

**“Impossible Speech” - Monologue Drama in Ireland from 1964 – 2016: Form and Per(form)ativity**

A thesis submitted to the School of Creative Arts, Trinity College Dublin,  
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**Tim Barrett, MPhil**

**Declaration**

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

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**Tim Barrett**

## Summary

This dissertation is a study of monologue drama by Irish playwrights on the island of Ireland from 1964 to 2016. The starting point of 1964 has been selected as it was the year of the first production of Brian Friel's *Philadelphia Here I Come!*, a study of which opens Chapter One of the thesis. The thesis proceeds through a consideration of different productions of monologue plays across recent decades in Irish history and through different social, economic and cultural contexts. I will identify monologue drama as a topic that has received limited attention by scholars and argue that my dissertation addresses that deficit in the field.

The critical methodology I have adopted is the analysis of a selection of texts of monologue plays from 1964 to 2016, including references to the first productions of those plays, their critical reception and the historical context in which those plays were produced. The texts, productions and performances have been selected according to theme and have been arranged to support an argument which seeks to interpret the prevalence of the monologue dramatic form as political, cultural and social expressions of desire to be reinstated into dominant narratives that have excluded them.

The critical frames I have chosen to critique monologue drama during this period are theories of performativity, principally the work of J.L. Austin, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. The basis of my critical approach is Austin's and Butler's theorisation of the performative force of language, as opposed to its descriptive function. Monologue drama, which stages the theatre and world-making performative properties of language, and with a visual and auditory emphasis on the speaking subject, offers a suitable site for analysis using these theories: monologue drama is posited as a theatricalisation of the speaking subject Austin and Butler theorise. The substitution of a diegetic, narrative mode for conventional mimetic representation is deciphered as a crisis in theatrical representation and a consequent pursuit of an alternative representational strategy which embodies and voices marginalised

subjects. Despite Austin's and Butler's respective reservations surrounding theatrical performance, their performativities are perfectly positioned to support a political reading of the growth of the monologue dramatic form over this period.

The critical methodology and theoretical framework will put into dialogue theories of performativity with theatrical performance. Performativity Studies has tended to focus on monologue performance genres other than monologue drama, such as performance art. Austin's thinking about performativity and the performative emerge from the realm of ordinary language philosophy. Subsequent scholars such as Searle, Derrida and de Man maintain focus on a linguistic, philosophical aspect to the questions of the performative. Butler, drawing on both Foucault and Derrida, introduces a political and social dimension to the genealogy of performativity, utilising its concepts in the arena of feminist activism, gender constructedness and construction. My use of Butler's more political orientations will explore monologue drama's constructions of gender, class and nationality and how spectators may intervene in projects of identity reconstruction.

My dissertation will conclude that the body of monologue drama from 1964 to 2016 constitutes evidence of a crisis in theatrical representation, precipitating a turn to the monologic and to the enabling conditions of theatrical performance which allow for cultural self-reconstructions. However, Butler's concepts of the performative forces' production of legitimate and excluded domains will be deployed to analyse the efficacy of these political acts of reconstruction. At a time of much formal innovation within the theatre in Ireland, the established domain of dialogue-based drama, founded on Aristotelian principles, produced a counter-canon of monologue drama in order to sustain its own legitimacy and dominance, an ongoing dialectic which productively highlights the strengths and limitations of both dramatic forms. The monologue dramatic form's singular capacity for lyricism and performative virtuosity continue to attract the attentions of playwrights and actors.

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## Introduction

Another way of approaching the ontology of the actor is to consider him as a kind of storyteller whose specialty is that he *is* the story he is telling.<sup>1</sup>

Agency begins where sovereignty wanes.<sup>2</sup>

## Overview

The aim of this thesis<sup>3</sup> is to critique a body of monologue drama by Irish playwrights during the period 1964 to 2016. Building on the recent work of both Irish and international scholars on monologue drama and performance, it will seek to add substantially to the discourse on the monologue dramatic form within Irish theatre.

I have selected the year 1964 as the starting point of my dissertation as that year saw the original production of Brian Friel's *Philadelphia Here I Come!* Friel's play is regarded by some critics as marking the beginning of contemporary Irish theatre<sup>4</sup> or at the very least as being influential in its formal

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<sup>1</sup> Bert O States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 123. States here uses the male pronoun to represent both genders, an academic writing practice reflective of gender hierarchies of the time. I will be addressing the theme of male monologic construction of female characters in Chapter Three of the thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 16.

<sup>3</sup> The quote in the thesis title, "impossible speech", is a concept taken from Butler: "'Impossible speech' would be precisely the ramblings of the asocial, the rantings of the 'psychotic' that the rules that govern the domain of speakability produce, and by which they are continually haunted" (Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 133).

My use of Butler's concept of "impossible speech" posits theatrical monologue dramatic performance as a form and site in which "impossible speech" is rendered possible, a "domain of speakability" in which abject and marginalised speaking bodies may perform speech acts to self-constitute and both resist and resignify hegemonic norms.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Roche notes that "Richard Pine has settled on the date 28 September 1964 as the inaugurating moment; the occasion was the premiere of *Philadelphia Here I Come!* and with it the emergence of Brian Friel as 'the father of contemporary Irish drama'" (Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), 2).



innovation.<sup>5</sup> Apart from its dramaturgical significance within Irish theatre history, I have chosen this play and its premiere year as a point of departure because I intend to relate *Philadelphia* as a foundational text in monologic terms with other plays within Friel's own canon and with later monologue plays by different authors. Samuel Beckett, of course, wrote both monologue plays and plays with notable monologic passages before and after 1964.<sup>6</sup> Given the depth and breadth of existing scholarship on Beckett's monologue plays and works in general, however, I have opted to focus more on monologue plays that to date have received limited or no critical attention.<sup>7</sup> Instead, I have deployed Beckett in a supporting role, to add historical detail during the 1970s or to relate his work thematically to the plays of other authors.

The timeline of the study ends with the year 2016, the final year before the writing up of the dissertation.<sup>8</sup> Although 2016 was the year of the centenary commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising, it

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Roche, while agreeing with Pine that Friel's play has lasting significance, places the beginning of contemporary Irish drama at an earlier time, in the mid-1950s, and the Pike Theatre's productions of Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1954, and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* at the same venue on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1955 (idem, 4).

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Murray observes that "what was revolutionary about *Philadelphia* in 1964 was that, while using traditional materials such as a peasant setting and decor, with familiar characters such as a parish priest and a schoolmaster, it dispensed with plot and concentrated on situation or condition. The condition explored is alienation" (Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 169).

<sup>6</sup> Prior to 1964, Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Happy Days* (1961) are major monologue plays that are prominent in Beckett's dramatic canon and which have received several high profile productions. Beckett also makes use of monologue in his dialogic plays: most famously with Lucky's speech in *Waiting for Godot* (1953). The character of Hamm in *Endgame* (1957) has three monologues. I will be making reference to his post-1964 monologue work in Chapter One.

<sup>7</sup> I have made this decision having considered how best to make as original a contribution to the study of Irish monologue drama as possible but also mindful of the necessary limitations of the thesis' scope. Including Beckett in the dissertation would necessitate critically addressing the considerable volume of scholarship on Beckett's monologue plays and other plays with monologic passages. Making an original analysis of Beckett's monologue work might therefore demand the breadth of a whole dissertation.

<sup>8</sup> I have briefly referenced two plays that were staged in 2017: *My Real Life* by Eoin Colfer and *On Blueberry Hill* by Sebastian Barry.

does not otherwise constitute the end of a distinct cultural or economic phase in Irish political or theatre history; in the Conclusion, I have briefly accounted for the current direction which Irish monologue drama and performance is taking, with examples of some recent novel uses of the form.

Brian Friel experimented with monologue not only in his monologue plays *Faith Healer* (1979) and *Molly Sweeney* (1994) but in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), *Living Quarters* (1977) and *Dancing At Lughnasa* (1990). Following some notable monologue productions in the 1980s, the Irish theatre then witnessed a significant increase in productions of monologue drama between the early 1990s and the mid 2000s, driven by the successful monologue plays of Conor McPherson and Mark O'Rowe, and prompting much critical debate about its validity as a dramatic form. The monologue form, other than offering an alternative representational strategy to the more conventional dialogic mode, drew the spotlight on to the lone speaking subject within the theatre and an accompanying critical focus on the subject's formation through language. The thesis will seek to interpret this dramaturgical trend in monologue drama and relate it to its political, social and theatre-making environment.

Monologue plays are theatrical events where language, traditionally one element of theatre's sign-system, is elevated to a dominant, constituting role in the theatre-making process. Language is put to work in constituting whole fictional worlds, necessitating the co-operation of spectators to create visual representations of those worlds in their own imaginations. This special function of language, in bringing about the existence of things in the world, as opposed to simply describing a state of affairs, is a key feature of monologue drama and how it is received by spectators. Apart from its linguistic emphasis, the form's direct address to spectators calls attention to theatrical process and disrupts theatrical illusion, giving it a unique capacity to throw into relief theatrical operations and confront issues affecting marginalised social subjects.

The work of J.L. Austin and Judith Butler will provide the critical framework with which to critique monologue drama. Austin and Butler specifically theorise the speaking subject and monologue

drama may be read as a theatricalisation of that speaking subject. Although Austin never discussed speech act theory within the context of theatrical performance, because he excluded theatrical performance, *inter alia*, from any consideration of speech act theory (“etiologies of language”)<sup>9</sup>, it may be said that the monologist on stage is invoking theatrical conventions of monologue (soliloquy, confession, expository speeches) which are intelligible as theatrical devices and which confer on the performer a verbal and visual authority in which he performs utterances and gestures to bring about effects on the audience.

Butler does not restrict her inquiry to a consideration of language in philosophical terms as Austin and Derrida have done, but instead orientates linguistic concerns towards the social and political arena, interrogating the essentialist leanings of some feminist schools of thought and the fixed ontological categories they reiterate. An application of Butlerian performativity to monologue drama situates the monologising performer on stage, citing the monologue form which inherently rejects conventions of realism and attendant associations of patriarchal, dominant, hegemonic norms. Monologue performance foregrounds theatrical process and the performer/spectator relationship, calling attention to hegemonic operations and resulting inscriptions on the performer’s body, and opening up possibilities to confront and resignify oppressive norms. In this critical vein, monologue plays may be read as sites of enunciatory resistance in which performances of narrative are understood as performative acts of self-constitution. The performance of monologue plays and their reception, however, may as easily be seen to consolidate oppressive norms as challenge or rework them.

A political reading of monologue drama from 1964 to 2016 is warranted given the focus on speaking subjects reinstating themselves in visual and aural frames and the inevitable conclusion that such enunciatory acts derive from an attempted challenge to official State narratives and the

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<sup>9</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 22.

dissemination of new narratives into the public domain. In terms of the politics of both visibility and audibility, the speaking subjects may be seen and heard to perform in a theatrical space which permits this, and which is implicitly denied to them in extra-theatrical public and private domains where the “speakable” is policed. The body of monologue drama under discussion, I will contend, is generated out of a recognition that dialogic representational strategies are inadequate to address the dramaturgical needs of playwrights, directors and performers whose aim is to embrace alternative dramaturgical strategies for political and aesthetic purposes. Use of the monologue form is a specific dramaturgical decision, which implicitly rejects dialogic representation. The monologue form and the theatrical space in which it is performed offer a singular site in which marginalised subjectivities of gender, race and class may be more easily voiced.

The country’s political, economic and social circumstances changed radically from 1964 and 2016, incorporating periods of economic stagnation and prosperity. The economic recession of the 1980s and early 1990s was succeeded by the Celtic Tiger (1997 – 2002), followed in turn by the recession and post-recession eras. The economic cycle of boom and bust was accompanied by a marked growth in transparency within political life, State institutions and the Catholic Church. The upsurge in the monologue’s popularity coincided with a new openness in the national conversation on social topics ranging from biopolitical issues affecting women, masculinities in crisis, the Troubles, rural isolation, emigration, the treatment of the elderly, homelessness and drug abuse. The narrators of the monologues are formed by their social and economic circumstances and attempt to forge narratives that endeavour to challenge and resignify them.

The field of Theatre Studies has seen a number of significant contributions to the study of monologue drama internationally and in Ireland, including Brian Singleton, Eamonn Jordan, Deborah Geis and Clare Wallace. There remains space, however, for a more comprehensive critical intervention to further address the deficit in the scholarship on Irish monologue drama. My research and analysis of

this corpus of work from 1964 to 2016, through the critical lenses of Austinian and Butlerian performativity, will seek to accomplish this.

### ***Methodology and Primary Material***

The critical methodology adopted will be the analysis of play texts primarily, but I will also be examining the first productions of the monologue plays in question, with appropriate reference to critical reception and to other circumstances of production. In some cases, I allude to revivals of monologue plays, allowing for a diachronic analysis of the play against different economic backdrops or for a consideration of an actor's change in age or health. My research has unearthed a large volume of monologue drama, produced in established theatres, fringe theatres and site-specific venues. I have chosen texts and productions which best critically illustrate my reading of Irish monologue drama since 1964 as "impossible speech" and inevitably it has not been possible to include many texts that deserve critical attention. My chronological use of Austin, Butler and Sedgwick, followed by Butler in the Conclusion and her latest thinking on social performative resistance, is designed to place a range of theories of performativity in dialogue with monologue drama and performance. In structuring the thesis in this manner, I hope to elicit as complex and insightful a relationship between the two as is allowable within the constraints of the dissertation.

The availability of published primary material has been uneven over the period of Irish theatre history under discussion. The first half of this period (1964 – 1990) has been sparse in terms of published monologue plays, outside the major playwrights such as Beckett and Friel. Following 1990, many more monologue plays were published in Ireland and England, although this reflects both the increase in productions of monologue plays and the entry into the marketplace of new publishers of drama.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Nick Hern Books (NHB) was founded in 1988 by Nick Hern, the former drama editor at Methuen. NHB is a prolific publisher of new writing in drama, many of which are monologue plays by Irish playwrights, including Conor McPherson, Mark O'Rowe and Enda Walsh. NHB's publications complement the output of other significant

Brian Friel Papers<sup>11</sup> housed in the National Library of Ireland, and the Frank McGuinness papers in University College Dublin, proved invaluable in complementing the published sources. Access to this archival material, which included early drafts of their plays, as well as copies of book chapters and magazine articles Friel read as part of his playwriting process, equipped me to greatly extend my analysis of their monologue works.

With regard to on-line sources, the website [www.irishplayography.com](http://www.irishplayography.com) (administered by the Irish Theatre Institute) proved an indispensable resource for locating monologue plays, their authors and production details. Some scripts of monologue plays, otherwise unpublished, were also available to download from the website for a fee. Video-sharing websites such as *YouTube* contain recordings of extracts from monologue plays and interviews with the creative team. The Gate Theatre and Abbey Theatre websites give information on past productions, including monologue plays, and smaller venues which frequently stage monologue drama, such as Bewley's Cafe Theatre and the Viking Theatre, also offer this on-line information. Where published texts of monologue plays were not available, I occasionally contacted playwrights or their agents to obtain copies of unpublished works. With no source of primary material whatsoever, I have when necessary cited directly from performances of those monologue plays. My research revealed that monologue plays by lesser known authors frequently remain unpublished unless they are included in anthologies.<sup>12</sup> The frequent scarcity of published scripts of monologues is perhaps unsurprising in the case of writer/performers working in smaller venues and

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publishers of Irish drama in the market, such as Faber & Faber and Methuen. Oberon Books is another example of a relatively new independent drama publisher, established in 1985 by James Hogan.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Friel donated his papers to the National Library of Ireland in February, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Even established playwrights such as Frank McGuinness (*The Glass God* (1982), *Feed the Money and Keep them Coming* (1988)), Tom MacIntyre (*Foggy Hair and Green Eyes* (1991)), Owen McCafferty (*The Waiting List* (1994)) and Jennifer Johnston (*Waiting* (2006)) have not published some monologue plays.

who may regard their scripts more as simply supports for performance than as literary works for publication.

Chapter One focuses exclusively on the work of Brian Friel as his innovative use of the monologue form, outside Beckett, dominates the period from 1964 to the early 1990s. Friel's groundbreaking *Philadelphia Here I Come!* was first staged in 1964 and I have selected this as the starting point of the dissertation. The chapter will begin with a reading of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* as containing the formal seeds of Friel's monologue plays *Faith Healer* (1979) and *Molly Sweeney* (1994). Gar Public and Private's inner dialogue may be read as an ongoing monologue, occupying a privileged narratorial and theatrical position in the drama: control of the narrative; commentary on and constitution of other characters; the privileged disclosure of thoughts; and the staging of imagined acts. The Public/Private device shares the traits of omniscient, autonomous characters in other plays (Sir in *Living Quarters* (1977) and later, Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990)). The chapter will argue that the autonomous characters of Gar O'Donnell and Sir are antecedents of the characters in the monologue plays, who similarly exercise narratorial, performative autonomy. Austin's speaking subject, which is conceived as autonomous, humanist, coherent and voluntarist (as opposed to Butler's conception of the speaking subject which is provisional, unstable and reliant on repeated citations to constitute itself), will be used to theorise Friel's narrators/monologists.

Following *Philadelphia Here I Come!*, the chapter will proceed to an analysis of *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*. Performativity in these plays rests in the "linguistic magic" ("impossible speech") of uttering monologues and creating self-truths through the performance of speech acts. The performative magic finds its metaphors in the act of faith healing and the miraculous restoration of sight. Enveloping both is the context of the theatre, and the theatre-making process. There emerges a network of performative magic: the literal act of faith-healing/sight restoration; the performative constitution of

personal “truths” by the three characters through speech acts; and spectatorial reception and production of narratives. I will conclude the chapter with a study of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, exploring Michael’s performative recollections of his, and the Mundy sisters’ lives, in the Glenties in the summer of 1936.

After Chapter One, the only chapter addressing the work of a single playwright, I move to explore performativities across a range of categories: nationality, gender and class. In setting out these categories, I am not proposing that each of them is mutually exclusive or owe their performative genesis to similar accounts. My research has illustrated that performativities of identity – gender, sexuality, class, and race – are mediated through one another. Butler, discussing the transposability of gender performativity onto race, observes that “no single account of construction will do, and that these categories will always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another. Thus, the sexualisation of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once, and the analysis surely illuminates the limits of gender as an exclusive category of analysis.”<sup>13</sup> The background which has emerged strongly from a study of monologue drama is male gender and sexuality, which forms what Butler terms an “unmarked background” to the research.<sup>14</sup> Masculinity finds expression through each of the chapters, in different ways. It is omnipresent throughout and for that reason, I have alluded to the performativity of masculinity throughout the dissertation, without dedicating an individual chapter to it.

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<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), xvii.

<sup>14</sup> Butler has commented that “for me, it’s not so much a double consciousness – gender and race as the two axes, as if they’re determined only in relation to one another, I think that’s a mistake – but I think the unmarked character of the one very often becomes the condition of the articulation of the other. Then the question is how to sustain an analysis that is able to shift perspectives sequentially in such a way that no one reading is actually adequate without the other. I’m not sure that what I want is a synthetic reading. I think what I want is a set of sequential readings that expose the partiality of each constitutive reading.” (Judith Butler in “On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler”, *Performativity & Belonging*, Vikki Bell, ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 163).



If in Chapter One I identify the oral art of the ancient *seanchaí* as one of the foundations of modern monologue dramatic performance, Chapter Two will begin with a consideration of the 1916 Proclamation as a monologue performance and how it produced a republican narrative inclusive of subjects aligned with its ideals but excluding those – for instance, the homecoming troops from the Great War - who fell outside that narrative's narrow parameters. The 1916 Proclamation is linked as a theatrical performance with the production of *Signatories* in 2016 to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising.

I will then proceed with a selection of texts and productions of monologue plays which feature speakers living in rural Ireland and either experiencing social isolation or fearing a cultural or psychological dislocation from their communities. Frank McGuinness' *Baglady* (1985) figures a vagrant woman who has been abused by her father as a child and still metaphorically on the move from its consequences. Tom MacIntyre's *The Gallant John Joe* (2001) presents John Joe Concannon, a widower obsessed with establishing the identity of the father of his daughter's child. Eugene O'Brien's *Eden* (2001) is a dual monologue play in which Billy and Breda Farrell deliver alternating monologues about their social life in Edenderry, Co. Offaly, Billy's pursuit of local girl Imelda Egan and Breda's attempts to recover her husband, having recently lost weight. Finally in this section, Enda Walsh's *Misterman*, originally produced in 1999 with Walsh himself playing Thomas Magill, and then revived in a revised version in 2011 with Cillian Walsh, dramatises the mentally unstable Magill's interactions with the local community, culminating in his murder of a local girl whom he idolises.

If the preceding section grouped together monologue performances speaking from within the nation's heartlands and reaching out monologically to their communities, I conclude the chapter with a section on emigrant speaking subjects, who use monologue to reflect on national identity and make sense of their alienation from homeland. Dermot Bolger's *In High Germany* (1990) and *The Parting Glass* (2010), written for real-life emigrant Ray Yeates, link national identity with support of the Republic of

Ireland's national soccer team. The performance of Irish identity is enabled through attendance at soccer fixtures around Europe, offering occasions where diasporic collectives of ex-patriots can affirm their national identity. Occasions for performance of post-national identity have evolved from an original connection to fixed places. Marie Jones' *A Night in November* (1994) also uses international soccer as a vehicle through which to articulate anxieties about northern Protestant identity in the form of Kenneth McAllister, a dole clerk disgusted with the sectarian attitudes of his father-in-law. Paul Mercier's *We Ourselves* (2000) charts the relationships of seven friends, over 22 years, who shared a formative summer working together in a gherkin jarring factory in Frankfurt.

In bringing together an analysis of isolated represented subjects both from within rural locations and settings of diasporic exile, my intention is to illustrate monologue's capacity to express a fracture from national narratives. My strategy is to assemble a multitude of playwrights and their fictional characters to voice their different subject positions. The monologists are both male and female and differ in terms of age and religion and collectively enunciate a rich tapestry of reflections upon national identity.

Chapter Three is dedicated to women's monologue drama, which is consistent with a growing canon of female-authored monologue plays. The enunciation of female subject positions through monologue takes on a particular urgency given the State's historic corralling of women into the domestic sphere and detention within Magdalene laundries. The sole female performer's command of audibility and visibility in the theatre may be read as acutely political, given the State's denial of them in real-world discursive fora. The chapter will trace a genealogy of women's monologue plays and identify how dramaturgical strategies have evolved to counter the dominant, patriarchal gaze and the tricky politics of visibility and embodiment. I have selected texts and productions representative of a range of economic, social and geographical contexts to allow a complex picture of female agencies to emerge.

The chapter will analyse Geraldine Aron's *A Galway Girl* (1979) her highly successful *My Brilliant Divorce* (2001) and Jennifer Johnston's *Waiting* (2006) as evidence of a conscious embodiment of maltreated women but ultimate female capitulation to the male gaze. In these plays, women are constituted in marital terms – one in an abusive marriage, the other abandoned for another woman, the third betrayed for a man. The stoic forbearance of Maisie in the earlier play, sharing a stage with her husband Dermot, is eclipsed by the virtuosic performance of Angela in *My Brilliant Divorce*. Eithne in *Waiting*, set in a waiting room, evokes the terminal dependence and chronic cultural subservience to male priorities. Patriarchal norms, despite voiced female subject positions, are ultimately supported in these monologues.

Moving to the North, I critique plays voicing two generations of northern women, written by Jennifer Johnston and Abbie Spallen. Johnston's monologues *Christine* (1988) and *Twinkletoes* (1993) present women from opposing sides of the conflict, who deal with the consequences of the male-dominated arena of sectarian conflict. Christine Maltseed, recently widowed by the death of her loyalist husband Billy, is finally yet only circumstantially monologically empowered to speak about her troubled marriage. On the republican side, Karen is effectively widowed as her husband Declan is serving a life sentence in jail for terrorist activities. Spallen's *Pumpgirl* (2006) is set in post-cease fire Armagh and relates the continued dominance of local patriarchies, but now displaced from abandoned sectarian activity on to the masculine performance of cars and trucks. Masculinity, however, is also problematised and the co-presence of three actors (two women and one man) onstage encourages a more relational gendered theatrical reading.

Returning to an urban milieu at a transitional economic period for the country, Johnston's *Moonlight and Music* (2000) figures a secondary school teacher whose life has been blighted by sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Elaine Murphy's *Little Gem* (2008) stages the challenges of three generations of Dublin working class women and their romantic relationships with men. The three

alternating monologues boldly address female sexuality and celebrate intergenerational solidarity. Carmel Winters' *Witness* (2013), set in Cork, marks the end of the chapter and looks forward to more imaginative representations of female characters. The part of Shannon and her son Stephen is played by the same female actor (Kate Stanley Brennan), a retort to male-authored monologue plays in which women are constructed on unfavourable terms through narrative.

Conscious of Austinian and Butlerian performativity's preoccupation with language and the regulatory power of discursive forces, in Chapter Four I draw on the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to broaden my theoretical approach and to support a spatialized analysis of monologue performance. My critical approach in this chapter will consider Dublin's theatre economy and hierarchy, dominated by the Abbey and Gate Theatres who share an urban geography with Victorian receiving houses, suburban theatres and small theatres located in the inner city. The early monologue plays of Conor McPherson (*Rum and Vodka*, *The Good Thief* and *This Lime Tree Bower*) and Mark O'Rowe (*Anna's Ankle*) were performed in small, intimate theatres in the capital, which facilitated a close proximity between spectators and actors. Added to the theatre's spatial dimensions is its own ideology and architectural history. I will consider the reception of the plays in the less prestigious theatres and subsequently at the Gate and Abbey Theatres.

McPherson's *The Good Thief* (1994; originally titled *The Light of Jesus*) and *Rum and Vodka* (1992) were performed in the City Arts Centre on Moss Street, with *This Lime Tree Bower* (1995) receiving its premiere in the Crypt Arts Centre, Dublin Castle. The monologues feature male narrators in desperate personal and economic circumstances – I intend to suggest a link between this economic precarity and the theatre space's rank within the urban theatrical order. The spectatorship economically patronising these productions are also critical in enabling their continued performances.

Standing out from a number of his early dialogic plays is O'Rowe's *Anna's Ankle* (1997), an unpublished work performed at the Project at the Mint. The single character monologue is a provocative

and disturbing account of a snuff film director's planned mutilation of a hapless young woman from Ennis. The monologue shares with McPherson's three plays the aim of a formal challenge to a conservative, dialogue-based canon. O'Rowe's play, however, is not concerned with economic collapse precipitating a crisis in masculinity but instead parodies liberal middle class taste and discourse whilst simultaneously compelling spectators to inhabit the mind of a depraved criminal.

The chapter concludes with accounts of how McPherson's *Port Authority* (2001) and O'Rowe's *Crestfall* (2003) were received at the Gate Theatre, and the fate of O'Rowe's *Terminus* at the Abbey Theatre. I will argue that both author's work, perceived as radical within intimate performance spaces, are absorbed into the dominant houses due to their larger spatial dimensions and to the playwrights' own modification of their drama to address audiences of different class and cultural composition.

My objective in Chapter Four is to complement my prior performative analysis with a performativity based on spatial orientation, as opposed to a discursive temporality. Sedgwick differentiates between the "periperformative" and the "explicit performative": I have aligned the more peripheral theatres with the former, and the pre-eminent Gate and Abbey Theatres with the latter, and attempted to map a pathway between the two, using monologue performances to illustrate their differing performance environments. The findings in the chapter will hopefully deepen an understanding of monologue drama's immediate material environment and the broader urban theatrical economy of which it is a part.

### ***Performativities: Austin, Butler and Sedgwick***

Current Performativity Studies is a vastly expanding field, stretching into education theory, economics, architecture, art and the social sciences. "Performativity",<sup>15</sup> related to the adjectival

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<sup>15</sup> Just as "feminism" is not uniform in its make-up but heterogeneous, comprising multiple and diverse feminisms, it is impossible to speak of a single monolithic "performativity", as this term has accrued various different and contradictory meanings in different contexts. I use the term "performativity" on occasion in my arguments but always qualified by a specific context and mindful of its multiple meanings.

“performative” and noun “the performative”, is a nebulous, polyvalent and interdisciplinary term which has drawn much scepticism in terms of its value as a critical tool.<sup>16</sup> Due to its double history of ordinary language philosophy and performance theory,<sup>17</sup> along with its multiple current disciplinary habitats, there is a consequent need in any critical practice to be attentive to its complex genealogy and usage. If its embracing of all performance practice may render it a blunt critical instrument, there are however opportunities to deploy it in ways that respects its complexity and pays attention to individual seams of thought within its overall morass. Many scholars of performativity have contributed to its evolving narrative; however, I will be primarily drawing on the work of J.L. Austin, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as my theoretical framework, but also referring to a range of other scholars and critics to support my arguments.

There has been a range of theoretical approaches to the study of monologue drama and performance in recent scholarship including gender studies, globalisation and post-colonial readings.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The term “performativity” as Richard Schechner has pointed out, is “a term hard to pin down.” In an account of performativity that is understandably both cautious and inclusive, he goes on to say that it covers “a whole panoply of possibilities opened up by a world in which differences are collapsing, separating media from live events, originals from digital or biological clones, and performing onstage from performing in ordinary life. Increasingly, social, political, economic, personal and artistic realities take on the qualities of performance.” He adds that “performativity points to a variety of topics, among them the construction of social reality including gender and race, the restored behaviour quality of performances, and the complex relationship of performance practice to performance theory” (Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 125).

<sup>17</sup> The major figures in the performance theory strand include Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, Allan Kaprow, Richard Schechner and Phil Auslander.

<sup>18</sup> Brian Singleton has produced masculinities readings of Irish monologue plays during the Celtic Tiger. Singleton deploys R.W. Connell’s three categories of masculinity “to map the relationship between the narrational construction of a masculine abjection with a performance of theatrical dominance, a relationship between the socially subordinate and mute and the spectacle of embodiment and empowerment” (Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 73).

Patrick Lonergan has written about the monologue in terms of globalization, observing that monologue “provides writers with opportunities to resist and reflect upon globalization” and discussing “how many Irish writers have used the form to explore such phenomena as time-space compression, mobility, and individualization” (Patrick

Monologue drama has not received the same level of critical attention as other genres of monologue performance, such as performance art, autobiographical performance and stand-up comedy, over recent years and although theories of performativity are commonly used within the Humanities, they are not frequently deployed in critiquing dramatic performance.<sup>19</sup> Austinian and Butlerian performativity, as I will demonstrate, offer incisive critical tools to interrogate monologue drama and performance in their focus on the speaking subject, the citation of conventions, and the constitutory qualities of language.<sup>20</sup>

My use of theories of performativity prompts me to both foreground my own dissertation as itself a performative citation and declare my own citing subjectivity – a white middle-class male – as inscribed within the thesis-writing process. The thesis explicitly cites a host of primary and secondary sources to make its arguments and implicitly invokes the authority and conventions of Trinity College - as

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Loneragan, *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 177).

Gilbert and Tompkins' *Postcolonial Drama: Theatre, Practice, Politics* (1996) discusses monodrama within the broader context of postcolonial subjectivity.

<sup>19</sup> The coverage of monologue drama in the Academy is not as comprehensive as other monologue performance categories – performance art and autobiographical performance have garnered more critical interest. Theories of performativity have frequently been deployed to unpack performance art's strategy of presenting the personal as the political and to throw into relief the body as effects of discourse. What may have fallen under the critical radar is monologue drama's propensity to engage in a similar project of identity reconstruction. It is possible that it has received less scholarly attention, situated as it is within a less radical art form and confined within both a referential dramatic paradigm and a theatrical institutional citationality. The fact that it is in a sense less overtly political as an art form than its performance art cousins adds rather than reduces a critical urgency to address its political potential. In keeping with the unregistered, slippery performative workings of hegemonic forces, monologue drama thrives under its own subterfuge of a relatively conservative dramatic form. Its referential framework deflects interpretations of political messaging which other forms of monologue performance, such as performance art, invite.

<sup>20</sup> Jen Harvie notes the productive use of performative analysis to critique theatrical performance: "it is usually the case that cultural materialist analysis is used to explore the (repressive) conditions of theatre production, whereas performative analysis is used to explore the (liberating) effects of more everyday practices or less conventional performances. One problem with this selective pairing of objects and practices is that it reproduces understandings of the theatre industry as problematically complicit with hegemonic socio-political ideologies and understandings of street performance and other performative acts as necessarily liberating. It prevents us from considering how we might seek examples of anti-hegemonic practice within the 'belly of the beast', within the theatre industry itself." (Jen Harvie, *Theatre & the City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 68).

manifested in pedagogical ethos, institutional standing and politics - and ultimately the wider national and global Academy. Indeed, scholarly citations both performatively sustain the circulation of concepts within the Academy and represent scholarly capital on which the *Times Higher Education* and *QS World University Rankings* partly base university rankings.<sup>21</sup>

***“Misinvocations”<sup>22</sup>: J.L. Austin***

Although concepts of performativity have been present in scholarly discourse for centuries, modern Performativity Studies began with a series of theatrical monologue performances: J.L. Austin’s William James Lectures, entitled *How to Do Things with Words*, in Harvard University in 1955. *How to Do Things with Words* not only refers to the subject matter of language performativity but to Austin *doing* words – delivering lectures to a live audience. The introduction indicates that “the content of these lectures is here reproduced in print as exactly as possible and with the lightest editing. If Austin had published them himself he would certainly have recast them in a form more appropriate to print . . . it is equally certain that Austin as a matter of course elaborated on the bare text of his notes when lecturing.”<sup>23</sup> *How to Do Things with Words* may be described as an archive of a performance, based on Austin’s notes to deliver that performance, which themselves were added to during the lectures. When Austin excluded soliloquy and utterances performed by an actor on a stage from his considerations, he

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<sup>21</sup> For the 2016-17 rankings, *QS World University Rankings* used “citations per faculty” as one of six criteria to determine rankings. The other criteria were: academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty/student ratio, international faculty ratio and international student ratio. The *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings used “citations” as one of five criteria to determine university rankings, the other four being teaching, international outlook, industry income, and research.

<sup>22</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 17.

<sup>23</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), vi.



was coming perilously close to excluding the lectures which instituted Performativity Studies in the first place.<sup>24</sup>

J.L. Austin put forward the theory that “performative utterances” (utterances that perform actions) do not simply describe a state of affairs, but bring a state of affairs into being. Austin initially distinguishes “performatives” from “constatives”, the former denoting utterances that constitute actions bringing about a state of affairs with real consequences; the latter describing utterances that merely record a state of affairs.<sup>25</sup> He uses the examples of, *inter alia*, the utterance of the words “I do” at the marriage ceremony (bringing the marriage into existence), the naming of a ship, the swearing of an oath, the making of a bet and the bequeathing of property in a will. He went on to outline the basic feature of the performative, when he said that “in these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it.”<sup>26</sup>

Austin theorises the issuing of utterances as the performance of a locutionary act (“roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference”<sup>27</sup>), containing within it an

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Gustafsson reveals that:

“In group-discussion, Austin could spend many hours probing some topic that, in a paper, was condensed into one or two short paragraphs. Indeed, most of what he did informally in front of small audiences did not enter his publications at all, and it has been said that it was precisely on such occasions that the nature of his philosophical talent and originality was most visible. We have the two reconstructed lecture series, *Sense and Sensibilia* and *How to do Things with Words*, which are said to provide a somewhat better view of Austin’s style as a teacher. But no one denies that these reconstructions, however carefully made, still only dimly reflect his actual performances” (Martin Gustafsson, Introduction, *The Philosophy of J.L. Austin*, Martin Gustafsson and Richard Sorli, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4).

<sup>25</sup> Austin later in *How to Do Things with Words* collapses this distinction, although it is still cited by scholars as a means of distinguishing performative and referential aspects of language.

<sup>26</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Idem*, 109.

illocutionary act (“such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking”<sup>28</sup>), with the possibility of also performing a perlocutionary act (“such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading”<sup>29</sup>). Illocutionary force is the effect of an illocutionary act, whilst a perlocutionary effect is the consequence of the illocutionary act, which may or may not be the intended effect of the illocutionary act. Also important in this process is what Austin terms “uptake”<sup>30</sup>, the addressee’s comprehension of what is being communicated to them. The successful execution of the performative is subject to different categories of conditions - the prior existence of an accepted convention; the appropriateness of the persons and circumstances involved in the procedure; the correct and complete execution of the performative; the appropriate thoughts and feelings of the invoker; and their subsequent conduct.<sup>31</sup>

Following Austin, a monologue is not describing the action of the play; it *is* the action of the play. The *doing* of the monologue is the bringing into being of a drama in front of spectators. The actor in the theatre in front of spectators (the appropriate person and circumstances) invokes theatrical conventions with illocutionary and perlocutionary force on spectators, and eliciting audience uptake. As the monologue’s narrative referents are not generally visually available to spectators, there can be no way of determining whether the utterance is true or false, as a constative utterance would be. When Frank Hardy, in the final Act of *Faith Healer*, describes the implements that will be used to murder him, he is producing these images for our individual mental consumption and figuration, and not describing implements that we can see on stage.

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<sup>28</sup> Idem, 109.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, 109.

<sup>30</sup> Austin explains: “Generally the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution. So the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of *uptake*” (idem, 117).

<sup>31</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 14-15.

In a passage that would provoke much debate within the Academy and arguably lead to Derrida's own concept of citationality, and his long debate with Austin's defender John Searle, Austin famously wrote:

as *utterances* our performatives are also heir to certain other kinds of ill which infect all utterances. And these likewise, though again they might be brought into a more general account, we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance – a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.<sup>32</sup>

Austin's specific exclusion of stage speech, soliloquy and poetry (whose recital may also be described as monologue) makes monologue drama the example, par excellence, of a "non-serious" performative utterance.<sup>33</sup> Placing Austin in critical engagement<sup>33</sup> with monologue plays will be a productive queering of Austin's theories.<sup>34</sup> Contemporary theatre scholars have recognised theatrical performance as a node of performativity. Elin Diamond identifies performance as "the site in which

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<sup>32</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Mark O'Rowe's *Crestfall* and *Terminus*, poetic monologues, would be excluded from Austin's consideration on all three grounds.

<sup>34</sup> My use of Austin will be an infelicitous reading of Austin although Austin himself, as cited above, has allowed that "performatives are also heir to certain other kinds of ill which infect all utterances" meaning that the critical queering of Austin may in fact be valid by his own reckoning.

performativity materializes in concentrated form, where the ‘concealed or dissimulated conventions’ of which acts are mere repetitions might be investigated and reimagined.”<sup>35</sup> The “concealed or dissimulated” conventions are made visible in monologue drama, where spectators are tasked with reading the “constrictive social script”<sup>36</sup> and the manner in which the narrating body either adheres to or deviates from that script. The “etiologies of language” (weakening, paling of language) described by Austin are, for Diamond, the opposite (“concentrated form”). Austin’s anti-theatrical prejudice is inverted: theatrical/monologic speech, with its multi-layered performative levels, becomes the site of a performative/theatrical convergence.

### ***Post Austin***

John Searle sought to use Austin’s theoretical foundations to develop a comprehensive theory of speech acts, generating the renowned debate with Jacques Derrida, whose concepts of iterability and citationality radically altered the discourse on performativity. Contesting Austin’s and Searle’s distinctions between “serious” and “non-serious” performative utterances, Derrida’s contention that all utterances constitute a “general citationality” dissolved barriers between these categories, and extended the discourse beyond language to all signifying systems.<sup>37</sup> The concept’s movement from the confines of ordinary language philosophy into the arena of deconstructionism and postmodernism led to an

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<sup>35</sup> Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London: Routledge, 1997), 47.

<sup>36</sup> *Idem*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida asks: “For, ultimately, isn’t it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, “non-serious,” *citation* (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a “successful” performative? (Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* Ed. Gerald Graff. Trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber. (Evanston: Chicago University Press, 1988), 17).

explosion of the term's applicability.<sup>38</sup> Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* adopts the term to assess the current state of knowledge, evaluable only in terms of its efficiency.<sup>39</sup>

Derrida's theory of *différance* is crucial in appreciating monologue drama's political potential of arresting insidious performatives and reversing them. Following Derrida's *différance*, individual theatrical performances are always different from one another; the internal self-difference underwrites continued iterations of the same but different performance text.<sup>40</sup> The self-alienated performance text, reiterated over successive nights and days, means that it cannot be reified, fixed in time and space. Other production aspects such as cast changes, amendments to the script, and change of performance space and venue further add to the production's armoury of resistance, not to mention completely new productions of the same monologue.<sup>41</sup> Derrida's concept of citationality is applicable, of course, to dialogic as well as monologue drama, but it achieves a unique significance when utilised by Butler for her theories of gender performativity.

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<sup>38</sup> Stanley Cavell, who defended Austin from criticism of academics working in the logical positivist tradition of philosophy, Stanley Fish, and Paul de Man, a deconstructivist critic who demonstrated the dislinkage between cause and effect in the performance of a selection of texts, are other dominant figures in the discourse.

<sup>39</sup> "The performativity of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one's disposal. Thus the growth of power, and its self-legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information." (Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 47).

<sup>40</sup> Elin Diamond says that "the political value of deconstruction lies in its interrogation of identity. . . . Deconstruction wreaks havoc on identity, with its connotations of wholeness and coherence; if an identity is always different from itself it can no longer be an identity. Sexual *différance* in this sense destabilizes the bipolar oppositions that constitute gender identity" (Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London: Routledge, 1997), 48).

<sup>41</sup> The dominant readings and stagings of canonical works can never achieve total mastery over how the play is produced because the ontology of theatrical performance does not permit it. Spatio-temporal performances, which occasion and enable the play's performance, also deny hegemonic prescriptions of the play's interpretation.

***“What does ‘transparency’ keep obscure?”<sup>42</sup> - Judith Butler***

Judith Butler is perhaps the scholar most associated with theories of performativity, following her groundbreaking work on gender performativity, *Gender Trouble* (1990), as well as multiple other books exploring the political potential of performative resistance, primarily in feminist and queer activist contexts. Her oeuvre is marked by an acute political and social consciousness and indefatigably probes patriarchal and other dominant discourses and the assumptions they proliferate. Building on the work in particular of Derrida and Foucault, she claims that “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.”<sup>43</sup>

In her subsequent book *Bodies that Matter* (which sought to clarify and elaborate upon her claims regarding the nature of gender performativity as laid out in *Gender Trouble*) she conceives the materiality of bodies as “the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect.”<sup>44</sup> Butler makes this observation as part of her argument that one’s sex is not a bodily given, but “a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices.”<sup>45</sup> Discursive regimes produce these effects through citational and reiterative practices in the service of a heteronormative matrix, which “enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications.”<sup>46</sup> But the effects of these discursive regimes are not permanent and their performative workings are never complete. The process of materialization is

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<sup>42</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), xx.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, xv.

<sup>44</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xii.

<sup>45</sup> Idem, xii.

<sup>46</sup> Idem, xiii.

vulnerable in its constant reiteration. Indeed, Butler theorizes a space in which the workings of this discursive regime may be resisted and reworked:

That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for materialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law.<sup>47</sup>

The agency required to effect the reworking is a contingent agency arising from the process of materialization through regulated practices, which open up possibilities for rearticulations - Butler makes clear repeatedly in *Bodies that Matter* that it is not the voluntarist, autonomous agency of Austin's humanist subject, which she associates with the theatrical performer, who may exercise "'will' or 'choice.'"<sup>48</sup> Although Butler has notably, and for some scholars, provocatively, made a distinction between performance and performativity,<sup>49</sup> her writings frequently invoke theatrical terminology such as "staging", "restaging", "scenes of address", "scripts", "casting" and "actor", which appear to gesture toward a critiquing of theatrical performance.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Idem, xii.

<sup>48</sup> Idem, 178.

<sup>49</sup> Butler argues that "in no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the 'truth' of gender; performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'; further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake." (Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 178).

<sup>50</sup> Geraldine Harris echoes Butler's reservations about the efficacy of theatrical performance:

And despite being clear that the voluntarist performer on stage is not the subject she envisages resignifying performative norms, the performative social scripts that coerce subjects into adherence to regulatory norms may be viewed as open to challenge and rearticulation theatrically through the performance text.<sup>51</sup> Butler has used examples from fiction (Willa Cather) and theatre (Antigone) to drive her arguments but retaining an interest in the philosophical and not the aesthetic or literary aspects of those works.<sup>52</sup>

Butler gives an insight into her thinking on performativity and theatricality when she says that theatricality is proportionate to the performative workings it conceals:

Performativity is thus not a singular “act”, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the

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The reason theatre as an institution is so attractive and yet so problematic to theorists of performativity is because it has traditionally been perceived as both quoting the reality effects they describe as being performatively produced and as simultaneously differing from those reality effects – which is, of course, exactly the effect they seek to achieve as a strategy for subverting identity in the realm of the social [. . .] any sort of act or movement within the theatrical frame or otherwise is already marked as double, already in quotation marks. (Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 76).

<sup>51</sup> Elin Diamond rejects Butler’s performativity/performance distinction, querying why the “iterative sites” of performativity should be restricted to “theory and to the theorist’s acts of seeing?” (Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London: Routledge, 1997), 47). Other valuable publications on the performativity/theatricality debate include Jill Dolan’s “Geographies of Learning: Theatre Studies, Performance, and the ‘Performative’” (*Theatre Journal* 45.4 (1993): 417-41); and Janelle G. Reinelt’s “The Politics of Discourse: Performativity Meets Theatricality” (*SubStance* 31 98/99 (2002): 201 – 15). Shannon Jackson also discusses the topic in Chapter 7 of *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim* (2000), perhaps suggesting a critical engagement with Sophocles’ drama in terms of its material theatrical performance, is instead a philosophical discussion on the nature of kinship, the manner in which it is constructed by social laws, and how those laws effectively demarcate legitimate and abject modes of gender and sexuality. Utilising Antigone’s iconic protest against Creon, Butler revisits concerns most notably confronted in *Gender Trouble*, and situates her reading of Antigone alongside those of Hegel and Lacan. Butler’s focus on the philosophical dimension of the text, given the opportunity to explore - even in passing - its theatrical and performative context with regard to specific productions of the play, is both telling and useful in illustrating her critical priorities.



conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity).<sup>53</sup>

Monologue drama, following Butler, may be the ultimate dissimulation of performative origins because it presents itself as a disruption of theatrical illusionism whilst at once affirming its own fiction of ontological stability (the masterful actor dominating the theatre and controlling the narrative). This demands a critical probity to distinguish between monologic speech acts that rehabilitate dominant norms, despite intentions to do otherwise, and those that may succeed in arresting and troubling the proliferation of those norms. The agent of theatrical disruption (the monologist) is itself something that needs to be disrupted. The fiction of the monologist's autonomy/stability is enhanced through its own status as disruptor. A critical methodology that employs Butlerian performativity may throw into relief the political, social and theatrical norms that the monologist cites to self-constitute through their narratives and open a critical and performative space to challenge them.

Butler offers a useful real-life example of oppressive performative operations when discussing the US military's former policy of censorship of "coming out" utterances by military personnel. She states that "censorship is not merely restrictive and privative, that is, active in depriving subjects of the freedom to express themselves in certain ways, but also formative of subjects and the legitimate boundaries of speech."<sup>54</sup> However, Butler, in a move characteristic of all of her expressions of her concept of performative resignification, theorises the possibility of resignifying dominant norms: "the failure of censorship to effect a complete censoring of the speech under question has everything to do with (a) the failure to institute a

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<sup>53</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xxi.

<sup>54</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 132.

complete or total subjectification through legal means and (b) the failure to circumscribe effectively the social domain of speakable discourse.”<sup>55</sup> My aim is to conceive of monologue drama as domains of speakability in which speaking subjects, through the convention of monologue and its guarantee of uninterrupted theatrical speech, are afforded a monologic space in which to self-constitute. The uttered speech is fraught with the dangers of confirming the language of dominant norms: “The question is not what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all. To become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject.”<sup>56</sup> And even in cases where utterances are intended to affirm identity and subjectivity, it may unwittingly serve to shore up the State’s or other hegemonic control over the meaning of those utterances.<sup>57</sup> Theatrical monologue performance may constitute a “domain of speakability”<sup>58</sup> as firstly, theatre is removed from real-life (where domains of speakability are restricted, controlled and censored) and secondly, monologue in performance possesses specific theatrical features (the prolonged and direct address to spectators; a spectatorial focus on performance of narrative and on the speaking body; and an intimate performer/spectator relationship) that give it a greater ability to accommodate the performance of narrative self-constitution than dialogic drama, which mostly stages intersubjective relations and has a greater tendency to maintain theatrical illusion.

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<sup>55</sup> Idem, 132.

<sup>56</sup> Idem, 133.

<sup>57</sup> “Hence, the performativity attributed to the homosexual utterance can only be established through the performativity of a state discourse that makes this very attribution. The figuring of homosexual utterance as contagion is a performative sort of figuring, a performativity that belongs to a regulatory discourse. Does the statement reveal the performative power of homosexual utterance, or does it merely underscore the productive or performative power of those who exercise the power to define homosexuality in these terms?” (Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 122).

<sup>58</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 133.

Butler's comprehensive arguments on performativity contain philosophical, political, linguistic and psychoanalytic dimensions and I intend to briefly address the latter aspect of her work that will be of value to my arguments. She extends her description of the workings of regulatory norms to include its psychic dimension, less visible than its more explicit manifestations:

The psychic operation of the norm offers a more insidious route for regulatory power than explicit coercion, one whose success allows its tacit operation within the social. And yet, being psychic, the norm does not merely reinstate social power, it becomes formative and vulnerable in highly specific ways. The social categorizations that establish the vulnerability of the subject to language are themselves vulnerable to both psychic and historical change (. . .) just as the subject is derived from conditions of power that precede it, so the psychic operation of the norm is derived, though not mechanically or predictably, from prior social operations.<sup>59</sup>

Given monologue's and soliloquy's capacity to reveal the interiority of the mind, Butler's description of psychic performative workings positions it to unpack monologue as evidence of psychic normative regulation, but vulnerable to psychic rearticulations of those norms through theatrical performance. Butler poses the question: "Is the norm first 'outside', and does it then enter into a pre-given psychic space, understood as an interior theater of some kind?"<sup>60</sup> Butler's "interior theater" may well be the troubled monologues of the plays and characters under discussion, who are enabled to externalise their thoughts and thought processes to spectators who in turn performatively diagnose their psychic dysfunctionality and attribute it to hegemonic regulatory forces that have shaped it.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 21.

<sup>60</sup> *Idem*, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Brian Singleton, writing about the monologue delivered by the patient of psychoanalysis, observes that "the private articulation of self becomes the prescriptive methodology for the healing and the re-entry into the public

Monologue - speaking alone - bears associations with anti-social medical conditions such as logorrhoea,<sup>62</sup> a deviance from accepted social norms of conversation.<sup>63</sup> Psychic rehabilitation in the form of spectatorial identification of those regulatory norms, impacting on the speech of the monologist, would appear to be one ethical project of monologue performance.

Butler's comments on the performativity of the gaze also suggest a role for spectatorial performativity. Using the example of the notorious Rodney King video in 1991 and its impact on race relations within Los Angeles, she has theorised, in addition to a performativity of language and gesture, a performativity of the gaze: "I do think that there is a performativity to the gaze that is not simply the transposition of a textual model onto a visual one; that when we see Rodney King, when we see that video we are also reading and we are also constituting, and that the reading is a certain conjuring and a certain construction."<sup>64</sup> Actors may performatively invoke language and gesture to generate meaning, but spectators may non-verbally and without gesture engage in a performative act of the gaze in which spectating constitutes the actor/character within frames of gender, class, race and sexuality. The performativity of theatrical language, gesture, as well as other material elements (costumes, props, set design, lighting and sound) may therefore be met by tacit counter-performatives produced by spectators.

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domain of the performance of self, that may or may not have the authority to speak alone" (Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 70).

<sup>62</sup> Logorrhoea, a communication disorder resulting in incoherent talkativeness, and sometimes classified as a mental illness, is a state that is approximated in Enda Walsh's *Bedbound* (2002) in which Dad and Daughter deliver long, energetic, frantically-paced speeches, parts of which are barely intelligible. Walsh's probing of linguistic comprehensibility and coherence, combined with his use of rhythmic, stylized speech patterns, owes much to Beckett's earlier interrogation and deconstruction of language, particularly evident in *Not I*, which illustrates a complete disjuncture between speech and subject.

<sup>63</sup> Ken Frieden has written about the link between monologue and genius, claiming that "genius is the intellectual obsession of our time, and monologue is one symptom of the disorder. Monologues of solitude and madness have reached epidemic proportions" (Ken Frieden, *Genius and Monologue* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) 7). He goes on to say that "the language of an individual is monological to the extent that it deviates from dialogical conventions of speech" (Idem, 17).

<sup>64</sup> Vikki Bell, ed. *Performativity & Belonging* (London: Sage Publications, 1999) 6.

In her most recent work, Butler has posited a politics of vulnerability, in which mastery should not be equated with control, but vulnerability instead put forward as a strategy of empowerment, accepting the ways in which we are affected in our daily lives: “We’re being affected all the time, not just when interpellated as a boy or girl after birth. If we accept that we are constantly being affected, this may lead us to forms of agency that are more productive.”<sup>65</sup> Her latest theoretical direction<sup>66</sup> responds to the global movement of mass protest, occupation and politicisation of public spaces, which seek to confront political, economic and social injustices.<sup>67</sup>

Along with the performativities of Austin and Butler, which constitute the major critical lenses of the dissertation, I have enlisted the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to shift the interpretive frame on to a spatialized account of performatives. In her introduction to *Performance and Performativity* with Andrew Parker, Sedgwick interrogates Austin’s use of normative examples of performative utterances, such as the marriage ceremony. Sedgwick queers Austin’s example: “It is the constitution of a community of witness that makes the marriage; . . . maybe even *especially* the presence of those people whom the institution of marriage defines itself by excluding – that ratifies and recruits the legitimacy of its privilege.”<sup>68</sup> Apart from examining how Austinian performativity normativises dominant hierarchies

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<sup>65</sup> Judith Butler, “Vulnerability and Resistance Revisited”. Trinity College, Dublin. 05 Feb 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Other current concerns of Performativity Studies include the performativity of virtual subjectivities, in which identities may be revised through on-line performance on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other on-line performance stages. Some recent publications have also addressed the material theatrical aspects of performativity. Marcus Tan, for example, has added a new critical tool for theatre studies in the form of the performativity of sound in his book *Acoustic Interculturalism: Listening to Performance* (2012).

<sup>67</sup> Jon McKenzie has for many years critically engaged with the performativity of civic disobedience. He continues to publish in this area, with a focus on how performativity operates through both dominant national and global institutions and how it is used by networks of activists and others attempting to attain justice. McKenzie’s latest book is entitled *Performance Inc: Global Performativity and Mediated Resistance*. At the time of the submission of the thesis, Routledge had not published this book, despite it featuring on book-selling website Amazon.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds. *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 10-11.

of gender and sexuality, she considers the space in which the performative utterance is made and the complexity of the responding speech acts of those who witness it. Sedgwick's focus on textural and material aspects of performativity is helpful in understanding theatrical reception of monologue and spectators' interaction with the theatre's architecture.

***Performativity and Monologue Drama: Alternative Perspectives***

Other scholars have recognised theatre's capacity to make visible unseen dominant norms. Shannon Jackson, contrasting performativity with the theatrical and its associations of seeability, agency and dramatic interaction, comments that "performativity . . . identifies conventions that are unregistered and unintended rather than fully visible and willed; it also questions the possibility of locating a discrete antagonist outside of the subject who is injured. Performativity thus seems to question the foundations of the theatrical."<sup>69</sup> Jackson, in her discussion about the performativity of racism in theatrical performance, also highlights the theatre's potential to bring to light issues of race relations: "Theatrical performances of racism thus offer a particularly illuminating laboratory for exploring the possibilities of integrating theatrical and deconstructive genealogies of performance. They are also a good place to think about what it means to create a pedagogical public sphere that investigates race privilege and racial injury."<sup>70</sup>

Performative regulatory norms operate below the radar, whilst theatre concerns itself with overt display and visibility. The discursive/material discord occasioned by the narrating body and the signified self produces the narrator as decentred and contingent, rather than the whole, coherent subject of Austin's speech-act theory. In spite of their respective reservations about the performativity of stage

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<sup>69</sup> Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 191.

<sup>70</sup> *Idem*, 192.

speech,<sup>71</sup> the staging of monologue drama may be read as an enactment of the oscillation between Austinian performativity (the autonomous, voluntarist subject) and Butlerian performativity (the agency deriving from performative failure). In the act of narration, the narrating body is citing from a citational chain which constitutes the narrator in that chain. But the illusion of a coherent, theatrical storyteller mastering her own narrative is constantly affirming a stable ontology and concealing the performative workings which have already interpellated her into performative processes. The fissures generated by the spoken narratives and the body which is their referent, however, presents critical openings to spectators to destabilise and reconstitute the speaking subject. Monologue drama presents a site in which performative operations may not only be made visible through viewing and deconstructing the narrated subject, but may allow spectators to performatively re-craft the viewed monologists.

The body of monologue drama represents a crisis in dialogic, intersubjective drama and its mechanisms of representation. Underlying monologue drama is a suspicion of dialogic models, a fear of exclusion from discourse and a consequent desire to reinstate the speaking subject into the aural and visual frame. The drive to enunciate, however, is not a straightforward restoration of marginalised voices and subjectivities. Austinian performativity posits a humanist, sovereign, voluntary subject who wilfully performs speech acts with illocutionary and perlocutionary force. This mode of sovereign subjectivity mirrors the intentional, voluntary behaviour of the actor on stage. However, Butler problematises subjectivity and agency, relocating the latter in a response to constant normative repetitions. For Butler, the illusion of the sovereign speaking subject is an effect of hegemonic norms, which serves to dissimulate its own institutory origins. The actor on stage therefore enacts both

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<sup>71</sup> Judith Butler and JL Austin express doubts, in different ways, regarding the performativity of speech onstage. Butler, for example, questions the efficacy of the presence of a transvestite onstage when spectators are protected from considering the real-life impact of the transvestite's appearance and performance. Austin regards onstage speech as non-serious, parasitic and as etiologies of language, withdrawing this category of speech from his theoretical considerations.

Austinian performativity (the intentional and voluntary) and the Butlerian performative speaking subject, who through performing speech acts, positions and constitutes herself within chains of citation. The actor is exceeded by the citational genealogies and is not in control of them. The tension arising from competing Austinian and Butlerian performativities is critically productive. It may represent a contestatory site between the waning of dominant cultural norms and the agency the waning of those norms occasion, holding out opportunities for spectatorial and critical intervention and resignification. Butler asks: “What is the means by which we come to see this delimiting power, and what are the means by which we transform it?”<sup>72</sup> The spectacle of the speaking body within the theatre would appear to be one such means, and the performative gaze and receptions of co-conspirators.

### ***“From Messenger Speech to Spalding Gray”: Global and Historical Monologue Performance***

#### ***Defining Monologue***

“Monologue” covers a broad swathe of theatrical, literary and performative genres, including dramatic monologue in poetry,<sup>73</sup> interior monologue in fiction, soliloquy, stand-up comedy, autobiographical performance and performance art and extends into real-world performative sites such as political speeches, religious sermons, lectures, and even describing long speeches delivered by one person in an everyday informal context. “Monologue” in a theatrical context is frequently interchanged with “soliloquy” – I would regard the latter as a subcategory of the former and Clare Wallace has helpfully suggested that “it is perhaps finally more useful to conceive monologue as *genre*, albeit a

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<sup>72</sup> *Gender Trouble*, xxiii.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Langbaum, Alan Sinfield and most recently, Glennis Byron have made significant contributions to the analysis of dramatic monologue in British and American poetry since the seventeenth century. Dramatic monologue, which can be loosely defined as a character speaking in the first person but who is not the poet, shares some similarities with theatrical monologue – a speaker who is implicitly or explicitly seeking the empathy of the reader/spectator in their narration of events. According to Alan Sinfield, “there is an ironic discrepancy between the speaker’s view of himself and a larger judgment which the poet implies and the reader must develop” (Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen, 1977), 7).



multifaceted one, and soliloquy as *dramatic device*.”<sup>74</sup> The permeability of these genre borders is often evident: Mark O’Rowe’s *Terminus* (2007) features three characters’ interweaving speeches in rhyming verse, recalling the tradition of dramatic monologue in poetry. Eugene O’Neill attempts to dramatize/externalize the thoughts of his characters in *Strange Interlude* linking it with stream-of-consciousness techniques in modernist fiction,<sup>75</sup> and comic passages in monologue drama often closely resemble the performance of stand-up comedy, barring the audience’s licence to heckle, in the latter category.

*The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance* states that the word “monologue”<sup>76</sup> is “most simply, a dramatic utterance that is not dialogue; a speech of extended length and internal coherence, delivered by a single speaker, that does not include another’s response.”<sup>77</sup> The definition of monologue as “not dialogue” is significant – monologue bears a negative relationship to dialogue, a turning away from dialogue to embrace the monologic mode. The relational aspect of monologue to dialogue means that the two terms are inextricably linked; the term “monologue” relies upon “dialogue” to maintain its intelligibility as “not dialogue”. Monologue cites itself as “not-dialogue” - it is therefore comprehensible not only in positive terms with its own specific attributes, but in negative terms as a turning away from a dialogic mode. My use of a dialogue/monologue opposition is used for a workable clarity and should not

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<sup>74</sup> Clare Wallace, “Monologue Theatre, Solo Performance and Self as Spectacle”, *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, Ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 4.

<sup>75</sup> Tom Murphy in his play *Alice Trilogy* (2005) has attempted a similar device.

<sup>76</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of English* states that the word “monologue” comes originally from the Late Greek “monologos” meaning “speaking alone”, and 17<sup>th</sup> century French “monologue.”

<sup>77</sup> *The Oxford Companion* goes on to explain that “monologues of exposition, reflection, or deliberation can be addressed to the audience, to another character, to the speaker herself (an ‘interior monologue’), or even to an inanimate object. They can be dramatically motivated or simply a theatrical convention, delivered from outside the action by a chorus figure or from inside the action by a character.” (*The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, Dennis Kennedy, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 402).

imply a binary relationship between the terms. It is important from the outset to acknowledge the fluid and unstable opposition between them, which Patrice Pavis has noted:

Dialogue and monologue never exist in an absolute form; moreover, there is a fluid transition between them, and there are several degrees of dialogism or monologism. Dialogue in classical drama, for instance, is more akin to a series of independently structured monologues than to an exchange of short speeches resembling a lively conversation (as in everyday dialogue). Conversely, many monologues, although they may be displayed typographically as a single unit and have only one enunciating subject, are actually a character's dialogues with a part of himself, another (imagined) character, or the world as his witness.<sup>78</sup>

What is evident here is that, despite the outward appearance of dialogically or monologically represented stage action, neither mode can exist without some element of the other. Moreover, the lone speaker on stage may also be seen to be in dialogue with herself. Emile Benveniste has said that "sometimes the speaking self is the only one to speak, but the listening self remains present nevertheless."<sup>79</sup> And as the actor is addressing spectators and therefore in dialogue with them, her language must be comprehensible in a way that dialogic language must be.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, Trans. Christine Schantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 96-97.

