his theatrical vision. McGuinness, born in 1953, had seen the rise of feminism and its growing impact on Irish society and beyond, despite the fact that the Northern Ireland Troubles and increased civilian casualties had always been in the headlines. The awakening of the Baglady reflects public attention being drawn to the

oppression and silencing of women victims who experienced sexual assault or misconduct, particularly when the Catholic Church dominated the everyday lives of Irish people. It might be argued that by portraying the Baglady as a dominant character who heals herself without relying on institutional support, the audience sees the transformation of mental weaknesses into genuine abilities. The efforts that McGuinness makes to have the Baglady seen and heard not only pay tribute to his Irish activists striving for gender equality but throw light upon women's power in being their own saviours, yet not losing their Christian faith.

Conclusion: Her New Road Ahead

Baglady illustrates how a woman protagonist tries to disown her past and troubles by fighting against the tremendous forces that have regulated and confined her. For McGuinness, who has been familiar with Christian philosophy, his writing is clearly not endorsements of the allegory in Genesis that "woman serves man as his mirror, his temptress, a seductress of the evil powers of his own unconscious" (Benstock 173). Instead, he presents the Baglady who is the victim of patriarchal violence and shows how she is able to heal her scar and recover from traumas, be they mental or physical, visible or invisible.

Although the Baglady can, to some extent, speak for herself or demonstrate her mental constraints to the audience, what is not much noted is the ways in which she is still subject to violence, implicit or not, in her community. As Michel Foucault notes, the network of discourse has created a "historically contingent social system that produces knowledge and meaning" and reinforces the given hierarchy (Adams par. 2). Specifically, by presenting the Baglady as being not entirely under male surveillance and giving her more opportunities to unfold her thoughts and feelings, this social confinement might thus be counteracted and examined theatrically. Having said so, this monodrama illustrates how the woman protagonist persists in unwinding her secrets and unlocking her emotions after experiencing sexual violation and how she processes her traumas and sense of shame. The dramatization of her painful past might therefore contest and invert the violence on her unregarded existence, offsetting historical patriarchal domination over women who are disrespected and stigmatized.

McGuinness's *Baglady* features a woman surviving under the shadow of sexual violation and her hard battle against herself and society, even when the male victimizer is no longer around to threaten her further. Arguably, for the Irish audience, the closer they encounter the darker truths, the more questionable is the myth of Cathleen ni Houlihan

standing for women in Ireland. Although the Baglady's predicament results from the traumas she has experienced and that can hardly be forgotten, the audience joins the protagonist in and out of her mindscapes, witnessing how her story is not purely fictional but contains echoes of themselves.

Notes

1 Despite the fact that early twentieth-century Irish theatre produced very few monodrama or play that involved a significant use of monologues under the influence of cultural nationalism and social realism, novelists were more courageous in devising interior monologues in their works following the advent of psychoanalysis and psychopathology on the European mainland. They aimed to reflect innermost voices, lives in chaos, and even the suppressed libido, which realistic approaches could only portray with considerable difficulty. The most notable works included James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, which were largely written in the style of the stream of consciousness. Joyce's later work, *Finnegans Wake*, further prompted its readers to sink into the unconscious world that the writer peered into. In the 1960s, Samuel Beckett, under the lingering impact of Joyce, produced many absurdist and radio plays, exploring seemingly unimportant trivialities through a more extensive use of monologues. 2 The foci of their creations are diversified, including historical events, class struggle, the gulf between rich and poor, parent-child relationships, the mentally and physically disabled, war memories, religious antagonism, labour issues, gender stereotypes, illegal immigrants, sex and drugs, domestic violence, adolescent crime, and so forth. The dramaturgy is not limited to conventional realism but challenges the intangible fourth wall of the stage by the mixed uses of stream of consciousness, metafictional devices and much more. These all demonstrate the ways in which Irish dramatists have succeeded to the Joycean and Beckettian radicalities with monodramas—which are relatively easy to produce in terms of performance costs yet, in terms of their theatricality, are almost as provocative.

3 Although most contemporary Irish playwrights have been devoted to the writing of monodramas to a certain extent, and the number of their plays is impressive, the study of this genre is still far from being comprehensive. Some notable researches on monologue as a theatrical expression, not limited to works by Irish playwrights, include Deborah Geis's *Postmodern Theatric(k)s: Monologue in Contemporary Americana Drama* (1993), Clare Wallace's *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity* (2006), Brian Singleton's *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (2011), and Michael Raab's essay "A Nation of Soliloquists? The Irish and the Dramatic Monologue."

4 Despite McGuinness saying in an interview that it was "a pure coincidence", the story of *Baglady* is resonant with the shocking 1984 "Kerry babies" incident in which two babies were found murdered in rural Kerry (Mikami 133). In the same year, a fifteen-year-old girl, Ann Lovett, was found dead in a field in County Longford, having been in labour. Apparently, these tragic events resulted not only from the lack of support for unmarried mothers but the tremendous pressure put on teenage girls who were sexually abused.

5 Other gifts that the father has given to his daughter include a ring and a golden necklace. However, he threatens that "if she breathed a word of their secrets, the necklace grew black, blacker and blacker, and it tightened about her throat, tighter and tighter, twisting her face up, . . . until she said she was sorry" (McGuinness 397).

6 On the stage the Baglady is constantly troubled by a chain that she hauls from her sack. The chain is symbolic of sexual abuses and social restrictions she has suffered: "Her hands start to beat against her body. She fights her hands away. They reach for the chain. She curbs it with her foot. Her hands free the chain and raise it to her neck. It starts to coil itself tightly about her" (McGuinness 397).

7 The Baptism of Jesus is documented in Matthew (3:16-17), Mark (1:10), and Luke (3:16-22) of the New Testament. In Matthew, for example, after Jesus was baptized, "the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (3:16-17).

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Breaking Silences: Women, Citizenship and Theatre In Northern Ireland

Quebrando silêncios: Mulheres, cidadania e o teatro na Irlanda do Norte

Lisa Fitzpatrick

Abstract: *This essay seeks to weave together an analysis of women's citizenship and its dependency on certain silences, and the exploration of this tension in two recent productions by Belfast- based Kabosh Theatre Company. Kabosh, and company Artistic Director Paula McFetridge, stage work that examines the realities of the region in the post-conflict era. In constructing the theoretical frame for the analysis, the concept of "silence" and "silencing" draws from Kristie Dotson (2015), and from work on violence such as Gayatri Spivak's concept of "epistemic violence" and a wide range of sources on the performance of violence in theatre. Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonistic democracy shapes the discussion of the Northern Irish state, and Wendy Brown and Joane Butler are the key scholars for the consideration of citizenship and nation.*

Keywords: *Silence; Silencing; Affect; Shame; Democracy; Civil Rights; Gender; Activism.*

Resumo: *Este ensaio procura tecer uma análise da cidadania das mulheres e da sua dependência de certos silêncios e a exploração dessa tensão em duas produções recentes da Kabosh Theatre Company, com sede em Belfast. Kabosh e a diretora artística da empresa, Paula McFetridge, encenam uma obra que examina as realidades da região na era pós-conflito. Ao construir o quadro teórico para a análise, os conceitos de "silêncio" e "silenciamento" baseiam-se em Kristie Dotson (2015) e em trabalhos sobre violência, como o conceito de "violência epistêmica" de Gayatri Spivak e uma ampla gama de fontes sobre a representação da violência no teatro. O conceito de democracia agonística de Chantal Mouffe molda a discussão*

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sobre a Irlanda do Norte, e Wendy Brown e Joane Butler são as principais estudiosas para a consideração acerca da cidadania e da nação.

Palavras-chave: *Silêncio; Silenciamento; Afeto; Vergonha; Democracia; Direitos civis; Gênero; Ativismo.*

Introduction

Based in Belfast, Kabosh has developed an extensive repertory of new writing that engages with the social realities of contemporary life, under the artistic directorship of Paula McFetridge. One strand of the company's work tackles issues that directly relate to the conflict known as "the Troubles" and its aftermath[1] (CAIN Web Service, online; McKittrick & McVea, 2012), which might be described as a partial peace, with paramilitary activity largely confined to low-income segregated housing estates across the region (Coupe 2022). Another strand examines LGBTQI rights, asylum, poverty – issues that are urgent across numerous societies. The two productions discussed here illustrate this. *The Shedding of Skin*, written by Vittoria Cafolla and premiering in 2021, explores gender-based violence in conflict and brings that history to bear on post-conflict Northern Ireland; while the 2023 production of Rosemary Jenkinson's *Silent Trade* explores people trafficking and builds on Jenkinson's earlier play *Lives.In.Translation* which was produced by Kabosh for the Belfast Arts Festival in 2017. This essay explores these productions as texts and performances that examine and represent women's silences about misogynistic violence and marginalisation, and state and institutional practices of silencing that shape women's access to civil rights.

Northern Ireland is persistently represented by a "two communities" model that divides the population into Protestant and British, or Catholic and Irish. Although this model excludes immigrant communities and the growing numbers who reject both these labels, there remains a large percentage of the population who live in segregated housing and attend segregated schools. The "two communities" concept also shapes public funding policies, and is recognized in the Peace Agreement and formalized in the structure of the devolved government. These plays are part of a larger body of theatre practice in Northern Ireland that might be characterised as post-conflict, meaning that it seeks to engage its audience with the lived experience of the "other" community, with the long-term aim of opening dialogue and discussion, to secure a lasting peace and reconciliation. Kabosh, for the post-conflict strand of its work, tours mainly to single-community venues

and offers talkbacks and discussions after the shows, addressing community sensitivities about policing, economic opportunities, and competing versions of history. In the absence of government policies to address the various legacies of the conflict and the structural inequalities of the sectarian state that preceded it, this task has been passed to the arts and culture sector (Coupe 2022).

Art and Democracy

Chantal Mouffe argues that artistic practice can play an important role in democracy. In the West, theatre has a long, documented history of public debate with the state in its various forms from the Ancient Greek theatre onwards, and Mouffe sees potential in all kinds of artistic practice to "subvert the dominant hegemony" and to visualise and represent "that which is repressed and destroyed by the consensus of post-political democracy" (Mouffe 6). Her argument is based on opposition to liberalism, replacing it with an agonistic model of democracy in which decisions must be made between conflicting alternatives, and in which rational consensus is not achievable. Democracy is the "struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally", and the public space "is the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation." She argues that "artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or in its challenging," and she concludes that "critical art is art that foments dissensus, makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony" (Mouffe 12).

Situating these performances in relation to Mouffe's argument brings them into direct collision with the UK government's repeatedly articulated vision for Northern Ireland – i.e., the dominant hegemony. In the decades since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and a lasting ceasefire, two contrasting representations of Northern Ireland have dominated public discourse: the Westminster government's use of the language of the marketplace to evaluate the region's progress towards a peaceful civil society, and a growing body of performance work that explores and reflects upon the traumatic events and the traces of the "Troubles" in everyday life – and these are in stark opposition. The current Conservative-led British government has characterized Northern Ireland as "open for business" and poised to reap a "peace dividend" in the form of increased foreign investment. The marketing of Fermanagh's natural beauty and tourism potential during

the G8 summit in 2013 and the decision to make Derry the first UK City of Culture in the same year, supports a process of strategically forgetting formative events like the Enniskillen Remembrance Day bomb or Bloody Sunday, to promote a "normalized" Northern Ireland. This language has persisted through the Brexit negotiations, with UK Prime Minister Sunak describing Northern Ireland as being in an "unbelievably special [economic] position" with potential for trading freely across both the EU and the UK. The language of neo-liberal economics measures social change in monetary terms and reduces community belonging and identity to individual choice. Yet personal and communal experiences of trauma and violence are bound into the landscape, communities, and politics of NI and cannot be simply wished away.

Like other work included within the umbrella term "theatre for social change", the two plays discussed here are concerned with making visible and audible experiences that are usually obscured, or obliterated, or contained within labels of victimhood or criminality. Such labels act to silence the individual, casting them as a symbol to be spoken about, or a criminal undeserving of human sympathy. Both plays explore violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland, one focused on the legacy and history of the conflict, the other on the contemporary issue of human trafficking. If post-conflict theatre and art might be positioned as anti-hegemonic resistance to neoliberal narratives of peace, then breaking the silence about women's experiences further resist these totalizing narratives. Northern Ireland is ranked as one of the most dangerous places in Europe for women, based on a murder rate that is almost entirely domestic or by perpetrators who are well known to the victim. The rates of sexual abuse and intimate partner violence are very high, a legacy of decades when policing and security measures were mainly focused on paramilitary acts, in the context of a very conservative society where traditional patriarchal models of the family acted as inhibitors on addressing domestic abuses. The issue of gender-based violence during and after the conflict has been consistently ignored and under-researched (Aisling Swaine, 2022; Ngozi Anyadike-Danes *et al* 2022; Anna-Lea van Ooijen *et al* 2023). The emerging, totalizing historical narratives of the conflict generally minimise intersectional explorations in relation to gender and sexuality; therefore, work that directly addresses violence against women and girls challenges the silencing and stifling of these histories, creating an agonistic response to the male-focused heteronormative hegemonic narratives.

Gender and Citizenship

Feminist theory has long pointed towards the gendered nature of citizenship, and the discursive construction of the normative "universal" citizen as male. In their explorations of nationalism and gender from the early 1990s onwards, scholars like Wendy Brown, Cynthia Enloe, and Joane Nagel have identified and analysed the operation of mainstream nationalist discourses and imagery as essentially male and conforming to a particular, heteronormative, concept of masculinity. Nagel's 1998 analysis is particularly useful because she examines nationalist icons of patriotic manhood and "exalted motherhood" that persist into right-wing nationalist discourse of the 2020s. These discourses seek to construct totalizing metanarratives of nationhood that cannot readily accommodate diversity. Eavan Boland writes of the Irish national literary tradition as "constraining" (Boland 148). Accusing Irish poets of "evading the real women of an actual past . . . whose silence their poetry should have broken", she asks how "real women with their hungers, their angers, endured a long struggle and a terrible subsistence . . . How then did they re-emerge in Irish poetry as queens, as Muses . . . That could happen only if Irish poets complied with the wishful thinking of Irish nationalism" (Boland 155).

Boland's essay points to the silences that mark women's histories and shape the terms of women's citizenship and civil rights. In recent years, Irish Studies has been concerned with previously silenced histories of the Magdalene Laundries, the Mother and Baby Homes, the systemic abuse of children by members of religious orders; rape and sexual violence in the War of Independence, the Civil War, and the conflict in Northern Ireland. Represented in art, mainly by women, these thematic concerns play out in images and narratives of knowing, not-knowing, refusing to hear, and processes of violent suppression of any who would speak publicly. The suppression of these histories, like the suppression of the original victims, maintains fictions of heroism, patriotism, national pride, comely maidens, and states that cherish all their citizens equally.

The Shedding of Skin

Commissioned by Kabosh Theatre Company and written by Vittoria Cafolla, *The Shedding of Skin* was directed by Paula McFetridge for an online premiere that streamed on YouTube in June 2021, when the theatres were still closed by the COVID-19 restrictions. The play was subsequently revised and performed live in Derry and Belfast in June 2022. The play addresses rape in wartime, drawing on international examples but situating a range of experiences of Northern Irish women within the storyline. The work aims to

point to both the ubiquity of rape and war, and the particularity of the local experience. It uses the framing device of the Eumenides or Furies from Greek mythology and tragedy, who persecute those who have committed crimes against the family and against hospitality, until the judgement of Athena redirects their activities towards the protection of justice, rather than vengeance. Often described as three sisters, daughters of the Night and the Underworld, these ancient deities are fearsome to behold. Their association with crimes against the family and household is important for the text, where many of the recounted and performed scenes of violence are situated within the supposedly safe space of homes and family relationships.

Performed by a cast of four actors, the play opens with a rising soundscape mingling industrial sounds with radio reports of atrocities that blend into a high-pitched hum and then cut out. The lights come up on with three robed figures (the Furies) in front of a cracked standing-stone, while a young woman, Samantha, lies unconscious on the grass before them. It is dawn. The lighting mutes the colours of the set and costuming, so that the colour palate shifts from grey overtones to sharp, vivid colour by the end of the performance. With a running time of approximately 70 minutes, the play is performed with no interval. The plot follows the discovery of Samantha, who has arrived at this in-between world for the Furies to gather her experiences of sexual violence. They act as repositories for these stories, bearing the grief and pain on behalf of the world. They are named according to the sections of the globe that they represent: Sinead standing for Western Europe, Tereza for the East, and Ruth for the ancient Levant. However, on this day something is different: the Furies rarely meet all together, and Samantha's arrival is outside of the norm. As Samantha awakens, the dialogue establishes the scene as Cave Hill, just outside Belfast, Samantha's hometown. The play is constructed of women's testimonies of war, gathered from documentary sources, play texts, novels, and newspaper reports. The Furies recount snippets, sharing horrors, sometimes laughing as they do so.

Cafolla writes the Furies as hybrid creatures who inhabit the remains of human women: Sinead's memories include her own experiences as an IRA woman in Belfast, for example, but she will eventually move on to another plane of existence and her work will be taken on by another. She and Tereza speak of someone who will come and change their futures, offering healing or reconciliation. Costumed in hooded robes, the Furies have blood-stained hands, explaining that the suffering they absorb results in a constant menstruation, but also linking menstrual blood to the women in Armagh prison during

the blanket protest of the 1970s and 1980s. Sinead's testimony of her experiences of gender-based violence in the IRA refers to rape by her commanding officer,[2] while Tereza "puts her hands in her knickers during the following and starts to smear blood on the rocks around her" (Cafolla, unpublished script, 20). Sinead continues:

> Sinead
>
> I have smeared my menstrual blood on the walls along with shit and piss. Shit mixed with that metallic scent, 23 hours a day red gleaming turning black. Crying. Squalling like a baby. We are trying- struggling- to be born again.
>
> Tereza
>
> They have decided that the women should not hunger strike. It distracts from the men's efforts-
>
> Sinead
>
> (bitter)
> Equality achieved – (Cafolla, unpublished script, 20)

The "blanket protest" or "dirty protest" began in the late 1970s when the British government removed the "political" or "special" status from paramilitary prisoners, forcing them to wear prison uniforms, take part in prison labour, and limiting and monitoring their interactions. The long-running protests included the "blanket protest" in which prisoners refusing to wear uniforms wrapped blankets around their naked bodies, and, in 1981, a hunger strike in which ten men died. The protests by the men are well known and are commemorated in murals in Catholic areas of Northern Ireland, but the women's protests – which began in slightly different circumstances – have been largely ignored (Christina Loughran, 1986; Laura Weinstein, 2007; Jolene Mairs (online)). The particular impact of the protest for women was that they had no access to sanitary products when they were menstruating, so smeared the blood onto the walls. By speaking on stage of women's biology, and seeming to smear the often-abjected menstrual fluid onto the set, the play draws attention to the lived, visceral impact of the conflict on the lives of women and to the silencing of that experience through processes of disgust and shaming.

The Shedding of Skin seeks to confront and challenge processes of silencing women's bodily experiences of the conflict: experiences of the infiltration of the war into the private space of the home, the abuse of children, sexual threat used to police women's

sexualities, and rape. Many abuses, particularly those imposed by the State such as strip searching, are silenced by criminalising those who bear witness to them. More commonly, these experiences are silenced because women are positioned as "exalted mothers" (to use Nagel's term), or as virgins, who attest to the honour of the nation in their modest demeanour. These particular impacts of war reveal acts of violence by respected members of the community, military or paramilitary heroes, martyrs.

Kristie Dotson links silencing to violence, specifically drawing upon Gayatri Spivak's concept of "epistemic violence". Spivak defines "epistemic violence" as a form of violence that seeks to eliminate the knowledge held by marginalized groups such as migrant workers, indigenous peoples, or other socially and politically disempowered sections of society (Spivak qtd in Kristie Dotson 236)[3] through processes that systematically devalue their knowledge and their status as holders of useful knowledge. Dotson illustrates how such silencing takes place in practice, offering examples of two kinds of epistemic violence where marginal subjects are giving testimony. She demarcates two kinds of silencing: "testimonial quieting" and "testimonial smothering." According to Dotson, "testimonial quieting" occurs when an audience "fails to recognize a speaker as a knower" (Dotson 242; Patricia Hill Collins, 2000). In this instance, the audience fail to recognize the knowledge and authority of the speaker because of external factors, outside of what is being said, typically race, gender, caste, social or organisational status.

Both forms of silencing are related to ignorance, as both "not knowing", and as the deliberate rejection of knowledge that challenges the individual's preferred world view named by Dotson and others as "pernicious ignorance". "Testimonial smothering", on the other hand, she defines as "the truncating of one's own testimony in order to ensure that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence" (Dotson 244).

Dotson's idea might be used concerning women speaking about domestic or sexual violence in Northern Ireland: in a divided society, if they are speaking against members of their own community they may be silenced because their testimony will feed negative stereotypes of their community. Members of the RUC, UDR, UDA, UVF, IRA, INLA, the Hunger strikers – if these are your heroes and the protectors of your community, then you may not be able to denounce individuals among them as wife-beaters, rapists, or child abusers. Your community is not likely to believe you, and you are likely to be blamed or punished for disloyalty.

Silent Trade: Human Trafficking on Stage

Silent Trade is a play in ten scenes about human trafficking. There are five characters: Precious, the young Nigerian woman who has been trafficked to Belfast; Erin, who is from Belfast and whose husband is Nigerian; Rab, the pimp, who takes Precious from Erin; Suze, a Belfast drug addict and prostitute who also works for Rab and who befriends Precious (who was played by the actor playing Erin), and Niall, an undercover police officer who visits the brothel to gather information. Precious has been brought to Northern Ireland as a domestic servant but is later sold into prostitution, and Suze is a young Belfast woman who is in debt and is forced to work as a prostitute by loan sharks (who are often paramilitaries). The play's focus is international and internal trafficking and aims to raise awareness of both. The title, "Silent Trade", refers to an ancient practice also called silent barter. It is a method by which traders who don't speak the same language can trade without talking, and it also refers to a process whereby the traders do not need meet each other. This describes the process in the play, where the traders have as little contact as possible, and only one – Rab, the pimp – is visible or audible on stage. The title also describes the silence surrounding this commerce in human beings, the absence of press and media coverage of the practice, and the resulting lack of public awareness or concern. And it can also describe the ways that the criminals to carry out this abuse benefit from the hostile anti-immigrant rhetoric that misrepresents anti-trafficking activists and silences survivors.

Silent Trade draws upon research by Jenkinson into human trafficking in Belfast, including interviews with people who have knowledge of the practice from the city's Nigerian community. The episodic plot unfolds chronologically: it opens with Erin explaining to Precious that she is to be Erin's unpaid maid, housekeeper, cook and child-minder. Precious will also clean other houses in the "community" and will be collected by van in the mornings.

The opening line spoken on stage is "So, this is your room", from Erin; it is briefly confusing because she and Precious are clearly in a kitchen. She continues:

> Kettle, cooker, washing mach. . . well, you don't need a full inventory . . .
>
> . . .
>
> You'll sleep here and you'll stow your bedding back in this cupboard as soon as you get up, ok? (Jenkinson 17).

Not only is Precious to sleep in the kitchen, but she is also instructed not to talk to anyone at the school when she is leaving or collecting the children. She is to be as hidden as possible: Erin tells her "When you're alone keep the blinds closed at all times . . . The back door is locked. I keep the key on me" (Jenkinson 17).

The exposition continues with Precious asking about her passport and visa, but Erin dismisses her, saying "Is there passport control on the Newtownards Road? If so, it's news to me". Her husband Joseph has the passport, and she says they will "attend to" these legal matters and concludes with a warning to Precious that if she's discovered she'll be sent to jail, and that Joseph will make trouble for her family at home in Nigeria (Jenkinson 19). The scene rapidly establishes for the audience the key information about human trafficking: that it is happening in Belfast in middle-class homes, that trafficked workers are unpaid and subjected to a kind of frightful semi-invisibility by their "employers" who threaten them with prison, deportation, and dire circumstances for their families. Precious has clearly been promised relative wealth in the affluent West; she had promised her mother money every month. Erin makes clear that this will not be possible – "We're already giving you meals, accommodation and we forked out a flat fee [for you] to Yosola" (Jenkinson 19). If everything goes well, Erin says they might send Precious' mother something in about six months.

The play emphasises silence: Precious is not to speak to anyone, anywhere. She is not to speak at the school gates, or at the doctor's office; she is not to speak to the neighbours, she is not to make friends. She should be invisible, as far as possible. This silencing protects her traffickers, but is framed as protecting her and her family, and she has no recourse beyond Erin and her off-stage husband. This silencing effectively disables Precious's claim on any rights associated with her humanity or her personhood. She has no bed to sleep in, no money for her work, and no security of any kind. She has no access to the law for protection, so is vulnerable to all kinds of violence and abuse.

Erin, the Northern Irish wife of Joseph Adebayo, is a finely balanced character who manages to be simultaneously human and appalling. Played with a slightly frantic, nervous energy by Louise Parker, she dismisses Precious's legitimate questions and appeals with a sarcastic humour that does not appear to be deliberately malicious. So when Precious asks about money, Erin asks "How are you planning to earn it, by becoming some sort of celebrity supernanny?" She explains that she is out a lot because of her work, "so I expect you to work hard without me there to whip you on. (*Laughs ironically*). Not that I mean whip you literally" (Jenkinson 20). With her extraordinary insensitivity and obliviousness to language (whipping) that recalls historic African slavery, Erin is obtuse,

hideously comic, and recognizably human. She occasionally confides in Precious, sharing her concerns about her husband and his mother. Precious, played by Lizzy Akinbami, maintains an air of quiet resignation throughout, occasionally smiling and indicating incomprehension by shaking her head or shrugging. Her silence allows her to maintain some dignity in a dreadful situation; she rarely shows emotion, apart from a brief phone call that she grabs with her mother. In scene three a few weeks later, Precious is roughly awoken by Erin: her presence has been discovered and she has spoken to someone at the local petrol station. "Joseph's raging and he's made his mind up. We can't keep you here any longer" Erin tells her. She adds that Precious is "lucky he's not here to take it out on you himself" (Jenkinson 27). They are selling her on, in Erin's words; when Rab arrives on stage shortly afterwards it is clear that Precious has been sold to a brothel. Erin is paid £200 and Precious's "consultant" as the trafficker is referred to, has been told. No money is given to Precious. The play demonstrates the concept of "silent trade" as Precious is passed about by people who are never visible on stage: her "consultant", Joseph, Yosola. Rab, the pimp, takes her from Erin without ever meeting the original trafficker, though clearly they will be sharing the income from Precious from this point forward. In this way, the traffickers and those holding Precious in slavery avoid prosecution: the network is structured to operate in small self-contained cells.

The play never shows violence explicitly, yet the whole performance is underpinned with a sense of threat. The trafficked women are in a highly precarious situation, dependent on pleasing the men who effectively own them. For Precious, this means her "agent", to whom she is ever in debt no matter how hard she works. Joseph, never seen on stage but present through Erin's words and stories, must also be endlessly appeased by the women in his household. This includes his daughter (who must take care of her appearance and her chastity), his wife, and Precious. She must also appease her pimp and therefore must please the anonymous clients who pay him to have sex with her. The play does not dwell on the horror for Precious, who is a modest and religious woman, in being forced into this work; rather, it stages her resilience and her burgeoning friendship with Suze. But the script and the performance are effective in creating a dread in the spectators at what they might be forced to witness. Scene four opens with Suze on stage, dressing after her last client, when Rab enters singing "The House of the Rising Sun". In their brief dialogue, Suze tells him that "the last girl still keeps crying", and Rab responds telling her to "break this one [Precious] in nice. I explained the score on the way here ... Looks like the fight's already been kicked out of her" (Jenkinson 30). Rab supplies both women with pills and gives Suze a bottle of vodka, to help them tolerate their situation. The dialogue and

action suggests the possibility of a scene between Precious and a client, that might even be forceful and violent. Having already developed a sympathetic relationship with Precious in the preceding scenes, to see this new degradation on stage would be distressing.

Precious has a voice but cannot be heard. She is threatened repeatedly with the dangers of speaking which will bring harm on her, her employers, and her family at home. Furthermore, her race and her work as a prostitute devalue her testimony, so she is effectively silenced again by the institutions of the stage. She is framed in public discourse as an unreliable witness, one who cannot be trusted to tell the truth. Her fellow prostitute Suze is in a similar situation. Although Suze believes she has repaid her debt in full, when she states this the pimp ridicules her and tells her she will never be free. The play ends with her begging on the street, under threat of torture and death from the pimp and his associates. Suze is a citizen in Northern Ireland, yet her own country does not offer her protection – and if it did, she couldn't access it anyway. Her rights as a citizen have been abrogated and suspended because her identity as a drug addict and prostitute and homeless person means that she is not a credible witness. This characterization of the female characters raises questions about the accessibility of "universal" rights.

Silent Trade critiques the silence that surrounds human trafficking, and the ways in which that silence permits the practice to continue. In a study of feminist theatre published almost thirty years ago, Lizbeth Goodman pointed to the recurrence of sexual violence as a thematic concern in women's writing for the stage. Lizbeth Goodman's *Contemporary Feminist Theatre* briefly discusses the recurrence of this issue, noting that women's artistic practice returns to it quite insistently, experimenting with methods and strategies of representation (Goodman, 1993). The issue continues to be addressed in women's dramatic writing and theatre practice, in Northern Ireland and around the globe. In these two plays, premiering with the same director, the question of sexual violence is explored in very different contexts, but with urgency and in recognition of the need to speak, and open dialogue, that might raise public awareness and result in meaningful action. In these plays, both of Dotson's forms of silencing are in operation. The characters are silenced from above, by other characters who are present on stage and who hold more power and authority over them, or by unseen characters whose words are relayed and who make the rules. This silencing is itself a kind of violence. It is interpersonal, but it is also systemic, defined by Zizek as operating largely invisibly as "normality" or as "just the way things are."

These examples of theatre, written and staged by women artists, act to break silences about social issues that have been covered over and suppressed through processes of shaming, victim-blaming, and denial. *Silent Trade* raises awareness and understanding

of trafficked women and of the obstacles they face if they try to escape or seek justice. *The Shedding of Skin* breaks the silence about the role of sexual violence during the conflict to harass particular communities, to police women's sexuality, and to suppress dissent. Resisting the imperatives of silence in this context offers empowerment, and also means liberating the voices of the people in the community, including the women, to raise challenges and to advocate for themselves and their community. These plays challenge the neoliberal version of Northern Ireland, drawing critical attention to the ways in which is it not just like anywhere else in the UK or Ireland. The work makes the differences visible and audible, performing the issues in a public space as a democratic action, as a critical and agonistic response to the dominant hegemony, seeking to force recognition of problems and solutions.

Notes

1 Although the term "Troubles" is used in journalism, scholarly writings, and dramatic representations of Northern Ireland, I will normally use the term "conflict" in this essay. The conflict is a minor but complicated one, broadly involving two opposing sections of the population: the Protestant population which is generally loyal to Britain and wishes to maintain Northern Ireland's place in the UK, and the Catholic population which generally identifies with Ireland and Irish culture. The conflict grew out of sectarian state institutions and structures which denied civil rights to the Catholic population. The conflict is notable partly because of its geographical location in Western Europe, in a disputed region between two wealthy states (the UK and the Republic of Ireland).

2 This part of the play is adapted from testimonies including the experience that Anne Walker recounts in the Theatre of Witness production *I Once Knew a Girl*. Walker, who was in the IRA, describes her commanding officer forcing himself upon her when they were in a safe house. She is one of very few former combatants who have spoken openly about this kind of experience.

3 Spivak is speaking of groups who are "the lowest strata of the urban sub-proletariat" and whose "capacity to speak and be heard" is systematically undermined by the state. This is not, of course, true of women as a class, to the same extent; but aspects of this kind of violence are often visible in rape trials and other situations when high-status individuals are accused of gender-based violence. Dotson proposes here a more general application of the term "epistemic violence" to consider the various practices by when the less powerful in any society may be silenced or rendered inaudible.

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Woman Undone *by Brokentalkers: Activism with a Difference*

Woman Undone *de Brokentalkers: Ativismo com uma diferença*

Helena Young

Abstract: *Brokentalkers theatre company first set up in 2001 may be described as a fearless, innovative organisation which has from the outset tried to balance the inequalities prevalent in Irish society. It comprises of Feidlim Cannon and Gary Keegan who describe their ethos as to devise original, accessible live performance and explore new forms that challenge traditional ideologies of text-based theatre. They use the postdramatic medium in order to convey the urgency of a particular situation and in line with this, their performances can often include slapstick, violent physical action, pop cultures, breaking of the illusion and hysterical outbursts from the actors. One of their more recent performances,* Woman Undone*, which premiered in 2018, is an impactful reimagining and reconstruction of an aspect of blues singer, Mary Coughlan's life. This essay investigates the use of dramaturgical strategies such as musicality, bodily movement and cross gender casting in the performance in order to highlight the situation of those who have been abused in Ireland. The microcosm of one well known woman's experience is brought to the macrocosm of society to educate and enlighten all women.*

Keywords: *Postdramatic; Memory; Gender; Patriarchy; Embodied Trauma.*

Resumo: *A companhia de teatro Brokentalkers, criada em 2001, pode ser descrita como uma organização destemida e inovadora que, desde o início, tentou equilibrar as desigualdades prevalecentes na sociedade irlandesa. É composta por Feidhlim Cannon e Gary Keegan, que descrevem o seu*

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espírito de conceber performances ao vivo originais e acessíveis e explorar novas formas que desafiam as ideologias tradicionais do teatro baseado em texto. Eles usam o meio pós-dramático para transmitir a urgência de uma situação particular e, com isso, suas performances podem muitas vezes incluir pastelão, ação física violenta, culturas pop, quebra da ilusão e explosões histéricas dos atores. Uma de suas apresentações mais recentes, Woman Undone*, que estreou em 2018, é uma impactante reimaginação e reconstrução de um aspecto da vida da cantora de blues Mary Coughlan. Este ensaio investiga o uso de estratégias dramatúrgicas como musicalidade, movimento corporal e elenco de gênero cruzado na performance, a fim de destacar a situação daqueles que foram abusados na Irlanda. O microcosmo da experiência de uma mulher conhecida é trazido para o macrocosmo da sociedade para educar e esclarecer todas as mulheres.*

Palavras-chavras: *Pós-dramático; Memória; Gênero; Patriarcado; Trauma corporificado.*

Introduction

In November 2018 I chose *Woman Undone*, the dramatic adaptation of the life story of Mary Coughlan, the Irish blues, jazz and soul singer, co-written by Brokentalkers and Coughlan herself, for my monthly theatre club. As we are a large group, one only gets to choose a show every eighteen months, therefore I was delighted to discover that the innovative duo, Feidlim Cannon and Gary Keegan, Brokentalkers, co-artistic directors, had something showing at that time. However, the majority did not enjoy it and some even went so far as to ask me to never to choose something again. It certainly has to be agreed that this is a harrowing piece of work but arguably an exceptionally important one which deals with multiple feminist issues. Feidlim Cannon, one of the Brokentalkers duo explained that it was after a performance of another of their works, *A Circus Animals Desertion* (2016**),** that Coughlan first approached their theatre company about the possibility of doing a collaborative piece on the happenings in her life. She liked their use of dance and costuming and when she referenced artists such as Robert Wilson and Marina Abramovic, he and Keegan were sold on the idea as they both agreed that she would be a very good fit for them. Their methodology first involves writing what is known as a Hollywood version of the performance which provides a structure and a scaffold for work. Contrary to popular belief, structural cohesion is of particular importance in postdramatic theatre.

Subsequently, Brokentalkers implement their use of image, action and text. A wall is filled with these ideas and then the connective tissues of music, song and props are added.[1]

I argue that Brokentalkers has achieved, in *Woman Undone*, an impactful reimagining and reconstruction of an aspect of Mary Coughlan's life in order to draw attention to the abuse women still endure in society today. It was not a straightforward process as while rehearsing for this show the singer was attending therapy which was, as Cannon described, integral to her life, to cope with the abuse that she had endured.[2] Brokentalkers has implemented innovative dramaturgical strategies including musicality, bodily movement and cross gender casting in order to highlight the marginalised Other, in this case a woman who has over the years become completely destroyed by the treatment proffered her by the male figures in her life. With the use of their craft and the subsequent affect instilled in the audience, Keegan and Cannon, together with Coughlan have made the individual universal or in other words the microcosm of one woman's story become the macrocosm of effecting awareness with possible societal change.

In order to bring this about, awareness and education are necessary and while *Woman Undone* makes for uncomfortable viewing it is imperative that every woman who is violated not only learns how to, but also feels courageous enough to speak out.[3] Sexual abuse of women is presently a very topical subject for discussion and this production needs to be seen through the framework of highlighting the great necessity for women to assert themselves, rather than being seen as another personal therapy session for Coughlan as was relayed to me by a member of the theatre group.[4]

Postdramatic and Memory

As *Woman Undone* was Mary's own story, she was given free rein to include whatever she saw fit. Images were to be given precedence in this performance as the text is in her autobiography, *Bloody Mary, My Story* (2009).[5] Emancipation from text is a major, if not one of the most important, component of postdramatic theatrical practices. As Marvin Carlson remarks "the emancipation of the performance from the literary text is arguably the most central concern of the postdramatic" (379). It was Mary's insight into the images pertaining to her life, rather than an interrogation of them, was deemed most important. Images regularly popped into her mind and were very difficult for her to let go. Car crashes seemed to feature heavily in her life story therefore it seemed prudent to have a car on set.[6] According to Cannon, Mary first learnt to drive in a repurposed post office van painted orange so one was sourced for the show. It was decided that because her

story involves a series of survivals, from such horrors as a traumatic childhood, alcohol addiction, suicide attempts and subsequent incarceration in psychiatric hospitals, it would be more impactful to place emphasis on the first survival experience, the escape from her toxic home environment, in *Woman Undone*, which is predominantly a snapshot of Mary Coughlan's life from her birth to the age of sixteen.

The work addresses the use of memory to home in on particular events but also, as memory is always fluid it could be described as having an "ability to move, both metaphorically and literally, across physical and disciplinary boundaries."(Pine, 2). Moreover, it gives a voice to the previously unheard (45). As Lehmann has described, the stage ultimately becomes a memory space for the audience thereby encouraging thoughts of possible latent bodily capacities (348). The material being relayed by Mary's forceful presence on stage is all coming from a real place but delivered in a postdramatic fashion in order to involve the audience in a more active way. Challenging the audience and performance spatial relationship are important aspects of the postdramatic (Carlson, 586). While *Woman Undone* is not as high energy as some of Brokentalkers' other works, such as *The Blue Boy* (2011), it does introduce an element of playfulness, such as Coughlan's delayed entrance, in order to make the serious content matter more palatable.

Musicality is a strategy used in *Woman Undone* to highlight vulnerability but, because there was no room for sentimentality, it was felt that Mary's own repertoire of songs would not be used. A libretto by "renowned Icelandic composer and music producer, Valgeir Sigurdsson, who fuses electronic music with live instrumentation and a haunting vocal score written for female voices" (brokentalkers.ie) is used. The band is an all- female quartet called Mongoose described as a "jazz infused folk-pop group (who) take their cinematic sound into brand new dimensions."(hotpress.com).[7]

The soundscape in this production is haunting which is particularly relevant for the subject matter. Ivan Vyrypaev, explained in an interview about the use of sound in his performance: "If you see the dance, then the dance is nothing more to you than the one you just saw. But if you hear it, then you will have your own dance. As soon as you hear it, an image of the dance manifests. The word comes to life – that is, within you the image is born" (Weygandt,195).[8] Moreover, extreme trauma can be conveyed to the audience in a universal way with the sound methods that are used (196).

The other postdramatic dramaturgical strategy executed in this performance is physical movement. Dance is implemented in such a fashion as to embody pain and trauma. As Lehmann attributes in his reassessment of the postdramatic, "in dance we find most radically expressed what is true for postdramatic in general." (163). Erin O'Reilly,

the sole dancer on stage, who emerges from the car as if it is a moment of birth, vividly represents the abuse that Mary's body, over a lifetime, has had to deal with. The dancer, apart from Mary herself, is the only female stage presence as the band members represent the male figures in her life. Coughlan is omnipresent on stage maintaining a strong physical presence often centre stage seated in a throne like chair. Highlighting the subjugated condition many women have to suffer, *Woman Undone* uses music and storytelling as one of their postdramatic dramaturgical strategies. The former fittingly plays a huge role in this performance as it did in Mary's own life, she even cites it as her redemption. During the performance, after an unsettling scene depicting sexual abuse, Mary tells young Mary represented by the dancer "that music will be (her) first love. It understands (her) and will comfort (her). It will soothe (her) soul. (She) is not alone" (www.vimeo.com 32:00). The cross gender casting is used not only to disrupt ritual and allow for immediate attention by the audience but more importantly, it acts as a means of feminist activism as female-male re-gendering can, not only highlight and question misogyny but "also expose the ideological structures that continue to collude with these values on the contemporary stage and in society more generally" (Miller 4).

In *Woman Undone* repetition is used from the very beginning with each band member asking the same question "Where are you now Mary?" (www.vimeo.com 5:45).[9] The question is also displayed on the audio-visual system at the back of the stage, a strategy used to blur the boundaries between performers and spectators where the intermediality is used to transform and deconstruct original thought processes throughout the performance. (Chappel and Kattenbelt 11-12). When the story of the car accident is recounted, Mary repeatedly utters "if you let me live, I will be good" (www.vimeo.com 7:52). When words are rhythmically used, in this fashion, in order to form a refrain, "the burden of authenticity shifts to the audience, allowing the spectator an entrance into the performance." (Weygandt, 195). It in effect becomes more of a participatory art. The echolalia and musicality implemented in the description of the car crash, as Mary sits on the ground alongside the car, allow the trauma she encountered not only to be imagined by the audience members but also to put them into the frame of the wider social implications of how a young girl found herself in this situation to be taken into account.

As the performance progresses it gets even more harrowing with Mary describing her father driving her to "the mad house" (www.vimeo.com 1:03:09) at the age of sixteen because of his inexplicable inability to parent a girl because he was expecting a boy. As Mary recounts "He would have known what to do with a boy, a boy would have been easier, they were expecting a boy" (www.vimeo.com 13.06). This statement by Mary is

followed by sprechstimme of "My son will be different to me, my son will be a man" (www.vimeo.com 13:56).[10] This is repeated to reinforce how in the 1950s Ireland that Mary was born into, society placed a higher regard on male children. Certainly, it was traditional for the firstborn male to inherit the parental estate often leaving other siblings no option but to emigrate or to join a religious congregation.[11]

Gender and Patriarchy

The refrain about Mary's father favouring a son is accompanied by audiovisual images of children and toys to juxtapose the picture Mary is describing. As evidenced in her autobiography, while recounting many happy times spent with siblings and friends the parental experience paints a very different picture because it explicitly describes her mother's inability to cope with her wilful behaviour and the subsequent beatings she had at the hands of her father as he was often waiting for her "leather belt at the ready" (Coughlan 52). This is demonstrated during the performance with the mention of popular foodstuff of the era, Fry's Cocoa Powder and Marietta biscuits being contrasted with a simulated beating accompanied by the utterance "Put manners on her. Beat it out of her" (www.vimeo.com 52:16).

Another poignant chorus "My son will never wear a soldier's uniform" (www.vimeo.com 15.49) points to the fact that Mary's father was probably aware of the toxic masculinity prevalent in the Irish army at that time. Tom Clonan has been outspoken about the patriarchal situation during his time in the defence forces. His groundbreaking research on the bullying, sexual harassment and assault that occurred within this organisation while he was a member (and most likely during Mary's father's time) has contributed to a book and two documentaries (tomclonan.ie). This situation has also recently been highlighted by the Women of Honour whistleblower group.[12] Bullying was also a frequent occurrence in 1960's domesticity. Tom Garvin cites how essentially during that time "children were practically the personal property of their parents and social worker supervision of dysfunctional families scarcely existed." (74). Mary Coughlan's questioning on stage is starkly contrasted with the dancer's silence demonstrating how she never spoke up in her younger life.

Brokentalkers use linguistic features and musicality to bring the spectators back to a time before "the delusion and the denials were exposed" (Ferriter 8). Education is the most powerful tool in order to bring about change and in this way postdramatic theatre plays an important role in informing society about the evils of the heretofore.

The audience is made to feel a part of the happenings onstage as "the strength of this reciprocal bond between theatre and society primarily stems from the fact that theatre is about human existence" (Lehmann 5). One of the most striking elements of this performance is the simulated birth where the dancer breaks through a membrane at the back of the van accompanied all the while by a haunting music score with Coughlan beside her repeatedly asking "what am I supposed to do with a girl?" (www.vimeo.com 18:25). Roles are reversed then when Mary sings about the power of touch. "Let your touch feel the trauma she is holding in her body" followed by a chorus of "Terrified bodies need a sense of where they are in space and time." (www.vimeo.com 22:40). Helen Bamber, a therapist who worked with holocaust survivors emphasised the importance of being physically present to their pain. Not just to talk, but to receive and "hold" the suffering" (228). During the performance, Mary continues to advise "If she is held she will be healed, she will not always have to guess who she is and where she is going."(www.vimeo.com 22:15). The soundscape helps the audience to identify with Coughlan's pain which is then reinforced by her utterance, "For now touch will remain a painful thing leading to confusion and violation, legs black with contusion no wonder she sings the blues" (24:55).

However, the most chilling sound in the whole performance is the clip-clop horse effect alongside sinister dark, ominous eerie wind like sounds that precedes the depiction of abuse by Mary's uncle who is played by Ailbhe Dunn. "I would rather go blind" by Etta James plays over radio undoubtedly chosen for the parallels of addiction between Coughlan and James. Later in the show Billie Holiday's "All of me" is played and while the earlier singer also suffered from sexual abuse and subsequent addiction, Coughlan makes no secret of her admiration for the latter citing a connection to her darkness (248). The song is accompanied by Molly O'Mahony, who represents her father, playing the mouth organ.

The shared vulnerability between father and daughter is made evident by not only the music but also Mary's uncle blowing bubbles into her father's face (www.vimeo.com 1:10:24). Not only does this visual metaphor enhance the soundscape but is even further intensified by the spectators' imagination to supply that which is left unsaid. Mary's father was most likely incapable of protecting her from the harmful effects of abuse. This is reinforced later when he explains the purpose of a hole that he dug in the garden, was to use as a car pit as he did not trust mechanics. His repeated utterance of "Keep everyone safe that was my job" (1:19:30) is accompanied by a cacophony of sound and flashing lights, after which he crashes into the hole.