<sup>79</sup> Emile Benveniste, *Problemes de Linguistique 2* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1974), 85-86.

<sup>80</sup> Deborah Geis has pointed out that "since the status of a play presupposes that even a speech performed in imagined solitude of a character will always include the audience as acknowledged or implicit witnesses, the inevitable status of the spectators as recipients foregrounds the 'telling', or 'narrating', function of the monologue" (Deborah Geis, *Postmodern Theatric(k)s: Monologue in Contemporary American Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) 7).

In other words, there is always an auditor, whether in the fictional world of the play or in the auditorium, and the presence of those auditors necessitates that the monologue is comprehensible as much to a member of the audience as to an auditor present in the fictional world of the play.

Monologue may also be considered in temporal terms as pre- or post-dialogue, indicative of solitary reflection on immediately past dialogic relations and anticipation of further dialogue; or in spatial and social terms, as a depopulated social space following a multi-bodied space and preceding a populated social space again. The characters in the monologue drama under discussion are often seen to avail of a monologic time and space in order to psychologically and emotionally regroup, remembering, evaluating and attempting to make sense of relationships with friends, spouses or relatives before confronting those relationships again. In this way, it may be construed as a therapeutic, reconstitutory space in which the integrity of the self is reaffirmed before facing the social domain again.

The primary focus of my dissertation will be on what I will term “monologue drama”, which includes both single and multi-character monologue plays. My use of this term is designed to capture monologue plays in which actors play a single character, and monodramas,<sup>81</sup> in which the actor is playing more than one character.<sup>82</sup> Brian Singleton has also introduced the term “monology” as an analytical approach which can usefully unpack the Irish theatrical monologue. The term refers to the “discursive

<sup>81</sup> In Theatre Studies, “monodrama” is generally used to describe a one-person play in which multiple characters are performed. Kurt Taroff has argued for a more specific usage of that term:

“Although monodrama has often been used to describe any one-actor play or performance and undoubtedly will continue to be used in this way in a popular vein, this usage blurs distinctions and does not take into account the entire tradition of monodrama from Rousseau and Benda through Evreinov to the present as a subgenre or mode of musical and dramatic composition, as well as its use as an interpretive concept employed in production and analysis. I would therefore prefer to call one-actor plays and performances just that – one-actor, or solo performance – and reserve the term monodrama for the complex and varied form that I argue has become a distinct and recognizable genre of modern drama (and film), and whose counterpart is seen in the interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness forms in modern fiction” (Kurt Taroff, *The Mind’s Stage: Monodrama as Historical Trend and Interpretive Strategy* (Ann Arbor: Proquest Information and Learning Company, 2005) 157).

<sup>82</sup> Single-character monologue plays or multi-character monologue plays (in which several actors play one character each, e.g. *Faith Healer*) use reported speech when referring to the speech of other characters in the narrative. The actor in monodrama *enacts* the speech of other characters in the narrative. Monodramas may be subdivided into two types: one with a central character maintaining narrative control and consistent point of view, but incorporating performances of other characters into the overall performance; and another when there is no anchoring performance of a central character but where the actor proceeds through several discrete performances.

method of ethnomethodological research”<sup>83</sup> practised by, for example, R.W. Connell in his analysis of different masculinities. Although my research is chiefly concerned with monologue drama and not on individual monologues within dialogic plays, such as Shakespearean soliloquies or long speeches, for instance Hickey’s speech in O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), I will be drawing on monologues of that type to account for the development of the monologue form in drama since classical times and as part of my analysis in the subsequent chapters, as appropriate.

### **“Virtuosic Retellings”: The Messenger Speech of Greek Tragedy**

The earliest examples of monologue date back to ancient Greek tragedy and the drama of Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus.<sup>84</sup> The speeches of heralds, messengers and other characters delivering reports of off-stage events were essential features of the plot.<sup>85</sup> These expository speeches laid the foundations for contemporary theatrical devices. According to Margaret Dickin, the “spontaneous messenger” (in contrast to the Herald, a professional messenger of higher social status) is “often a character of low status”<sup>86</sup> because his presence is based on his chance “status as an eye-witness

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<sup>83</sup> Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 72.

<sup>84</sup> Messenger speeches appear frequently within Greek tragedy. In Aeschylus’ *Persians*, the Messenger gives an eye-witness account of the Persian defeat at the Battle of Salamis. The Guard in Sophocles’ *Antigone* appears on two occasions to recount the events at Polynices’ grave, on the second occasion appearing with Antigone herself. Euripides’ *Medea* features one of Jason’s men describing in detail the deaths of Creon and his daughter after receiving poisoned gifts from Medea. Dickin notes that “this speech would have allowed an actor to demonstrate the widest possible range of his skills, in the use of both voice and gesture.” (Margaret Dickin, *A Vehicle for Performance: Acting the Messenger in Greek Tragedy* (Lanham, Maryland: New York University Press, 2009), 31).

<sup>85</sup> Deborah Geis identifies two other forerunners of monologue within Greek tragedy: when a “character delivers an opening discourse, either explicitly or implicitly directed toward the audience, for the purpose of exposition and commentary” (Deborah Geis, *Postmodern Theatrics: Monologue in Contemporary American Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) 15); and the agon (a dialogue between speaker and Chorus), which she argues prefigures the soliloquy as the focus is on the protagonist’s discourse, and the Chorus, acting as surrogate audience members, reacts and feels but cannot act (Idem, 16).

<sup>86</sup> Margaret Dickin, *A Vehicle for Performance: Acting the Messenger in Greek Tragedy* (Lanham, Maryland: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

at the events on which he is reporting.” Because he has witnessed the event first hand, his account is more vivid, and “the orality and spontaneity of his report . . . may have provided greater opportunity for dramatic expression on the tragic stage.”<sup>87</sup> Dickin has proposed that the importance of the messenger speech role may have grown as a result of principal actors doubling major roles with that of the messenger later in the drama, who metatheatrically relates an account of an episode involving a noble or heroic figure that the same actor had earlier performed. The actor would have an opportunity to quote from the speech of the earlier character and “to re-enact in a vigorous mimetic fashion that same character’s death, his involvement in some kind of mortal combat or his marvellous escape or transformation. By doing this, the poet was highlighting the talents of the actor, but he was also demonstrating his own skill, by the creation of these deliberate linkages.”<sup>88</sup>

If the role of the messenger gained prominence through performance by well-known actors, Aristotle also favourably assesses the qualities of the monologic epic. In *Poetics*, when comparing the merits of epic and tragedy, he states that “epic is for a cultured audience who need no acting-out; tragedy is for a less discriminating public – and since it is popular, it must be inferior.”<sup>89</sup> Aristotle is here referring to what he perceives as a crude enactment of events (tragedy) and the audience that favours this genre, as opposed to epic poetry, where the audience is cultivated enough to imagine the events for themselves. Aristotle stresses that his criticisms are “to do with acting, not with forms of literature”<sup>90</sup> but the comments are nonetheless insightful, taking into account the favourable reception of some contemporary monologue plays written in poetic form, such as Mark O’Rowe’s *Terminus*, whose three characters narrate many acts of violence through monologues, without enacting them.

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<sup>87</sup> Idem, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Idem, 147.

<sup>89</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, Trans. Kenneth McLeish (London: Nick Hern Books, 1999), 41.

<sup>90</sup> Idem.

The messenger speech and its demands on the actor to describe off-stage events have survived as an expository device in contemporary drama. In terms of monologue drama where the solo actor must performatively produce entire dramatic worlds through narrative description and bodily enactment, the messenger speech may perhaps be seen as foundational. Dickin refers to the opportunities, presented by the role of the messenger, for an actor to voice the character of a hero as well as describe a pivotal event in the plot. The voicing of other characters is a key feature of contemporary monodrama and the versatile nature of messenger speech performances anticipates present-day virtuosic monologue performance given by well-known actors.<sup>91</sup>

***“Spectatorial Conspirators”: Shakespearean soliloquies***

Shakespeare and the Elizabethan period introduced and developed new uses for monologue, most notably the psychological soliloquy - a device to reveal a character’s interior thoughts and motives directly to spectators. Shakespearean soliloquies are often given by characters with definite plans of action in response to unfolding events and circumstances. The performance of soliloquy carries an added appeal to spectators, one could argue, as they are privileged with information withheld from other characters in the play. Spectators are elevated into the onstage action above naive characters unaware of impending plots. It could be argued that Shakespeare deliberately confers and empowers spectators with knowledge of villainous plots in order to counter-balance the dominant prevailing order against which the villains are attempting to rebel. Edmund in *King Lear* is the illegitimate half-brother of the elder and legitimate Edgar, who is heir to their father Gloucester’s lands:

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<sup>91</sup> A recent example of this is Tom Vaughan-Lawlor’s performance as both the Howie Lee and the Rookie Lee in the 2013 Landmark Productions’ staging of Mark O’Rowe’s *Howie the Rookie* (1999). Vaughan-Lawlor won the 2014 Irish Times best actor award for his performance in the role. The play was originally performed by two actors (Aidan Kelly and Karl Shiels).

EDMUND: (. . .)

Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.

Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund

As to the legitimate. Well, my legitimate, if

This letter speed and my invention thrive,

Edmund the base shall to' th' legitimate.<sup>92</sup>

Edmund's soliloquy at the beginning of the second scene at once privileges spectators with knowledge of his plot to top the "legitimate Edgar" and constitutes them as co-conspirators in an attempt to overthrow the established order of inheritance from which the "whoreson" Edmund is excluded. Although Gloucester acknowledges Edmund as his son, Edmund will be expelled from the legitimate order of patrimony, noble status and entitlement. But Gloucester's plan to banish Edmund from the Kingdom in the opening scene<sup>93</sup> is followed by Edmund's hypervisibility in the second: his soliloquy allows a display of verbal and visual dominance, persuasion and sexually menacing presence. His domination of the performance space defies the performance of subservience that immediately precedes it. Edmund's monologue is the play's first soliloquy and carries a singular priority in establishing a bond with the audience. Admitted to Edmund's schemes and entrusted with his inner thoughts, spectators are enlisted as empathetic colluders in a challenge to the "legitimate" order. Edmund's transition between scenes speaks to much of what I intend to discuss in this thesis. The opening scene is a social scene in which a character - marginalised owing to his bastardly status - shows obeisance to his superiors. The beginning of the following scene shifts to a solitary, post-social mode of

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<sup>92</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear* in *The Norton Shakespeare*. Stephen Greenblatt et al, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997) 1.2. 16-21. 2332.

<sup>93</sup> "He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again", idem, 1.1, 29-30. 2321.

reflection in which the same character possesses theatrical and narrational dominance. If the first scene features Edmund in a fixed hierarchy, subject to his father's plans and denied his birthright, the second opens with a performance of self-determination and control, deciding upon his own fate.

If Edmund is disadvantaged by his bastardly status, Richard Duke of Gloucester in *Richard III* exploits spectators' empathy through display of his spinal deformity. In his opening soliloquy, he laments his physical condition and how it bars him from the amorous activities of the court.

RICHARD GLOUCESTER. ( . . . )

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks  
 Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass,  
 I that am rudely stamped and want love's majesty  
 To strut before a wanton ambling nymph,  
 I that am curtailed of this fair proportion,  
 Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
 Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time  
 Into this breathing world scarce half made up -<sup>94</sup>

Richard diverts his energies to political scheming, manipulation and the murders of those who stand between him and the throne. He justifies his villainous plots: "since I cannot prove a lover . . . I am determined to prove a villain."<sup>95</sup> Theatrical necessity dictates that he occupies the role of villain as the deformed spectacle of his body in the theatre is inconsistent with the representation of a lover. His soliloquy is in this way metatheatrical, revealing his awareness of how the visual presence of his

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<sup>94</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third in The Norton Shakespeare*. Stephen Greenblatt et al, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997) 1.1. 14-21. 516.

<sup>95</sup> *Idem*, 1.1. 28-30. 516.



misshapen body determines spectatorial reception and more generally, spectators' cultural expectations of archetypal roles based on how those actors/characters are "shaped." The Duke expresses his own sense of physical inadequacy in numerous ways – "curtailed", "unfinished", "scarce half made up" – as well as a sense of his arriving prematurely ("sent before my time"). Richard may be read as an inchoate being requiring the performative work of spectators to make him whole. The completion of self that he craves is a task that spectators can perform through tacit participation in a conspiratorial bond with the villain before them, facilitated through the direct actor/spectator relationship of monologue. Richard's three soliloquies come within the first two scenes of the play – two in the first, and the third at the end of the second – and perhaps serve to strategically establish spectators, for Shakespeare, as empathetic co-conspirators for the murderous events to follow.

At the close of the third scene of *Othello*, Iago reveals to the audience that he intends to lead Othello to believe that Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona.

IAGO. (. . .)

The Moor is of a free and open nature,  
 That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,  
 And will as tenderly be led by th' nose  
 As asses are.  
 I ha't. It is engendered. Hell and night  
 Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.<sup>96</sup>

Spectators are constituted as witnesses to Iago's conception of his plans to destroy Othello. They are made privy to his developing thought process and then to the precise moment of Iago's

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<sup>96</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice* in *The Norton Shakespeare*. Stephen Greenblatt et al, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997) 1.3. 381-386. 2115.

formulation of his plot (“I ha’t”). Shakespeare’s metaphors of “engendered” (which means to “beget” or “procreate” as well as to “generate”) and “birth” links Iago’s mental conceiving of his plan to the alleged sexual activity between Cassio and Desdemona. His addressees are in this way directly implicated in the “monstrous birth” of the plot that will befall Othello. They are performatively brought into being - “engendered” - as knowing conspirators. Iago’s soliloquy is a speech act that produces both a plot and witnesses to the conception of the plot: the theatrical conspirators who are required to co-create that plot through their collective theatremaking act of viewing and hearing. Linguistically produced as conspirators, they proceed through the drama as knowing onlookers to Othello’s naivety and demise.<sup>97</sup>

Traces of the conspiratorial contract present in many Shakespearean soliloquies survive into contemporary monologue forms and performances. Monologue drama in Ireland between 1964 and 2016 often invites spectators to conspire with monologists to challenge hegemonies of gender, class and nationality. The ethical dimension of Shakespearean villains’ inveigling of audiences into their inner psychic landscapes and externally manifested plots is an aspect of soliloquy that may be seen in the work of McPherson and O’Rowe. In those latter monologues, speakers with dubious or non-existent ethical positions construct their audiences as companions on narrative journeys that embrace amoral criminal and even psychotic, sadistic behaviour. The singular actor/spectator bond, borne out of monologic direct address, forces spectators to confront their own moral standing on the many issues that the narratives provoke with the added urgency that the narrated scenes are occurring in their own imaginations.

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<sup>97</sup> Raymond Williams has also noted the soliloquy’s potential as a linguistic mode of self-revision: “The rhetorical form of speaking to the self as to another is . . . transformed when there is a new and strongly felt openness to the question of what the self might *become*, as distinct from what in received terms it is and must be.” (Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 146).

***“Fourth Wall Experiments”: Modernist Monologues***

There has been a rapid development in the dramaturgical deployment of the monologue form from the modernist period, ranging from plays maintaining fourth wall illusion to more radical usages which abandon all illusionist convention, calling attention to theatrical workings and destabilising representations of the unified self.

In Strindberg’s one-act play *The Stronger* (1889), Madame X, a married established actress, enters a ladies’ cafe and sits down with Mademoiselle Y (Amelia), a single actress who has recently broken off an engagement with her fiancé and who previously had an affair with Madame X’s husband, Bob. Madame X’s monologue shifts from a tone of contempt to feigned concern and pity for the young woman, showing her gifts she has bought for her husband and children and claiming that his infidelity with Amelia taught her how to love him. Strindberg uses monologue to stage power relations between the older and younger actress. He gives Madame X the power of speech and movement (Madame X enters and leaves the cafe) whilst confining Amelia to a sedentary position at the table, expressing not only a social, economic dominance but alluding metatheatrically to the hierarchy of the acting profession itself. Although Amelia laughs in response to Madame X’s displaying of the slippers she has purchased for her husband, she is denied language and movement. Madame X’s linguistic authority extends to interpreting Amelia’s silence: “But you - you only sit there, silent, calm, not caring – not caring whether it’s night or day, summer or winter, whether other people are happy or miserable – unable to hate and unable to love – motionless like a stork over a rat-hole!”<sup>98</sup> Her affair with Bob has strengthened his marriage with Madame X, not undermined it. *The Stronger* of the title and of the two women is Madame X; Strindberg’s play represents an early example of how monologue may be used to stage linguistic and visual authority.

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<sup>98</sup> August Strindberg, *Plays: Two*, Michael Meyer, trans., (London: Methuen, 1982), 25.

Eugene O'Neill made extensive use of monologue with the unreliable narratives of Brutus Jones in *The Emperor Jones* (1920), the lengthy asides in *Strange Interlude* (1928) and the Tyrone family's resort to expiatory monologues in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1940-41). Monologue was more dominant, however, in his one-act plays *Before Breakfast* (1917)<sup>99</sup> and *Hughie* (1941) although both of these works contained interlocutors that rationalised the monologues.<sup>100</sup> The latter two plays have realist sets, a defined time and an indicated interlocutor (either on or off stage) and remain within a mimetic representational mode. The actor is impersonating a character delivering a monologue in a manner which has been justified by the circumstances of the play.

*Hughie*, one of O'Neill's later works and his last one-act play, places two forms of monologue in dialogue with one another. "Erie" Smith, a Broadway gambler and hustler, enters a down-market hotel lobby in New York's midtown, in the early hours of a summer's morning in 1928. He engages Charlie Hughes, the night clerk, in conversation, telling him of his friendship with the deceased former night clerk Hughie, whose recent death has seemingly marked a halt to Erie's fortunes. O'Neill juxtaposes the spoken monologues of Erie with the interior monologue of Hughes, who has more interest in sitting down again and listening to the sounds of the city outside than in Erie's narrative. Hughes' imaginative wanderings, however, are present in the stage directions but not uttered in performance. When Erie

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<sup>99</sup> In Eugene O'Neill's *Before Breakfast* (1917), Mrs. Rowland is moving around the flat she shares with her husband Alfred, occasionally talking to him directly, but mostly talking to herself. Alfred is in the bedroom (off-stage) and unseen to the audience, and never responds to Mrs. Rowland (or if he does, his response is neither visible nor audible to the audience). The fourth wall thus remains intact as Mrs. Rowland is not directly addressing the audience, only herself and her husband.

<sup>100</sup> The fourth wall method of monologue drama persists to the present time in Irish drama. Eoin Colfer's *My Real Life* (2017) features Noel, a Wexford man, who records a taped message for his friend. The ensuing monologue is in fact a suicide message, as Noel takes various medications from vials on the table to his left. Noel reflects on his debilitating illness and the breakdown of his relationship with his former partner Rosie. The play features a dream sequence when Noel dreams that his illness has magically disappeared and then proceeds to sing and dance. When he wakes up, he is again seated in his chair. The taped suicide message is a framing device for the monologue. Actor Don Wycherley sometimes addresses the tape recorder. (Eoin Colfer, *My Real Life*, perf. Don Wycherley. Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. 23 Feb. 2017).

concludes a monologue and abruptly asks Hughes, “How d’you and your Little Woman hit it off, Brother?”, the stage directions for the night clerks’ response indicate “*His mind has been counting the footfalls of the cop on the beat as they recede, sauntering longingly toward the dawn’s release. ‘If he’d only shoot it out with a gunman some night! Nothing exciting has happened in any night I’ve ever lived through!’ He stammers gropingly among the echoes of Erie’s last words*” followed by the voiced response of “Oh, you mean *my* wife? We get along fine, I guess.”<sup>101</sup> The appearance of dialogue between the two men is effectively two monologues, connected occasionally only by meaningless exchanges, that only develop into dialogue towards the end of the play when Hughes asks Erie about Arnold Rothstein, a well-known gambler. O’Neill brings together two monologic styles: storytelling and stream-of-consciousness – and although spectators do not hear the inner monologue of the night clerk, his disconnected lethargy must be evident in performance, supported by O’Neill’s elaborate stage directions. Despite Hughes’ brief monologues remaining unuttered, *Hughie* anticipates dual monologues in the Irish canon, such as *Eden* (2001) and *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007).

Strindberg and O’Neill, and later Williams and Albee, experimented with monologic modes of drama, chiefly in naturalistic settings, but Beckett’s use of the form proved to be a radical development in its lineage. Beckett used monologue to explore themes of loneliness, isolation, failure of communication (*Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958), *A Piece of Monologue* (1980) and *Rockaby* (1981)), the reliance upon speech and narrative to continually self-constitute (*Happy Days* (1961)) and the speaking subject alienated from the act of speech itself (*Not I* (1972)). Mouth in *Not I* appears divorced from her own logorrheic deluge: “words were coming . . . imagine! . . . words were coming . . . a voice she did not recognise . . . at first . . . so long since it had sounded . . . then finally had to admit . . . could be no other . . . than her own.”<sup>102</sup> Beckett destabilises a coherent autonomous link between speakers and the

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<sup>101</sup> Eugene O’Neill, *The Later Plays of Eugene O’Neill*, Travis Bogard, ed. (New York: Random House, 1967), 279.

<sup>102</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 379.

language they utter. One of the key formal developments that came with the Beckettian theatrical monologue was that monologue had come to supplant dialogic modes of representation. Given the depth and range of existing scholarship on Beckett's monologues and the corresponding deficit in other areas of contemporary Irish monologue drama, I have opted to focus on works that have received less critical attention.

***“Usurping Dialogue”: Monologue as Drama***

The evolution of monologue drama since the modernist period has moved it from theatrical device to a distinct dramatic category, often with political inflection. “Monologue”, apart from designating a speech within a play now also commonly describes a dramatic composition in itself, where the monologue constitutes the whole play. From Greek tragedy onwards, dramatic theatre has accommodated monologic content within a dialogic framework, which exists in dialectic with the dialogic scenes of those plays. Hamlet's and Lear's soliloquies, for example, set up a contrast between the inner workings of the protagonists' minds and the events occurring around them. The monologue's expression of interiority greatly extends the scale and depth of the action and how spectators interpret it; at the end of the second scene in *King Henry IV Part One*, for example, Prince Hal's soliloquy signalling his intent to self-reform manifests in the physical enactment of Hal's slaying of Hotspur in Act V, Scene 4. The action in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* moves from the narrated action of Tom's solitary reflections, speaking from an undefined point in time and space, to embodied on-stage action in the Wingfield apartment. Alfieri in Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* has a similar dual theatrical function – fulfilling a role in the onstage action, but also reflecting in hindsight on the tragic events leading up to the death of Eddie Carbone. The function of monologue in the above examples, then, is to offer a counterpoint to enacted onstage events and enrich the psychological complexity of the work.

Apart from breach of fourth wall illusionist representation, the movement from monologue within a play to monologue constituting a play is also highly significant in that monologue is removed

from a dialectical relationship with dialogic scenes and instead tasked with narrating the play in a diegetic mode. Eamonn Jordan refers to the differing functions of monologue as, firstly, part of a dialogic play, and secondly, a play in itself: “If *Friel’s Philadelphia, Here I Come* (1964) captures the tensions between public and private, the socialized and inhibited public persona and the radical, subversive internal voice, the monologue seems to be a way in part of closing down that dialectic, as if monologue meshes the private and public inextricably.”<sup>103</sup> The “closing down” of the monologue/dialogue dialectic shifts the role and function of monologue from a mode that merely has to complement dialogue to one that is burdened with the task of representing the whole drama via narrated action. The change from embodied action to narrated action necessitates a narrational structure and aesthetic that will compensate for the absence of embodied action, with a resultant emphasis on the narration of detailed, evocative events to facilitate the audience’s comprehension of those events, and on the performative abilities of the story-teller to conjure the narrated world.<sup>104</sup> It also relies on the imaginative input of spectators to the point that, in Mark O’Rowe’s words, they become the “second character”: “The drama in traditional theatre occurs between the characters on stage, the drama in the monologue play occurs between the performer and the audience, and so the audience needs to commit to being the second character, the listener. If they don’t, it’s not going to work.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Eamonn Jordan, “Look Who’s Talking Too”, *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, Ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 133.

<sup>104</sup> Occasionally, monologue performance pieces rely on audience participation. *Oliver Reed: Wild Thing* (2012) by Mike Davis and Rob Crouch, a biographical monologue performed by Crouch, includes a passage in which spectators are invited to take part in a scene with Reed (the re-enactment of Reed’s appearance on an American TV chat show in which one of the other guests throws a glass of water in his face).

<sup>105</sup> Mark O’Rowe in “A Tallaght of the Mind: In Conversation with Mark O’Rowe”, *Sullied Magnificence: The Theatre of Mark O’Rowe*, Sara Keating and Emma Creedon, eds., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 151.

***Performance Art, Spalding Gray and the Unknowable Self***

Although deviating slightly from my chosen area of monologue drama, a consideration of monologue performance within the realm of performance art may helpfully contextualise monologue in its dramatic form. If monologue drama causes dialogic dramatic theatre to reflect on its own boundaries (as manifested, for example, in negative reviews of monologue plays that question the dramatic status of the monologue form) performance art's relationship to monologue dramatic performance may in turn highlight the borders between these two categories.

Performance art originated in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States as part of a wider counter-cultural movement driven by second wave feminism, protests against American involvement in the Vietnam War and disenchantment with post-Kennedy political corruption and inertia. Its emphasis on presentation over representation, its focus on recuperating and exploring everyday activities and its radical performance practice of abandoning scripts and archiving sets it apart from conventional dramatic representation. Performance art and monologue drama share concerns such as the social and discursive construction of the self, a singular relationship with spectators and a focus on the performing body. However, performance art's more overt political posture renders the relatively conservative form of monologue drama less obvious as a political form - conditions in which hegemonic norms may go unregistered.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Monologue drama may be viewed as relatively conservative when placed within a broader genre of monologue performance: political performance pieces, stand-up comedy, autobiographical performance and performance art. Monologue drama retains a fictional referential element separating it from these other categories of monologue. In addition to the issue of referentiality, some monologue performance categories are explicitly political in their stance. Spectators' expectations and reception of these performances are therefore at least partially predetermined; they are consequently more alert to overt mechanisms to posit polemical and rhetorical statements. They are not positioned to identify unregistered performative workings in these monologues because the political content is already explicit.

The political content of monologue drama on the other hand is less marked. Monologue drama is less likely to attract political readings due to its own referentiality and situation within an aesthetic framework - performative norms are stealthily smuggled in through performed fictional characters, resembling coherent subjects. It may be that the overt political monologic posturing of stand-up, solo political performance pieces and performance art is



Autobiographical performance emerged strongly out of this movement with the work of Spalding Gray, Laurie Anderson, Guillermo Gomez Pena, Karen Finley, and Tim Miller and in the United Kingdom with Bobby Baker.<sup>107</sup> The work of Spalding Gray, who died in 2004, poses intriguing questions about the limits separating performer from performance, authenticity from fiction. His props are, famously, a glass of water, a notepad and a microphone. Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia* (1985) - about his experience filming *The Killing Fields* (1984), the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the Cold War - was made into a film, as were other notable monologues *Monster in a Box* (1991) and *Gray's Anatomy* (1994). A founder in 1980 of the Wooster Group, which had grown out of Schechner's The Performance Group, Gray worked primarily in experimental theatre but also in mainstream films. His monologue performances are largely improvised, with only some key notes in his notebook; he self-consciously pursues experiences that will provide material for his monologues. Gray's monologues perpetually hold attempts to locate him at bay – in postmodern fashion, his work resists the more stable actor/character ontological category that monologue drama provides. Instead, Gray's monologues position him in dialogue with various other iterations of Gray – the private citizen, the writer and experimentalist, the supporting actor in movies – so that Gray is finally unknowable and what remains is a series of fictional constructs of Gray. Philip Auslander remarks that: "Even though Gray is ostensibly present before us in his own person, we get the sense that the figure we are seeing is the performance persona Spalding

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the monologic store-front masking the real proliferation of norms within monologue drama, hence making it a fruitful object of enquiry.

<sup>107</sup> Geraldine Harris, commenting on performance art in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s and drawing on both Derrida and Butler, theorises a "hiatus in iterability", a resignificatory space in which dominant performatives may be undone and reworked. She uses the example of performance artist Bobby Baker, and the gap between the historical performer Bobby Baker and her adopted stage persona, as a productive resignificatory space. (Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 1999), 25).

The "hiatus in iterability" in terms of monologue drama may correspondingly be the space between represented cultural norms and their reworking through theatrical performance.

Gray, which is caught up in a complex and reversible relationship with the performer Spalding Gray.”<sup>108</sup>

The vein of autobiographical performance for which Gray and other performance artists became renowned in the United States does not have a comparable movement in contemporary Irish monologue performance, although writer/performers such as Pat Kinevane, Mannix Flynn and Sonya Kelly have used autobiographical material in their works to highlight social problems such as drug abuse, homelessness, same sex marriage equality and institutional child sex and physical abuse. The fictional/autobiographical boundaries in these monologues, however, are marked in a way that does not produce the layered ontological complexity that Gray’s monologues generate.

Monologue drama invokes its performative authority from the practice and institutions of drama since classical times, and more specifically, from monologic forms of drama, either in the form of monologue dramas or in the form of monologues within plays that feature both mimetic and diegetic action. If Butler contends that gender is constituted through “a stylized repetition of acts”,<sup>109</sup> the theatrical speaking subject may be said to be constituted through the repetition/citation of theatrical and other performative conventions. Monologue drama becomes *intelligible* to spectators through a citational matrix of theatrical conventions<sup>110</sup> (messenger speeches, soliloquy), non-theatrical monologue performance genres (the Irish oral tradition, performance art, stand-up comedy) and the broader sphere of real-world monologue performance (lectures, religious sermons, political speeches). All are citable within a performative monologic citational chain and are reinforced through spectatorial uptake.

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<sup>108</sup> Philip Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 81.

<sup>109</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 191.

<sup>110</sup> Eli Rozik notes that theatrical conventions are indispensable from theatrical performance: “theatre cannot do without stage conventions, unless it relinquishes the purpose of fully describing fictional worlds. Even naturalist drama disguises but not disposes of them” (Eli Rozik, *Generating Theatre Meaning* (Eastbourne: Sussex University Press, 2008) 68).

The theatre’s reliance upon conventions, including monologic conventions, ensures their continued intelligibility.

### ***Ireland's Monologue Explosion***

Monologue drama and performance came to prominence in Ireland in the 1990s and 2000s, following the earlier monologue works of Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel in the 1970s, and drawing from the country's oral tradition, other genres of monologue performance and an increasingly liberal national discursive environment.

Up until the 1990s, monologue plays in Ireland were most often produced as one-act plays and frequently assigned to lunchtime or late night time slots. Monologue plays also continue to be presented as part of a group of two or more monologue plays, centred on a single theme, such as Passion Machine's *Songs of the Reaper* programme in 1995 or Fishamble's Y2K Festival<sup>111</sup> in Dublin in 2000. Their relatively short duration (generally shorter than one hour) allowed for this flexibility. From the early 1990s onwards, monologue plays are seen to move in from the periphery of the one-act form and are more frequently being produced as full-length plays performed at the conventional starting time of 8:00pm. The shift may not solely be attributed to practical time considerations: the trend also arguably signals a growing acceptance by theatre practitioners, critics and audiences of monologue drama's aesthetic validity as a full-length dramatic form. Apart from monologue drama, which may be subdivided into different categories, there has been a notable rise in biographical and autobiographical performance.

Biographical performance has grown significantly as a category within monologue performance in Ireland. *The Importance of Being Oscar* (1960) by Micheál Mac Liammóir was a notable international success, which had its premiere in the Gate Theatre in 1960 but which toured internationally during the

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<sup>111</sup> The Y2K Festival, produced by Fishamble Theatre Company between 7<sup>th</sup> February and 4<sup>th</sup> March 2000 in the City Arts Centre, Civic Theatre, Tallaght and The Crypt, Dublin Castle, featured three single monologue plays (*The Great Jubilee* by Nicholas Kelly, *Doomraider* by Gavin Kostick and *Moonlight and Music* by Jennifer Johnston) amongst a total of six 40-minute plays.

1960s.<sup>112</sup> Biographical performances of this type may be described as solo entertainment pieces often depicting famous writers within elaborate sets and incorporating recitations from the work of that writer. The commercial appeal and motivations for such entertainments lie in their offer of encounters with the works and lives of celebrated authors who are represented in their own living and working environments. The aesthetics of these solo pieces are realist impersonations of the authors, aiming to provide an authentic experience for spectators in which there is an oscillation between recited work and direct address between performer and spectator. The monologues seek to move away from published works as art objects and represent the process of writing, illuminating famous works as lived and living.<sup>113</sup> Although the dominant form within this category is the literary biographical monologue,<sup>114</sup> other biographical performance pieces such as *Hurricane* (2002), about the life of Alex Higgins, performed by Richard Dormer and *Tom Crean: Antarctic Explorer* (2003) performed by Aidan Dooley,<sup>115</sup> represent the subject performing their famed sport or activity.

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<sup>112</sup> It was revived in 1997 in the Savoy Theatre with Simon Callow playing Wilde.

<sup>113</sup> Famous Irish writers have provided the subjects for several biographical monologues. James Joyce has been represented in *Joycemen* (1980) and *Joyicity* (1989); Brendan Behan in *Brendan* (1977); Flann O'Brien in *Flann's Yer Only Man* (2011); Jonathan Swift in *Mr Gulliver's Bags* (1984); W.B. Yeats in *I Am of Ireland* (1988) performed by Bosco Hogan; Patrick Kavanagh in *The Heart Laid Bare* (1990) and *Patrick Kavanagh: A Life* (2014); Lady Gregory in *Lady G* (1987); George Bernard Shaw in *My Astonishing Self* (1976) and *My Fair Ladies* (2015); and Samuel Beckett in *I'll Go On* (1985) performed by Barry McGovern. *Strolling Through Ulysses* (2012) performed by Robert Gogan, is a one-man-show containing extracts from Joyce's *Ulysses*. Phelim Drew performed the role of George Orwell in his adaptation of Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (2015). Examples of other biographical monologues staged in Ireland are *Dickens*, performed by Simon Callow.

<sup>114</sup> Closely related to this form are stage adaptations of literary works, in which a character in the adapted novel is performed, and not the author. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (Corn Exchange, 2014) is based on the novel of the same name by Eimear McBride and garnered critical acclaim for the performance of Aoife Duffin.

<sup>115</sup> Other non-literary figures have featured in biographical monologues such as pirate queen Grace O'Malley in *A Most Notorious Woman* (1995); west Belfast priest and community activist Des Wilson in *Des* (2000); Radio chat show host Gerry Ryan in *Lambo* (2014); and Josephine de Beauharnais, first Empress of France, in *Josephine in the Night* (1988). Performer Lynda Radley mixed biographical and autobiographical elements in *The Art of Swimming* (2006) about Mercedes Gleitze (the first English woman to swim the English Channel), and Eamonn Morrissey adopted the same approach in his monologue *Maeve's House* (2013) about the New York Times columnist Maeve Brennan and his own personal interaction with her.

The political, socio-economic and cultural context of the 1990s and 2000s in Ireland does not provide any telling clues for the sharp rise in productions of monologue plays during this period, a phenomenon that does not appear to have been replicated in other major western theatre-producing countries. The traditional pillars of Governmental, institutional and clerical authority were nonetheless gradually being eroded, realigning and ultimately abolishing the limits of the speakable for marginalised groups. The discourse of the theatre and monologue drama was one of many cultural arenas being shaped by these developments.

A growing demand for political accountability and transparency in the post-Haughey era led to the setting up of tribunals to investigate allegations of political corruption. The Freedom of Information Act (1997) also placed Government decision-making under scrutiny, allowing citizens access to previously unattainable Government records. The Catholic Church was also waning in its influence during this period, with the Bishop Eamonn Casey scandal coming to light in 1992. Media coverage of the topic of clerical child sex abuse, which had been extensive since the early 1990s, reached a critical point when RTE broadcast its documentary series *States of Fear* (1999), which exposed institutional abuse perpetrated on residents of industrial schools. Cases of child sex abuse in the Ferns diocese and other locations further highlighted the horrors. Both the Ryan Report (2009)<sup>116</sup> and the Murphy Report (2009)<sup>117</sup> have exposed significant levels of physical and sexual abuse, perpetrated by those who were entrusted with the care of adults and children. A report into State involvement with Magdalen Laundries was published in 2013, broadening the spotlight to include collusion of State bodies in the detention of women inside the laundries. The culture of institutional silence and policies of non-disclosure by hospitals in the face of potential legal claims, have engendered a counter-discourse which sought to hold

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<sup>116</sup> The Ryan Report investigated physical and sexual abuse of residents of industrial schools controlled by Catholic religious institutions.

<sup>117</sup> The Murphy Report examined child sex abuse allegations in the Catholic archdiocese of Dublin.

State institutions to account. This discourse found expression in fora such as investigative journalism within the mainstream print media, RTE's *The Late Late Show*, the *Gerry Ryan Show* and *Liveline*, hosted by Joe Duffy; and from the late 1990s onwards, on on-line versions of national newspapers and various niche websites' discussion fora, blog spots and message boards. Monologic expression can be seen to originate in public arena which denied and suppressed speakability and which instead found voice in cultural spaces of the city in which "impossible speech" which challenged official narratives could be enunciated.

The growth of Irish monologue drama has attracted commentary on how global capitalism and various technological advances have shaped the daily experiences of Irish citizens,<sup>118</sup> curtailing time spent in communal settings,<sup>119</sup> and how this change in the social, or anti-social habits of citizens, may have been reflected in the prodigious output of monologue plays.<sup>120</sup> However, a more direct economic

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<sup>118</sup> Patrick Lonergan comments that "it seems significant that such a large number of narratives about isolated individuals appeared when individualization was becoming a powerful force throughout the West" and notes "the increased influence of cultural products that need to be consumed individually rather than communally, such as the internet, video games, digital television, and so on" (Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 184).

<sup>119</sup> Eamonn Jordan says that "contemporary plays have emerged from a youth culture in the 1980s and early 1990s that was more likely to spend less time in contact with their families, friends, or communities than previous generations. Smaller family units, single siblings to rooms, a high incidence of chat/confessional radio show formats, access to television, music and video games in the rooms of teenagers, led to a sort of headphone/headset, room-alone, media-saturated generation . . . this was before internet, chat rooms, mobile phones, and texting" (Eamonn Jordan, "Look Who's Talking Too", *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, Ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 132).

<sup>120</sup> Aoife McGrath contrasts monologue drama of the 1990s with dance theatre of the same period, "in which marginalised corporealities were beginning to achieve political agency" (Aoife McGrath, *Dance Theatre in Ireland: Revolutionary Moves*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 10). McGrath observes that:

On the one hand dance theatre practitioners created vibrant choreographies of dancing, singing, speaking bodies, brimful of movement, dialogue and dispute, and on the other hand, the monologue dramatists produced plays for still, lone bodies (or two/three bodies that did not interact) in dialogue with themselves, on typically empty stages. The dance theatre works challenged the dominance of the word with articulate, moving bodies, while, at times, the monologue playwrights seemed to want to enshrine a disembodied word. It could then be viewed, curiously, as a faithful representation of the corporeality

impact on theatre production in Ireland does not explain the rise of the monologue form. There is no evidence of a correlation between the trend and a corresponding reduction in Arts Council funding. The Arts Council's budget for drama jumped from €8,660,000 in 1997 to €12,608,000 in 2001, the peak of the monologue trend. This figure represented 26.2% of the entire Arts Council budget for 2001. Dance received €2,007,000 (4.2% of the budget) in that year, with opera receiving €2,784,000 (5.8%). The Abbey Theatre received a total grant of €4,983,300 for 2001.<sup>121</sup> However, the monologue play clearly holds an appeal for producers operating with limited budgets and presents other logistical benefits, e.g. touring the play with just a single cast member and often with very few props.<sup>122</sup> Economic considerations may also be the imperative for writing a monologue play in the first instance.<sup>123</sup>

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created and maintained by the status quo in Ireland: a mind separated from its troublesome body. (Idem, 11).

<sup>121</sup> The Arts Council of Ireland, *Annual Report, 2001*, (Dublin: Arts Council of Ireland, 2002), 45.

<sup>122</sup> Donal O'Kelly's highly successful *Catalpa: The Movie* (1995) is the dramatisation of a screenplay that failed to be produced. With only a few props, O'Kelly parodies the Hollywood film industry whilst demonstrating the economic viability of monologue production.

<sup>123</sup> In an interview about her play *Pumpgirl*, Abbie Spallen complains "Oh how, oh how I wish people would stop bleating on about monologues, (. . .) I know why I wrote one... because it was cheap and I had no money and no investment from any source and a ridiculous thing called a credit card from some very stupid bank on which I was going to fund a production." (David Lewis, "Theatre Review: Pumpgirl". [www.culturenorthernireland.org/reviews/performing-arts/pumpgirl](http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/reviews/performing-arts/pumpgirl). 04 Sep 2008. Date accessed: 31 Dec 2016).

Spallen's reference to the inexpensive production costs for monologue plays are echoed in Jennifer Johnston's account of how she came to write *Moonlight and Music* for the Y2K Festival in 2000 – "I was invited by Jim Culleton to write a short play for a millennium season of short plays. 'Cheap,' I was told. You can't get much cheaper than one person! So I sat down and tried and gradually this poor, sad, hard-drinking woman came into my head" (Jennifer Johnston, *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) xi).

Conor Mullen recalls how Conor McPherson approached him in a pub in 1995 with a script of *This Lime Tree Bower* and offered him the part of Ray, but for no money. (Ronan Farren, "From telephone to theatre to silver screen", *Irish Independent*, 24 Sep. 2000).

***“Am I Talking to Myself?” - A Suspect Form***

I have described a genealogy of dramatic monologue conventions from Greek drama to the present day. The citation of monologue convention allows for a legitimate deployment of those conventions given their previous usage. J.L. Austin divided what he termed “misinvocations”, a subset of “misfires”, into two sub-categories, the first of which states that “there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances . . .”<sup>124</sup> I want to examine in Austinian and Butlerian terms the anxiety created as a result of the rise of monologue drama during the 1990s and 2000s. If the accepted theatrical conventional procedure has been misinvoked – the monologue’s *constitution* of a whole drama instead of its *function as a part* of a play – it nonetheless produces effects: “This does not mean, of course, to say that we won’t have done anything: lots of things will have been done . . . but we shall *not* have done the purported act . . . Further, ‘without effect’ does not here mean ‘without consequences, results, effects.’”<sup>125</sup> The glut of monologue plays during this period was a productive misinvocation that reconfigured dramaturgical norms in Irish theatremaking practice.

An unease amongst critics, scholars and some playwrights gained force during the spate of monologue plays during the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>126</sup> Newspaper articles by Brian Singleton and Fintan

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<sup>124</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 14. The second sub-category, which Austin terms “misapplications” requires that “the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked” (idem, 15).

<sup>125</sup> Idem, 17.

<sup>126</sup> The discourse provoked by the rise in monologue drama recalls earlier assessments of the monologue form by Hegel and Bakhtin. Hegel’s succinct comments on the monologue recognise the function of monologue within an overall dramatic framework but assigns it a “right place”:

In the *monologue*, on the other hand, it is the isolated individual who, in a given situation of the action, becomes objective on his own account. Monologues are, therefore, dramatically in their right place at those moments chiefly when the emotional life is entirely self-concentrated as the result of previous events; when it sums up, as it were, the nature of the cleft between itself and others, or its own spiritual



O'Toole, and an interview with Marina Carr, as well as the defence of the form by some writers, helped to bring into question the dramatic credentials of the monologue dramatic form and revealed an anxiety about the prevalence of the form on playwriting practice. Singleton, commenting on McPherson's *Port Authority* (2001) Eugene O'Brien's *Eden* (2001) and Neil LaBute's *bash* trilogy, and the monologue dramatic form in general, observed that they "reveal an anxiety about theatre as a medium for communication" and that "it is an almost embryonic form of writing, as indeed in most playwriting courses the first exercise for writers is to write monologues in order to get to know their characters better."<sup>127</sup> David Nowlan, who was chief theatre critic of the *Irish Times* for many years and a dominant

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division; or when it arrives at some sudden decision, or comes to the final point of resolve on matters already long debated. (Hegel, *Hegel on Tragedy*, eds. Anne and Henry Paolucci (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 20).

After considering choral interlude, monologue and dialogue, Hegel concludes that dialogue is the "complete form of the drama" as dramatic characters are "mutually able to express their character and aims" and "engage in conflict, and thereby actually advance the movement of the action" (idem).

Mikhail Bakhtin famously criticised monologic expression and instead praised what he viewed as the dialogic, polyphonic qualities of Dostoyevsky's novels. Strangely, Bakhtin attributed the monologic mode to drama:

In drama, of course, this monologic framework does not find direct verbal expression, but precisely in drama is it especially monolithic. The rejoinders in a dramatic dialogue do not rip apart the represented world, do not make it multi-leveled; on the contrary, if they are to be authentically dramatic, these rejoinders necessitate the utmost monolithic unity of that world. In drama the world must be made from a single piece. Any weakening of this monolithic quality leads to a weakening of dramatic effect. The characters come together dialogically in the unified field of vision of author, director, and audience, against the clearly defined background of a single-tiered world. (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 17).

Bakhtin's comments are significant if applied to the monologue dramatic form, which may have represented for Bakhtin the monologic form *par excellence*, given the presence of a solitary performer onstage, and a form in which the roles of writer, director and even performer are frequently conflated.

<sup>127</sup> Brian Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself?" *Irish Times*. 19 Apr 2001. Singleton also comments that "the variables of the directing process are thus dispatched from the stage as this becomes a writing-and-acting exercise. It also points to an attempt to turn theatre into a purely literary medium; since relatively little happens on the stage, the focus is on the writer's storytelling abilities, and the actor's ability to serve the writing".

voice in theatre criticism in Ireland from the 1970s to the 2000s, described Eugene O'Brien's *Eden* as "not so much a play as a pair of interwoven monologues."<sup>128</sup>

Monologue drama typically strays from theatrical convention, encountering and interacting with other genres such as the poetic sub-genre of dramatic monologue, stream-of-consciousness passages in fiction, and radio drama. Fintan O'Toole commented that Paul Kennedy's monologue play *Love in Dublin* (2011), produced in the Focus Theatre, Dublin, "could just as easily be short stories" and claimed that "the regrettable rise of the monologue in Irish theatre has created a tacit pact between theatre companies and new writers. If you stick to monologues or two-handers (a) we don't have to risk a lot of money and (b) you don't have to undertake the messy, awkward, high-risk business of large-scale dramatic conflict."<sup>129</sup> O'Toole has also said that "the monologue really limits ambition."<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>128</sup> David Nowlan, "Eden: Peacock Theatre". Rev. of "Eden" by Eugene O'Brien. *Irish Times* 26 Jan. 2001.

<sup>129</sup> Fintan O'Toole, "Theatre's Regrettable New Rule: Keep It Simple, Stupid". Arts Commentary. *Irish Times* 12 Mar. 2011.

<sup>130</sup> In conversation with Fiac Mac Conghail, O'Toole commented: "Young playwrights like Conor McPherson and Mark O'Rowe who emerged in the boom years knew that if they tried to compete directly with the glitz and glamour of the big dance shows, they were bound to lose so they went in the opposite direction towards small, quiet, poetic plays with tiny casts, sometimes with just one actor performing a monologue. I could understand why they chose to do this and I could admire their great skill with language but I missed the ambition, the daring, the sheer scale of the plays I had grown up with. I felt a bit like someone with a craving for the red meat of big theatre being fed beautifully cooked morsels of tasteful drama."

Mac Conghail responded, saying: "Get over it, right. It's not about that. What you're actually assuming is you're trying to work on a thesis and force different artists into that thesis. There was a different movement then. They've come out of a different sensibility. They've come out of a different Ireland than perhaps you've come out of." (Fintan O'Toole, writ. "Fintan O'Toole: Power Plays". *Arts Lives*. 2011 Series: Programme 2. Dir. Sinéad O'Brien. RTE, Dublin. 07 June 2011).

Elsewhere, O'Toole has offered a different theory regarding the rise of the monologue form within Irish theatre: "The rise of the monologue relates, in part, to the decline of traditional Ireland. When it was alive and kicking, the struggle between tradition and modernity was the stuff of epic drama. When the struggle was over, there was no drama any more, just a valedictory voice recording its receding presence from the edge of the grave." However, O'Toole, writing in 2002, and comparing the 1991 production of the monologue play *John Hughdy/Tom John* with its revised 2002 version entitled *On the Way Out*, says that the monologue form is no longer novel: "The monologue has become a leash that constrains Irish theatre. *On the Way Out* shows all the limitations that have become so obvious: the smallness, the absence of a feeling that we are, as an audience, embarking on a voyage of

perceived formal arbitrariness, noted by critics in many reviews of monologue plays, elicits critical reactions that focus on appropriateness of form, whilst distracting from the content.

There has been a limited but growing body of female-authored monologue drama about women since 1964, but the most prominent Irish woman playwright of her generation, Marina Carr, is conspicuous in her avoidance of the form. Carr displays an anxiety about the form and its dramatic credentials, questioning the challenge posed by writing monologue plays.<sup>131</sup> Monologue plays are “intrinsically undramatic” and “easy to write” enabling an indulgence of a “literary sensibility”. She completes her disavowal of the form through an assertion of theatre’s dramatic values – theatre “is about the spoken word and conflict. It is about people bouncing off of one another.”<sup>132</sup> Carr’s difficulties with the form appear to be aesthetic, rather than political. The female protagonists of her plays find themselves positioned within patriarchal hegemonies and compelled to challenge and disrupt them, often with tragic consequences. In particular, Hester Swane’s claim on Carthage Kilbride in *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) and her disruption of his wedding through the wearing of a wedding dress is an attempt at a performative reworking of the marriage ceremony (rich with performative resonance following Austin’s seminal example) and its attendant norms.

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discovery, the sense that too little is at stake.” (Fintan O’Toole, “Reviews”. Rev. of “On the Way Out” by Vincent Woods, *Irish Times* 05 Sep. 2002).

<sup>131</sup> The monologue play has its champions amongst playwrights also. Sebastian Barry, when discussing the work of Conor McPherson, refers to the same anxiety that accompanies the form:

Conor McPherson’s early plays built a theatre of complete intimacy and human surprise out of actors talking directly to the audience. The disquiet sometimes voiced about monologue, as if it were a suspect form, or an ‘easy option’, does not tally with the experience of witnessing a McPherson monologue. Every play is impossible to write until it suddenly breaks from cover, and monologue or dialogue, it makes no difference to the challenge and the difficulty. What the playwright gets in honesty and clarity is the dog he must bring to the races. (Sebastian Barry, “McPherson’s Magic Elixir” in *The Seafarer by Conor McPherson (Play Programme)*, (London: National Theatre, 2006), 6).

<sup>132</sup> Lillian Chambers, ed. *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2001) 61.

For Carr, performative re-enactments are bodily encounters with the Other, and not isolated performances of autonomy.<sup>133</sup>

The unease and scepticism with which the emergence of monologue plays was greeted by scholars, journalists and playwrights continued a long history of anxieties with the form.<sup>134</sup> The remarkable increase in numbers of monologue plays being produced and the dramaturgical re-evaluations and reflections they engendered within the theatre industry are reasons that Irish monologue drama ought to form an area of academic concern and enquiry. Monologue, in my reading, is generated either out of a failure or denial of equitable dialogue, and occurs in a post-dialogic time and space, enabling direct address to spectators who may performatively collaborate in the reworking of regulatory norms. The dissertation will not attempt a deconstructive project of attributing a greater value to monologue and restore to it parity or even grant it superiority in a monologue/dialogue binary, in which dialogue has been traditionally pre-eminent. Both monologic and dialogic dramatic forms are capable of radically subverting political and cultural norms – my focus will be on how monologue drama either succeeds or fails in doing this.

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<sup>133</sup> Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006), the only play in her canon that may have been presented in monologue form, features primarily Woman's dialogue with Scarecrow, a personification of Woman's own spirit but an eternal spirit that may attach itself to other bodies upon Woman's demise. Despite Scarecrow's ability to seemingly perform physical actions, such as turning on the CD player, opening the wardrobe or serving wine, she and Woman represent parts of the same person and Scarecrow is invisible to other characters. Woman's interaction with Scarecrow is of course dialogic, but within the reality of the play, she is effectively speaking to herself, as Him's bewildered reactions to the instances in which Woman addresses Scarecrow attest. Carr's use of this device, which recalls in some respects Friel's use of *Gar Public and Private* in *Philadelphia Here I Come!* seems to confirm her aversion of the monologue format, as evidenced in her quote above. She opts for Woman and Scarecrow conflicting and "bouncing off one another" over Woman monologising.

<sup>134</sup> For example, Michael Holquist observes that "Bakhtin . . . conceives monologue as not only secondary in importance to dialogue, but as having a different ontological status. Dialogue is real, monologue is not; at worst, monologue is an illusion, as when it is uncritically taken for granted." (Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 58-59).

***Monologue in Performance: Production, Reception and Orientations***

Monologue performance presents a narrating subject commanding spectators' attention. However, unlike mimetic realistic frames of representation, the spectator relies on the narrating actor to comprehend the narrative. The "drama" in monologue lies in the disjunctures between the performer's speaking body and the spoken word, as opposed to the drama of dialogic intersubjective interaction, which generates an externalised dramatic conflict. Spectators' visual attention is drawn to the mouth, face, arms, hands and bodily elements that support delivery of the narrative. The other constituents of theatrical production - set, costume, lighting, audio – are frequently minimised in monologue productions to allow for close attention to the aural and visual presence of the speaker. Monologue drama therefore insists upon a focus upon the body, when conventional dialogic drama offers a more democratic panorama of the onstage action, i.e. spectators may direct their gaze at both speaking and silent characters. The compulsory visual focus on the monologist collapses the gaze onto one speaking body which is visually dominant by virtue of its status as sole body and speaker; the intersubjective space of dialogic drama is removed. The insistence on looking at and hearing a sole speaker, which brings it closer to the visual politics of film where the camera dictates the spectators' view, necessarily raises political considerations of how and to whom the narratives are being addressed and the empathy or discord that the monologues will produce amongst different audiences.

Sara Ahmed, in her reading of Husserl, has spoken of the towardness and directionality that bodies have to objects and spaces: "the objects that we direct our attention toward reveal the direction we have taken in life. Other objects, and indeed spaces, are relegated to the background; they are only ever co-perceived."<sup>135</sup> She goes on to say, paraphrasing Husserl, that phenomenology must put aside "what is made available by ordinary perception" and that phenomenology must see familiar objects

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<sup>135</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 32.

“‘without’ the natural attitude.”<sup>136</sup> The mandatory viewing of the speaker in monologue drama defamiliarises the spectacle of that body because with no sources of alternative ocular interest, it cannot be relegated to the background. The experience of viewing and hearing the actor cannot be considered the “natural attitude” as we are forced to undertake this over a set period of time within the specific conditions of theatrical performance.

The performer’s corporeal autonomy includes a bodily domination of space, in which the presence of other characters may be implied.<sup>137</sup> As actors in monologues have no onstage interlocutors, they may autonomously produce other characters and objects through bodily posture, position and attitude. Where other characters are not implied by the lone performer in this manner, spectators fulfil the role of interlocutor themselves, intensifying the performer/spectator interaction.

The process of subject formation visible on stage is mirrored by subject formations of spectators, whose subjectivities are formed through the work of narrative constructions by their own culturally determined imaginations.<sup>138</sup> Their imaginative agency in this way produces their own subjectivities. The corporeal schism occasioned by the narrating and narrated body reveals how narratives produce bodies, highlighting performative mechanisms and disrupting illusionistic identification of the actor/performer. The gaps between the two allow spectators to produce the narrative in an act of performative specularly. Whereas with Brecht’s alienation effect, the conditions of performance and the manner in which they are foregrounded by the actor are more apparent (actor vs. mise-en-scene), in monologue

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<sup>136</sup> Idem, 32.

<sup>137</sup> For example, in *After Sarah Miles* (2013) written and directed by Michael Hilliard Mulcahy, actor Don Wycherley makes use of bodily position and hand movements to suggest onstage interlocutors.

<sup>138</sup> This occurs in conventional drama also, as imagination is required (e.g. for monologues within dialogic plays) but the burden placed on the imagination by monologue drama means that the work of the imagination and its task of narrative construction more fully define the imagining subject.

drama, the disjunctures are more complex as the actor/character is relying on the spoken narrative for its own ontology.

In psychoanalytic terms, the speaking subjects onstage vacillate between autonomous agents of discourse to specimens of medical interest and analysis; spectators are accordingly positioned variously as passive interlocutors and as active decoders and prescribers of mental illness, based on the medical evidence in front of them, akin to medical subjects from Victorian times presented by their physicians in front of student-filled lecture theatres. Monologue performance, while staging linguistic domination, is always immanently threatened by lapses into medical analysis – agency is in that scenario reversed, with spectators diagnosing and therefore determining the treatment plan and social outcome for the patient. The tension between performed hegemony and insubordinate subjection is productive and presents a critical space in which to interrogate monologic displays of performative reversals, recuperations or inconclusive outcomes, as the case may be.

### **Conclusion**

Academic coverage of the monologue dramatic form at home and abroad has been sparse. Deborah Geis' *Postmodern Theatric(k)s: Monologue in Contemporary American Drama* (1993) is a notable exception, as well as contributions by Philip Auslander in his book *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance*.<sup>139</sup> Closer to home, *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity* (2006), edited and introduced by Clare Wallace,<sup>140</sup> featuring several essays on Irish monologue plays, is a substantial contribution to the field, as are writings by both Brian Singleton and Eamonn Jordan, who have written individual chapters about

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<sup>139</sup> Geis' book offers a brief history of the monologue form, from classical through Renaissance, and modernist periods. She then utilizes postmodern theory to interrogate the use of monologue in the work of Sam Shepard, David Mamet, Maria Irene Fornes, Ntozake Shange, Karen Finley and Spalding Gray.

<sup>140</sup> Clare Wallace has also published on Conor McPherson's monologue dramas in *Irish Studies Review*.

monologue plays in terms of both hegemonic masculinity and Celtic Tiger socio-economic forces.<sup>141</sup> Patrick Lonergan has written about the monologue in terms of globalization, arguing that the recognizable features of Irish monologue plays to international audiences – “the presentation of gender, the poeticization of speech, and the use of storytelling”<sup>142</sup> enable Irish playwrights to exploit that familiarity and, far from reinforcing Irish stereotypes in a global context, work to critique globalization, and the stereotypes they proliferate.<sup>143</sup> Rosana Herrero Martin’s *The Doing of Telling on the Irish Stage: A Study of Language Performativity in Modern and Contemporary Irish Theatre* (2008) makes use of Austinian performativity, amongst other theorists, to critique the work of Irish playwrights from Yeats to Enda Walsh.<sup>144</sup>

Having identified a space to be filled in Irish Theatre Studies for a comprehensive analysis of Irish monologue drama, my choice of a Performance Studies reading of monologue plays is intended to productively unlock the performative, citational nature of monologue drama and performance. Theatre

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<sup>141</sup> Eamonn Jordan’s wide-ranging essay *Look Who’s Talking, Too: The Duplicitous Myth of Naive Narrative* touches on many aspects of the monologue play, including its situation in an Irish social context (its recalling of the confessional space, the rise in suicide rates in recent years, especially amongst young men, and its potential for a healing and reunion of the divided self, a fall-out from colonial rule), its link to an economy that prioritizes financial capital over interpersonal capital, and the role of monologic narrative in identity formation.

<sup>142</sup> Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 177.

<sup>143</sup> Lonergan goes on to contextualize monologue plays, and their reception, within a wider capitalist social and cultural context of accelerated social processes caused by efforts to shorten turn-over times, which in turn affects the way in which we receive and process information – shorter plays, including monologue plays, are more digestible to an audience conditioned to process larger chunks of information in shorter timeframes. Lonergan also makes reference to the mobility of monologue plays, and the economic benefits of having few overheads, and also to the socio-economic backdrop to the glut of monologue plays, with specific reference to the phenomenon of individualization, associated with globalization.

<sup>144</sup> Martin’s thesis is driven by the “contemplation of language *not* as a mere means of communication and indicator of facts, but as a distinctly dynamic entity which adopts multiple chameleon-like guises and functions, not necessarily aiming at the representation of factual reality, but rather at a set of confrontations of that reality.” (Rosana Herero Martin, *The Doing of Telling on the Irish Stage: A Study of Language Performativity in Modern and Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 13).



scholars have in the past viewed with scepticism the merits of performance and performativity as critical implements<sup>145</sup> but recent Irish and international scholarship has drawn more upon performativity to critique theatrical performance. A study of monologue drama during this period is of critical and scholarly value, I would argue, as it may be read as an expression or index of power relations in Irish society, throwing into relief hegemonic domains of the sayable and the consequent enunciatory performances which seek to voice disempowered subject positions. Speaking subjects implicitly require the refuge of the theatre to express what would be the “impossible speech” of a real-world discursive environment.

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<sup>145</sup> Matthew Causey has commented that:

The not-so surprising tendency toward a bordered theatricality and critique of performativity as an ineffective epistemological model constitutes one flank in the defensive maneuverings by theatre scholars and practitioners against the perceived crisis of subjectivity in mediatised culture. The arguments appropriately indicate the growing concern within theatre scholarship that the analytical model of performance/performativity is too broad a concept to be an effective methodology. (Matthew Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 106).

## Chapter One

### “Linguistic Magic”<sup>1</sup>: Myth and Truth Creation in Friel’s Monologue Drama

Declarations represent linguistic magic. No other speech act type has this magic-like power.<sup>2</sup>

If there is a doctor in the house, I’d ask him to leave. Because his profession and mine are unsympathetic.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Introduction*

Ireland in the 1960s was a country, after forty years of independence, finally beginning to embrace economic policies of openness and expansion and shedding its former nationalist attitude of economic self-sufficiency. The First and Second Programmes of Economic Expansion laid the foundations for what is Ireland’s economic stance in the present time: encouraging inward investment through a highly competitive corporate tax regime, a skilled and educated workforce and a relatively stable industrial relations environment. In educational and cultural spheres, the country was undergoing seismic changes, with the advent of television<sup>4</sup> and the introduction of free second level education for all. Diarmaid Ferriter, referring to the work of journalist Michael Viney, observes that:

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Fotion, *John Searle* (Teddington: Acumen Publishing, 2000), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Idem. Fotion is here referring to John Searle’s category of declarations. Searle describes this class as follows: “It is the defining characteristic of this class that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality, successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world: if I successfully perform the act of appointing you chairman, then you are chairman; if I successfully perform the act of nominating you as candidate, then you are a candidate; if I successfully perform the act of declaring a state of war, then war is on; if I successfully perform the act of marrying you, then you are married” (John Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 16-17).