The juxtaposition of what actually happened, according to Mary, and her father's perception of the situation is starkly portrayed. Jenny Kitzinger has investigated how women are often discredited in the media as having false memory syndrome and priority is given to patriarchal testimony (Reavey and Warner 9). In fact, Coughlan's silence is not unusual as many victims of abuse say there was no point reporting it as they knew they would not be believed. Research in this field has determined that "creating open-ended opportunities for discussion, as well as being empathic and responsive to the women, increased the possibility of the women disclosing abuse." (Rhodes 620). As depicted during this performance and reiterated throughout Mary's autobiography no safe space was provided for her to recount what was happening to her.[13]

Woman Undone with its use of musical soundscape and repetitive language in a fragmented disjointed way, typical of the postdramatic method, encourages the audience to relate their own experiences to what is happening onstage in order to fill in the gaps. This heightens the emotional tension and moves the action towards the audience, thereby resulting in a much more immersive experience than that which is provided by realism. Erica Fischer Lichte terms this "the feedback loop" (150), which contributes to the authenticity of that which is being conveyed.

Embodied Trauma

The bodily movement during this performance disrupts the norm particularly with the simulated birth of the dancer. The back window of the post office van is covered with a membrane that limb by limb she breaks through and falls to the floor wearing just a pink bodysuit (www.vimeo.com 17:51). This foreshadows the difficult life Coughlan will experience in the future. O'Reilly bears a striking resemblance to the blues singer with similar hair colouring and both women dressed in blue to indicate a symbiosis between the two performers. While the later staccato type dance movements can be seen to display teenage rebellion, they could also be interpreted as showing evidence of trauma (www.vimeo.com 29:15).

Often it is bodily movement that can convey much more than any text and may be seen as a way of providing an invitation to the audience to travel on an experiential journey with the performers. From the very beginning the spectators are left in no doubt that this is going to be a harrowing ride. Interestingly, dance therapy has been used as a means of healing for victims of sexual abuse. There is therefore a dichotomy evident in this performance whereby it may be seen as not only a depiction of, but also a possible

treatment, for trauma. Often survivors of abuse transcribe their suffering on to their flesh and although they are unable to verbalise it, even years later, it is often possible for them to work through it with bodily movement (Oh 4).

There is an emotional scene before which Coughlan carefully strips down O'Reilly to the leotard of her birth and then gently leads her into a bath. The movement of the young dancer's body by continually slipping and sliding with her feet seemingly stuck to the side of the bath suggests the entrapment Mary felt during the periods of abuse. The situation is heightened even further by the older woman's utterance "your little feet don't touch the ground" (www.vimeo.com 41:54). The blue dress is replaced by a yellow one for the representation of Coughlan's wild phase where the kinesiology takes on suggestive gyrating motions while simulations of smoking and drinking alcohol are portrayed to the audience. This is chillingly, accompanied by a distorted voice ringing out "Giving him the eye, was it? Leading him on, was it?" and Mary all the while shouting "Stop!" in the background (44:13).

Sexual abuse victims often blame themselves for what has happened to them. Vicary et al, in their research on date rape, have identified a connection between this feeling of self -blame and long-term psychological problems and even, worryingly, incidents of re-victimisation (300). Concomitantly, Filipas and Ullman have found that abuse victims who blame themselves are much more likely to demonstrate risky behaviours often leading to alcohol and drug addiction as they grow older (653). This is something that Coughlan continually addresses in her autobiography as her life has been totally controlled by what her uncle forced her to do against her will.

Research undertaken just last year (2022) by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre demonstrates that 70 per cent of Irish people believe that there is a problem with consent in Ireland. Noeline Blackwell, CEO, has said, the organisation has made a commitment to a "long term initiative (working) with survivors, individuals and communities across the country, to help us better understand consent and its importance and how to shape our society towards one that does not tolerate sexual violence and sexual coercion."(www.drcc.ie). Brokentalkers has put these words into action by displaying the abuse and subsequent psychological damage that Coughlan experienced throughout her lifetime by using dance and bodily movement to convey trauma. While this is mostly executed by the professional dancer other performers particularly Dunn (playing her uncle) also play a part. He simulates the sexual act using a bottle of bubbles accompanied by a grinding noise and mounts young Mary and rides her like a horse (www.vimeo.com 30:26). The

absence of words can make the message even more clear. In fact, according to Carlson it is the "slapstick, violent physical action, pop cultures, breaking of the illusion and even seemingly spontaneous hysterical outbursts" (581) from the actors that assist greatly in the audience interpretation. He continues that "in order truly to approach the postdramatic, . . . the body must be freed from the constraints of the mimetic character, traditionally derived from the dramatic text, and set free to register as purely performative" (588).

Brokentalkers set out to do this in *Woman Undone*, by telling Coughlan's life story in an impressionistic use of memory rather than in an orderly fashion primarily utilising the use of the body over language to recount what happened. According to Julian Beck, it would appear that the company facilitated Mary to reach "into (her) entrails and (and have them) strewn . . . about the stage in the form of questions"(10). While language and indeed, as previously explored music, are both very beneficial to convey the horrors of what happened to Coughlan in this performance it is even more impactful when done with the use of bodily movement.

Marie Bardet has investigated the connection between dance and self-actualisation comprising the core characteristics of significance, fulfilment and spirituality (364). German theatre director, Georg Fuchs, identified that those "rhythmic movements of the human body in space" infected "other people with the same or similar rhythmic vibrations."(13). It is with the use of bodily movement that Brokentalkers has the most success in bringing the audience on the experiential journey of not only what happened to Mary Coughlan but also more importantly, all women who have been abused in a similar way.

The phenomenological feeling that results contributes to not only possible awareness of the social issue but also more importantly might lead to a later discussion. It is the lived experience of the spectators that contemporaneously fuses with the movement onstage to result in individual interpretations that is at odds with objective analysis more relevant to realism theatre.[14] Bert O States feels that the audience who is merely interested in the text of a performance would be best served to stay at home and read the script (236).

Certainly, staying home to read the script of *Woman Undone* would not achieve what Brokentalkers is highlighting in this performance, as the movement onstage is such a major dramatic strategy in order to tell Coughlan's life story of abuse. During the performance O'Reilly runs incessantly on the spot to portray Coughlan running away from home with her boyfriend, played by Cara Dunn. Simultaneously a road is simulated on the audio-visual screen at the back of the stage (www.vimeo.com 1:01:37). The frantic movement of the dancer is used to suggest that no matter how fast or how far she went there was in fact no escape. In her autobiography Mary recounts how while in

a drunken haze, after one of her own performances, she would lie down to an analepsis of her childhood and horrifically describes it as (her) grandfather kissing her, (her) uncle masturbating in front of (her), (her) father beating her.....(alongside) (t)he fear that (she) was being sucked into a black hole of shame"(203). She also describes how she felt bitterly that she had never moved on and was essentially always a "sexually abused, physically and emotionally violated child" (223). This is demonstrated onstage with Coughlan removing O'Reilly's dress over her head and the latter getting into the bath once again where her arms become covered in blood (www.vimeo.com 1:02:25). Self-harm is a way for those who have been psychologically damaged by abuse to try to numb the pain incurred and cutting as a method is particularly associated with future suicide attempts (Hawton et al). On stage the dancer's arms, covered in blood foreshadows Mary Coughlan's numerous suicide attempts during her lifetime.[15]

In a postdramatic performance, it is often only on reflection afterwards that it becomes clearer to the audience what the actual message is. Wolfgang Hoffman believes that theatre should incorporate a surprise factor to encourage this reflection (www.auroranova.org). This occurs in *Woman Undone* when Mary becomes extremely annoyed by the other cast members questioning her about her mother. She vehemently refuses to talk about her absence as she too has been an absent mother.

By implementing postdramatic strategies, including bodily movement, I would argue that Brokentalkers achieves this fine balance between artistic integrity and care for the audience in *Woman Undone*. Victor Turner the symbolic cultural anthropologist termed this a liminal space where the ethical and aesthetic go hand in hand. It is the very intertwining of life and art that makes us think and question what we are exposed to (6). *Woman Undone* addresses not only the atrocities that Mary Coughlan was made to endure but also what Turner referred to as the communitas or collective responsibility the general population should take for not only child abuse, but also the abuse directed at any woman in our midst. It is the cross gender casting in this performance that draws immediate attention to the imbalance of the situation as author Louise O'Neill has said "we are not raping and killing ourselves (www.youtube.com). The juxtaposition of female characters playing male ones in *Woman Undone* can be seen as a feminist action (Miller).

Male characters have dressed as females since Ancient Greek theatre when patriarchal practices included the prohibition of women onstage as it was considered dangerous (nctheatre.com). However, the opposite is a relatively recent phenomenon as the prologue to the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre's 2003 performance of *Taming of the Shrew* demonstrates "Vice-versa's very rare. But in this odd piece, The girls do get the chance

to wear the codpiece. Our new productions, crammed with female talents, May help in some way to redress the balance." (Klett 166).[16] It is the cross gender casting with females portraying males in *Woman Undone* that facilitates what Paulo Freire describes as critical pedagogy to recognise the oppression that occurs to individuals who are marginalised in society (17). All four members of the band in *Woman Undone* represent the male presences in Coughlan's life interchanging roles at times to demonstrate how Coughlan's life was predominantly influenced by patriarchal forces. It is particularly striking that the dancer and Mary are the only females represented onstage. The billowy costume worn by Muirrean Ni Cheannabhain playing the monsignor enlarges him to represent a looming figure lauding over young Mary to constitute the control the church exerted over society at the time of her youth. All the while the cleric is saying, in an ironic, flippant way "you know you can always talk to me" (www.vimeo.com 34:43). The postdramatic strategy of repetition is again used for extra emphasis. He is also superimposed on the audio-visual equipment at the back of the stage to accentuate the power the religious organisations had over the general population in the 1960's.

Brokentalkers is bringing alive onstage Coughlan's personal experience of patriarchal control and subsequent abuse with the postdramatic dramaturgical strategy of cross gender casting. Alisa Solomon observes that it is the incongruity of what the actor plays and what her body shows that helps to disrupt ritual and subsequently raise the consciousness of the audience in the cross-gendering process (19). The fact that "the uniqueness of the all-female cast gave . . . more room to push the boundaries of the play." (Chung 1) has thus also allowed Brokentalkers to draw even more attention to the male behaviours that affected Mary throughout her lifetime. It is by the very act of females displaying typical male characteristics, especially those of an unsavoury type, that the audience become even more aware of the abuse to which Coughlan has been exposed. While wrong in any guise, the heightened tension as a result of subverting gender roles makes it even more unacceptable.

Conclusion

The postdramatic dramaturgical strategies that are employed by Brokentalkers in *Woman Undone* particularly those of musicality and storytelling, bodily movement and cross gender casting have allowed the audience not only to witness past injustices but also to raise awareness of present ones also.

However, as Emilie Pine cautions, social responsibility should not fall solely on the shoulders of the Arts (221). It is, nevertheless, a major first step in the process of addressing the fate of the marginalised in our society where audiences are encouraged to not only be made aware of what happened in the past but also to question their involvement in any collusion.

Woman Undone is drawing attention to, not only Mary Coughlan's experience of child sexual abuse but also, to the one in five women and one in six men (out of a randomly selected survey of 3,000 adults in 2002 by Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland SAVI) who have been the victims of child sexual abuse with direct contact. Almost half of those who responded had never before told anyone of their horrific experiences. Unfortunately, this survey was not immediately followed up by either a repeat study or even a political discussion. It actually took sixteen years for a subsequent study to be called for. It is scheduled to be published this year (2023), five years after its commission. (www.independent.ie). If presence at this performance has encouraged even one person to talk about their experience of child sexual abuse, Brokentalkers will have achieved, where the state has failed, in keeping the light shining on an aspect of Ireland's dark past.

Mary Coughlan was very brave to expose her story of abuse in such a public way but she felt safe doing so in the hands of Cannon and Keegan and wanted to highlight the fact that it was not just happening in her house. Many of her childhood friends in Galway contacted her after her autobiography was published to let her know they had had similar experiences. While it may not be solely the responsibility of the Arts sector to encourage change it is nevertheless vital that governmental funding continues to be provided to theatre companies like Brokentalkers in order that they can produce more groundbreaking work in the future and provide that small first step of a very long journey.

Notes

1 Tim Etchells of the Sheffield based theatre company, Forced Entertainment, describes a similar process whereby they use "a few scraps or fragments of text, an idea or two for action, a costume, an idea about space, a sketched out piece of music-everything unfinished, distinctly incomplete-so there'd be more space for other things to fill in.....more dots to join" (50).

2 This is something familiar to this theatre company as in a previous production called *Have I No Mouth* dealing with bereavement it was deemed necessary to actually have a psychotherapist onstage.

3 If presence at this performance encourages even one woman to share a story it will have served a very important purpose.

4 The Brokentalkers duo was very aware of their male privilege during the making of this performance, often leaving the rehearsal room to give the women privacy to work through whatever was necessary. It was while collaborating with Fiona Whelan, on the *What Does He Need* project concerning the creation of a public dialogue about the current state of masculinity, that these two theatre makers became better informed on gender and feminism (www.fionawhelan.com).

5 Cannon has said it was unusual to have a script nearly ready prior to rehearsal.

6 Set design was by Sabine Dargent in performance viewed.

7 This was not the first time that Mongoose had championed women's rights as they released music in support of the repeal the eighth movement in 2016.

8 The Russian oral tradition, skaz, moves towards the field of "verbal signification ... and to the cognition of aural phenomena (in order to involve the audience) with its affective and emotional registers" (Weygendt, 195).

9 Allen James asserts regarding the linguistic layers and social semiotic functions of the postdramatic that it is the vocality and verbality that take precedence over the setting and characterisation of dramatic theatre and are, in fact, important play defining elements (134).

10 Sprechstimme is a cross between speaking and singing in which the tone quality of speech is heightened and lowered in pitch along melodic contours indicated in the musical notation.

11 Diarmiud Ferriter has discussed how in the 1950s London became a refuge, in particular, for Irish women who did not feel welcome at home in Ireland (475).

12 The Women of Honour arose from a documentary of same name investigating a group of defence forces who had been victims of sexual assault during their work.

13 As the performance is based on Coughlan's book it could be termed a looser form of verbatim theatre. Hammond and Steward, in their introduction to an anthology devoted on this particular genre of contemporary theatre, define verbatim as "the origins of the text spoken in the play" (1) where the spectator is almost in conversation with the performers who are confiding intimate details of what happened to them.

14 Renowned Irish playwright Samuel Beckett also relied on movement and spatial awareness over words expecting the audience to fill in the gaps based on their own personal experience (McMullan, 10).

15 When interviewed for the *Irish Times* she talked about the staggering thirty-two times she ended up in hospital with alcohol poisoning (www.irishtimes.ie).

16 Galway's Druid Theatre celebrated their 40th anniversary by staging what they simply called *DruidShakespeare* "an epic story of families, wars and the making of nations

played out over six hours and staging Irish women as English kings and men as bawdy widows."(wildefirefilms.net).

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Dramaturgical Precedence: Music Space and the Story in Conor McPherson's The Night Alive *and* Girl from the North Country

Predecência dramatúrgica: Espaço musical e a história em The Night Alive *e* Girl from the North Country de *Conor McPherson*

Maha Alatawi

Abstract: *The spatial and musical cultures in* The Night Alive *and* Girl from the North Country *are complex and rich with meaning. Space and songs are integral components of both plays. While both plays have similar contexts in terms of being set within a great financial downturn, space and music are used differently to serve the narrative.* The Night Alive *relies on the creation of the space and setting to allow the audience a greater understanding of the characters and their backgrounds, whereas* Girl from the North Country *is a musical and therefore relies more on the music of Bob Dylan to help do something similar. This essay suggests that important aspects of Conor McPherson's composition of space and music have been overlooked and that further examination is needed of the Irish experience concerning the significance of space and music used to advance a play's narrative. Both plays deploy music in a way that assists the audience to become familiar with the space and in turn this creates a place, one in which the narrative of the play can sit comfortably.*

Keywords: *Space; Music; Narrative; Irish Theatre.*

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Resumo: *É notável a complexidade e a riqueza de significados na cultura do espacial e musical em* The Night Alive *e* Girl from the North Country. *O espaço e as canções são componentes estruturais de ambas as peças. Embora ambas apresentem contextos semelhantes, ambientadas durante uma grande recessão financeira, o espaço e as canções são utilizados de maneira distinta de acordo com as necessidades de cada narrativa.* The Night Alive *se baseia na criação do espaço e do ambiente para permitir ao público conhecer mais profundamente as personagens e seus contextos, enquanto* Girl from the North Country *é um musical e, por isso, necessita ainda mais das canções de Bob Dylan para realizar algo semelhante. Este ensaio sugere que aspectos relevantes da composição de Conor McPherson em relação ao espaço e à música foram negligenciados; além disso, é necessária uma análise mais aprofundada da experiência irlandesa sobre a importância do espaço e da música para a progressão da narrativa de uma peça teatral. Ambas as peças utilizam canções com o objetivo de tornar o espaço familiar ao público e, por consequência, essa escolha cria um lugar onde a narrativa da peça possa acomodar-se confortavelmente.*

Palavras-chave*: Espaço; Canção; Narrativa; Teatro irlandês.*

Introduction

Both music and space have increasingly occupied a place within Irish theatre, particularly from the 1990s to the present day. Music and space can add to the narrative of a play and provide clarity and context for the audience's benefit. According to Gay McAuley, space is an "active agent" rather than an "empty container" (41). Similarly, according to Solga, much of the academic understanding surrounding space and place at the theatre reads space as "one of several theatrical languages" (10). The role of music within a play can be enriched by the theatrical dimension of the surrounding silent space, on which the story itself relies for conveying key narrative details in profound ways.[1] Music and space are audio and visual forms of narrative and thematic communication in theatrical contexts and, when staged, they exert their own impact. Music does audibly what space does visually, both being a way in which the context and narrative of the play can be effectively communicated to an audience in a more implicit way rather than the need for explicitly communicating this to the audience.

Traditionally, the word "space" was understood as referring to simply an empty area; however, over time, the concept of space has expanded to incorporate broader dimensions

in theatre, including mental and social spaces. The concept of a social space relates it to the politics of space and the idea that space orders our "social relationships; it structures our relations of power (economic, political, gendered, and more)" (Solga). It is the framework that enables all human interaction, grounding us within space and not simply occupying it. Space can concern our immediate surroundings, the objects within our reach and the place where we live at that moment, but also referring to the wider world. The politics and the community in which a play is set also occupy space just as much as the set design and scenography. The spaces in theatre are layered and complex, underscoring the multi-faceted nature of theatrical environments. At the core, the physical space is perceived as the primary element, representing tangibility that can be manipulated. Tompkins refers to this concept as theatre's "geographies", noting that they "incorporate architectural, narrative, and more abstract interpretations of spatiality" (537). For most, the theory of theatrical space goes back to Marxist Henri Lefebvre, who implores that space is socially "produced" and in fact an effect of social and political interactions. The theatre itself is an instrument used to create a place out of space, the actor can enter the space of the stage even if not empty in any meaningful sense, the process of their inhabiting the stage creates the place itself (Morash and Richards 27).

When looking at music in connection with space, their interaction is noticeable. Undoubtedly, space and the creation of place are important for not only setting the immediate scene on stage but also for creating an understanding of the wider world in which a play is set. Music has the potential to be a major part in this interaction, not only setting the scene in an emotional sense but also having the ability to help create space and aiding in the familiarisation of the space, which is what seems to move us from a space into a place. The unique ability of music to set the scene emotionally and enhance the creation of space is what transforms an undifferentiated space into a place: "as soon as we get to know it better and endow it with value. When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place" (Morash and Richards 35).

Music itself is synonymous with Irish culture, tradition and history; it has always been thought of as a defining element reflecting the essence of Irishness. A close study of the Irish plays reveals that music has always been essential. It plays a variety of roles in Irish theatre, supporting underscoring dramatic themes, moods, surroundings, and narratives. Indeed, music is embedded into the heart and mind of plays in which it helps the story move forward. Songs have played a major role in the dramatic experience of Irish theatre, in plays such as those by Sean O'Casey, Tom Murphy and Brian Friel as well as younger playwrights like Mark O'Rowe and Marina Carr. Harry White, Joseph Greenwood and

Ciara Fleming are some critics that have written extensively about music in the Irish theatre. White has examined the various roles of music in the articulation of plays, while Greenwood explores the malleability of songs and their significance over time. Focusing on the use of the "language of music" rather than on the musicality of words or the "music of language," Fleming outlines the phases through which the use of music has developed in Irish theatre and investigates how playwrights use music to represent themes of identity.

Both of Conor McPherson's plays have been carefully selected to shed light on the significance of music and space used to advance a play's narrative. The context of *The Night Alive* lies in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger, while for *Girl from the North Country*, the historical context originates in the Great Depression; both can, therefore, be considered as falling within the context of financial troubles. This context is amplified by heightened expressions of space and music and their dramaturgical functions. The aim of this essay is to examine these two plays by Conor McPherson, looking at the important aspects of the composition of music and space that have been overlooked by previous research. Examining the significance of music and space in the above-mentioned plays, and the ways in which music and space intersect to create further insight into the Irish experience through exploration of the diegetic function and the representation of contexts, issues and dilemmas.

The first play to be explored is *The Night Alive,* which combines reality and dream, good and evil, science and religion, despair and hope.[2] In his 50s and separated from his wife and children, Tommy lives in a cluttered bedsit in his uncle Maurice's house, which forms the backdrop of the play. Doc, Tommy's "disabled" friend and business partner, finds himself constantly thrown out of his sister's house by her boyfriend and finds shelter on Tommy's camp bed. Aimee is a prostitute, beaten by an apparently abusive boyfriend, Kenneth, and our first introduction to Aimee finds her covered in blood, being led by Tommy into his living space. Maurice, Tommy's uncle who lives upstairs, continually judges Tommy's life and behaviour. Set in Dublin, the play centres on Tommy's chaotic life and the trouble he faces due to his helping Aimee. Most noticeably we see throughout *The Night Alive* how incidental music is used to create a strong effect.

Following this, *Girl from the North Country*, however, is a very different piece of work, and was described as the best musical of 2018 by *The Washington Post.*[3] It tells the story of Nick Laine, the owner of a guesthouse, and his family in 1934 America. Nick's wife, Elizabeth, has dementia, while their son, Gene, is unemployed and writes stories. Nick and Elizabeth's adopted black girl, Marianne, is pregnant, and Nick tries to marry her off to a cobbler, Mr Perry. Among their guests are Mrs Neilsen, a widow in love with

Nick; Mr and Mrs Burke, and their son Elias, who is a grown man with the mental age of a four-year-old; a black boxer named Scott; and Marlowe, a preacher. Dr Walker, Elizabeth's doctor, narrates the play. Bob Dylan's songs are performed throughout by Charlie Brow, Pete Callard and Don Richardson and some cast members. Characters sing along with the live band revealing the different emotional states of the characters who are facing a hopeless future. While similar in space to *The Night Alive,* the different approaches to music are what really differentiate these two plays.

It is important to point out that the focus of music and space within this article is highly dependent upon how space and music function within each play. With the analysis of each play, the aim here is to recognise and explore how the language of music and space within the plays of Conor McPherson can inform the narrative and provide appropriate context and clarity to an audience. *Girl from the North Country* is a musical, this therefore lends itself to an analysis weighted more towards the musical aspects. However, as aforementioned, the musical elements can be of significance to the space and the creating of place.

The Night Alive

With the play set in an Edwardian house in Dublin, that has now been converted to bedsits amongst the economic downturn, the space in which the play itself occupies is one of depravity and loss. The space surrounding the play, and the greater context for *The Night Alive*, aligns with the Celtic Tiger consciousness, "a sudden increase in wealth driven by employment, by social mobility and by property boom" (Jordan 35). A modern-day Dublin experiencing the aftermath of an economic downturn, that shapes the play's narrative as well as the character's lives, communications and destiny. The space in which the play is set is shaped by the economic situation, the lives of these characters formed from the hardships they face. The economic context of the play therefore provides clarity as to the very space in which these characters inhabit. As Jordan puts it, "The play's ending marks a distortion of time, space, and causality, shattering the notion of economics as being the singularly governing frame" (Jordan 26).