<sup>3</sup> Brian Friel, quotation attributed to the character of Frank Hardy. Original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 31 May 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Raidió Teilifís Éireann made its first television broadcast at 7:00p.m. on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1961. President Eamon de Valera inaugurated the new television service from Áras an Uachtaráin. Television had been received since 1949 on

Viney's work in many ways highlighted what was good and bad about the 1960s in Ireland: squalor and neglect in the midst of a new-found opulence; the degree to which promises of a more egalitarian Ireland had been continually reneged on over 40 years of Irish independence; but also a public discourse, aided by an expanding media, that, at the very least, was shedding light on dark, often shameful, corners.<sup>5</sup>

The numbers emigrating from Ireland declined during the 1960s from the previous decade and there co-existed economic progress and a new national economic and cultural extrovertedness on the one hand, with the maintenance and reverence of a traditional rural way of life, on the other. A sentimental attachment to place and origin competed with a national discursive environment that was increasingly being shaped by American and British cultural influences through the advent of television. Despite economic, social and cultural advances, however, a distinct hegemony persisted in Irish life which demarcated spheres of speakability. The country was still very much in the grip of a discursive regime dominated by the Catholic Church, a patriarchal political order, and social and professional advancement still proved elusive to many, on grounds of class and gender. Performances of monologic expression were intertwined with and received as a display of State domination and a recuperation of State authority. The performativity of such expressions – designated individuals (priests, politicians, teachers, barristers) invoking and exercising authority through performative utterances – invited

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the east coast of Ireland from BBC transmitters in England, and from 1953 many Irish households could receive television from transmitters in Northern Ireland. Perhaps wary of the medium's social and cultural influence, de Valera gave the new RTE television service a guarded welcome, saying that "he was confident that those in charge of the new service would do everything in their power to make it useful for the nation and that they would bear in mind that we are an old nation, that we have our distinctive characteristics and that it was desirable that these should be preserved" ("President Opens Irish TV: Launched in confident and happy spirit", *The Irish Press*, 01 Jan. 1962).

<sup>5</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland: 1900 – 2000* (London: Profile Books, 2004), 536.

counter-performativities that sought to challenge those statements of State control. In the United States, the subversive potential of performance art,<sup>6</sup> second wave radical feminism and stand-up comedy was blossoming in the 1960s and 1970s, but these cultural movements had yet to take root in Ireland.

The cultural domain of monologue performance in Ireland during this time offered modes of expression removed from official Ireland but nonetheless shaped by it. The ancient oral tradition, sustained by *seanchaithe* who for centuries had narrated stories in return for hospitality, was still alive, particularly in western Gaeltacht regions, although had diminished significantly with the decline of the Irish language and with the growth of television, film, radio and other entertainment media. However, the custodians of the Irish oral tradition were highly-esteemed in their communities and the State had demonstrated its commitment to preserving written and audio recordings of narrative performances through its establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935, whose work concluded in 1971 and which then became the Department of Irish Folklore in University College Dublin, one of the largest folklore archives in the world (the National Folklore Collection). Apart from an archival approach to the oral tradition, folklore studies in Ireland has also benefited from its membership of the broader Performance Studies family, placing it alongside research into a wide spectrum of social, cultural and political performance in Ireland, such as parades, traditional Irish music, murals, commemorations, pageantry and G.A.A. sports.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Áine Phillips begins her history of performance art in Ireland (North and South) in the year 1972 in her book *Performance Art in Ireland: A History* (2015).

<sup>7</sup> Jack Santino comments that “folklore studies tended towards a textual approach to documentation until the 1970s, when the paradigm shifted to a performance-centred approach. Folklorists recognized that texts are fluid and context-dependent. Henry Glassie’s *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (1982) epitomized this approach in the study and documentation of narrative performance. As performance studies has developed as a distinct field, the traditional folkloristic areas of seasonal custom, including folk drama, processions, and bonfires, as well as life-cycle rituals, provide a rich source of scholarship and areas of research” (Jack Santino, “Performing Ireland: A Performative Approach to the Study of Irish Culture” in *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture*, eds. Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 16).

Contemporary Irish theatrical monologue performance is one descendant of an indigenous, oral tradition of storytelling disseminated primarily through the Irish language and the preserve of impoverished custodians of local lore and genealogy whose prodigious performances of memory and appropriation were respected and valued by folk in their locality. The performativity of oral narrative performance is also significant in that “presumably, the storytellers did not memorize entire tales – rather they memorized the outlines and filled in the details extemporaneously.”<sup>8</sup> The *seanchaithe* could thus preserve ancient narratives whilst adding local colour, characterisation, etc., for their audiences. Citing narrative structures enabled performative reworkings of those structures – for example, a feature of narrative performance known as “runs” allowed the *seanchaí* to incorporate lengthy lists of placenames, landmarks, etc. into the narrative and thereby demonstrate their narrative prowess and affirm to auditors their cultural authority as performers and custodians of local folktales, legends and lore.

The evenings of storytelling performed by Eamon Kelly in the Peacock Theatre during the 1970s and 1980s<sup>9</sup> very much underscore continuity between the Irish oral tradition and the type of dramatic monologue performance which will be the topic of my thesis. Invoking this indigenous tradition and resituating it from the traditional, domestic space of the hearth to the theatre, Kelly formalised the theatricality of the oral form. His oral performances are no less political for their professed entertainment value – they disseminate and recuperate rural social attitudes to gender, class and religion and do so in a manner that goes performatively unregistered. For example, the production title *English That for Me: An Evening of Storytelling* frames Kelly’s narratives in a cosy, hearth-side

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffery Gantz, trans. and introd. *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (London: Penguin, 1981), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Eamon Kelly’s *In My Father’s Time* (1975), *Bless Me Father* (1976), *The Rub of a Relic* (1978), *The Story Goes* (1979), *English that for Me* (1980) and *A Rogue of Low Degree* (1981) affirmed the form’s theatrical identification with the art of storytelling and transposed an ancient tradition from a typically rural domestic setting into a more formal theatrical one ([http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/person\\_detail/15655](http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/person_detail/15655); Date accessed: 21 Feb 2017).

environment, promising theatregoers a proximity and intimacy with one of Ireland's best known storytellers. The focus is on Kelly's personality and storytelling ability, rather than the politics of a rural Ireland that is being consolidated through narrative performance. Erik Pierstorff observes that "although Kelly himself uses properties and gestures in a minimal way (he sits in a kitchen set-piece, at the table, with a fire on the hearth with the teapot warming) he seems to let speech pour through him, and to become his story."<sup>10</sup> The concept of *becoming* his story suggests a construction of the self through narrative and a reliance on continued citation of those stories to ensure his continuing authority as disseminator of the narratives. Kelly and other *seanchaithe* embody the oral Irish tradition through mnemonic retention of their repertoires but are also reliant on performative citations of those stories that exceed their control.<sup>11</sup>

Other forms of popular monologue performance were also gradually disappearing. The popularity of comedy shows on television and radio contributed to the decline and demise of variety performance in venues such as the Capitol Theatre (off O'Connell Street, Dublin), Queen's Theatre (Pearse Street, Dublin) and Theatre Royal, Hawkins Street.<sup>12</sup> Variety shows included solo comedy performance, along with comedy sketches, musical performances, magic, acrobatics, juggling and

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<sup>10</sup> Erik Pierstorff, Introduction, in *Two Nights of Storytelling with Eamon Kelly: English That for Me and Your Humble Servant* (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1990), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Butler posits that "performativity . . . consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'" (Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 178). The narrative performance of the seanchaí suggests autonomy when in fact he or she draws upon a larger citational genealogy that discursively exceeds them.

<sup>12</sup> "Inevitably, and as in the cases of Britain and America, Irish 'fit-ups' and variety suffered the slings and arrows of radio, the film industry and television from approximately the 1940s onwards. The amalgamation of such forces delivered the deathblow to the mass popularity of the performance form. As in Britain, comic tastes were changing and an Irish audience also tuned into the same BBC radio shows. The rise of television would finally kill off the variety star. Shows, including the likes of *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, were beamed into front rooms around the country and variety just could not compete." (Susanne Colleary, *Performance and Identity in Irish Stand-Up Comedy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 30).

ventriloquism.<sup>13</sup> Outside of the specific monologue conventions of the dramatic theatre, theatregoers in 1964 in Ireland would have understood monologue as an authoritarian voice of the State,<sup>14</sup> Church and professional classes; as an entertaining but revered expression of the country's oral tradition; and as a staple of music hall variety performance. The decline of the latter two forms opened up a space for a cultural monologue form that would counter and interrogate dominant sanctioned monologic modes of the country's established order.

Monologue drama may be seen to display language's constitutory properties in the monologist's narrational construction of character, space and plot, all of which frequently showcase the actor's virtuosic performing abilities. In his/her autonomous exercise of linguistic power, the monologist may create myths and truths unchallenged by any truth/falsity judgements: the performative utterance simply brings into being the state of affairs that it utters. Amongst the primary criteria the monologue performer must satisfy to successfully execute performatives, according to Austin, is the "uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances."<sup>15</sup> In the theatre, the actor's authority to utter performatives is unquestioned. The content of the spoken narratives is very much a response to the lone speaking subject's immediate cultural, economic and political environment. It generally reflects a pressing urge for self-expression, disenchantment with their social status and aspirations for self-improvement. The self-making qualities of language therefore take on a magical dimension, bringing into being a desired subjectivity which is frequently generated out of abject material conditions but which seldom resembles those conditions.

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<sup>13</sup> Many variety performers successfully transferred from theatrical to television performance and opening monologues are still a feature of present-day chat shows including BBC's *The Graham Norton Show* (2007-present), *The Tonight Show* (1954 – present) broadcast from New York, and RTE's *The Saturday Night Show* with Brendan O'Connor (2010-2015).

<sup>14</sup> I will be discussing the State-constituting monologue performance of the 1916 Proclamation in Chapter 2.

<sup>15</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 14.

I have selected Friel's *Philadelphia Here I Come!* (1964)<sup>16</sup> as a suitable critical point of departure as, apart from its formal innovation, it initiated the Irish theatre's response to hitherto untouched social issues including emigration, class and male sexuality, thereby initiating a critique which the thesis will continue through the analysis of selected monologue plays. Frequently cited as the inaugural moment of contemporary Irish drama, I will also argue that it established specific theatrical features particular to monologue drama - mastery of the narrative, construction of other characters, the exclusive disclosure of thoughts and the staging of imagined acts. In fact, Private's<sup>17</sup> monologues may be seen to anticipate the monologic performativities of gender, class and nationality that will reappear in monologue drama of subsequent decades. I will also explore themes of performative "linguistic magic" in the texts, performances and productions of Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979), *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) and *Molly Sweeney* (1994).<sup>18</sup> Friel's monologue plays constitute key texts in an analysis of monologue drama in

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<sup>16</sup> *Philadelphia Here I Come!* was first performed in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1964, directed by Hilton Edwards and produced by Edwards-Mac Liammóir Gate Theatre Productions in association with Dublin Theatre Festival. Patrick Bedford played Public, Donal Donnelly Private and Eamon Kelly played S.B. O'Donnell. The first American performance of *Philadelphia Here I Come!* was directed by Edwards at the Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia on 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1966, presented by the David Merrick Arts Foundation, by arrangement with Oscar Lewenstein and Michael White. It later transferred to the Helen Hayes Theater, New York, for a nine month Broadway run. It received its British premiere at the Theatre Royal, Brighton, on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1967.

<sup>17</sup> The character of Gar O'Donnell is represented by two actors, playing Public Gar and Private Gar. Friel explains in the stage directions that "the two Gars, PUBLIC GAR and PRIVATE GAR, are two views of the one man. PUBLIC GAR is the Gar that people see, talk to, talk about. PRIVATE GAR is the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the *alter ego*, the secret thoughts, the id. PRIVATE GAR, the spirit, is invisible to everybody, always. Nobody except PUBLIC GAR hears him talk." (Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 27).

<sup>18</sup> Productions of monologue plays in Ireland from 1964 to 1980 were scarce, compared to the proliferation of the form in the early 1990s and 2000s. The Abbey Theatre staged O'Neill's *Before Breakfast* in 1967 and Strindberg's *The Stronger* in 1968. The Abbey also produced some of Beckett's monologues: *Happy Days* was performed in the Peacock Theatre in 1973 (directed by Jim Sheridan and with Marie Kean as Winnie and O.Z. Whitehead as Willie) and *Act Without Words I* was staged in 1978, performed by John Molloy. However, there is no evidence that the formal boldness of these plays ignited any attempts at similar experimentation with the form by other Irish authors. Instead, Irish audience's theatrical experience of the monologue form most often came in the form either of adaptations from literary sources or evenings of storytelling. Beckett's experimental monologue pieces and Kelly's evenings of storytelling are striking in their contrast: representing opposite poles on the monologic



Ireland, with significant repercussions for monologue playwriting practice in the following decades, and I will accordingly be devoting considerable critical attention to them. I will not be discussing monologue works by female authors in this chapter, and instead will be addressing those plays in Chapter Three, which is dedicated to female playwrights.

I intend to argue for a reading of Friel's *Philadelphia Here I Come!* as a fully theatricalised monologue play, in which Gar O'Donnell is speaking to himself throughout much of the play, and whose subjectivity – a rural Irish, lower-middle class, white, heterosexual young man – is privileged in its constructing of other characters. Public and Private's inner dialogue may be read as an ongoing monologue, occupying a privileged narratorial and theatrical position in the drama.<sup>19</sup> If in monologue dramatic performance a single character either sustains a central character with no secondary characters, maintains a primary character while performing secondary characters or plays a number of

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spectrum, one innovative, technically accomplished and ground-breaking, the other retrospective, sentimental and conservative, albeit entertaining and compelling for Kelly's theatrical and narrative abilities.

Other examples of monologue plays during the 1960s and 1970s include Lee Gallagher's *The Goodbye Machine* (1970, Project Arts Centre, 12a Lower Abbey St); *Brief Lives* (1973) an adaptation by Patrick Garland of John Aubrey's biographical work *Lives*; *Red Biddy* (1973) by Heno Magee; *The Brother* (1974), *Joycemen* (1980) and *Mr Gulliver's Bags* (1984) - adaptations by Eamon Morrissey; Hugh Leonard's *A Time of Wolves and Tigers* (1975); Declan Burke-Kennedy's *Hoods* (1976); *Mothers* (1976) performed and devised by May Cluskey; and, *Molloy* (1972) and *From the Vikings to Bang Bang* (1979) by John Molloy.

<sup>19</sup> Friel's original notes on *Philadelphia* provide an insight into how the staging of Gar O'Donnell's thought process is prioritised above other characters. Friel's notes reveal that "Gar is always making the pace: the jokes are his; the crack, his; the prancing and dancing and humour his. And a time is reached when he is beaten to a stop – You can't keep up this private facade endlessly" (Brian Friel, Original notes on *Philadelphia*, MS 37/047/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin). The humour described here clearly favours Gar in establishing a rapport with spectators, frequently at the expense of other characters.

More significantly, Friel notes that "everybody wants something. Tries to state it. Can't" (idem). These reflections are followed by a list of characters and their unspoken desires. This may be read as the "impossible speech" of the play, in which Gar is privileged as the only character who can express his inner thoughts. Gar O'Donnell is described in Friel's notes as "People think: he's quiet, reserved, modest" (idem), a contrast with the intensity of Gar Private. Friel also describes a sequence in which Gar is sitting on a plane with the inhabitants of Ballybeg visible below – Gar Private is speaking nonsense while Gar Public is sobbing (idem). Although he is upset at leaving, he is positioned in a dominant stance over the folk of Ballybeg.

discrete characters, in *Philadelphia* the secondary characters are physicalised, orbiting around the central constructing force of Gar O'Donnell, and they are no less constructed for being embodied than if they were the verbal constructs of a sole monologising character. As I will illustrate later, encounters with other characters reinforce the monologising subjectivity of Gar, in terms of his nationality, gender and class. This magical construction of others recurs within other non-monologue plays in Friel's body of work: by the character of Sir in *Living Quarters* and through Michael, the narrator of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, who constitutes others (including his younger self) through a retrospective narrative. What separates *Philadelphia*, *Here I Come!*, *Living Quarters* and *Dancing at Lughnasa* from Friel's monologue plays is that in the former, characters interact with the narrator, whereas in the latter works there is no interaction with the narrator (although in *Molly Sweeney* all three characters remain onstage throughout). Notwithstanding the presence or lack of interaction with a narrator, the non-narrating characters in the first three plays are constructed to the extent that our interpretation of those characters is framed by the narrators' observations of them and in the case of Gar O'Donnell and Michael, by their construction of those characters through the act of remembering. However, the physical onstage presence of those constructed/remembered characters may be said to dissimulate their sense of constructedness, summoned through the agency of the narrator's active re-remembering yet displaying all the attributes of fully autonomous agents. The narrators are of course all authorial constructs themselves, yet there is a discernible hierarchy of constructing agents at work; given Friel's own identification with his narrator/monologists - onstage surrogates for the author - the politics and ethics of subject construction in *Philadelphia*, *Here I Come!*, *Living Quarters* and *Dancing at Lughnasa* seem directly comparable to performative narrational character constructions in Friel's monologue plays and indeed in the monologue work of McPherson, O'Rowe and others.

### ***Austin's Magical Invocations***

As I have discussed in the introduction, J.L. Austin's speech-act theory laid the foundations for many theories of performativity, although he did not address the political and social aspects of the self-constitutory function of language in the way that Butler and other theorists have. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has commented that "Austin tends to treat the speaker as if s/he were all but coextensive – at least, continuous - with the power by which the individual speech act is initiated and authorized and may be enforced."<sup>20</sup> And Bourdieu has taken Austin to task for his lack of consideration of the social conditions in which performatives operate: "Austin's account of performative utterances cannot be restricted to the sphere of linguistics. The magical efficacy of these acts of institution is inseparable from the existence of an institution defining the conditions (regarding the agent, the time or place, etc.) which have to be fulfilled for the magic of words to operate."<sup>21</sup> Whilst mindful of the subsequent political applications of theories of performativity, I intend to consider here the "magical efficacy" of Austin's speech acts. I plan to utilise Austin's idea of the autonomous speaking subject to interrogate the monologising actor's theatre and world-making performances on stage. Not forgetting the implications of citing performative conventions, as Butler has theorised, an Austinian take on magical world-making will be a good critical fit with the texts and performances that I will discuss.

Austin claims that performative utterances are not subject to a truth/falsity determination because the utterance brings into being that which it describes.<sup>22</sup> The utterance does not *describe* a

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Introduction: Performativity and Performance" in *Performativity and Performance*, eds. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995) 7.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. Ed. and introd, John B. Thompson. Trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 73.

<sup>22</sup> Austin's theories of language posit language as possessing a constitutory force, and not merely a descriptive one. He discounts the theory that language primarily describes a state of affairs as the "descriptive fallacy". He specifically argues that one's speech is not merely an expression of one's thoughts, as had been posited by some philosophers. *Philadelphia* reveals an ongoing struggle between Public and his internal thought process (Private).

state of affairs; it *is* that state of affairs. He states that “reference is necessary for either truth or falsehood”<sup>23</sup> but without a conventional semiotic signifier/signified referential dimension, spectators have no means to judge the truth/falsity of signifying performatives and so the utterance of performatives allow for the autonomous performances of truths and myths. The referential aspect of *Philadelphia* is largely intact: there is a realist set and actors playing fictional characters, and when Private describes characters, those referents are visually available to spectators. I will show, however, that glimpses of Private’s truth-making ability anticipate Frank Hardy’s similar power in *Faith Healer*. With the truth/falsity constative binary collapsed into myth-making performatives, Private is empowered to create uncontested truths.

In addition to Austin’s concept of the subject as stable, coherent and centred, yet to be reconfigured by poststructuralist reframing of that concept, Sedgwick has underscored the gender assumptions of Austin’s normative examples. It is important to foreground J.L. Austin’s own gender, race and sexuality within Performativity Studies, and the specific examples he uses to illustrate his theories because implicit in my use of Austin as a critical tool for plays of this period is a concomitant assumption by Friel of the primacy of male, heterosexual subjectivity. Eve Sedgwick has highlighted the normative example of the marriage ceremony, in which the marriage vows uttered by the bride and groom bring into being the state of the marriage. The assumptions underpinning Austin’s example point to a heteronormative position which wields an exclusionary force as much as a productive one. Members of the LGBT community are ghettoised in the marital speech act. The “universal” example of the marriage ceremony, chosen by Austin for its intelligibility to as wide an audience as possible, although culturally

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<sup>23</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 50.

at home in a lecture theatre in 1955 in Harvard University, becomes through the passage of time a troubling example of heteronormative exclusion. Sedgwick observes that:

It is the constitution of a community of witness that makes the marriage; the silence of witness (we don't speak now, we forever hold our peace) that permits it; the bare, negative, potent but undiscretionary speech act of our physical presence – maybe even especially the presence of those people whom the institution of marriage defines itself by excluding – that ratifies and recruits the legitimacy of its privilege.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the limitations to which both Sedgwick and Bourdieu allude, Austin (1911-1960) is in my view a suitable critical companion to Friel (1927-2015). A feminist, Butlerian analysis of Friel's drama would no doubt quickly lay bare the patriarchal norms that he disseminates. Austin and Friel inhabited Anglophone male-dominated academic social environments.<sup>25</sup> An Austinian performative analysis of Friel's monologue drama, I would argue, is appropriate as the gender and sexual norms attendant upon Austin's theories are consistent with Friel's. The contemporaneity of their works confirm the gender normativity of

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Introduction: Performativity and Performance in *Performativity and Performance*, eds. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995) 10-11.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Gustafsson comments on Isaiah Berlin's description of the all-male intellectual milieu in which he and Austin worked and of their "inchoate attitude" towards the study of philosophy: "Sharing this attitude seems to have been enough to induce a strong sense of common purpose among the people gathering around Austin in 1936-7, when he and Berlin began organizing weekly discussions on Thursday evenings. With the exception of Ayer, who, under the influence of the logical positivists, had already formed a relatively determinate view of the nature of philosophy, these young men – the oldest was 27 – had no clear program or method. Yet the sense of intellectual vitality was strong" (Martin Gustafsson and Richard Sorli, eds., *The Philosophy of J.L. Austin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10).

Brian Friel was a member of Field Day's all-male Board of Directors, along with Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, David Hammond, Tom Paulin and Thomas Kilroy, who joined the Board in 1988. Field Day was a cultural and political project, which began in 1980 with the production of Friel's *Translations* and which sought to open up a discursive space that hoped to overcome political and cultural divisions on the island of Ireland. However, the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991) was widely criticised for its under-representation of female authors.

both insitutional academic and theatre-making practice during this time and in doing so, highlight the wider social gender norms that inform them. Placing the monologue performances of Austin in dialogue with Friel's may prove a useful critical strategy in appreciating the historical social and cultural context in which they wrote.

The single monologue performer in the theatre has in his/her possession a theatrical autonomy that Austin did not include in his reckonings.<sup>26</sup> The actor, cast for that specific role, invokes a theatrical, linguistic authority to perform locutionary utterances, with illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects. The spectatorial uptake of monologue performance is not easily measurable, although theatre reviews are invaluable in gauging audience reception and thereby offering some index of perlocutionary force. Austinian performativity offers such a useful critical tool for monologue dramatic performance that it is not surprising he specifically excluded theatrical performance from his own theoretical considerations. It may be argued that theatrical monologue performance featured prominently in Austin's thinking as he would not otherwise have denied these forms so vehemently. Indeed, his definitive exclusion of these theatrical forms make the option of applying Austin's own theories to interrogate them all the more critically appealing. In categorising different types of performative utterances, Austin draws on examples from the spheres of law, the military, the civil service and sport. These contexts are appropriate as they provide examples of speech acts Austin wishes to explain but they also imbricate with Austin's sense of what constitutes serious and non-serious speech acts. A speech act made by a judge or umpire is quite

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<sup>26</sup> Austin uses the expression "first person singular present indicative active" to describe the conditions necessary for successful execution of what he terms "explicit performatives", for example: "I name, I do, I bet, I give." (J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 56).

Austin's use of grammatical terms bears their own theatrical sense: a single actor on stage, physically and temporally "present". The sense of the first person implies a certain visual and auditory dominance and spatial priority, enjoyed by Friel narrators Private, Sir, Frank Hardy and Michael (*Dancing at Lughnasa*). It also points to an untroubled autonomy, agency and even virtuosity.

discrete from a speech act made in jest or “said by an actor on the stage . . . or spoken in soliloquy.”<sup>27</sup> In the plays under discussion, the speech acts of authority figures contest with those that are either subversive or unsanctioned.

If Austin’s speaking subject onstage delivers performative utterances with illocutionary and perlocutionary force both on spectators and other actors, there are two other frames of speech acts simultaneously taking place. Framing the individual theatrical performance is the monologue play as speech act, its performative force on the canon of monologue drama and performance, on the entire dramatic canon, and on other genres of monologue performance. The outermost frame positions monologue dramatic performance as an index of a cultural expression in political and social terms. Nestled within the individual monologue play are the monologues within the fictional world of the play. The monologue play and its performance within the theatre is the performative fulcrum, *enclosed* by the macro-social and political context and *enclosing* the fictional performative utterances of the characters. As complicated as these three levels of speech acts are, they are further complicated and enriched by the performativity of reception. Speech acts, as Austin himself and later Eve Sedgwick have demonstrated, may not be confined to performative speech or gestures, but may include the speech act of silence, which includes the tacit reception of spectators and uptake of the monologues they witness.<sup>28</sup> Having regard to the macro- and micro-speech acts inherent in any monologue performance, I plan to focus on the productions and texts of individual monologue plays with reference to the macro-frame as appropriate.

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<sup>27</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 22.

<sup>28</sup> Austin’s category of performatives known as “behabitives”, which include “the notion of reaction to other people’s behaviour and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else’s past conduct or imminent conduct”, resonates with audience reception. (J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 160).

Austin uses the word “invoke” to describe the use of a formula to execute a performative procedure. In his scheme, under “A.2”, he states that “the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.”<sup>29</sup> The word “invoke” means, *inter alia*, “to summon (a spirit) by charms or incantation; to conjure;” and also “to utter (a sacred name) in invocation” and “to call on (God, a deity, etc.) in prayer or as a witness; to appeal to for aid or protection; to summon or invite in prayer.” Austin’s sense of the word is “to call for (a law, procedure, etc.) to be applied or observed.”<sup>30</sup> One could argue that Austinian performativity has from its inception carried a magical dimension of conjuring worlds through language. The Austinian speaker in a monologue play thus magically invokes theatrical authority to bring fictional worlds into being through illocutionary force, giving rise to perlocutionary effects.

**“You Jist Keep Atalkin’ to You’self”<sup>31</sup> – Philadelphia Here I Come!**

The original production of *Philadelphia Here I Come!* featured Patrick Bedford as Public, Donal Donnelly as Private and Eamon Kelly as S.B. O’Donnell. Many theatregoers attending the first production of *Philadelphia* would have been familiar with Kelly’s reputation as *seanchaí* and raconteur. His presence onstage may have raised expectations of at least one passage of narrative dominance. However, it is Private who is allocated the most lines, including monologues, contrasted with S.B. O’Donnell’s brief one-line contributions and taciturn behaviour. Gar’s exasperation at S.B.’s lack of communication is echoed by spectators’ awareness of Kelly’s renowned verbal eloquence and turn of phrase. Kelly’s

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<sup>29</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 15.

<sup>30</sup> Oxford English Dictionary on-line. <http://www.oed.com.elib.tcd.ie/view/Entry/99173?redirectedFrom=invoke&> Date accessed 20 Feb. 2017.

The OED’s first recorded instance of the use of “invoke” in its sense of “summoning a spirit” is in 1602. The first usage of the word in Austin’s sense (calling for a law to be applied) is in 1870.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1*(London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 38.



casting as the inexpressive, emotionally undemonstrative S.B. O'Donnell is a poignant signal of stories untold and memories unshared. The production may thus easily have been read on one level as a transition between an innovative use of monologue responding to contemporary social issues affecting Ireland, superseding a conservative monologue form intent on clinging to and perpetuating ancient rituals and customs. Friel intervenes into a lineage of Irish monologue performance with the character of Private, arriving at monologue from a distinctly literary, intellectual sensibility and using monologue to interrogate themes of divided national subjectivity and identity, the fictive nature of memory and the vagaries of the creative process and of theatre-making. But the co-presence on stage of Kelly offers a visual reminder of the primal need for ancient narrative to maintain a connection with the past and with family origins, and to sustain that continuity into the future. Gar's aspirations for a better life in Philadelphia are in stark contrast to the world Eamon Kelly represents.

In addition to the production's link with the oral tradition, Private's monologues draw their theatrical resonance from the conventions of the Elizabethan aside, the Shakespearean soliloquy and from contemporary sources such as stand-up comedy and variety performance. Christopher Murray observes that "in Gar O'Donnell, Friel supplied an Irish Hamlet for his time, a character longing for contact but driven back repeatedly upon himself since the world he inhabits is no longer the stable world of authority and security it once was. As his subjective memory shows him, Gar is alone in a world of change and illusion."<sup>32</sup> Murray's identification of Gar O'Donnell with Hamlet – Gar's loss of Kate Doogan (Ophelia) on her father's wishes and his discovery of his family history that leads to a decision to go into exile – is also valid in terms of the two characters' performance of monologues to reveal troubled interior selves and to allow for a staging of brittle masculinities. Hamlet's most famous speech is his "To be or not to be" soliloquy: Friel's invocation of Hamlet and of Shakespearean soliloquy establishes a link

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<sup>32</sup>Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 169.

between Hamlet and Gar O'Donnell, situating Friel's play firmly in the genealogy of theatrical monologue, and supporting a reading of *Philadelphia* as a monologue drama.<sup>33</sup>

Anthony Roche also makes a connection between *Hamlet* and *Philadelphia*, although via a solitary utterance by S.B. O'Donnell: "S.B.'s late epiphany, in a play where he has remained the observed while we have attended to Gar, resembles that moment in *Hamlet* where Claudius is discovered at his prayers, minutes before Hamlet enters, and we are given direct and privileged access to his innermost thoughts at a moment of pained recognition. In both cases the play is tilted towards a more objective, broader perspective."<sup>34</sup> The spectators' access to S.B.'s "innermost thoughts", a primary function of monologue, here illustrates the monologic dominance of Private: S.B.'s brief solitary onstage utterance serves to underscore the paucity of monologic privilege assigned to characters other than Gar O'Donnell. It confirms a subjectivity favoured by Friel to express his various concerns and perhaps tragically glimpses at the unexpressed and inexpressible thoughts of men and women of an older generation, culturally conditioned to withhold rather than to articulate. The *Irish Times* review of the play comments that "everything that Mr. Friel had to say was served with great intelligence by Hilton Edwards' direction but one wondered why it hadn't all been said years ago and at the Abbey which is (or would have been years ago) its proper place."<sup>35</sup> The review illustrates the restrictive cultural domains of speakability in

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<sup>33</sup> Shakespearean soliloquy is evident in Private's performance of lengthy monologues which highlight the repressed, guarded behaviour of Public and S.B. O'Donnell, as well as other male characters. The link between Gar O'Donnell's inner thoughts and outward behaviour is most evident through the effects of Private's self-talk. Friel writes in his notes that "as the play goes on the Alter Ego's advice weakens and Gar has finally to talk himself into going." (Brian Friel, Original notes on *Philadelphia*, MS 37/047/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin).

Self-talk thus determines whether Gar will emigrate or remain. Private comments that "An' you jist keep atalkin' to you'self all the time, Mistah, 'cos once you stop atalkin'to you'self ah reckon then you jist begin to think kinda crazy things." (Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 38).

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), 101.

<sup>35</sup> "Brian Friel's Sadly Comic Story". Rev. of "Philadelphia Here I Come!" by Brian Friel. *Irish Times* 29 Sep. 1964.

Ireland at the time, dominated as they were by the spectre of the Censorship of Publications Board and other bodies, and serves as a reminder of Friel's achievement in bringing emigration and other issues under the theatrical spotlight and the novelty of his dramaturgy in doing so.

Friel's play dramatises a hierarchy of linguistic and discursive authority which positions Gar at the lowest rung. Public engages with other male characters who have eked out distinctive domains of speakability which they participate in or control through monologue performance. The most illustrious is Senator Doogan, who is associated with the parliament of the Senate and the professional speaking sphere of the Courts. In Austinian terms, Doogan satisfies the strict demands of appropriate performance of speech acts: he has been elected as a Senator and has been called to the Bar.<sup>36</sup> Doogan's dominance over Gar is illustrated through Gar's sudden departure from the Doogan homestead after learning that Francis King has arrived. The Kings, we learn, are a family of doctors, occupying a privileged discursive sphere of medicine. Gar's interaction with Doogan constitutes Gar in inferior class terms:

DOOGAN. . . But if this post does fall into his lap, well, her mother and I . . . let's say we're living in hope. A fine boy, Francis; and we've known the Kings, oh, since away back. As a matter of fact his father and I were class-fellows at school . . .

(DOOGAN *goes on and on. We catch an occasional word. Meantime PRIVATE has moved up to PUBLIC's elbow.*)

PRIVATE: Cripes, man!

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<sup>36</sup> Austin uses "verdictives" to describe performatives that "consist in the delivery of a finding, official or unofficial, upon evidence or reasons as to value or fact, so far as these are distinguishable." J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 153.

DOOGAN: . . . and then later at university when he did medicine and I did law, we knocked about quite a bit . . .

PRIVATE: O God, the aul bitch! Cripes, you look a right fool standing there – the father of fourteen children! Get out, you eejit you! Get out! Get out quick before the others come in and die laughing at you! . . .<sup>37</sup>

Private's panic here reveals a class anxiety, prompting an exit from the stage which Public and Private generally dominate. It may be that Private recognises Doogan's form of monologue as representing the official hegemonic order, as opposed to his own horseplay in the bedroom. Gar has been defeated in class and economic terms, Private conceding that Doctor and Mrs Francis King had their "honeymoon in Mallorca and you couldn't have afforded to take her to Malahide."<sup>38</sup> Gar's economic status is directly related to his inability to marry Kate Doogan - he accordingly fails to make a bid for Kate's hand to the Senator. The failure forces Gar into a space where he invokes and performs an American identity, utilising a north-eastern language and idiom and which embraces a distinctly American sensibility of economic entrepreneurial spirit and possibility. The virtuosic control of Private receives a setback in a speaking arena alien to it (the Doogan living room) and must immediately be reinstated, within the bedroom, through a more powerful imagined identity of Senator Gareth O'Donnell, Chairman of the Foreign Aid Committee, whose investigators have discovered that "Senator Doogan is the grandfather of fourteen unborn illegitimate children" and that he "sold his daughter to the king of the fairies for a crock of gold."<sup>39</sup> The comic retort to Senator Doogan's rejection of Gar in favour of Francis King illustrates monologue's subversive performative potential but significantly, it is contained

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<sup>37</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, 44.

<sup>39</sup> *Idem*, 57.

within private discourse and not effecting any change within Ballybeg's sphere of discursive power relations. Whilst uttered theatrically and jocosely (two of Austin's markers for non-serious speech), however, it is nonetheless a public utterance to a live audience. Richard Schechner, commenting on Austin's division between real-world speech acts and those uttered on the stage, observes that "the characters are real within their own domain and time. Both actors and audiences identify with the characters, shed real tears over their fate, and become deeply involved with them. Insofar as the characters partake of their special reality, their performative utterances are efficacious."<sup>40</sup> Private's speech is twice-removed as it is inaudible even to other characters within the fictional world of the play. However, to borrow Austin's term, it is not further "etiolated" as a result and may be said to be inversely empowered. Enunciated within the special domain of the theatre, it is uttered in specifically theatrical terms (Friel's novel Public/Private device) and carries with it an aesthetic force which invokes a theatrical authority in a similar manner to Doogan's calling on statutory or legal privilege. Friel develops and exploits a tension between publicly authorised speech and private insubordinate speech, which is paradoxically made public through theatrical performance (the Public/Private pairing may easily be read as the opposite, with Public's speech publicly private, and Private's privately public). Friel may well be making a statement about the nature, function and efficacy of theatrical language. It is private discourse made public, and it is necessarily so because public domains of speech cannot accommodate Private's unspeakable statements, critical as they are of State-sanctioned modes of discourse and the cultural verbal repressions they inflict on ordinary working people such as the O'Donnells.

Gar interacts with two other staples of the Irish discursive arena – the local parish priest and schoolmaster who are taken to task for shortcomings in their respective community roles. Private's

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 124.

parody and derision of the Canon<sup>41</sup> and Mr Boyle take place in the domestic space of the O'Donnell kitchen, removed from the sites of monologue performance of pulpit and classroom. Private brands Master Boyle “nothing but a drunken aul schoolmaster – a conceited, arrogant wash-out!”<sup>42</sup> and reproaches the Canon for his inaction in respect of his distant relationship with his father: “you’re warm and kind and soft and sympathetic – all things to all men – because you could translate all this loneliness, this groping, this dreadful bloody buffoonery into Christian terms that will make life bearable for us all. And yet you don’t say a word.”<sup>43</sup> Gar’s frustration with Master Boyle and Canon Mick O’Byrne (“dedicated moulders of the mind”)<sup>44</sup> is rooted in what he perceives as their disavowal of monologic responsibility: Boyle’s in loquaciousness bolstered by alcohol and O’Byrne’s in tacit complacency. Unable to attain a social status such as they occupy, Gar’s monologue expressions are restricted to the interior realms of fantastic play-acting and role-playing (some reviewers of *Philadelphia* have cited Walter Mitty to describe Gar’s fantasising). Gar’s monologues fall outside of what Austin may deem “serious” performatives, a category which instead includes the orthodox performative authority of Boyle and the Canon. In social terms, the theatre provides a discursive space in which Gar O’Donnell may forge an identity out of a monologue performance predicated on interactions with stock figures of Irish society. If Austin names soliloquy as one example of “etiolations of language”, Friel demonstrates its ability to interrogate societal norms. However, Friel’s use of monologue is not entirely subversive and indeed consolidates gender norms of the time, as I will discuss later.

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<sup>41</sup> Canon Mick O’Byrne is addressed by S.B., Public and Madge as “Canon”, which apart from a title within the Catholic Church, also evokes Canon law, the body of law and regulations made by ecclesiastical authority within Christian churches, but which is mostly associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Canon also carries with it a sense of the literary and dramatic canon. Friel/Gar O’Donnell may therefore be read as attempting a social and theatrical counter-canonical revolt.

<sup>42</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 55.

<sup>43</sup> *Idem*, 88.

<sup>44</sup> *Idem*, 52.

With no valid, conventional speaking space, Gar is forced into conducting monologues in domestic and private spaces: the kitchen and his bedroom. Anthony Roche observes that “in the private space of the bedroom, Gar Public and Gar Private . . . encourage and inspire each other to a greater degree of self-expression than is possible in the public or family domain.”<sup>45</sup> Roche also hints at Gar’s performative utterances: “In striving to remake himself, Gar has sought to reconstitute his origins through a series of substitute relations, through furnishing himself through alternative parents.”<sup>46</sup> Without the necessary levers of professional status to improve his own station, Gar makes use of the only means available to him: language and its magical creationary power. His monologic speech necessarily counters the type of authorised discourse in which he cannot partake while imagining a new identity for himself which is based on American idioms denoting wealth and convenience. His linguistic power comes in the form of myth-making, which gains force in the context of the theatre and in the performance of narrative:

PUBLIC. (*In absurd Hollywood style*) Hi, gorgeous! You live in my block?

PRIVATE. (*Matching the accent*) Yeah, big handsome boy. Sure do.

PUBLIC. Mind if I walk you past the incinerator, to the elevator?

PRIVATE. You’re welcome, slick operator.

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PUBLIC. A malted milk at the corner drug-store?

PRIVATE. Wow!

PUBLIC. A movie at the downtown drive-in?<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), 87.

<sup>46</sup> *Idem*, 98.

<sup>47</sup> *Idem*, 46.

Gar's use of language constitutes the United States as a fantastical location of wealth while denigrating Ballybeg as a stifling backwater. His performance of an American economic and cultural identity is simultaneously a rejection of his Donegal subjectivity.<sup>48</sup> Central to Private's role-playing is an Austinian autonomy and control, where performative conventions are magically invoked to supply his new identity. But the performances that are designed to assuage Public's doubts about going only underline his ambivalence about departing (the play never displays or confirms Gar's departure from Ballybeg). The chief performance space for Gar's self-construction is the bedroom, generally a solitary space in an Irish context of the 1960s, but which accommodates Public and Private's fantastical role-playing. Importantly, Friel assigns this private space a pre-eminence in the play's set. Gar's bedroom is visually privileged, situated downstage alongside the kitchen.<sup>49</sup>

Language enables the performance of a new economic identity for Gar. His virtuosic performances of sporting and artistic fantasies, typical of a young person, mask the more serious

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<sup>48</sup> In Friel's original notes for the play, Con Sweeney is described as a cousin of his mother, as a "General Manager of big hotel. Self-made. 'I'll give you 9000 bucks a year to start.' Isn't that something?" (Brian Friel, Original notes on *Philadelphia*. MS 37/047/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin). Gar identifies Con Sweeney as economically self-made, independent, and an example to which Gar himself aspires. It is no surprise then that Gar engages in self-making through constituting others in unfavourable terms in an attempt to justify his decision to emigrate. Con Sweeney, in the final draft of the play, is in fact married to his Aunt Lizzy, and therefore his uncle, and the General Manager a Patrick Palinakos, but the appeal of self-making is significant for Gar. The play can be seen as a ritual of self-constitution, in which Gar is formed in gendered, national and class terms.

<sup>49</sup> In Friel's notebook for the play, containing a draft set description, Friel suggests that the bedroom be raised by 4 inches, giving a further prominence to the bedroom, and Gar's performances of fantasy that occur within. "The centre of the stage (now in darkness) is Gar's bedroom. How this area is to be made appear distinct from the kitchen is a matter for the producer. I would suggest a 4" high octagonal platform or simply marking off the area with white lines. The bedroom should be slightly upstage, leaving a fairly generous apron. Since the room has no walls, no door etc., every time one of the characters enters or leaves it he must go through the gesture of opening and closing a door, switching on and off a light, etc. It is furnished with a single bed, an old-fashioned crockery wash-hand basin, a chest of drawers, a gramophone and a chair." (Brian Friel, Holograph draft of *Philadelphia Here I Come!* (Episode 1) in hardback copybook. MS 37,047/2. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1963-4.)



monologic strategy of envisioning an independent life away from Ballybeg. Gar performs his new Philadelphia self through a speech act which Gar hopes will performatively make itself a reality. The vividness and colour of Gar's Stateside fantasies may indeed be generated by the mundane practicalities of the family business and its rote enumerations of material goods. His flights of fancy are as much a statement about his own ambitions as they are the harsh economic struggles of the county he is abandoning. As an admission of his declining business and perhaps also as a means of coping with Gar's departure, S.B. tells Madge that "it's not like in the old days when the whole countryside did with me; I needed the help then. But it's different now. I'll manage by myself now."<sup>50</sup> S.B. will "get one of Charley Bonner's boys to do the van on Tuesdays and Thursdays."<sup>51</sup> The O'Donnell dry goods business will effectively become a one-man operation again, symptomatic of an increasing urbanisation of Irish society during the 1960s at the expense of small businesses in rural towns. With Gar's magical self-crafting as a successful economic immigrant to America, S.B. will un sentimentally replace him with one of his friend's sons.

The autonomous myth-making performance of Gar O'Donnell, privately imagined but publicly theatricalised, is also privileged with an ability to debunk the myths of others. After Ned gives a distorted account of their escapades on the beach, in which two girls take the trousers off their friend Jimmy and pursue him across the beach, Private "corrects" the account but what is not foregrounded here is that Private's own memory is a construct, and equally susceptible to distortion through the unreliable process of recollection:

PRIVATE. We were all there that night, Ned. And the girls' names were Gladys and Susan. And they sat on the rocks dangling their feet in the water. And we sat in the cave, peeping out at

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<sup>50</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 96.

<sup>51</sup> *Idem.*

them. And then Jimmy Crerand suggested that we go in for a swim; and we all ran to the far end of the shore; and we splashed about like schoolboys. Then we came back to the cave, and wrestled with one another. And then out of sheer boredom, Tom, you suggested that we take the trousers off Crerand – just to prove how manly we all were. But when Ned started towards Jimmy – five foot nothing, remember? – wee Jimmy squared up and defied not only the brave Ned but the whole lot of us. So we straggled back home, one behind the other, and left the girls dangling their feet in the water. And that was that night.<sup>52</sup>

Private's monologue is uninterrupted and not subject to interjection – the other actors are silent for its passage. It has all the trappings of a "truthful" account and again underlines Private's unique myth-making agency but also his represented subjectivity as normative. The monologue is designed to counter the macho posturing and hyperbole of Ned's delivery; in doing so Private uncritically installs himself as the truth-speaker.<sup>53</sup> Private's re-construction of the event is established as the accurate version, although his account is no less a construct than Ned's. Friel empowers Private as the pre-eminent truth-creating figure, who invokes a theatrical privilege to performatively constitute Ned's empty bravado, Jimmy Crerand's courage and Gar's own sound, moral judgement.

However, in installing Gar O'Donnell as an everyman character, described by Boyle as being "young and strong and of average intelligence"<sup>54</sup> and representative of "normal" aspirations and desires,

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<sup>52</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 73.

<sup>53</sup> Friel leaves the topic of male gender and sexuality unproblematised, which is in keeping with social norms of the 1960s. Even seven years later with his play *The Gentle Island* (1971), Friel does very circumspectly tackle the subject but never explicitly or graphically, when it was becoming more acceptable to do so within playwriting practice in the Anglophone theatre. Gar is presented as economically dependent on his employer/father and infantilised by Madge. Sexuality is not explored because it is not practised (there is no indication that any of the characters are currently sexually active except Senator Doogan), so what stands in for the celibacy is not sexual performance but the performance of mythmaking.

<sup>54</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 52.

Friel is guilty of the same recuperation of social norms as Austin. And there is more than a suggestion that Friel himself identifies with his central character: both Friel and Gar O'Donnell abandoned studies prematurely;<sup>55</sup> they both have strong connections or orientations towards the United States, Friel having had published short stories in *The New Yorker*. Prior to and following the premiere of *Philadelphia* as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in September 1964, there was a long delay before the play finally received a production on Broadway in February 1966 - correspondence between Friel and his agent reveals the playwright's growing frustration by the delays.<sup>56</sup> It appears that Friel and his fictional creation share a desire for American success, despite Friel's own prejudices towards Americans (he refers to Americans as "Yanks"<sup>57</sup> in his notes and his depiction of American characters in *Philadelphia* cannot reasonably be deemed favourable). *Philadelphia Here I Come!*, it seems, was not far from *Broadway, Here I Come!*

Friel's use of male monologists is certainly normative and reflective of a patriarchal culture, notwithstanding his subsequent attempts to voice marginalised female subject positions in *The Loves of Cass Maguire* (1966) and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990). Nonetheless, gender normativity is most clearly naturalised in Gar's conversation with Senator Doogan when what follows is effectively a negotiation for Kate Doogan, who is removed from the scene of male exchange. The ritual transfer of ownership of the female, however, is not completed, but only because Gar surrenders to the economic dominance of another male.

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<sup>55</sup> Gar O'Donnell leaves University College Dublin before sitting his First Arts exams. Friel attended St Patrick's College, Maynooth as a seminarian for two years before leaving to train as a teacher in Derry.

<sup>56</sup> Brian Friel, *Philadelphia Here I Come!* Productions. MS 37,048/1-2. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>57</sup> Brian Friel, Original notes on *Philadelphia*. MS 37/047/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

Private calls Kate Doogan a “rotten aul snobby bitch”<sup>58</sup> and “the aul bitch”;<sup>59</sup> this casual but shocking insult is not tempered by the fact that Private and not Public, is uttering it. At worst, it is an underhand, misogynistic slur, as while it is expressed theatrically and publically it is not uttered in the fictional world of the play and therefore Public (and by extension Friel), paradoxically, cannot be accused of saying it. In fact, it serves to reveal an internalised misogyny and to underscore Gar’s formation as both a product and an agent of a patriarchal culture. If his thought process reveals this internalised dislike of women, and *Philadelphia* theatricalises a link between Gar’s cognition and behaviour, Friel unwittingly discloses Gar as a product of de Valera’s Ireland and its gender hierarchy. When debunking his friends’ vows to embark on a night of womanising, Private remarks that “they’ll shuffle around the gable of the hotel and take an odd furtive peep into the lounge at those English women who won’t even look up from their frigid knitting!”<sup>60</sup> Women are othered and desexualised in an attempt to rationalise Gar’s and his friends’ rejection by them. Monologue here can be seen to permit a negative construction of women by male narrators, a trait that will be re-enacted most noticeably in the monologue drama of McPherson and O’Rowe.<sup>61</sup> The reception of the play in 1964 does not challenge Gar O’Donnell’s gender position and the male-gendered recollections he stages – in fact, some of the uptake was positive.

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<sup>58</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 39.

<sup>59</sup> *Idem*, 43.

<sup>60</sup> *Idem*, 77.

<sup>61</sup> Another example of male, narrational dominance may be found in Friel’s *Give Me Your Answer Do!* (1997). Tom Connolly delivers the play’s opening and closing monologues to his disabled daughter Bridget, in which he narrates fantastical stories about Bridget’s grandparents and mother. Tellingly, Tom supplies his daughter’s own responses to the exchange, justifying the continuation of his monologue, so that it is clear that Tom is speaking and performing for himself, and attempting to maintain the illusion of an interlocutor. Although Friel may in fact be critiquing Tom’s self-absorbed narratives, the theatrical spectacle enables actor Tom Hickey (Tom) to display verbal virtuosity, whilst relegating Pauline Hutton (Bridget) to a fixed posture on the bed, representing a severely disabled young woman. “He talks to BRIDGET with almost excessive enthusiasm. And although she never speaks, he pauses occasionally as if he were listening to a response from her and replying to it.” (Brian Friel, *Give Me Your Answer Do!* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery Press, 1997), 11).

Desmond Rushe observes that “Mr Friel’s insight into a sensitive boy’s mind is extraordinarily acute, and his observation of others through the boy’s inner thoughts perfectly supplements the characters he creates.”<sup>62</sup>

Notwithstanding the pitfalls of monologue drama and the invitation it presents to construct others in negative terms, with *Philadelphia* Friel appropriated a potent theatrical device chiefly for an aesthetic inquiry into memory and myth construction and into the familiar dramatic and literary trope of father-son relations. Gar’s mythmaking performance would lie dormant in Friel’s artillery for some years to come. Although Friel’s use of monologue is situated within a dialogic framework in which other characters are voiced, Friel through the character of Private could perhaps be attributed the status of originating contemporary monologue drama in his experimentation with monologic constructions of gender, class and nationality.

***“A Triumph of Unconvention”<sup>63</sup> - Faith Healer***

The 1970s in Ireland represented a more turbulent economic climate and tempered somewhat the unbridled optimism of the 1960s. The Republic of Ireland entered the Common Market on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1973, along with the United Kingdom and Denmark, joining the six founding members. Although the Troubles achieved its lowest point on Bloody Sunday (30<sup>th</sup> January 1972), “it was clear throughout the 1970s that the majority of the population of the Republic did not wish the Northern crisis and the avowed republican nationalism of the state’s traditional ideology to interfere with the economic progress of the country along the path signposted by Lemass in 1959.”<sup>64</sup> Intellectual discourse continued

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<sup>62</sup> Desmond Rushe, “At last it’s the best new Irish play of year”. Rev. Of “Philadelphia Here I Come!” by Brian Friel. *Irish Independent* 29 Sep. 1964.

<sup>63</sup> Desmond Rushe, “Faith Healer - A Triumph of Unconvention”. Rev. of “Faith Healer” by Brian Friel. *Irish Independent* 30 Aug. 1980.

<sup>64</sup> Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 268.

to be shaped by the poststructuralist movement which had begun in France in the 1960s. Derrida's *Signature Event Context* was initially delivered as a lecture in Montreal in 1971 and published in an English translation in 1977, prompting a lively exchange with John Searle, a former student of Austin's. Derrida's essay marked a new direction for theories of performativity, and proved to be foundational to much thinking on the subject post-Austin. Both the Troubles and the awakening of gender politics in 1970s Ireland generated the beginnings of performance art, a radical new solo performance genre which would provide a new lens through which to view the relatively conservative form of monologue drama and the ontological, social and political issues it was seeking to address. Áine Phillips notes that "performance art in Ireland began in the early 1970s as Irish political turmoil aroused fervent artistic response and international feminist ideas began to influence Irish society and cultural discourse."<sup>65</sup> Against this backdrop of political, social and cultural ferment, Friel continued his own theatrical experiments.

Friel's experiment with the character of Sir in *Living Quarters* is part of the through-line of male monologue performers. Again, there emerges an analogy between Friel and an onstage male author. Friel describes Sir as "middle-aged. Always in full control of the situation, of the other characters, of himself. His calm is never ruffled. He is endlessly patient and tolerant, but never superior. Always carries his ledger with him. Dressed in a dark lounge suit, dark tie, white shirt, black, highly polished shoes."<sup>66</sup> Although Friel aims for a neutral performer, he opts for a white, middle-aged, middle class male to narrate and control the narrative of the Butler family.<sup>67</sup> The name "Sir" also evokes authority and as Sir is stage-managing the performed recollections of the characters, his onstage authority eclipses that

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<sup>65</sup> Áine Phillips, *Performance Art in Ireland: A History* (Bristol: Intellect, 2015), 8.

<sup>66</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 175.

<sup>67</sup> The part of Sir was played by Clive Geraghty in the original Abbey Theatre production in 1977 and by Tony Flynn in the 1999 Abbey Theatre production (in the Peacock Theatre).

of Commandant Frank Butler, who has returned a hero from a recent UN mission. Sir is a Pirandello-type creation with the metatheatrical function of ensuring that the play's characters adhere to the stage directions contained in his ledger. He claims that "in their imagination, out of some deep psychic necessity, they have conceived me – the ultimate arbiter, the powerful and impartial referee, the final adjudicator, a kind of human Hansard<sup>68</sup> who knows those tiny little details and interprets them accurately."<sup>69</sup> Friel's analogy with Hansard is misleading but offers an insight into Friel's supposedly neutral narrator-monologists. The device also links Sir with other narrator-monologists (Gar O'Donnell and Michael) who keep a register of the play's action, and whose interpretation of those events are viewed and experienced by an uncritical male gaze.<sup>70</sup>

The progression from *Living Quarters* to *Faith Healer* in this regard is evident in Friel's consideration of a neutral commentator for *Faith Healer*: "With neutral commentator?"<sup>71</sup> This sense of neutrality is borne out by further comments from Friel "at this point, after months of notes and work, I have no idea who S.S. is, why he lives, why he dies, his relationship with his gift, the meaning of his gift,

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<sup>68</sup> Hansard is the traditional name of the transcripts of Parliamentary Debates in Britain and many Commonwealth countries.

<sup>69</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 177-8.

<sup>70</sup> Friel's *Lovers (Winners)* (1967) is served by two narrators, a "Man" and a "Woman", whose accounts are impartial. Friel's concept of an impartial truth is developed in the character of Sir, who is given a more central role in the action of *Living Quarters*. However, Friel uses the possessive adjective "his" to include both "his" and "her" book: "When the curtain rises, a MAN and a WOMAN are seated on two high-backed chairs, one down left and one down right, at the edge of the stage. They are the Commentators. They are in their late fifties and carefully dressed in good dark clothes. Each has a book on his knee – not a volume, preferably a bound manuscript – and they read from this every so often. Their reading is impersonal, completely without emotion: their function is to give information. At no time must they reveal an attitude to their material." (Brian Friel, *Lovers* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery Press, 1984), 11).

<sup>71</sup> Brian Friel, original notes for *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, 1975.

his association with other people.”<sup>72</sup> The completed play, however, points to Friel’s desertion of the concept of a register of impartial truth evident in *Lovers* and *Living Quarters*, instead representing “truth” as unstable, provisional, arbitrary, and in the theatre: performable.

Building on his earlier monologic experiments with *Gar Private* and *Sir*, Friel’s *Faith Healer* (1979)<sup>73</sup> represents a bold departure in dramatic monologue composition, lifting monologue from its contained status within a dialogic play to one in which it performatively constitutes the play and abandoning fourth-wall convention in favour of direct address to spectators. *Faith Healer* forms a key intersection between playwriting practice, theatrical monologue performance and theories of performativity. The practice of faith healing<sup>74</sup> is used by Friel metaphorically and allegorically, quite self-consciously, however, the faith healing event is never enacted on stage (the curing of ten people in the village of Llanbethian in Wales; and the straightening of Donal’s finger in Ballybeg), despite Friel’s early intentions to enact it.<sup>75</sup> Instead, it is narrated in the past as related action, displaced into language and the act of narration. The spectators do not witness acts of faith healing; they imagine them through reception of the four monologues. The magic of faith healing, in a transformative theatrical process,

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<sup>72</sup> Brian Friel, original notes for *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, 1975. “S.S.” refers to “Seventh Son”, the working name for the character that would later become Frank Hardy. There is a belief among some communities in Ireland that the seventh son of a seventh son possesses faith healing abilities.

<sup>73</sup> *Faith Healer* was first produced at the Longacre Theatre, New York, on 5 April 1979, directed by José Quintero. James Mason played Frank, with Clarissa Kaye as Grace and Donal Donnelly as Teddy. It received its Irish premiere on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1980, directed by Joe Dowling and featured Donal McCann as Frank, with Kate Flynn as Grace and John Kavanagh as Teddy.

<sup>74</sup> At time of writing, faith healing continues as a practice and business in Ireland, with a number of faith healers offering services for fees. Aidan Wrynn, for example, is a seventh son faith healer based in Leitrim and has been practising since 1973. Monica Walsh, based in Co. Wicklow, identifies as a “natural healer”.

<sup>75</sup> Friel notes that “there must be a demonstration of his art/craft. N.B. In Act 1. It must be seen.” (Brian Friel, original notes for *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975.)



becomes the magic of narrative performance. Language is imbued with curative properties, underscored by the invocations of placenames by Frank and Grace:

FRANK. (*Eyes closed*)

Aberarder, Aberayron,

LLangranog, LLangurig,

Abergorlech, Abergynolwyn,

LLandefeilog, Llanerchymedd,

Aberhosan, Aberporth . . .

All those dying Welsh villages. (*Eyes open.*) I'd get so tense before a performance, d'you know what I used to do? As we drove along those narrow, winding roads I'd recite the names to myself just for the mesmerism, the sedation, of the incantation -<sup>76</sup>

The theatricality of the opening of the play is focused on the projection of Hardy's voice, rather than movement or visual stimulation. There is therefore a move from the tactile (Frank cures through touch) to the linguistic, from the material to the discursive. Sean Bryson describes Donal McCann in rehearsal: "Four spotlights beam in on actor Donal McCann, as he stands in all his loneliness on the stage of the Abbey Theatre. His hands move in a hypnotic way, and his voice rises, hurling its sound into the blackness of the theatre, as he becomes the Faith Healer."<sup>77</sup> The movement of the hands here, coupled with the emergence of the voice into the darkness of the auditorium, establishes voice and language as a primary theatre-making force with attendant associations of a magician's conjuring hands: language is magical and powerful, and also mystical, as Dublin (and New York) audiences would not comprehend the meaning of the Welsh and Scottish placenames. Hardy's linguistic power is therefore mystified from the

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<sup>76</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 332.

<sup>77</sup> Sean Bryson, "Fantastic Faith Healing at Abbey". *Irish Times* 29 Aug. 1980.

outset and consequently protected from a challenge that would bring its authority into question.<sup>78</sup> And the deliberate mystification of his gift operates to conceal Hardy's own lack of knowledge of its origins and his control of it.<sup>79</sup>

Frank's incantations are Welsh and Scottish placenames, proper names he enunciates prior to performances, but not in the act of faith healing performance. Once placenames are established as invocations, they are used elsewhere in the monologues as indices of the truth positions of Frank, Grace and Teddy. Grace claims that they were in Wales when Frank received news of his father's death. Frank states that they were in Kinlochbervie in Scotland when he was informed of his *mother's* death. Both Grace and Teddy identify Kinlochbervie as the site of Grace's giving birth to her and Frank's dead baby: Frank reinscribes Kinlochbervie with the trauma of the death of his mother in order to deny the death of his unnamed baby, which remains unnamed both because it did not survive and because Frank is unwilling to acknowledge it – like failed candidates for faith healing, the baby ceased to exist biologically or linguistically. And Frank declares early on his confusion with placenames (“Welsh – Scottish – over the years they became indistinguishable.”).<sup>80</sup> The act of nomination provides a vehicle for the creation of truths:

GRACE. . . One of his mean tricks was to humiliate me by always changing my surname. It became Dodsmith or Elliot or O'Connell or McPherson – whatever came into his head; and I

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<sup>78</sup> Hardy is privileged as being in the present tense and theatrically present. In describing Frank Hardy's character, Friel summarises Frank's view of himself and of Grace and Teddy: “Teddy lives for the future. Gracie lives in the past. I exist in the present.” (Brian Friel, original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975.)

<sup>79</sup> Friel, in his transparent identification with his created central character, poses a series of questions as to what “healing” is: “The ability to generate a faith in the process? A faith in the ability to generate a faith in the process? A complete accident? The design of an accident? A supernatural gift? The creation of possibilities? A mirage?” (Brian Friel, original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975.)

<sup>80</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 332.

came from Yorkshire or Kerry or London or Scarborough or Belfast; and he had cured me of a blood disease; and we weren't married – I was his mistress – always that – that was the one constant.<sup>81</sup>

Grace goes on to describe how Frank regarded the cure-seeking as “real enough, but not real as persons, real as fictions, his fictions, extensions of himself that came into being only because of him”, the cured becoming a “successful fiction and therefore actually real”, the failed “allowed to dissolve and vanish as if he had never existed.”<sup>82</sup> Frank’s construction of others extended even to his father whom he made “a stonemason and a gardener and a bus-driver and a guard and a musician.”<sup>83</sup>

The power of language to constitute is demonstrated throughout.<sup>84</sup> When Grace tells a doctor that Frank’s occupation was an “artist”, “quickly – casually – but with complete conviction – just the way he might have said it. . . And then because I said it and the doctor wrote it down, I knew it was true.”<sup>85</sup> Although the clipping from the *West Glamorgan Chronicle* misnames Frank as Francis Harding in its account of the faith healing event in Llanblethian, Frank claims “it identified me – even though it got my name wrong.”<sup>86</sup> In all cases, language is endowed with constitutory force, irrespective of truth or falsity criteria. Friel demonstrates and in a sense celebrates language’s magical, creational powers and through doing this, unwittingly advertises its political potential for identity construction.

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<sup>81</sup> Idem, 345.

<sup>82</sup> Idem, 345.

<sup>83</sup> Idem, 346.

<sup>84</sup>The constitutory force of language is evident thematically elsewhere in Friel’s canon, most notably in *Translations* (1980) and *Making History* (1988). In the former, Friel theatricalises the toponymic transformation of the countryside through the translation of Irish placenames into the English language; in the latter, he stages the historiographic process of history-making. *Faith Healer* is more radical in its dramatisation of language performativity as it self-reflexively deploys the theatre-making process to achieve this.

<sup>85</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 346.

<sup>86</sup> Idem, 371.

Austin states that performatives “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constatae anything at all, are not ‘true and false’”<sup>87</sup> - therefore the performative utterances of Frank, Grace and Teddy bring one another into being without being held to any truth/falsity judgement. What is at stake for spectators are the performatives and counter-performatives of the three monologists. If the facts (constatives) of the accounts cannot be verified, in their absence, focus turns to the performances of the characters in their narrations of competing truths. Performativity, then, in both the philosophical and theatrical sense, is staged in *Faith Healer*. The perlocutionary effects of the monologues manifest in interval and post-play conversations centring on whose truth creations are more plausible than the others. And perhaps *Faith Healer* is a testimony to monologue drama’s capacity to self-create without being held to truth/falsity criteria. Monologue effectively removes referentiality because the monologues produce and constitute the referents themselves – there is no signifier divisible from a corresponding referent. The signifier/referent duality is collapsed into performative utterances. Friel stages the performance of truths without the possibility of falsity because there are no facts, only recollections. The truths of the three narrators are created autonomously and alone onstage, and are protected from any interjection that might challenge their veracity. Friel makes the point that truths are fictional and as fictions, they cannot be rebutted – the only relationship that is significant is that between the author of the fiction and his or her truth creation. The monologue form is apt for this theme because it disallows a contradiction (which a realist, intersubjective drama would allow) that might undermine its claims to autonomous truths. Facts are suppressed in favour of truth performances and in *Faith Healer*, with opening and closing monologues given to Frank, he is positioned as the dominant truth-creator. Grace and Teddy only exist because Frank “created” them.

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<sup>87</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 5.

As with *Philadelphia*, the politics of voicing disempowered subject positions appears to be connected with a low economic status and an exclusion from the realms of institutional authority. The threesome travels around the fringes of Wales and Scotland, performing in derelict kirks, meeting-houses and schools, “hardly ever cities or towns because the halls were far too dear for us.”<sup>88</sup> Grace recalls living one winter “in a derelict cottage in Norfolk miles from anyone – it was really a converted byre. I remember kneeling before a tiny grate and crying because the timber was so wet the fire wouldn’t light, and trying to get to sleep on a damp mattress on the floor.”<sup>89</sup> The abject material conditions of both their accommodation and performance spaces are consequences of their situation outside sanctioned modes of monologue performance and discourse: Grace is a qualified lawyer who never practised and Teddy managed profitable entertainment acts (including a one-woman show) before becoming Frank’s manager.<sup>90</sup> They do not merit inclusion in dominant discursive arena because they cannot invoke legitimate and known procedures to successfully execute their attempts at speech acts. They are removed from the pre-eminent centre of England and confined to a Celtic periphery, from where they attempt to produce the performative magic of faith healing. Framed in postcolonial terms - only within the borders of Great Britain and Ireland - they are staging a linguistic coup, invoking Celtic languages to supplant the hegemonic colonial English tongue. Frank’s, Grace’s and Teddy’s monologues are expressions of marginalised economic subjectivities seeking to strike back at a dominant, linguistic, discursive and performative centre. Friel again figures an orthodox professional dominance in the shape of Grace’s father, whom she visits after leaving Frank:

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<sup>88</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 332.

<sup>89</sup> *Idem*, 346.

<sup>90</sup> With regard to Frank himself, Friel’s notes contain the quote “I dabbled in cures and discovered that they became my life” (Brian Friel, original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975). This is a line Friel no doubt attributes to Hardy, but also resonates with the artist/playwright. Friel had an early career as a maths teacher before turning to writing full-time.

GRACE. . . . But words were now spilling out of him, not angry words but the tired formula words of the judge sentencing me to nine months in jail but suspending the sentence because he understood I came from a professional family with a long and worthy record of public service and hoping that I would soon regret and atone for the blemish I had brought on that family and on my own profession and threatening that if I ever appeared before him again he would have no option but to send me to jail and impose the maximum penalty et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.<sup>91</sup>

Grace's interaction with her father places her outside of spheres of hegemonic performative discourse. Her father performs what Austin would describe as a "verdictive" – "the delivering of a finding, official or unofficial, upon evidence or reasons as to value or fact, so far as these are distinguishable."<sup>92</sup> Father's performatives deal with reasons and fact and in keeping with Austin, cannot take seriously the non-serious performatives of the mountebank.<sup>93</sup> Friel's statement here is that theatrical monologic performatives, cast out of serious consideration, can still exert illocutionary force. Frank Hardy does not conform to the world of conventional performative utterances as embodied by

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<sup>91</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 348.

<sup>92</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 153.

<sup>93</sup> Austin does not include faith healing in his categories of performative utterances, unsurprisingly, as he would no doubt group it with other non-serious utterances ("etiologies of language"). If he were to place it under any category, it would be classified as an "exercitive", which Austin describes as "the exercising of powers, rights, or influence" (idem, 151). Austin includes the verbs "pray", "entreat" and "give" as examples of this category (idem, 156), which have some bearing on the act of faith healing.

Father and instead is placed outside of the realms of sanctioned discourse.<sup>94</sup> Faith healing is unintelligible to the professional discourses of law and medicine and disavowed by the Catholic Church. Instead, Frank's practices constitute counter-performatives drawing on no prior authority except themselves. Father's rebuke of Grace prompts her to confess that she "wanted to . . . assault and defile him with obscenities and to articulate them slowly and distinctly and brutally into his patrician face; words he never used; a language he didn't speak; a language never heard in that house." Her father would recognize it as "the final rejection of his tall straight poplars and the family profession and his formal Japanese gardens. But more important, much, much more important, recognize it as my proud testament to my mountebank and the van and the wet timber and the primus stove and the dirty halls and everything he'd call squalor."<sup>95</sup> Competing languages, language performativities and the material conditions of the performance of those languages are pitted against one another in this exchange. The family home and its "patrician" owner accommodate the order of dominant, juridical discourse. Frank's unorthodox livelihood and performances necessitate constant travel to squalid venues on the Celtic margins.

In Austinian and professional terms, Hardy is an outcast, and Friel deploys Hardy to eke out a theatrical space for alternative performativities. If Friel makes an allegorical gesture connecting him to Hardy and the practice of playwriting, the macro-speech act is to challenge the dialogic canon which is resistant to accommodating full-length monologue drama. A critical unpacking of monologue drama in this instance is in every sense a disruptive misappropriation of Austin's theories as it utilises a type of speech act unsanctioned by Austin in a setting excluded by Austin from serious consideration. Reviewing the Irish premiere of the play at the Abbey Theatre, Desmond Rushe notes that "in purely dramatic

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<sup>94</sup> Hardy is placed outside conventional realms of authoritative discourse- in his notes, Friel attributes the following statement to Hardy: "My job is to medicine as poetry is to journalism." Brian Friel, original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975.

<sup>95</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1*(London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 348-349.

terms, Mr. Friel throws convention and caution to the winds, and stacks the odds so recklessly against himself that he seems obsessed with failure.”<sup>96</sup>

Friel questions himself in his notes as to what exactly is in need of being cured, conceiving of faith healing as potentially symbolic of a greater cure: “The kernel of the magic is healing – healing by some mysterious kind of instantly endowed faith. What is it requires healing – the family? The nation? The healer?”<sup>97</sup> I would venture that the cure of *Faith Healer* is an attempted redress of theatrical and societal representation. The play has been generated through a crisis in dialogic representation; the cure is to voice suppressed subject positions and to challenge hegemonic monologic discourse. The practice of faith healing is unsanctioned by the church and by orthodox professional institutions. Friel is giving voice to a pagan, itinerant performative practice in order to disrupt social, cultural and theatrical hegemonies. He returns to the theme in *Dancing at Lughnasa* where the pagan ritual of Lughnasa is staged to challenge the dominant prescriptions of the Catholic Church and also the State-sanctioned dictates of the education system, represented by the school in which Kate Mundy works. If Frank’s faith healing challenges dramaturgical hegemony, the wild dance of the Mundy sisters is a performative expression of the same challenge to a social dominant order. The difference perhaps is that the disruption enacted by *Faith Healer* challenges the dominance of intersubjective dramatic representation itself, making it all the more radical, whereas the enacted rebellion in *Dancing at Lughnasa* falls within conventional representational parameters.

Dublin theatre-goers had attended productions of monologue plays during this period, but those plays were generally of short duration, and staged with other plays of similar length. The Abbey Theatre

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<sup>96</sup> Desmond Rushe, “Faith Healer - A Triumph of Unconvention”. Rev. of “Faith Healer” by Brian Friel. *Irish Independent* 30 Aug. 1980.

<sup>97</sup> Brian Friel, original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975.



staged *Happy Days* in 1973, and although it contains lengthy monologues by Winnie, it is punctuated by exchanges with Willie. In that regard, the Abbey Theatre production of *Faith Healer* in 1980 represented a breakthrough in contemporary monologue dramatic performance: a full-length monologue play on the Abbey Theatre's main stage at the primary performance time of 8:00pm (as opposed to the more common lunchtime performance slots for monologue plays). Spatially and temporally, the play challenged the dramaturgical status quo.

Significantly, after considering stills or film to accompany the monologues, and then making a further decision as to whether the play would comprise Frank Hardy's words or be a "realistic" play, Friel decided to go with the monologue format.<sup>98</sup> He also considered writing *Faith Healer* for television. Friel, in a sense, placed his faith in the monologue dramatic form, as opposed to the more conventional, conservative aesthetic form of realism, or visual aids to complement the monologues uttered by Frank, Grace and Teddy. His composition of the play, and his gamble on the monologue form, is linked to Frank Hardy's own monologue performance, in which he produces other characters through his fictions. Faith healing stands in for the magical, constitutory qualities of language, its nominating force and more specifically, its power within the theatre to install itself as the creating force and to do away with other representational strategies which Friel assessed before determining that primarily language would represent the action.

We can corroborate the Friel/Frank Hardy linkage with a later play from Friel's corpus, *Give Me Your Answer Do!* (1997), in which novelist Tom Connolly struggles with the dilemma of selling his papers

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<sup>98</sup> In his original notes on the play, Friel considers various staging options, which betray uneasiness about the performance of lengthy monologues. He contemplates visual accompaniments for the monologues: "There will be visuals, not necessarily of what is being described by Hardy, but of his own images as he talks." Friel refers to a film to which Hardy "will refer – so that he would be commenting on the actual scenes" before writing "just the monologue only." Friel debates: "No stills, no film, no theatrical realistic illustration is necessary – if the words are always perfectly true and in perfect pitch. Either: absolute trust in the character and his revelations or: a 'realistic' play. Which?" (Brian Friel, original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975).

to the University of Texas. Connolly and his wife Daisy have a daughter, living in a mental health institution, who suffers from a severe intellectual disability. Given the monologue dramatic form's precarious status as I have discussed earlier, Frank Hardy's practice of faith healing may be read not merely as a universal allegory for artistic or playwriting practice, but as the risky art of monologue drama, which goes outside the conventions of dramaturgical hegemony. And informing Friel's composition of the play was a notion of the artist as a failed miracle worker.<sup>99</sup>

Friel's play about a man performing cures through touch draws together the contemporary private practice of faith healing but also modern Christian evangelical healing performances, some of which have been the subject of criminal investigations.<sup>100</sup> *Faith Healer*, while not tapping into a sensationalist marketing approach, cannot completely shed the allure and promise of witnessing a faith healer at work. The poster advertising the 1980 Abbey Theatre production features sketches of the heads and shoulders of Donal McCann, Kate Flynn and John Kavanagh. McCann's hands are raised and are just visible, in what may be read as a magician's pose. For patrons unfamiliar with Friel's work or thematic concerns, and not making a distinction between Friel's play and non-artistic faith healing performances, the poster may indeed have promised a magical theatrical experience offering knowledge, insight or indeed, "truth".

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<sup>99</sup> In conceiving of Frank Hardy as the artist/faith healer, Friel draws on the work of Russian writer and publisher Andrei Sinyavsky, who describes the artist as a failed miracle worker. The following appears in Friel's notes:

In this sense the artist is a failed miracle worker, or in simpler language, a magician who casts a spell on reality through his images. The magical transformation of the world by means of art is unattainable, but art lives and breathes by such stimuli. Hence the tragedy of the artist, who is incapable of carrying out the primordial injunction that has been laid upon him. And therein lies the great strength and joy of art: to create images by transforming life and thus on a sheet of paper . . . to play the artist's immemorial role – that of "sorcerer and myth-maker". (Andrei Sinyavsky, "Sinyavsky: Fiction and Reality", Int. With K Pomerantsev, trans. Michael Glenny, *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 May 1975, p. 560).

<sup>100</sup> In his 1987 book *The Faith Healers*, James Randi, a magician, explores the world of faith healing in the United States and what he claims are the deceitful and sometimes fraudulent methods of its practitioners.

Andrew Sofer has argued that Elizabethan audiences were drawn to performances of Dr Faustus for the added excitement of the possible appearance of the devil:

Faustus's spells enact theatre's potential to escape from the character's (and actor's) control and unwittingly bring into being that which it names. Faustus traffics in performative magic not in the service of scepticism, as some critics have argued, but to appropriate speech's performative power on behalf of a glamorous commercial enterprise, the Elizabethan theatre itself. It was precisely the potential for inadvertent magic on the part of the players – the belief that Faustus's spells might operate independent of actor and character – that thrilled and alarmed Elizabethan audiences, causing them to see devils that were not literally there.<sup>101</sup>

As Frank Hardy has conceded that his gift was not within his control, spectators at *Faith Healer* may have been attracted to the added sense of unpredictability of his curative performances. The expectations induced by the subject matter of the monologues and perhaps by Donal McCann's growing reputation as an actor within Irish theatre at the time may reasonably have shaped the play's perlocutionary outcome. In illustrating the capricious and unpredictable nature of Frank's gift, Friel makes a comparison with Christ's performance of miracles, which is controllable and is only a means to the ultimate objective, the promulgation of the Christian message.<sup>102</sup> Frank Hardy, however, cannot

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<sup>101</sup> Andrew Sofer, "How to Do Things with Demons: Conjuring Performatives in Doctor Faustus". *Theatre Journal* 61.1 (2009): 1-21.

<sup>102</sup> Friel compares the miracle-making of Christ, which he could control, with Frank Hardy's unpredictable practice of faith healing: "Christ's cures – of withered hands, leprosy, etc. – were of no importance and he knew it: free lollipops before the real business. He had no interest in healing; only in selling his philosophy. But he knew that – the mind couldn't withstand the physical benefit of incontestable evidence. And that a cure, for the patient and his family and friends, would be the most memorable event in a life: endlessly talked over. S.S. is aware of this. And the absence of a philosophy, the follow through, makes him feel empty and a bit absurd. His curing is a suspended gift, deriving from what, leading to what – an irrational accident. And unlike Christ, his power is erratic: he can

control the efficacy of his faith healing, and can only know for certain the outcome of an upcoming performance when he knows that his gift will have no effect. Friel notes to himself that Hardy should be thought of “as a medium. In this understanding of the artist, S.S. (Seventh Son, Friel’s name for the faith healer prior to Frank Hardy) is neither accountable for nor in control of his power, whatever it is.”<sup>103</sup>

The critical reception of *Faith Healer* was mixed, and along with it Friel’s monologic revolt to a dialogic playwriting hegemony. The allegory between play and faith healing session and the inevitable linkage between positive critical uptake and the success or otherwise of Hardy’s “curative” performance could not have been lost on critics and unsurprisingly raised the critical and commercial stakes for the play’s production. Lindie Naughton observed that:

. . . like those who attend meetings of faith healers, theatregoers are often seeking simply to have their prejudices confirmed and the final seal put on their anguish and hopelessness. So that when a miracle does occur, pure panic ensues. . . The feeling at the end is one of frustration at the hopelessness of the lives we have come to know and at the resigned and dour pessimism of the playwright. It is easy to see why “Faith Healer” didn’t go down well in New York.<sup>104</sup>

Rose Costello implicitly draws a parallel between the faith of spectators in Friel’s playwriting ability and Hardy’s onstage performance: “His faith in himself is only sustained by the faith of others in

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neither summon nor control it. To an extent he is its victim.” (Brian Friel, original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975.)

<sup>103</sup> Friel elaborates on the connection between healing and faith in the process of healing: “Since the kernel is healing (by the mysterious endowment of a faith in the process: or equally the failure to assume the healing process because of the inability, the involuntary inability, to believe) and presumably healing by belief, then we are concerned at least as much with the possibility of faith in certain situations as we are with the empirical fact of a cure. So that in some respects S.S. works as blindly as Francis Bacon, believing in chance, in accident.”

<sup>104</sup> Lindie Naughton, “Friel Play in Need of a Cure”. Rev. of “Faith Healer” by Brian Friel. *Irish Times* 29 Aug. 1980.

his power and strangely enough despite the fact that he is cold and unfeeling in his relationships with others he still manages to obtain and maintain their constant devotion.”<sup>105</sup> Friel likens faith healing to “making whole” and a practice “to banish disorder temporarily”, which is contrary to how *Faith Healer* is received, with its differing accounts of the same events. James Fenton articulated a familiar anxiety about the monologue form when he observed, about the 1983 Royal Court Production, that “I felt at the end: that was quite a play, but I must now read it. If a play leaves one with such a feeling, I suppose this is already a sign that something is amiss” and “in a normal play, in true dramatic writing as opposed to ‘dramatic monologues’, the text is absolutely not self-sufficient in this way. The spoken text is only a part of what the audience takes in – and the great skill of the dramatist is that he never forgets this.”<sup>106</sup> Fenton’s attempted reaffirmation of the conventional qualities of the “normal play” and “true dramatic writing” must read as the response Friel would have desired most, as *Faith Healer* seeks to subvert “true” dramatic models with coherent, stable meanings and instead replace them with multiple truths delivered through an abnormal dramatic form, cross-pollinating the literary, poetic form of dramatic monologue with the live performance of the theatre. The uptake of different productions of the play in different cities is also linked to the faith healer’s varying fortunes across different regions – Friel notes that the faith healer’s “healing gift is like the diviner’s rod – it works only on certain responsive territories.”<sup>107</sup> The transformative, curative properties of faith healing become the magical illocutionary and perlocutionary force of monologue performance – Friel’s cure attempts to magically reconfigure the dialogic canon to accommodate full-length dramatic monologue plays.

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<sup>105</sup> Rose Costello, “Put your faith in Play!” Rev. of “Faith Healer” by Brian Friel. *Irish Examiner* 29 Aug. 1980.

<sup>106</sup> James Fenton, *You Were Marvellous: Theatre Reviews from the ‘Sunday Times’* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), 181.

<sup>107</sup> Brian Friel, original notes on *Faith Healer*. MS 37,075/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1975.

**Miracle Molly**

Friel revisits the old territory of *Faith Healer* with his play *Molly Sweeney* (1994),<sup>108</sup> which in many ways marks a redemptive attempt to modify his earlier monologue work. *Molly Sweeney* was staged at a time when the resurgence of the form was beginning.<sup>109</sup> The similarities with the earlier monologue play are so marked, formally and thematically, that they can be critiqued not only as discrete companion pieces, but as one play segueing into the next.<sup>110</sup> Both Grace Hardy and Molly Sweeney have husbands named Frank. Grace Hardy's father is a retired judge and "mother in her headscarf and wellingtons was a strange woman who went in and out of the mental hospital."<sup>111</sup> Molly Sweeney's father is a retired judge and her mother has been in and out of the hospital "with her nerves."<sup>112</sup> Neither set of parents is named. After Molly begins to lose her vision again and revert to her original visual state, she believes her mother visits her in hospital:

Mother comes in occasionally; in her pale blue headscarf and muddy wellingtons. Nobody pays much attention to her. She just wanders through the wards. . . But when she sits uneasily on the edge of my bed, as if she were waiting to be summoned, her face always frozen in that nervous half-smile, I think I know her better than I ever knew her and I begin to love her all over again.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *Molly Sweeney* was first staged in the Gate Theatre on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1994 with Catherine Byrne as Molly, Mark Lambert as Frank and T.P. McKenna as Mr Rice, directed by the author.

<sup>109</sup> For example, McPherson's *Rum and Vodka* had its first professional production on 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1994 in the City Arts Centre, Dublin.

<sup>110</sup> Friel asks himself: "Is it possible that the ophthalmologist is the centre of the play? (Too close to *Faith Healer*?)" Brian Friel, original notes on *Molly Sweeney*. MS 37,128/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1993.

<sup>111</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996) 347.

<sup>112</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999) 457.

<sup>113</sup> *Idem*, 508.

I plan to argue here that Friel reincarnates Grace Hardy in the form of Molly Sweeney in order to voice a repressed female subjectivity and that the intention to re-voice Grace Hardy recuperates her as a subject of patriarchal desires. As with *Faith Healer*, Friel uses scenarios of miraculous healing as a metaphor for the magic of language performativity. In neither play is the act of healing staged, rather it is displaced into language and the performance of narrative. Monologic theatrical language receives the magical force of the subject matter of its narration. The mystical, transformative properties of the act of miracle-making are transferred to language and its metamorphic, world-making power.

At the outset, Friel exploits the two meanings of “gnosis”: meaning “long period of blurriness – impaired vision” but also a “knowledge of mystical things.”<sup>114</sup> Molly is granted this knowledge, much as Frank Hardy is endowed with the gift of faith healing - again monologue performance is deployed to theatricalise the world-making power of language.<sup>115</sup> Molly’s monologues, which open both Acts and conclude the play, are an expression of a visually impaired subjectivity – monologue performance and visual impairment are twinned at the beginning.<sup>116</sup> Language is a theatre-making and world-making tool

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<sup>114</sup> Brian Friel, original notes on *Molly Sweeney*. MS 37,0128/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1993.

<sup>115</sup> Friel also views Mr Rice as having a mystical function: “Is the ophthalmologist-neurologist something more than a facilitator? Has he a mystical function – leading into light? Seeing? Or merely a tradesman?” (Brian Friel, original notes on *Molly Sweeney*. MS 37,0128/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1993.)

<sup>116</sup> Friel’s composition of *Molly Sweeney* owes much to an article in the *New Yorker* by renowned neurologist Oliver Sacks, who describes meeting Virgil (not his real name), a middle-aged man originally from Kentucky but living in Oklahoma, who had thick cataracts and also suffered from retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease that causes severe vision impairment through progressive degeneration of the rod photoreceptor cells in the retina: “The rest of us, born sighted, can scarcely imagine such confusion. For we, born with a full complement of senses, and correlating these, one with the other, create a sight world from the start, a world of visual objects and concepts and meanings. When we open our eyes each morning, it is upon a world we have spent a lifetime *learning* to see. We are not given the world: we make our world through incessant experience, categorization, memory, reconnection. But when Virgil opened his eye, after being blind for forty-five years – having had little more than an infant’s visual experience, and this long forgotten – there were no visual memories to support a perception, there was no world of experience and meaning awaiting him. He saw, but what he saw had no

and with no realist set, spectators are asked to imagine worlds much in the same way as Molly. Language and the hearing of language are primary. Friel cites Denis Diderot in his epigraph to the published text of the play: “Learning to see is not like learning a new language. It’s like learning language for the first time.”<sup>117</sup> Words are put to work in constructing a world for Molly and spectators are enlisted as co-creators in her world-making process.<sup>118</sup> Unlike *Faith Healer*, Friel makes no reference to a set, only that “all three stay on stage for the entire play” and suggests “that each character inhabits his/her own special acting area – Mr Rice stage left, Molly Sweeney centre stage, Frank Sweeney stage right.”<sup>119</sup> Molly is positioned centre stage, flanked by two men and therefore visually and aurally dominant – visual focus rests on her body, even at certain times when she is not speaking.<sup>120</sup>

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coherence. His retina and optic nerve were active, transmitting impulses, but his brain could make no sense of them; he was, as neurologists say, agnostic.”

Surgery intended to at least partially restore Virgil’s sight proves unsuccessful over time, “but then, paradoxically, a release was given, in the form of a second and now final blindness – a blindness he received as a gift. Now, at last, Virgil is allowed to not see, allowed to escape from the glaring, confusing world of sight and space, and to return to his own true being, the touch world that has been his home for almost fifty years.” (Oliver Sacks, “To See and Not to See”, *New Yorker*, 10 May 1993).

<sup>117</sup> Denis Diderot, quoted in Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999) 453.

<sup>118</sup> As with *Faith Healer*, Friel considered other staging options prior to deciding upon monologues and a minimalist set. In terms of the set, Friel writes: “The set – her home where she functions fully and comfortably. Then as the play unfolds (with the restoration of partial sight) that room – an island within the stage – becomes less familiar, strange, finally foreign.” Friel considered “duets” between characters before settling on three alternating monologues. The fact that Friel alighted upon the monologue format points to the suitability of that form to represent the mystical world-making narrative of Molly. (Brian Friel, original notes on *Molly Sweeney*. MS 37,0128/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1993).

<sup>119</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2*(London: Faber & Faber, 1999) 455.

<sup>120</sup> In the 2011 Gate Theatre production of the play, which featured Dawn Bradfield as Molly, Peter Hanly as Frank and Michael Byrne as Mr Rice, Molly moves and dances, including during Frank’s monologue. The set consists of seven white wooden chairs, in opposing positions across the stage. The actors sit in different chairs during the performance. There are two rectangular windows with blinds at the rear, giving the effect of viewing from within someone’s brain. Molly occasionally looks through the windows. There are three suspended light bulbs, lit in various permutations. Mr Rice is dressed in overcoat and hat and is formally dressed. Frank is dressed for outdoor work and has a rucksack. Molly wears a dress and is barefoot.



Friel writes in his notes, citing Sack's *New Yorker* article that "in the newly sighted, learning to see demands a radical change in neurological functioning and with it a radical change in psychological functioning, in self, in identity."<sup>121</sup> The process of Molly's sighting is paradoxically not staged visually but through language. Frank Hardy's acts of faith healing are similarly displaced into performances of narrative in which he magically conjures people. Mr Rice, through performing a miraculous operation to restore some of Molly's sight, enables her new journey of sight and subject formation. As the set denies visual stimulation in favour of aural appreciation of a lyrical, musical language, the spectators can only understand and interpret Molly's self-constitution as generated by and through language. Framed and positioned in linguistic terms, she is again subject to the male, medical, professional discourse of Mr Rice, who wants to miraculously resurrect a flagging career as an ophthalmologist, and the philosophical discourse of her husband Frank, who does not figure as an authority figure in the same way as Mr Rice, but whose discursive, illocutionary force is no less influential in theatrical terms. What is at stake is not Molly's sight but a new sighted world which she is mandated to construct but which will also simultaneously construct her. If *Faith Healer* enacts the speech acts and counter-speech acts of Frank, Grace and Teddy bearing contradictory constitutory force in generating truths, which extends to the creation of individual subjects, *Molly Sweeney* stages similar competing monologues, whose accounts are complementary, but whose objectives rest in the successful reconstruction of Molly.<sup>122</sup> The immediate post-operative phase appears to augur well for Molly but as time passes, her condition worsens and the play ends with her in a hospital suffering from an unspecified illness connected with her regressed visual function.

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<sup>121</sup> Oliver Sacks, "To See and Not to See", *New Yorker*, 10 May 1993.

<sup>122</sup> Friel appears to extend the metaphor of re-sightedness to all three characters. He writes in his notes that "Each of the characters has been afforded an opportunity to see – each has been offered promise. Cautiously, almost reluctantly, each has met that promise – and been destroyed by it. Demonstrate precisely what each promise was. And how total the loss." (Friel's emphasis). (Brian Friel, original notes on *Molly Sweeney*. MS 37,0128/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1993).

Mr Rice views Molly as a means to restore his reputation as an internationally renowned eye surgeon: “And suddenly (. . .) I wanted nothing more in the world than that their inordinate hopes would be fulfilled, that I could give them their miracle. And I whispered to Hans Girder and to Matoba and to Murnaghan and to Bloomstein – yes, to Bloomstein, too! – to gather round me this morning and steady my unsteady hand and endow me with all their exquisite skills.”<sup>123</sup> Mr Rice invokes his former colleagues’ ability to assist him with restoring Molly’s sight, in a manner that recalls Frank Hardy’s invocation of Welsh and Scottish placenames. And in a gesture again reminiscent of the faith healer, he names Molly “Miracle Molly”, marking her as miraculous for her restored vision but also for her part in the phenomenal recovery of his career, which had been stagnating in a Donegal hospital (only the people who were successfully cured by Frank Hardy achieved subjecthood in the eyes of Frank). If Molly’s newly sighted subjectivity is attributable to Mr Rice’s performance, and that new identity is all-constituting, she is in all respects his creation.<sup>124</sup>

For Frank, Molly represents the latest in a long line of outlandish schemes – running a small farm for piebald Iranian goats for three and a half years on Inis Beag; working for a charitable organization in Nigeria; selling storage batteries for wind turbines; and spending three winters in Norway to ensure the well-being of whales. He subsequently spends an afternoon with his friend Billy Hughes attempting to relocate two badgers from a lakeside sett to a new home on the mountainside, before travelling to Ethiopia the following morning. All of Frank’s projects concern the care of animals, environmental protection or other charities.<sup>125</sup> Frank has perhaps unconsciously embarked on a marriage with Molly in

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<sup>123</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999) 480-481.

<sup>124</sup> Friel of course is the ultimate author of characters – Frank Hardy and Mr Rice may be read as onstage agents of Friel, bringing people into being through miraculous restoration, an act suggesting the god-like authorial act of dramatic character creation.

<sup>125</sup> In his notes, Friel describes the character of Martha, who would later become Molly: “Martha: all feeling, all sensibility; between 2 indifferent disciplines (psychology/neurology; philosophy).” (Brian Friel, original notes on *Molly Sweeney*. MS 37,0128/1. Brian Friel Papers. National Library of Ireland, Dublin. 1993).

order to make permanent his project of animal care, as Molly is repeatedly presented in terms of sensuality and sensibility, as opposed to the male regime of philosophical thought (Frank cites Berkeley and Locke) and the field of medical science (neurology, ophthalmology). Anna McMullan comments that the play “directly stages the performance of male authority on the female body. Molly Sweeney’s blindness represents an alternative mode of interaction with the world, based on the intimacy of touch or smell and corporeal immersion . . . Molly’s corporeal subjection and role as symbol, rather than agent or author, may have the performative force of naturalizing what it purports to critique.”<sup>126</sup> Mr Rice’s suspicions of Frank’s motivations in respect of his wife are (project)ions of his own desire to perform surgery on Molly to salvage his reputation: “two thoughts flitted across my mind. That her blindness was his latest cause and that it would absorb him just as long as his passion lasted.”<sup>127</sup>

Friel again inscribes himself as a deictic figure (Mr Rice) with world and theatre-making ability (Friel directed the original production of *Molly Sweeney*, adding another layer of creative autonomy). Molly represents a project to both Frank and Mr Rice, and to Friel, the ultimate author. If Friel is implicitly critical of Frank Sweeney’s and Mr Rice’s respective investments in the project of Molly’s re-sighting, it is ironically Friel himself who is gnostic (possessing a mystical playwriting ability) but also gender-blind in his lack of foregrounding of his male authority. Efforts to “rehabilitate” and “recuperate” Molly (both terms freighted with a sense of the reiteration of male and other hegemonies) misfire and

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<sup>126</sup> Anna McMullan adds that “Molly is persuaded into having an operation to restore her sight by her autodidact husband with an obsession for lost causes, and an alcoholic eye surgeon hoping to restore his reputation by one more performance. Molly sees this clearly: “Why am I going for this operation? None of this is my choosing. Then why is this happening to me? I am being used” (. . .). Yet she submits, and cannot survive the ensuing dislocation. Initially presented as self-possessed, independent and highly resourceful, her integrity is destroyed by instrumental masculine authority, and, as Karen Moloney has argued, citing several references to Molly’s pagan namesake, mad Buile Suibhne, at an allegorical or tropological level she becomes a symbol of Ireland “astray”. Molly’s corporeal subjection and role as symbol, rather than agent or author, may have the performative force of naturalizing what it purports to critique.” (Anna McMullan, “Performativity, Unruly Bodies and Gender in Brian Friel’s Drama” in *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*, ed. Anthony Roche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 145).

<sup>127</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 460.

only confirm patriarchal hegemony and control. The magic of theatrical language is advertised as an ethical mode of subject construction but the uptake of this mode is uneven and gender-reliant. Richard Pine writes:

Never has Friel written with such lucidity, never have his voices spoken so clearly. Never has he allowed magic so much latitude in demonstrating the capacity for a play. . . . However compelling the magic may be, audiences leave Friel's theatre not wondering, but knowing that a statement, however intangible, has been made, that a finality of sorts, however brief, has been reached, and that it somehow concerns and affects them deeply.<sup>128</sup>

The perlocutionary effects of Friel's spell were mixed and the monologue dramatic form is again laid open to question. Noeleen Dowling questions whether in fact Friel's work is a play before adding: "even while one appreciates the quality of writing of that calibre, one can't help thinking how much greater the scene's impact would have been mounted on the stage as full-blown drama."<sup>129</sup> And Jocelyn Clarke complains that "in spite of all the miracles mentioned and alluded to in the text, there are no burning bushes, only dull mirages."<sup>130</sup> *Molly Sweeney* ultimately suffered the same critical fate as its predecessor. Friel the magician of language attempts to cast a spell to undo male gender hierarchies in his originary monologue plays but the perlocutionary force proves beyond his control.

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<sup>128</sup> Richard Pine, "In Search of Miracles". *Molly Sweeney* by Brian Friel (Play Programme). (Dublin: Gate Theatre, 1994).

<sup>129</sup> Noeleen Dowling, "Beautiful, but is it a play?" Rev. of "Molly Sweeney" by Brian Friel. *Evening Press*, 10 Aug. 1994.

<sup>130</sup> Jocelyn Clarke, "Dull Friel lacks force". Rev. of "Molly Sweeney" by Brian Friel. *Sunday Tribune*, 14 Aug. 1994.

***“Bewitching Moves” - Dancing at Lughnasa***

Michael Evans in *Dancing at Lughnasa*<sup>131</sup> carries on Friel’s authorship of theatre, memory and characters which inhabit it. There is again an argument for *Dancing at Lughnasa* to be read as a monologue play, as what we witness are products of Michael’s memory. The play resembles a performativity of memory, where past events are brought into being through the act of remembering. The recollected characters owe their ontologies to the dominant, autonomous remembering agency of Michael, including the younger self of Michael.

As in *Faith Healer*, language, world and theatre-making are conjoined at the outset. Friel’s stage directions indicate that “*when the play opens Michael is standing downstage left in a pool of light. The rest of the stage is in darkness. Immediately Michael begins speaking, slowly bring up the lights on the rest of the stage. Around the stage and at a distance from Michael the other characters stand motionless in formal tableau.*”<sup>132</sup> Michael is privileged with the opening and closing monologues of the play, along with three other monologues: two in Act One, one of which closes the Act, and another monologue in the middle of Act Two. The opening narrative positions Michael as sole agent of character construction; the allegory of both playwriting and theatremaking are evident. The rest of the stage is lit as Michael narrates. The effect of enlightenment/discovery attributes to language a primary theatremaking force, with other effects (lighting, sound, costume) supporting that primary function. Added to the theatrical effects is the magical presence of the wireless which is initially named “Lugh” - but later merely “Marconi” - and Michael’s witnessing “Marconi’s voodoo derange those kind, sensible women and transform them into shrieking strangers.”<sup>133</sup> The transformative powers attributed to Marconi may be

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<sup>131</sup> *Dancing at Lughnasa* was first performed on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1990 in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, directed by Patrick Mason.

<sup>132</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 7.

<sup>133</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2*(London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 8.

read as those of language, which as we have seen bears similar constitutory and transformative qualities. The performative nature of Michael's monologue in constructing memories is underlined in the closing monologue, when he claims that "there is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me most often; and what fascinates me about that memory is that it owes nothing to fact."<sup>134</sup> Memory is performative – it brings into being that which it remembers without a truth/false criterion. And if the constructed, remembered characters are immeasurable in factual terms, Michael is empowered to performatively generate the Mundy sisters, Uncle Jack and Gerry with theatrical impunity. In Austin's terms, Michael's monologues are not constatives describing the summer of 1936; they are performatives produced in his mind for theatrical consumption by spectators.

In an analogous project of preservation, it was reported in January 2016 that ownership of the derelict "The Laurels" cottage in Glenties, Co. Donegal would be vested in the Brian Friel Trust. The cottage, when recreated to represent its state in the 1930s, will form the centrepiece of the Brian Friel Centre, to be located next to the cottage. Friel's connections to the cottage and its former inhabitants suggest Michael as Friel's onstage surrogate presence.<sup>135</sup> The project of the play is a personal and poignant reconstruction of his four aunts, mother and uncle (Friel had four other uncles). It is similarly a tribute to the power and vagaries of memory construction, the project of theatremaking and the creative force of language and monologue.

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<sup>134</sup> *Idem*, 107.

<sup>135</sup> Peter Murtagh notes that "The cottage was the home of Brian Friel's grandfather, Barney McLoone, and his wife Sarah. It was originally railway property and Barney worked at the nearby station in Glenties. The couple had 10 children, including five girls, one of whom, Chris, married Paddy Friel. They were the playwright's parents. The five McLoone sisters were immortalised by Brian Friel in *Dancing at Lughnasa* as the Mundy sisters of fictional village, Ballybeg. Friel acknowledged his debt to the McLoone sisters in the play's dedication, describing them as 'those five brave Glenties women'. The play's other central character, Fr Jack, just back from mission work in Uganda and dying, was based on one of their five brothers, Fr Barney McLoone, Friel's uncle." (Peter Murtagh, "Brian Friel's 'Dancing at Lughnasa' Donegal Cottage to be Preserved", *Irish Times* 18 Jan. 2016).

The play appears to be aligned with feminist historiographic imperatives of recovering narratives of under-represented women from a history written by men; giving voice to a rural working class of female subjects who would not otherwise be heard; and making visible/audible this female experience through theatrical performance. *Lughnasa* addresses many topics specific to a rural, working class female subjectivity in 1930s Ireland, who are thrice removed from historical consideration, by virtue of their gender, class and location. The separate identity categories reinforce one another: rural isolation contributes to fewer job prospects, which narrows marital opportunities, which reduces class and status, and so on. And the individual narratives of the five Mundy sisters can almost be read as a manifesto of how women's rights fall foul of patriarchal social, economic and ecclesiastical dominance. Michael's mother Chris is socially marginalised after giving birth out of wedlock. The controlled and self-contained Kate is the breadwinner in the local school but is dismissed for her brother Jack's non-conformist pagan views. Rose's intellectual disability renders her vulnerable to the advances of local men. Agnes and Maggie soldier through an abject existence through humour and the odd Woodbine. Underpinning the lives of the Mundys is a stoic celibacy, with the local dance holding out the dim possibility of marriage, sexual fulfilment, and perhaps an enhanced social status. Friel sets up a series of oppositions to express a general theme of suppressed and repressed female lives: language/body, orthodox Catholic doctrine/pagan Ugandan rituals; male mobility/ female confinement to the home; economic modernisation/ cottage industry. In all cases, the dominant element of the binary is associated with male power. If Friel engages in a form of deconstructionist critique in which the dominated becomes the dominant, the attempted redress misfires because the frames through which spectators receive the Mundy sisters' plight are infused by and filtered through a male subjectivity. Michael narrates/constitutes the characters of the play. It is Uncle Jack, and not the sisters, who effects most disruption through his refusal to relinquish his deviant pagan interests and practices. His fall from sanctioned Catholic practice prompts the dismissal of Kate from her school-teaching job. Agnes and Rose depart

because the cottage industry of sewing is collapsing in the face of industrialisation. Female agency is either made extinct, powerless or absorbed into male power structures.

Reviews of *Dancing at Lughnasa* tend to focus on the now iconic scene of pagan dance, read at face value as a significant feminist performative moment of liberation from abject economic and social circumstances. The headline scene masks Friel's inscription of Michael/Friel as author of this depiction of female agency. Theatrically situated as a mere deliverer of news, much as the messenger in Greek drama, Michael's own gender and sexuality is significantly never foregrounded during the play. The mystical workings of memory are interrogated, but not gender. And an exploration of memory's constructing ability – a recurrent trope of Friel's – does not address how gender distorts the pictures that memory calls up. For Friel, memory appears to be gender-neutral. Female sexuality and attendant patriarchal biopolitical strategies, on the other hand, are very much in evidence. Maggie pines after a dance and reminisces about her attendance at dances with friends as a younger woman. When Agnes, supported by Rose and Chris, suggests to Kate that the sisters attend the local dance – “I want to dance, Kate. It's the festival of Lughnasa. I'm only thirty-five. I want to dance”<sup>136</sup> - Kate snuffs the plans out, claiming that they are too old for dancing and that the reputation of the household ought to be protected. The act of dancing though is represented as an escape from a confined social space and the reaching out to male society and romantic possibilities. Kate, concerned about patriarchal propriety (“this is Father Jack's home – we must never forget that – ever. No, no, we're going to no harvest dance”),<sup>137</sup> is ironically figured as the agent of patriarchal suppression, not the anonymous male structures who have interpellated Kate into her frame of thinking (the framing narration of Michael/Friel). Dancing as a corporeal expression is implicitly linked with romantic bonding and sex, as

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<sup>136</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 24.

<sup>137</sup> *Idem*, 25.



when Gerry dances with Chris and offers to dance with others. With the focus pushed on to suppressed/repressed female sexuality, the spotlight is removed from Michael's, who is cast as an asexual, neutral relater of events. And significantly the representation of his self as a seven-year-old child desexualises him and makes him an innocent witness to the unfolding Mundy drama. The middle-aged Michael reveals nothing about his sexuality or his current romantic or marital circumstances. With Michael's gender position left unparticularised, in contrast to the yearnings of the Mundy women, whose domestic squabbles are at least partially symptomatic of a lack of sexual fulfilment, Friel installs a male reconstruction of events as normal, gender-neutral and unremarkable, when in fact Michael may be the least qualified of narrators to relate the troubles of his mother and aunts. Michael is an invisible presence but paradoxically narrates the Mundy sisters into existence.

The patriarchal structures which restrict and contain the five women within the fictional world of the play – the Catholic Church and the institutions it controls; the non-committal Gerry who neglects to give Chris any financial support for raising Michael; the local sewing factory most likely owned and managed by men - successfully dissimulate Michael/Friel, the very originator of the play. In this way, the Mundy sisters may just as well be parallel iterations of Frank Hardy's god-like autonomous, omniscient authorship. In an apparently liberal and compassionate act of female re-voicing and re-appearing, Friel nonetheless subtly insists on a male agent to effect this recovery.<sup>138</sup> And if female subjects are once again the creations of man, their expressions are representative of a male conception and understanding of a female subjectivity, which is socially and culturally determined by the very patriarchal institutions it is seeking to critique. But they would not be called forth into the theatre without first being imagined and created by Friel. In this way, they can only be effects of a male imagination and memory and can have no possible existence beyond that. The outcome is a recurring dilemma for feminist aims: to be

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<sup>138</sup> Patrick Mason directed the original production, receiving an Olivier nomination for Best Director and a Tony Award for Best Director, along with other awards.

summoned from memory theatrically on male terms or not to be summoned at all. Perhaps the only narrative made available of the Mundy sisters is a male understanding of them, irrespective of the good intentions of the author and that Friel/Michael is stepping aside in order not to distract from the cherished five females he is portraying. But in neutralising the narrator and truth-maker, the subjectivity of Michael is unavoidably placed beyond scrutiny, with the politics of myth and memory-making being removed from view. David Nowlan describes the performances of the five actors playing the Mundy sisters as “pure, loving, worrying, caring, lively magic”<sup>139</sup> – invoking a barrage of stock tropes for representations of Irish women, ranging from sexual purity, to assigned caring domestic functions, to mere objects of male entertainment. The significant international success of the play and its putative representation and indeed celebration of female bodily expression and liberation is in fact only a reminder of an inescapable regime of male language and theatrical representation.

In the closing monologue, Friel upholds dancing as a corporeal alternative to language but paradoxically it is Michael’s closing monologue which establishes dance in this way. Friel refers to “dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary.”<sup>140</sup> In fact, it is language and not dancing that is the indispensable element of the play – the subversive, wordless power of dance has been displaced into the act of narrating and the force of monologic utterances. In attempting to subvert and replace language, Friel has unwittingly reinforced its predominant theatremaking role. While Michael closes the play linguistically, the tableau from the beginning of the play is reinstated, with some changes and “as Michael begins to speak the stage is lit in a very soft, golden light so that the tableau we see is almost, but not quite, in a haze.”<sup>141</sup> Michael is speaking and there is very little movement by the other actors to distract from the visual focus and narrative

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<sup>139</sup> David Nowlan, “First night of new Brian Friel Play: Dancing at Lughnasa at the Abbey”. *Irish Times* 25 Apr. 1990.

<sup>140</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 108.

<sup>141</sup> *Idem*, 106.

dominance that he commands. Fintan O'Toole observes that "never before in Friel have visual elements been so central – dances, ceremonial gestures, painted images – but never at the expense of the lyrical power which Friel can summon with words, of the deceptively easy cadences of speech which cover but do not hide deep and inescapable emotions. The reaching beyond language is not a disavowal of language but an immense enrichment of it."<sup>142</sup> Dance is enlisted to support theatrical language, not supplant it, and the efficacy and primacy of monologic speech is again confirmed.

### **Conclusion**

Brian Friel has said that "unlike the words of the novelist or poet, the playwright's words are scored for a very different context. . . And it is with this score that the playwright and the actor privately plot to work their public spell."<sup>143</sup> I have attempted in this chapter to explore the linguistic magic of monologue performances and the perlocutionary effects they bring about.

The performativities of identity through monologue began with Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in 1964 when monologue performance was first deployed specifically to construct identities of class, gender and nationality. In the breach between the decline in other forms of monologue performance in Ireland such as variety performance, and the emergence of television as a vehicle for stand-up comedy, Friel's discovery of monologue as a theatrical response to Ireland's changing economic, social and cultural circumstances was pivotal in a shift from the monologues of popular entertainment to a sophisticated use of the monologue form. *Philadelphia* is a macro-speech act which brought into being an innovative, critical purpose for monologue and which countered and to some extent parodied the more conservative cultural form of stand-up comedy. It was timely for this to happen in 1964 when there existed a creative opening for an innovative theatrical monologic mode, and prior to the cultural advent of performance art in Ireland,

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<sup>142</sup> Fintan O'Toole, "Beyond Language". Rev. of "Dancing at Lughnasa" by Brian Friel. *Irish Times* 28 Apr. 1990.

<sup>143</sup> Brian Friel, "Words" in *Molly Sweeney* by Brian Friel (*Play programme*). (Dublin: Gate Theatre, 2011).

which would bring a radical new strand to the range of solo performance in Ireland. It is noteworthy that all of the topics that Private enunciated have been interrogated by playwrights of monologue drama coming after him: the fractured post-national emigrant subjectivities of Bolger and Mercier; McPherson's monologues of male gender and sexuality; O'Rowe's plays of abject class anxieties; and performances of the interior self that later gave rise to autobiographical performance.

However, if Friel may be credited with establishing pillars on which present-day Irish monologue drama is based, a balanced critical position will also need to address norms that Friel has inculcated. The characters of Gar O'Donnell, Sir, Frank Hardy and Michael are all deployed as narrators. With control of the narrative, their understanding and recollection of events is inevitably framed and constituted through a male (and also a heterosexual, white, middle-class) subjectivity. The subject position of these narrator-monologists is not foregrounded or particularised, so that Friel is naturalising a male experience of events. His privileging of the male voice and subject position institutes gender norms of patriarchal dominance, a bias that again manifested in the monologue plays of McPherson and O'Rowe and which prompted counter-speech-acts in the form of female-authored monologue drama of the 2000s, such as the monologue work of Jennifer Johnston, Elaine Murphy and Abbie Spallen, whose plays voice long-suppressed female subject positions.

*Philadelphia*, and then *Living Quarters*, staged rehearsals for Friel's most radical aesthetic speech act of *Faith Healer*, which sought to reconfigure the canon with its audacious "cocking a snook" at dramatic convention and to force an expansion of the Irish dramatic canon to accommodate full-length monologue plays. Friel eased the full-length monologue play into the Irish canon by degrees: *Philadelphia* contained the trappings of many staple Irish stage productions (the kitchen), an immediately intelligible set-up for Irish theatregoers, but ingeniously smuggled in the innovative device of the staged split subjectivity and the unfamiliar setting of the bedroom, providing the scene for performances of self-making. Friel again experimented with the omniscient narrator Sir in *Living Quarters* (1977) before completing work on *Faith*

*Healer*, on which he had been working since 1975. Frank Hardy's attempts at miracles are a direct allegory for Friel's promotion of the monologue form and its theatrical validity. He casts himself as unorthodox mountebank endeavouring to sell a "suspect" dramatic form. Noting the parallels between *Faith Healer* and the ancient myth of the *Fate of the Sons of Uisneach*, Declan Kiberd has commented that "Friel retells an old story, borrowing protagonists, situations, even phrases from the tale, and to that extent he is, like Francis Hardy, a con-man. But like Hardy, he also remoulds his tale and his people to some private standard of excellence of his own . . . and to that extent he is indeed an artist."<sup>144</sup> The "impossible speech" of faith healing is rendered theatrically viable but the uptake is unpredictable. Its premiere on Broadway elicited mixed perlocutionary effects:

Faith Healer, an eloquent metaphorical study of the artist's life and death struggle, had a very brief life on Broadway through a combination of unfortuitous circumstances. A play of four seemingly contradictory monologues, it did not sit comfortably on a Broadway stage. But even in New York it had its ardent admirers. After the final performance, James Mason, who played the title role, addressed the audience. As he began speaking about 'the Broadway failure' of the play, theatre-goers shouted in protest, 'No. Never. Never'.<sup>145</sup>

Friel inscribed dominant monologic figures in his monologue plays in order for subversive monologies to undermine them. In this way, the interior monologue of Gar O'Donnell, the radically creative monologues of Frank Hardy and Molly Sweeney are given theatrical space to assert marginalised subjectivities inside the theatrical space of speakability. I have necessarily dedicated much critical attention

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<sup>144</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: the Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996) 632-3.

<sup>145</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*, ed. Christopher Murray (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 144.

to *Philadelphia Here I Come!* and *Faith Healer* in this chapter – that focus is commensurate with those plays' importance in demonstrating to theatre practitioners and spectators the powerful potential of monologue dramatic performance.

Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa* looks back on the idyllic summer of 1936 and the lives of the Mundy sisters and continues Friel's mode of primary male speakers. Renowned for its outbreak of pagan dance, the play invites an uncomplicated reading of feminist liberation under a repressive Catholic regime. Corporeal expression is linked with pagan ritual and the feminine is therefore set in opposition to a controlling, rational orthodoxy. As I have argued, Michael's monologues frame female experience from a contemporary standpoint and although Friel declares the instability of memory, he does not specifically describe the constructions of memory as filtered through a male sensibility. He is positioning and performatively constituting the Mundy sisters through the speech acts of monologue, invoking patriarchal and theatrical convention to cast them in a light, literally, as he sees them. Friel again inscribes himself into the project of memory construction, as the play is an homage to his aunts from the Glenties. What may pass as the admirable recovery of inaudible, rural female voices from the 1930s (the type of recovery which is a key tenet of feminist projects) on closer examination may in fact reveal male-generated female tropes.

Austin's speech act theories and the illocutionary and perlocutionary force he attributes to language seem an apposite philosophical and critical fit for these originary monologue plays. Austin's lack of consideration for the social and political institutions from which performative utterances draw their authority agrees with a lack of awareness amongst theatre-makers and critics of the efficacy of monologue drama and its potential for subject construction/audience interpellation during the 1960s and 1970s. The critical reception of *Philadelphia* and *Faith Healer* did not focus on monologue's more political dimensions, i.e. the staging of gender or class subject positions - this commentary followed in subsequent decades.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Owing to its subject matter, *Dancing at Lughnasa* received much critical coverage from feminist critics.

What was discovered in the plays that I have discussed was monologue's ability to supplant dialogic representation in favour of diegetic modes of self-constitution through narrative. During the 1960s and 1970s, the magic of monologic, theatrical language was received by spectators and critics and discussed in aesthetic terms, however, and not as part of a political theatrical discourse preoccupied with issues of representation, visibility, embodiment, movement and voice. These matters would enter and indeed dominate the critical frame within theatre and performance studies with the publication of Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and the subsequent expansion of performance and performativity studies. The seminal plays of *Philadephia* and *Faith Healer* made the Irish theatre-going public amenable to, respectively, a sophisticated use of monologue within dialogic drama and to full-length monologue drama. Critics were put on alert to monologue's magical myth-making and constitutory force. Friel had supplied a new dramaturgy to Irish theatre-makers and it would be later appropriated - not for emigrant soliloquys or for theatrical allegories of truth creation - but as desperate narratives from the margins.

## Chapter Two

### “Signatories”: Isolation, Exile and Sovereign Performativity

He believed in the theatre. All of us did. That’s what it was. A piece of theatre.<sup>1</sup>

Those eleven men in green – twinning the accents from the sons of those who stayed and those forced to leave – feel like the only Ireland I still belong to.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Introduction*

The constitutory force of monologue performance in terms of state formation may be traced back to the Proclamation of the Republic in 1916, which instituted principles and ideals for the future State. The Proclamation is frequently invoked for political ends to decry the current state of the nation and how it has deviated from the ideals of its signatories. The original 1916 Proclamation (delivered in a theatre of war<sup>3</sup>), re-enacted and reiterated by a member of the Irish Defence Forces, and reconstituted through the 2016 Centenary commemorative theatrical monologue performances, are linked through their shared constitution of nationhood. The theme of performative constitutory proclamations will inform the monologue plays under discussion in this chapter.

If Patrick Pearse and the leaders of the 1916 rebellion oratorically instituted a new republic, they themselves were conscious of, and invoked, Irish dramatic tradition. W.B. Yeats’ *Kathleen ni Houlihan* (1902),<sup>4</sup> in particular, made a deep impression on some of the leaders. Declan Kiberd notes that “to the republican insurrectionist P. S. O’Hegarty, the drama became at once ‘a sort of sacrament’, to the rebel

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Plunkett referring to Patrick Pearse and the Easter Rising 1916 (Joseph O’Connor, *Joseph Mary Plunkett: Ten Minutes in Signatories*, Emma Donoghue et al (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2016), 113).

<sup>2</sup> Dermot Bolger, *The Parting Glass*, (Dublin: New Island, 2011), 8.

<sup>3</sup> In warfare, a “theatre of war” means an area in which important military events occur or are progressing. The theatre may include the air space, land and sea area that is or that may potentially become involved in war operations.

<sup>4</sup> *Kathleen ni Houlihan* was first performed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1902 in St Teresa’s Hall, Clarendon Street, Dublin.



Countess Markievicz ‘a kind of gospel.’ The Rising, when it came, was therefore seen by many as a foredoomed classical tragedy, whose *dénouement* was both inevitable and unpredictable, prophesied and yet surprising.”<sup>5</sup> And to go back further, Yeats had written *Kathleen ni Houlihan* mindful of his Irish audience’s “passion for oratory.”<sup>6</sup> Theatrical and real life oratorical performance here can be seen as intertwined in chains of performative citation – a splicing of cultural and political nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

I have selected texts, productions and performances that express disenchantment from within the nation, within rural contexts; and from without, from the perspective of emigrants removed from homeland and attempting to harmonise a fragmented, post-national identity. *Baglady* (1985) by Frank McGuinness explores themes of abuse and vagrancy; and Tom MacIntyre’s *The Gallant John-Joe* (2001), Enda Walsh’s two versions of *Misterman* (1999 and 2011) and Eugene O’Brien’s *Eden* (2001) all examine social isolation. Bolger’s *In High Germany* (1990) and *The Parting Glass* (2010), Marie Jones’ *A Night in November* (1994) and Paul Mercier’s *We Ourselves* (2000) focus on the personal outcomes of emigration. Central to the monologues in these plays is an effort to reconnect with and reaffirm a place within an

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<sup>5</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), 200.

<sup>6</sup> W.B. Yeats, Edward Martyn and Lady Gregory first conceived of an Irish national theatre in Duras House, near Kinvara, Co. Galway in September 1897: “We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism” (Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1972), 20).

<sup>7</sup> The mirroring of onstage and real world performances of Irish rebellion can perhaps be seen most clearly in the case of Sean Connolly, an insurrectionist who died on the Easter Monday of the 1916 Easter Rising, shot by a British sniper on the roof of City Hall. Connolly was due to play the part of Peter Gillane in scheduled lunchtime and evening performances of *Kathleen ni Houlihan* at the Abbey Theatre on that same day (Yeats’ play was to be presented in a double bill with *The Mineral Workers* (1906) by William Boyle). The performances of the double bill for Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1916 and for the rest of the week naturally did not go ahead. Connolly’s absence from the Abbey Theatre that day was due to his participation in a rebellion against the British. He had renounced his obligations to the play in favour of the uprising. Ironically, in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, the character of Peter Gillane watches powerlessly as his son Michael – under the spell of the Old Woman - quits his home and wife-to-be Delia Cahel to join the neighbours and the landed French in the 1798 Rebellion, despite the protests of Bridget and Delia.

Irish State narrative and to re-voice subject positions which the speakers suspect have been muted by the State's dominant narrative.

The social and cultural setting of these works has developed since the 1970s. The 1980s and early 1990s in Ireland were economically depressed, accompanied by a political culture that failed to inspire public confidence, with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael-Labour coalitions alternating in government.<sup>8</sup> The national debt grew substantially during the early to mid 1980s, with a sharp rise in unemployment, growing crime rates, including a drug crisis in inner-city Dublin, and a dearth of policy imperatives to address the problem. Terence Brown, paraphrasing Desmond Fennell, observed that "the underlying Irish problem was the lack of a satisfactory, workable self-image after the economic and social change of the 1960s and '70s had destroyed the once serviceable version of the national identity of Ireland as Gaelic, Catholic, and republican."<sup>9</sup> The conversation within the field of Performativity Studies would witness significant interventions with Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), which was translated into English in 1984; the translation and publication in English of Shoshana Felman's *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin or Seduction in Two Languages* (1983)<sup>10</sup>; and Judith Butler's groundbreaking contribution of *Gender Trouble* (1990), which inaugurated

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<sup>8</sup> Fianna Fáil was in coalition with the Progressive Democrats for the 26<sup>th</sup> Dáil from June 1989 to November 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922 – 2002*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 319.

<sup>10</sup> Felman's original 1980 French publication was entitled *Le Scandale du corps parlant: Don Juan avec Austin, ou, la seduction en deux langues*. Felman puts Moliere's *Don Juan* and Austin's speech act theory into a productive dialogue to explore the act of promising and the philosophical problems this act poses. Felman contrasts the differing concepts of language held by characters in *Don Juan*:

What is really at stake in the play – the real conflict – is, in fact, the opposition between two views of language, one that is cognitive, or constative, and another that is performative. According the cognitive view, which characterizes Don Juan's antagonists and victims, language is an instrument for transmitting *truth*, that is, an instrument of knowledge, a means of *knowing* reality. Truth is a relation of perfect congruence between an utterance and its referent, and, in a general way, between language and the reality it represents. (Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13).

an awakening of theories of performativity to political possibilities throughout the decade of the 1990s, extending beyond issues of gender and sexuality to race and other identity categories. The work of JL Austin was inevitably re-examined in light of contemporary gender discourse and despite his foundational contribution to the field, was paradoxically found to be supporting heteronormative assumptions which later theorists of performativity were attempting to challenge. Once confined to a discourse mainly centred on the philosophy of language, the field expanded rapidly to face feminist social and political issues and became particularly embedded within gender and sexuality studies, and later queer studies. Austin's and Searle's attempted classifications of performative utterances, although continuing to be cited within the new discourse of Butlerian performativity, would appear isolated and outdated when juxtaposed with the new social and political contexts in which theories of performativity were being put to work. Deconstructionist critiques, led by Derrida and Paul de Man, were also not fully engaging with the political consequences of thinking surrounding the performative, maintaining a close focus on textual analysis to posit the alienation of text from itself, such as de Man's reading of Rousseau's *Confessions*. Despite this, Butler would make much use of Derrida's concepts of iterability and citationality when writing *Gender Trouble*.

The developments in the Academy, combined with growing national, political and social activism, filtered into theatre-making practice and monologue drama in Ireland, in which monologue performance became more politically inflected, signalling a growing disconnect between citizens on the margin and official State narratives. The works I have selected were staged between 1985 and 2016, a period that captures the fluctuating economic fortunes of the country, from the economically depressed 1980s and early 1990s, through the Celtic Tiger period and into the recession phase, which began in 2008.

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Don Juan, however, "does not share such a view of language. Saying, for him, is in no case tantamount to knowing, but rather to *doing: acting* on the interlocutor, modifying the situation and the interplay of forces within it. Language, for Don Juan, is performative and not informative; it is a field of enjoyment, not of knowledge." (Idem, 14).

Significantly, these plays have been produced in times of economic boom and bust, which allows for an insightful, diachronic analysis of those texts and performances, as well as a more complex interpretation of their performance environments.