Tommy's place is marked by chaos, untidiness, shabby furniture and filthy kitchen utensils. In stark contrast to his current economic chaos, Tommy recalls how the bank "threw the money at me" to buy two outdoor live gig rigs (McPherson 75). During the boom, almost anyone could receive a loan; in Tommy's words, leading to a "legal nightmare" (McPherson 75). During a moment of honesty and revelation, Maurice judges

Tommy's irresponsible conduct within the difficult situation the country is going through, saying "the country is a shambles and we're crying out for people like you. That can lead us into the light" (McPherson 80). Moreover, characters desperately seek means to make and save money: Tommy hides his cash under the floorboards; Aimee makes money through prostitution and her boyfriend Kenneth through pimping for her; Maurice rents the bedsit in his house to Tommy; while Doc and Tommy, as mentioned earlier, are business partners doing odd jobs and selling expired goods.

Fundamental to McPherson's theatrical experiences is the dark ambiance of space through scenic design and its implication of the mysterious and the infinite.[4] This infinity of the universe and relativity of time can be found across McPherson's work. In *Dublin Carol*, for example, Mark's prospects "lie ahead of him, and what the world has in store," while he listens to John's past reminiscences (McPherson, *Dublin Carol* 93); in *The Seafarer*, Sharky "stares into his bleak eternal fate" as Lockhart describes life in hell (McPherson, *Seafarer* 128); and in *The Veil*, Hannah looks beyond "into somewhere else" after Berkeley's séance (McPherson, *The Veil* 268). Time also slows down in hell and during a card game (*The Seafarer*) as well as in a black hole.

This interaction between imaginative and real spaces finds expression in *The Night Alive* in many instances. Towards the end of the play, time is problematised and distorted through the incompatible and often perplexing use of time periods. This last scene thus lacks temporal seamlessness with the other scenes, with their logical temporal progression. This change of pace could represent eternity by revealing the life of the characters after their death. The title *The Night Alive* also suggests a dream in which this night is the only time when the characters feel fully alive, engaging with family and celebrating Christmas. The disjointed ending could then suggest a conflation of waking and dreaming, reality and fantasy, and the logically possible and impossible.

The character of Kenneth facilitates the space operating at times between the imaginative and the real. Peter Crawley suggests that Kenneth is an otherworldly menace, described as a demon of destruction. He is seen as "the physical manifestation of evil incarnate" (Shanley). Kenneth, therefore, reflects the supernatural presence that marks the entirety of McPherson's oeuvre. Kenneth stands for the evil residing generally in the play's characters. Tommy tends to "forget a devil life inside" him (McPherson, *The Night Alive* 81). Kenneth, through his otherworldly link, is there to remind him.

The Night Alive is packed with spatial knowledge (at the mimetic level, which relates to what the audience sees on the stage), which is directly connected to significant moments in the story (on the diegetic level, or what the audience hears from the characters).

When it comes to theatre, it is more than just the occupation of a space. Instead, when an actor uses that performance space, they create a memory and association for the audience through the creation of place (Morash and Richards 176). This created place is not somewhere that simply exists, but it is rather a place that is curated and produced into existence. (Morash and Richards 176) Tommy's bedsit, for example, contains a poster of Steve McQueen on his motorbike from the film *The Great Escape*, a poster of Marvin Gaye's album cover *What's Going On* and two posters advertising Finland as a holiday destination (McPherson 70). The three posters here "offer an alternative sensibility in terms of escape and possibility" (Jordan 43). The living space that Tommy inhabits, seems to juxtapose itself, illustrating both this irresponsible behaviour towards himself but also the idea of freedom and movement, making the space have both creative and destructive potential. (Jordan 43) McQueen's *Great Escape* Character Hilts represents the embodiment of masculinity, particularly when he jumps over the Swiss border on his stolen motorbike to escape the Nazis. It is this brand of masculinity that Tommy tries to demonstrate throughout the play; first, by helping and providing sanctuary to Aimee and, towards the end of the play, by planning to escape with her. Later in the play, Tommy, Aimee and Doc are seen "grooving around" to Gaye's song *What's Going On*. Maurice's banging on the ceiling from upstairs disturbs the fun of the dance and serves as a reminder of Maurice's control over Tommy's life and his position in his uncle's house.

While the use and context of the space itself is a contributing factor to the narrative of the play, music within *The Night Alive* does not convey the narrative, but rather contributes to the interpretation and the audience's experience. In this instance, the use of song is one of further articulating important feelings or sentiments beyond the ability that words have.

When asked about McPherson's music choices, Gregory Clarke, the sound designer of the 2015 production at The Gaiety, explains that "those pieces are part of the DNA of the show" and that they "inform the whole feel" of the performance. Tommy, Aimee and Doc dance to Gaye's song *What's Going On*. The song's question, "What's Going On" takes on an existential stance, as when Tommy contemplates "What's going on? That is the question" (McPherson 77), reflecting the chaotic and aimless lives of the play's characters. The whole play, then, circles around the question "What is going on?" Two of the songs in this production are Talk Talk's *Myrrhman* and *Ascension Day* played during scenes 2, 3, 5 and 6. The songs reflect the religious motives and implications that underpin the play. Reference is made in these songs to Christ, his birth and the wise men who brought gold, frankincense and myrrh as gifts. Implicit reference can therefore be

linked to one of the three wise men who appeared to Doc in a dream and told him about the scientific concept of black holes. In the original Biblical story, the wise men, or Magi, follow a star that leads them to the Messiah, the saviour, yet in the play, the star collapses to form a black hole, denoting darkness, death and endless time. Jordan argues, therefore, that *The Night Alive* is a modern nativity play examining issues of "eviction, homelessness, sanctuary, generosity, and communal sharing" (33).

The final sequence features Father John Misty's *Fun Times in Babylon*, which offers potential redemption by the end of the play. The final moments of the play have been interpreted in many ways, including the survival and exoneration of the main characters or the demise of life and death themselves. The latter is a more realistic proposal, based on Doc's statement at the close of the play: "Yeah, apparently, when you die, you won't even know you're dead! It'll just feel like everything has suddenly... come right, in your life. Like everything has just clicked into place and off you go." (McPherson, *The Night Alive* 84). The show ends with the song *Courage* by Villagers which points at the lives of characters, mainly Tommy, who seems to finally find the courage to make things right after the mistakes he has made. Songs, therefore, play a major role in the theatrical experience of the play and serve a specific analytical function.

Girl from the North Country

Much like *The Night Alive,* the wider context of an economic downturn is integral to the creation of space in which the play situates itself, and therefore also integral to the space directly represented on stage. A word about the Great Depression is necessary in order to contextualise the financial and other difficulties the characters encounter in *Girl from the North Country*. The play is set in 1934 in Duluth, Minnesota. In the period between 1920 and 1929, the country's economy had experienced a rapid expansion, echoed by the later Celtic Tiger period in Ireland, albeit on a very different scale. Through storytelling, music and space, the hardships faced during the Great Depression are explicitly staged in *Girl from the North Country*.

Narration, dance, music and specific historical time periods feature in several Irish plays such as the production of *Dancing at Lughnasa* in 2015 and recent adaptations such as *Jimmy's Hall* (2017) and *Ulysses* (2017). However, *Girl from the North Country* is distinguished from the output of other playwrights through the presence of Bob Dylan's songs. In this play, the songs fully interrelate with the dialogue in the narrative construction

of the play, deepening the experience of the audience and providing further support for the play's central themes.

As in *The Night Alive* and others of McPherson's plays, the collision of alternative realities is evident in *Girl from the North Country*. *The Seafarer*, for example, witnesses the embodiment of the devil arising from hell. The devil, Mr Lockhart within this play, wants to take Sharky through what he describes as 'the hole in the wall' to eternity – his definition of life in hell. In *Girl from the North Country*, on the other hand, the ghost-like space and the use of songs from different periods of Dylan's life offer a similar disjointedness.

The end of *Girl from the North Country* suggests the illusion of an alternative space. In one of Dr Walker's last narrated parts, Nick appears relieved at having made up his mind about a subject. We are told this by Dr Walker, following the conversation between Nick and his son Gene, in which Nick insinuates ending both his life and his wife Elizabeth's. This piece of narration serves as a confirmation of Nick's decision to arrange joint suicide. However, something appears to have changed in Nick's plans as he and Elizabeth remain alive. It is clarified by Dr Walker that they lost their house during the Depression and that Nick took Elizabeth and moved south. Elizabeth ended up in a house for women on the banks of the Missouri, while Nick lived in a hostel nearby and visited her every day until the morning she passed away. Dr Walker is unsure where Nick went after that point, but he claimed to have heard that Nick had headed to Oklahoma. About Nick and Elizabeth's son, Gene, Dr Walker says that local man Perry offered him a job at his store and a place to stay. Gene later tried working as a reporter for a local newspaper before heading to New York in search of further work. He met a girl in New York, but the relationship did not work out. When the war started, he was recruited as a marine and was reported missing in June 1945. To end this part of the narrative, Dr Walker tells the audience about his own death on Christmas Eve in 1934, which is the first intimation that Dr Walker is narrating from beyond the grave. He describes the experience thus: "[I]t was just like stepping through a glass wall. I could still see everything." (McPherson, *Girl from the North Country* 102). He was able to see Marianne, her baby and Joseph visiting Nick, Elizabeth and Gene the following winter. Well, dressed, he watched them outside the old inn walking away: "I looked out on the water. Then I closed my eyes." (McPherson 102). The tragic way in which Walker describes this moment contradicts the action as described and staged in the background, since the image presented to the audience is that of a happy family getting together. As Dr Walker is narrating the last part of this scene, the stage directions say, "*We see Nick and Elizabeth having dinner – happy and healthy. Gene joins them . . . Marianne comes and sits. The family are happy together*" (McPherson 101).

An alternative world is created on the stage that contrasts the tragedy of the final piece of narration to portray a happy family who have survived the hardships of the Depression era, with their own house and fine clothing and food. The audience thus encounter a conflict between the narrated story and the action taking place on the stage, which has power over their own understanding of the denouement of the play. Other examples of the interplay of such varying temporalities are: Elias's ghost appearing "*free of pain, worry or limitations*" singing *Duquesne Whistle* after we are told he is dead (McPherson 83-84); Marianne telling Perry that she has been impregnated by someone "deeper than a man, [and] older than a man" (McPherson 73), suggesting the story of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit; Elizabeth hearing the sound of a girl down a hole, which apparently alludes to a childhood story about Nick and his sister; and finally the narrator Dr Walker standing before us recalling his own death. The sound Elizabeth says she hears early in Act 1 is precursory to the later narrative about Nick's sister. In Act 2, Elizabeth and Nick fight over this as Elizabeth again speaks of the voice she hears, assuming this time that Nick can also hear it. It is implied that this sound could belong to the baby girl they lost at birth; Elizabeth mentions that they lost a baby girl, and she leaves it at that (McPherson 22). This unnatural voice, therefore, is presumably employed to provoke a sense of guilt in Nick.

This notion is clearly elevated by the photographs used by Rae Smith in her set designs for the production in 2017/18. A short while before Mr Burke announces to Marlowe his fishing trip with Elias, a photograph on a canvas of Lake Superior (or what appears to be a projection of it) is slowly dropped down to the stage and Elizabeth dons sunglasses during the scene. It is in this lake that Elias goes on to lose his life, appearing to be mercy-killed by his father despite his father's claim that his death was an accident. The lake in *Girl from the North Country* recalls Cummings's design in McPherson's adaptation of Franz Xaver Kroetz's *The Nest* (1975) in which the lake, represented by bedrock around the stage as the auditorium stands for the lake itself, is also a source of harm to the family. Cummings remarks, "I was interested in the idea that no matter how we try to control everything we cannot live in a hermetically sealed and controllable environment. We must exist within the world and within society" (Alatawi). Cummings' comment on the convergence of the mimetic and the diegetic, the public and the private also applies to *Girl from the North Country*.

Songs and music also take on an integral role in a wider sense, in the dramaturgy and dramatic composition of *Girl from the North Country*. It was Dylan's record company who originally approached McPherson with the idea of using Dylan's music in a play.

However, McPherson dismissed the idea at first because none of his previous plays had been musicals and he could not picture Dylan's songs having a place in a musical. However, when McPherson later had the idea of a play set during the Depression in Duluth, Minnesota, where Dylan was born, he sent an outline to Dylan's record company to which, after a few days, Dylan gave his approval. The record company sent McPherson forty albums, with a note that he was free to select any song he required for his play.

In McPherson's work, music and songs are woven together with the narrative to interfere with the character's lives and stories and have their own key dramaturgical functions through their unique expressiveness of the characters' situations that cannot be simply voiced through dialogue. This echoes the constitutive undertone of music in Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964). Music has a diegetic function in most of Friel's work as the music in his plays directly originates from the narrative (White 210). The Irish emigrant ballad *Off to Philadelphia* is blended in Friel's play with the American popular song *California, Here I Come* to show the influence of a foreign culture (Ireland) over the country (the US). Gar in Friel's play dreams of the assumed range of economic opportunities in the US which are unavailable to him in Donegal. The lyrics of both songs are referenced and sung in the play.

The function of McPherson's music is not dissimilar from that of Friel in *Philadelphia, Here I come!* McPherson shares some traits with other Irish playwrights but also differs in his use of music. The songs and musical interludes that feature in many of McPherson's theatrical works should be viewed as invaluable in view of their thematic and structural significance to the overall narrative. For example, *The Seafarer* ends with John Martyn's *Sweet Little Mystery*, while music composed by Neil Young features throughout *Shining City* and characters in *The Night Alive* dance to Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, which has been described as a fleetingly transcendent moment performed by "four whacked-out wastrels" (Brantley). Mentioned earlier, Father John Misty's *Fun Times in Babylon* is chosen to end *The Night Alive*. McPherson has also used music in his theatrical adaptations – *The Nest* featured an original score by the singer-songwriter and poet P.J. Harvey. McPherson integrates music into the action on stage in order to heighten the dramatic potency of the theatrical performances, as well as to aid the progression of the narrative.

One can recognise Brechtian aspects in McPherson's presentation and integration of the songs in *Girl from the North Country*. Brecht, in his drama, integrates songs to create a distancing effect between characters and audiences. The purpose of songs in Brecht's plays is not to deepen the emotions of the scenes, but rather to comment and narrate,

offering a direct commentary on the action onstage, rarely using music for emotional effect. In other words, in Brechtian theatre, the attention and reaction of the audience is deliberately designed to heighten and bring to light the different levels of the spoken and musical narrative. Music is understood in this context as a device for distancing the audience, in order to prevent them from getting lost in the drama and instead allow them to use their rational faculties to question the social issues behind the play. (Saleem and Resshid 247). Despite McPherson not holding Brecht's materialist view of the world, his use of music has similar objectives to comment and to separate, but not always to alienate. Emotion, in *Girl from the North Country*, is not outlawed but embraced. Songs in the play bring to the audience the experiences of performances which take place in public houses in which, in this case, characters are brought together by external circumstances. They create powerful communal and emotional effects on the audience.

As a method for achieving a similar effect in *Girl from the North Country*, McPherson uses the following techniques: a large cello placed in the centre of the stage opens the play along with a piano and drum kit to the side; the band is positioned on the stage and is visible to the audience; and the narrator talks and actors sing directly to the audience through microphones. These techniques clearly illustrate the theatrical and performative quality of narration accentuated by drama narratologists. McPherson was also clearly writing the dialogue of the play with Dylan's songs in mind, knowing which song each character would sing.

Despite the claims of Brantley and Bryan Appleyard that songs are not linked to the action in *Girl from the North Country*, McPherson, in his introduction to *Girl from the North Country*, confirms that the songs "always fit somehow" (McPherson 7). When asked about the relationship between songs and story during the rehearsals of the American premiere, McPherson states, "Dylan will do it for us" (Marks). As to why the play was set before Dylan was born, McPherson claims that he wanted to "free the songs from the burden of relevance for our generation and make them timeless" (Curtis 1). For McPherson, Dylan's songs resonate with any time, place, and person. The universality of the songs implies the universality of the play itself. The same is said about *The Veil*, which has received a great deal of criticism regarding resonance. McPherson states that *The Veil* is set in the 1820s but still echoes "the big economic crash following the Napoleonic wars" and the recent crash of the Celtic Tiger (Costa).

In *Girl from the North Country*, the performances are used as a method of interrogating the narrative and are therefore simultaneously separate and discrete elements of the action taking place on the stage. This view is affirmed by key figures who have served

in creating the performances. Matthew Warchus, the artistic director of the Old Vic, where the play was first performed in London, points out that the "text and songs [are] assertively independent of each other – a deliberate collision sometimes, and sometimes an embrace – yet somehow soulmates and walking in step" (Warchus 1). McPherson has also confirmed this by pointing out in his Introduction to *Girl from the North Country* that "many of Mr Dylan's songs can be sung at any time, by anyone in any situation, and still make sense and resonate with that particular place and person and time" (McPherson 6). McPherson goes on to point out that Dylan's songs are comparable to more traditional forms of literature because they contain "images and conceits, . . . creating a new inner world" (McPherson 7). Simon Hale, the orchestrator, arranger and musical supervisor for the play, has also noted how songs in the classic West End musical "drive the plot", whereas in *Girl from the North Country*, they become a "conversation between the songs and the story" (Curtis 1). The songs are re-worked, and their inclusion explores the new meanings implicit in the songs. The audience and readers are sometimes left to infer connections and relationships among the songs, action and narrative and come to realise that the integration of songs is never subtle. This is also evident in the choice of new songs such as *Duquesene Whistle* (2012) for a play set in the 1930s. Therefore, Dylan's songs in the play are used to create an 'additional' narrative element that is both separate to as well as an integral part of the play.

As Fergus Morgan in *The Stage* has pointed out, *Girl from the North Country* is "not a 'Bob Dylan musical' [or] a jukebox compilation of classic tracks" (Morgan). Instead, Dylan's songs and music form an integral element of the narrative construction of the play and inform the characters' stories and situations. McPherson's use of Bob Dylan's songs and music clearly represents an intrinsic element of the dramatic structure of *Girl from the North Country*. I would argue that the songs in the play tell a story which cannot be alienated from the play's comprehensive narrative. Furthermore, there is a clear delineation between the songs, as acts of narration, and the dialogues which take place before and after each song, in a way that contradicts Brantley's view of the songs as not extensions or substitutions of dialogues. *Slow Train* (1979), which was written following Dylan's born-again Christian period, is sung by Marlowe, a preacher, and Scott, a boxer. Marlowe's observation that a "Big storm's coming . . . Here. Europe. Everywhere", serves to reinforce the sentiments of the song:

> Sometimes I feel so low-down and disgusted
> Can't help but wonder what's happening' to my companions
> Are they lost or are they found?

> Have they counted the cost it'll take to bring down?
> (Bob Dylan, *Slow Train*, 1979)

Went to See the Gypsy (1970) is sung by Mrs Neilson and echoes a similar situation to that of her and Nick. *True Love Tends to Forget* (1978) is again performed by Mrs Neilson and forms a completion to her conversation with Nick in which she reveals her love to him. Marianne sings *Tight Connections to My Heart*:

> You're the one I've been looking for
> You're the one that's got the key
> Has anybody seen my love?
> Has anybody seen my love?
> (Bob Dylan, *Tight Connections to My Heart*, 1985)

This song seems to signal Scott's arrival after Marianne talks to Perry, the man her father wants her to marry. In the dialogue between Elizabeth and Marlowe, Elizabeth says, "Day's gonna come we all gotta blow" and "Everybody gotta go a different door" (McPherson, *Girl from the North Country*), followed by a rendition of *Like a Rolling Stone* (1965). The song is reminiscent of the characters' stories; we know that they are all staying in Nick's guesthouse which will be foreclosed soon by the bank.

In terms of the effect of the music on the narrative, songs such as *I Want You* (1966), which is sung by Gene and his girlfriend Kate, are intended to underpin the feelings they have for each other. Furthermore, their emotions are made increasingly poignant by the knowledge that Kate is about to leave town and to marry someone else. Their yearning for each other is made more explicit by the chorus:

> I want you; I want you
> I want you so bad
> Honey, I want you.
> (Bob Dylan, *I Want You*, 1:09-17)

Additional parallels between Dylan's songs and the narrative can be made throughout the play, as when Nick refers to his financial state: "I don't find that money, the banker gonna take everything. We'll be like dust in the wind here." (McPherson, 2015: 67). This statement is reinforced in lyrics such as "Freedom just around the corner for you, but with the truth so far off, what good will it do?" which is from the song *Jokerman* (1983).

Hurricane (1976) is sung by Scott and appears to tell his own story, "Put in a prison cell, but one time he could-a been the champion of the world" (McPherson, *Girl from the North Country* 76). Throughout the play, Dylan's songs are used to reinforce, as well as offer an additional narrative strand, and in this respect, the songs become an integral element of the narrative progression of *Girl from the North Country*.

Conclusion

The spatial and musical cultures in *The Night Alive* and *Girl from the North Country* are complex and rich with meaning. Space and songs are integral components of both plays. However, while *The Night Alive* explores the representational function of stage space, *Girl from the North Country* delves into the narrative induced by the role of songs. In relation to music in particular, the songs in *Girl from the North Country* merge with dialogue in the text and the performance and are sung directly to the audience, which is not the case in *The Night Alive*.

Like in *The Night Alive* and *Girl from the North Country*, the ideas of the infinite, the transcendental and the mysterious characterise McPherson's other work and take precedence in the ways in which space is described and designed and music is implemented. Details of space and music weave rampantly across all of McPherson's plays. The church bells and the associated festive music alongside the unpacking of Christmas decorations are the impetus to the promised change in John's life in *Dublin Carol* (2001). The same idea of Christmas-oriented renewal and hope is evoked by John Martyn's 'Sweet Little Mystery' played by Sharky after the light under the sacred heart blinks on in *The Seafarer* (2006). There is also the double significance of the music of the ice cream van and the uncanny presence of Mari's ghost in Ian's office to the life of both John and Ian in *Shining City* (2004). Considering the combination of songs and design, McPherson offers a dimensional perspective and posits the narrative engagement of music and space.

While both *The Night Alive* and *Girl from the North Country* use music, they utilise it in extremely different ways. While this is the case, the music used in both plays act as an extra layer to the setting of the scene, and while this could be seen as an emotional element to create the mood for the scene, it also enhances our familiarity with the space. Thus, creating a place in which the audience is emotionally invested. In *Girl from the North Country* creates familiarity by using the music of Bob Dylan, almost embodying where the play itself is set, establishing the wider off stage setting as Duluth, Minnesota (Dylan's birthplace). On the other hand, *The Night Alive* uses music in a similar fashion, with the

familiar song by Marvin Gaye that enhances the creation of place. As is discussed by Lojek about McGuinness, McPherson too has chosen to use music that contains lyrics which creates a dialogic relationship between the play and another time and place (262). The various layers of space are only enhanced using music, and this interplay between the two is integral to the audience's experience. An experience that has the potential to transport you from your regular existence and into the world of Conor McPherson, filled with the transcendental and mysterious.

Notes

1 See *The Spaces of Irish Drama: Stage and Place in Contemporary Plays* in which Helen Lojek provides a study of space in selected Irish plays and its relation to themes of land and belonging.

2 *The Night Alive* opened at The Donmar Warehouse in London in 2013 and transferred to Off-Broadway at The Atlantic Theatre Company in 2013. The play also opened the Dublin Theatre Festival at The Gaiety in a co-production with the Lyric Theatre Belfast in 2015.

3 The play was first performed in London at the Old Vic in the summer of 2017. After a successful run, the play was transferred to the Noël Coward Theatre in the West End in early 2018, and then to New York at The Public Theatre with a new American cast.

4 Ian Walsh talks about Elinor Fuchs's notion of the *mysterium* and use of darkness on stage in *Dublin Carol*.

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Community With Shared Differences: Solo Performance in Pat Kinevane's Silent *and Panti's* A Woman in Progress

Comunidade com diferenças comparilhadas: Performance solo em Silence *de Pat Kinevane e* A Woman in Progress *de Panti*

Zixin Huang

Abstract: *Solo performance is a theatrical form which has been increasingly popular in contemporary Irish theatre with the rise of individualism. This paper takes the works of two representative solo performers in contemporary Irish theatre, Pat Kinevane and Panti (Rory O'Neill) as examples, trying to discuss how the form of solo performance is applied by the two performers to create an intermediate space for the marginalized groups to find their distinctive voices and for the audience to identify with the "other", so as to build up a community that respects differences. While at the same time, the two performers use postdramatic strategies to admonish the audience to take a step back to reexamine the constructiveness of community and performativity of identity. By addressing the significance of solo performance in contemporary Irish theatre, this paper calls for the diversification of not only subjects but also forms in contemporary Irish theatre.*
Keywords: *Solo Performance; Pat Kinevane; Panti; Community.*

Resumo: *A performance solo é uma forma teatral cada vez mais popular no teatro irlandês contemporâneo devido à ascensão do individualismo. Este artigo toma como exemplos os trabalhos de dois* performers *solo representativos do teatro irlandês contemporâneo, Pat Kinevane e Panti (Rory O'Neill), tentando discutir como a forma de atuação solo é aplicada pelos dois performers para criar um espaço intermediário para os grupos marginalizados encontrarem as suas vozes distintivas e para o público*

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se identificar com o "outro", de modo a construir uma comunidade que respeite as diferenças. Ao mesmo tempo, os dois performers *utilizam estratégias pós-dramáticas para aconselhar o público a dar um passo atrás e a reexaminar a construção da comunidade e a performatividade da identidade. Ao abordar o significado da performance solo no teatro irlandês contemporâneo, este artigo apela à diversificação não apenas dos temas mas também das formas no teatro irlandês contemporâneo.*

Palavras-chave: *Performance solo; Pat Kinevane; Panti; Comunidade.*

Both Pat Kinevane and Panti (Rory O'Neill) are increasingly active stars in contemporary Irish theatre, whose works embody the great changes in terms of subjects and forms in twenty first century Irish theatre. Although neither of their performance career starts with solo performance, it is their solo performance in recent years that establishes their reputation and secures their places in the Irish theatre. Kinevane has five solo performances up to now: *Forgotten* (2006), *Silent* (2011), *Underneath* (2014), *Before* (2018), and the currently on tour *King* (2023). All of his solo plays were produced by Fishamble: The New Play Company and directed by Jim Culleton, Artistic Director and CEO of the company. The self-styled "gender discombobulist" Miss Pandora "Panti" Bliss is one of the most representative voices in both the national and the international queer community. To date, she has written and performed five solo plays, *In These Shoes?* (2007), *All Dolled Up* (2007), *A Woman in Progress* (2009), *High Heels In Low Places* (2014), and *If These Wigs Could Talk* (2022). Their solo performances give voices to the historically and socially marginalized groups in Irish society, from homeless and elderly people to queer community.

Kinevane gets the inspiration for writing *Silent* when he was surprised by the huge amount of homeless people on the street during his first visit to New York City in 2008, and he was even more aware of the number of dispossessed after he went back to Dublin. Bringing such reflection with him to the stage, Kinevane transforms into a homeless man named Tino Mc Goldrig living on the Dublin street and he is here to share his story. On the other side, Panti draws artistic inspiration from her own life experiences. *A Woman in Progress* is an autobiographical performance based on Panti's life from growing up in a monotonous and depressive town in Mayo to traveling around other places in the world and discovering her identity. Through solo performances, both Pat Kinevane's *Silent* and Panti's *A Woman in Progress* create an intermediate space for the marginalized groups to find their distinctive voices and for the audience to identify with the "other", in the hope of building up a community that respects differences. While at the same time, the two

performers apply postdramatic strategies to admonish the audience to take a step back to reexamine the constructiveness of community and performativity of identity.

Monologues and monodramas have gained an increasing degree of popularity in Irish theatre since the 1990s, which parallels the early period of the Celtic Tiger. Yet it needs to distinguish between a monologue and a solo performance. Monologues are usually written by a playwright and performed by an actor, whereas solo performances are written and performed by the same person so that performers will have full control of the performance. In this sense, solo performance usually has fewer restrictions and is often combined with other performance forms such as dance, mime, and stand-up comedy. In addition, while the monologue "sets aside interpersonal spaces" (Jordan 222), the solo performance emphasizes more on the interaction and connection with the audience. Within solo performances, solo autobiographical performance stands out for its trait that "the performing subject and the subject of performance are typically one and the same" (Heddon 161), represented here by Panti's works.

Eamonn Jordan argues that there is a strong connection between monologues and suicide and that the high rates of suicide in young males may due to male's inability to communicate (222). Michael Peterson also acknowledges the ubiquitousness of monologues and solo performances in the works of "straight white male" playwrights as a way to reinforce the heteronormative white hegemony which has been destabilized in the postmodern period (12). However, one should not dismiss the power of solo performance to subvert the existing hegemony which is a common artistic practice especially for socially marginalized groups. Hany Ali Mahmoud Abdelfattah investigates the representations of Iraqi and Moroccan women in the solo performance and examines "how solo narrative theatre becomes a tool that breaks the silence of the subaltern" (89). Carrie Sandahl also explores the intersection of queer and disabled identities in solo autobiographical performance (25). As solo performances "rarely maintain the conventions of a naturalistic stage space" (Wallace 5), the stage is usually quite empty with only a few props, thus highlighting the performer's existence and visibility.

Moreover, solo performance has a long history within the queer community, as Holly Hughes and David Román recognize how queer artists use solo performance to build alternative communities and they also investigate the reasons for such popularity of queer solo performance in the introduction of their co-edited book *O Solo Homo*. For one thing, they argue that solo performance, especially autobiographical performance, is a form of self-representation that responds directly to identity politics and can be seen as "part of a larger collective and ongoing process of revisionist history" (13). Panti's autobiographical

performance may fit into part of revisionist Irish history, as Panti's retelling of her life story takes the audience back to the key national and international events in Irish history, such as the Pope's visit in 1979, the mass emigration in the 1980s, and the Celtic Tiger in the 1990s. In doing so, Panti reclaims the position of the queer community in Irish history, who has long been ignored or purposefully excluded from the canonical narratives of the historical events. For another, Panti's open criticism of the New Gay in the final part of her performance is also in line with what Hughes and Román say about queer solo work being pedagogical and serving "to educate queer audiences of all backgrounds even as it entertains us or mobilizes us politically" (14). In the performance, Panti bashes what she calls "the New Gay" community hard, as she accuses that the New Gay is assimilated into the mainstream culture and becomes an apolitical product of consumerism, "an inoffensive, sickly sweet candyfloss of blandness created by corporations" (258), and she tries to mobilize the young queer generation to be more politically engaged.

Panti is credited for her seminal role in promoting LGBTQIA+ rights in Ireland, including her great participation in the Equal Marriage referendum held on 22 May 2015, in which Ireland becomes the first country to legalize same-sex marriage by popular vote. And it is also Panti "who pitched Irish queer performance onto the international stage in 2014, when her oration in the Abbey Theatre went viral" (Walsh "Touching" 21). Although Panti is good at getting the mainstream to understand and identify with the queer community's call for rights with her eloquence, she does not want to be assimilated into the mainstream culture and she never stops celebrating and insisting on her queerness and difference. In *A Woman in Progress*, Panti consciously rejects Catholicism and is happy to be an "outsider" from mainstream society to build her own community. For her, the queer culture should always be "a rejection of the status quo" and "dangerous and exciting and anti-establishment and mother-horrifying" (Panti 258). The solo performance gives Panti the perfect platform to celebrate her queerness and individuality, as it is one of "the few forms of artistic expression that registers as democratic" (Hughes and Román 10) which is open to everyone regardless of race, gender, or sexuality.

The rise of individualism and celebration of differences are due to radical changes that took place in Ireland since the last decade of the 20th century with the economic surge as well as the subsequent immigration flows and cultural liberalization. Ireland is now recognized as "the most globalized country in the world" (Jordan 3). But not everybody can enjoy the benefits of these changes. Such huge economic success is at the expense of widening class division with still relatively few opportunities provided for the marginalized social groups, whose voices are weakened by the chanting and praises for the Celtic Tiger.

Silent is the play that calls for people's attention to those who are left behind by society, as it deals with the problems of homelessness, suicide, depression, mental health, and homophobia, which for a long time have been silenced in Irish society. The performance opens with the rise of Kinevane as Tino from under a gray blanket as he says the first line, which turns out to be the last line as well, "If anyone asks, I'm not here at all, alright" (Kinevane 3). Then Kinevane turns the stage into a real-life scenario on the street, and we, the audience, become the passersby who are too busy minding their own business to pay attention to the people around us. "Only one in every six hundred will stop and talk, look ya level in the eye – like an equal" (20). When Tino narrates his story, there are frequent interruptions with coin sounds. But every time when Tino stops his telling and attempts to initiate a conversation with the kind-hearted person (of course we never know whoever that is), they are already gone, "all they see is the Blanket" (5). Even for someone who is as generous as willing to give out a fifty-euro note, there is little possibility of communication, "all he saw was the blanket" (12). Tino the homeless is never seen as an equal individual by the passersby, as the blanket becomes the signifier of a fresh-and-blood individual and thus reduces Tino to an objectified abject. Tino arises from the blanket and eventually disappears into the blanket. His story is not heard, as nobody knows that he also "once had splendid things, a job a wife a son" (20). And like his brother Pearse, Tino becomes an outcast from society and commits suicide eventually. It is towards the very end that the audience realizes Tino has long been dead and the person on the stage is just a phantom from the past forgotten by society.

In addition to addressing great empathy for homeless people, Kinevane also places the queer community at the centre of the play. It can be argued that the heart-wrenching tragedy of Tino's brother Pearse is at the core of *Silent*, since his whole life, as well as his death, is repressed by the conservative society as an unspeakable and silenced taboo. Pearse suffered greatly from the extremely homophobic society in 1980s Ireland. After three failed suicide attempts, he eventually succeeded on 6th May 1987, only six years before the decriminalization of homosexuality, as Tino laments "sure today, if he was alive, he could get his hole in any gay club he wanted and nobody would bat an eye" (Kinevane 8). Suicide is one of the unforgivable sins in Catholicism and no one would dare to bring it up even after the death of Pearse. Yet "it was there, bursting to escape, behind the front teeth of everybody's downturned mouth" (12), as the sound of silence gradually grows so loud that everybody related is drowned in it. After Pearse's suicide, Noellette Amberson, who reported Pearse's homosexual behavior to the Garda, was forever traumatized by the accident that Pearse's "half a human leg" (22) came through the window and landed on

her lap. Pearse's mother became mute and died within six months. Tino, despite his effort to keep everything normal and carry on with his happy family life, was knocked down by his enormous guilt for not taking action, "I should have stood up, and stopped them – But I remained shtumm" (5).

The community here is a fantasy and communication remains silent. By bringing the story of Tino and Pearse to the audience, Kinevane not just points out the insufficient social care and actions for the marginalized groups, but urges our reflections and gratitude towards our daily normal life, noting that we are no more different than the others except for some lucks, as in the preface he explains his motivation for writing the play, "it could be me lying against a posh restaurant door. It could be me under a blanket outside a bank. It could be me hassling you for cash beside an ATM" (xvi).

The two plays touch upon the issue of identity, which has been troubling Irish society from generation to generation. What constitutes our identity? Is it the same popular culture we are all immersed in, the same places we have been to, or the same historical events we have all been through? Such questioning of Irishness pervades the frequent self-referential lines in regards to Irish culture in both solo performances. For example, Panti adopts a queer intervention into Irish history with multiple references to historical events, city landmarks, and Irish television programs such as *Wanerly Wagon*. Scholars point out the "meticulous specificity of time and place" in Pat Kinevane's plays (Dean 213). In *Silent*, Kinevane brings up many well-known locations in Ireland from the North Infirmary in Cork to Cathal Brugha Street in Dublin. The specificity of time is also worth noticing. Pearse's third suicide attempt took place on the Eve of St Patrick's Day, one of the most important festivals celebrated by Irish people. The sharp contrast amplifies the disillusion of the community and the fact that no one cares about the condition of marginalized characters represented by Pearse. Moreover, even the name of Pearse carries a strong relation to Irishness, which comes from the nationalist leader of the 1916 Rising, an irony that a homosexual boy is named after the icon in Ireland's masculine, heterosexual, and nationalist narrative.

Apart from demonstrating the constructiveness of Irish identity, in *A Woman in Progress*, Panti points out the performativity of gender in the very beginning. Before the performance begins, Panti shows a video of the process of her transformation into "Panti" with a spoken word track saying "lipstick, powder press, lash curl, eyeliner, and I am, Pandora 'Panti' Bliss" (Panti 244), thus foregrounding the constructiveness of identity. Panti herself is the drag alter ego constructed by Rory O'Neill, and she is never afraid to reveal the man beneath her blond wigs and extravagant makeup. Throughout the show,

Panti encourages Rory (and the audience) to find ways to construct their own identity: "Life is plastic, malleable, and you have to shape your own" (250). She gives full credit to herself in constructing her own identity "I am my own life's work. The fruit of my own creative endeavours" (245). Panti also underlines it is "sex" that defines us, taking sex or sexuality as the identifier between homosexuals and heterosexuals, between her and the New Gay: "The New Gay wants to go to sexless, shiny, over-decorated bars, and drink Bacardi Breezers on glass table tops; I wanted to smash the glass table tops and fuck on the shards" (258).

Similarly, the performativity of gender is also implied by the performance of Kinevane in *Silent*, only more ambivalent and downbeat. Kinevane appears on the stage with a black eyelined, shaven-headed, and androgynous impression. Such paradoxical and inconsistent gender representation may suggest "dark corridors of internalized sexual guilt", as Ben Brantley writes in his review. Pearse was troubled by his "misplaced" gender representation since the age of four, because he wanted "Crolly dolls instead of Action Men, tea-sets instead of Meccano" (Kinevane 6). The gendered allocation of toys has drawn a clear line in regards to gender identity. But in the performance, Tino (Kinevane) crosses the border purposefully as he expertly switches his role from Tino to fashionable Noellette Amberson or the nasty, violent Mom through changes of costumes and postures, which underlines the performativity of gender and disrupts the fixed identity.

However, it is the misogynous portrayal of female characters in *Silent* that draws controversy, as most female characters in the play are presented as unsympathetic and selfish: Tino and Pearse's Mom is an irresponsible mother who mentally and physically abuses Pearse. Noellette Amberson is deemed by Tino as the first to blame for the tragedy of Pearse since she is the one who "opened the can of worms" (Kinevane 4) and Tino curses her foully "may she sizzle forever in deepest hell" (4) despite the fact she gets her comeuppance in the end. Tino's wife Judith is also accused by Tino of having a "cold soul" (8). Tino makes fun of the women who buy the jewelry made by Gretta, "stupid bitches from Foxrock wear them to charity balls at the Radisson – standing beside some celebrity from TV3" (6). While on the other hand, all the male characters are fragile, sensitive, and much easier to sympathize with. Even the Garda Pisspot is allowed to have some softness inside, since "he's at her grave every mornin at six before duty with daisies" (19). It can be argued that Kinevane subverts the gender stereotype that men are tough and women are soft, yet such simple subversion cannot be justified as Kinevane does not push further to challenge such gender binarism.

The deconstruction of identity is one of the characteristics that mark the postmodern era and the postdramatic theatre. Clara Mallon carefully examines the application of postdramatic strategies in Pat Kinevane's solo theatre. In her observation, Pat Kinevane's plays combine the "postdramatic modalities with more traditional methods of storytelling" (340), which facilitates the identification of the audience with characters while also keeping the audience at a critical distance to evoke their active reflections. Panti also adopts the postdramatic methods in her performance, as she specifies in the beginning that "I am merely using me as a theatrical device, through which I hope to illuminate a larger truth" (245). In fact, the premise of Panti's performance is that "all gender is a form of drag: a performative mode of expression that bears no direct relationship to biological sex" (Walsh *Queer Performance* 60-61). By using herself as the tool for artistic and political expression, Panti speaks for the performative nature of queer lives in which the private self and public self will always sustain and contradict each other.

Mallon also points out that postdramatic theatre shifts its focus of inquiry from representation to "the relations between actor and audience", so as to include otherness in its discussion (331). Both gifted masters in solo performance and improvisation, Kinevane and Panti infuse their stage personas with great charisma, as every movement and comment they make on the stage dazzles the audience. On the stage, both performers manage to establish a strong connection with the audience so as to form a temporary community. The plot of *A Woman in Progress* is developed through letters written by forty-year-old Panti to young Rory and videos playing on the stage screen. Panti passes a letter to an audience member in the beginning and will ask them to read it aloud at the end of the show, which turns out to be the letter written by little Rory back to Panti. Through the action of inviting the audience member to engage in the performance directly, the audience is no longer the passive spectator hiding in the seats, but can be seen and heard. The fourth wall in the conventional theatre is broken and no longer exists. In addition, with the audience taking the character of young Rory, the context of the whole performance immediately changes. It is not just a private exchange of letters between Panti and her younger self, nor a one-way story-telling addressed by Panti to the audience, but rather it is an intimate and thought-provoking conversation between Panti and numerous Rorys who are still struggling with their newly awakened sexuality and confused or anxious about finding out their own identity.

Although not directly engaging the audience in taking up characters in the performance, Kinevane also finds other ways to interact and connect with the audience. Before his monologue begins, Kinevane emerges from the blanket, and "after he takes time

to survey the audience, he eventually winks at them" (Kinevane 3). By acknowledging the existence of the audience, Kinevane subverts the power structure of spectatorship. Moreover, according to reviews of *Silent*, Kinevane "asked two members of the audience for their names and repeatedly during the performance broke the fourth wall by engaging with them by name in lines ad libbed" (Dean 212). It carries significant meanings to exchange names with somebody, for as soon as the action of exchanging names is complete, the two people are no longer strangers and form an interpersonal relationship. Such direct engagement of the audience strengthens the connection between the audience and the performer as well as between the audience and the marginalized people represented by him.

In Pat Kinevane's and Panti's solo performances, marginalized groups are offered great opportunities to negotiate with the mainstream without denying their differences. As Panti and Kinevane go further to investigate the constructiveness of identity, whether national identity or gender identity, they relocate their performance in the postdramatic theatre where identities are dynamic and contingent, which shatters the stability of building a community. Yet still, Panti and Kinevane do not indulge themselves in the celebration of individualism but rather turn their performance towards the audience by breaking the fourth wall to include them to take the role of not just a spectator but also a questioner and an investigator. While solo performance is the manifestation of the rise of individualism, there is no other art form that better nurtures the sense of community and identity, which brings us closer to others while recognizing our differences.

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Space, Place and Identity in Bernard Shaw's The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman

Espaço, lugar e identidade em The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman de *Bernard Shaw*

Justine Zapin

Abstract: *The last of Bernard Shaw's "Irish" plays,* The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman *(1921), raises the same concerns over colonialism, nationalism, and identity explored in* John Bull's Other Island *(1904) and* O'Flaherty V.C.: A Recruiting Pamphlet *(1915) but does so from outside his preferred dramatic style, theatrical Realism. In this proto-Absurdist experiment, Shaw invents an Ireland in which differences of religion, class, and politics are moot; in 3000 A.D., age is the only category of social distinction. Experimenting with dramaturgical form and eschewing mimetic scenic design, Shaw utilizes Ireland's mythic wildness and the transformational effect of its climate as an affective element of the play's argument. Through Shaw's treatment of space, this future Ireland with its inherently Irish inhabitants becomes the utopic home to a superior race that portends a life beyond the oppressive British/Irish and later intra-national binary partisan reality of post-WWI and pre-Free State Ireland.*

Keywords: *Bernard Shaw; Absurdism; Space; Ireland; Identity;* Back to Methuselah*;* The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman.

Resumo: *A última das peças "irlandesas" de Bernard Shaw,* The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman *(1921) levanta as mesmas preocupações sobre colonialismo, nacionalismo e identidade exploradas em* John Bull's Other Island *(1904) e O'*Flaherty V.C.: A Recruiting Pamphlet *(1915), mas o faz fora de seu estilo dramático preferido, o realismo teatral.*

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Nesse experimento proto-absurdista, Shaw inventa uma Irlanda em que as diferenças de religião, classe e política são discutíveis; em 3000 d.C., a idade é a única categoria de distinção social. Experimentando a forma dramatúrgica e evitando o design cênico mimético, Shaw utiliza a selvageria mítica da Irlanda e o efeito transformador de seu clima como um elemento afetivo do argumento da peça. Por meio do tratamento dado por Shaw ao espaço, essa Irlanda do futuro, com seus habitantes inerentemente irlandeses, torna-se o lar utópico de uma raça superior que pressagia uma vida além da opressiva realidade binária partidária britânica/irlandesa e, mais tarde, intranacional, da Irlanda pós-Primeira Guerra Mundial e pré-Estado Livre.

Palavras-chave: *Bernard Shaw; Absurdismo; Espaço; Irlanda; Identidade;* Back to Methuselah*;* The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman.

Galway Bay, 3000 A.D.: Space, Place, and Identity in Bernard Shaw's *The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*

The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman (1921), the penultimate play of George Bernard Shaw's five-part play-cycle *Back to Methuselah* (1921), is set in and around Galway Bay in the year 3000 A.D.. Written between 1918-1920 and dubbed his "Metabiological Pentateuch," *Back to Methuselah* is a reflection on Europe after the Great War. In the fourth play, *The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*, Shaw turns his focus to his native Ireland and questions the rationale of their militant strategy in pursuit of independence. The last of his "Irish" plays, *Tragedy* raises the same concerns over colonialism, nationalism, and identity explored in *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) and *O'Flaherty V.C.: A Recruiting Pamphlet* (1915) but does so from beyond the bounds of the dramaturgical form for which he was best known.

Shaw began *Back to Methuselah* seven months before the Treaty of Versailles and completed it two years later. The tone and tenor of the larger piece reflects the shock and disillusionment of post-WWI Europe. The play cycle traverses millennia, starting in prelapsarian Eden with Adam and Eve in 4004 B.C., and ending in 31,920 A.D. – the date Shaw decides is *As Far as Thought can Reach*.[1] At its centre, Shaw's epic argues for his version of "Creative Evolution" – a concept developed by Henri Bergson in 1907 – which by way of accessing the "Life Force" (Shaw's name for the nineteenth century concept of

the will) humankind could reach a utopic state. In living three centuries or more, fully mature humans would acquire a "well instructed conscience" with which they would finally become ". . . capable of solving the social problems raised by his own aggregation, or, as he calls it, his civilization" (*Complete Prefaces* 375). Shaw's assessment of post-war Europe in *Back to Methuselah* is incredibly harsh but, at the very least, offers a strategy for moving forward. Shaw is adamant throughout the preface and the five-play cycle that he is in earnest; he truly believes that Creative Evolution is not only possible but necessary. But the complete narrativized picture of his solution, despite its inherently hopeful didacticism, is bleak, listless, and devastating.