***Originary Performatives: The 1916 Proclamation***

The modern Irish State was brought about through monologue performance, through a declaration by Pádraig Pearse on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1916 of the Easter Proclamation, declaring Ireland an independent State from Great Britain. The speech act of the Proclamation invokes authorities to validate its performance: “In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.”<sup>11</sup> However, the felicity conditions are not present to successfully perform the speech act. Ireland, read here as the people of Ireland (as only people, the inhabitants of a country, can authorise the signatories to make the Proclamation) are invoked as the authority with which the Proclamation is declared. But as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Patrick Pearse and the signatories have no prior authority to make the Proclamation. Without this authority, the Proclamation must bring into being the Ireland to which it refers, and to which it appeals for its proclamatory powers. The Austinian model of performativity is not adhered to in this example – rather it is what Derrida has termed “originary” performativity, when “the signature invents the signer.”<sup>12</sup> The declaration of Irish independence cannot invoke the appropriate authority (the British monarchy and Government, of which the signatories and people of Ireland are subjects) to legitimise its utterance as it is a speech act designed to remove that very authority. Instead, Pearse cites God and an alternative authority, “the

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<sup>11</sup> Ireland (Provisional Government, 1916), Thomas J. Clarke et al. *The Easter Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001 (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 49.

dead generations,”<sup>13</sup> who have in the past enacted the convention of rebelling against Britain (“six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms”)<sup>14</sup> and which is being enacted once more to attempt a rebellion. The Proclamation authors’ constitution of Ireland as uniformly made up of people advocating rebellion through violence is also problematic. Many Irishmen and women favoured national self-autonomy through peaceful, parliamentary means and the Head of the Irish Volunteers, Eoin McNeill, did not sanction the 1916 Rising. The speech act of the Proclamation forcefully constitutes all inhabitants of Ireland as backing and authorising the rebellion. The perlocutionary effect of this is in fact not to unify the country behind the strategy of violent revolution but to divide it into factions of pro- and anti-violent means, which would later manifest in the Pro- and Anti-Treaty Sides and the Irish Civil War (1922-23). In Butlerian terms, the Proclamation performatively generates a domain of sanctioned State subjects who support the republican ideals underlying the rebellion and an abject realm of those deemed not part of that project. The most notable inhabitants of the abject domain are the homecoming soldiers from the trenches of Belgium, whose chosen theatre of war is no longer recognised by the newly crafted republican script. Now lumbered with the colonial insignia of Great Britain, who have been cast as oppressors and savage crushers of the uprising, they are marked as social pariahs, and visual reminders of the overlord from whom they have achieved independence. But the exclusionary force of the dominant script, perpetually provisional and vulnerable to resignification, has wavered since 1916 and indeed been contested. The 2016 commemorations recognised all who died in the 1916 Rebellion, including Irish soldiers serving in the British army.

James Loxley, commenting on Derrida’s analysis of the American Declaration of Independence, observes that “instead of the collective speaker coming first, and then issuing its utterances as the

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<sup>13</sup> Ireland (Provisional Government, 1916), Thomas J. Clarke et al. *The Easter Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> *Idem*.

product of its general will or shared intention, the speaker is retroactively constituted by the utterance it appears to authorise.”<sup>15</sup> Having effectively constituted an independent State through the enunciation of the Easter Proclamation on the steps of the G.P.O., Pearse goes on to lay out the principles by which the newly formed State will conduct itself: “the Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.”<sup>16</sup> The speech act, which Austin categorises as a “commissive”, “to commit the speaker to a certain course of action”<sup>17</sup> undertakes that the new State will ensure equal rights and opportunities for all. The subsequent performances of the State will determine whether the speech act, an originary national performative of massive scale and ambition, will in fact be felicitous. If Austin’s examples of the marriage ceremony or the christening of a ship are deployed to explicate in relatively simple terms the workings of a speech act, the 1916 Proclamation may be viewed as irreducibly complex and heterogeneous in both its time-span and its efficacy. The performative of the Proclamation will conceivably be an ever-present speech act in Irish national discourse, perpetually laying out the challenge for felicitous enactment. Stanley Cavell tells us that the meaning of language mutates as it enters new contexts.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the language of the Proclamation resonates differently with changing

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<sup>15</sup> James Loxley, *Performativity*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 102.

<sup>16</sup> Ireland (Provisional Government, 1916), Thomas J. Clarke et al. *The Easter Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 157.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52.

national, political and cultural discourses.<sup>19</sup> A living and performing document, its shifting signifiers and referents mutate to inhabit and interact with these new political and socio-economic contexts. As I will demonstrate, different productions of monologue texts will engage with different audiences depending on their separate economic contexts.

Jon McKenzie has explored “the relation between . . . two sites of democracy’s performance: those resistant sites we study so closely, and those dominant sites of the new world order” and suggests that “perhaps then there is only one test site, a global site on which multiple experiments in democracy are now playing out” referring both to relatively new democracies that have both thrived and withered away since the falling of the Berlin Wall and established democracies that have yielded some of their autonomy to trans- or supra-national bodies.<sup>20</sup> The performance of global democracy is closely scrutinised and analysed according to a range of indicators.<sup>21</sup> Ireland’s democracy, effectively launched in 1916 but only officially manifesting in 1922, is captured in a global network of democratic governments, most immediately within the European Union, with strong democratic traditions, but also within a global sphere, dominated by the United States. McKenzie is here referring to organisational performance, measurable across certain standards, as opposed to cultural performance. However, the

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<sup>19</sup> For example, the Proclamation’s “children of the nation” refer to all Irish adults and children, but the Children’s Referendum in 2015 illustrates how long it took the State to re-constitute children as citizens worthy of constitutional protection.

<sup>20</sup> Jon McKenzie, “Democracy’s Performance” (*The Drama Review* 47.2 (2003), 117-128), 120.

<sup>21</sup> According to McKenzie, “concepts of government performance date back at least to the 1970s. Some of the most important academic fields contributing to this research today are political science, international relations, public policy, and sociology. Significantly, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, there has been an explosion of research into the performance of newly formed democracies, not only in Eastern and Central Europe, but around the world. In this field, the criteria for evaluating democracy’s performance are numerous and complex. Some of the most important are the existence of a multi-party system, free and regular elections, human rights protections, fair labor practices, health care services, criminal justice system, environmental protections, as well as overall popular satisfaction with government performance.” (Jon McKenzie, “Democracy’s Performance” (*The Drama Review* 47.2 (2003). 117-128), 125).

concept of democracy's performance is a useful addition to my discussion here. Rather than measuring Ireland's democratic performance in terms of comparable global statistics, the benchmark here will be the cultural, theatrical monologue performances of playwrights, directors and actors, which in Raymond Williams' view may be interpreted as symptomatic of changing social relations.<sup>22</sup> The promised gender equality is oft-cited as a grave infelicity which has still not been fully satisfied. The "carefully fostered differences" alluded in 1916 to troubled relations between nationalists and Unionists, but the term has now habituated in today's Ireland to reference the Traveller community and large ethnic contingents of Polish, Chinese and Africans living in the Republic, some of whom are subjects of the State's direct provision policy.<sup>23</sup> In this chapter, I intend to examine how the foundational speech act of the Proclamation and the ideals it institutes positions subjects in terms of their lived experiences of those State ideals. The 1916 Proclamation is a performance, initially of an attempted uprising, but also of State formation – the make-up of the State is the performances of its citizens.

The re-enactment of the 1916 Proclamation by the Irish Defence Forces commemorates the original event but also constitutes the auditors of the Proclamation in positions that are in accordance with the practice of its ideals or not.<sup>24</sup> The text of the Proclamation has proliferated both on-line and in

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<sup>22</sup> Williams discusses the emergence of the soliloquy in Elizabethan drama and relates it to "the general social changes in self-conceptions of the individual and in relations between individuals in this new sense and their assigned or expected social roles" (Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 145.

<sup>23</sup> Direct provision is the State's means of accommodating asylum-seekers who are waiting for a final decision on their asylum applications. At time of writing, residents of the State's 34 direct provision centres are not permitted access to the labour market, are paid a small weekly allowance and are not allowed to cook for themselves in the centres, receiving three meals at set times per day.

<sup>24</sup> Captain Peter Kelleher of the Irish Defence Forces re-enacted the reading of the 1916 Proclamation on Easter Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2016 under the portico of the General Post Office. Captain Michael Barry again re-enacted the reading as part of The Easter Rising commemorations on Easter Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

Owing to the positive public response to the centenary commemorations of the Rising that took place in 2016, the Irish Government launched Creative Ireland in December 2016, the Government's Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016, a five year all-of-Government initiative running from 2017 to 2022. The objective of the Programme was to



print and has been absorbed into systems of capital exchange in the form of a commodity, a memento to the event but also a symbol of late capitalist domination, in which all objects are converted into items that may support and perpetuate capitalist economic ideology and practice. James Connolly, a prominent signatory of the Proclamation and outspoken socialist, unwittingly contributes to this capitalist commodification of the document. This is one such way that the Proclamation is performing in contexts not anticipated by the 1916 rebels.

The political monologue performance of the Proclamation, delivered in a theatre of war, elicited a cultural theatrical response in 2016 with the performance of the *Signatories*<sup>25</sup> monologues. The production of *Signatories* to mark the centenary of the 1916 Rising maintained a continuum of monologue performance from the 1916 Proclamation. In their commissioning of eight writers (four male and four female authors) to write the monologue pieces, the producers displayed an awareness of the gender politics surrounding representations of the 1916 Rising<sup>26</sup> and indeed sought to adhere to one of the Proclamation's aspirations, to guarantee "equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens."<sup>27</sup> Although Joseph O'Connor, in his monologue about Joseph Plunkett, links the theatrical nature of the

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improve access to creative and cultural activity across the State. As part of Creative Ireland, Cruinniú na Cásca, a new annual cultural day was established, to be held nationwide on Easter Monday each year in an attempt to replicate the success of the Reflecting the Rising event of 2016. The annual Cruinniú na Cásca initiative will include a re-enactment of the reading of the 1916 Proclamation as well as wreath-laying and other commemorations of the Rising.

<sup>25</sup> *Signatories* was first performed in Kilmainham Gaol on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2016, presented by the University College Dublin Decade of Centenaries Programme and Verdant Productions. It was directed by Patrick Mason and featured monologues of the seven Signatories to the Proclamation, and Elizabeth O'Farrell, a nurse who delivered the surrender to the British military. The monologues were written by four men and four women: Emma Donoghue, Thomas Kilroy, Hugo Hamilton, Frank McGuinness, Rachel Feehily, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Marina Carr and Joseph O'Connor.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth O'Farrell's voice is added to the monologue series, in an effort to represent the female contribution to the Rising.

<sup>27</sup> Ireland (Provisional Government, 1916), Thomas J. Clarke et al. *The Easter Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975).

1916 Rising and the *Signatories* monologues, the shared *monologic* theatricality of the 1916 Proclamation and dramatic monologue performance is not explicitly recognised by the production.<sup>28</sup>

*Signatories* was first performed in the East Wing of Kilmainham Gaol at dusk in a promenade production lasting around ninety minutes and ending in candlelight.<sup>29</sup> The opening monologue, written by Emma Donoghue, is given by Elizabeth O'Farrell (Barbara Brennan), who brokered peace with the British army on behalf of Patrick Pearse and proceeded to travel around the city by car and by foot informing rebels of Pearse's command. Her perambulations set the tone for the evening, and her stories of meetings with the network of Volunteers introduce the audience to some of the Rising's leaders. Deirdre Falvey describes the sequence and atmosphere of the monologues: "The monologues take place in different areas in the central chamber of the gaol, and the audience moves to follow the light and action and sound, each monologue segueing quickly from one to the other without pause, so the overall effect is passionate and cumulative."<sup>30</sup> The monologues following O'Farrell's are those of Pádraig Pearse (by Thomas Kilroy), James Connolly (Hugo Hamilton), Éamonn Ceannt (Frank McGuinness), Thomas Clarke (Rachel Fehily), Seán Mac Diarmada (Éilís Ní Dhuibhne), Thomas MacDonagh (Marina Carr) and

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<sup>28</sup> Neither the performance of *Signatories* nor the published text of the play makes a link between Pearse's performed monologue of the 1916 Proclamation and the eight monologues which make up *Signatories*. However, the production of *Signatories* in the National Concert Hall, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin, featured A5-sized copies of the Proclamation, printed with the effects of blood stains, which were strewn across the stage. Patrick Mason explains that "*Signatories* is a work of theatre consisting of eight monologues, written by eight writers, in response to eight figures from the Easter Rising of 1916. . . The monologues were all linked by their connection, direct or oblique, to the events of 1916: but each monologue had a distinct tone, and each had a very distinctive take on those events – as distinctive as the individual characters and writers involved." (Patrick Mason, *A Director's Note in Signatories*, Emma Donoghue et al (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2016), xiii and xiv).

<sup>29</sup> It later played at the Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire, Civic Theatre, Tallaght, National Concert Hall and the Olympia Theatre.

<sup>30</sup> Deirdre Falvey, "Signatories review: An Imagined Truth about Key Figures in the Rising". Rev. of "Signatories" by Emma Donoghue et al. *Irish Times* 24 Apr. 2016.

Joseph Mary Plunkett (Joseph O'Connor).<sup>31</sup> Two of the signatories are represented indirectly. In Hamilton's piece, an unnamed female narrator (Lisa Dwyer Hogg) recalls that James Connolly was loved by Angela, a Dublin-born woman who babysat her and her two sisters Theresa and Anne, although Angela never met Connolly. Angela tells them the story of James Connolly so they can forget their traumatic attempted abduction by a man and woman. And in Ní Dhuibhne's monologue, Min Ryan (Roseanna Purcell), a former fiancé of Seán Mac Diarmada, recalls her final meeting with Mac Diarmada, accompanied by her sister Phyllis. The remaining five speeches are delivered by the signatories themselves from their cells. Marina Carr ends Thomas MacDonagh's monologue with a stream-of-consciousness passage culminating in his father's prophetic advice:

The hands are tied behind my back and the blindfold goes on and it's not as bad as I expected and I hear the sounds of the soldiers lining up and the muffled commands of the officer and I think they'll probably make some awful myth out of me and thank God my legs are not shaking and my father flashes through my mind, him sitting in the parlour nursing his glass, me and John arguing politics with him and him waving his big strong hand in dismissal. 'Keep away from them Fenians,' he's saying, 'just steer clear of them. Great cry, little wool, like the goats of Connacht.'<sup>32</sup>

Given that the rebels speak from their individual cells, monologue on a material level is an apposite dramatic form for the *Signatories* project. The staging of *Signatories* within the large space of the prison's East Wing presents a spatial disjuncture between the sizeable performance space and the

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<sup>31</sup> The monologues were performed by (in order): Barbara Brennan (Elizabeth O'Farrell), Peter Gaynor (Pádraig Pearse), James Connolly (Lisa Dwyer Hogg), Ronan Leahy (Éamonn Ceannt), Joe Taylor (Thomas Clarke), Roseanna Purcell (Min Ryan), Stephen Jones (Thomas MacDonagh) and Shane O'Reilly (Joseph Mary Plunkett).

<sup>32</sup> Marina Carr, *Thomas MacDonagh in Signatories*, Emma Donoghue et al. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2016), 101.

confined conditions of the cells, which are represented as small elevated stages within the East Wing but which are historically located within the same prison complex. The performance within the auditorium of the East Wing allows a collective expression of voices, male and female – Frank McGuinness anticipated prior to the premiere that the “final production will be symphonic.”<sup>33</sup> After the performances, the audience walks out into the stonebreaker’s yard, completing the journey from pre-execution reverie and soliloquy to the grim finality of the firing squad. *Signatories* may be read as a performative monologic reappropriation of the 1916 Proclamation, uttered by Pearse, espousing primarily gender equality but also revised attitudes to the colonising forces.<sup>34</sup> Tellingly, Elizabeth O’Farrell’s own monologue contains Pearse’s written order of surrender, which was not publicly declared by Pearse but which O’Farrell now enunciates. A female voice brings a conclusion to the rebellion, initiated so famously by a male one.

One of the planners of *Signatories*, University College Dublin’s Director of Communications Eilis O’Brien, asked “what better way to tell the stories of these leaders than by harnessing the unique power of theatre?”<sup>35</sup> The monologues were first performed in Kilmainham gaol as “the setting is so evocative – entering the cold corridors we immediately think of the despair it must have instilled in those imprisoned there. For the signatories it was a point of no return. The tiny cells were to be the last place they would write their letters, lay their heads and think of their loved ones.”<sup>36</sup> Despite the urge to revisit a prison space connected to the signatories, which followed from the broad, unconfined space of O’Connell Street (Sackville Street at the time of the Rising), O’Brien recognises the ubiquitous nature of the

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<sup>33</sup> Hugh Linehan, “Irish Writers Commemorate Proclamation Signatories”, *Irish Times* Mar. 23, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Plunkett remarks in his monologue: “One of the soldiers who guarded me, a young Tommy, a Londoner, was a handsome, pouty boy. But kind, do you know. You’ll get that with the English.” (Joseph O’Connor, *Joseph Mary Plunkett in Signatories*, Emma Donoghue et al. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2016), 112).

<sup>35</sup> Eilis O’Brien, Preface, in *Signatories*, Emma Donoghue et al. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2016), vii.

<sup>36</sup> *Idem*, ix.

monologues when she observes that “Kilmainham is where we began, but the nature of the monologues – the symphonic movement through sound and tempo, the focus on the voice and the face of the actor – ensure that the play can be performed anywhere.”<sup>37</sup> If the *Signatories* monologues explicitly sought to respond to the 1916 Proclamation by giving theatrical monologic expression to the seven signatories and O’Farrell within Kilmainham gaol, the 1916 Proclamation, which may be interpreted as both a State manifesto for a Republic but also a call to its citizens to observe the social and ethical code of the new State, had implicitly invited ubiquitous, nationwide performance of counter-monologues which would address the enunciated ideals of the Proclamation. These productions of monologue plays would offer a retort to Pearse and his co-signatories and reveal the State to which they had unknowingly subscribed and their own positions within that unfolding State narrative. Delivered across decades, the monologues illuminate a State narrative that accommodates some but not others and clearly delineate boundaries of sanctioned subjecthood and abject subjects who are not intelligible to the official script. The monologue plays under discussion in this chapter seek to render “impossible speech” possible and to highlight the contours of official national discourse.

Judith Butler has theorised, across different contexts, a mode of performativity that both produces a legitimate domain of subjects based on hegemonic norms and a realm beyond this which haunts the legitimate domain and poses a constant threat to its dissolution. The force of hegemonic performatives produces that which is intelligible and speakable – subjects who are not intelligible to the dominant discourse of the sanctioned domain are not eligible for subjecthood. Butler states that “if the subject speaks impossibly, speaks in ways that cannot be regarded as speech or as the speech of a subject, then that speech is discounted and the viability of the subject called into question. The consequences of such an irruption of the unspeakable may range from a sense that one is ‘falling apart’

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<sup>37</sup> *Idem*, ix.

to the intervention of the state to secure criminal or psychiatric incarceration.”<sup>38</sup> Pearse’s inaugurating spoken monologue establishes such a domain but what emerges from the selected monologues in this chapter is that they are unintelligible to the country Pearse and the co-signatories envisioned. They take stock of national preoccupations with immigration into Ireland, alcohol consumption, the growing disparity between economic classes and post-national identity. All in their own way seek a legitimate form of subjecthood through the performance of monologues that ask for recognition and inclusion into the national narrative. As I have previously argued, the site of the theatre enables such monologic entreaties, protected by an aesthetic framework, and offering a discursive environment in which dominant performatives may be rearticulated.

Pearse’s 1916 Proclamation lays down a claim for Ireland’s political sovereignty. The monologue performances of the plays selected may be interpreted as attempts at individual sovereignty in the face of fragmentation of national identity. Political, economic and social turbulence have generated a national landscape that is now heterogeneous, contingent and unstable which elicits monologic claims to autonomy and recovery of a lost sense of sovereignty – the sovereignty as envisioned by the signatories. I intend to expand the concept of “sovereign” to link political with individual autonomy and posit that the monologic drive to personal sovereignty represents an attempted reconnection of the self to the original State sovereign performative of 1916 – State subjects who have fallen out of the sovereign narrative now seek their inclusion and this is expressed through the performance of bodily and narrational sovereignty: sovereign performativity to fit in to Pearse’s foundational sovereign performative. The site of this contestation of national identity is linguistic and therefore monologue drama accommodates the construction of national identity through illocutionary and perlocutionary means. Acknowledging Foucault’s position that power emanates from multiple sites and not from a single sovereign source, Butler comments that:

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<sup>38</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 136.

The difficulty of describing power as a sovereign formation, however, in no way precludes fantasizing or figuring power in precisely that way; to the contrary, the historical loss of the sovereign organization of power appears to occasion the fantasy of its return – a return, I want to argue, that takes place in language, in the figure of the performative. The emphasis on the performative phantasmatically resurrects the performative in language, establishing language as a displaced site of politics and specifying that displacement as driven by a wish to return to a simpler and more reassuring map of power, one in which the assumption of sovereignty remains secure.<sup>39</sup>

Butler is here referring to the sovereign force of a dominant regime and its utilisation of the linguistic force of the performative to achieve its aims of performative control and regulation. Elsewhere she has contended that, in order to oppose and rearticulate dominant performatives, there is a need to occupy the position of the dominant figure – in the below example, Antigone appropriates the dominant language of King Creon to perform her refusal to comply with his wishes:

Although her defiance is heard, the price of her speech is death. Her language is not that of a survivable political agency. Her words, understood as deeds, are chiasmically related to the vernacular of sovereign power, speaking in and against it, delivering and defying imperatives at the same time, inhabiting the language of sovereignty at the very moment in which she opposes sovereign power and is excluded from its terms. What this suggests is that she cannot make her

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<sup>39</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 78.

claim outside the language of the state, but neither can the claim she wants to make be fully assimilated by the state.<sup>40</sup>

I propose to examine a number of productions of monologue plays in terms of monologic responses to the challenge that Pearse issued in April 1916. It is my intention to examine how those monologue texts and performances seek to articulate the positions of disenfranchised subjects within, or exiled from, Irish society. Sometimes referred to not as a rebellion but as a performance of a rebellion, Pearse's politically theatrical monologue elicits culturally theatrical responses but in order to register their protest at their exclusion from Pearse's blueprint for the country, they must utilise the language of sovereign power for that protest to be intelligible. They are therefore at once occupying a position of state linguistic power (the monologist in the theatre addressing silent interlocutors) and opposing it. Although Antigone "uses language to claim her deed, to assert a 'manly' and defiant autonomy, she can perform that act only through embodying the norms of the power she opposes. Indeed, what gives these verbal acts their power is the normative operation of power that they embody without quite becoming."<sup>41</sup> Economically and socially disempowered speaking subjects are conferred with a powerful locutionary privilege within the realm of the theatre, wielding an addressive power to spectators without usurping the real-life monologic authority of politicians, the professional classes and industry leaders.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>41</sup> *Idem*, 10.

<sup>42</sup> The danger for playwrights and performers in appropriating the monologic mode is that it may reiterate the same mode used not only by democratic States and its institutions, who may be the target of monologue performance seeking to critique or parody those structures, but by totalitarian regimes. Michael Holquist, exploring the concerns of authority as authorship and authority as power, within Bakhtin's dialogism, observes that:

Dialogically conceived, authorship is a form of governance, for both are implicated in the architectonics of responsibility, each is a way to adjudicate center/non-center relations between subjects. Totalitarian



***“On the Way Out”<sup>43</sup> – Rural Monologues of the Dispossessed***

I propose to examine a group of monologue plays exploring rural subjects attempting to establish identity in small town Ireland. The speakers are connected by an isolation from and disillusionment with community life and negotiating barriers to a full participation in social relations. These plays, productions and performances seek to enunciate a subject position which is not being heard. Many of the plays are set in small Irish towns and represent a dislocation from State political, economic and cultural narratives. The villages brought into being may be read as metonymic as although they evoke the distinct characteristics and idioms of those places, they put on the table for discussion subjects central to national discourse: secularisation, rural isolation, the social and personal consequences of alcoholism, the status of the Traveller community and assimilation of foreign nationals.

Frank McGuinness’ *Baglady* (1985)<sup>44</sup> is a monologue about a woman who myth-makes in order to cope with the pernicious effects of incest.<sup>45</sup> The play is a strong example of how monologue drama

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government always seeks the (utopian) condition of absolute monologue: the *Gleichschaltung* which was attempted in Germany during the 1930s to “Nazify” trade unions, universities, publishing houses, professional associations, and so on had as its aim the suppression of all otherness in the state so that its creator alone might flourish. (Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 34).

<sup>43</sup> Vincent Woods’ *John Hughdy and Tom John* was first produced on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1991, with Des Braiden as John Hughdy, Conor McDermottroe as Tom John and Maura McLoughlin as the storyteller. The play, comprising two separate companion monologue pieces, was produced by Druid Theatre Company as a lunchtime play and directed by John Crowley. It was subsequently rewritten by Woods and produced by Skehana Productions as *On the Way Out*, with its premiere on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2002. Des Braiden reprised his role as John, Maeliosa Stafford played Tom and Fiona Kelly was the storyteller. Vincent Woods co-directed with Stafford. *On the Way Out* features John Hughdy and Tom John, a father and son from Co. Leitrim. John, who is 90 years old and his son Tom, in his fifties, both face death: John from old age and his son by suicide. A third character, a female narrator who tells fanciful stories, is suggested as John’s late wife Mary Flynn, and Tom John’s mother.

<sup>44</sup> *Baglady* was first performed by Maureen Toal on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1985 in the Peacock Theatre as a lunchtime performance during weekdays, running for eight performances. It was toured in 1986 and was later produced as an evening performance during the 1986 Dublin Theatre Festival with *Ladybag* (1986). An earlier title of the play was “Who’s at the Window, Who?” which evokes a greater sense of anxiety and fear, caused by the threat of sexual abuse. A rarely performed play, it was revived in August 2010 in a production by Caroline Fitzgerald at the Focus Theatre, with Maria McDermottroe performing.

provided a cultural domain of the sayable in 1980s Ireland at a time when the Catholic Church and conservative State institutions remained socially and culturally dominant.

The baglady of the title is on her way to a wedding. We learn that she comes from a prosperous background and that her father supported the local homeless community but it is unclear what her situation is now, or if she is even alive, as she refers to her own death at the end of the monologue. Her father was “a good-living man, he worked hard for what he got in this life. He never touched me, never raised his hand, never.”<sup>46</sup> She tells the audience that “not one of you are fit to tie his shoes.”<sup>47</sup> She acknowledges the audience again when she says “Sit down, I’ll tell you about the house.”<sup>48</sup> She reveals

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<sup>45</sup> Frank McGuinness’ other monologue plays include *The Glass God* (1982) and *Feed the Money and Keep them Coming* (1988).

*The Glass God*, a Platform Theatre Group production, was first presented in the Lourdes Hall, Sean McDermott St, Dublin on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1982. *The Glass God* explores the convergence of religious, mathematical and sexual knowledge. Thom McGinty played Prisi, directed by Jacqui Dickson. The play was presented alongside *One-Off* by Henry Munroe and *Rosebud* by Daniel Magee under the umbrella title *Shrapnel*. *The Glass God* is a monologue in the style of a sermon, delivered by Prisi, who describes his experience training to be a priest in Maynooth, his dead parents and his relationship with a fellow trainee priest. He and his friend conduct a séance in a reputedly haunted room in the college in an effort to make contact with the man’s father. Following ordination, he begins a career as a teacher teaching mathematics. He calls a pupil to the blackboard, seeing in him his friend from Maynooth, and strikes him on the head, before leaving the classroom. (Frank McGuinness, typed draft of *The Glass God*. Folder No. 57, Frank McGuinness Papers (James Joyce Library, University College Dublin, 1980)).

*Feed the Money and Keep them Coming* was first performed on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1988 in the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, alongside *Brides of Ladybag* (1988) and *Flesh and Blood* (1988) under the umbrella title *Times In It*. Gerard McSorley played the Man, directed by Caroline Fitzgerald. *Feed the Money and Keep them Coming* features an unnamed man standing in the “light and noise of an amusement arcade. The light concentrates on a man, standing, his right fist pointing upward and outward. During the monologue at selected intervals the raised fist moves inward to the man’s body. Initially it should resemble pulling the lever of a slot machine. It should end as a gesture of supplication.” From a reading of the text, the meaning of the play is unclear. The man recites lines with the refrain “feed the money and keep them coming” and asks to be buried in Belfast, Enniskillen, Dublin Airport, Gibraltar, Belleek and England. (Frank McGuinness, typed draft of *Feed the Money and Keep them Coming*. Folder No. 410, Frank McGuinness Papers (James Joyce Library, University College Dublin. 1988)).

<sup>46</sup> Frank McGuinness, *Frank McGuinness: Plays 1*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 386.

<sup>47</sup> *Idem*, 387.

<sup>48</sup> *Idem*, 388.

that her “father had money. Wads of it lying on the table or smelling in his hands. Sometimes there was a picture of a woman in his smell. She looked like a mad woman, dressed all strangely, all in green. A green lady. I held her once in my hands the only time I was trusted with money, because money’s a man’s responsibility.”<sup>49</sup> Money and economic dominance are gendered as masculine. Women, on the other hand, are represented as objects of currency: the banknotes feature a woman and are handled and exchanged by men. The baglady herself is the victim of abuse by her father and other men.

The monologue’s addressive structure shifts throughout – she speaks to spectators, to herself, to her hands and to an imagined younger person to whom she gives advice. The multiple addressees destabilise spectators’ fixed sense of interaction with the baglady and theatricalise the baglady’s state of psychological unrest. Her monologue reveals the impact of sexual abuse. She is distrustful of spectators and threatens recriminations if they tell stories about her in the community: “Go away from me. Don’t look at me. Don’t come near. I’m not dirty. Do you hear? Go away. I’ll tell my father what you call me. He’s a respected man in these parts. A decent man. He’ll nail you for the stories you tell about me. He hears you. He hears everything. Go away.”<sup>50</sup> She goes on to say that “when things are torn, you can’t put them back again. When something’s taken from you, you can’t get it back.”<sup>51</sup>

The baglady initially refers to her father as respectable and decent but then links her father to abuse she has suffered: “Your fist’s like a knife. It’s cutting me. I can’t breathe. The water will rise and take me. I can’t run away. I’m sore. I won’t tell. I won’t open my mouth. Let me go. I’ll stay quiet. I’ll be good. Let me out. I’m soaking. I’ll turn into water. Let me go.”<sup>52</sup> When the baglady consoles herself, she says “Be a good girl. Your daddy does it for your own good. You can be a bad girl. You have to do as

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<sup>49</sup> *Idem*, 389.

<sup>50</sup> *Idem*, 385.

<sup>51</sup> *Idem*, 391.

<sup>52</sup> *Idem*, 396.

your daddy tells you.”<sup>53</sup> Her earlier defence of her father, and her recollection that he abused her, illustrates the bifurcated identity arising from the abuse, at once appropriating her abuser and disavowing him.

The climax of the monologue reveals that a man claiming to be her father visited the house and sexually abused her. A priest later visited the house and told her she was lying about the incident. However, she was brought to a Magdalene laundry where nuns washed her “with fire.”<sup>54</sup> Her son, conceived through the rape, was drowned in the river by the nuns. Her own father lamented the loss of his grandson and to please her father, the baglady took her own life. The nuns refused to bury her so she “got up and walked into her coffin.”<sup>55</sup> The baglady then removes a ring from her finger and recites the marriage vow to herself, before dropping it on to the heap, which contains the chain, cards and white dress. The final word uttered is “drown”, following on from the earlier “melt” (the melting of bits of bread).

Her battle with her hands, which attempt to strangle her with the chain, stages an internal turmoil in which an inner self seeks to dominate the perceived dirty victim of sexual abuse. *Baglady* is an opaque narrative resisting easy interpretation. Its themes of shape-shifting and its indeterminate narrative may underline the baglady’s inability to accept her own identity as victim of rape. Her femininity is suppressed by “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. On her back she carries a grey, woollen sack.”<sup>56</sup> Only shortly before the conclusion of the monologue does she remove her scarf revealing her hair and the white dress from her sack. And the scarf, dress, ring, chain, bread, red

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<sup>53</sup> *Idem*, 396.

<sup>54</sup> *Idem*, 399.

<sup>55</sup> *Idem*, 399.

<sup>56</sup> *Idem*, 385.

lemonade and cards are all consigned to drowning. The song that Baglady sings, referring to a man “with a bag on his back” mirrors Baglady’s own appearance in what may be an appropriation of the form of her assailant. Baglady employs various narrational strategies to deflect from her status of victim of child abuse. Rosana Herero Martin comments that “the Baglady has interiorised a strong, masculine, even violent, use of language, which is very likely to be her father’s legacy.”<sup>57</sup> The baglady appropriates her father’s voice as a consequence of sexual abuse but also as an effort to salvage a past sense of territorial control.

An early handwritten draft of the play reveals a more explicit account of the effects of child sex abuse. The early draft contains lines which more urgently re-enact the incest. After informing spectators that she is on her way to her husband’s funeral (in the published version, the baglady is going to a wedding), she suddenly says: “My father is dead. Don’t touch me. I’m a married woman. A respectable woman. Stop that. Stop touching me.”<sup>58</sup> The abuser is positioned as the audience. After explaining how she washes herself thoroughly every morning, she says: “I don’t like dirty girls. Do you know what happens to dirty girls? No? Daddy, no. (The woman suddenly crouches on all fours).”<sup>59</sup> In both of these cases, McGuinness deploys monologic language specifically to produce an imagined assailant, disempowering the monologist, countering its more prevalent form of utopian self-construction. The final draft of the play is more opaque, more suggestive and points to a theatre-making environment in which more gratuitous elements of the script were cut, possibly mindful of an Abbey

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<sup>57</sup> Rosana Herero Martin, *The Doing of Telling on the Irish Stage: A Study of Language Performativity in Modern and Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 241.

<sup>58</sup> Frank McGuinness, Handwritten draft of *Baglady*. Folder No. 66, Frank McGuinness Papers (James Joyce Library, University College Dublin, 1985).

<sup>59</sup> Idem. In the published version, McGuinness writes “I wash my breast and my woman”. In the earlier draft, this is “I wash my breasts and I wash my woman’s thing.”

Theatre audience who may not have been ready for such startling revelations.<sup>60</sup> The play would anticipate the shocking revelations of child sex abuse in the 1990s. David Nowlan observes that McGuinness carefully conjures images of red, black and white and that “he crystallises the images, then he lets them blur with terror or remorse, as his baglady tells her fearful tale.”<sup>61</sup> The oscillation is reflected in Maureen Toal’s performance, which is “now chatty, now distraught, alternately nostalgic and haunted, finally drained and somehow purified.”<sup>62</sup> The earlier draft of the play has the baglady say “I know what you did. I saw. I was there. I was looking in the window. Don’t lie to me. Don’t lie. Don’t. I’ll tell, father. I’ll tell.”<sup>63</sup> There is no such determination to reveal the abuse in the published version. Ultimately, the baglady’s disclosure of abuse is delivered impressionistically, drawing its theatrical power more from poetic imagery than conventional, linear dramatic narrative. The jumbled images and conflated characters resemble the emotional and psychological confusion caused by incest. The transition between a more explicit early draft and final performed version suggests that McGuinness’ monologue was not fully speakable in 1985, but in its more opaque form, it achieves a performance of the unspeakable, which is perhaps more truthful to its own conservative theatre-making environment.

Moving forward from the 1980s to the 2000s, despite the transformation of the Irish economy, themes of rural isolation persist in the work of Irish monologue dramatists. If *Baglady* is a monologue about the sexual abuse suffered by a daughter at the hands of a vicious father, Tom MacIntyre’s *The*

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<sup>60</sup> Another example of edits to the handwritten script has the published version as “Face. Neck. All red for ever. Breast and woman. Pouring. Legs. Wet. Feet.” (Frank McGuinness, *Frank McGuinness: Plays 1*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 398) with the handwritten script reading: “I’m all red. Breast and woman’s thing. Jesus Christ I’m bleeding. Legs. The very bed is bleeding.” (Frank McGuinness, Handwritten draft of *Baglady*. Folder No. 66, Frank McGuinness Papers (James Joyce Library, University College Dublin. 1985)).

<sup>61</sup> David Nowlan, “‘Baglady’ at the Peacock”. Rev. of “Baglady” by Frank McGuinness. *Irish Times* 06 Mar. 1985.

<sup>62</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>63</sup> Frank McGuinness, handwritten draft of *Baglady*. Folder No. 66, Frank McGuinness Papers (James Joyce Library, University College Dublin. 1985).

*Gallant John-Joe* (2001)<sup>64</sup> is a comic monologue, laced with racial anxieties, about a Cavan father and his pregnant daughter.<sup>65</sup> At the centre is John Joe Concannon, a widower of sixteen years, who sings snatches from a song celebrating the former Cavan GAA star, John Joe O'Reilly. *The Gallant John-Joe* is a play about a man fearful of old age and frail health, affirming a distinctive Cavan identity and idiom amidst anxieties about the paternity of his daughter's child, the changing ethnic make-up of the town and future economic uncertainties.

John Joe seeks to establish the paternity of his grandchild and in doing so reveals his own unease about the race and morals of contemporary Ireland. Speaking of the foreign nationals working in the local hospital, John Joe complains that the "place was fuckin' full of them, lick of the tar-brush, every breed y'ever saw barrin' the Eskimo, and they probably had them below in the basement beside the furnace."<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, the child is revealed as fictitious by Jacinta who also invents a phantom dog, after being committed to a local mental health facility. The play destabilises any notions of lineage and thus any concept of Irishness. Xenophobic fears fixating on oriental influences ("The Chinees"<sup>67</sup>) reveal Irish nationality as itself constructed and as fantastic as the invented dog. John Joe performatively constructs race as a bastion against what he regards as unwanted foreign influences. He physically attacks Mr Woo,

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<sup>64</sup> *The Gallant John-Joe* was first produced by Skehana on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2001 in McGrory's, Culdaff, Co. Donegal and featured Tom Hickey as John Joe Concannon. The one man play was based on an earlier MacIntyre play, *The Chirpaun*, which was first performed on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1997 at the Peacock Theatre. *The Chirpaun* had a cast of seven, with Tom Hickey playing John Joe Concannon. After the production of *The Chirpaun*, Hickey asked MacIntyre to write a one-man play for him based on the character of John Joe Concannon, and MacIntyre assented.

<sup>65</sup> MacIntyre has written one other monologue play, entitled *Foggy Hair and Green Eyes*, which was first performed on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1991 at the Punchbag Theatre, Dominick Street, Galway, produced by the company of the same name. It was staged along with two other one-act plays, *Jack Be Nimble* and *Fine Day for a Hunt* under the umbrella title *Go On Red*. Dermot Arrigan plays He, giving a monologue about unrequited lust and the object of his desire "forever circling around the love object's abode where, when he finally penetrates it, he finds only fetishist gratification." (Michael Finlan, "Three Plays by Tom MacIntyre in Galway", Rev. of "Jack Be Nimble"; "Foggy Hair and Green Eyes"; and "Fine Day for a Hunt" by Tom MacIntyre, *Irish Times* 19 Feb. 1991).

<sup>66</sup> Tom MacIntyre, *The Great Hunger & The Gallant John-Joe* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2002), 57.

<sup>67</sup> "The Chinees" is the name John Joe gives to Mr Lee Chang Woo, the Chinese man who runs the local chip shop.

who runs the local chippers: “I lugged him out to the back-yard. . . Well, I smigged him the twice. Them I milled him with the boot – by which time he’s pumpin’ the red stuff. Left him lying on top of the fish-boxes, a handy dose of quiet in him.”<sup>68</sup> He repeatedly cites the song celebrating the mythic GAA figure John Joe O’Reilly, but the exploits of O’Reilly on the pitch are here deployed to shore up the cultural and national identity of his namesake John Joe Concannon. The hero status conferred on John Joe O’Reilly harkens back to a time of Gaelic cultural and national purity and myth and is deliberately invoked through performative song to recall an earlier culture and to throw into relief the negative ethnic influence of Mr Woo and the dubious services of “the Hitmatist”, a local con-artist whose real name is Dallan Devine and who claims remedies for a range of ailments. John Joe O’Reilly is figured as mythic and cunning - the inevitable inference is that Concannon identifies with O’Reilly to the point where singing his song performatively sustains him. But Concannon’s failing is that he refuses to accept the social and moral decline of his community, instead placing his faith in fixed identities and forgotten myths in an environment of ethnic diversity and fraudulent business practices. The final revelation that the “chirpaun”<sup>69</sup> is a construct underlines Concannon’s naivety. The constative myth, to which Concannon clings, yields to the performative domain of citation. A telling indication of the performative nature of language and its ability to precede, constrain and exceed the speaker is Fintan O’Toole’s comment that “Hickey conveys the feeling that these words are speaking the character rather than the other way round.”<sup>70</sup> Hickey may have the illusion of theatrical sovereignty but the words he invokes bring into being a performative force that was present before him and that will endure after he has gone. This is not to say that John Joe is bereft of agency – the drama in *The Gallant John-Joe* is located in tensions between John Joe’s cited performatives and his agential appropriations of those citations. This

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<sup>68</sup> Tom MacIntyre, *The Great Hunger & The Gallant John-Joe* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2002), 68.

<sup>69</sup> Cavan slang for a child.

<sup>70</sup> Fintan O’Toole, “The Gallant John-Joe”. Rev. of “The Gallant-John Joe” by Tom MacIntyre. *Irish Times* 29 Nov. 2001.



is in turn framed by a wider social context of discord between an ageing rural population and its local customs, and an emerging globalised and ethnically diverse economy.

Dominic Symonds and Millie Taylor, commenting on a range of forms and practices that could be labelled “song and dance”, note that “they are all corporeal gestures of vocality and physicality that engage bodies in expressive commitment . . . that say something in the very act of performance about the bodies that are their source and raw material, about the contexts in which they are uttered, and about the idioms they use.”<sup>71</sup> They go on to note that “song and dance also defy structural boundaries, their effects seeping fluidly through conventional modalities of understanding and affecting us therefore in tangential and peripheral ways.”<sup>72</sup> Throughout the monologue John Joe sings snatches of *The Gallant John-Joe* (“In each corner of Breiffne, there’s sorrow and pain/Such a great-hearted sportsman we’ll ne’er sing again / Grand players may come and grand players may go / But we’ll ne’er find the likes of the gallant John-Joe”)<sup>73</sup> a song celebrating the legendary performances of Cavan footballer John Joe O’Reilly (1919-1952), a former captain of the Cavan county team that won the All-Ireland Senior Football Championships in 1947 and 1948.<sup>74</sup> John Joe is linked with John Joe O’Reilly through name, and when he invokes the image and performances of the Gaelic football star, he is not only resurrecting O’Reilly but appropriating wistful memories of Cavan in the 1940s and early 1950s. Concannon through performance of song, embodies O’Reilly and establishes resolutely a distinctive Cavan identity, which can only be contrasted with Mr Woo and other ethnic minorities, about whom Concannon is deeply suspicious. Those alien characters are othered as “the Chinees” (Mr Woo) and “the Hitmatist”, whose actual name

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<sup>71</sup> Dominic Symonds and Millie Taylor, *Gestures of Music Theater: The Performativity of Song and Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Idem*, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Tom MacIntyre, *The Great Hunger & The Gallant John-Joe* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2002), 58.

<sup>74</sup> *The Gallant John-Joe* is a ballad composed by Tommy Gilronan celebrating the playing prowess of Cavan footballer John Joe O’Reilly but lamenting his early death at the age of 33.

Dallan Devine seems Irish but, as we discover, is made up. The invocation also assuages John Joe's growing sense of physical decline and dependence on others. The summoning of the footballer's athletic prowess and dominance contrasts with the speaking body of Concannon ("th'oul lumbar's a hoor")<sup>75</sup> – the disjuncture of singing body and sung referent may be said to produce a supplementary excess in which an idyllic Cavan past is brought violently into the present, but which cannot be accommodated there. The outcome is a temporal excess which is both irrecoverable past and unliveable, or barely tolerable, present. John Joe occasionally sings the song whilst working the mangle or enacting a penalty kick in a Gaelic football match. He tells the audience that the mangle is "an heirloom. I could get a mint for her in any of them museums is to be found in every old hayshed these days. A mint. Only, there's some things you don't let go of."<sup>76</sup> If John Joe discursively reconstitutes John Joe O'Reilly through song and the miming of playing football, the mangle is a material and visual reminder of the past, a piece of domestic equipment at odds with the time of the play's production. The mangle, and the labour it requires, sits in opposition with the charlatan enterprise of "the Hitmatist" whose staff have "fifty quid outa me pocket before they've the coat off me back."<sup>77</sup> The performance of the mangle (John Joe uses it to store his medication) is to provide a lifeline to John Joe's and Cavan's idyllic past and to defy the passage of time and the economic globalisation it has visited on his village.

Tom Hickey reprised his role as John Joe Concannon in a 2016 production of the play.<sup>78</sup> Hickey had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2012 and so his performance was more measured but

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<sup>75</sup> Tom MacIntyre, *The Great Hunger & The Gallant John-Joe* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2002), 58.

<sup>76</sup> *Idem*, 67.

<sup>77</sup> *Idem*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> The set consisted of a wooden chair, a metal fold-up chair and a mangle on brown lino, worn in places. A red lampshade is suspended and there is an ambient microphone. Hickey wears battered old runners, a woolly hat, overcoat, trousers and a shirt. Parkinson's disease is most evident in Hickey's right hand. His oral delivery is weak and his movement is slow. Some audience members commented after the performance that they found Hickey difficult to comprehend. (Tom Hickey, perf. *The Gallant John-Joe*. Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire. 01 Jul 2016).

less energetic than the 2001 performance. Hickey's affliction however added to John Joe's sense of isolation and vulnerability and delivered a fascinating sequel to the 2001 performance. Fifteen years on from the original, (and 19 years from *The Chirpaun*), Hickey's three performances outline a heartbreaking deterioration, which profoundly reinterprets MacIntyre's text and shifts the reading from one of defiant, violent father to one of desperate survival. During the run of the 2016 production, Hickey remarked that "MacIntyre thinks it's fifty times better than it was the last time. Because of the fragility of the man. The interesting thing about this production is that the character in the original never stopped taking medicines and pills during the piece. Now I'm doing it for real."<sup>79</sup> The altered economic context – from Celtic Tiger affluence to one of haggard post-recessionary daze – dramatises the ravages of economic recession that has occurred in the intervening years and which have left their mark on Hickey's/John Joe's body. Hickey's symptoms of Parkinson's disease – a long-term degenerative disorder of the central nervous system mainly affecting the motor system – are alleviated by performance. In a performative reversal, the text that was written for Hickey to perform has become a remedy for Hickey's own symptoms of Parkinson's. *The Gallant John-Joe*, in attempting to resurrect a lost Cavan identity, problematically rehabilitates cultural norms of xenophobia and racism. The play is ethically open to charges of constructing and othering Asians and other minorities whilst shoring up a native identity. The perlocutionary outcome is complex – depending on uptake, MacIntyre, a Cavan native, may be exposing himself as racist or his monologue may be read sympathetically as symptomatic of a regional subject becoming extinct. The nature of the reception would surely vary according to rural and urban contexts. The reception of the 2016 production, presenting as it does John Joe with Parkinson's, may soften its explicit racist positions and figure the monologist as one with diminished agency, independence and with an implausible capacity to beat up Mr Woo.

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<sup>79</sup> Maggie Armstrong, "Stage-Mover and Shaker: the solo comeback of Tom Hickey" *Irish Times* 17 Apr. 2016.

John Joe Concannon's reliance on the famed sporting performances of John Joe O'Reilly to enable his own spiritual survival leads to an analysis of another male monologue subject, and his wife. Billy Farrell's illusions, though, are greater than John Joe's. If the exploits of John Joe O'Reilly, a real-life GAA football legend, were witnessed by thousands, the sexual conquests of Billy Farrell's friend Tony Tyrrell are the stuff of small-town myth. The national sense of economic wellbeing, the collapse of masculinity in rural Celtic Tiger Ireland and the power of storytelling and personal myth are all at the core of Eugene O'Brien's *Eden*<sup>80</sup> (2001). O'Brien, whose other monologue plays include *America '87* (1988)<sup>81</sup> *Checking for Squirrels* (1995)<sup>82</sup> and *Just Here* (2015),<sup>83</sup> made a more considered use of the monologue form with *Eden* where alternate monologues are delivered by Billy and Breda Farrell, a married couple with two children living in Edenderry, Co. Offaly.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Eden* was first performed on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2001 in the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, produced by the Abbey Theatre. The play was directed by Conor McPherson. Don Wycherley played Billy Farrell with Catherine Walsh as his wife Breda.

<sup>81</sup> *America '87* was first performed in 1988 at the Players Theatre, Trinity College Dublin, produced by Brass Tacks Theatre Company and performed by the author and directed by Rebecca Roper. The monologue is about a young Irishman's travels in the United States on a Greyhound bus.

<sup>82</sup> *Checking for Squirrels* was first produced by Black Box Theatre Company in Andrew's Lane Theatre, Dublin, on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1995, performed by O'Brien and directed by Rebecca Roper. Eoin, a father of a young son, travels through Ireland meeting a range of characters in response to his son's question as to why squirrels hibernate. The play was produced alongside a revival of *Without the H* (1994) by Sean Moffatt, under the banner title *Man Two Man*.

<sup>83</sup> *Just Here* was first performed in Bewley's Cafe Theatre at the Powerscourt Centre on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015. Daniel Reardon plays John, an elderly man living alone in an apartment near Dublin's Baggot Street, who receives a letter from his daughter who now lives in Australia. The letter concerns an incident long ago that led to her emigration and which John has trouble coming to terms with. Opening the letter will disrupt John's carefully contained and controlled existence within his apartment and his cherished collection of films. The monologue was directed by Charlie Bonner and produced by Bewley's Cafe Theatre.

<sup>84</sup> O'Brien describes how he wrote *Eden* in the midst of a loud and boozy location and how he did not set out to write a play about personal issues of loneliness. The ambience of the house seems to have had a bearing on the play: "I shared a house with two other actors. It was in the days of cheap rent. Drink, pork chops, more drink, and Tin Tin's Chinese for sweet and sour chicken balls was the diet. Our flat's address was 82 Northumberland Road . . . or Club 82 as it was known for the amount of drinking that went on in it. . . It was just two characters, Billy and Breda from Edenderry, and their unhappy marriage and a world of characters and spake of the town like the local

Their representation points to an average Irish couple, unremarkable in many respects and while it has all the trappings of a personal play, it may be seen to represent the universal through the local, redolent of the small-town drama of Billy Roche's *Wexford Trilogy* (1988 – 1991). Neither character's occupation is mentioned, the focus resting instead on the characters of Edenderry and the Farrells' marriage. O'Brien's writing seeks to capture a distinctive idiom and vocabulary native to Edenderry and the fluidity of the writing and its performance by Don Wycherley and Catherine Walsh convey the identity of Edenderry social life while perhaps dissimulating the project of commenting on the national economic crisis and illusions of economic sustainability. One cannot help but read the play as a snapshot of rural social life at the height of the economic boom and the sense of abandon that took hold of the nation. The theatre, and theatrical convention, plays host to the troubled relationship of the Farrells, and spectators are called upon to mediate between them by bearing witness to their respective testimonies, and determine whose narratives reveal the most delusion and denial. Bláithín Sheerin's set is "of an elegant art gallery exhibiting paintings of harvest time. But the 'pictures' painted by the author's words with two stunningly good and richly detailed performances by Don Wycherley and Catherine Walsh are of a bleak bedroom, populous bar-room gatherings and a quiet canal bank."<sup>85</sup> In the original 2001 production, there were two paintings, one for each act, both of which depicted idyllic rustic settings. The onstage presence of the plastic art objects complements, but also contrasts with, the performances of Wycherley and Walsh. The utopian portrayal of harvest time in the country is ever-present but the fantasies of the Farrells are dynamic, fragile and performative.

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ladies' man being known as James Galway, the man with the golden flute! It would turn out to be about loneliness and lack of communication and sexual dysfunction but I didn't know that then. I just kept scribbling and Billy and Breda's voices were getting stronger." O'Brien also mentions the economic context of *Eden's* genesis, with rising rents in the capital: "The old computer got left behind in 'Club 82' when the Celtic Tiger kicked us out and I bought a Mac with the proceeds from the play's first run." (Eugene O'Brien, "How a random act of kindness by a stranger helped change my life", *Sunday Independent*, 02 July 2017).

<sup>85</sup> David Nowlan, "Eden: Peacock Theatre". Rev. of "Eden" by Eugene O'Brien. *Irish Times* 26 Jan. 2001.

The alcohol consumption in *Eden* is representative of a buoyant national mood underpinned by Ireland's economic prosperity during the Celtic Tiger (1997-2002).<sup>86</sup> As a mark of the country's secularisation, Billy refers to his socialising on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights as the "holy Trinity" at the end of which he aims to seduce Imelda Egan: "now it's here again, the holy trinity . . . Friday, the beezneez, Johnstownbridge, Saturday, here in the fuckin' golf links but usually Spiders, Sunday, Mac's, late bar, and she'll be there too, set it up tonight and then tomorrow night . . . I will be James Galway."<sup>87</sup> Billy constructs an identity based on a desire to emulate and outdo his close friend Tony Tyrell, whom he believes to be a Casanova, possessor of the golden flute and giving rise to the nickname of James Galway, renowned Irish flute player, "The Man with the Golden Flute". Billy's illusions are fuelled by excessive drinking, a trope of male monologue drama during the Celtic Tiger. His moment of awakening finally comes after he grabs Imelda Egan in the bathroom of Geraldine Cullen's house and they fall to the floor, Billy hitting his head on the toilet bowl. They are quickly surrounded by the party-goers, one of whom kicks Billy in the ribs. Humiliated, Billy stumbles past Breda's best friend Eilish Moore and a group of his male friends and others, "past them all and out the front door, me eyes squintin' against the bright, me head spinnin', ribs achin' from the kick, balance goin', fightin' for to keep straight, but fall into the gate, nothin' ever hard about me. I can see them all standin' around the front door, and I'm about to roar at them that I'm all right and they can fuck off back inside, but I don't. 'Cause there's nothin' ever hard about me."<sup>88</sup> Billy's fall from grace, ostensibly a crisis and deconstruction of masculinity, is a trope for national illusions of economic stability. Male erectile dysfunction, linked with excessive alcohol

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<sup>86</sup> In 2001, alcohol consumption in Ireland peaked at 14.44 litres of pure alcohol per person per year. In 2012 annual consumption levels were down to 11.681 litres of pure alcohol per person. . . In 2001 the average Irish adult drank the equivalent of 543 pints of beer or 152 bottles of wine a year; last year (2013) the equivalent figures were 377 pints of beer or 113 bottles of wine. (Ronan McGreevy, "Has Our National Lust for Alcohol Been Cured?", *Irish Times*, 20 May, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> Eugene O'Brien, *Eden*, (London: Methuen, 2001), 4.

<sup>88</sup> *Idem*, 34.

consumption, may be read as a national addiction to credit and consequent economic crash. In that way, O'Brien anticipates Ireland's economic crash of 2008 which led to the arrival of the International Monetary Fund at Government Buildings in November 2010. Ireland had been rendered economically impotent, foregoing economic sovereignty to the Troika, having sustained itself with illusions of a soft landing - *Eden* is a poignant harbinger of the 2008 economic crisis and its aftermath. Eamonn Jordan has observed about *Eden* that "male impotency has its root in many different areas, emotional, physical or psycho-sexual, but none of these is teased through in the drama. The impotence of a society to support such problems shines through, as does the dysfunctional dynamics of an alcohol-focused community."<sup>89</sup>

*Eden* is not the first monologue play to explore alcohol-induced male impotence. The theme is suggested in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), when the taped 39 year-old Krapp recalls a failed sexual encounter with a young woman in a punt ("I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes")<sup>90</sup> and also refers to an earlier failed relationship ("At that time I think I was still living on and off with Bianca in Kedar Street. Well out of that, Jesus yes! Hopeless business").<sup>91</sup> The 69 year-old Krapp also alludes to sexual problems in later life ("Fanny came in a couple of times. Bony old ghost of a whore. Couldn't do much, but I suppose better than a kick in the crutch").<sup>92</sup> The 39 year-old Krapp refers to excessive drinking habits during his late twenties (and his resolution to reduce his drinking intake, at which the 69 year old Krapp utters a brief laugh) which may have contributed to his sexual dysfunction: "Seventeen hundred hours, out of the preceding eight thousand odd, consumed on licensed premises alone."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Eamonn Jordan, *Dissident Dramaturgies: Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 225.

<sup>90</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), 221.

<sup>91</sup> *Idem*, 218.

<sup>92</sup> *Idem*, 222.

<sup>93</sup> *Idem*, 218.

Breda Farrell, trying to eradicate memories of being called “Pigarse” at school, is attempting to performatively rework that label and reconstitute herself through monologues of self-confidence and betterment. If Billy’s obsession is to take the mantle of James Galway and perform with Imelda, Breda recalls the time Billy asked her to dance to *True* by Spandau Ballet. Catherine Walsh played Breda in the original production: Walsh is not overweight or obese, so her monologues of shame at being described as Pigarse are at odds with the spectacle of Walsh’s non-obese body.<sup>94</sup> Butler comments that “no one has ever worked through an injury without repeating it: its repetition is both the continuation of the trauma and that which marks a self-distance within the very structure of trauma, its constitutive possibility of being otherwise.”<sup>95</sup> Breda’s utterance of “Pigarse” creates a disjuncture between the term Pigarse and its intended referent, which is the speaking body of Breda. But the injurious name does not meet its bodily target. Instead, the non-obese body’s enunciation of the term underscores the insult’s incompatibility with the referent and in doing so performatively refashions it into something other than its original meaning. What are now performed are the linguistic/bodily disjuncture and the determined weight loss that has produced the speaking body in front of us. Breda psyches herself up for her re-entry into the social life of Edenderry, when she will accompany her friend Eilish Moore out on the town: “Eilish is goin’ to be a great help to me tomorrow night. It’s me big entrance into the pubs of the town, I’m goin’ out for the first time in ages, ‘cause I’ve lost the weight. She’s callin’ over and we’ll end up in Mac’s, and he will come home with me, I think he will, ‘cause I’ve made the effort, I’ve lost the weight.”<sup>96</sup> Similar to Billy’s binge drinking, Breda’s former obese state raises another topic of national interest, with

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<sup>94</sup> Lesley Conroy played Breda in the 2013 Decadent Theatre Company production of the play, with Patrick Ryan playing Billy. The promotional material accompanying the 2013 production does not indicate that Conroy is overweight or obese.

<sup>95</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 102.

<sup>96</sup> Eugene O’Brien, *Eden*, (London: Methuen, 2001), 8.



Ireland projected to be the most obese nation, with the United Kingdom, by 2025.<sup>97</sup> What separates the two is that Breda has addressed her weight problem and abandoned her reliance on reading an erotic book for masturbatory pleasure. Solo sex, perhaps associated here with monologue performance in which the monologist controls the narrative and eschews interaction with another, will be cast aside in favour of a renewed relationship with her husband. Billy, however, still fantasises about making love with Imelda Egan behind a tree which he has seen depicted in a painting with field-workers in the background. Billy's sexual performance will be public because "all the men in the fields workin' are lookin' over at us, because they'll all know now. That I'm havin' Imelda Egan behind the big tree and they're not."<sup>98</sup> His conquest of Imelda is intended to secure his reputation as the predominant womaniser in the town, outdoing even the famed Tony. Brian Singleton has made the link between male characters of low self-esteem and social status in monologue productions and their desire to be desired sexually by spectators: "they conversely in the theatrical world present their own to-be-looked-at-ness. This, I would conjecture, stems from an erotic impulse to be desired physically in embodiment."<sup>99</sup> The to-be-looked-at male body of Wycherley is asking spectators to validate his claims to male sexual pre-eminence. Of course, Walsh's sexually available body is co-present and reminds spectators that Billy is not "performing" with Breda. Breda's bodily presentation to the audience is also an appeal for a confirmation of a deliverance from a previously obese subjectivity. Separate monologue performances, driven by discrete sexual fantasies, perform dialogic and sexual dysfunction. Although there is no

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<sup>97</sup> "Ireland is set to become the most obese country in Europe, with the UK, within a decade, according to a study published in *The Lancet*. Irish men already have the highest body mass index (BMI) – a key measure of overweight – in Europe, while Irish women rank third, the study shows. . . By 2025, 37 per cent of Irish women will be obese, just behind 38 per cent in the UK, the study forecasts. Among men, 38 per cent in Ireland and the UK will be obese." (Paul Cullen, "Ireland's obesity rate among world's worst", *Irish Times*, 01 Apr. 2016).

<sup>98</sup> Eugene O'Brien, *Eden*, (London: Methuen, 2001), 33.

<sup>99</sup> Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 73.

drinking on stage, the capacity for copious alcohol consumption is perhaps conveyed by the rigorous demands of monologue performance.

Breda's weight loss and the performance of her leaner self on the town do not however attract the attentions and renewed commitment of her husband. A portable golf-green salesman instead fulfils her on the bank of the canal: "We're in the tent and all the guards have left, just me and the sultan and I climb on to him, astride him now, I can feel him, grab hold of the bench because Pigarse is gone, it's just the sultan and me, Breda, ah yes, me and him and Billy is behind us in the tent, forced to watch us . . . I grab hold of the sultan's hair and it's over now, beautifully over, heavy with breath, both of us, and we kiss."<sup>100</sup> Breda's fantasy gels with a real sexual encounter but with a lover other than her husband. She has attained the affirmation of her own physical attractiveness but not with her intended object of affection because Billy has not abandoned his own fantasy.

*Eden* is about the pressures of a young couple to perform in middle Ireland. Theatrical performance envelopes the Farrells' performances in front of the community of Edenderry. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker say that "like the most conventional definition of a play, marriage is constituted as a spectacle that denies its audience the ability either to look away from it or equally to intervene in it."<sup>101</sup> The silent interlocutors witnessing the broken marriage are powerless to intervene but through the performative act of reception, in which two visible speaking bodies are fused into a visual and auditory whole, spectators complete the project of the Farrells' psychic if not physical reunion. The demands of monologue performance and prolonged direct address to spectators may also be read as metaphors for sexual performances of the self. Spectators here fulfil the role of the Edenderry interlocutors in which the Farrells' bodies are displayed and decoded against their narrating and fantasising bodies. The performance of

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<sup>100</sup> Eugene O'Brien, *Eden*, (London: Methuen, 2001), 36.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 11.

fantasy is maintained throughout because dialogue between the couple is never realised. Their co-presence onstage emphasises their separateness. There is no reference to how Billy is economically supporting his lifestyle of socialising – what appears paramount is the excessive consumption of alcohol and the performance of the sexual self in Edenderry: Billy’s seduction of Imelda Egan and Breda’s recovery of her husband and sexual partner. Billy’s humiliation and physical injuries enable an awakening from fantasy and return to home life. My reading of *Eden* is of a window into Celtic Tiger economic pressures which mandate subjects to perform socially. O’Brien, I contend, selects an everyman couple in order to make a comment about national behaviour. The specific details that would mark the Farrells out as distinctive are suppressed – remarkably, Billy’s or Breda’s occupations are not revealed to us, despite extensive narratives from both. The stage directions make no reference to their age, appearance or what they are wearing. Instead, they are defined specifically in terms of their private fantasies and emplacement within the social life of Edenderry. Their identities are bound up with the town’s public houses and interaction with others who frequent those spaces. Brian Lenihan, former Minister for Finance, famously claimed when reflecting on the economic crash in Ireland: “Let’s be fair about it. We all partied.”<sup>102</sup> And perhaps that is the play’s message: the practical details of one’s working life is forgotten in the haze of alcohol and personal illusions. Cloaked in Edenderry idiom, the play achieved much critical success because it at once gave voice to Edenderry language and culture but also resonated with the national mood in 2001 and the excessive lifestyle that the economic boom permitted.