In *Tragedy*, Shaw turns from a global apprehension about the fate of human progress to the more immediate concern about Ireland's future. While writing *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw's exasperation with the hyper-nationalism of Sinn Féin and other Irish patriots (save his support for Roger Casement), and frustration with the "derisive doggerel"[2] espoused by a divided Ulster, was at an all-time high; it was, as Peter Gahan notes, "during the years 1918-21 . . . [that] Bernard Shaw's attention to his native country's politics was at its most persistent" (209). Shaw's private correspondence and public writings reveal near constant warnings against enmity and the Irish adopting nationalism as their defining characteristic – flaws he felt were necessarily crippling the progress of a people with unyielding potential.[3] In this proto-Absurdist theatrical experiment, Shaw looks to Ireland in the year 3000 A.D.. An evolved race of "longlivers" are thriving in their remote enclave on Galway Bay; the rugged landscape and temperate climate enrich their quality of life and of their thought. Concerns over nationality, class, gender, and religion are irrelevant in their society, though to the non-evolved "shortlivers" outside of Ireland these markers of identity are still of paramount importance. Experimenting with theatrical form and eschewing mimetic scenic design, Shaw utilizes Ireland's mythic wildness and the transformational effect of its climate as an affective element of the play's argument. Through Shaw's treatment of space, this future Ireland with its inherently *Irish* inhabitants becomes the utopic home to a superior race that portends a life beyond the oppressive British/Irish and later intra-national binary partisan reality of post-WWI and pre-Free State Ireland.

The Burren,[4] at nearly 350 million years old, and Galway Bay, with its long reaching port history, are places that convey longevity. As the setting of Shaw's future play, these prehistoric locations, rich with cultural memory, provide a temporal aesthetic that is both familiar and estranging. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi Fu Tuan considers the ways in which humans experience, constitute, and form attachments to place

and how those feelings are influenced by and affect our concepts of time. "Permanence," Tuan notes, "is an important element in the idea of place...things and objects endure and are dependable in ways that human beings, with their biological weaknesses and shifting moods, do not endure and are not dependable" (140). Tuan goes on to note that "attachment to homeland is a common human emotion" that can be quite intense (149). A native Irishman, Shaw chose of the natural setting of the Burren and Galway Bay to directly affect his audience.

The play follows a group of shortliving humans wandering in the Burren, all but one of whom are too self-absorbed to appreciate the beauty and timelessness of their surroundings. In 3000 A.D., the higher forms of humanity foretold in *Methuselah's* second play, *The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas*, have manifested themselves into existence (the main action of the third play, *The Thing Happens*). In *Tragedy,* the select psychologically advanced beings have taken up residence in what was formerly Ireland. Secluded on Galway Bay, caught between the rocky Burren landscape and the sea, the longlivers are shrouded in mystery, and revered by the shortlivers. Residing all over the world, the shortlivers are still suffering from the same petty concerns they did in 1920 A.D.. Shaw's narrative releases this race of "shortlivers" – consumed by the concept of identity and culture – on the enduring western Irish landscape to illustrate the futility of their flag-waving preoccupations.

With the juxtaposition of the constant and the fleeting, Shaw emphasizes how conflating nation and land was a fool's errand; land will always outlast nation. Additionally, Shaw understands how the image of the West of Ireland is especially evocative of traumatic cultural memories. Shaw's landscape setting recalls numerous invasions, wars, epidemics, drownings and, of course, the Great Famine (1845-52). In "All the Dead Voices," Joseph Roach notes how "the landscape of [Ireland], particularly...the west country, was created by the actions or inactions of historical persons as well as by the workings of God or Nature" (87). Though Roach is speaking more of the depiction of Irish landscape in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) the reading also holds true of Shaw's scenography. Tuan confirms Roach's analysis, noting how "landscape is personal and tribal history made visible" (140). In *Tragedy*, Shaw's Irish landscape is remarkably poignant. Despite the play's futurity, in choosing a setting in which colonial trauma is so ineluctably bound, Shaw ensures that his contemporary views of Britain and Ireland are sufficiently masked but immediately felt.

Unlike in his Realist plays, where the mimetic representations of place are presented to a passive audience, Shaw's creation of place in *Tragedy* is actively rendered by the playwright, his performers, and the audience during the performance. In *The*

Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre argues that space exists and is produced in three distinct ways: physically, mentally, and socially. Known as his 'spatial triad,' Lefebvre defines three understandings of space: spatial practice or perceived space, representations of space or conceived space, and representational space or lived space. Perceived space is a straightforward concept; it is the everyday space in which we live. Conceived space is related to the production of space and the order in which that relationship imposes (involving signs, codes, and knowledge itself). This space is best understood and forwarded by cartographers, planners, and theorists of space themselves. Lived or representational space, Lefebvre's says, "embodies complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, and also to art" (40). Lived space is subjective to cultural experience and knowledge. It is a specific socio-cultural milieu made manifest in the subconscious participation and adherence rules and histories inherently known. Theatrical space, Lefebvre believes, is understood through all three conceptions of space: "Theatrical space certainly implies a representation of space (that of the classical drama, say – or the Elizabethan, or the Italian) ... [t]he representational space, mediated yet directly experienced, which infuses the work and the moment, is established as such through the dramatic action itself" (188). The theatrical space in *Tragedy* does not need to be wholly imitative to be affective, but in its referents establishes a world in which shared experiences – past and present – can turn space into place.

While Lefebvre's writing on theatre is practically limited to the above sentiment, in *Mapping Irish Theatre*, Christopher Morash and Shaun Richards argue that in these passing references "we get a sense of the potential complexity that [his] model brings to the theatrical event" (8). Morash and Richards see the dynamism of Lefebvre's model, calling the moment-to-moment interaction between his three modes of spatial production "profoundly theatrical" (8). Drawing a connection between Lefebvre's assertion that space is continually produced in the present and the simultaneity of what happens in the theatre, Morash and Richards contend that "the production of lived space is [a] participative process...involv[ing] not only the performers but also the audience" (8). While they concede that there are strict social boundaries in the theatre that ties the participative production of space to the duration of performance itself, Morash and Richards see an anomaly in Irish Theatre specifically. In Irish theatre, they argue, the two-way flow between performer and audience will not remain confined to the stage in productions that reference key moments in Irish history:

> the concentrated, intensified production of space in performance is reliant upon spaces produced outside of the theatre; however, in a particular society or historical moment, those socially produced spaces may have already been the subject of intense, non-theatrical condensational spatial production. (8-9)

As the Irish landscape appears politically theatricalized before Shaw even stages it, the participative exchange between performer and audience that engenders place from space has the potential to carry on after the performance has ended. Therefore, as the Ireland in *Tragedy* is mutually produced by Shaw's dialogue, the actors' performances, and the audience themselves, and as that conception of Irish space can outlast the theatrical event in which it was created, *Tragedy*'s setting becomes an essential affective piece of the argument itself.

Coupled with Shaw's experimentation with dramatic form during the post-WWI/pre-Irish Free-State period, this participative transmutation of abstract space to specific place allowed Shaw to redefine what it meant to be Irish. Within this non-Realist spatial theatrical intervention, Shaw portrays a utopic vision of Ireland in which the defining characteristic of the Irish people was not all-encompassing Nationalist fervor, but an identity informed by the enduring quality of the Irish land itself. Moreover, as the process implicates the audience in the construction of place and identity, Shaw ensures his audience align themselves with Ireland and the Irish in the struggle against colonial oppression.

Tragedy is set on "*Burrin pier on the south shore of Galway Bay in Ireland, a region of stone-capped hills and granite fields...[on] a fine summer day in the year 3000 A.D"* (Collected Works 910). Shaw continues in the stage directions, describing "*an ancient stone stump, about three feet thick and three feet high, used for securing ships by ropes to the shore"* on which the Elderly Gentleman sits "*facing the land with his head bowed and his face in his hands, sobbing"* (910). To his right, "*three or four full sacks*" that Shaw insists, "*suggest the pier, unlike many remote Irish piers, is occasionally useful as well as romantic"* (911). Beyond the Elderly Gentleman is the sea (unseen by the audience), and behind and to his left is a flight of stone steps descending to the beach. Without the benefit of reading the stage directions, with the rise of the curtain in performance, the audience would not be able to immediately discern the location beyond recognizing it as a (perhaps *useful*) pier, nor would they be able to imbue that pier with any of the romanticism Shaw implies in his written text that they should. The geographical features that might disclose it as Irish place (the stone-capped hills and granite fields) are only for the Elderly Gentleman to look out

upon. While Shaw's dialogue introduces this space as the West coast of Ireland early on, setting the action a thousand years in the future, and the peculiar dress and general affect of its inhabitants, initially distantiates the audience and inhibits any true recognition. This inchoate space, and the longlivers themselves, are made more meaningfully Irish to the audience through the experience of watching the play.

As Tuan notes in *Space and Place*, "space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" (136). Shaw's stage space acquires meaning through direct references to places, and several indirect or general references, locating the playing space as Ireland or and its inhabitants as Irish. The first marker of place is the identification of the Elderly Gentleman as alien to the space in which he is occupies The centenarian woman offends the Elderly Gentleman by calling him "a foreigner," prompting his proud rebuttal: "I am a Briton." The Elderly Gentleman concedes that while the British Commonwealth has now relocated to the Middle East, "these islands" were once the center of the empire, and he is "on a pious pilgrimage to one of the numerous lands of [his] fathers"[5] (*Collected Plays* 911). The centenarian woman refuses his intimation that they are "of the same stock" and dismisses him as being unwell (*Collected Plays* 911).

This first interaction reveals both parties as struggling to locate themselves spatially and within a social context. She later positions herself, her location, and her elevated status distinctly: "[Y]ou are on the west coast of Ireland, and that it is the practice among natives of the Eastern Island to spend some years here to acquire mental flexibility...The climate has that effect" (*Collected Plays* 912). These comments, this attitude, and the inability to freely converse calls to mind the stereotypically suspicious and insular Aran Island's Gaeilgeoiri, and firmly locates and identifies her within a distinctly Irish context. Her inherent Irishness and his Englishness is further reinforced with the following exchange in which the centenarian woman indirectly insults Anglo landlords/landlordism and in which the Elderly Gentleman insists he is speaking "the plainest English":

> The Woman. Then why are you here?
> The Eldderly Gentleman. Am I trespassing? I was not aware of it.
> The Woman. Trespassing? I do not understand the word.
> The Eldderly Gentleman. Is this land private property? If so, I make no claim. I proffer a shilling in satisfaction of damage (if any) and am ready to withdraw if you will be good enough to shew me the nearest way. [*He offers her a shilling*].
> The Woman [*taking it and examining it without much interest*] I do not

> understand a single word of what you have just said.
> The Eldderly Gentleman. I am speaking the plainest English. Are you the landlord?
> The Woman [*shaking her head*] There is a tradition in this part of the country of an animal with a name like that. It used to be hunted and shot in the barbarous ages. It is quite extinct now.
> (*Collected Plays* 912)

Shaw uses place to distinguish peoples and peoples to distinguish place. Tuan notes how fixed boundaries and land ownership in both agrarian and industrialized societies provide important markers of identity (156). For Shaw, on the coast of Western Ireland in the year 3000 A.D., the land is inhabited but not owned. Tuan explains that when no ownership or fixed boundaries exist, the territory in question is distinguished in one of two ways, as "the estate" and/or as "the range": "Estate is the traditionally recognized home...of a patrilineal descent group and its adherents [whereas] [r]ange is the tract or orbit over which the group ordinarily hunts or forages" (157). Estate, Tuan argues, is more important in the ceremonial and social life where range is more important for survival. The Elderly Gentleman, so consumed with his agnates, primogeniture, and (as we discover later) a slavish adherence to pomp and circumstance, is the first to initiate this type of distinction in the conversation. He views the land as an estate, as something he could take ownership of; in doing so, the man defines himself. The woman, in comparison, reinforces her understanding of the land as range; this is a place where animals roam and are hunted and where – as her long life suggests – perenniality is of paramount importance. In this way, she is distinguishing herself from her short-living counterpart through her experience of space, but is also suggesting that the agricultural mores and mythic wildness of Western Ireland persists in 3000 A.D.

It is important to note, however, that while the Elderly Gentleman wears his Englishness as a badge of honor, the longlivers insist their only distinguishing "class" or social identity is that of the long-living. Zoo, a longliver brought in to care for the Elderly Gentleman, scoffs at the shortliver's insistence on maintaining national identities: "what a ridiculous thing to call people Irish because they live in Ireland! you might as well call them Airish because they live in air" (*Collected Plays* 918). The longlivers' identity is formed from their ability to sustain, to live many centuries and embrace the wisdom and ability their long-life grants them. It is only in the audience's perception of character, reinforced by the spoken markers of place, that the longlivers become "Irish." Shaw's longlivers reveal

how one can necessarily be shaped by place without being defined by it.

In acts two and three, Shaw moves the action to "[a] *courtyard before the columned portico of a temple*" and inside the temple in "*a gallery overhanging an abyss*" in "Galway city," respectively (*Collected Plays* 926, 934). No ruins of Galway city survive in 3000 A.D., instead the place is home to a large temple built for the sole purpose of humoring shortlivers. Though not depicted on the stage, the "city" is also home to a great statue of Sir John Falstaff. In a bizarre (and scarily accurate predictive) digression, the longliving Zoo recounts how ten years after the war to end all wars there was another war, where "hardly any soldiers were killed; but seven of the capital cities of Europe were wiped out of existence." She continues:

> It seems to have been a great joke: for the statesmen who thought they had sent ten million common men to their deaths were themselves blown into fragments with their houses and families, while the ten million men lay snugly in the caves they had dug for themselves. Later on even the houses escaped; but their inhabitants were poisoned by gas that spared no living soul. Of course the soldiers starved and ran wild; and that was the end of pseudo-Christian civilization. The last civilized thing that happened was that the statesmen discovered that cowardice was a great patriotic virtue; and a public monument was erected to its first preacher, an ancient and very fat sage called Sir John Falstaff. (*Collected Plays* 930)

The future this story portends, and the irony that what remains is that statue of Falstaff, is so ludicrous that the very place in which this is "happening" is beyond comprehension. The ensuing action in the final two acts further confounds reason so, while the scenic elements are more numerous in acts two and three than the sparsely decorated pier in act one, the space in the second and third acts appears unstable. Shaw's design and didascalia distantiates the audience from making meaning of the dramatic action and interrupts a clear production of space.

In *Tragedy*'s first act, the playwright, the performers, and the audience join in producing a familiar and historically dense space that facilitates the audience's allegiance to those who reside in that produced environment (the perceived "Irish" longlivers). In the second and third acts of *Tragedy*, the audience is kept from emotionally identifying with any of the characters. When that distance is maintained, the audience plays less of a role in the production of space than the playwright and the performers. As such, to the audience the space feels fractured, disjointed, or ephemeral. In applying what Brecht would later

call the Verfremdungseffekt (or alienation effect), Shaw ensures his audience brings greater scrutiny to the events onstage.

In "The Theatre of the Absurd," Martin Esslin agrees that when the alienation effect is produced successfully, "emotional identification with the characters is replaced by a puzzled, critical attention" (5). Shaw's distanciation techniques come to head in the second and third acts, when there is a completely break-down of language between the Elderly Gentleman's party of shortlivers and the residents of Galway Bay. Act two begins in a

> *courtyard before the columned portico of a temple* [where a] . . . *veiled and robed woman of majestic carriage passes along behind the columns towards the entrance . . . [f]rom the opposite direction a man of compact figure, clean-shaven, saturnine, and self-centred: in short, very like Napoleon I, and wearing a military uniform of Napoleonic cut, marches with measured steps; places his hand in his lapel in the traditional manner; and fixes the woman with his eye. She stops, her attitude expressing haughty amazement at his audacity* (*Collected Plays* 926).

In the opening dialogue, the Napoleonic figure introduces himself as "The Man of Destiny," though he is revealed to be the Emperor of Turania, whom we know from act one has been travelling in the Elderly Gentleman's party under the alias "General Aufsteig." The veiled woman is revealed to be not *the* oracle but *an* oracle as the longlivers who have lived past 100 (called secondaries) take turns filling that role. As if this juxtaposition of countenance and costume isn't enough, the ensuing conversation in which the veiled woman utterly refuses to acknowledge his point of view, to see value in the identity he has cultivated for himself, and to regard him with any of the respect he feels he deserves is enough for communication itself to seem to be a feckless endeavor.

In a moment of extreme frustration, and in what is clearly an attempt to locate himself in both an unfamiliar place as well as in an uncomfortable social space, the emperor reveals his full name as Cain Adamson Charles Napoleon, the "powerful, popular, famous [and] historically immortal" (*Collected Plays* 929). He is trying to position himself on a chronological timeline he believes will incorporate him into communion with the race of longlivers. He is so flustered that he repeatedly uses military jargon to communicate, even once using the German "Kamerad" to address her but cannot make himself understood.

They both fail to communicate because their functional value systems exist on

different planes. The shortlivers cannot conceive of anything more important than of the domination and subordination of others. They desire glory and fear death. The longlivers differ from the shortlivers not just in that they have more time in which to become wise, but in that the extended time gives them a new attitude on life itself. As Zoo explains to the Elderly Gentleman in act one, "it is not the number of years we have behind us, but the number we have before us that makes us careful and responsible and determined to find out the truth about everything...we are made wise not by the recollections of our past, but by the responsibilities of our future" (*Collected Plays* 921). Their evolutionary superiority is maintained not by "looking down at" the shortlivers but "up to something higher than [them]selves" (921). The longlivers "true destiny" is not to "advise or govern" the shortlivers, but to "supplant and supersede" them. Language fails, and understanding is rendered impossible, because the short-lived are concerned with trivialities and the long-lived only realities.

The audience, who face the same biological weakness of the shortlivers, have been given the key with which they can access the higher plane of the longlivers. Through the experience of watching the play, they are confronted with the uncomfortable realization that unless they burden themselves with the responsibility of the future, they will be doomed to a futile existence. Further driving this message is Shaw's use of meta-theatricality. The longliver Zoo openly admits that any pomp on their behalf is only for the benefit of the shortlivers: "[Zozim] has to dress-up in a Druid's robe, and put on a wig and a long false beard, to impress you silly people. I have to put on a purple mantle. I have no patience with such mummery; but you expect it from us; so I suppose it must be kept up" (*Collected Plays* 930). Shaw instructs these actors in the stage directions to put on and take off their ridiculous costumes onstage and to alternatingly "*feign geniality*" and severity in their speech, which repeatedly draws the audience's attention to the nature of the play's theatricality. Despite Zoo's warning that "all th[e] business with colored lights and chords on that old organ is only tomfoolery," the appearance of those same-colored lights, smoke, and music still astounds the shortlivers, and they stoop and stumble in awe and reverence. Most appalling for the audience is watching the shortlivers who, at the end of this highly manufactured and obviously perfidious display, acknowledge its falsity but agree to continue perpetuating the "lie" as it means of maintaining their political status quo. As a function of the play's meta-theatricality, the Elderly Gentleman and the audience come to realize the inconsequence of an existence in which its value system is predicated on cupidity, egoism, and bombast.

Upon leaving the theatre, the audience can choose to follow in the way of the

shortlivers, with their "put on" British mannerisms and petty identity politics or *will* themselves to evolve into a race not unlike the longlivers. Though the longlivers' detachment is off-putting, the highly rational "society" in which they live – where competition and hostility have been eliminated, social, political, and economic problems have been solved, and where life is experienced on an infinitely higher level intellectually and aesthetically – is not unappealing. And while in the wake of the Great War the world seemed an irredeemable place, the audience has effectively contributed to producing that utopia in an *Irish* space.

Martin Esslin describes the Absurdist genre as one in which "[i]t is impossible to identify oneself with characters one does not understand or whose motives remain a closed book" (5). "While the happenings on the stage are absurd," Esslin continues, "they yet remain recognizable as somehow related to life with *its* absurdity, so that eventually the spectators are brought face to face with the irrational side of their existence" (5). Whereas the place created in act one was familiar, the space in acts two and three is – at first – very nearly incomprehensible. While the shortlivers that appear in the second and third acts are in manner, custom, and costumed similarly to the audience, they seem far more alien in this "Galway city" than the Elderly Gentleman had on Burren pier. The shortlivers respond erratically and disproportionately to stimuli, but the tactlessness with which the longlivers treat them fails to engender any intimacy between the audience and the longlivers, as had been done in the first act. *Tragedy* is not a futuristic *Ubu Roi*, but the Falstaffian buffoonery of the shortlivers and the disdain and disconnectedness of the longlivers does confront the audience with a tragic picture of humanity's selfish and callow charlatanism. Nor is *Tragedy* an earlier *Waiting for Godot*, though in Shaw's location specific but minimalist set, the audience is forced to look for more in the conceptual aesthetic he invites them to create. Often read as a bi-partisan tract, in choosing to settle his creatively evolved longlivers on Galway Bay and imbuing them with Irish characteristics, Shaw reveals his support for Ireland and the Irish in the crucial pre-independence period. Further, it is through *Tragedy's* proto-Absurdist dramatic form that Shaw can actively draw on the constitutive presence of the audience to construct a utopic Ireland in which challenges their conception of Ireland and of Irish identity.

Notes

1 The first play of *Back to Methuselah*, *In the Beginning*, reveals Adam and Eve's choosing to leave Eden, "inventing" marriage, embracing death as a means of renewal and of progress. Jumping forward to the years just following WWI with *The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas*,

two brothers have discovered that a higher form of humanity may be possible for those who can learn to live with full vitality for three centuries. In the third play, set in 2170 A.D., and as the title suggests, *The Thing Happens.* Two of the characters from *The Gospel* have succeeded in increasing their lives span. Interestingly, the two characters who have achieved this fate – Reverend Haslam and the parlormaid – were those who, because of class prejudice, had been deemed unworthy of Creative Evolution in the previous section. In *Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*, set in 3000 A.D., "shortlivers" are becoming a thing of the past, A new race of "longlivers" have taken up residence in the west of Ireland, and their two main political parties are considering the eradication of the whole lot of ineffectual shortlivers for their own good. In the last play, *As Far as Thought can Reach*, reveals a fully evolved society. The end of the play reinforces what the longliver tried to impart to the shortliver in the preceding play: living life for the is the of future is the only way to secure the present.

2 From "How to Settle the Irish Question": "All the rest of Ireland could not coerce a united Ulster; and to repeat the original sin that delivered Ireland into England's hands by calling in English soldiers to coerce Irishmen would be morally impossible. There is quite as much fight in Ulster as in Sinn Féin. Ulster may not love the Dark Rosaleen, but it hates the Virgin Mary. It does not want to die for Ireland. On the contrary it believes that all the people who die for Ireland go straight to hell; but it wants to send them there and have the island to itself...Ulster children still repeat the derisive doggerel "Sleether slaughther, holy wather"; and the adults are as determined as ever that 'the Protestant boys shall carry the drum'" (145).

3 Typical of his writing of the time, this letter to his former secretary and mother to future Taoiseach Garret, Mabel Fitzgerald, explores Shaw's concern over where Sinn Féin's short-sighted brutal nationalism would lead. The description of the effects of Ireland's climate on the "base" and the "noble" seems to serve as a model for how the Irish climate in *Tragedy* affects the shortlivers and longlivers differently:

> The days of small nations is past, indeed, except for nations still denied self-government, nationalism is a dead horse; and even subject nations like Ireland must never forget that the moment they gain home rule, the horse will drop down under them and reveal by a sudden and horrible decomposition, that he has been dead for many years. Only as a member of a great commonwealth is there any future for us. We are a wretched little clod, broken off a bigger clod, broken off the west end of Europe, full of extraordinary beautiful but damnably barren places, with a strange climate that degrades base people hideously and clears the souls of noble people wonderfully. We are capable of taking a very high degree of training: in fact we are rather dangerous without it. We have an enormous advantage of exceptional literary power and a language which puts us in communication with a fifth of the human race. We are not rich enough to become fatheaded and demoralised like our biggest neighbours. In short, we shall be either a very highly civilised people or nothing; and this means that we should carefully preserve our relations with the large countries....Now if Sinn Féin means that we are to decide and arrange all this ourselves instead of having

> it arranged for us by others, then more power to Sinn Féin's elbow. But if S.F. means that we are to turn back and shrink into a little village community...and do nothing but wonder how much longer the turf will last in Donegal, then the proper place for Sinn Féin is the ash-pit (qtd. in Mulhall).