If Billy Farrell achieves a drunken and violent moment of self-awareness, Enda Walsh’s *misterman* (1999)<sup>103</sup> and its later revised version *Misterman* (2011)<sup>104</sup> are portraits of an individual clinging on to an

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<sup>102</sup> *Primetime* Int. with Brian Lenihan RTE. 24 Nov. 2010.

<sup>103</sup> *misterman* was first performed on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1999 at the Granary Theatre, Cork, produced by Corcadorca Theatre Company. Enda Walsh played Thomas, directed by Pat Kiernan. *misterman* was published (along with Walsh’s *bedbound*) by Nick Hern Books in 2001, with the title in lower case. I will accordingly refer to the 1999 version of Walsh’s play as *misterman*.

outdated Catholic prurience to maintain a precarious identity in the small Irish village of Innishfree. I will be critiquing *Misterman* in this section, the 2011 version of the play, unless otherwise indicated.

Thomas Magill, a violent, self-harming, unemployed man in his thirties, lives with his widowed mother. His father once ran a shop and since his death, the family's status has diminished. Magill's odyssey through his village is dramatised by a combination of Magill's monologues and voice recordings of the village characters, which Magill controls, recalling Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *All That Fall* (1957). The theatricality of the play's opening- recalling Frank Hardy - reveals an awareness of the power of theatrical language in monologue form:

THOMAS: It all began from a Nothing. This loud crashing all began as a whisper . . . but a whisper that was from God, from Him, from the Lord our Master . . . and that whisper grew and grew and became this growling and soon a thundering and a roaring that was never heard in the Nothing before. And out of the noise came a voice, the great voice of the Lord and He said, 'Let there be light' . . . and on the Nothing a light shone. And what was the first light like?

*(Lights slowly come up on all the small playing areas dotted about the space.)*<sup>105</sup>

The opening monologue establishes a god-like presence for Thomas, at once citing the Bible and assuming its authority. The Biblical citations confer on Thomas a moral authority but it is also a comment on the divine autonomy of monologue theatrical performance. Monologic language performatively brings into

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<sup>104</sup> *Misterman* was first produced by Landmark productions and Galway Arts Festival, and performed at the Black Box Theatre, Galway, as part of the Galway Arts Festival, on 11 July 2011. Cillian Murphy played Thomas Magill, with Walsh directing. *Misterman* was published by Nick Hern Books in 2012, with the title in upper case. I will accordingly refer to the 2011 version of the play as *Misterman* (distinguishing it from *misterman*, the 1999 version).

*Misterman* is longer than its predecessor and extensively rewritten. The number of actors playing recorded roles rose from three in the 1999 version to ten in the 2011 version of the play.

<sup>105</sup> Enda Walsh, *Misterman* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), 10.

being that which it names and the early Biblical reference constitutes Thomas as citer and enforcer of a strict moral code. The Old Testament passage is preceded by a comic sequence in which Thomas fails to silence the annoying sound of Doris Day's "Everybody Loves a Lover". After searching for the correct starting point within his audio recordings, he effectively commences the play.

Magill perambulates Innishfree, attempting to defend and uphold a fundamentalist moral code, recording names of offenders in his notebook: Dwain Flynn goes into the book for profanity; Timmy O'Leary for lack of cleanliness; Mr McAnerny immodesty; Mrs Cleary, indecency; and Simple Eamonn Moran for having a pornographic calendar in his garage. Thomas ultimately meets Edel whom he believes to be his angelic saviour. Upon entering the town hall dance, he plays a recording of a scene between himself and Edel in which he discovers that he has been set up with Edel as part of an elaborate joke. The recording reveals that Thomas murders Edel in a fit of rage.

*Misterman* is a monologue about a damaged mind attempting to control its environment but remaining isolated from the community life around him. It speaks of rural isolation, mental illness, poverty and outdated religious doctrines. Magill's performance of control is exercised through the carefully assembled range of voice recordings as well as notations of the village's various misdemeanours. His neurotic obsession with perfecting the order of the daily chronology of events, the Derridean *différance* ensuring its constant reiteration, also speaks to mental disorder. As is common in Walsh's work, theatrical performance is foregrounded: Magill searches for the correct starting point in his tapedeck to begin his "performance". The performance of another artist, Doris Day, is delaying the commencement of his own performance. Walsh self-consciously cites Krapp's searches through his own tape reels in *Krapp's Last Tape* and the reference to Innishfree brings to mind Yeats' famous recorded recitation of *The Isle of Innishfree*. Magill's performance is just one of a network of competing performances striving for attention and reception. With the disappearance of the family business, Magill needs an alternative mode of authority, but lacking any basis for that authority, he resorts to one that no longer bears any purchase on the social life

of the community. Peter Crawley describes the theatrical effect of the 2011 production: “Alone in Black Box Theatre’s eerily cavernous space, Cillian Murphy’s sandals and biblical beard may suggest a Messiah complex, but Enda Walsh’s greatly expanded version of his 1999 play pushes further: he is actually playing God.”<sup>106</sup> If sovereign performativity – a coherent subject exercising performative autonomy – is an unspoken aim of many monologists facing a crisis of identity, Walsh here introduces in the figure of Thomas Magill a divine performativity conferred with boundless creative and restrictive powers. If Magill was not derided by the village populace as an object of mockery, he may indeed be read as a type of theatrical agent and embodiment of Butler’s performative regulatory practices. As performed, however, he does not represent the insidious and dissimulated form of coercive performativity as theorised by Butler. He is on the contrary, a parody of a bygone figure that wielded the power of Church-sponsored behavioral control but who is now regarded as anti-social, mentally unstable and isolated. *Misterman* is in that regard a key text and performance in unpacking Butlerian performativity. On another level, *Misterman* is both an affirmation and a critique of the monologue dramatic form. Magill’s narcissistic self-construction as Innishfree’s moral policeman appears to corroborate critiques of the form itself, which point out its disallowance of challenge from others and resultant dramatic stasis; its insistence on the monologist as sole source of ocular pleasure and its monopoly of the narrative. But the energetic, virtuosic performance of Murphy justifies the monologic project and in doing so, paradoxically adds to the sense of divine theatrical performance, which is the very source of anxiety about the form.

The original 1999 production, *misterman*, featuring Walsh as Magill, was performed against the backdrop of the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger. As Peter Crawley notes, the 2011 play “pushes further” – with the economic crash devastating many rural regions during the economic recession, *Misterman* perhaps finds a more resonant economic context. The loss of the Magill grocery business and

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<sup>106</sup> Peter Crawley, “Misterman”. Rev. of “Misterman” by Enda Walsh. *Irish Times* 13 Jul. 2011.

Thomas' descent into mental instability, expressed through vigilant paranoia, distorted narratives and delusions of authority, chimes with the narratives of young unemployed men, who have been found to be at greater risk of mental health disorders. Cillian Murphy, recalling the different audience reactions to the play, which was staged in Galway, New York and London, says that "in Galway, they just got it. And they got him. In rural Ireland, there seem to be a lot of potential Thomas Magills. He's a version of the guy that everyone knows who's wandering around the town, muttering to himself."<sup>107</sup> Magill, who is not a credible figure within the Innishfree community, confers himself with a self-made pastoral authority which is an appropriation of a past performative regulatory control enforced by priests, nuns, members of religious orders and lay teachers. His self-generated authority is drawn from a socio-religious era in Ireland which has been eclipsed by successive reports that have severely damaged and discredited the Catholic Church and religious orders in Ireland. The fact that Magill is forced to resort to such outlandish behaviour is a measure of his desperation, social isolation and loss of economic standing. His diminished social status, and there is no evidence he bore any, clashes with the divine theatrical autonomy he wields but the extent of theatrical narcissism and impunity only underscores the degree of his illusions. The moral authority he plunders to buoy up a low self-esteem is expressed theatrically through a range of distinctly postmodernist borrowings, as I have mentioned. *misterman* and its successor *Misterman* are ultimately tragic tales of national and cultural dislocation with no promise of social integration. The 1916 script supplied by the Easter rebels, guaranteeing religious liberty, is exposed as producing subjects such as Magill and their intolerance of other's lifestyles.

### ***"Playing Away": Diasporic Monologues of Exile***

Moving from rural isolation and monologic attempts to create communities and a place within them, highlighting a troubled relationship with that community, is the wider diasporic experience of

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<sup>107</sup> Sean O'Hagan, "Enda Walsh: 'I Tried to Take a Hammer to Rural Ireland'." Int. with Enda Walsh and Cillian Murphy. *Guardian* 01 Apr. 2012.

emigrants who abandoned the country in depressed economic times and who use narrative and monologue performance to rationalise that experience and piece together a discernible emigrant identity. I want to focus on key monologue productions that will unpack expressions of diasporic dislocation: *In High Germany* (1990) and its sequel *The Parting Glass* (2010) by Dermot Bolger; *We Ourselves* (2000) by Paul Mercier and *A Night in November* (1994) by Marie Jones.

Friel set the template for the divided emigrant in the form of Gar O'Donnell whose Public/Private device was as much an expression of a split emigrant subjectivity as it was a means of soliloquising Gar's inner thoughts: "Answerable to nobody! All this bloody yap about father and son and all this sentimental rubbish about 'homeland' and 'birthplace' –yap! Bloody yap! Impermanence - anonymity – that's what I'm looking for; a vast restless place that doesn't give a damn about the past. To hell with Ballybeg, that's what I say!"<sup>108</sup> Friel would follow up *Philadelphia* with *The Loves of Cass Maguire* (1966), whose eponymous character's difficult resituation in Ballybeg following decades in New York acts as a sharp and bleak sequel to Gar's bedroom emigrant fantasies.

Tom Murphy has devoted many plays to a study of the fracturing of identity and alienation from homeland in works such as *A Whistle in the Dark* (1961), *The White House* (1972) *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) and *The House* (2000). The consequences of emigration are here worked out socially and intersubjectively, through expansive conversations often lubricated by alcohol, where past aspirations and hopes of the characters are brutally held up to the evidence of the present day. Engagement with peers onstage means that personal myths and fantasies, constructed in earlier times but sustained in foreign lands, cannot and do not go unchallenged. The outcome of these deconstructions represents a violent adjustment of fantasy to reality. The metaphor and performance of alcohol consumption, an accepted social therapy in tackling life crises, is deployed to underscore the sustenance and jealous guarding of personal myths. Division in these works comes in the form of subtle barbs, contested versions of the past,

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<sup>108</sup> Brian Friel, *Brian Friel, Plays 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 79.



manifesting in verbal arguments and occasional physical violence. Murphy, more than any other Irish playwright, has interrogated this sense of irreconcilable internal division affecting not only emigrants, but those who decided to stay and are haunted by untaken options. The conflict is staged in conventional dramatic terms in a determinate space and time with a realist *mise-en-scène*. The characters' inner turmoil is directed and manifested externally – the ontological stability, coherence and autonomy of characters remains necessarily intact.

Monologue drama offers a different but equally effective strategy in representing the divided emigrant subject. The monologue form offers specific theatrical opportunities to articulate the Irish diasporic experience of cultural dislocation and self-interrogation. The self-division is theatricalised not in a conventional group setting but through a single actor performing several roles. The performing monologist, although displaying the trappings of a coherent, harmonised, autonomous subject exercising theatrical control, reveals fissures through the performance of other roles in the narrative. Although anchored by a primary character, subjectivity is received as provisional and unstable – if the actor can construct other selves, his own self must surely be subject to the same constructing powers. The type of social drama staged in Murphy's emigrant plays is resituated to the lone actor's body and voice, which populates the narrative with characters through necessity but also expresses the fractured diasporic self.

Elsbeth Tilley has commented on monologue performance as an apposite form in which to stage diasporic identities and the conflicting urge to, on the one hand, achieve a coherence and oneness through performance of narrative, and the polyvalent nature of multiple diasporic subjectivities (adopted country, homeland and transit zones) on the other. In a study of three monologue plays,<sup>109</sup> she concludes that:

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<sup>109</sup> Jacob Rajan's *Krishnan's Dairy* (New Zealand, 1997); Guillermo Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas (American Borders)* (Canada, 1993) and Dina Panozzo's *Varda Che Brutta . . . Poretta (Look How Ugly She Is . . . Poor Thing)* (Australia, 1991).

. . . in polycharacter monodrama, these diasporic performers have found the means to represent this dialectic of fracture and suture in ways that are complementary; polycharacterization refracts and exposes the limitations of modernist subjectivity while, simultaneously, storytelling offers continuity and coherence. Each mode keeps the other in balance, so that their extremes of rupture and reduction are avoided or, at the very least, acknowledged.<sup>110</sup>

Emigration has been a constant feature of Irish social life since Independence, with primary destinations being Britain and the United States, as well as Australia, Canada and continental European countries. The status of Irish citizens who are not legally resident in the United States has been a regular item of discussion between successive Taoisigh and American Presidents. In 2014, Enda Kenny appointed Jimmy Deenihan as Minister of State for the Diaspora and three years later, Kenny announced plans for a referendum to enfranchise members of the Irish Diaspora for Presidential elections in Ireland. The experience of the Irish diaspora, separated as they are from homeland, brings into focus issues of national identity.<sup>111</sup>

Dermot Bolger's *In High Germany*<sup>112</sup> marked a new departure in itself – a monologue play performed at an 8:00pm slot in Dublin's Gate Theatre. *In High Germany* and its sequel *The Parting Glass*

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<sup>110</sup> Elspeth Tilley, "Staging a 'Plurality of Vision': Diasporic Performance in Polycharacter Monodrama" in *Modern Drama* 55.3 (2012): 304-28.

<sup>111</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter notes that "in the years 1985-6, over 30,000 emigrated, and between 1983 and 1988 there was a net outflow of 130,000." A large proportion emigrated to England, where they continued to celebrate their Irish heritage, however, their "optimism and confidence belied the complexity and difficulty of that heritage, the consequences for those that left and those left behind." (Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900 - 2000* (London: Profile Books, 2004), 672).

<sup>112</sup> *In High Germany* was first performed as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival at the Gate Theatre on 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1990. Bolger wrote a companion monologue entitled *The Holy Ground*, which premiered on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1990 and which was presented with *In High Germany* as part of a double-bill called *Tramway End*. *The Holy Ground* features Monica Hurley, who has just returned from her husband Myles' funeral and narrates a marriage of control and abuse by her dead husband.

form a key site of analysis for the subject of emigration from Ireland over three generations, ranging from the 1950s to the 2010s. Bolger's monologues probe emigration in terms of a national identity prescribed by the 1916 rebels and culminates in the post-national diasporic environment in which that identity has become negotiable and globalised. Eoin, the speaker across both plays, begins with memories of his father who was forced to work in England but who was determined to retain the link with his homeland: "1957 was when the building game collapsed. I was one, a scuttery-arsed bundle of love. Daddy was a shadow coming and going, from London, Birmingham, Coventry, a succession of registered letters with crisp English banknotes, a black travel-light bag, carried in and out of Westland Row."<sup>113</sup>

During the 1966 commemorations, Eoin, Mick and Shane perform the role of Pearse but their political enactments are shifting to the preferred cultural performance of soccer, the English game: "We knelt down at night, like Pádraig Pearse at his trial said he had as a child, and pledged our lives' blood for Ireland. It was all we lived for, to grow up and die for Ireland. But in the meantime we played soccer in the back field where Molloy couldn't find us and rant at how ungrateful we were."<sup>114</sup> Their performance as soccer players and fans is now central to an expression of national identity. Having emigrated from Ireland, their bonds to homeland lie with their support of the national soccer team on their travails abroad. The traditional model of nationhood – of citizens of an Irish Republic living in their homeland – has been inverted with a mobile team of Irish and British nationals now supplying the heroes to unite a nation. The Proclamation's "resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts"<sup>115</sup> emphasises unity, but that wholeness in the homeland is now supplanted by the unity of the global diasporic

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<sup>113</sup> Dermot Bolger, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), 76.

<sup>114</sup> *Idem*, 81.

<sup>115</sup> Ireland (Provisional Government, 1916), Thomas J. Clarke et al. *The Easter Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975).

Irish. After the euphoria of defeating England 1-0 in the first match of the 1988 European Championships and the ensuing celebrations, Eoin and his friends feel the genesis of their post-national identities:

Toners, the International Bar, the Hut in Phibsborough, I could imagine them all and yet . . . you know like when you dream of something which is so real that when you wake you still want it to be there even as it's retreating from you. Shane went suddenly silent. We would never really know now what they were like that night because even if we went back and they hadn't changed then we would have. And I knew and I think he knew that now when we said 'us' we weren't thinking of those Dublin bars any more, but the scattered army of emigrants who were singing in every bar and every hotel in Stuttgart that night.<sup>116</sup>

Bolger's *The Parting Glass* (2010)<sup>117</sup> is a sequel to the 1990 monologue, again featuring Eoin, this time returning to Ireland with his partner Frieda and son Dieter. Frieda dies tragically in a car crash and Eoin is left to negotiate life in boomtime Ireland, followed precipitously by the economic crash of 2008, with his son Dieter. Bolger wrote the part of Eoin for actor Ray Yeates, who originated the role in the play's American premiere in 1990. Yeates himself emigrated to New York in 1992 and was subsequently artistic director of the Axis Theatre, Ballymun, from 2004 to 2011. The departure and homecoming of Eoin and Yeates are interconnected – departing in a period of economic stagnation and returning in boom times. The physical presence of Yeates is a reminder of the economic hardships of the acting profession and the demands to move abroad to ensure continued work.

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<sup>116</sup> Dermot Bolger, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), 90.

<sup>117</sup> *The Parting Glass* was commissioned by axis Art Centre, Ballymun, and premiered in axis, Ballymun, Dublin, Ireland on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010. Ray Yeates played Eoin, directed by Mark O'Brien.

Eoin returns to Ireland at a time of rampant economic growth and finds the country he left barely recognisable in terms of its newfound consumer culture, ethnic diversity and sexual liberalisation.

Suddenly I know I'm not going home for my mother: I'm going for myself. I'm calling my own bluff, claiming my inheritance in a new land of tall skinny lattes and gleaming apartment blocks. I'm going home to fulfil my father's dreams. Dublin airport is a massive building site the morning we fly home. The route in from the airport is the same: cranes and earthmovers – a pandemic of SUVs. All the women have turned blonde, all the waitresses speak Latvian. The bookies in Dorset Street are now sex shops. The girls buying John Player Blue at Hardwick Street flats are so posh they have a different pair of pyjamas to wear to the shops every day.<sup>118</sup>

The action of the play ends on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2009, when Eoin, Dieter and Shane attend the Republic of Ireland's play-off game with France, accompanied by the ashes of their friend Mick McKenna, who had emigrated to New York and remained as an illegal immigrant, dying of colon cancer. After the end of the game, in which Thierry Henry's handball ensures a draw for France on the night and their aggregate victory over two legs, the three men enter the pitch to strew Mick's ashes into the turf. In the following melee with security, Eoin loses Shane but accompanies his son to the airport, where they leave for Dublin and Canada respectively. Eoin returns to Dublin and a date with Laima, a Latvian immigrant to Ireland, whom he met on an online dating website.<sup>119</sup> Eoin has a German-Irish son with a German wife, and is now dating a Latvian. Shane lives in the Netherlands with his wife and children. Pearse's Proclamation addressed

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<sup>118</sup> Dermot Bolger, *The Parting Glass* (Dublin: New Island, 2011), 14.

<sup>119</sup> Latvia became a Member State of the European Union on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004, along with Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The enlargement of the European Union, giving citizens of the Accession States access to the European Union, and allowing them free movement across the single market, also positions Ireland within a network of 28 European Member States, opening its borders to citizens of all other EU States.

to the “children of the nation”, forged in a time of nation-building, has been performatively countenanced and reworked to capture children of multiple nations.

*In High Germany* and *The Parting Glass* are set in transitory zones – a railway station and an airport departure gate. Against these material backdrops signalling transience and mobility, is the performance of monologue and its discursive ability to create space without boundary. National identity is represented as negotiable and determined by global economic trends. The national identity as enunciated by Pearse in the 1916 Proclamation, whose claims to sovereign self-determination led to subsequent economic policies of self-sufficiencies under de Valera, has been eclipsed by global multinational imperatives. And allegiance shifts from the founders of the modern Irish State who are embedded in Irish streetscapes in the form of statues, street names and names of railway stations, to a team of players who are mobile, multi-national and non-political.<sup>120</sup> Many of the Irish national soccer team were and still are British nationals with Irish heritage. Eoin hums the verse “Alive-alive-o!/ Alive-alive-o!/ Stephen Ireland’s two grannies/ Are alive-alive-o!” at the beginning of the monologue and close to the end, alluding to Stephen Ireland’s false claims that both of his grandmothers had died in order that Ireland could be excused from international duty and visit his girlfriend.<sup>121</sup> Ireland’s falsehoods involving two of his grandparents suggests grandparentage as

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<sup>120</sup> Another example of a monologue play exploring the relationship between the performances of the Irish national soccer team with constructs of masculinity is Sebastian Barry’s *The Pride of Parnell Street*, which was first performed on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007 at the Tricycle Theatre, London, before transferring to the Tivoli Theatre, Dublin, as part of the Ulster Bank Dublin Theatre Festival. The play comprised alternating monologues by Janet (Mary Murray) and Joe (Karl Shiels), directed by Jim Culleton. Joe and Janet Brady are a married couple living on Parnell Street in inner city Dublin, resorting to criminal activity to support themselves and two young sons. When the Republic of Ireland loses to Italy in the quarter finals of the 1990 World Cup, Joe returns home and assaults Janet, who takes the children and goes to the women’s shelter. Janet observes that “when the Irish team was winning they could pretend they were winning, but when they lost, they knew they were losers too – had never been winners in the first place!” (Sebastian Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 16-17).

Barry’s other monologue work is *The Pentagonal Dream* (1986), performed by Olwen Fouéré, produced by Operating Theatre and directed by David Heap at the Damer Hall, Dublin. Fouéré speaks with five separate male voices which constitute a single man: father, murderer, storyteller, fetishist and Messiah/anti-Christ.

<sup>121</sup> In September 2007, before a Republic of Ireland international senior soccer match with the Czech Republic, Stephen Ireland, a starting midfielder in the Republic of Ireland squad and Manchester City player, was notified by

negotiable and subject to fabrication. An adoption of the Molly Malone song, it comically derides Stephen Ireland's web of deceit but also hints at the longevity and wellbeing of the nation's elderly. It takes on added significance when considered within the frame of the FAI's grandparent rule, which means that soccer players with one Irish grandparent are eligible to play for the Irish national soccer team. Claims to Irish heritage by British citizens allow membership of the Irish national team, which itself facilitates the claims of diasporic Irish to a sense of Irish national identity. Anne-Marie Fortier observes that "belongings refer to both 'possessions' and *appartenance*. That is, practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings which mark out terrains of commonality that delineate the politics and social dynamics of 'fitting in'."<sup>122</sup> The fixity and centrality of the G.P.O. and the surrounding streets which staged the 1916 Rising and which confer national identity on citizens who circulate among those sites has now been complemented by major sporting events in which diasporic subjects gather to support the national team. The events are set in multiple locations across various European countries, drawing different compositions of travelling and resident support, and staging the collective performance of belonging to the nation.

The performances of national identity and those of international soccer teams are again intertwined in Marie Jones' *A Night in November* (1994),<sup>123</sup> which carries the additional complexity of divided

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the team's manager Stephen Staunton that he had received a phone call from Ireland's girlfriend stating that she had suffered a miscarriage and that Ireland's maternal grandmother had died. When Ireland rang his girlfriend, he discovered that she had indeed had a miscarriage but that his grandmother had not died, but that she had fabricated this in order to furnish Ireland with an excuse to be given leave from international duty and join her in Cork. Ireland then reiterated the lie to Staunton, who gave him leave to return to Ireland. When the media established that his maternal grandmother was still alive, Ireland claimed that it was his paternal grandmother who had died. When this was exposed as a lie, Ireland contended that it was his grandfather's second wife that had passed away. After the last claim was discredited, Ireland finally gave a truthful account of events and issued an apology. The episode attracted much media attention in Ireland and the UK.

<sup>122</sup> Anne-Marie Fortier, "Re-Membering Places and the Performance of Belonging(s)" in *Performativity & Belonging*, ed. Vikki Bell (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 42.

<sup>123</sup> Marie Jones' *A Night in November* was first staged by Dubbeljoint Productions at the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, Whiterock Road, Belfast on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1994, directed by Pam Brighton and performed by Dan

loyalties between the island's two international soccer teams. *A Night in November* is a monologue drama about Kenneth McAllister, a Protestant dole clerk working in Belfast, who renounces sectarian Unionist attitudes to follow the Republic of Ireland national soccer team to the 1994 World Cup Finals in the United States.

Kenneth is initially represented as a "perfect Prod"<sup>124</sup> whose life objectives focus on upward social mobility and consolidating his solid but ordinary middle-class status. He takes pleasure in informing his Catholic boss Jerry Duffy that he has been offered membership of an exclusive golf club when Duffy has been attempting to secure membership for two years. Kenneth is figured as an agent of a Protestant, Unionist hegemony, exercising his discretion to maintain that hegemony above Catholics in his workplace and elsewhere. The epiphany for Kenneth occurs during a World Cup qualifying soccer match between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland when his father-in-law Ernie begins to shout sectarian anti-Catholic chants, including one celebrating the Greysteel massacre ("Greysteel seven, Ireland nil . . . do da do da"),<sup>125</sup> and encourages others to do likewise. The experience leads Kenneth to confront his own sectarian attitudes and that of his wife Debrah and their friends. Using money set aside for the golf club membership, he books a flight to New York to follow the Republic of Ireland soccer team, achieving a sense of liberation in the process. The reappropriation of the money from its intended purchase of golf club membership to the reservation of flights to New York, however, is more of a wilful, autonomous change of direction than a Butlerian double movement of performative signification/resignification, which is occasioned by conditions of regulatory constraint.

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Gordon, followed by an extensive tour throughout Ireland. The production then appeared in the Tricycle Theatre, London, in March 1995 and the play has been produced in Ireland and abroad numerous times since.

<sup>124</sup> Marie Jones, *A Night in November in Stones in His Pockets and A Night in November* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2000), 81.

<sup>125</sup> Marie Jones, *A Night in November in Stones in His Pockets and A Night in November* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2000) 71.



The set, as indicated in the stage directions, includes a rostra “which has three levels representing the terrace” and which “is painted red, white and blue which flips to green, white and orange when Kenneth reaches Dublin airport. The only props are a World Cup t-shirt, shorts and hat.”<sup>126</sup> The symbolic, material “flipping” from Unionist to nationalist sympathies and the donning of Republic of Ireland colours marks a swift transition from the constraints and paranoia of Unionist ideology to the euphoria and bonhomie of following the Republic’s soccer team and expression of national pride. His overnight conversion to the Republic of Ireland soccer team, though, seems to offer an all too easy escape from the complexities of his background and ultimately suggests a nationalist utopian narrative of a united Ireland (“I am free of it, I am a free man . . . I am a Protestant Man, I’m an Irish Man”).<sup>127</sup> There is no account of his return to Belfast, which would appear inevitable, and the reconciliation with his wife, family and friends. Staged around the time of the I.R.A. ceasefire in 1994, the play’s commercial success perhaps reflected audiences’ hope for, and belief in, a speedy progression of the peace process, which would in fact not significantly materialize until 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement. Absent from the play is a meaningful working through of sectarian hatred – Kenneth’s elopement with Jack’s Army signifies a defection to the opposing side, not a reconciliation of two sides. This is echoed in terms of the play’s critical reception in the United Kingdom and in New York. *The New Yorker* acknowledges Dan Gordon’s virtuosic performance, commenting in 1998 that the play seems “not just a potent plea for an end to violence and prejudice in Ireland but by extension a denunciation of intolerance and sectarian strife wherever it occurs.”<sup>128</sup> *The Guardian’s* Brian Logan, however, applauds Marty Maguire’s performance in the 2002 production but states that Jones’s “critical intelligence accedes to affectionate nationalism . . . whereas in act one she uses sport as a revealing prism through which to view

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<sup>126</sup> Idem, 63.

<sup>127</sup> Idem, 108.

<sup>128</sup> Lawrence Van Gelder, “‘A Night in November’: In Many Guises, a Plea for Peace”. Rev. of “A Night in November” by Marie Jones. *New York Times* 13 Oct. 1998.

nationalist loyalties, after the interval it becomes an excuse to celebrate the craic and absolve Kenneth of his cultural heritage.<sup>129</sup> Geographically closer to The Troubles, a British reading of the play does not turn away from the reality of sectarian division and the inescapable ties of homeland. The deconstruction of a Protestant, Unionist identity is insightful but the adoption of Republic of Ireland colours may be viewed as simplistic.<sup>130</sup> The monodramatic form, in which the actor plays multiple characters, undermining a fixed, coherent character, would appear to enable a staging of a transition between a Northern Unionist to an all-island Irish identity. The rather unsubtle adoption of a more complex national identity foregoes theatrical performative opportunities to illustrate the change. McAllister internalises Unionist ideology and anti-Catholic attitudes, failing to challenge Unionist cultural norms surrounding him. The voicing of Ernie's invective at the football match is Ernie's voice but it is also Gordon's/McAllister's. Hate speech is reiterated by Gordon's speaking body, leaving its traces on the body that is shared by the multiple voices. The performing body is contaminated by the voicing of the injurious anti-Irish abuse. McAllister is tainted by the hate speech that he is uttering: he is both enunciating it and disgusted by it but nonetheless a vessel for its voicing. McAllister mouths words of the Greysteel rant to convince others nearby that he is part of the tribal group – he is not in fact uttering noise but leading others to believe that he is. This passage in *A Night in November* is key to staging Kenneth's internalised Unionist bigotry in which he is wilfully complicit. The self-division that the reiteration causes brings about a desire to extinguish it through bodily defragmentation. The monologue performance integrates multiple characters into a single performing body: the

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<sup>129</sup> Brian Logan, "A Night in November". Rev. of "A Night in November" by Marie Jones. *Guardian* 13 Jul. 2002.

<sup>130</sup> Conall Morrison's *Hard to Believe* (1995) is a monologue play exploring the constructedness of national identity, not in the context of international football, but in the context of espionage during the Troubles. John Foster, a British army intelligence spin doctor, delivers a monologue prior to electrocuting himself. He has just returned from his mother's funeral. He enacts various characters, including his mother and grandfather. He reflects on the career and the violence he has witnessed, before planning to electrocute himself. The play was commissioned by the Cultures of Ireland Group and first produced by Bickerstaffe Theatre Company on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1995 at Cleere's Theatre, Kilkenny. Sean Kearns played John Foster, with Morrison directing. Lalor Roddy later performed the role of Foster in Andrew's Lane Theatre, Dublin, in October 1996, in the same Bickerstaffe production.

enlightenment that comes from accommodating opposing republican viewpoints is necessary for a development and maturity in national identity. In this regard, the first half of Jones' play is an effective theatricalisation of changing ideological perspectives. The second half does not adequately problematise or trouble such transitions, leaving the play open to charges of utopian, unresisted self-constructions. Having departed from an environment of political and religious tension, the trip to Dublin airport followed by his experience in New York bring him into contact with fans of the Republic of Ireland national soccer team. Religious division is forgotten in the project of cultural nationalism. The polyvocal fragmentation of the earlier scenes is harmonised through support of the team and bonding with other fans. If Bolger theatricalises the fractured diasporic identity without lifting it out of a post-national identity crisis, Jones appears to claim that cultural nationalism is a cure for sectarian divide. The riots by English hooligans at the 1995 international soccer friendly between the Republic and Ireland and England at Lansdowne Road, however, demonstrated that travelling football support is also often an expression of a desire and nostalgia for former imperialist domination.<sup>131</sup>

The return of many emigrants to the Republic of Ireland during the Celtic Tiger is explored in Paul Mercier's *We Ourselves* (2000),<sup>132</sup> which figures a group of seven friends who worked together in a gherkin jarring factory in Frankfurt in 1977 and who reflect both on their seminal bonding period in Germany and their subsequent relationships. The monologues are delivered in sequence at different time intervals and from different locations between 1977 and 1999 with set changes between each monologue. Book-ending the series of monologues is Sarah's monologue from the gherkin factory in 1977 and Declan's monologue in 1999, almost contemporaneous with the play's production in 2000. Sarah reminisces about a walk she took with Declan on Booterstown beach and then through Seapoint,

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<sup>131</sup> The Lansdowne Road riot occurred on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1995, caused by the English Neo-Nazi organisation, Combat 18.

<sup>132</sup> *We Ourselves* was first performed on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2000 in Vicar Street, Dublin, produced by Passion Machine and directed by Paul Mercier.

Dun Laoghaire and Deansgrange in the days before she travelled to Germany. She declares her love for Declan in the opening address and Declan mourns her loss in the final speech. While talking to the hotel receptionist on his hotel room phone, Declan confesses that “I took a walk on the beach, you see . . . The beach, yes. The tide was out so . . . I managed to walk to Booterstown. An old friend has . . . Hello, you still there? . . . Yes . . . . An old friend of mine has died . . . yes . . . Gone.”<sup>133</sup> Declan revisits the site of his journey that he travelled with Sarah. Both use monologue to reconnect with place and to recall time they spent together.

The reconstitution of place is integral to recalling and reconstructing personal relationships. Mikey McGann reveals his romantic difficulties from a bedsit in Ranelagh in 1980; Úna frets about her upcoming one-woman performance in a Bayswater hotel room in London in 1985; Aonghus performs a reverie of Frankfurt and his love for Mikey from an artist’s warehouse loft in New York in 1989; Eimear Deasy confesses a jealousy of Úna and her love of Declan while adopting a baby from Romania in 1992; and Killian narrates an account of his dismissal from an information systems company in Dublin in 1995. The shared experience of working in the gherkin factory in Frankfurt, their brief trip to Eindhoven, and the group’s relationships with one another informs the content of the seven monologues. The monologues invoke Frankfurt in 1977 as a common spatiotemporal starting point and proceed to a working through of that formative experience, from separate locations, and the impact it has had on their own personal narratives.

The final monologue represents a personal reunion (the six surviving friends unite to attend Sarah’s funeral) but also a homecoming in which Ireland is reaffirmed as the origin motherland – Declan’s reminiscence of Booterstown, Seapoint, Dun Laoghaire and Deansgrange recall the journey he took with Sarah before embarking for Germany. He reconnects with Sarah through a reconstruction and revisitation of Booterstown strand. Declan’s closing speech privileges the coastal villages of Dublin’s

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<sup>133</sup> Paul Mercier, *We Ourselves* (2000, Unpublished script) 64.

southside over the gherkin factory in Frankfurt. South Dublin is constituted in time before and after Frankfurt and is therefore temporally pre-eminent. Personal connections are linked through place and the sharing and experience of place. The final monologue reunites friends, Irish citizens of the Diaspora and reaffirms Ireland and Dublin as the home place. The laying to rest of Sarah and the reunion of the six remaining friends marks a reconstitution that the seven monologues have formally been attempting.

Overlaying the homecoming is Declan's revelation that significant progress has been made in Anglo-Irish relations with the coming into force of the British Ireland Agreement and the setting up of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1999. *We Ourselves* presents a postnationalist generation, alienated from nation but always desiring of reunion with nation and friends. Personal and national alienation is expressed through monologue, which literalises physical isolation. The togetherness of the group cannot find expression through monologue, which can only express desire for togetherness and defragmentation/reunion. The seven actors perform on the same stage space but never share it. Borrowing a sequential monologue model from *Faith Healer*, Mercier uses the form to stage diasporic dislocation and dispersal, rather than problematising truth narratives. A cast of seven would seem to demand a populated stage space but the withholding of onstage interaction poignantly conveys the cultural fragmentation of the emigrant experience. Consistent with the play's theme of memory's constitutory powers, Emer O'Kelly comments that "it remembers better than it plays because it is somewhat indigestible at the time of seeing" but that the play "is sharply observed, and cynically critical of our empty showiness."<sup>134</sup> *We Ourselves* emphasises unity through dislocation and identity through re-remembering.

Eoin, Kenneth McAllister and the seven speakers in *We Ourselves* construct narratives in order to reclaim a coherent subjectivity, which has been threatened by factors undermining their national identity. In its oneness of body, time and space, monologue theatrical performance makes available a

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<sup>134</sup> Emer O'Kelly, "Too clever for us". Rev. of "We Ourselves" by Paul Mercier. *Sunday Independent* 21 May 2000.

means to re-order a personal, national narrative. Other characters and voices are subsumed into a primary narrational presence. Monologue drama is therefore an appropriate cultural response to divisions of identity, occasioned by a dislocation of time and space, which are associated with the national narrative of emigration and the multiplicity of personal stories that make up a grand narrative. If the country's rural voices begin as self-autonomous subjects at the beginning of their monologues but ultimately face crisis and dissolution - excluded bodies at a point of crisis - because they cannot integrate into a national narrative and therefore collapse, the emigrant monologists seek a unified self to heal the rupture of a national identity crisis.

### **Conclusion**

Billy Farrell, Thomas Magill and John Joe Concannon invoke past mythologies in attempts to self-construct through monologue performance, but the pressures of community life eventually cause these bids for secure identities to collapse. The performed identities are unstable and the mythologies on which they are based – the hard-drinking womaniser, the heroic athlete and past hegemonies of Church-sponsored prudence and modesty – are outdated and vulnerable to elision. In the case of Magill and the baglady, the loss of former economic status within the community has left them as social pariahs, unable to adjust to the dominant norms of their communities. The speakers share a paranoia regarding the talk of the town – John Joe Concannon remarks that “I know the sulphuric tongues of this town – the sideways looks and the half-way gawks”<sup>135</sup> – it is perhaps out of a pressing urgency to protect their local reputation and establish accounts of themselves that they elevate themselves as sovereign storytellers, subordinating other voices to their own subject position. The subjects, isolated in monologic mode, make utterances that are not acceptable to the sanctioned codes of conduct, despite being formed by those very codes. Their efforts to reiterate hegemonic narratives meet with derision. The paradox is

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<sup>135</sup> Tom MacIntyre, *The Great Hunger & The Gallant John- Joe* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2002), 86.

that their formation, in Butlerian terms, is in accordance with dominant State dictates but their performance and articulation of those narratives fail because the dominant narratives no longer accommodate or recognise them. If the monologues are efforts to enter into a sanctioned domain of subjecthood, the perlocutionary outcome is a shoring up of the legitimate domain and confirmation of the isolated speakers' own excluded status.

The post-national emigrant subjectivities of Bolger and Mercier utilise monologue to reconstitute memory and place, and negotiate newfound national identities. Jones's Kenneth discovers the Catholic side of Belfast and a way of life unfettered from the constrained script of "perfect" Protestantism. Bolger's Eoin and Mercier's emigrants confront in their different ways their identity positions; through the customs and culture of international soccer and via personal relationships, in which the different stages of those relationships are marked by the places that play host to them. Butler, discussing the valued aspect of dispossession (the abhorrent aspect being forcible loss of land, citizenship, means of livelihood, and subjection to military and legal violence) says that "we are dispossessed of ourselves by virtue of some kind of contact with another, by virtue of being moved and even surprised or disconcerted by that encounter with alterity. The experience itself is not simply episodic, but can and does reveal one basis of relationality – we do not simply move ourselves, but are ourselves moved by what is outside us, by others, but also by whatever 'outside' resides in us."<sup>136</sup> The emigrant speakers and Kenneth McAllister are "moved" by other people and places, external forces that speak to the "outside" within them all, causing them to move geographically and setting in train an inner psychological movement of identity. The relationality that Butler speaks of is manifested theatrically through communion with spectators, enabling these movements to take place.

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<sup>136</sup> Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 3.

In a quickly evolving narrative from the economic recession of the 1980s and early 1990s, to the Celtic Tiger and into the post-recession era, the monologue plays are defiant statements of regional or emigrant identities. It is no surprise that rural idiom is a strong feature of many of the monologues, fearful of an incremental sanitisation of language and discourse, a consequence of globalised cultural forces and “political correctness.” The performances are haunted by a concern to maintain relevance and a connection to national narratives. If the national conversation has excluded or forgotten these characters, the only recourse is autonomous cultural expression. Ultimately, what these monologue works reveal are both the vitality of excluded individual narratives and the dominant narratives that are pushing them out. Rural idiom and vernacular are marked as remarkable and notable, despite the fact that they have been present all along, only not being heard on the national stages. Fintan O’Toole says about *The Gallant John-Joe* that “though the play is an act of mourning for the individuality lost in a blander Ireland, it is itself a fierce vindication of a lingering uniqueness.”<sup>137</sup> Peter Crawley similarly notes that Thomas Magill is “desperately inscribing his existence into the world through a perpetual ritual, replaying one fateful day.”<sup>138</sup> What the monologists share is an illusion that they control their own narratives, however, the language they cite is always exceeding them, similar to the global economic forces that have displaced them and occasioned the need for monologic self-construction.

All of the speakers require an empowering referent to self-constitute, be it a local sexual myth, a forgotten religious code or the performance of the Irish national soccer team. The one-man and one-woman performances are hopeful signatories to a developing national narrative and project and seeking inclusion within the dominant script. The monologue dramatic form that they inhabit is both indicative of their social isolation and their means to rearticulate dominant narratives and reshape their excluded

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<sup>137</sup> Fintan O’Toole, “The Gallant John-Joe”. Rev. of “The Gallant John-Joe” by Tom MacIntyre. *Irish Times* 29 Nov. 2001.

<sup>138</sup> Peter Crawley, “Misterman”. Rev. of “Misterman” by Enda Walsh. *Irish Times* 13 Jul. 2011.



bodies. The performative force of the 1916 Proclamation is an example of how hegemonic political and social scripts engender the legitimate and the abject; the intelligible and the unintelligible; the speakable and the censored. The national performance script has mutated over the previous century, its borders shifting with changing political and economic scenarios. Abject bodies have over time been admitted into the legitimate domain and legitimates similarly ejected. Butler, speaking of coercively formed heteronormative matrices, says that the:

. . . exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed . . . requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects’, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.<sup>139</sup>

The material conditions of many of the speakers are economically basic or poor: the Farrells inhabit a nondescript house; John Joe speaks from a dingy kitchen with dirty brown lino; Magill lives in a disused old depot; the baglady is homeless, consigned to perpetual travel. None of the subjects are economically dominant or affluent. The speaking subjects are “candidates for subjecthood”<sup>140</sup> appealing for inclusion into the domain of the subject, but through interlocutory engagement with spectators, their monologues mostly illuminate the borders of that domain and reinforce its hegemony. The rearticulation of these subject positions within different theatrical productions against changing

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<sup>139</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge: New York, 1993) xiii.

<sup>140</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 133.

economic backdrops, however, constantly keeps alive the audibility and visibility of excluded bodies. The project of coercive hegemonic performatives is never temporally complete: future performances and spectatorships will continue to assess the appeals for subjecthood and in doing so, interrogate the borders which occasion them.

## Chapter Three

### “Re(citing) Genders”: Staging Femininities

If the “cause” of desire, gesture, and act can be localized within the “self” of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary practices which produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from view.<sup>1</sup>

I laughed a bit when he said that . . . inside myself of course.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Introduction*

An interrogation of the model of gender dialogue to be found in Ireland since the early 1960s reveals a society in which men are the dominant dialogic partners, a model of “dialogue” that acts to conceal its functioning monologic mode of male dominance and control. With its ideological foundations rooted in the 1937 Constitution (performatively “constituting” citizens in gendered terms), the policy-making apparatus of Government and its agencies, along with the Catholic Church, has historically conspired to deny audibility and visibility to women in social and professional life. Policies adopted by successive Irish governments invoked a patriarchal hegemonic structure in Ireland that had as one of its performatives the naturalized assignment of women to, and containment within, maternal roles in the home, and a consequent under-representation in the workforce.<sup>3</sup> As an index of women’s participation in the political, social, cultural and economic life of the country in the early 1970s, the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 186.

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *O Ananias, Azarias and Misesal in Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) 79.

<sup>3</sup> One of the most notorious manifestations of patriarchal Government policy in respect of women’s working rights was the the “marriage bar”, the compulsory resignation by women from positions in the civil and public service upon marriage (the policy was abolished in 1973). However, State-sanctioned practices have emerged into public view in recent times including the detention and abuse of “fallen women” within Magdalene Laundries and past biopolitical strategies exercised upon women manifesting in medical malpractice, such as the denial of the contraceptive pill and the unnecessary performance of symphiosotomies on pregnant women in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, and other hospitals.

published a pamphlet demanding “equal pay; equality before the law; equality in education; justice for deserted wives, unmarried mothers, and widows; and one family, one house.”<sup>4</sup>

Improvements in gender equality matters have been gradual from the 1970s to the present time. Although the election of Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese as President of Ireland in 1990 and 1997 respectively went some way in redressing political gender representational imbalance, one could argue that they occupied a totemic political office with limited executive power and thereby dissimulated resolute male power structures. Similarly, the occupation of the office of Tánaiste<sup>5</sup> by three female politicians (Mary Harney, Mary Coughlan and Joan Burton) has reaffirmed in its own way the primacy of male politicians in Ireland, as it marks a boundary, a limit, beyond which progress to the office of Taoiseach has to date not occurred. Participation in the most symbolic of speaking spheres, the Dáil, is reflective of women’s stake in controlling legislative narratives directly affecting women. Commenting on the 2007 general election, Ferriter notes that “of Fianna Fáil’s 105 Dáil candidates in the same election, only 14 were women. Between 16 and 18 percent of the other parties’ candidates were female, with the exception of the Green Party and the Progressive Democrats, a quarter of whose candidates were female. Overall, it was another macho election contest.”<sup>6</sup> Despite advances in female representation in the Oireachtas, women are still heavily outnumbered by men.<sup>7</sup> If one views the Dáil as a theatrical, performative space, in which political actors

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<sup>4</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, “Women and Political Change in Ireland”, *Éire-Ireland* 43 1&2 (2008): 185.

<sup>5</sup> The Irish language word “tánaiste” means “Deputy Chief” in the political context. Other meanings for “tánaiste” are “second in rank or dignity, next in order”. (Niall Ó Dónaill, ed., *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Dublin: An Gúm, 1977) 1201).

<sup>6</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, “Women and Political Change in Ireland”, *Éire-Ireland* 43 1&2 (2008): 204.

<sup>7</sup> Twenty-five women were elected to the 31<sup>st</sup> Dáil, which convened for the first time on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2011. Fifteen women were nominated or elected to the 24<sup>th</sup> Seanad, with a sixteenth being nominated in 2013. The 24<sup>th</sup> Seanad first convened on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011. Thirty-five women were elected to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil from the general election on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2016. Eighteen women were elected to the 25<sup>th</sup> Seanad. This followed the enactment of the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2011 which required political parties to ensure that at least 30% of their candidates on the entire national ticket for general elections were of the “minority sex”.

perform mostly scripted speeches adversarially, the Dáil may be seen as emblematic of a male monopoly of speech which proportionately curtails the speaking time of female TDs and the interests of women they represent. The Dáil supplies a performative template for female monologue performance in broader social and cultural spheres, one of which is monologue drama.

Theatre in Ireland has in its productions of realist drama frequently colluded in structures of patriarchal control it claims only to represent. Melissa Sihra, writing about the influence of patriarchal forces such as the Catholic Church and the Irish Constitution within Irish society, says that “plays by Irish women, in particular, have sought to challenge this limiting constitutional ideology and often display anxiety in relation to motherhood and home through dramatizing disillusionment and employing dramaturgical strategies which challenge conventional realist modes and realms of representation.”<sup>8</sup> The monologue play, in its diegetic mode of representation, would seem to offer a dramaturgical strategy to challenge the realist modes that Sihra refers to. If the male-dominated canon of Irish drama performs an exclusion of female playwrights, male-authored and enunciated monologue drama may be viewed as a dramaturgical expression of that exclusion, in its complete removal of female characters from embodied representation. For female playwrights, then, the monologue play suggests an appropriate site in which to contest that exclusion, reinstating embodied female presence at the very place of its disappearance but paying heed to the politics of embodiment and the potential recuperation of patriarchal regimes. Deborah Geis, identifying monologue’s Brechtian gestic qualities, which “forces the creation of the same moment of ‘splitting’ between énoncé and énonciation”, suggests that “this is one reason why so many female playwrights have been drawn to the monologue form: to some extent the gestic monologue marks a locus for the struggle for female subjectivity as it enacts the drama of the gendered

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<sup>8</sup> Melissa Sihra, “Introduction: Figures at the Window”, *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, Ed. Melissa Sihra (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) 2.

speaking body and its polyvocal signifiers. The monologue's conquest of narrative space might thus be viewed as a reification of the feminine subject-in-process."<sup>9</sup>

The adoption of the monologue form by Irish female theatre practitioners can be seen as symptomatic of a turning away from realist representational modes in order to allow both for a critical relationship with those modes and to provide a space for the crafting and imagining of new subjectivities. Janelle Reinelt, speaking about Irish female playwrights of the twentieth century, says that "if not all characters escape from the confines of the past, the writers shape their dramaturgy to reveal the structures which constrain them."<sup>10</sup> Miriam Haughton and Maria Kurdi, in their introduction to *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland* (2015), observe that "by choosing a path away from the patriarchal heritage of realism, one can identify a common thread of attraction to alternative forms of making work and a diversity of themes relating to female experience."<sup>11</sup> It follows that an analysis of women's monologue drama in Ireland since 1964 will yield powerful insights into the most pressing political and social issues affecting women. If, as Raymond Williams has argued, prevalent cultural forms are symptomatic of their social context, women's monologue drama may be viewed politically as female efforts to access fora of speech and self-enunciate.

In this chapter, I will be charting the evolution of representations of women in female-authored monologue drama, primarily across the work of Geraldine Aron, Jennifer Johnston, Abbie Spallen, Elaine Murphy and Carmel Winters while referring to the work of other female writers who have contributed to the form. The chronology of women's monologue drama under discussion ranges from the 1970s to 2016

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<sup>9</sup> Deborah Geis, *Postmodern Theatric(k)s: Monologue in Contemporary American Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) 119.

<sup>10</sup> Janelle Reinelt, "Preface", *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. Melissa Sihra (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) 241.

<sup>11</sup> Miriam Haughton and Maria Kurdi, eds., *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015) 2.

and captures the varying contexts of The Troubles, the post-ceasefire era in the mid-2000s in the North, the Irish female Diasporic experience in London, the Celtic Tiger era in Dublin and the recession era in Ireland from 2008 to 2013. Historically, the monologue plays reflect changing social and political circumstances and taken together, form an insightful narrative of women's concerns and attitudes to participation in society north and south of the border from the 1970s onwards. More specifically, I will be examining how the monologue plays expose performative operations through the presentation of the speaking body and its reworking or restatement of hegemonic imperatives. In the monologue plays under discussion, there exists a tension between given contexts, mostly oppressive to women, and the enunciatory agency of the female monologists. Utilising Butler's concepts of performative regulatory practices and resignificatory possibilities, and mindful of Phelan's problematisation of visibility, I will critique acts of performative resistance to those imperatives: how do female-authored and enunciated monologue plays performatively rework canonical formations and reinstate female embodiment? How can women's monologue drama challenge assigned gender roles and resignify them without rehabilitating hegemonic, patriarchal norms? How can the visually dominant female speaking body affirm identity while disrupting the male gaze? The monologue plays under discussion, through monologic utterances, either affirm the dominant hegemonic order and confirm the sanctioned "domain of the sayable,"<sup>12</sup> or they succeed in reconfiguring that domain by challenging and resignifying oppressive patriarchal norms.

### ***Butler and Female Monologue Dramatic Performance***

If preceding chapters were based on various deployments of Austinian and Butlerian performativity to interrogate the "linguistic magic" of theatrical language and Irish performances of national identity, Chapter Three returns to one of Butler's original and most pressing concerns both as philosopher and as a social activist: the global subjectivation of women, the need to problematise binary categories of

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<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 133.

male/female and the disruption of the naturalised linkage between sex and gender. It is important to recall Butler's clarifications concerning her theories of gender ontology following the publication of *Gender Trouble*:

For if I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored that garment to its place at night. Such a willful and instrumental subject, one who decides on its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided *by* gender.<sup>13</sup>

Butler makes clear that the "donning" of genders by a "willful and instrumental subject" is not the model of gender performativity she theorised in *Gender Trouble*. She goes on to make a clear distinction between performance and performativity: "performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice.'"<sup>14</sup> The voluntarist, female actor in the theatre performing monologues, and autonomously constituting the drama through performance of narrative, may reasonably be interpreted as the antithesis of how Butler conceived gender performativity. And if, as I have discussed in the Introduction, Butler also argues that performativity's "apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated" (although performativity is not a singular "act" and is not "primarily theatrical"),<sup>15</sup> the performance of the theatrical monologist may be read as an example *par excellence* of Butler's voluntarist, humanist subject, working to dissimulate the conventions that she cites to maintain her fiction of gender stability.

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<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) ix.

<sup>14</sup> *Idem*, 178.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, xxi.



For Butler, agency does not originate in the will of the subject, rather “it is to be found, paradoxically, in the possibilities opened up in and by that constrained appropriation of the regulatory law, by the materialization of that law, the compulsory appropriation and identification with those normative demands.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, agency is occasioned by enabling cultural normative conditions and neither precedes nor follows those conditions. Monologue plays stage a productive tension between the theatrical autonomy of the actor (the constitution of the play through narrative performance, the construction of narrative time and space and the visual and vocal dominance of the theatrical space) and the performativity of the normative conditions which “precede, constrain and exceed” the performer (the political, social and cultural norms which the performer brings into being through the speech act of narrative performance).

The performative act of self-crafting through language by female performers must contest another dominant regime. Monologue drama privileges a patriarchal language as a primary, self-constituting means through which subjectivities may emerge. Butler, however, commenting on Lacan’s assertion that “the symbolic law has a semiautonomous status prior to the assumption of sexed positions by a subject” suggests a resignificatory strategy when she claims that the law is dependent on citations of the law, and without these citations, is no law: “If ‘sex’ is assumed in the same way that a law is cited . . . then ‘the law of sex’ is repeatedly fortified and idealized as the law only to the extent that it is reiterated as the law, produced as the law, the anterior and inapproximable ideal, by the very citations it is said to command.”<sup>17</sup> Butler understands the law not as a self-sufficient powerful entity, but as one which depends on citations to prop itself up and maintain the appearance of its own power. The citational qualities of language and behaviour are evident in the plays under discussion in this chapter, in which linguistic and behavioral citations are shown to either deconstruct or fortify male hegemonic regimes.

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<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, xxi.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, xxii.

The resignificatory process of self-constitution arising from enabling cultural conditions I have alluded to has so far focused on discursive self-making, the utterance of speech to craft new subjectivities. However, the speaking actor in the theatre is also a spectacle, available for visual consumption by spectators and frequently (in single character monologue drama) the sole visible speaking body. It is necessary to address the theatrical context of performance of monologues by female actors, as a consideration of the visual, audible and material elements of production are clearly essential in critiquing the reworking of cultural norms by performers of monologue.

The perils inherent in the representation of women's bodies in performance have been theorized by feminist scholars since the 1970s, when Laura Mulvey made a groundbreaking intervention in film theory with her concept of the male gaze and the way in which it captures and contains women's bodies within frames of male sexual desire.<sup>18</sup> Theatre studies borrowed and appropriated the concept of the male gaze and successfully applied it to the study of women's bodies in theatrical representation. Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) sought to disrupt the truth models of Platonic representation by positing a womb-theatre possessing the ability to produce, rather than reflect, reality.

Elin Diamond has said that "in the 1970s and 1980s, in the feminist theater theory many of us were writing, the 'scene of representation' was generally understood as a narrativization of male desire. Representation, we tended to say, *inevitably* transforms female subjects into fetishized objects whose referent is ideologically bound to dominant – heterosexual – models of femininity and masculinity."<sup>19</sup> And Peggy Phelan cautions against seeking to make visible subjectivities which have been elided or disfigured by hegemonic discursive forces. Recalling film theorists' productive troubling of female visibility in the

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<sup>18</sup> Mulvey argues that "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (1975)).

<sup>19</sup> Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London: Routledge, 1997) xii.

1970s and 1980s, Phelan asserts that “the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal.”<sup>20</sup> In a view echoing Butler’s concerns about the assumptions of equality inherent in participation in dialogue,<sup>21</sup> she goes on to state that “the terms of this visibility often enervate the putative power of these identities. A much more nuanced relationship to the power of visibility needs to be pursued than the Left currently engages.”<sup>22</sup> Monologue would appear to offer women at once a productive site in which subjectivities may be interrogated and resignified; and a trap in which women not only perform and reaffirm assigned hegemonic roles but amplify them through the hyper-visibility and to-be-looked-at-ness of theatrical representation.

The problems of visibility and absorption into the male gaze, which are attendant upon individual female monologue performances, seem to be equally present in terms of candidacy for inclusion within the male-dominated canon of monologue drama. “Elevation” of female-authored monologue drama into the Irish monologue canon may be interpreted by many feminist theatre critics as a satisfying of criteria determined by male critics. Jill Dolan, discussing the critical reception of Marsha Norman’s *‘night Mother* following its opening at the John Golden Theatre, Broadway on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1983, observes that:

Since one of the aims of feminist literary and dramatic criticism is to deconstruct the male canon and its underlying ideology, including a woman’s text in the dominant canon is a complicated

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<sup>20</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) 6.

<sup>21</sup> Butler has commented that dialogue is necessary within feminist movements, but has cautioned against assumptions that dialogue is understood in similar terms by all parties: “The very notion of ‘dialogue’ is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated. Otherwise, the model of dialogue risks relapsing into a liberal model that assumes that speaking agents occupy equal positions of power and speak with the same presuppositions about what constitutes ‘agreement’ and ‘unity’ and, indeed, that those are the goals to be sought.” (*Gender Trouble*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999) 20).

<sup>22</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) 7.

gesture. A popular alternative for some feminists is to construct a countercanon with feminist criteria for inclusion. The female version of the canon often rescues obscured women from literary or theatrical history, and replaces the generic male reader/spectator with a generic female. The universal qualities sought are those that might explain or describe what are considered prototypical female experiences.<sup>23</sup>

The monologue plays critiqued in this chapter may be read either as candidates for inclusion within the dominant canon or more radically interpreted as being formative of a countercanon of monologue plays which address female experience, and which specifically interpellate and constitute a female spectatorship. An aspiration by female playwrights for their work to receive the sanction of male critics and scholars that will lead to inclusion within the canon may be seen as indicative of dominant regulatory forces presenting the canon as the legitimate body of classic dramatic works, when in fact the canon is reliant upon the citation of canonical works to maintain its fiction of canonicity. Inclusion of female-authored monologue drama within the dominant canon not only confirms the canon's legitimacy but protects it from claims of gender bias. In this way, an unproblematic absorption of women's monologue plays into the canon may be read as another capitulation to patriarchal canon formation. The alternative strategy of countercanon formation, as Dolan has commented, is a popular one among some feminists, but is still fraught with the risks of patriarchal rehabilitation despite its intentions to resist such an outcome.

### ***Male and Female-authored Monologue Drama in Ireland***

Monologue drama in Ireland since 1964 has, for the most part, been composed by male playwrights and has concerned itself largely with crises in male sexual and class identity. Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979) and

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<sup>23</sup> Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012) 21.

*Molly Sweeney* (1994) have female characters, but the former is centred around the dominant persona and verbal authority of Frank Hardy, who is privileged with the opening and closing monologues, and in the latter play, the character of Molly appears to fulfil an aesthetic function for Friel, presented in reductively feminised, sensual, terms, in opposition to the rational, sighted Mr Rice. More recently, Mark O’Rowe’s *Crestfall* (2003), which features female characters exclusively, and his play *Terminus* (2007), with two female characters and one male character, are exceptional in their giving precedence to female subjectivities - one could argue, however, that O’Rowe has simply transposed his themes of urban, gangland violence from a context of macho posturing, explicitly bound up with a sensibility as seen in *Howie the Rookie* (1999) and *Made in China* (2002), to a social context featuring women, but with no obvious shift in emphasis to a female subjectivity. Acts of violence, perpetrated by both men and women, seem to efface obvious gender distinctions, as violence is attributable specifically to neither. And although Eugene O’Brien, Conor McPherson and Sebastian Barry have written monologue plays with one male and one female character (*Eden, Come on Over* and *The Pride of Parnell Street* respectively) the dominant trend within Irish monologue drama during this period is a prevalence of male-authored drama, featuring men and exploring themes specific to heterosexual white male and mostly working class subjectivities.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> One exception to the trend is Michael Harding’s *Misogynist* (1990), in which male monology is foregrounded. The play premiered at the Dublin Theatre Festival on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1990 and features an unnamed priest (“Him”) and his crisis of masculinity precipitated by a cleaning girl’s (“She”) unwarranted handling of a chalice. Him was played by Tom Hickey, with Dervla Kirwan as She. The play was directed by Judy Friel. Harding, a former priest, tries to deconstruct misogyny and the ambivalence that infuses it. Him claims that: “I’ve nothing against women. Nothing. OK. Fuck them. Excuse me. In fact I’m a bit of a feminist myself” (David Grant, ed. *The Crack in the Emerald: New Irish Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), 147).

Harding states that “I felt there wasn’t really a play that did an anatomy of misogyny. I tried to explore what it is and where it comes from and what the connection is between complete normality and utter, unspeakable violence.” (Sarah Hemming, “Edinburgh Festival Day Four.” *The Independent* 20 Aug. 1992).

Harding later rewrote *Misogynist*, removing the “sumptuous” set and the chorus of women, and restaged it in the 1992 Edinburgh Festival, with Tom Hickey again playing the role of Him. Harding explains that “It has reverted to what it was originally intended to be: a one-man show.” (idem).