4 The Burren (Irish: *Boirinn* meaning "rocky district") is a garst/glaciakarst landscape in County Clare, on the West Coast of Ireland.

5 The first act of Tragedy covers much of this exposition through a series of discussions between the Elderly Gentleman and three separate longlivers, each of whom grow exceedingly tired from the shortliver's stubborn self-importance. Frustrated and often misunderstood, the Elderly Gentleman tries to justify his interest in visiting the longlivers in the former Ireland. The Elderly Gentleman considers himself a historian of sorts, and in reciting the "history" of the British Isles reveals the grave mistake that led to the effacement of the Irish people. When the British first considered a move to the Middle East, the Elderly Gentleman explains, they asked their "oppressed but never conquered" Irish neighbors to join them. Horrified at the prospect of abandonment and desperate without an oppressive force to define them, the Irish travel around the globe, searching for other battles of national independence and offering aid and encouragement to resistance groups as far as India and Korea:

> Hardly two hundred years had elapsed when the claims of nationality were so universally conceded that there was no longer a single country on the face of the earth with a national grievance or a national movement. Think of the position of the Irish, who had lost all their political faculties by disuse except that of nationalist agitation, and who owed their position as the most interesting race on earth solely to their sufferings! The very countries they had helped to set free boycotted them as intolerable bores. The communities which had once idolized them as the incarnation of all that is adorable in the warm heart and witty brain, fled from them as from a pestilence. (*Collected Plays* 917)

Disheartened and displaced, the "devoted Irishmen, not one of whom had ever seen Ireland" were counselled to return to home. "This had never once occurred to them, because there was nothing to prevent them and nobody to forbid them." Jumping at the suggestion, they returned, landing in Galway Bay. The elders "flung themselves down and passionately kissed the soil of Ireland, calling on the young to embrace the earth that had borne their ancestors", but the young "looked gloomily on, and said 'There is no earth, only stone.'" They turned around and returned to England, never confessing to being Irish ever again – not even to their own children. Within a generation, the Elderly Gentleman reflects, "the Irish race vanished from human knowledge" (*Collected Plays* 918).

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Voices from Brazil

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Samuel Beckett no Cerrado Brasileiro. Diálogos

Samuel Beckett at the Brazilian Cerrado. Dialogues

Ronei Vieira Nogueira

Robson Corrêa de Camargo

Resumo: *Este artigo discute como a obra literária e dramática de Samuel Beckett pode dialogar com o imaginário do cerrado goiano, analisando as performances do Máskara – Núcleo Transdisciplinar de Pesquisas em Teatro, Dança e Performance, grupo fundado em 2002 na Escola de Música e Artes Cênicas da Universidade Federal de Goiás. Em 20 anos de existência o coletivo já encenou 5 espetáculos tendo como base os textos do escritor irlandês, trazendo em sua composição elementos do imaginário da cidade de Goiânia e as cores e referências visuais do Cerrado. Partindo de reflexões do encenador brasileiro Robson Corrêa de Camargo e do filósofo e liderança indígena brasileira Ailton Krenak, o artigo reflete sobre como as particularidades da obra de Beckett encontra terreno fértil para fincar suas raízes em solo goiano.*

Palavras-Chave: *Teatro; Performance; Samuel Beckett; Teatro Irlandês; Cerrado; Teatro Brasileiro; Teatro goiano; Máskara*.

Abstract: *This article discusses possible dialogues between the literary and dramatic work of Samuel Beckett and the imagery of the Goiás Savannah (*Cerrado*) by analysing the performances of* Máskara – *Transdisciplinary Research Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance, a group founded in 2002 at the School of Music and Performing Arts of the Federal University of Goiás. In its 20 years of existence, this group has already staged 5 performances based on the texts of the Irish writer, bringing out elements of the imagery of the city of Goiânia and the colours and visual references of the* Cerrado*. Drawing on reflections by the Brazilian director Robson Corrêa de Camargo and the philosopher and Brazilian indigenous leader*

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Ailton Krenak, this article reflects on how the particularities of Beckett's work find fertile ground to take root in the soil of Goiás.

Keywords: *Performance; Samuel Beckett; Irish Theatre; Cerrado; Brazilian Theatre; Goiânia Theatre;* Máskara.

Figura 1. Curta Beckett. Da esquerda para a direita: Nina Soldera, Ronei Vieira, Ilmara Damasceno, Allan Lourenço, Mariana Tagliari e Crissiane Andrade. Apresentação na Av. Goiás com Anhanguera em Goiânia. 2022. Foto: André Miranda.

Samuel Beckett estabelece o silêncio como ponte de seus diálogos. Diálogos que se abrem também entre o imaginário irlandês e o imaginário brasileiro, entre o existir negro dos rios Liffey e Poddle, em Dublin, e as cores quentes do seco cerrado Goiano, que paira em seu não espaço sobre o abundante aquífero Guarani. Não! Beckett não define claramente localizações geográficas em suas obras; há sim algumas paisagens irlandesas em suas memórias/imagens do romance *Companhia* (1979) ou na peça de teatro *Improviso de Ohio* (1980). Beckett escreve sim o silêncio e o vazio. Entretanto, a ideia de não-lugar em seus escritos possibilita uma abertura ou um entre-lugar, para que artistas de qualquer parte do mundo preencham suas vivências várias num diálogo estimulante com o universo beckettiano.

Paradoxos. A Irlanda ocupa uma pequena parte do continente europeu, enquanto o Brasil é o segundo maior país do continente americano, o primeiro em extensão territorial da América do Sul e o quinto maior país do mundo; não é pouca coisa. Estabelecem-se assim distintas formas de se perceber e viver no espaço circundante. As noções de espaço social e histórico são igualmente distintas, se percebermos algumas peculiaridades entre as cidades de Goiânia e Dublin. A primeira, localizada próxima à capital Federal do Brasil, Brasília, tem cerca de um milhão e meio de habitantes e quase a mesma quantidade em sua região metropolitana, enquanto Dublin tem cerca de meio milhão de habitantes, e o triplo desse número vivendo em seu entorno. Dublin, de certa forma, continua com a mesma população numérica que possuía no início do século XX, quando nascia Samuel Barkley Beckett (1906-1989). Goiânia, como unidade político-social, ainda não existia naquele tempo, era um não lugar, pois seria fundada apenas em 1933.

Se levarmos em consideração as questões climáticas e os ecossistemas, as distinções parecem se evidenciar ainda mais. O Brasil é diverso tanto em clima como em vegetação e vida animal, sendo considerado o país com a maior biodiversidade do mundo. O Estado de Goiás é um dos locais do bioma Cerrado, seco, quase desértico, mas que se alterna com fortes chuvas, com árvores distantes umas das outras, às vezes enormes, como suas sucupiras, jerivás e jequitibás, e com raízes profundas, troncos e folhas grossas e galhos retorcidos, local de gado e queimadas, com umidade do ar bastante baixa em várias épocas do ano. Já a Irlanda é uma ilha com um clima úmido, com temperaturas baixas o ano todo, e pouca diversidade de fauna e flora em todo o seu território. Suas pradarias e pântanos não serão encontrados no Centro Oeste Brasileiro.

Esta diversidade paradoxal e estranha, entre o *locus* vivente original da Irlanda beckettiana e o Cerrado brasileiro tem, de alguma forma, impulsionado o Máskara, um fruto local, o Núcleo Transdisciplinar de Pesquisas em Teatro, Dança e Performance, a se

aprofundar na dramaturgia de Samuel Beckett de forma perene há cerca de seus 20 anos. Este coletivo, artístico e acadêmico, originado em Goiânia – GO, é vinculado à Universidade Federal de Goiás. Suas pesquisas têm como impulsionamento principal a busca de um teatro íntimo, imagético e sensorial, que tem o corpo, tanto do público como dos artistas, como ferramenta fundante para a criação de imagens e provocação de sensações e emoções e, estranhamente, o texto beckettiano como sua estrutura e suporte.

O Máskara não se restringe à obra de Beckett, tendo, em seu histórico, montagens teatrais dos escritores brasileiros: Nelson Rodrigues (*Senhora dos Afogados*, 1912 – 1980) e Bernardo Élis (*Explosão Demográfica - Minueto em Fó Menor*, 1915-1997), e do dramaturgo cubano José Triana (*A Noite dos Assassinos,* 1931 – 2018). Porém, a maior parte de seu repertório é vorazmente dirigido a trabalhos relacionados a textos do escritor irlandês que foi viver em Paris. De 2002, ano de sua fundação, até 2023 foram apresentados 5 espetáculos a partir dos escritos de Beckett, são eles: *Esperando Godot*, em duas versões (2005 e 2023), *Companhia* (2009), *Quê Onde* (2010), *Curta Beckett* (2014) e *CascandoBeckett: Uma Imagem Como Outra Qualquer* (2016 e 2022). As montagens dos textos curtos de Samuel Beckett são apresentadas até os dias de hoje, em Goiânia, no Brasil, na Argentina, México e Polônia.

O processo de construção destas performances do Máskara passa pela pesquisa das possíveis imagens que possam surgir como reverberações, aprofundamentos, discussões da dramaturgia insólita proposta por Samuel Beckett em nosso saber local. Nesse sentido, o que vemos é uma sobreposição dramatúrgica, isto é, tudo se converte em elementos que podem ser lidos separadamente ou conjuntamente. As montagens do Máskara, então, não são teatro "do absurdo", uma vez que se propõem a um teatro das ruínas, do silêncio, do indizível, da experiência que o ouvinte/olhante faz dos resíduos dos processos imateriais e de outras coisas, de sua fina ironia.

Se Beckett escreve para eliminar a linguagem e a substância do real, apresentando o vazio, o Máskara procura equacionar imagens e presenças na busca do silente. Movimentos, gestualidades, cores, nuances e timbres da voz, respiração, olhares, emoções, escorrem pelo suor das atrizes e atores, onde iluminação, figurinos, música e cenografia são protagonistas de suas próprias histórias. O que significa que a criação de todos esses elementos precisa transpassar, penetrar, a obra de Beckett ao corpo presente. No processo de construção, o texto escrito é um estimulador para um mergulho em si mesmo e traduzido nas performances presentes no seu cotidiano, na sua cultura. Um Beckett que procura seu silêncio nas vozes do Cerrado.

Robson Corrêa de Camargo, encenador da companhia, reflete que muitos estudiosos e admiradores da obra de Beckett infelizmente converteram "as imagens construídas por seus primeiros encenadores em ícones, imutáveis, cimentados no tempo e no espaço, em marcos regulatórios de um determinado fazer teatral, o *imprimatur* de um 'genuíno e autêntico Beckett', a ser repetido indefinidamente" (Camargo 2). O caminho percorrido pela trupe do Máskara, ao abordar a dramaturgia beckettiana, perpassa as imagens de montagens anteriores, mas não para fazer morada nelas, ao contrário, é a partir da experimentação do corpo orgânico que se descobre quais são as imagens do diálogo no presente, do encontro entre os indivíduos que estarão verbalizando e corporificando aquele texto numa outra "cidade imagem". Vejamos as palavras do encenador:

> Num novo processo de montagem de um espetáculo é essencial que se conheçam as imagens já construídas, enterradas, descobertas, submersas, estabelecendo-se uma percepção imagética com a qual se pode dialogar, refletir, sobre as distintas percepções e leituras que o texto receberá, para a repetir ou as destruir. Alguns críticos saudosistas, no caso de Godot, vão exigir uma reconstrução do primeiro espetáculo francês, mas o teatro não se permite ser uma velha fotografia de nossos esquecidos álbuns de infância. (Camargo 6).

O Brasil, com seu DNA antropofágico, isto é, a capacidade de criar novas imagens, discursos e nuances num diálogo entre as performances da cultura local com obras de todas as culturas estrangeiras, reformulando-as a partir de nossa memória, provoca uma eterna busca por inúmeras identidades do original perdido, apresentando uma quantidade expressiva de abordagens distintas dos textos do irlandês Beckett. As mais peculiares são aquelas acrescidas com determinado tempero tropical, expressando também a diversidade cultural do país em que agora também reside.

Em 1928, Oswald de Andrade publicava seu Manifesto Antropofágico, que defendia a criação de uma arte brasileira a partir da deglutição e defecação da cultura europeia chegada ao Brasil. A proposta é de heterogeneidade, de adesão crítica às influências e de assimilação criativa do outro, o que só é possível no Brasil cosmopolita e plural, "cadinho de todas as raças", uma vez que apenas assim a identidade e a cultura nacional podem ser complexificadas, regurgitadas, questionadas.

Vale a pena se deter um pouco nesta questão. *Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question*, bradava Andrade em seu *Manifesto.* Os rituais antropofágicos do Brasil Colônia tinham forte base Tupinambá. Ser ou não ser, devorar ou não devorar, como apresentou Oswald de Andrade: "Nada existe fora da Devoração. O ser é a Devoração pura e eterna"

(Andrade 64). A devoração de nossas origens, quando os Tupinambás devoraram o então Bispo, com seu sugestivo nome de Sardinha, estabeleceram uma relação cosmológica de encontros de distintas culturas. Como já afirmou Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, é possível dizer que "a verdadeira questão é "Tupi or to be". E a resposta já está contida na questão: tupi, é claro", afinal "o "tupi" cancela e inverte o to be, a antropofagia é uma contraontologia" (Castro in Azevedo 17). E a ordem dos fatores que alterou a questão: "*Tupi ou ser*" implica tomar a relação entre o ser e o devir (ou entre o ser e o modo de ser, ou entre o ser e o não ser). Somos, assim, apenas se deixarmos de ser e nos tornarmos outros, devorando-os e sendo devorados.

Não há como negar que um dos grandes propulsores da antropofagia e da obra de Oswald de Andrade foi justamente José Celso Martinez Corrêa (1937 – 2023)[1] e seu teatro Oficina Uzyna Uzona que a todos devora. Recentemente, em São Paulo, no ano de 2022, o grupo apresentou e devorou *Esperando Godot*, sob sua direção, onde aproveitava a obra do dramaturgo irlandês para estabelecer um discurso crítico sobre o intenso momento político vivido no Brasil nos últimos anos. Entre imagens de tragédias, como o rompimento de barragens em cidades do estado de Minas Gerais, em suas cenas iniciais, e referências explícitas ao ex-presidente de extrema-direita Jair Messias Bolsonaro, o Teatro Oficina mergulhava no lado clownesco do texto beckettiano e o subvertia ao enclausurar Godot na *camarinha* do Zé Pilintra,[2] entidade malandra que substituiu o menino do texto original.

(Figura 2. Tony Reis como Zé Pilintra, em Esperando Godot do Teatro Oficina. Foto de Guilherme Gnipper, disponível no site do Deus Ateu: https://deusateucombr.wordpress.com/2022/04/12/o-teatro-oficina-esperando-godot-uma-galeria-por-guilherme-gnipper/ acesso em 18/12/2023 às 09:00)

Afirmava o Oficina então que Godot não vem e que também não tem mais barbas e cabelos longos e brancos, pois se fazia presente agora na *camarinha*, local de culto afro-brasileiro, isolado no silêncio do terreiro, cuidando de seu processo de renascimento, firmando seus pensamentos aos Orixás, pois morto, renascerá. Neste caso, o Godot do Oficina passará por lavagens, banhos, cantos e defumações implícitas.

Sim! Outras transformações anteriores já foram operadas em Godot, Cacilda Becker (1921-1969), por exemplo, a grande atriz brasileira, já desfilou um Estragon interrompido em 1969, Godot lá não teve tempo de chegar.[3]

Na realidade, desde a estreia parisiense de *Esperando Godot* que a obra de Beckett encontra terreno fértil em terras brasileiras. Afinal, como diz a personagem beckettiana Estragon: "Vazio é o que não falta" (Beckett 130). E é no vazio das perguntas sem respostas, dos absurdos cotidianos, dos silêncios e suas inúmeras nuances, do tempo que escorre lento ou que corre desvairadamente, das imagens que gritam e do estar sozinhos juntos que Beckett encontra como florir no Brasil, seja no Cerrado com seus extensos descampados, na Caatinga, Amazônia, Pantanal, Mata Atlântica ou ainda nos Pampas de Luis Carlos Maciel (1938-2017). Maciel estreou Godot em três de dezembro de 1958, no Theatro São Pedro de Porto Alegre. O elenco, de universitários gaúchos, trazia figuras outras que também iriam se destacar na cultura brasileira: Mário de Almeida (Pozzo); Linneu Dias (Vladimir), Dias interpretou seu Ornelas em *Grande Sertão Veredas* (Rede Globo, 1985), e foi ator em montagem dos textos de Beckett *A Última Gravação, Becktianas 3, Fim de Jogo*; Paulo José (Estragon), o Macunaíma branco e também a mãe, no filme ontológico de Joaquim Pedro de Andrade e ainda Paulo César Pereio, (menino), que, em 1972, interpretou Alvarenga no filme *Os inconfidentes*, e em 1973 foi personagem central em *Vai Trabalhar Vagabundo*, para citar alguns.

Maciel, o guru da contracultura fora o segundo a parir Godot no Brasil e o país também foi o segundo a receber esse deus desconhecido e ainda esperado, pouco tempo depois da estreia primeira em Paris (5 de janeiro de 1953 no Théâtre de Babylone). No Brasil, a peça foi encenada pela primeira vez em julho de 1955, com elenco formado pelos alunos da Escola de Arte Dramática de São Paulo de Alfredo Mesquita. Em Londres, a primeira apresentação ocorreu cerca de treze dias depois da montagem do dr. Alfredo, como Mesquita era chamado, em 3 de agosto de 1955, no Arts Theatre, dirigida por Peter Hall, na ocasião um jovem de 24 anos.

Beckett foi entronado no Brasil de diversas maneiras e com olhares antagônicos. Abordagens de figuras consagradas do teatro brasileiro como Cacilda Becker, Antunes Filho e mais recentemente Matteo Bonfitto, em parceria com o ator e diretor japonês Yoshi

Oida. Passando Beckett ainda por análises de contraditórias personas de nosso teatro, como o diretor e ex-secretário de cultura do governo Bolsonaro, Roberto Alvim, com seu *Tríptico Beckett*[4]. Alvim chegou a citar frase do Ministro de Propaganda Nazista, Joseph Goebbels, em comunicado oficial nas redes sociais da Secretaria Especial de Cultura, circundado pela trilha sonora preferida por Hitler,[5] e não o faria com ironia, pois o texto o professava. Alvim seria logo destronado, mas isto é matéria para outras escritas.

Por outro lado, Beckett pode prover inúmeros espetáculos candentes de grupos e escolas de teatro por todo o país, o que mostra que a obra beckettiana fincou raízes profundas na arte brasileira. E é no centro do país que essas raízes fazem brotar troncos fortes, galhos tortos, frutos de gostos particulares e flores coloridas. É no cerrado que as pesquisas artísticas, se valendo de textos do autor irlandês, se enraízam e ganham cores vivas nos corpos das atrizes e atores ligados ao Máskara – Núcleo Transdisciplinar de Pesquisas em Teatro, Dança e Performance.

Em Brasília, também no cerrado, há um trabalho muito interessante a ser destacado, o do Coletivo Irmãos Guimarães, sob a direção de Adriano e Fernando Guimarães, que com predominante característica visual, do final dos anos 1990 até os dias de hoje realizaram as seguintes montagens a partir dos textos de Samuel Beckett: *Felizes Para Sempre* (1998-2001), *Não Ficamos Muito Tempo... Juntos* (2002-2005), *Todos Que Caem* (2003), *Modos de Usar* (2008), *Resta Pouco a Dizer* (2008-2011), *OFF ON* (2011), *Sopro* (2014 – 2015), *Fôlego* (2015), *Balanço* (2000-2013) e *Quadrado* (2014-2015).

Entretanto, o espaço deste artigo nos impele a focar nas produções do Máskara. Já em seu surgimento em 2002, o núcleo de pesquisa goiano inicia um processo de investigação para montagem de *Esperando Godot*, proposta feita pelo diretor Robson Corrêa de Camargo para jovens estudantes do curso de Artes Cênicas da Universidade Federal de Goiás, onde acabara de chegar como professor. Robson cresceu e viveu grande parte de sua vida artística em São Paulo - SP e as atrizes e atores desta montagem eram todos goianos. Esse encontro proporcionado por um texto irlandês colocou também uma lente de aumento sobre as diferenças culturais de uma região e de outra do Brasil, e possibilitou que o encenador pudesse jogar com os elementos culturais que estavam registrados nos corpos dos intérpretes e iam se revelando na maneira como abordavam fisicamente o texto.

(Figura 3. *Esperando Godot*. 2005. Estreia em Goiânia. Foto divulgação: Layza Vasconcelos
Karine Ramaldes (Lucky), Wesley Martins (Estragon), Saulo Dallago (Vladimir)
e Valeria Braga (Pozzo), ao centro o menino João Pedro Caetano.)

Quando *Godot* surge nos palcos goianienses, pouco habituados às particularidades da obra de Beckett, houve estranhamento. A professora e pesquisadora brasileira Célia Berrettini definira que, tudo no texto de Beckett está "numa linguagem nova, não-tradicional, criando uma "farsa metafísica" (Berrettini, 2004, p. 162), e noticiara que sua montagem havia provocado burburinhos em Paris, quando de sua primeira encenação em 1953. No caso da montagem do Máskara de 2005, apresentava-se a radicalidade estética da escrita beckettiana, mas também as transgressões da própria encenação ao estabelecer no início do novo século novas possibilidades ao que já se vira em outras montagens famosas da obra. A participação do coletivo, em 2006, no 20º Festival Internacional de Teatro Universitário de Blumenau, em Santa Catarina, ilustra bem o incômodo de parte da crítica acadêmica com as escolhas do Máskara. O encenador do espetáculo Robson Corrêa de Camargo, narra que após a apresentação houve uma sabatina pública, em que o douto júri rechaçou cada detalhe que transgrediu a "estética beckettiana" de sua apresentação original no Théâtre de Babylone, como se o autor irlandês tivesse estabelecido um tratado de como deveriam ser montados os seus textos.

Figura 4. Wesley Martins como Estragon, em Esperando Godot do Máskara, em apresentação no 20º Festival Internacional de Teatro Universitário de Blumenau. Foto disponível no site do evento: https://bu.furb.br/CMU/expoVirtuais/?cdExpoVirtual=3#gallery-12 acesso em 18/09/2023 às 10:53

O que o Máskara apresentara não era absolutamente uma coisa nova, mas a maneira como urdia seu mosaico de referências e criações embebidas de cotidiano é o que faria de sua arte algo único. Nesse caso, abordando um texto que por si só já carrega essa ressignificação de velhas tradições do teatro e estabelece assim novos paradigmas, como já apontara o professor e diretor teatral Stanley Gontarski, um dos grandes especialistas na obra do autor irlandês:

> As convenções do teatro nunca mais foram as mesmas desde Godot. Trata-se de uma dessas obras de arte que mudam a cultura e as formas pelas quais enxergamos e construímos a realidade. Foi uma peça tão inesperada, porém hoje parece tão inevitável, tão necessária. Ela capturou algo que talvez nunca foi encenado antes, mesmo não apresentando nada de novo. Seus elementos são parte fundamental da cultura ocidental e judaico-cristã por milhares de anos, mesmo se não realizados em arte (Gontarski 52).