The inevitable outcome of this male narrational authority is that female characters are present only in the narratives and only as male constructs, denied an embodied presence.<sup>25</sup> Eamonn Jordan has referred to “female characters all too noticeable by their frequent absence, with some references to the feminine serving the type of symbolic function that many commentators have traditionally resisted or found utterly distasteful and prejudicial”<sup>26</sup> and Brian Singleton has observed about McPherson’s and O’Rowe’s male-narrated monologue plays that “women exist within their narratives either as conquests of the hunter-hero, or dismissed as attempted and rejected prey.”<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, evidence of productions of women’s monologue drama is relatively sparse up until the late 1990s.<sup>28</sup> Since that time, however, women’s monologue drama has focused on themes

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<sup>25</sup> There are, nevertheless, examples of female-authored monologue plays featuring male characters. These include Ioanna Anderson’s *Describe Joe* (2000) which features John, a young man temporarily living in a B&B as he is locked out of his apartment. He reflects on his current situation, his best friend who went missing ten years previously, and his marriage. *Requiem of Love* (2005) by Patricia Burke Brogan figures John O’Kelly, who visits his wife’s grave on the night after the morning on which she has been laid to rest, having abandoned her years before.

<sup>26</sup> Eamonn Jordan, “Look Who’s Talking, Too: The Duplicitous Myth of Naive Narrative”, *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*. Ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 125.

<sup>27</sup> Brian Singleton, “Am I Talking to Myself? Men, Masculinities and the Monologue in Contemporary Irish Theatre”, *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*. Ed. Clare Wallace. (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 263.

<sup>28</sup> Apart from Geraldine Aron and Jennifer Johnston, other theatrical monologue performances by women during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s include *Mothers* (1976), devised and performed by May Cluskey and directed by Joe Dowling, which was first produced on the Peacock stage on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1976 and received further production runs in 1977, during the evening, and 1983, as a lunchtime event. *Mothers* features extracts from the work of Yeats, O’Casey, Kavanagh and other writers and focuses on the theme of motherhood. Heno Magee’s *Red Biddy* (1973) is a monologue delivered by Biddy (Marie Kean), set in a Dublin pub, who was reared in Limerick City. She speaks of her upbringing and her dreams of settling down with a man. *Red Biddy* was directed by Alan Simpson in the Peacock Theatre.

*Lady G*, a portrait of Lady Gregory written by Carolyn Swift and performed by Máire O’Neill, first appeared in the Peacock on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1987. Marie Jones’ *Gold in the Streets* (1985) was originally composed and performed as a monologue play and toured community centres in the U.K. It dealt with the emigration experiences of three Irish women to England in 1912, the 1940s and 1985. Nell McCafferty’s three monologue plays encouraged debate on issues affecting women in Ireland: *The Worm in the Heart* (1987), *Sheep, Shite and Desolation* (1994) and *A Really Big Bed* (1995) explored issues around feminist politics, McCafferty’s experiences staying with members of the Irish Countrywomen’s Association, and female sexuality, respectively.

concerning the search for romantic love, marital crisis and breakdown, female sexuality, social isolation, family relationships, mental illness, domestic violence, and The Troubles. The proliferation of women's monologue drama since the late 1990s has coincided with a gradual move to greater transparency in political life and in public institutions, the continued decline of the Catholic Church as a social force in Ireland, the pioneering work of journalists committed to unearthing institutional failures in the past and the liberal influence of American and British popular culture.

Recent developments in women's monologue drama may be viewed within a broader context of female solo performance in Ireland. Olwen Fouéré has been a leading exponent of avant-garde performance through the artistic company *Operating Theatre* (1980-2008)<sup>29</sup> and her current artistic entity, *The Emergency Room*, which she established in 2010. There has also been a developing corpus of female autobiographical performance, with the work of Sonya Kelly and Stefanie Preissner attracting positive reviews from critics.<sup>30</sup> In recent years, Amanda Coogan<sup>31</sup> and UK-based Kira O'Reilly<sup>32</sup> have emerged as

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<sup>29</sup> Fouéré was co-artistic director of *Operating Theatre* with composer Roger Doyle.

<sup>30</sup> *The Wheelchair on my Face: A Look Back at My Myopic Childhood* (2011), written and performed by Sonya Kelly, is a monologue comprising memoir and stand-up comedy. She narrates her ophthalmological history, from the prescription of her first pair of glasses at the age of seven years of age. Kelly's *How to Keep an Alien* (2014), in which she is accompanied on stage by her stage manager, narrates her struggle with the Irish Government to keep her Australian female partner with her in the State.

Stefanie Preissner's *Solpadeine is my Boyfriend* (2012) recounts Preissner's move to Dublin and her subsequent break-up with her boyfriend. It confronts issues of alienation, homesickness, emigration, drug addiction and mental health.

Michelle Read's *Play about my Dad* (2006) is an autobiographical piece dedicated to the memory of her father and featuring other members of her family.

Lynda Radley's *The Art of Swimming* (2006), which the author also performs, is the story of Mercedes Gleitze, the first British woman to swim the Channel and the first swimmer of either sex to swim the Straits of Gibraltar. Radley goes beyond a mere biography of Gleitze and explores her own personal experiences and how they relate to the famous swimmer.

<sup>31</sup> Coogan's "live performances are referents for her video and photographic works. Her expertise lies in her ability to condense an idea to its very essence and communicate it through her body." (Amanda Coogan, "Amanda Coogan: Biography", 11 Feb. 2016. [www.amandacoogan.com/about/html](http://www.amandacoogan.com/about/html)).

notable Irish female performance artists. Panti Bliss (Rory O’Neill), in collaboration with Thisispopbaby, has achieved much success with solo drag performances *All Dolled Up* (2007), *In These Shoes?* (2007), *A Woman in Progress* (2009) and *Panti: High Heels in Low Places* (2014). Perhaps her most renowned monologue performance, however, is a ten minute speech she delivered in the Abbey Theatre on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2014, in what became known as the Noble Call speech.<sup>33</sup> Panti, echoing Butler, has commented that:

In many ways, I would argue that the drag queen is the ultimate expression of the theatrical arts. She is the director, the scriptwriter, the make-up artist, the costume designer, the producer and the actress in the leading role of the production of her own life. You know, when an actor steps off the stage, well, he’s just a waiter but a drag queen is never off the stage, she carries the stage with her and it amplifies her every gesture.<sup>34</sup>

Female monologue performance has responded enthusiastically to the opportunity of expressing concerns on social issues affecting women – women’s monologue drama has played its own role in this collective voicing of female subject positions. However, the “Waking the Feminists” campaign - which was initiated in November 2015 following the announcement of the Abbey Theatre’s programme for “Waking the Nation 2016” that featured one out of ten plays written by women and three plays to be

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<sup>32</sup> Kira O’Reilly is a London based artist; her practice, “both wilfully interdisciplinary and entirely undisciplined, stems from a visual art background; it employs performance, biotechnical practices and writing with which to consider speculative reconfigurations around *The Body*. But she is no longer sure if she even does that anymore.” (Kira O’Reilly, “Kira O’Reilly: Statement”, 22 Feb. 2016. [www.kiraoreilly.com/statement](http://www.kiraoreilly.com/statement)).

<sup>33</sup> The noble call is an “age-old Irish tradition of the Noble Call, which is essentially a party piece or a time when you’re having a party where you’re asking all your guests to respond to the mood or the atmosphere of the day”. (Fiach Mac Conghail, <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/behind-the-scenes/backstage-blogs/the-risen-people-blog/the-noble-call/> Date accessed: 07 Jan 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Rory O’Neill in *The Queen of Ireland*. Dir. Conor Horgan. Prod. Ailish Bracken, Katie Holly. Blinder Films. 21 Oct 2015.



directed by women - has renewed a focus on the employment of women not only in playwriting, but in performance and indeed in all aspects of theatrical productions.<sup>35</sup> The campaign has highlighted the continued under-representation of women working in the theatre arts in Ireland, which may explain at least partially why many female playwrights, directors, and writer-performers have been drawn to the monologue form, with lower production costs, greater creative control and an opportunity to access performance spaces in which to stage responses to matters negatively impacting on women.

***“Drinking Ovaltine in Front of the Fire”<sup>36</sup>: Marital Monologies***

I have chosen three texts and performances in this section to illustrate how female agency, expressed through theatrical visibility, dissimulates regulatory, cultural and socioeconomic norms. Geraldine Aron’s *A Galway Girl* (1979) and *My Brilliant Divorce* (2001), and Jennifer Johnston’s *Waiting* (2006), take place in different locations and against different economic backdrops but reiterate similar ingrained patriarchal marital codes. Female subjectivity in these plays is defined by marital subservience to dominant males. While men are constructed by solo female monologists in the latter two plays, their female embodiment and narrational constitution of men serves to illustrate not a resignatory dominance but a telling index of the degree to which their thoughts and narratives are controlled by (absent) men.

Geraldine Aron’s *A Galway Girl*<sup>37</sup> is an important early contribution to women’s monologue drama. Dermot and Maisie, an ill-suited married couple, tell the story of their marriage through brief alternating monologues to the audience. The stage directions indicate that the characters Maisie and Dermot “*begin as*

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<sup>35</sup> Ali White’s *Me, Mollser* was the only play by a female playwright on the Abbey Theatre’s “Waking the Nation” programme.

<sup>36</sup> Geraldine Aron, *A Galway Girl* (New York: Samuel French, 1981) 9.

<sup>37</sup> *A Galway Girl* was first produced by Druid Theatre Company in The People’s Space Theatre, Cape Town, South Africa, in October 1979. The original production was directed by Keith Grenville and featured Dermot Judge as Dermot and Ethwyn Grant as Maisie. It received its Irish premiere on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1979 in Druid Lane Theatre, Galway, with the same cast as the performance in Cape Town. It was also performed as part of the Edinburgh Festival in 1980, and in the Lyric Theatre, London, 1980.

*a couple in their twenties and age through posture, and voice until they are in their fifties.*"<sup>38</sup> The ambitious thirty year time span of *A Galway Girl*, which is performed in around 50 minutes, holds out the promise of a performance of the characters' temporally shifting ontologies. However, the progression of the play effects no changes of attitude or behaviour from either character - both Dermot and Maisie remain entrenched in their outlooks. The monologic mode, far from disrupting rigid binaries or challenging marital norms, only appears to reaffirm them.

Whilst sharing a naturalistic set and remaining aware of one another's presence, the characters deliver separate, uninterrupted but non-contradictory accounts of their marriage.<sup>39</sup> The theatrical convention of monologue enables Maisie to relate her own account of the relationship, constituting herself as victim of domestic abuse and constructing her husband as its controlling and violent perpetrator. Dermot's monologues unapologetically corroborate Maisie's accounts, reaffirming himself as the violent referent of Maisie's narrations. After being brought to the police station following a domestic disturbance, Dermot and another male detainee reveal their awareness of their own agency within the Catholic Church's system of compulsory performatives: "Dermot, says he, isn't the Catholic faith a wonderful institution the way it stops our wives abandoning us? We'd a good laugh over that."<sup>40</sup>

The theatrical effect of the dual monologues is unproblematic and rhetorical – the play does not make use of narratorial devices that might emphasise the subjective nature of the narratives or destabilise the reliability of the performed accounts. Dermot, who smokes and drinks whiskey throughout, appears as a stereotype of an oppressive, alcoholic male, rather than a nuanced character. His complaints about his

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<sup>38</sup> Geraldine Aron, *A Galway Girl* (New York: Samuel French, 1981) 4.

<sup>39</sup> Aron's *Bar and Ger* (1975) bears formal and thematic similarities to *A Galway Girl*. It tells the story of the relationship of brother and sister Bar (Barry) and Ger (Geraldine), who are separated by ten years, Ger being the elder. The stage directions state that "*sometimes they touch or interact, but mostly they are separated by time and place*" (Geraldine Aron, *Bar and Ger* (New York: Samuel French, 1980) 4). This part realist, part metaphorical use of stage space is also utilized in *A Galway Girl*.

<sup>40</sup> Geraldine Aron, *A Galway Girl* (New York: Samuel French, 1981) 10.

marriage, his wife's class consciousness, his mother-in-law, his daughters and their husbands are utterances that constitute him in simple, caricatured terms.

Despite Maisie's appeals for understanding, it is apparent that her monologic privilege recuperates masculinist, patriarchal norms, rather than rearticulate or resignify them. Her revelations reinforce normative Catholic and societal imperatives which uphold marriage as inviolable and which assign women to supportive roles within the domestic sphere. Maisie's reflections on her decision to marry Dermot reveal maritonnormative pressures:

MAISIE. (*Very soft and wistful*). Lying there on my own, with himself in the next room, I realized I'd missed the boat entirely. Wasn't I a fool to be taken in by his sweet talk? But wasn't I twenty-six, and hadn't nobody else proposed to me! It's just that marriage isn't at all how I thought t'would be. I'd visions of the two of us going to the pictures, drinking Ovaltine in front of the fire, and, on a wet Sunday, the kids and their Dad playing snap in the attic. Sure wasn't I a country girl when all's said and done. An innocent young one from Galway. (*She sits up*) Snap in the attic my eye!<sup>41</sup>

Maisie self-constitutes as rural, young and innocent, reifying a binary with her husband Dermot, who is urban (from Dublin), older and more worldly.<sup>42</sup> The stage directions add to the contrast in vocal delivery, Maisie being "*soft and wistful*", Dermot as "*mischievous*"<sup>43</sup> and "*cocky*."<sup>44</sup> Maisie's fears of not being married by the age of twenty-six testify to the pressures to submit to hegemonic, maritonnormative forces, still very much prevalent in 1970s Ireland. Her invocations of romanticized narratives of marriage

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<sup>41</sup> Geraldine Aron, *A Galway Girl* (New York: Samuel French, 1981) 9.

<sup>42</sup> The stage directions state that "*the ideal accents are Galwegian for Maisie and Dublin for Dermot. But any southern Irish accents will do*" (Geraldine Aron, *A Galway Girl* (New York: Samuel French, 1981) 2).

<sup>43</sup> *Idem*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Idem*, 9.

also suggest a subject interpellated by the machinations of insidious performatives which proliferate those alluring narratives in order to compel compliance with the normative marital model. Throughout the play, Maisie exhibits a concern about how the neighbours perceive her and her family's behaviour, a concern not shared by her husband. When Maisie's friend Mrs. O'Flaherty notifies the police after Dermot causes a domestic disturbance, Maisie reveals her shame and an acute awareness of sanctioned social behaviour:

MAISIE. (*Very distressed.*) The disgrace. The disgrace of it. The whole street up with its ears cocked. The children screaming, and the Garda arriving in the van. They pushed Dermot down the stairs ahead of them. Head over heels over head over heels. . . . Next thing he was up, bawling and kicking. Bastards, says he, and the kids listening. Oh the disgrace of it, the disgrace.<sup>45</sup>

Maisie repeats the word "disgrace" to describe Dermot's abusive behaviour.<sup>46</sup> By using and repeating "disgrace" she is both describing and performatively censoring the behaviour in her own terms, but also appropriating what she anticipates will be the view of her neighbours, whether they have perceived the events or not. "Disgrace" is effectively a self-regulating performative designed to mark out as deviant the unruly behaviour and to compel compliance with social propriety. The performative workings which compel Maisie to regulate her husband's behaviour act to give the illusion that Maisie herself is the voluntary, censoring agent. The illusion of Maisie's agency conceals the oppressive norms which she is unconsciously citing.

If Maisie is concerned with complying with socio-economic norms and maintaining the appearance of social propriety prescribed in large part by Catholic doctrine and teachings, Dermot resists these normative forces and instead complies with separate but not unrelated patriarchal cultural norms which

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<sup>45</sup> *Idem*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Maisie also uses "disgrace" to describe Dermot's habit of drinking on a Sunday (8), and the condition of the family's accommodation in London (13).

install men as dominant and which compel behaviours such as heavy alcohol consumption, violent physical behaviour and an independent lifestyle that renounces family responsibilities. These behaviours construct a masculine identity for Dermot which both institute and sustain him amongst his peers in the local community:

DERMOT. (*Cocky.*) She's still hiding out up above, but I've a plan of my own. The boys'll be round for a couple of jars – and we'll soon see who's boss when I order the sandwiches!

MAISIE. (*furious.*) Dermot brought half the pub home – singing in Irish – the great patriots. I had to come down in my dressing gown to make them their sandwiches. The big, common clods – with their oily heads!<sup>47</sup>

Despite Maisie's protests, she submits to Dermot's demands and accepts the role of hostess to a group of strangers. Through the practice of sandwich-making, she is citing and empowering the performative of a subjugated housewife who is on call at all times to provide hospitality. Dermot, for his part, manipulates Maisie's willing compliance with societal norms. Dermot's performance as hard-drinking tyrant and Maisie's as submissive, stoical housewife continually cite, enable and perpetuate pernicious hegemonic norms. And in their recuperation and affirmation of these norms, they fail to see that their own citations are what enable them to continue. Their failure to recognize this - another by-product of hegemonic norms which blinds its subjects to hegemonic workings through the propagation of illusory hegemonic models - means that change is ultimately unattainable. It is only after Dermot's death that she can claim any real autonomy.

In the 2012 Pat Moylan production of the play, the play begins and concludes with a brief tableau in which Maisie (Clare Barrett) is standing and looking in remembrance from outside at her husband (Joe Hanley), sitting slumped at the table in their living room. The director Terry Byrne says of the play "that one

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<sup>47</sup> Geraldine Aron, *A Galway Girl* (New York: Samuel French, 1981) 9.

of them is a survivor. One of them lives, the other dies. And I decided to make it a play about the woman's memory of that marriage. We begin with her outside the marriage looking back into the room and we bring the room to life and then she changes into a young woman."<sup>48</sup> Maisie's dominant, active position of rememberer and voyeur, as well as the characters' unequal respective standing and sedentary positions, enact a power relation in which Maisie is superior. But if simply outliving her husband constitutes a victory for Maisie, this tableau, like the hegemonic social forces she perceives to be irresistible, is illusory. Her post-marital solitude and independence is circumstantial and not the outcome of a challenge to Dermot's authority. The discursive stasis of Dermot and Maisie is reflected by their unchanging material environment: *"The set is simply two chairs, positioned on either side of a small dining table. The table and chairs stand on a Persian carpet. These items are constant in the lives of the couple. They have been well looked after and are in good condition."*<sup>49</sup> Dermot is presented as an agent and embodiment of dominant patriarchal norms but it is Maisie's self-ascriptions which most effectively and insidiously voice the regulations of the dominant regime. Dermot functions as an unobtrusive decoy for the concealed work of social hegemony: the self-constitutive utterances of Maisie, which represent and sustain the dominance of gender and marital norms, are the concealed agents of hegemonic regulation. The spectacle of the couple in the theatre may be read as a theatricalisation of the illusory fictions which Butler has theorised. Aron's deployment of the monologue form does not achieve a deconstruction of the norms it is displaying, and through Maisie's performance of stoicism, it unwittingly repeats uncritically a dominant, patriarchal model of marriage.

The production's material site of performance and semiotic matrix adds to a sense of comfortable recuperation of violent marital norms. Patrons may purchase soup and sandwich prior to the performance, have tables in front of them on which they may place programmes, bags, etc, and can move their chairs to

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<sup>48</sup> Evelyn McClafferty, "A Galway Girl – Interview with Joe Hanley, Terry Byrne and Clare Barrett", 20 Aug. 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8bdsjMxn9c>. Date accessed 01 Jan. 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Geraldine Aron, *A Galway Girl* (New York: Samuel French, 1981) 4.

better view the performers (some chairs in Bewley's Café Theatre are positioned either adjacent to or even with their backs to the stage). The performance space is situated on the top level of a multi-storey café,<sup>50</sup> with sounds of shoppers and performers on Grafton Street frequently audible (the stage manager closes the window shutters prior to the performance but this does not make the theatre sound-proof). The placement within an affluent shopping area in the city, at the heart of the city's capital exchange, may be said to diminish claims to efficacious performative reworkings of socio-cultural norms. It is inevitably – as with other Bewley's lunchtime performances – framed by the performances of the surrounding buildings, engaged in the practices of late capitalism. Maisie's protests are figuratively and sometimes literally competing with other performative voices, both in the form of Grafton Street musicians, mime artists and acrobats and the performances of high-end retail outlets who compete for the attention and time of resident Dubliners on shopping trips, as well as domestic and overseas tourists.<sup>51</sup>

Angela in *My Brilliant Divorce* (2001)<sup>52</sup> is a recently separated middle-aged woman living in London, who is negotiating the liberation but loneliness of living alone, and who is seeking a new partner. We are given indications of the patriarchal and social hegemonic forces which have constituted Angela and her expectations of marriage. She says that "career-wise, I'd been industrious, but not ambitious because Max didn't want me working full time and frankly, my window-dressing had pretty well dried up."<sup>53</sup> When Angela

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<sup>50</sup> At the time of writing (October 2017), Bewley's Cafe Theatre is temporarily located at the Powerscourt Centre, South William Street.

<sup>51</sup> The trip to Bewley's Café Theatre may quite possibly be incorporated into a shopping trip: the auditorium is spacious enough to lay down shopping bags – material evidence of capital exchange – and when sharing a semiotic and performative context with the speaking subjects onstage, the impact of Maisie's accounts of abuse may be further undermined - viewed and heard as commodities in the same manner as other products of a shopping spree.

<sup>52</sup> *My Brilliant Divorce* was first produced in the Town Hall Theatre, Galway, by Druid Theatre Company on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2001, directed by Garry Hynes with Glene Headly playing Angela. It was subsequently produced at the Apollo Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, premiering on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2003, and has been revived several times in Ireland since. Apart from Headly, other actors playing Angela include Dawn French, Deirdre O'Kane, Polly Draper and Tara Flynn.

<sup>53</sup> Geraldine Aron, *My Brilliant Divorce* (London: Samuel French, 2003) 5.

phones her mother with the news of her divorce, her mother tells her “that’s hardly the sort of news a mother wants to hear, Angela. Divorce my eye. Is it Hollywood you think you’re living in? Eat a slice of humble pie quick and apologize for whatever you did to annoy him.”<sup>54</sup> In a subsequent phone conversation when Angela confirms that the divorce will be proceeding, her mother says “Well, I’m not telling anyone at the club. I’ve always found divorce very common” and that divorce is “different for Protestants.”<sup>55</sup> The exchanges are comic but representative of attitudes towards divorce in Ireland and the attendant shame. Angela’s mother’s decision not to tell any of her friends at the Emerald Isle Club (a comic metonym for an elderly London community of Irish ex-patriots) about her daughter’s divorce recalls Maisie’s fear of incurring the judgments of her neighbours in *A Galway Girl*. In both cases, normative social attitudes and behaviours, shaped by Catholic doctrine, serve both to regulate social, and in particular sexual behaviour, through the naturalizing of regulated behaviours and the outcasting of those deemed deviant to imposed norms. *My Brilliant Divorce* may indeed be read as the separation that Maisie could, or would not, bring herself to avail of. The picture of Angela’s life established at the beginning of the monologue drama, restricted as it is by a lack of autonomy and subordination to her husband’s career, may orientate an audience to expect an attempt by Angela to radically challenge or at least disrupt the patriarchal structures imposed upon her. But her account of an appointment with a post-divorce therapist ridicules feminist ideals of self-sustenance:

I started Post-Divorce-Recovery classes with a therapist called Kay O’Kay. She was terrific! We worked on “The Importance of Venting Anger”, and “Dispelling the Myth that a Woman is Incomplete without a Man.” Kay – who assured me that the first fifty years of a woman’s life are usually the worst – said I should view my life as a wonderful meal, and think of a man as a condiment – a pleasant but non-essential enhancement to whatever is on my plate. She advised me

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<sup>54</sup> *Idem*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> *Idem*, 10.



to propose to, accept, and marry myself. To love and honour and cherish myself till death do me part.<sup>56</sup>

Aron's (literal) citation and parody of feminist self-empowerment therapies work to shore up the marital norms prescribed by Angela's mother. By the end of the play, it is clear that the threatened rupture and subversion of conservative marital models through comic performance has not been realised, and that the comedy has instead been deployed to rehabilitate marital norms of dependence. The play lampoons and deconstructs the search for romantic love, but ultimately confirms and consolidates those performatives. After unsuccessful dates with a range of men, Angela finally meets her General Practitioner unexpectedly on a rural retreat in Wales, and later marries him.

ANGELA. And he said . . .

*The star-cloth comes up, turning the stage into a beautiful night sky, filled with twinkling stars.*

*Poignant flute music plays once more.*

As Dr Stedman. (*laying each word carefully*) Mrs Angela Kennedy Lipsky, I have loved you for four years. Since the time you thought you'd caught tick bite fever by walking past the zoo on a windy day.

*Pause*

ANGELA. And I said, "Dr Joseph Stedman, I have loved you for four hours. Since the moment you knocked Jake off his mountain bike into those nettles and made it seem like an accident." And he said . . .

As Dr Stedman: Timing, lamb. Timing is everything.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Idem, 29.

<sup>57</sup> Idem, 36.

*My Brilliant Divorce* performatively cites the innocuous theatrical conventions of vaudeville (Angela's dog Dexter is represented by a toy dog on wheels which the actor operates<sup>58</sup>) as well as genres of stand-up comedy and literary romance narratives. The explicit material citation of the star-cloth and the sonic performative of the flute music to theatrically constitute the culmination of a romantic narrative may be construed ironically, but there is no reworking or resignification of those theatrical effects. The comic conventions that the monologue cites to constitute itself are conservative comic genres which not only leave gender power relations intact but enhance and effectively recuperate maritonnormative positions. Instead, *My Brilliant Divorce*, a commercial success which had an extensive run in London West End's Apollo Theatre in 2003, displays Angela's illusory autonomy (Angela's construction of her ex-husband as "Roundhead", the actor's virtuosic performance of a range of characters of different genders, class and nationality, and her control of the toy dog, which appears emblematic of her theatrical autonomy) in order to dissimulate a hegemonic, maritonnormative project: spectators are presented with the visual and auditory trappings of female mastery and control. The theatrical impression of female autonomy that is conveyed and the visceral bodily pleasure of laughter it promotes masks the maritonnormative workings which are its origins. The capitulation to dominant marital and gender norms is not experienced as such. Angela's speech acts do not aim for reconstitution as an independent female but only seek and desire reunion with the Other. Notwithstanding the light-hearted nature of the monologue, and the conventions of romantic comedies which culminate in heteronormative union, *My Brilliant Divorce* does not deploy its comedy to radically challenge hetero- and matronormative assumptions, but corroborates fairytale fantasy narratives culminating in marital union to a man (narratives which have normatively been attributed to the imaginations of women and the female desire to marry). Far from utilizing the monologue form to construct

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<sup>58</sup> The way in which the actor operates Dexter varies according to the production. For example, in the Bay Street Theatre (Sag Harbour, New York) production in June 2012, Polly Draper operates the mechanical dog with a remote control.

a female character that could challenge normative representations of women, Aron's Angela invokes performatives that underline her status as being dependent on the company of a man to function and reaffirming the myth "that a woman is incomplete without a man."<sup>59</sup>

I want to conclude this section with another monologue play exploring a troubled marriage playing out in London. Jennifer Johnston's<sup>60</sup> *Waiting*<sup>61</sup> tells the story of Eithne Callaghan, who travels to England to run a grocery shop in Holland Park, west London, with her husband. The play is set in a hospital waiting room in London where Eithne awaits news of her dying husband. As in Johnston's other monologue plays, female subjectivities are voiced only when the male is absent or indisposed (dead or dying, imprisoned or in a nursing home). It is a circumstantially permitted staging of a subject position – it does not arise from a contest with male subjects.

*Waiting* is an example of Johnston's project of unearthing and displaying female experience within constrained parameters of marriage to Irish males. Similar to her other monologues, the female protagonist performs a confession of an inner life that has been suppressed in the name of social propriety and hegemonic compliance. Eithne reveals that she grew up in Glasthule, Co. Dublin, near the sea, working with her mother Molly in a shop. When Eithne informs her mother that she will be moving to London with a man she met in the shop, her mother displays happiness with the news: "Better to have a daughter married and in London than a daughter unmarried and working in the shop with her."<sup>62</sup> Once settled in London, they devote themselves to the running of a shop, forsaking trips home to Ireland at Christmas to cater for their opulent customers. The couple has rooms above the shop, along with a

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<sup>59</sup> *Idem*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> I will be discussing Jennifer Johnston's background in greater detail in the next section.

<sup>61</sup> *Waiting* received its first staging in the Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire, on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2006. Mary McEvoy played Eithne Callaghan, directed by Caroline Fitzgerald.

<sup>62</sup> *Waiting* is unpublished and the script is not available. The quotes from the play that I have cited are taken directly from the performance of *Waiting* on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2015, in the Dolmen Theatre, Cornelscourt, Dublin. This production was performed by Geraldine Plunkett and directed by Caroline Fitzgerald.

kitchen and living room on the ground level. Significantly, the domestic and work spaces are combined, and the lay-out of their residence evokes Eithne's dutiful commitment to her unnamed husband, who goes to the pub every evening and returns inebriated, whilst Eithne takes solace in the company of her cousin Judy, and trips to the cinema. The performance of film stars Jimmy Stewart and James Dean provide for Eithne an escape from marital subordination and tolerance, but also a fantasy of unattainable models of masculinity.

The defining revelation of the monologue renders Eithne mute: she arrives home one evening and enters the living room to discover two naked figures on the couch, thinking she saw a woman's shape but realising that this was a man, "his dark hands between my husband's pale legs."<sup>63</sup> She leaves the house and walks to Shepherd's Bush, returning home after a while - the couch is spotless and it was like she had just tidied the living room. Eithne questions what she saw and reveals that "we never spoke about what I'd seen."<sup>64</sup> Eithne's mother Molly once told her that "men have their little ways. And you just have to put up with them."<sup>65</sup> It is clear that Eithne performs a citation of marital stoicism and self-sacrifice. The male domain of behaviour is not encroached and the lack of meaningful communication with her husband generates a need for monologic disclosure in front of spectators, who are positioned and constituted as surrogate confidants. Eithne muses, "Secrets. They just leak out of you from time to time like a tap that needs a washer"<sup>66</sup> - pithily expressing the pressures of non-communication and the confessions they inevitably lead to. Johnston's monologists find a voice in the theatrical space, which is gendered as feminine, and which constructs male domains of speakability as in the past or elsewhere.

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<sup>63</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *Waiting*, (Unpublished script, 2006).

<sup>64</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>65</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>66</sup> *Idem*.

The theatrical space serves to make possible the “impossible speech” of intersubjective marital communication and appoints spectators as interlocutors and witnesses to marital norms.

Both Angela and Eithne notably carry Irish Catholic marital norms into the liberal, multicultural mix of London. Eithne’s husband renounces heteronormative practices for a physical relationship with another man of different ethnicity. Angela’s “Roundhead” similarly embarks on a new life with a 25-year-old woman from Argentina. The abandoned women are encouraged to accept their spouses’ behaviour by their mothers, whose enforcement of these norms underlines the interpellative strength of imported maritonormative codes. The experiences of the two women perhaps signal the power of Irish Catholic hegemonic norms and the way in which they regulate the behaviour of their subjects, even away from their socio-cultural home.

Despite the opportunities for performative reworkings, the title of her final monologue play, *Waiting*, reflects the attitude of the monologues of Maisie, Angela and Eithne: it may be read as a stoic statement of passivity and a conscious foregoing of agency in the face of dominant marital and gender norms. Meaningful intervention is deferred and external circumstances are allowed to dictate their narratives. Deborah Geis has commented that “the speaker of the monologue has the ability to compress time by narrating a series of events, to suspend time entirely by offering words that do not affect the time elapsed in the play . . . and to alter time by changing our perception of the rate at which time moves during the monologue itself and/or during the onstage events that follow it”. The female protagonists fail to deploy the monologue’s narrative agency to shape temporalities to effect change, instead actively submitting to patriarchal narratives that contain them.

### ***Female Narratives from the North***

Women’s monologue drama from the North of Ireland is sharply expressive of suppressed female voices. Subordinated to the multiple and competing performances of masculinities within the context of the Troubles, women are relegated to domestic spaces, removed from the masculine performative sphere of

male control of communities and on-street violence. The male monologue plays emerging from this context and its social problems of unemployment, alcoholism and depression include Owen McCafferty's *The Waiting List* (1994), *I Won't Dance, Don't Ask Me* (1998), and *Cold Comfort* (2005); and Conal Morrison's *Hard to Believe* (1995). These plays convey the male experience of crisis in depressed socio-economic settings under the shadow of sectarian strife. Robert Welch's *Protestants* (2004), which condenses a history of Protestantism into seven scenes and one hour, was played by a single male actor, Paul Hickey, and directed by Rachel O'Riordan in its original production. The concluding monologue of Welch's monodrama has the unnamed narrator say: "I am free when I am free of what people want to tell me. All stories are lies. I protest against all stories. All. I protest. A Protestant. I want to tell what I am with no ifs, no buts, no inventions. Just me. Just me. No other voice. All the other voices gone."<sup>67</sup> The fact that a single male actor performs all roles, including the only female character, Queen Elizabeth, reflects a familiar male representational dominance – encapsulating an entire history of a religion, no less – and implicitly begs for a female counter-representation. In this section, I intend to examine Jennifer Johnston's *Christine* (1988) and *Twinkletoes* (1993), and Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* (2006), to take a broad look at women's evolving performativities from the 1980s to the 2000s and how they interact with male-dominated sectarian and post-ceasefire environments.

Jennifer Johnston, one such female voice, dedicates her *Selected Short Plays* "for all the men, women and children who have been victims of violence and intolerance, for so long, in this country, Ireland."<sup>68</sup> Her monologues confront issues of gender inequality, alcoholism, child abuse, sectarian violence in the North and its impact on the local community. In an interview broadcast in November 2015 in which she discusses gender equality in Ireland, Johnston reveals that "there were various things that annoyed me

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<sup>67</sup> Robert Welch, *Protestants* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2006), 51.

<sup>68</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) v.

very intensely, one was Field Day. I suddenly realised something that I hadn't realised before: that women are not well treated in Ireland. They were very badly treated by Field Day and they were people that should have known better."<sup>69</sup> Johnston's recognition of Field Day Theatre Company's all but total exclusion of female authors from its three volume anthology and her linking this episode to how women are treated in Ireland provide a useful lens through which to consider her monologue drama. Johnston's four monologue plays are all written for female performers - it is possible then to read her monologue plays as an act of deliberate female bodily and vocal reinstatement, and very much a protest against male exclusionary strategies, particularly as the Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing was intended to be representative of a range of Irish identities.<sup>70</sup>

Jennifer Johnston's monologue plays feature women whose lives have been profoundly shaped by their relationships with dominant males, and who are struggling to establish a sense of themselves. She has collaborated with director Caroline Fitzgerald on all four monologue projects, and Fitzgerald continues to direct Johnston's monologue plays.<sup>71</sup> The collaboration is uncommon in its all-female triple frame of authorship, comprising Johnston, Fitzgerald and a range of female performers. As there is no male intervention within the creative hierarchy, the Johnston-Fitzgerald collaborations are an important source of material for a study of women's theatre-making because as specifically female productions they are unmediated by a male view or understanding of female experience, thereby positioned to rupture male-female subject-object relations. If the plays themselves are concerned with women's

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<sup>69</sup> A.P. Heffernan, dir. *The Works Presents: Jennifer Johnston*. RTE: 19 Nov 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Johnston also reveals that she wrote an unperformed play about an abortion: "I wrote a play about a girl who had had an abortion, who was a close friend of mine actually. She didn't know. My mother sent it to her agent and he rang me up and said 'come and see me'. And I went to see him and he threw this manuscript at me and he said 'that's an awful play but you're a writer. Now go away and write a novel and send it to me and I will get it published.'" (A.P. Heffernan, dir. *The Works Presents: Jennifer Johnston*. (RTE: 19 Nov 2015)).

<sup>71</sup> Caroline Fitzgerald directed a double bill of *Moonlight and Music* (2000) and *Waiting* (2005) in the Dolmen Theatre, Cornelscourt, Dublin, which opened on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2015.

narratives of domestication and marginalisation, Johnston addresses those experiences in contexts north and south of the border, and in both urban and rural areas. All four solo characters speak of their isolation, and the patriarchal structures in which they struggle, or whose legacies they cannot escape. In this section, I intend to critique Johnston's northern monologues, *Christine* (1988) and *Twinkletoes* (1993).

The life of working class women in urban Northern Ireland during the Troubles has received little attention from historians, although Diarmaid Ferriter has commented that "for many, feminism was a luxury they could not afford, given the daily battle for subsistence. But collectively women ensured their voices were heard, and some sought to challenge the masculine political traditions their male family members embraced; and they did gain recognition (though not without opposition) as 'political actors within the community.'" <sup>72</sup> He goes on to say that "lack of social contact in the 1980s and 1990s (in contrast to that of the 1940s and 1950s) was contributing to considerable psychological ill-health among women." <sup>73</sup>

Imelda Foley, whose 2003 book *The Girls in the Big Picture: Gender in Contemporary Ulster Theatre* addresses a deficit in the coverage of female Ulster playwrights, observes that:

. . . the cultural constructs that have impeded a development of feminist perspectives in Northern Ireland are those relating to both the Irish Republic's constitution for nationalists and fundamentalist Christianity for the unionist community. The former's dictate of the place of women in the home is replicated by the latter's espousal of loyalty to the men of Ulster. The challenge to the relegation of women as literal and cultural servants is a challenge to the hegemony of church

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<sup>72</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900 - 2000* (London: Profile Books, 2004) 631-2.

<sup>73</sup> *Idem*, 655.



and state and, more importantly in Northern Ireland, to deeply held senses of history and tradition on both sides of a religious divide.<sup>74</sup>

Foley further comments that in Ulster theatre, “the portrayal of women as domestic minders rarely encroaches upon their psychologies, or even describes them in terms of lives lived and characters shaped.”<sup>75</sup> Johnston’s monologists, with the exception of *Waiting*, which is set in a hospital waiting room, speak from domestic spaces. The domestic settings represent assigned spaces for women but also provide enabling cultural conditions in which to stage performative resistance. In this interpretation, women speakers may be seen and heard to “speak out” of their domestic confinement, physical spatial circumstances which define their position in broader social terms but simultaneously offer possibilities to resist and rework domestic containment – the fixity of the material domestic set is challenged by the discursive narratives of the female performers.<sup>76</sup>

Christine Maltseed is the eponymous character of Johnston’s *Christine*<sup>77</sup> (originally titled *O Ananias, Azarias and Misedal*), recently widowed following the death of her husband Billy. The monologue is set in an unspecified rural location in the North of Ireland during the 1980s. Christine constructs herself as

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<sup>74</sup> Imelda Foley, *The Girls in the Big Picture: Gender in Contemporary Ulster Theatre* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2003) 24.

<sup>75</sup> *Idem*, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Although not writing monologue dramas, Anne Devlin’s plays are significant in giving a voice to women living in the North of Ireland during the Troubles. *Ourselves Alone* (1986) tells the story of Frieda and Josie, their sister-in-law Donna, and their lives shortly after the end of the hunger strikes. The play illustrates how women have been excluded and silenced by the nationalist project, and offers monologic spaces to three main characters to reconstitute their own identities. Enrica Cerquoni says of Devlin’s drama that “rejecting a ‘realistic reality’ and the parameters of theatrical realism, Devlin’s female personae become conjurers of other spaces and times: in some cases they reinvent realities and selves and achieve a plenitude of visibility and audibility beyond the restrictions of fixed identities” (Enrica Cerquoni, “Anne Devlin”, *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer, eds. (London: Methuen Drama, 2010) 68).

<sup>77</sup> *Christine* was initially produced as a lunchtime play at the Peacock Theatre on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1988, performed by Rosaleen Linehan. It was subsequently broadcast by BBC Radio Ulster, along with a companion monologue play written by Johnston for the radio, *Mustn’t Forget High Noon*, on 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April 1989, respectively.

domesticated and sheltered, limited to her home and the company of the television. Reference to powerful female figures such as Margaret Thatcher and the Queen, whom she sees on television, underscores Christine's own situation, deprived of agency: "They make it all sound so important . . . and then I feel foolish because I don't understand it . . . I mean about the Middle East and that . . . I don't understand . . . I don't suppose it matters whether I do or not."<sup>78</sup> The reference to Thatcher and the Queen – powerful women symbolic of British sovereignty over the North of Ireland and wielding dominant monologic authority – serves to highlight Christine's own domestic domain of speakability, and her gendered position outside the sphere of political influence or indeed beyond any claim at self-autonomy.

Christine's ambitions to become a teacher are thwarted by her husband, who urges her not to go to teacher training college: "I was going to train as a teacher and then I met Billy. Where's the point? He said."<sup>79</sup> When she raises the possibility with Billy of putting his father in a retirement home: "Billy wouldn't hear of it. *My father's going into no home. We can mind him. We!* I laughed a bit when he said that . . . inside myself of course."<sup>80</sup> The withheld laughter alluded to here finds expression in Christine's monologue but remains unuttered in her interaction with her husband. Monologue here enables a disclosure of her thought process to spectators, and reveals the workings of patriarchal hegemonic norms, suppressing protest and naturalising male dominance.

Billy Maltseed, we are led to believe, is infertile - paradoxically seedless - but this has the effect of rendering his wife unwilling to disclose the secret. Monologue affords her a confessional space in which to reveal and rework assumptions about her husband's ancestry. Christine is privileged with an insight into the demise of the Maltseed lineage but patriarchal normative pressures render her mute on the subject. The impact of the normative regime (which requires the guarantee of patrilineal custom) upon Christine's

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<sup>78</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *O Ananias, Azarias and Miscal* in *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) 59.

<sup>79</sup> *Idem*, 68.

<sup>80</sup> *Idem*, 70.

thought processes is laid bare. Billy, in the accompanying radio play *Mustn't Forget High Noon*, laments the fact that "We speak our history to our sons. Our lives, our languages. I have no one to speak my history to."<sup>81</sup> Women are here excluded from considerations of genealogy, where "we" and "sons" represent and subsume men, women, sons and daughters. However, it is Christine who is conferred with the privilege of insight about the demise of the Maltseed line. Like Maisie in *The Galway Girl*, however, confessional freedom is only achieved through the death of her partner. It cites and perpetuates models of passive but resilient married females.

The re-signifying force of Christine's humour is evident throughout her monologue and is used to interrogate and subvert aspects of her political and social environment. She asks her husband "turn a bowler hat upside down and guess what you could use it for? He wasn't all that amused."<sup>82</sup> Christine's humorous utterances are in all cases not received well by the recipients. The delivery of the jokes, combined with the discord they produce, throw into relief the societal norms which they attempt to subvert. Their re-signifying force is met with either a verbal or tacit disapproval and censorship. The continuous urge to performatively lighten sombre situations despite the risk of causing offence illustrates both Christine's own frustrations and the rigid social codes to which she is compelled to adhere.

Billy invokes the performatives of Ulster Unionism partially as a means to demonstrate his masculinity, but his antics are a source of amusement to Christine: "He liked to play the big guy. You know . . . tough guy Billy Maltseed. That was what he liked about the Lodge . . . all those men . . . preening themselves. I used to laugh to myself when I saw them, beating their drums, marching, flags, all that sort of thing."<sup>83</sup> Christine's monologic space empowers her to deconstruct Billy's empty bravado, but also to deflate broader notions of masculinity, as manifested in spectacles employing the trappings of Ulster

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<sup>81</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *Mustn't Forget High Noon* in *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) 43.

<sup>82</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *O Ananias, Azarias and Misedal* in *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) 66.

<sup>83</sup> *Idem*, 66.

Unionism. Her monologue may be viewed on one level as a “challenge to the relegation of women as literal and cultural servants”<sup>84</sup> as it supplies a critical voice to political discourse dominated by men but it may also concede the hegemonic discursive impact on Christine’s behaviour: laughter is either uttered to herself in private or suppressed entirely. When Christine successfully buries the orange sashes with the bodies of her husband and father-in-law without the objections of the minister, she symbolically lays to rest her own connection with Ulster Unionism. Liberation, however, is only achieved through death and protest to male dominance never materialises.<sup>85</sup>

Johnston turns her attention to the republican, sectarian side of the female marital experience with *Twinkletoes* (1993).<sup>86</sup> Karen is a thirty-five year old woman living in a town in the North whose husband

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<sup>84</sup> Imelda Foley, *The Girls in the Big Picture*, 24.

<sup>85</sup> In *Mustn’t Forget High Noon*, the masculinity performed by Billy as a child is shaped by the matinee screen idols he sees at the cinema initially with his father, and then with his friend, Sammy Hickson. Billy and his father act out the narrative of the film in front of Billy’s mother, on their return home. The performances invoke historical events such as Custer’s encounter with Chief Sitting Bull, occasionally deviating from accepted historical accounts. Performance of the westerns revisit and re-examine history, making history negotiable. The innocent enactment of scenes from westerns later becomes intertwined with Billy’s growing awareness of his Protestant heritage and a desire to take part in Unionist parades: “The old man gave me a cowboy set for Christmas once. . . I wanted to wear them on the twelfth, but my mother wouldn’t let me” (Jennifer Johnston, *Mustn’t Forget High Noon* in *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003), 39).

Billy’s and Sammy’s transition from teenage play-acting to sectarian activity is expressed through a development from Hollywood to local historical iconography: “The holy names keep you safe. Jimmy Stewart. Gary Cooper. Randolph Scott. Burt Lancaster. Kirk Douglas. General Custer . . . Destry . . . Billy the Kid . . . Billy the King. Sammy Hickson” (idem, 53). The performativities of Hollywood westerns and Unionist sectarian violence are intertwined. It is marked, however, by a naivety of the dangers of involvement with the Regiment, but also by a naivety of his own domestic situation (“My house with the old man dying and Christine. Barren. No matter about that. I must say that to her one day. No matter” (idem, 53)). Ultimately, Christine is privy to a fuller knowledge of the domestic situation. However, like Maisie in *A Galway Girl*, she is only afforded a voice upon the demise of her husband. Full self-expression derives from the external removal of the patriarch in the political realm, and not through self-determination.

<sup>86</sup> *Twinkletoes* was first produced by the Project Arts Centre at the Bewley’s Café Theatre (at the Powerscourt Centre), Dublin, on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1993, with *Christine* as a companion piece. Carol Scanlan played Karen. It was later performed at the Stage Left Studio, New York, as part of a double bill with *Forgotten Milk* by Bernard McMullan from 15<sup>th</sup> September to 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2011. Paula Nance played Karen, directed by Jo Cattell.

Declan is serving three concurrent life sentences in prison for republican terrorist activities. She has returned from her daughter Noreen's wedding reception, "a bit the worse for wear"<sup>87</sup> after the party.

Karen lives in a watchful, paranoid social environment where both her and her daughter's behaviour are perceived to be under the microscope. The hegemonic, normative forces originate in both political and socio-religious spheres: Karen must maintain loyalty to her imprisoned husband and the cause that he represents, but also to the bonds of marriage. Noreen must equally conform to appropriate social norms and standards. Both are constrained in their behaviour by republican and religious hegemonic performatives.

Photographs of Karen's parents on their wedding day act as insistent reminders of marital norms: "There are pictures of him and her all round their house. Together. Him in his uniform. Them being married. Very old fashioned."<sup>88</sup> Not surprisingly, Karen's father Sean threatens to boycott the wedding of Karen's daughter Noreen because he disapproves of Noreen's pregnancy. He relents when Karen threatens to invite the groom's father down from Belfast, to give Noreen away. The hegemonic social pressures impact significantly on Karen's management of Noreen's wedding. Desperate for her daughter to conceal her pregnancy, she tells her to use pink roses sent by her husband: "Hold them over your tummy, I said, and no one will notice the way you are. Wasn't it good of your daddy to think, I said. She didn't answer, but she carried the roses. Over her tummy. She looked lovely."<sup>89</sup> Neither Karen nor Noreen is willing to disclose Noreen's pregnancy to her father in prison and Karen fails to convince her daughter that marriage is not mandatory: "I told her she had a choice but she didn't believe me."<sup>90</sup> Noreen may be taking her cue from her mother, whose lies about her daughter's pregnancy seem designed to preserve hegemonic propriety.

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<sup>87</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *Twinkletoes in Three Monologues* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1995) 15.

<sup>88</sup> *Idem*, 20.

<sup>89</sup> *Idem*, 30.

<sup>90</sup> *Idem*, 25.

Karen resolves that “I won’t tell him that I cried. I won’t tell that the baby showed.”<sup>91</sup> The withholding of secrets to shore up irresistible hegemonic imperatives is manifested in Karen’s and Noreen’s behaviours. Karen’s monologue only serves to fortify the social norms under which she struggles.

Abbie Spallen’s monologic representation of the post-ceasefire North is barely recognisable from Johnston’s homebound confessions. Her monologue play *Pumpgirl*<sup>92</sup> comprises the interweaving monologues of the eponymous ‘Pumpgirl’, Hammy and Sinéad, with no verbal interaction between the characters during the play. The spectacle of three actors on stage is a departure from the single-character monologues previously discussed and the outnumbering of females over males may be said to prioritise female subject positions. Despite stage directions detailing the stage setting as “*battered, faded signs, ends curling in the sun, grace the stage: desperate attempts at enticing customers with cheap two-litre bottles of cola and free car-wax*”,<sup>93</sup> productions of *Pumpgirl* have had settings with few on-stage props, ranging from a single petrol pump to a backdrop featuring a country road, to a minimalist glass decking. In any event, the mise-en-scene suggests economic depression, poverty, anomie and even abjection - the characters inhabiting this world may be read as Butler’s abject subjects, excluded from sanctioned domains of subjecthood. Spallen explains the inspiration for the character of Pumpgirl:

I was in the middle of touring with a show and we were travelling back in the car one day when we stopped at this garage. A girl came out to fill up the car and I just recognised this girl from so

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<sup>91</sup> Idem, 20.

<sup>92</sup> *Pumpgirl* was first produced at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh in August 2006 as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival with Jim Doran, Orla Fitzgerald and Maggie Hayes, directed by Mike Bradwell. It was subsequently staged at The Bush Theatre, London, from September to October 2006. There have since been different productions at the Manhattan Theatre Club, New York, and in Chicago, Washington and Philadelphia. A Lyric Theatre production of the play was staged in Belfast in September 2008, which subsequently toured the North of Ireland. Spallen wrote the screenplay for the film *Pumpgirl*, which was produced by PG productions in 2009.

<sup>93</sup> Abbie Spallen, *Pumpgirl* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006) 7.

many people I'd seen. There's kind of one in every town – I got a sense of a character from her and the story carried on from that . . . . It just fascinated me; somebody quite marginalized who wouldn't have a voice.<sup>94</sup>

Spallen reveals that the girl is recognisable “from so many people I'd seen” but someone that “wouldn't have a voice.” The impression on Spallen of the girl's ubiquitous visibility (which may lead to a type of non-visibility) and voicelessness awakens in her a political imperative to act to restore voice and visibility to such marginalised characters through the composition of *Pumpgirl*. However, the uncritical making visible of marginalised subjects may be said to be vulnerable to patriarchal rehabilitation.

The political and social complexion of Spallen's post-ceasefire south Armagh, which was known as 'Bandit Country' during The Troubles, is markedly different to the sectarian North represented by Jennifer Johnston in *Twinkletoes*, *Christine* and *Mustn't Forget High Noon*, whose divided society assigned women to roles in the domestic realm, removed from the visible political sphere. The Good Friday Agreement in 1998 had eventually led to peace in the province, although sporadic dissident paramilitary activity continued. The community described in the monologues, other than Shawshank's house, is represented as being economically depressed. The region of south Armagh, as described by Spallen in interviews, had fallen between the economic renewal of Belfast to the north, and the Celtic Tiger economy of the south. The males in *Pumpgirl* are not engaged in paramilitary activity – they pass their time with their jobs, criminal activity, drinking and womanising.

There is little evidence of the regulating impact of Catholic teachings on sexual codes and behaviour, or the surveilling presence of local republican groups on the look-out for women being unfaithful to imprisoned spouses. Hammy is having an affair with Sandra, who resents his wife Sinéad.

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<sup>94</sup> Mary Gallagher, “Interview: Abbie Spallen”, *Irish World*, 25 July 2006.

Shawshank's wife Eileen is "playin' away with a Chinese delivery man out of Silverbridge."<sup>95</sup> In a light-hearted exchange of sexual bravado with his friends, Shawshank himself tells them "about some PE teacher he's riding in Lisleagh. McManus starts chippin' in about this mother and daughter combo he's takin' turns with in Culloville [sic]. Shawshank comes right back at him with some housewife he's just left not two hours ago with a smile in her face like Liberace in a locker room."<sup>96</sup> Despite the presence of two female actors to one male actor, the language is marked as being distinctly masculine, with Spallen's use of an earthy south Armagh vernacular adding both to a sexual frankness and an undefined sense of menace. The characters of Sandra and Sinéad are dominant as part of a visual spectacle but ironically the narratives they deliver and which construct local male characters bring into being a drama which is laden with danger to themselves.

South Armagh is represented as being culturally impoverished, with few indigenous cultural references other than South Armagh country music. The play quotes extensively from the worlds of pop, rock and country music, popular television personalities, television characters, comic book heroes, television shows, authors, film stars and fictional characters. The referencing of various forms of non-indigenous popular culture hints at a community whose culture continually draws on foreign cultural imports to sustain itself and the south Armagh landscape is generally represented in terms of either former British army presence or sexual activity. Regional identity is thus sustained through the performative citation of mostly American and British foreign cultural products. But as Butler has theorised, the work of cultural materialization through highly regulated practices is never complete and presents opportunities, through its constant temporal incompleteness, to respond with reiterations that rework performative imperatives. In *Pumpgirl*, as will be discussed, these performative opportunities are not taken up.

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<sup>95</sup> Abbie Spallen, *Pumpgirl* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), 30.

<sup>96</sup> *Idem*, 25.



Citations of popular culture extend beyond the sustenance of regional, cultural identity to specific personal gendered identities. The citing of macho Hollywood action films and rock stars underscores the vacuous and fraudulent nature of the men's performed masculinities and forms a direct link to the performance of gender, foregrounding male characters' exalted notions of their own masculinity. *The Matrix*, *GI Joe*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Lethal Weapon*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Dr Zhivago*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Sommersby*, all of which feature spectacular feats of male courage, endurance, skill and ingenuity act to shed an unflattering light on the male characters in *Pumpgirl*. The citation of these references highlights the reliance upon external masculine models to prop up brittle masculinities. *Pumpgirl's* monologue form, which stages the act of enunciation and calls attention to performative utterances, succeeds in illuminating these citational processes.

Hammy's sense of masculinity is anchored in his performance on and around the local amateur stock car racing track. He styles himself 'Hammy "No Helmet" McAlinden', a reference to his reckless bravery and endurance in not wearing a crash helmet during the stock car races. For Hammy, the atmosphere at the car racing events is enhanced by "the crowd roarin' behind me. The disco lights zippin' past me" and the MC on the megaphone "screaming my name over and over."<sup>97</sup> When Hammy goes up to receive his trophy, he mounts the podium, which consists of "a few mouldy oul' teetering Jaffa orange-boxes stacked up against a wall with a bit of green fake lawn flung over them."<sup>98</sup> The compere at the race-track mistakenly announces Hammy's surname as McAlpine, instead of McAlinden, further deflating his own sense of importance and his attempts at self-mythologising. The construction of Hammy's masculinity, of which his on-track moniker forms a large part, is reduced by the compere, his competitor McPolin, and his own friends. Masculine identities are continually invoked to sustain identities but are fragile in the process of invocation.

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<sup>97</sup> Idem, 13.

<sup>98</sup> Idem, 17.

Unperformed characters in the play exert their own impact, none more so than “Shawshank” McCabe, a local ex-convict and friend of Hammy’s. Similar to Billy Maltseed and Sammy Hickson enacting the roles of matinee icons Gary Cooper, Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne in *Mustn’t Forget High Noon*, references from popular culture in *Pumpgirl* serve as foundations for personal mythologies, such as Shawshank’s nickname, from the film *The Shawshank Redemption*. Hammy reveals that “Shawshank got let out of Maghaberry Prison early by letting on he’d been born again, redeemed. Your man in the film had to crawl through miles of shite to get free. The Shawshank just had to spoof a load of it.”<sup>99</sup> Shawshank continues his deceptive behaviour after his release from prison, learning off literary quotations to seduce women: “This is what the bastard does – he learns off quotations from poems and shit and then uses them to get the women into bed. Started learnin’ them in Maghaberry.”<sup>100</sup> Shawshank thus performs literal citations, a manifestation of the aforementioned figurative cultural and gendered citations. Shawshank’s character is figured as economically and physically dominant (he lives in a large, comfortable house and his sidekicks Doot and McManus submit to his authority). Hammy, on the other hand, works cleaning out the local chicken hatcheries. The character of Hammy is theatrically embodied and visually and vocally present, but it is the character of Shawshank, a construct in the narrative, who appears to be dominant. This has the effect of undermining the monologue form’s claims to the power of theatrical presence, in the case of *Pumpgirl*, and perhaps supporting an argument that disempowered subjectivities are featured in monologue drama by virtue of the fact that they cannot achieve dominance through intersubjective relations.

“Pumpgirl”, the name given to her by Hammy’s male friends, but whose real name is Sandra, is a young woman in her twenties working in a run-down petrol station in south Armagh close to the border, declining due to the unfavourable cross-border exchange rate: “A butch girl. A girl who loves her job and

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<sup>99</sup> *Idem*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> *Idem*, 32.

thinks she's one of the lads. A tomboy all growed up."<sup>101</sup> Performing in a role and space typically assigned to men, she signals a dislike of other women, whilst confessing her appreciation of Hammy, with whom she maintains a casual sexual relationship. Sandra "can't stand the women drivers. They can't drive for shite"<sup>102</sup> – after doing an oil-check for a group of four young women, one of them asks her if she is a man or a woman, to the amusement of her friends. Sandra "could see streaks in her fake tan around her chin where she hadn't wiped"<sup>103</sup> and it is clear that Sandra does not conform to female normative behavioral protocols of fake tans and skimpy clothing, as prescribed in publications such as *OK* magazine, copies of which lie on the back seat of the young women's car. Instead, Sandra's butch appearance confounds heteronormative forces, resisting and straddling gender categories. Hammy refers to her as the "man-woman",<sup>104</sup> and Darren, Hammy's son, asks if she is a boy or a girl.<sup>105</sup> Shawshank refers to her as "Pumpy"<sup>106</sup> and "Pumpgirl" and comments that she "walks like John Wayne and looks like his horse."<sup>107</sup> Her real name, Sandra, is only mentioned on two occasions in the play, once by Shawshank, and once by Hammy. Apart from the title of the play which asserts Shawshank's nickname for Sandra, the cover of the published text of *Pumpgirl* features a rough sketch of a young woman's head, with a petrol pump hose and nozzle extending from her head.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Idem, 7.

<sup>102</sup> Idem, 12.

<sup>103</sup> Idem, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Idem, 19.

<sup>105</sup> Idem, 50.

<sup>106</sup> Idem, 23.

<sup>107</sup> Idem, 25.

<sup>108</sup> The front image on the play text has the appearance of black and red spray-paint against a white wall, whose paint is peeling. This suggests a graffitied identity inscribed by others for Sandra, in public view.

Shawshank's interpellation of Sandra as "Pumpgirl" may be read as a speech act reducing Sandra to her function as a pump attendant and rendering her amenable to acts of sexual violence – providing a function, dehumanised. His likening of Sandra to John Wayne and his horse may also signal an attempt to linguistically capture Sandra within a web of macho cultural references intelligible to Shawshank and his friends. The designations of Sandra in these terms are acts of linguistic violence prefiguring acts of physical violence. This comes to pass when the four men rape Sandra in Hammy's Toyota Celica: "My face is pressed into the back of the seat now as he turns me over. The leather sticks and then unsticks to my face. . . I'm turned round again and this time it's McManus. Hammy's standing behind him with this mad face on and I can't help feeling I've done something wrong."<sup>109</sup> The narration of the account of rape in performance is powerful as the actor is in a dominant visual and vocal position but the narrated content refers to the same body in a position of violent subordination (forcibly held prostrate on the car seat, with "a hand over my mouth. A hand that tastes of dirt and salt and cigarettes.")<sup>110</sup> The narrating body's discord with the narrated body underscores the enabling performative opportunities that theatrical monologue performance occasions. Although the traumatic event is to some degree resignified through performance of monologue, which reaffirms Sandra's survival of the event through enunciatory dominance and bodily uprightness, the account of the sexual violation of Sandra suggests violent heteronormative forces insisting on rigid, non-negotiable roles for women. Sandra's performance as a butch young woman who loves the smell of petrol is intolerable to hegemonic social forces and is forcibly reassigned to an acceptable gender category, i.e. receptive to male sexual domination.

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<sup>109</sup> Idem, 34.

<sup>110</sup> Idem, 34.

Sandra bears hostility towards Sinéad, claiming that “she doesn’t deserve him. He’s two kids. A wee boy and a wee girl. Hammy only stays because of the kids.”<sup>111</sup> Her dislike of Hammy’s wife, which may be read superficially as a simple expression of envy, betrays a deeper antipathy to conformism with gender norms. Sandra disavows any intention of bearing children herself – “You spend all your time bringin’ them up and teachin’ them right from wrong and how to be safe and then they go off with the first person they see”,<sup>112</sup> distancing herself from State-prescribed functions of child-rearing and confounding oppressive social gender norms. Sandra affirms her own singular connection with Hammy, which bears more of a resemblance to a friendship between two males than a male-female sexual relationship.

Sandra’s almost exclusive association with the petrol station positions her in gendered terms between the family home of Sinéad, Hammy and their children, and the race-track, with which Hammy is associated. Her movement away from the petrol station, and wearing more feminine clothes “I’ve a skirt and sandals on and I put the baseball hat in the bin”,<sup>113</sup> marks a shift from her previous tomboy appearance and an embracing of a more feminine identity. In the concealing of her female form, Sandra is disrupting the male gaze by confounding delineated gender categories. By choosing to wear more feminine clothes, she reverts to a heteronormative category and a subjectivity intelligible to dominant gendered norms.

Her collecting Darren and Kelly at the school is an expression of maternal care, as is her ultimate decision to ensure their safety and bring them home, after initially contemplating doing one or both of them harm at the upside-down house. Finally, she returns to her own home in the housing estate, removing her from the masculine environment of the petrol station and resituating her in the family

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<sup>111</sup> Idem, 16.

<sup>112</sup> Idem, 48.

<sup>113</sup> Idem, 41.

home, designated by Irish Catholic doctrine and the Irish Constitution as an environment for the raising of children by women.