Esperando Godot, do Máskara, apresentava novas escolhas dos elementos que compunham a cena, agora em formato circular, a imagem dos atores com corpos e vozes distorcidos, a atmosfera densa, as cores do solo goiano presentes nos figurinos, a estranheza do ritmo e da comicidade, a presença de atrizes representando dominantes papéis masculinos (Pozzo e Lucky), permitindo que a feminilidade estivesse completamente presente em

suas construções e, ainda, a presença de uma criança atuando com desenvoltura igual a de seus colegas de cena, provocavam os espectadores convidando-os a saírem de sua zona de conforto do então modorrento teatro goiano.

O jornalista Ranulfo Borges, no *Diário da Manhã*, reflete sobre a presença feminina no espetáculo. "Se pensarmos Goiás como um Estado extremamente machista, esta discussão se polariza ao confrontar a autoridade com sua forma feminina, um fenômeno pleno no século 21" (Borges 1). Lucky e Pozzo, representados pelas atrizes Karine Ramaldes e Valeria Braga, respectivamente, davam corpo à relação oprimido-opressor, entre gestos de força extrema e delicadeza insólita.

Mesmo mantendo o caráter atemporal e sem delimitação geográfica, Vladimir e Estragon, interpretados pelos jovens atores Saulo Dallago e Wesley Martins (1975 – 2023), na montagem do Máskara, bem que poderiam estar numa estrada que liga uma cidade a outra no estado de Goiás, ou no terreno vazio da rua 57,[6] onde estourou o maior acidente nuclear brasileiro, no centro de Goiânia, em 1987, no Brasil, o "país do futuro".

A iluminação do espetáculo de cores quentes remetia ao sol escaldante do mês de setembro em Goiânia, e toda a cenografia estava alinhada à ação da espera que nos colocava num estado de cansaço e languidez, típico dessa cidade nessa época do ano, onde muitas folhas secam, árvores deixam seus galhos tortos mais evidentes, algumas vezes caídos, onde a temperatura é alta e a baixa umidade do ar quase nos impossibilita de respirar. A corda envolta no pescoço de Lucky, que desumaniza a condição da personagem, nos coloca dentro das fazendas dos coronéis goianos que insistem em perdurar na história do Estado. Pozzo é um coronel que laça seu gado, é dono de terras e come seu frango caipira temperado com pequi, concedendo os ossos "límpidos" para o carregador. Toda a caracterização proposta pela atriz e figurinista Renata Caetano trazia cores que remetem à memória da terra vermelha, da poeira, das folhas secas e do sangue derramado na história de Goiás.

A relação sensorial com o espectador é uma busca constante nas performances do Máskara e, nesse sentido, sua adaptação do romance homônimo *Companhia,* de Samuel Beckett, investiu radicalmente na sensorialidade. Na performance, geralmente apresentada em salas tradicionais, o espectador é colocado no centro da ação, no centro do palco, estando quase totalmente no escuro, nas penumbras, onde é convidado a um aguçamento sensorial. "Com os olhos colocados na fronte da face de cada espectador, nada se vê. A ideia, portanto, é essa: olhar com os olhos da imaginação, localizados no hipotálamo? No cerebelo? Onde é mesmo que fica a imaginação???" (Mate 2). Questionamentos do professor e diretor teatral Alexandre Mate após experienciar a peça que o mesmo classificou como um "espetáculo ritual".

Figura 5. Companhia. No centro da fotografia o ator Ronei Vieira. Apresentação no Espaço Sonhus em Goiânia. 2015. Foto: André Conrado.

Existe realmente nessa montagem uma característica ritualística. As cadeiras em que o público irá se sentar para vivenciar a performance estão localizadas dentro de um círculo de folhas secas e, debaixo de cada um dos assentos, há uma pequena vela aromática acesa. O público posiciona-se sentado em forma aleatória, onde as cadeiras não se encontram ao lado da outra, mas dispersas. E direcionadas a centros distintos, com espaços entre elas, para estimular o isolamento da audiência.

No decorrer do primeiro texto falado pelo ator as velas vão sendo apagadas até ficar somente uma acesa, iluminando as sombras. Durante os 50 minutos que duram o espetáculo-ritual as atrizes e o ator vão alternando as poucas velas acesas, na penumbra permitida, até que no último texto todas as velas estarão apagadas. O círculo e o fogo, elementos tão presentes em diversos rituais e danças indígenas por todo o Brasil ou nas festas juninas tradicionais em Goiás com suas fogueiras e danças circulares, convidam para uma conexão consigo mesmo, para experienciar as subjetividades a partir das imagens propostas por Beckett, das cores e formas da construção da fala do elenco, do cheiro das velas e do perfume dos corpos dos intérpretes, do hálito e do quase toque das atrizes e ator em cada espectador ou espectadora, que realizam toda a performance por entre os espectadores. Vozes sussurradas ao pé do ouvido de cada ouvinte.

Se *Companhia* é realmente "o texto em que Beckett mais se coloca" (Berrettini 215) como apresenta Célia Berrettini, o mais autobiográfico, o ritual proposto pelo Máskara é para descobrir ou criar sua própria história nas sombras das memórias de Beckett. As imagens do texto possivelmente remetem às vivências particulares do autor ou de alguém deitado de costas no escuro. O mar gelado da Irlanda, a neve, as caminhadas pelas colinas, as lojas Connolly ou os sanduíches de ovos prediletos do pai, descritos por Beckett, pouco

tem a haver com as imagens gravadas na memória e na pele das atrizes Mariana Tagliari e Valéria Livera[7] e do ator Ronei Vieira, que formam o elenco da peça.

A construção da performance passou por encontrar as próprias referências pessoais dos atores, como motivo para interpretar as provocações imagéticas do texto. Assim, é possível levar as memórias de Beckett a banhar nas águas geladas da Chapada dos Veadeiros, a comer pamonha perto da fogueira em junho ou passear pelo centro comercial das lojas da rua 44[9] com sua mãe. Quando a obra é compartilhada com o espectador surgem, então, tantas outras possibilidades a partir do momento que cada indivíduo vivencia ou se abandona às suas próprias conexões, com as suas imagens de *Companhia* e as relações vivas com os intérpretes.

O líder indígena e filósofo brasileiro Ailton Krenak reflete que a ideia judaico-cristã do ser humano se descolar da terra para viver "numa abstração civilizatória, é absurda. Ela suprime a diversidade, nega a pluralidade das formas de vida, de existência e de hábitos. Oferece o mesmo cardápio, o mesmo figurino e, se possível, a mesma língua para todo mundo" (Krenak 22-23). Vamos ficando sem possibilidades de expressar ou pensar as nossas subjetividades, acreditando numa maneira correta e única de entender, sentir e fazer arte.

Figura 6. Companhia. Apresentação em espaço aberto, no fim de tarde da Praça Universitária em Goiânia. 2022. Foto: André Miranda.

"Uma voz chega a alguém no escuro. Imagina" (Beckett 41). Assim começa o texto de *Companhia*, e com essa frase também se inicia o ritual-espetáculo do Máskara, convidando a imaginar sozinhos juntos, parafraseando o autor do texto. Afinal, a obra fala sobre solidão e a busca por companhia, e, a montagem do coletivo goiano, dicotomicamente, provoca o espectador a estar sozinho e, ao mesmo tempo, o estimula a viver intensamente a presença do outro, dos outros presentes em nossa memória, numa proximidade pouco aguçada no nosso cotidiano. E como cada espectador vai lidar com esses estímulos dicotômicos é algo extremamente pessoal. Apesar de solitário, tudo é realizado num ritual coletivo, reforçando as ideias de Krenak, que afirma ser "importante viver a experiência da nossa própria circulação pelo mundo, não como uma metáfora, mas como fricção, poder contar uns com os outros" (Krenak 27).

Não é por acaso que as versões de Beckett do Máskara são coloridas e que as cores presentes nos figurinos e nas nuances corpóreo-vocais tenham a finalidade de dialogar de maneira sutil com uma identidade cultural goiana ou brasileira. Em *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo,* Krenak afirma: "Eu não percebo onde tem alguma coisa que não seja natureza. Tudo é natureza. O cosmos é natureza. Tudo em que eu consigo pensar é natureza" (Krenak 16-17). Assim, é com a própria natureza e a natureza que está em volta, que olhos capturam, que o corpo sente, respira, que os artistas do Máskara criam suas performances e visualidades. As cores da solidão, do tempo passando, da espera, das pausas, dos duplos e da circularidade beckettiana vão ganhar tons específicos do cerrado goiano nas montagens do Máskara porque são construídas por essa natureza presente nos corpos de toda a equipe envolvida na criação.

Já no espetáculo *Quê Onde*,[10] última peça escrita por Beckett (1983), o coletivo usa cores fortes em toda a encenação para ampliar a cena curta de Beckett, fazendo-a cinco vezes mais lenta, a peça dura cerca de cinquenta minutos. O cerrado goiano aparece diluído em cada detalhe do espetáculo. Os corpos se movimentando lentamente com rigidez e movimentos que evidenciavam torsões, sobretudo nos braços, mãos e dedos, são como grandes árvores sem folhas com expressivos galhos tortos se locomovendo pelo espaço, entrando e saindo de focos de luz como quem busca a vida e está condenado à morte. Os figurinos, criados pelo diretor do espetáculo Robson Corrêa de Camargo, são grandes túnicas cobrindo os pés e com capuz pontiagudo com capacidade de esconder todo o rosto, criando uma semelhança discreta com os farricocos da Procissão do Fogaréu[11] que acontece todos os anos na Cidade de Goiás – GO. As cores das vestimentas são um degradê quente caminhando do amarelo para o alaranjado, tons da terra do cerrado goiano e do céu do fim de tarde de Goiânia, que oscila entre o amarelo ouro e o alaranjado intenso, passando por

tons avermelhados. No texto de Beckett, a passagem do tempo se dá por declarar em qual estação do ano estamos naquele momento, dessa maneira os figurinos acabam por trazer o céu de Goiânia em diferentes estações passeando num ambiente sombrio e misterioso.

Figura 7. *Quê Onde.* Atriz Ana Paula Teixeira (BOM) entrando na luz. Apresentação no Espaço Sonhus em Goiânia. 2015. Foto: André Conrado.

Quê Onde pode ser uma peça que aborda "um interrogatório político, e/ou um ataque ao totalitarismo, diz uma parte da crítica. Neste, sobressai o tema da tortura" (Berrettini 227). E a dilatação do tempo na montagem do Máskara desloca o espectador para a situação de tortura. Vejamos as palavras do historiador e professor goiano Eduardo José Reinato:

> Nos cinquenta minutos da peça, a repetição é uma imposição da tortura ao espectador. Há momentos em que o desconforto do espectador fica evidente. A lentidão dos deslocamentos dos atores, a sofreguidão nas falas, a repetição, não permitem ao espectador decidir se há sentido na cena, e qual é o sentido da cena. De fato, o sentimento da dor é passado na peça. O espectador se incomoda com os movimentos dos corpos, e a sensação de peso e leveza que alternam. É como uma seção de tortura que não finda. (Reinato 5-6)

Figura 8. *Quê Onde*. Atrizes e ator posam para foto no teto do Teatro Pyguá. Da esquerda para direita: Ilmara Damasceno (Bem), Edlúcia Barros (Bom), Ronei Vieira (Bam) e Dorivânia Xavier (Bim). Apresentação no Centro Cultural Martim Cererê em Goiânia. 2022. Foto: André Miranda.

O tema da tortura é tabu no Brasil, afinal durante mais de 20 anos o país viveu sobre o domínio de uma ditadura civil-militar onde a tortura fazia parte do modus operandi de quem detinha o poder. O local onde o Máskara estreou sua montagem de *Esperando Godot*, em 2005, e onde posteriormente apresentou o espetáculo *Quê Onde*, o Centro Cultural Martim Cererê, teria "abrigado aparelhos, equipamentos e sessões de tortura" (Santos 100), dentro dos hoje chamados teatros Yguá e Pyguá, durante a ditadura militar, como confirmou o Relatório da Comissão Nacional da Verdade. "Na época, o espaço era um reservatório de água que anteriormente abastecera o setor sul em Goiânia, e se encontrava desativado. No retorno à democracia, foi transformado em um centro cultural, já em 1988, e que ficou então muito conhecido na cena *underground* goianiense, famoso por seus inúmeros festivais de rock.

A tortura talvez seja tabu permanente, devido ao fato de que ela nunca realmente deixou de existir no Brasil, mesmo após o fim do regime militar. O Estado de Goiás foi considerado o terceiro estado do país com a maior taxa de assassinatos cometidos por intervenções policiais, de acordo com o Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública de 2022.[12]

Portanto, *Quê Onde* provoca o incômodo de se estar presente, frente à situação

de tortura, jogando assim com a dilatação do tempo, num momento em que a aceleração do nosso cotidiano já se torna quase insustentável, com um número extravagante de informações trocadas durante todo o dia, e a necessidade de se estar em frente a uma tela consumindo e gerando conteúdos, respondendo e mandando mensagens, onde já não conseguimos mais focar em uma única atividade e ouvimos as mensagens de áudio de nossos celulares em modo acelerado. Permitir-se ser torturado frente a esta lenta sessão, é um ato de resistência do ser humano, máquina de produção e consumo que vamos nos transformando, e/ou uma possibilidade de refletir sobre nossa história recente e atual que flerta com o fascismo disfarçado em diversas crenças religiosas.

Figura 9. *Curta Beckett*. Da esquerda para direita: Ronei Vieira (Leitor), Allan Lourenço (Ouvinte), Crissiane Andradre (Mulher), Dorivânia Xavier (RU), Glenda Sousa (VI) e Nina Soldera (FLO). Apresentação na galeria de arte do Centro Cultural Oscar Niemeyer em Goiânia. 2022. Foto: André Miranda.

Os diversos corpos que passeiam por nossa cidade com mais de um milhão e meio de habitantes, três vezes Dublin, vão se fixando no imaginário das pessoas que os capturam pela retina dos olhos cotidianamente. No caso de atrizes e atores, a memória física e mental do que se vê é também a argila de seu trabalho artesanal de criação. Em *Curta Beckett*,[13] a apropriação desses tipos do cotidiano nos corpos das atrizes e atores se evidenciam. As velhas benzedeiras, raizeiras, matriarcas que cozinham para uma família gigantesca, as tias e avós que falam umas das outras nas tradicionais pamonhadas familiares em Goiás se presentificam nos corpos trêmulos das atrizes em *Vai-e-vem*. A típica vizinha fofoqueira invasiva que vai adentrando nossa casa sem avisar pode ser vista em *Esboço Para*

Rádio I. Os velhos contadores de causo, saudosistas de um passado que não volta mais, os bêbados e transeuntes que caminham pelas ruas falando consigo mesmos, imersos nas próprias histórias, estão presentes em *Improviso de Ohio.* Já em *Texto Para Nada IV*, é possível encontrar as moradoras de rua, as personagens meio bruxas que caminham pela Vila Nova ou o Centro de Goiânia,[14] aquelas que são chamadas de malucas, as catadoras de material reciclável ou aquelas que vagueiam capturadas pelo crack.

Com uma iluminação que parece trazer as nuances do céu de Goiânia no decorrer de um dia, iniciando com um âmbar quente de fim de tarde e finalizando em um azul que remete ao fim da madrugada e início da manhã ou a brilhante luz do Césio-137, que encantou e matou Devair Ferreira e sua sobrinha Leide das Neves, *Curta Beckett* pode ser um passeio pelas ruas de Goiânia ou uma caminhada pela Dublin de Beckett a partir das imagens descritas por ele em seus textos. A abordagem do Máskara é um convite para passear pelas próprias memórias cercadas pelas flores de ipês amarelos, vermelhos, roxos e brancos, como quem adentra a um quadro que se move lentamente. Olhar para o palco e ter a sensação de que estamos vendo uma pintura viva é um efeito recorrente nas abordagens de espetáculos beckettianos realizadas pelo coletivo goiano, o efeito pode ser visto, além de *Curta Beckett*, em *Quê Onde* e *CascandoBeckett: Uma Imagem Como Outra Qualquer*.[15]

A ideia de imobilidade presente em obras de Beckett como *Dias Felizes* (1961) e *Fim de Partida* (1956), entre tantas outras, é explorada em *CascandoBeckett: Uma Imagem Como Outra Qualquer*, aprisionando as personagens em suas janelas, enquanto veem duas figuras que caem, levantam e dançam circulando na quadratura circundante externa, pausadamente contrastando à volta do espaço circular do conjunto enquadrado de janelas. A circularidade e o manuseio de velas presentes na dança trazem novamente os ecos ritualísticos de uma tradição indígena, que a história de Goiás e do Brasil teima em tentar apagar.

(Figura 10: CascandoBeckett: Uma Imagem Como Qualquer Outra. Nas janelas da esquerda para a direita: Jhamila Sousa (Voz 1), Glenda Sousa (Voz 2), Nayara Ferreira (Voz 3) e Carlos Campos (Voz 4). Do lado de fora das janelas: Ronei Vieira (Abridor 1) e Warla Paiva (Abridor 2). Apresentação no Teatro IFG em Goiânia. 2022. Foto: Poliane Vieira Nogueira)

O elemento que cobre os olhos das atrizes e do ator ecoa Oxum, rainha das águas doces, dona dos rios e das cachoeiras tão presentes nas paisagens do cerrado goiano. As janelas parecem recortes de tantos goyazes: das roças, do interior, das cidades históricas e da urbanidade de uma Goiânia caótica com seus belos grafites, lambe-lambe e suas pichações.

Voltando às provocações de Ailton Krenak, ele destaca nossa relação com a Natureza e nos diz:

> Se existe uma ânsia por consumir a natureza, existe também uma por consumir subjetividades — as nossas subjetividades. Então vamos vivê-las com a liberdade que formos capazes de inventar, não botar ela no mercado. Já que a natureza está sendo assaltada de uma maneira tão indefensável, vamos, pelo menos, ser capazes de manter nossas subjetividades, nossas visões, nossas poéticas sobre a existência. (Krenak 32-33)

Talvez esse seja o grande intento do Máskara, traduzir em poesia visual e física suas visões de mundo, expressar subjetividades de modo a contribuir para uma sensibilização em relação a si mesmo e ao outro, sempre tão necessárias.

A obra de Samuel Beckett serve de estímulo e não de caixa para conter os desejos desse coletivo, ao contrário, o Máskara só existe há 20 anos porque é esse liquidificador

de experiências ressoantes a constantemente revirar e expor os seus baús. Onde é possível misturar a Irlanda de Beckett com a São Paulo de outrora do encenador Robson Corrêa de Camargo e a Goiânia presente, vivenciada das atrizes, atores e da equipe criativa dos espetáculos. Nas mãos do Máskara, Beckett é colorido com o vermelho-terra, vermelho-sangue, tons de pôr-do-sol e de incêndios florestais, azul-céu e azul-césio, ipês e grafites de todas as cores, opressões e poesia. Assim, a obra de Beckett vai fincando profundamente suas raízes no vermelho cerrado goiano. Imagine!

Notas

1 José Celso Martinez Corrêa, o "Zé Celso", foi o principal diretor do Teatro Oficina Uzyna Uzona, grupo criado em 1958 e considerado um dos maiores e mais longevos grupos de teatro em atividade constante no Brasil.

2 Entidade de cultos afro-brasileiros, em especial a Umbanda. O Zé Pilintra é um espírito ligado a bares e casa de jogos, carregando em si também o arquétipo do malandro. É importante ressaltar que essa entidade não possui um cunho negativo, ao contrário, ele é invocado quando se precisa de ajuda com problemas domésticos ou financeiros.

3 Para mais detalhes sobre montagens brasileiras no século XX ver: Camargo, Robson Corrêa de. "A recepção crítica de Esperando Godot no teatro brasileiro". *Revista Gestos*, v. 20, ed. 40, p. 113-132, nov. 2005; Camargo, Robson Corrêa de. "Samuel Beckett: (Re)construindo imagens e memórias". *Fênix: Revista de História e Estudos Culturais,* v. 9, ano IX, n. 2, p. 1-19, 2012; Camargo, Robson. "Finding Godot: Samuel Beckett, Fifty Years in the Brazilian Theater". 15(1-2), pp. 124–144. In *Journal of Beckett Studies*. Journal of Beckett Studies Volume 31, Issue 2.

4 Espetáculo estreado em 2014 no teatro da companhia Club Noir, em São Paulo – SP, com elenco formado por Nathalia Timberg, Juliana Galdino e Paula Spinelli, em encenação de Roberto Alvim. A montagem conta com trechos de três romances de Samuel Beckett: *Companhia*, *Para o Pior Avante* e *Mal Visto Mal Dito*.

5 O fato foi amplamente noticiado pela mídia, e com detalhes em matéria do Jornal O Globo do dia 16 de janeiro de 2020. A matéria pode ser acessada no site https://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/roberto-alvim-copia-discurso-do-nazista-joseph-goebbels-causa-onda-de-indignacao-24195523, acesso dia 18/09/2023 às 10:19.

6 Terreno no centro de Goiânia em que funcionava o ferro-velho de Devair Ferreira. No local foi aberta uma cápsula de Césio 137 em setembro de 1987, causando o maior acidente radioativo do mundo fora de usinas nucleares, levando a morte de várias pessoas, entre elas o próprio Devair e sua sobrinha Leide das Neves, de 6 anos de idade. O terreno foi desocupado e até hoje não pode ser habitado.

8 Atualmente a atriz Ilmara Damasceno substitui a atriz Valéria Livera no espetáculo.

9 Rua comercial localizada no Setor Norte Ferroviário na região central de Goiânia. A rua e seu

entorno são conhecidos por ser um dos maiores polos da moda atacadista do Brasil.

10 A montagem conta com 5 intérpretes que assumem o papel de BAM, BEM, BIM, BOM e VOZ. Durante os mais de 10 anos que o espetáculo vem sendo apresentado houve várias trocas de elenco. Listo aqui o nome de todas as atrizes e atores que já atuaram na montagem: Ronei Vieira, Ana Paula Teixeira, Mariana Tagliari, Valéria Livera, Robson Corrêa de Camargo, Nataly Brum, Takaiúna Correia, Luciano Di Freitas, Deusimar Gonzaga, Renata Curado, Edlúcia Barros, Dorivânia Xavier, Ilmara Damasceno e Allan Lourenço.

11 É uma tradicional procissão católica que acontece no mês de abril, durante a Semana Santa. O evento é uma encenação da caça e prisão de Jesus Cristo. Os farricocos representam os soldados romanos. A Cidade de Goiás é pioneira no Brasil na realização da procissão, contando mais de 270 anos de existência.

12 https://forumseguranca.org.br/anuario-brasileiro-seguranca-publica/ , acesso em 22 de junho de 2023 às 08h35min.

13 O elenco desse espetáculo também passou por mudanças. Segue os nomes das atrizes e atores que participam ou participaram dessa montagem: Ronei Vieira, Nina Soldera, Nataly Brum, Clécia Sant'Anna, Mariana Tagliari, Kelly Priscila, Ana Paula Teixeira, Dorivânia Xavier, Glenda Sousa, Haroldo Di Piedro, Allan Lourenço, Crissiane Andrade e Deusimar Gonzaga.

14 Dois dos principais bairros da região central de Goiânia, onde há uma grande circulação de passantes e moradores.

15 A peça teve duas montagens distintas, em 2016 e 2022. Seguem os nomes dos artistas que participaram das montagens: Ronei Vieira, Warla Paiva, Jhamila Sousa, Glenda Sousa, Nayara Ferreira, Carlos Campos, Karine Ramaldes, Deusimar Gonzaga, Bruno Pina e Elisa Abrão.

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