Sandra's initial resistance to heteronormative forces collapses into compliance with gender norms. She accepts the rape, and her own partner's role in it ("I whisper in his ear, 'it's okay'").<sup>114</sup> If Sandra troubles heteronormative forces through her performance as a butch petrol pump attendant aspiring to integrate into male company, Sinéad accepts a role prescribed for her by hegemonic, patriarchal forces – mostly confined to the home, caring for her two children Danny and Kelly and tolerating a philandering husband. Her marriage to Hammy has been maligned by Hammy's excessive drinking and womanizing. Sinéad tells us that she would lie awake alone in bed at night with her hand stuffed in her mouth to stop her crying, in the days when she cared, "but now it's only to stop up the laughin."<sup>115</sup> Sinéad reveals that her sisters are also poorly treated by their husbands: "I've a family full of women settled for a bunch of bastards."<sup>116</sup> She finds her motherly duties routine and taxing: feeding, washing, minding her children, saying "'Aye right' and 'Don't pull the dog's tail' and the other pieces of robot crap that tumble out of the mouths of mas."<sup>117</sup>

After Shawshank interrogates Sinéad over the theft of his flatbed truck, he leaves her stranded and humiliated, walking miles before she successfully hails a taxi, "walkin' along the road like a drunk woman with my tights in shred and blood on my knees."<sup>118</sup> The public shaming visited upon Sinéad may be read as a cruel manifestation of hegemonic forces reaffirming normative power. Significantly, it is the unvoiced and unembodied Shawshank who registers the most damage on the lives of Sandra, Sinéad and

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<sup>114</sup> *Idem*, 35.

<sup>115</sup> *Idem*, 15.

<sup>116</sup> *Idem*, 24.

<sup>117</sup> *Idem*, 37.

<sup>118</sup> *Idem*, 59.

Hammy. In a demonstration of the consequences of what Peggy Phelan may regard as an unnuanced visibility, *Pumpgirl* stages the violence meted out to voiced and embodied characters by an unperformed character: on-stage embodiment, visual and vocal dominance, far from empowering them, underscores their vulnerability to invisible oppressive patriarchal forces.

After Shawshank leaves Sinéad's house following their sexual encounter at the end of Act One, Sinéad reverts to her normal role of mother: "The gas comes on with a whoosh; I chuck the match into the sink. It's a quarter past seven, the kids'll be home soon and I start to make them their tea."<sup>119</sup> When Sinéad returns home in the taxi at the end of Act Two, her evening-time routine is reiterated: "The gas comes on with a whoosh and I throw the match in the sink where it makes a fizz-plop sound and then goes to black. Hammy and the kids'll be home soon and I start to make the tea."<sup>120</sup> If as Butler has theorised, performativity constitutes "a stylized repetition of norms", it appears that Sinéad has not successfully resisted the dominant norm of unfulfilled, frustrated housewife. As the repetition of her routine, almost word for word, suggests, she remains entrapped in domestic cycles of martyrdom. However, the fate of her husband, of which she is unaware, may offer a limited measure of escape from an unhappy marriage, despite ushering in new economic pressures.

Spallen gives Sandra a voice, paradoxically to describe amongst other events, her rape by four men, during which she is forcibly denied a voice. Spallen's instinct to supply a voice to a socially marginalised, vulnerable young woman ironically only demonstrates and reiterates her own state of voicelessness. If females are reduced to simple constructs by male narrators in much male-authored monologue drama, the male characters in *Pumpgirl* are revealed as fakes attempting to propagate their own personal myths, reliant upon masculine tropes of cars, trophies and literary quotations to shore up brittle masculinities. Hammy is the only male character to engage in self-reform and demonstrate self-

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<sup>119</sup> *Idem*, 35.

<sup>120</sup> *Idem*, 59.

awareness and guilt, but the outcome of his self-effacement is his suicide in the chicken hatcheries. Shawshank continues an unenlightened narrative of philandering, crime and violence. Sandra and Sinéad are violently segregated and sustained into sexual and socially gendered categories, their resistance in different ways (Sandra's defiance of gender performative norms and Sinéad's transgression of marital codes) meeting with hegemonic intolerance and force. *Pumpgirl* finally offers little in the way of performative resistance, despite Sinéad's imminent independence as a single mother, which may only open up new channels of hegemonic marginalisation.<sup>121</sup>

### ***Urban Confessions: Celtic Tiger and After***

The final section focuses on three plays taken from the Celtic Tiger, pre-recession and recession economic contexts, all in urban settings: Jennifer Johnston's *Moonlight and Music* (2000), Elaine Murphy's *Little Gem* (2008) and Carmel Winters' *Witness* (2013). I have selected these texts and performances to examine both the developing dramaturgies and representational strategies of women's monologue drama and the continuing negative patriarchal legacies that occasion them. The pernicious effects of incest are dramatised in Johnston's and Winters' plays, while the three women in Murphy's *Little Gem* narrate a more complex register of men. Although most speakers narrate monologues in some way shaped by harmful experiences with men, the plays signal a growing awareness of dramaturgical efficacy in responding to patriarchal norms.

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<sup>121</sup> Another notable monologue play set in the time of the Troubles is Tara McKeivitt's *Grenades* (2010), first produced by Mephisto Theatre Company on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2010 at Nun's Island Theatre, Galway City, directed by Caroline Lynch. It tells the story of Nuala Kelly (Emma O'Grady), speaking from a prison waiting room in the late 1980s, initially from her current perspective of a nineteen year old, but then as a nine-year-old and then developing into her mature years. She recalls and re-enacts her experiences of growing up with her older brother Oran, her mother and grandfather and nuns and bullies at her school. The Grenades of the title have literal and figurative resonance: the explosive revelations which have impacted on Nuala's life, growing up during the Troubles, and the local paramilitary sectarian activity. She recounts the death of her older brother and the act of revenge she implicitly committed on her brother's behalf which led to her incarceration. *Grenades* is an insightful and original narrative about the experience of the Troubles from a young girl's viewpoint.



Johnston's *Moonlight and Music*<sup>122</sup> features Rosie Fleming (Catherine Byrne), a single secondary school teacher in her late forties, who has returned home to her flat in Dublin from her final day's work after being fired by the headmaster. She recounts the day's events, sings, dances, drinks whiskey and reflects upon her past. At times, she addresses the audience; at others she maintains a conversation with an imagined interlocutor who is critical of her disorganised lifestyle and self-presentation: "Do yourself a favour Rose and don't talk such rubbish."<sup>123</sup> *Moonlight and Music* continues themes encountered in *Christine* and *Twinkletoes* – women living alone, experiencing social isolation and struggling with the imprint that male spouses have left on their lives.

Rosie drinks single malt whiskey but will "have to go down market without a salary. Rotten thought."<sup>124</sup> She tells us that her father "drank cheap whiskey. After the day's work was done; the curtains pulled tight; no possibility of a client ringing the door bell, no one needing words of advice from him."<sup>125</sup> Her father would suggest that her mother retire for the evening, which she would do after serving tea, leaving him to indulge in "his two, or possibly more, glasses of whiskey."<sup>126</sup> Rosie denies that she is an alcoholic, claiming that she could give up alcohol "if I wanted to. I am not a slave"<sup>127</sup> and instead saying that she is addicted to "the silk veil dropping. That's what I'm addicted to. Yes."<sup>128</sup> Rosie's repeated denials that she is an alcoholic, however, are undermined by her copious on-stage drinking, and her inner voice which asserts that she is talking nonsense. Rosie cites her father's alcoholism and his addictive behaviour. But the

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<sup>122</sup> *Moonlight and Music* was first performed at the City Arts Centre, Moss Street, Dublin, on 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2000, as part of the Y2K Festival. It was one of six short plays commissioned for the Y2K festival.

<sup>123</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *Moonlight and Music* in *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Idem*, 12.

<sup>125</sup> *Idem*, 15.

<sup>126</sup> *Idem*, 15.

<sup>127</sup> *Idem*, 18.

<sup>128</sup> *Idem*, 19.

citational chain of abuse ends with Rosie. The toxic performativity in *Moonlight and Music* is Rosie's repeated citation of her father's alcoholic behaviour. She performs an inescapable performative citation of abuse and self-abuse.

Rosie's monologue is mediated through the inebriated body. Alcohol in this way enables monologic disclosure, just as the theatrical convention of monologue enables uninterrupted direct address to the audience. Unlike Karen in *Twinkletoes*, who wants to dance to affirm her liberty and independence, dancing is figured as a form of imprisonment in *Moonlight and Music*— the act of dancing for Rosie has become contaminated with memories of her abuse. Her alcoholism is presented as being intertwined with dancing, which is linked to her abusive relationship with her father, who would sexually abuse her following her return home from the "hops" on Saturday night, "harmless affairs for teenagers in the parish halls."<sup>129</sup> Where other female-authored monologue drama figures dance as a space for performative resignification, the ending of *Moonlight and Music* marks it as a despairing capitulation to performative cycles of addiction and trauma. Alcohol provides an enabler for Rosie's harrowing testimony of abuse whilst at the same time undermines her attempts at escaping its memories.

Johnston uses alcoholism as a metaphor for the legacy of abuse. Butler's theories of performativity may usefully be applied to unpack Rosie's addictive behaviour – the performative gesture of drinking alcohol, the citation of drinking, repeatedly invokes alcohol consumption as a perceived cure for inner turmoil. The hegemonic force of the practice of alcohol consumption is invoked and sustained by the consuming subject. The anxiety and depressive thoughts experienced by the subject are relieved by the sedative effects of alcohol, which successfully dissimulates the practice of uncontrolled drinking as the source of damaging, addictive behaviour. Rosie, however, hints at a self-awareness of her problems. When she reminisces about going to dances as a teenager, her inner critic chides her: "Again you talk rubbish,

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<sup>129</sup> Idem, 14.

Rose. Self-deception, always self-deception.”<sup>130</sup> The ending of the play is one of Johnston’s most despairing: there is no challenge to the performative cycles of addiction, and no resolution to seek counselling for her alcoholism and her experiences of incest. Using Butler’s distinction between performance and performativity, *Moonlight and Music* may be said to stage a domination of performativity over performance in the manner that the cited behaviour of drinking “precedes, constrains and exceeds”<sup>131</sup> Rosie. She observed her father drinking single malt whiskey as a child, her current problem with alcohol is constraining her in her personal and professional relationships, and the alcohol addiction is seen to overcome Rosie, as she begins a night of excessive and destructive drinking. Intimacy with spectators does not assuage her self-destructive tendencies – the memories of abuse that she invokes exceeds the capacity of the theatrical space.

The genesis of Elaine Murphy’s *Little Gem*<sup>132</sup> came out of conditions of gender inequality within the Irish theatre industry that the “Waking The Feminists” campaign would later address in 2015. In Eithne Shortall’s account of an interview with Elaine Murphy, it is revealed that Murphy’s monologue play began as a monologue piece written for herself: “The three-hander started as a single monologue created for an audition. She didn’t get the job, but the director was impressed by the piece. Murphy bluffed that it was

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<sup>130</sup> Idem, 12.

<sup>131</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 178.

<sup>132</sup> *Little Gem* was first performed at the Civic Theatre, Tallaght, on September 8<sup>th</sup> 2008, as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival, produced by Gúna Nua Theatre company and directed by Paul Meade. It was produced at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh in 2009 as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival where it was awarded the Carol Tambor Best of Edinburgh Award.

In January 2010, it premiered at New York’s Flea Theatre and then featured at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin and at the Bush Theatre, London before touring to Paris. A two-month tour followed in Australia in February and March 2011. It has received further productions in Philadelphia (Inis Nua Theatre), Pittsburgh (City Theatre) and Eastbourne, England (Green Room Productions).

part of a longer play she was writing. When the director said he'd like to read it, Murphy completed *Little Gem* in a matter of weeks."<sup>133</sup>

The impetus for the writing of *Little Gem* came from Murphy's perceived imbalance in the quality of roles for men and women that she was reading in scripts: "Murphy spent several years working as an actress – appearing in *Boy Eats Girl* and *The Clinic* – but it was writing that interested her. 'With a lot of the scripts I was getting, you're thinking, "There has to be a bit more to this." The girls were all pretty vacuous, and the lads all got great parts,' she says. 'That's pretty much why I wrote *Little Gem*.'"<sup>134</sup>

In addition to redressing broad, gender representational inequalities, Murphy sought to give voice to elderly women through the character of Kay Neville, one of three characters inspired by women she encountered in Artane and in the female health clinic where she worked: "They were just characters I liked and didn't think had been on stage before, especially the granny and what she talks about. Whenever I saw women of a certain age on stage, they'd be floating in and out, a bit senile, and that wasn't the women I knew."<sup>135</sup>

*Little Gem* features three generations of Dublin women: Kay Neville (Anita Reeves), her daughter Lorraine (Hilda Fay) and grand-daughter Amber (Aoife Duffin) and explores their relationships with men and with one another. Kay cares for her husband Gem, who has recently suffered a stroke. Lorraine, a retail manager, seeks a new relationship while attempting to escape the legacy of her former partner Ray, the father of Amber. Amber works in a call centre and is pregnant with Paul Devlin's child, who plans to travel to Australia. Kay, Lorraine and Amber support one another through the challenges of ill health and troubled relationships. The play is a testament to intergenerational, female solidarity.

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<sup>133</sup> Eithne Shortall, "Tea and a Whole Lot of Sympathy", *Sunday Times*, Irish ed., 2 June 2013, Sec. Culture: 8-9.

<sup>134</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>135</sup> *Idem*.

*Little Gem* has a tripartite structure in which monologues are delivered alternately, beginning with Amber and followed by Lorraine and Kay. Each character has six monologues, which complement, rather than contest, a single narrative thread. The complementarity adds to the effect of the three women's togetherness and shared experiences. The veracity of experiences that are recounted is not destabilised through strategies of narrative discord, in which truth becomes unstable and spectators are forced to constitute a coherent narrative from conflicting accounts presented to them.

The three females' behaviour may be viewed not primarily as the regulating effect of hegemonic models which prescribe subordination to patriarchal regimes, but as citations of one another's behaviours and moral codes. Performativity in *Little Gem* manifests itself principally in the reiteration of traditions, codes and values of generations that have come before. In this way, there are moments of resistance to hegemonic patriarchal norms. In their place is a self-sustaining matriarchy which embraces an independent lifestyle and which finds its expression through an uninhibited and frank approach to sex and to obtaining sexual gratification or sexual partners and a hedonistic lifestyle of drug and excessive alcohol consumption. The female body, far from being trapped and controlled in regimes of patriarchal control, exercises agency and autonomy, seeking to fulfil its needs without compunction or fear of patriarchal censure.

Amber's opening monologue details the night of her Debutantes Ball, her "Debs". Her neighbours think her "dress is massive, my false tan looks real natural and my hair is holding up lovely."<sup>136</sup> Amber is from the outset represented as largely complying with regulatory norms which dictate the terms of young women's bodily appearance and impose mandatory hegemonic norms, proliferated through young women's magazines, Hollywood films, and music videos for the visual consumption of males. The neighbours are described as "paparazzi" which points to Amber's ironic likening of her pre-Debs get-together to a celebrity event but also reveals a fascination with celebrity and a desire to emulate lifestyles of the famous. The father of Amber's friend Jo follows his daughter with a camcorder and attempts to enter their car with it

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<sup>136</sup> Elaine Murphy, *Little Gem* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009)3.

before they push him out. Hegemonic normative pressures which regulate performances of femininity are rendered visible in the Debs Ball, with its spectacle of expensive Debs' dresses, shoes, hairstyles and make-up. Adherence to the traditions of the Ball may be read as a confirmation of hegemonic, normative regulation. The theatrical nature of the Ball, with its promotion of spectacle and hedonistic excess, is especially effective at dissimulating the origins of hegemonic imperatives.

To some extent, however, Amber's and Jo's behaviour at the Debs Ball deviates from traditions of the "Debs" which insists upon the observance of codes of conduct including in some cases, abstinence from alcohol: "Jo and me just did a line in the toilets. Feeling nice. The music is thumping in my chest. Unce, unce, unce. Like this fuzzy feeling, know exactly where I am but when I close my eyes I could be anywhere."<sup>137</sup> Amber tells Jo that she wants to "hammer" a blonde girl who was talking with Paul at the bar and who accidentally banged into Amber. Jo and Amber go onto the dance floor where they gyrate together "like a pair of lezzers"<sup>138</sup> between Jo's date Dean and his friend Lee. Amber's behaviour at the Debs, jealously protecting her date from other predators, displaying aggression towards other females, and consuming drugs and alcohol, resembles the dominant, territorial behaviour of alpha males and not passive objects of affection by men. Men are utilised by women as instruments towards some defined objective. Jo's companion Dean has expectations of romance with Jo, but Jo intends to ditch Dean in favour of Lewis Lawlor, and hopes that Lewis will ditch his own date, Tania Keogh. Samantha's date Robbie is constructed as "twenty-five and here he is dressed like a dog's dinner, feeling awkward as fuck around all of us. It was real handy having him around when we were in school, always buying drink and never expected the round

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<sup>137</sup> Idem, 5.

<sup>138</sup> Idem, 5.

back.”<sup>139</sup> Jo’s father, who films the girls with a camcorder as they set out for their Debs Ball, is regarded as a nuisance.<sup>140</sup>

Amber constructs men as being variously untrustworthy, unreliable, non-committal, pathetic and irritating. Her discovery that she is pregnant by her boyfriend Paul Devlin, however, creates in her a heightened vulnerability to the reaction and behaviour of her partner and an anxiety as to the repercussions of her pregnancy. The negative appraisals which she has made of male relatives, friends and acquaintances up to this point are confirmed when she attempts to convince Paul that the child is his:

‘Me and you,’ he says, ‘We’re going nowhere, well . . . I am – Australia. Ah, c’mere. I’m cool with it; to be honest I was going to blow you out anyway.’

‘You were? (*Beat.*) I’m pregnant.’

‘You can’t be.’

‘You’d think, but there was that one time when it broke, remember?’

(*Pause.*)

‘Nice try . . . I didn’t even . . . ye know, that night.’

‘Paul, I haven’t been with anyone else, I swear.’

‘Out’.

He reaches over me and opens the car door.<sup>141</sup>

Amber’s ejection from Paul’s car may be read as an expulsion from a normative economy in which married couples produce offspring within the bounds of wedlock. The revelation of Amber’s pregnancy

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<sup>139</sup> *Idem*, 4.

<sup>140</sup> *Idem*, 4.

<sup>141</sup> *Idem*, 25.

highlights the workings of the normative regime, provoking reactions of denial, tacit disappointment and censure. The maritonnormative economy is manifested in the character of Blondie, with whom Amber previously clashed over Paul, who taunts her by saying that Paul “brought his ticket forward, he did, didn’t want to be stuck with yer little bastard.”<sup>142</sup> The baby (Little Gem) is designated a “bastard”, an abject body inadmissible to a regime which only accommodates adherents to social norms (the bearing of children within wedlock). Amber’s friend Jo reiterates and sustains attitudes to marital normativity when she comments that “most bastards are the image of their das, it’s God’s way of making sure they can’t deny them.”<sup>143</sup> Paul joins Amber at the maternity clinic but confesses that he is “not ready for this”,<sup>144</sup> before travelling to Australia.

Amber’s mother, Lorraine, attempts to move away from her destructive marital past (her marriage to Ray) - the experience of which has led to her compulsive behaviours of locking all the doors in her house and cleaning until her hands are raw - and to forge a future with Niall. Lorraine meets her husband again after many years, on the street outside Tesco. Her comprehensive description of Ray underlines the power she possesses to construct a male character in her terms:

. . . this bundle of clothes gets up off the ground. A big black Puffa jacket, tracksuit bottoms and ripped runners – which were probably robbed to order in a previous life – walk towards me. Recognised Ray underneath the woolly hat. He smiles at me. His teeth are so bad, he makes Shane MacGowan look like he has porcelain veneers.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Idem, 31.

<sup>143</sup> Idem, 37.

<sup>144</sup> Idem, 30.

<sup>145</sup> Idem, 26.



The description de-genders Ray: he is merely a “bundle of clothes” emerging from the ground. It is only when she recognises Ray under the hat that he is revealed as a man. The impression of poverty and decay that she conveys constructs Ray in unequal terms to herself. When Ray arrives at Gem’s funeral and says goodbye to Lorraine prior to returning to England, Lorraine again registers her bodily disgust: “He hugs me tight but I don’t hug him back. My stomach churns at the stench of his clothes and the feel of his bony arms around me . . . Break away from him, breathing through my mouth. Look at him, trying to find a spark of the old Ray from before but he’s completely gone.”<sup>146</sup> The disparity of the narrated exchange between Lorraine and Ray, in which Lorraine is granted narratorial authority, is reinforced by corporeal dominance of the actor/character of Lorraine in performance. The actor/character is an embodied, present, speaking subject conferred with bodily and vocal dominance over an atrophying body with no voice other than the reported speech controlled and mediated by Lorraine’s speaking body. After purchasing a bread roll for herself, Lorraine offers Ray a sandwich (instead of money) and in doing so demonstrates power over Ray’s ability to nourish and fortify his body. In constituting Ray through speech and gesture, Lorraine exerts performative dominance.

The defiant Kay’s confession of sexual frustration to her Muslim G.P. may be interpreted as a performative resignification. Her disclosure is met with the young woman’s uncomfortable silence: “She’s trying not to appear judgemental but I can tell she’s shocked because she’s fiddling with her hi-jab. Take that as my cue to leave.”<sup>147</sup> Kay’s sexual frankness, loquacity and old age are juxtaposed with the tacit discomfort of the young doctor, whose hi-jab represents the visible trappings of gender regulation and suppression, and the concealment of the female form. Kay’s breach of acceptable norms is tacitly censored : deviation from the performative script has elicited a gesture (the fiddling with the hi-jab) from the young doctor signalling a “cue” to leave the scene of transgression. Kay’s encounter with her G.P. and her rupture

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<sup>146</sup> Idem, 46.

<sup>147</sup> Idem, 10.

of hegemonic norms portrays her as feisty, uninhibited, and youthful. Her narrative self-construction defies conventional portrayals of elderly Irish women as prudish and morally conservative.

Kay again confounds behavioral age norms by visiting Ann Summers, an adult shop selling lingerie and sex toys, on the suggestion of her friend Marjorie Burke and is shown a Rampant Rabbit by the shop assistant. When she is told that there is a Deluxe version of the Rabbit, Kay quips that the “Deluxe must do the Hoovering.”<sup>148</sup> Kay’s comment invokes an image of Hoovering, a domestic task typically assigned to women and particularly to women of Kay’s generation, and uses it to describe a gadget representative of female agency, control and pleasure. The comment encapsulates a transition from assigned gender roles confined to the domestic sphere and supporting a male regime, to a scenario of female empowerment and self-sufficiency independent of male sexual dominance (“Jaysus, if I brought that home I’d never have sex with him again, whether he got better or not”).<sup>149</sup> The performance with the dildo disrupts fixed roles of male-female sexual relations, removing the male from the scene of sexual intercourse.<sup>150</sup>

When Gem dies, Kay reveals that being Gem’s wife is “all I’ve ever been or wanted to be.”<sup>151</sup> Her identity is bound up with marriage to Gem and her confession that her only ambition was to be married to him reveals maritonnormative forces which prescribe marriage as the sole acceptable social model for women. Kay’s affection for Gem hides from her her own compliance with normative models, so that marriage and the unequal gender roles it accommodates, is naturalised and its oppressive origins dissimulated. Gem’s and Kay’s template for marriage compels Lorraine to enter into a marriage with Ray, with disastrous consequences. Thus the socially normative model of marriage is propagated, irrespective of

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<sup>148</sup> Idem, 11.

<sup>149</sup> Idem, 11.

<sup>150</sup> The fact that the green dildo is named “Kermit”, presumably taking its name from Kermit the Frog of *The Muppet Show* adds to the reversal of respective gender power relations. Kermit is the anxious presenter of the show, dominated by his girlfriend Miss Piggy and frequently subjected to her trademark thwacking.

<sup>151</sup> Elaine Murphy, *Little Gem* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), 36.

the wellbeing of the married partners.<sup>152</sup> However, *Little Gem* imagines possibilities of lives in the wake of relationships with men and independent of their constituting force.

*Little Gem* gives voice to three working class Dublin women and the intergenerational bonds that sustain them. In terms of canonical gender politics, its structure of three alternating monologues is a direct response to McPherson's *This Lime Tree Bower* and *Port Authority* and implicitly demands an equal status to those plays. It constitutes a marked reversal from the models of female marital stoicism and endurance which feature so prominently in the work of Geraldine Aron and Jennifer Johnston. *Little Gem* is a celebration of female agency and control and is radical in its appropriation of masculine behaviour and attitudes. Theatrical visual and vocal dominance allows the characters to construct their own identities and experiences whilst constructing male characters. A temptation to construct men as uniformly oppressive and destructive is resisted. Masculinity is not represented as a crude monolith but instead as multiple and diverse. Gem's gentle nature is acknowledged as is Niall's. Masculinity is thus interrogated and problematised and not deployed as a crutch to support female empowerment and to justify an indiscriminate denigration of men. The play is ostensibly about three generations of Neville women but book-ending the play are Gem and Little Gem, linked in features by "Grandpa's nose." *Little Gem's* strength is to resist the repetition of the strategies of much male-authored monologue drama, which as alluded to, represents women merely as sexual objects or symbolic maternal figures. There is in its place a nuanced and mature reflection on male diversity. In resisting the unproblematised caricaturing of male characters, *Little Gem* may be said to perform a moment of performative resistance. *Little Gem* is optimistic in pointing to a future in the Neville household where certain masculine traits will be cherished and perpetuated.

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<sup>152</sup> Divorce was not available for residents of the Republic of Ireland prior to 1995. The Family Law Act 1995 allowing for divorce entered the statute books in 1995 and the legislation was only commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1996. The social and legal consequences for men and women in troubled marriages before 1996 were therefore onerous (in *Little Gem*, Lorraine is still married to Ray, despite not having seen him for many years).

I will conclude the section with a critique of Carmel Winters' *Witness*,<sup>153</sup> a play which effects a performative resistance in its single-woman performance of both a male and female character.<sup>154</sup> Winters directed the play, which was performed by Kate Stanley Brennan, who plays both Shannon and her son Stephen. The conventional playwright-director-performer chain of interpretation is compacted into a collaboration between Winters and Stanley Brennan. A further telescoping of the creative collaboration is achieved with Brennan's performance of teenager Stephen, which is both imaginative and daring. It is justified as Shannon and Stephen are closely related and plausibly bear a physical likeness, both facially and in their physical shape (Stephen is a teenage male). But it also signals a reversal of gendered appropriation I have previously identified within male-authored monologue drama, in which male narrators construct female characters, primarily through frames of male sexual desire. *Witness* executes a performative absorption of a male subjectivity by a female one. The virtuosity of a female performer is on display but is not sexualised – Brennan's transitions from female to male representations resist a male fetishisation because gender is presented as transient and ephemeral and the male gaze is consequently deflected and disrupted.

Shannon opens the play by confronting spectators over media accounts of her son Stephen's alleged abduction and sexual abuse of Colin, a local toddler. She recounts her own upbringing and her confession that she gave her baby girl up for adoption despite her father's offer to take care of the child. She concedes that she was not suitable to be a mother and reveals that she had ambitions to become a nun. When she gives birth to a boy, she decides to allow her child to form a relationship with her father:

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<sup>153</sup> *Witness* was first produced at Bank House, Whiddy Island, on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2013 as part of the West Cork Fit Up Festival.

<sup>154</sup> Another example of a single-character woman's monologue in which the performer plays both male and female characters is Amy Conroy's *Eternal Rising of the Sun*, which was first produced on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011 at the Project Arts Centre as part of the Absolut Dublin Fringe Festival, directed by Veronica Coburn and performed by the playwright. Conroy plays Gina and a range of other characters including her father ("Da") and her partner ("Paddy"). Conroy enacts abuse perpetrated by Da and Paddy on Gina, e.g. through the use of her own arm to represent Paddy slapping Gina.

SHANNON. Thing is, I thought it'd be alright for Stephen, him being a boy and all. Living with his granddad. The pair of them were real tight. You could hardly squeeze a tuppence between them. Me Da would have to drag Stephen over to see me. Bribe him with stuff in the shop just so's he'd spend five minutes in the same room as me. I was the odd one out, the spare part.<sup>155</sup>

Her monologue suggests but does not confirm the sexually abusive nature of her father, or her belief that only young girls are of sexual interest to him. It is when Stephen shows a video to Colin that the performative nature of the incest is revealed:

*(He inserts a video; we see the reflected light of a screen flicker on his face as he watches, rapt.)*

STEPHEN. There's me in the bath. Having a good scrub-a-dub-dub. Oops, there goes the soap. That's me Grandda's hand – the one what's not on the camera – having a feel for the soap. Look it? Look at me face? How I'm enjoying it? Having a grand old time for meself.<sup>156</sup>

The performativity of the abuse is multi-layered. Stanley Brennan is performing Stephen, who is performing for Colin in the mode of a presenter of a video. Nestled within this double performance is Stephen's past performance as a victim of incest for the video camera, and Granda's performance of both abuser and director/recorder of abuse. Contextualising the myriad levels of performance is Stephen's desire for Colin to perform what he himself performed for his grandfather. The "frames" of representation, both aesthetic (theatrical and audio-visual) and gendered (female writer/director and actor authoring a male

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<sup>155</sup> Carmel Winters, *Witness* (Unpublished script) 8.

<sup>156</sup> *Idem*, 17.

subjectivity) add a further level of complexity to the represented abuse. The play's final revelation is a powerful and harrowing statement on incest, gender and sexual desire:

SHANNON. There's a photo I have of Stephen when he was small. He's sitting on his Grandda's lap and his Grandda has his hands under his vest tickling him. You can see he only has the two teeth – top and bottom – and a mad shock of pure white hair. Like candyfloss. *(beat)* I sat there the other night looking at that photo and I swear it could have been someone else's kid. I don't remember it. I remember a baby what I couldn't touch. Then a boy of eight or nine. In between – nothing.

I showed the photo to Stephen this morning when I had me visit. He sat there staring at it. Just like I'd been. Then he hands it back. 'Who's that in the mirror', he asks, 'the person what's taking the photo?' I hadn't noticed before but, yeah, there is a person in the mirror. A woman. A woman with curly hair like Stephen's. Me mother.

It wasn't Stephen on me Da's lap. *(beat; touches blanket in her arms; realising)* It was me...

*(Several beats; slow fade to black.)*<sup>157</sup>

The photograph, taken by Shannon's mother, of Shannon on her father's lap mirrors Stephen's playing of the video featuring his grandfather molesting him. Neither Shannon nor Stephen authored the photographic or audiovisual records of their own abuse, yet they have possession and control of those records now. Ownership of the records may empower them to understand the abuse they have suffered and performatively resignify its effects: Shannon's ultimate realisation of her own abuse has the effect of uniting Shannon and Stephen as victims, bringing them closer than before. More troubling theatrically is

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<sup>157</sup> Idem, 24.

that spectators are made to adopt the viewpoint of the abusive grandfather, who abused both genders and apparently had no distinct preference for either. Genders are merged in performance - Winters' ethical statement may be that perpetrators cannot distinguish between their victims or even their genders: to do so would be to humanise them and so force a consideration of their own abusive behaviour.

### **Conclusion**

In *Excitable Speech* (1997), Butler conceives the speakable as being approved by the dominant regime which determines speakability – the “domain of the sayable”<sup>158</sup> - but also posits a responsive and contingent agency allowing utterances of “insurrectionary invocations”, utterances which may reconfigure the terms of what is speakable and unspeakable.<sup>159</sup> The monologue plays that I have discussed at once feature cultural norms (sanctioned domains of the speakable) and the means to resignify and “respeak” them (narration of monologue). The hegemonic regulatory forces that Butler theorise do not simply produce legitimate domains of speakability, they simultaneously produce other domains by force of exclusion, whose inhabitants are not candidates for subjecthood because their speech is not comprehensible within the domains of the sayable. I have attempted in this chapter to link the monologue form with sites of unspeakability and to frame monologue drama and performance in terms of attempted reconfigurations of the speakable and unspeakable. The sophisticated and insidious workings of performatives demand a close attention to outward signs of performative resistance, which may on closer scrutiny be supportive of hegemonic gendered regimes.

Many of the monologues under discussion are situated in realist sets. Aron's *A Galway Girl* is set in a dining room (“two chairs, positioned on either side of a small dining table”).<sup>160</sup> *Twinkletoes* is set in “the

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<sup>158</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 133.

<sup>159</sup> Idem, 145.

<sup>160</sup> Geraldine Aron, *A Galway Girl* (New York: Samuel French, 1981) 4.

empty living room of a small terrace house.”<sup>161</sup> *Moonlight and Music* is set in a “shabby room. Once it was spick and span, but now it is a bit gone to seed. A bit weary. Sofa, chairs, matching curtains.”<sup>162</sup> There are no set directions for *Christine* but at the end of the play, she reveals her own spatio-temporal context when she suggests that she is in her home: “It’s time I went. The bus passes the end of the lane in ten minutes: I wouldn’t want to miss it. I hope I haven’t taken up too much of your time. Goodbye.”<sup>163</sup> *Waiting* is set in a hospital waiting room.<sup>164</sup> As has been noted at the beginning of the chapter, the deployment of the monologue form by women may be read as a rejection of realist representation. However, monologue plays with realist settings may accept from the outset realist representational strategies, in spite of the monologue form’s ability to transform time and space. Deborah Geis has observed that “a result of the monologue’s ability to affect time and space, then, is that it creates types of narrative fluidity that allow the dramatic work to transcend the physical limitations of the playing space.”<sup>165</sup> As I noted in the introduction, it has been commented that realist representational forms may reproduce existing power structures, including patriarchal structures, which in turn impel female authors to embrace alternative representational strategies. Realist settings may thus act as an impediment to disruptive strategies in their shaping of the physical space in which the monologue is enunciated, therefore reiterating realist, patriarchal hegemonic structures and foreclosing possibilities for performative resignification. *Pumpgirl*, *Little Gem* and *Witness* are set in multiple locations and are not as spatially restrictive as the earlier plays under discussion. In the later plays, narrative language is allowed to constitute space, and therefore to better effect transformations and open up resignificatory possibilities. This development is itself indicative of more imaginative staging on the

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<sup>161</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *Twinkletoes* in *Three Monologues* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1995) 15.

<sup>162</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *Moonlight and Music* in *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) 3.

<sup>163</sup> Jennifer Johnston, *O Ananias, Azarias and Misedal* in *Selected Short Plays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2003) 79.

<sup>164</sup> Performance of *Waiting* on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2015 in the Dolmen Theatre, Cornelscourt.

<sup>165</sup> Deborah Geis, *Postmodern Theatric(k)s: Monologue in Contemporary American Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) 11.



part of both playwrights and directors and perhaps of a greater alertness to the trap of reaffirming hegemonic norms.

The single-character monologue plays critiqued have characters in post-social, post-dialogic spaces. Johnston's characters of Christine, Karen and Rosie all return home to solitary living spaces from social occasions or some significant social interaction. Christine has returned from her husband's funeral; Karen has arrived home from her daughter's wedding reception; and Rosie is back in her flat following her working day in a secondary school and a meeting with her headmaster in which she is dismissed from her job. Angela in *My Brilliant Divorce* and Eithne in *Waiting* are alone following the end or imminent end of their marriages arising from divorce and death. Winters' Shannon and Stephen find themselves socially isolated following Stephen's abduction of Colin. In *Pumpgirl*, the characters' sharing of stage space serves to emphasise their isolation and need for monologic expression. What follows in all these cases is a reflection by the individual upon self and the emplacement of self within social relations. Removed from conventional, interactional drama which may situate them as objects of male power relations and which may collude with the hegemonic and normative spheres that they represent, the women are allowed a space and conferred with some degree of monologic autonomy to disclose suppressed truths and to assert narrational authority. What emerges is a pathology of patriarchal hegemony accompanied by an outpouring of formerly stifled voices and deferred protests. The access given to spectators to inner psychic workings of the characters may uncover the coercive forces that have shaped these psychologies. The monologue form enables such disclosure and access but it simultaneously signals the utterances that are either not possible or not willingly undertaken in a dialogue with the agents and instruments of hegemonic, patriarchal control. Monologue may grant the women a sense of autonomy and consciousness of their histories but this sense of control may simply be the illusory effect of a dominant, regulatory regime which seeks to dissimulate the origins of its own power. *Christine*, *Twinkletoes* and *Moonlight and Music* provide fora in which these patriarchies and

their psychological impact on women may be comprehended but their performative resistance to those norms is not realised.

There has been a significant increase in productions of women's monologue drama since the 1990s, which has redressed a canonical gender imbalance in a growing body of monologue drama in Ireland. Female-authored and enunciated monologue plays have offered a retort to male-authored monologue drama which frequently stages an inward, narrow focus on issues of masculinity to the exclusion of imaginative, nuanced portrayals of female characters. This can only signal a recognition on the part of female playwrights, directors and performers that the monologue form makes available a representational strategy that can break from the confines of realist structures and settings, which are collusive in maintaining social norms and are therefore ill-equipped to confront social gender issues. The work of Geraldine Aron, Jennifer Johnston, Abbie Spallen, Elaine Murphy, Carmel Winters and many others, have brought into the theatrical domain a range of topics affecting women including exclusion from the workplace, domestic physical abuse, alcoholism, marital infidelity, rape, drug addiction and incest. The narrating body delivering monologues offers spectators an opportunity to trace the often damaging bodily effects of naturalised patriarchies and hegemonies and to intervene to constitute new meanings. The earlier monologue drama under discussion may be seen to uncritically reiterate the very hegemonies they seek to contest, or at the very least bring to light, but the more imaginative stagings and form of more recent monologue work<sup>166</sup> has demonstrated a clear development in dramaturgical

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<sup>166</sup> Two recent examples include work by Gillian Greer and Amy Conroy.

Greer's *Petals* was first performed on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2014 in Theatre Upstairs, produced by Roadkill Productions. Katie Gilmore performed with Karl Shiels directing. In this verse monologue, an unnamed 16 year old schoolgirl narrates uncompromisingly her sexualised and hard-drinking escapades.

Conroy's *I Heart Alice Heart I* was first staged on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2010 in the New Theatre, Temple Bar as part of the 2010 Dublin Fringe Festival. Conroy and Clare Barrett play Alice Kinsella and Alice Slattery, respectively, a lesbian couple who metatheatrically narrate the history of their relationship directly to spectators. The play was directed by Conroy and produced by HotForTheatre.

strategies. Butler's theories posit materializing hegemonic workings as vulnerable to recasting in their constant reiteration, allowing time and space for future and multiple stagings of monologic resistance.

## Chapter Four

### “Foreclosed Houses”: Monologue Drama, Class and the Periperformative

In truth, we do not so much enter rooms, but rooms (so to speak) happen to us.<sup>1</sup>

It’s a small quibble but I refuse to constrain my personality.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapters, I have primarily deployed a discourse-orientated critical approach based on Austinian and Butlerian performativities - I now intend to complement this analysis with a deeper consideration of material sites of performance and how they interact within an urban theatre economy. Butler has received criticism from some quarters for an emphasis on language to the exclusion of the everyday. Susan Bordo, critiquing *Gender Trouble*, has argued that “Butler’s world is one in which language swallows everything up, voraciously, a theoretical pasta-machine through which the categories of competing frameworks are pressed and reprocessed as ‘tropes’.”<sup>3</sup> And Nancy Fraser has contended that Butler’s language is “deeply antihumanist” and that her idiom is “far enough removed from our everyday ways of talking and thinking about ourselves to require some justification.”<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein to these criticisms of Butler, Paul Murphy recognises the limitations of Butlerian performativity to interrogate constructions of class. Murphy *has* advocated the use of theories of performativity to understand the construction of class, but has revealed how these theories, within the arena of

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<sup>1</sup> Branko Kolarevic and Ali M. Malkawi, eds. *Performative Architecture: Beyond Instrumentality* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Conor McPherson, *The Good Thief in The Weir and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999), 200.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Bordo, cited in *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, Donn Welton, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 64.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Fraser, “False Antitheses” in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, Seyla Benhabib et al (New York: Routledge, 1995), 67.

performance studies, have come to become focused exclusively on issues of gender and race – while the philosophical basis of postmodernism and poststructuralism have “opened up new ways of understanding the performativity of gender, for instance in the work of Judith Butler, or of race and ethnicity in the work of Homi Bhabba, the same cannot be said for the opening up to new ways of understanding the performativity of class.”<sup>5</sup> Murphy argues that “while Butler’s theory of performativity works well on the level of discourse and language, it would need to be significantly modified to deal with the performative dimension of class as cultural practice.”<sup>6</sup>

Butler uses the term “foreclose” to describe a process of psychic subject formation in which one psychic identity is effectively removed from the field of possible attainable subjectivities, usually a non-heterosexual identity. She also uses it in more general terms, outside of a specific psychoanalytic context, to describe the exclusionary process of regulatory performatives in which one avenue of possibility is effectively sealed off as an effect of the force of the performative. Indeed, Butler expands the original concept to refer to the “violence of the foreclosed life”<sup>7</sup> as a consequence of such oppressive regulations. Foreclosure, though, may institute further possibilities of rearticulating the original performative. Lacan introduced the term into psychoanalysis but it is more commonly used in the field of property law, referring to the action of taking possession of a mortgaged property when the mortgagor fails to keep up their mortgage payments. I plan to use this material thread, implicit in Butler’s language, to effect a shift from discursive to material performativity, without departing from Butler’s concepts of performative resignifications.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Murphy, "Class and Performance in the Age of Global Capitalism", *Theatre Research International* 37 01 (2012): 13. P 52.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), xxi.

Countering the strand of performative, discursively focused analysis - yet generating a productive critical collision with it – I will consider the performer/spectator spatial dynamics of intimate performance spaces within smaller theatre venues and the broader economies and hierarchies of Dublin theatre buildings in which monologue performance operates. Following an analysis of Michael West's *Foley* (2000), I have chosen texts and productions that were staged in both intimate and larger spaces: Conor McPherson's *Rum and Vodka* (1992), *The Good Thief* (1994), *This Lime Tree Bower* (1995) and *Port Authority* (2001); and Mark O'Rowe's *Anna's Ankle* (1997), *Crestfall* (2003) and *Terminus* (2007); all of which have specific performative interactions with their theatre spaces and their associated architectural histories and audience politics. In order to support the analysis of these plays and performances, I will introduce another prominent voice in performativity studies, that of Eve Sedgwick, whose focus on the material, spatial and textural will complement the discursive analysis of previous chapters. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950 – 2009) is a key thinker in the field of queer performativity and has built substantially on the work of Austin, Derrida and Butler. Sedgwick advocates a spatialized consideration of the performative, moving away from its temporally-based iterations:

Jacques Derrida's and Judith Butler's important discussions of performativity, for example, tend to proceed through analyses of its temporal complexity: iteration, citationality, the "always already", that whole valuable repertoire of conceptual shuttle movements that endlessly weave between the future and the past. By contrast, the localness of the periperformative is lodged in a metaphoric of space. Periperformative utterances aren't just about performative utterances in a referential sense: they cluster around them, they are near them or next to them or crowding against them; they are in the neighborhood of the performative. Like the neighborhoods in real estate ads, periperformative neighborhoods have prestigious centers (the explicit performative utterance) but no very fixed

circumferences; yet the prestige of the center extends unevenly, even unpredictably through the rest of the neighborhood.<sup>8</sup>

Sedgwick's contribution to theories of performativity contribute much to performance analysis, with a focus on spatial relationships. Building on the temporal aspects of performativity, Sedgwick's periperformative brings within critical view the performativity of theatrical space and the narrating body's illocutionary and perlocutionary effects upon the spectators seated in front of it.

Taking Austin's model of the explicit performative,<sup>9</sup> Sedgwick suggests that "the category is more useful in a spatialized mode of thought" and that "it could be more helpful to imagine a maplike set of relations: a map that might feature *explicit performative utterances* . . . and a multitude of other utterances scattered or clustered near and far, depending on the various ways they might resemble or differ from those examples." Sedgwick then goes further in positing "a new class of periperformative utterances whose complex efficacy depends on their tangency to, as well as their difference from, the explicit performatives."<sup>10</sup>

I intend to take Sedgwick's concept of the relationship between explicit performative utterances and periperformatives within a spatial and relational context and utilise this to map Dublin's theatre hierarchy, dominated by the Gate and Abbey Theatres (explicit performatives) and also populated by smaller theatre spaces (periperformative utterances) whose relationship with the dominant houses

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<sup>8</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 68.

<sup>9</sup> Austin's "explicit performatives" are those "with verbs in the first person singular present indicative active . . . Examples are 'I name', 'I do', 'I bet', 'I give'." (J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 56).

<sup>10</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 5.

defines their “complex efficacy.”<sup>11</sup> Sedgwick herself makes the link between the explicit performative and theatrical performance when she notes that “arguably, it’s the aptitude of the explicit performative for mobilizing and epitomizing such transformative effects on interlocutory space that makes it almost irresistible . . . to associate it with theatrical performance.”<sup>12</sup> Mindful of this association, I want to argue that the theatrical performances of the dominant houses constitute the explicit performatives, whilst performances within the smaller venues make periperformative utterances.

Michael McKinnie has written about the relationship between urban development in downtown Toronto since 1967, the operation of theatre buildings and theatre companies within it, and the political, economic, civic and artistic ideologies that underpin and shape these relationships. He explores the tensions arising from different conceptions and valuations of spaces occupied by theatres: the urban space understood in real estate market terms and the social and aesthetic theatrical spaces fostered by theatre companies. McKinnie studies the relationship between a selection of theatres and theatre companies in Toronto since 1967, situating them in their urban economic contexts and exploring how “theatre contributes to the city, and the city contributes to theatre.” The theme that links the two parts of his book is “the way in which the city comes to be conceived and represented as theatrical, while, at the same time, theatre comes to be conceived and represented as urban.”<sup>13</sup> McKinnie’s book is an important contribution to Theatre Studies in both a Canadian and international context, adding to an understanding of how the workings of theatre companies and the buildings they inhabit interact with their urban environments. The dialogue between separate spatial value systems brings into sharp relief city-dwellers’ attitudes to their home town’s cultural offerings and their sense of urban identity.

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<sup>11</sup> Idem.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Michael McKinnie, *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 20.



The fortunes of theatre companies and theatre buildings in Dublin are no less susceptible to the real estate market economy. The Dublin theatre economy is dominated by the heavily-subsidised national theatre, the Abbey Theatre, and the Gate Theatre, which receives a fraction of the Abbey's annual subsidy and whose programming is therefore more driven by commercial imperatives. The impact on the Gate Theatre's programming translates into a necessarily conservative reliance on canonical works by, in particular, Friel, Wilde, Coward, Miller and Williams to satisfy the theatrical and cultural taste of its spectatorship. The theatre offering in Dublin is augmented by the presence of the commercial receiving houses - the Gaiety and Olympia Theatres - owned by MCD productions, which counts dramatic theatre as only one of a range of entertainments on offer to the public, with the remainder comprising stand-up comedy, live music, dance, and musicals. The Project Arts Centre in Temple Bar is a subsidised multi-disciplinary arts centre featuring art exhibitions, performance art, visual arts, as well as both canonical and new plays. Dotted around the city landscape are a number of studio performance spaces<sup>14</sup> whose capacity and dimensions offer singular performance conditions suitable for monologue performance. Studio theatre spaces in Dublin and in other cities and towns around the country have indeed come to be marked and associated with monologue performance.

The dominance of the major houses is underscored by their established hold on their respective premises. The Gate Theatre, when it was founded in 1928, used the Abbey Theatre's Peacock studio space before moving to its current location within the Rotunda Hospital complex on Parnell Square. From 1936 to 1961, the Gate Theatre building was shared on an alternating six-monthly basis between

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<sup>14</sup> Studio spaces in the inner city Dublin area include Bewley's Cafe Theatre, Grafton Street (at time of writing, located at Powerscourt Centre, South William Street); the Project Cube at the Project Arts Centre; the New Theatre, Essex Street, Temple Bar; Theatre Upstairs, Eden Quay; the Boys' School at Smock Alley Theatre, Lower Exchange Street, Temple Bar; and the Teacher's Club, Parnell Square West. In the suburban Dublin area are the Viking Theatre at the Sheds, Clontarf; the Maureen O'Hara studio at the Mill Theatre, Dundrum; the Loose End Studio at the Civic Theatre, Tallaght; Draíocht Studio, Blanchardstown; and the Dolmen Theatre, Cornelscourt. Small inner city theatre spaces that have now closed include the City Arts Centre, which had been located at numerous venues, including Moss Street; Theatre Space at Henry Place; the Crypt Arts Centre, Dublin Castle; the Focus Theatre, Pembroke Place; and Andrew's Lane Upstairs, St Andrew's Street.

Edwards-Mac Liammóir's Gate Theatre Productions and Longford Productions, run by Lord Edward and Lady Christine Longford. When the Longfords were resident in Parnell Square, Edwards and Mac Liammóir would either stage plays in the prestigious Gaiety Theatre or tour productions to Europe, Egypt and North America. Since 1961, however, Gate Theatre Productions has enjoyed an almost constant presence in its Parnell Square home.<sup>15</sup> And the Abbey Theatre (founded in 1904), although having to relocate to the Queen's Theatre, Pearse Street, from 1951 to 1966 following the fire in 1951, has been located at 26 Lower Abbey Street since that time, apart from a brief hiatus in 2012.<sup>16</sup>

Other less dominant theatre companies are more nomadic in comparison, often moving while renovations take place in the home site or due to financial or regulatory issues.<sup>17</sup> In 2014, Bewley's Cafe Theatre relocated from its home on the top floor of Bewley's Cafe on Grafton Street to the nearby Powerscourt Centre on South William Street. This followed a Supreme Court ruling that Bewley's annual rent of €1.46 million would stand, overturning a ruling by the High Court in 2013. Bewley's Cafe began extensive refurbishment of its premises in 2014, necessitating the relocation of the theatre.

The smaller theatre spaces, often faced with annual economic survival, are heavily dependent on State funding and on box office receipts. The theatres' performance of survival clearly has the potential to galvanize a local spectatorship whose continued patronage of that space will contribute to the theatre's ongoing operations and afford those patrons an identity in supporting the work and continued

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<sup>15</sup> The Gate Theatre was closed from 21<sup>st</sup> October 1991 to 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1992, for structural repairs to be carried out to the theatre. A production of Friel's *The London Vertigo* (1992) was staged at Andrew's Lane Theatre, Dublin, for part of this time (from 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 15<sup>th</sup> February 1992).

<sup>16</sup> The Abbey Theatre was closed between 17<sup>th</sup> July and 15<sup>th</sup> September 2012, to allow for the removal of asbestos from the building. The Abbey's production at the time, *The Plough and the Stars*, moved to the O'Reilly Theatre in Belvedere College for the duration.

<sup>17</sup> One illustration of the contrasting fortunes of a dominant and fringe house is the Abbey Theatre and Theatre Upstairs, which was located above The Plough pub on Lower Abbey Street, opposite the Abbey. Theatre Upstairs, established in 2010, ran into licensing difficulties and in 2012 was forced to move around the corner, where it is now located above Lanigan's Bar, Eden Quay.

output of that theatre. Patronage of the theatre becomes a statement that it is in accordance with the ideological position of the theatre. The performance of monologue drama in these intimate venues therefore establishes a singular actor/spectator dynamic and cultivates niche audiences to economically support and enable the continued staging of monologue and other types of performance. Both an aesthetic and economic link may be made between smaller, less established theatre venues and monologue performance: the limited capacity of these venues enables an intimate performer/spectator relationship and the lower production costs of single person performance lead to less expensive ticket prices. Abbey and Gate Theatre audiences are mostly composed of a highly literate, metropolitan middle class. Monologue performance in marginal venues may be read as implicitly challenging the economic dominance of The Gate and the Abbey Theatres who less frequently stage monologue plays and who foster established mainstream audiences through attractive membership schemes, with relatively expensive ticket pricing structures and selective programming of classic American, European avant-garde and contemporary and classic Irish drama.

The construction of class in the monologues discussed is produced by the self-classing body on display and the classing of spectators through reception of narrative speech acts. This process of class construction varies between the fringe venues and the major houses, to which the former are economically and culturally subservient. The monologues not only construct the narrating performer but have a class-constitutory effect on his/her interlocutors. Class is performed discursively and materially: language is mediated through the bodied voice, the body of the performer, their material attire and the physical space of the theatre. What is of specific interest in this chapter is how the performance of class is mediated between the performer, the class of the theatre building and the spectators who patronise that space. Monologue drama sets up an exclusive contract with spectators in theatre-making, through the production of narrative via the imagination, which is culturally determined. The imaginative act of theatre-making is always framed by a predetermined classed subjectivity, which is usually middle class

but which may be more diverse with some fringe venues. However, the effect is that performed narratives are heard, mediated and produced through a dominant middle-class urban experience. The outcome is a spectatorial class subjectivity which is either reaffirmed or challenged in its class status. Performances in the smaller venues may affirm audience values based on shared economic position whereas similar performances in the dominant houses may be at odds with the economic make-up of those audiences.

The production of meaning in smaller theatre venues is usually mediated through the primary or alternative function of those buildings – most commonly pubs, but also a hotel (Theatre Upstairs), a medieval church (The Crypt),<sup>18</sup> a socialist bookshop (the New Theatre) and a cafe (Bewley's Cafe Theatre). The functionality of the theatre building in which monologues are performed is a key constituent of the performance's aesthetic and indivisible from the play's reception. This contrasts with the purpose-built Abbey Theatre and major Dublin receiving houses (the Gaiety and Olympia Theatres). The Gate Theatre, where the supper rooms of the Rotunda Hospital were located, was designed by Michael Scott. Although not being a custom-built theatre, the Gate Development Project in 2003 addressed its shortage of space.<sup>19</sup> The Gate Theatre received a grant of €2.2 million from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands for the project and raised an additional figure of €1.63 million. The project may be viewed as a demonstration of the economic clout of a major theatre and how it draws upon its prestige within the peripformative economy to consolidate its dominant

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<sup>18</sup> The Crypt Arts Centre closed on October 11<sup>th</sup> 2003 to become a media centre in advance of Ireland's hosting of the EU Presidency during the first half of 2004. Due to funding cuts, it did not reopen as a theatre in 2004.

<sup>19</sup> The Gate Development Project was initiated in response to the theatre's shortage of space: "The Gate Theatre is located in a beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> century building. Not being a custom built theatre, however, this creates very great practical difficulties. There is no dedicated storage space for props or costumes; no rehearsal space; a very cramped box office; almost no office space; a workshop that is smaller than the size of a suburban garage; and a get-in facility that involves sets being built in small sections, manually lifted up a narrow staircase, through a narrow doorway and reassembled on stage." (Scott Tallon Walker, Architects. "Gate Development Project". *Two Plays After by Brian Friel (Play Programme)*. Dublin: Gate Theatre, 2002).

position relative to smaller theatres who have not survived economic difficulties. For McKinnie, this may represent a convergence of theatrical and economic valuations of urban space. Although non-purpose-built theatres may have architectural features that add to the semiotic complexity of the play's reception, such as spectators' descent into the Crypt, Dublin Castle, to view the performance, the auditoria and performance spaces of the dominant houses do not bear the same spatial ambiguity. It is this architectural intentionality that adds to their status as theatres who utter the explicit performatives – canonical plays performed in major houses designed or adapted specifically for that purpose.

The periperformative in the Dublin theatre scene would figure the Abbey and Gate as dominant performatives within a materially performative spatial economy, interacting with other theatres of medium-sized and small capacity in the “neighborhood”. The venues in which the plays are performed have their own histories and ideologies relative to other theatres in the city. Branko Kolarevic and Ali M. Malkawi describe how theatres, houses and museums are not passive structures awaiting human entry and animation but possessing something active and indeed performative:

Compared to film, architecture seems positively motionless, about as animated as a stop sign. The house, theater and museum just sit where they have been planted, patiently awaiting a visitor's arrival and experience, as if they could only glow with life when ignited by interests you and I bring into them when we walk through their front doors. But is the building only what we make of it? One suspects there must be something more to it because if it were only the consequence of an inhabitant's intentions, it would be impossible to understand why we often feel the need to habituate ourselves to buildings, and also why they can alternately depress and delight us.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Branko Kolarevic and Ali M. Malkawi, eds., *Performative Architecture: Beyond Instrumentality* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

The smaller theatre spaces are not static receptacles for monologue performance but are implicated very much in the play's production and reception. My intention in this chapter is to examine a selection of monologue productions which have been performed in these smaller spaces and, following the success of these plays, to critique monologue plays performed in the Abbey and Gate Theatres and how they interact with a larger performance space. In doing this, I hope to analyse the spatial trajectory of the monologue play from fringe venue into the major auditoria of the Gate and Abbey.

The texts I have selected to drive my argument in this chapter are by male authors. As I have sought to demonstrate in my analysis, a range of masculinities may be articulated through the performance of class, as indeed they are through other identity categories, such as nationality, ethnicity and sexuality. My focus on male playwrights has been guided in part by a linkage of masculinity with economic class. Historically and culturally, men in Ireland have occupied a dominant presence in the workplace, underpinned by a discriminatory Constitution which prescribes the domestic sphere as the appropriate place for women, although women's participation in the workplace in Ireland has been increasing significantly over the last three decades. Consequently, a crisis in economic class is often closely bound up with a crisis in masculinity, in particular when it constitutes a threat to a man's ability to economically support his family or himself, leading to an erosion of his sense of masculine pride, self-sufficiency and his role of provider to others. This is not of course to exclude women and the multiple femininities that are produced through the performance of economic and social class, which I have discussed with regard to some plays in Chapter Three.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> One notable production dealing with this topic is a female-authored and performed monologue play that illustrates a woman's negative experience of living in the capital on a low income and its attendant social and economic challenges. Amy Conroy's *Eternal Rising of the Sun* (2011) features Gina Devine, a convenience store worker, who struggles to raise her daughter Anna and escape the destructive influence of her father and her partner Paddy. Her decision to attend dance classes after work, resisted by Paddy, is an attempt to assert identity and self-esteem. Gina's performance of class and the limited economic options open to her (e.g. working full-time with no childcare support) underscores the class privileges of middle class female spectators who view her.

Analyses of class in the Irish dramatic canon most frequently come in the form of dramatisations of the Anglo-Irish family ensconced uneasily in the Big House and most notably explored by Lennox Robinson in *The Big House* (1926), Yeats in *Purgatory* (1938) and deconstructed ironically by Friel in *Aristocrats* (1979). More contemporary and recent stagings of class are evident in the light comedies of Bernard Farrell, which frequently exploit Dublin suburban middle-class anxieties and one-upmanship for comic effect. Declan Hughes' *Shiver* (2003) chronicles the devastating breakdown of two middle-class Dublin families following the collapse of the dotcom boom. However, monologic dramatic performances of class during the Celtic Tiger period were limited. Irish television viewers' exposure to these performances in recent decades would more likely come from across the Irish Sea than in Ireland, whose republican ideals professed a classless society and which perhaps resulted in a greater fascination, on the part of playwrights and theatre-makers, with national rather than class identity.

Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads*, two series of six monologues, were broadcast on BBC One from 19<sup>th</sup> April to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1988 and from 6<sup>th</sup> October to 11<sup>th</sup> November 1998. The monologues, around 30 to 40 minutes in length, are mostly set in a fictional Leeds, and feature men and women, generally middle-aged and older, speaking about social and personal issues such as marital relationships, caring for relatives, mental health, social isolation, community relations and past criminal behaviour.<sup>22</sup> Bennett's monologues reached significant audiences in the U.K., Ireland and the United States. Although relatively mild entertainments and windows into British northern lower middle-class life, his monologues present compelling disjunctions between the televised face and narrated content. In the monologue *A Chip in the Sugar* (1988) performed by Bennett, he repeats the phrase "I didn't say anything"<sup>23</sup> when either his mother or her boyfriend says something he finds offensive; the close-up of his face acts as a register of

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<sup>22</sup> The monologues were adapted to the stage in a West End theatre production in 1992 also entitled *Talking Heads*, starring Patricia Routledge and Alan Bennett. Some of the monologues were later staged in Los Angeles and Off-Broadway and aired on the American PBS Network and on BBC Radio.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Bennett, *A Chip in the Sugar*. BBC One, 19 Apr. 1988.

exactly what he is “saying.” The fixed camera position and banal indoor settings mean that the frame is animated solely by the speaking face and upper body in a medium more given over to interactive exchange and bodily movement. In terms of monologue dramatic performance, Bennett’s monologue works are culturally dominant and have served to shape reception of monologue theatrical performance by subsequent authors. The Irish audience for these monologues may have comfortably categorised class as both a colonially imposed hierarchy and a current British cultural import.

As I have outlined, the urban class economy of Dublin and its theatrical structures will form the site of criticism in this chapter. A suitable lead-in to this analysis is a consideration of a play that is at a remove in terms of both class and geography. Michael West’s *Foley* (2000)<sup>24</sup> is a single-character monologue which gives the perspective of George Foley, the sole surviving descendant of a Tipperary Anglo-Irish family whose lineage stretches back three hundred years. Foley reflects with cynicism upon his privileged upbringing and his rebellion against his Church of Ireland identity. He remarks that “I was not named for three months. Which does not inspire you with a sense of welcome.”<sup>25</sup> When he is named, it continues a rigid naming pattern: “George. That was my father’s name. My name. I hated it. Still do. *George*. One long-drawn-out-vowel sent out to punish the dragon . . . Four George Foleys in a row. Four.”<sup>26</sup> His marriage to a Catholic nurse from Tipperary has ended in divorce and failed to produce a child that would continue the Foley’s heritage. Isolated in the Castleown estate, monologue is an apt mode of expression for Foley who is literally without interlocutor.

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<sup>24</sup> *Foley* was first performed at the Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2000, produced by Corn Exchange in association with Belltable. Andrew Bennett played Foley, directed by Annie Ryan. It was subsequently performed at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh in August 2001 as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

<sup>25</sup> Michael West, *Foley* (London, Methuen, 2001), 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Idem*, 23.



*Foley* is an exceptional monologue play in that it represents an Anglo-Irish class of privilege and dominance in an era within Irish theatre when representations of male monologic subjects were almost exclusively working class. And although the play is a lamentation of the termination of an ancient family lineage, Foley's erudite ramblings may be read as seeking to connect with middle class spectators to ameliorate his sense of isolation. The interlocutory circuit that Foley establishes is harmonious and the desired outcome is an affirmation of class on both sides of the performance space. One could view Foley as the final bastion of an anomalous ruling class, consigned to self-talk as there are no descendants with whom to converse. And accompanying the demise of Foley would be a figurative disappearance in Ireland of a clearly stratified class structure, demarcated by land holdings and the visually dominant Big House. But Richard Breen and Christopher T Whelan comment, writing in 1996 that "the popular impression is that rigid social class demarcation was left behind with the ending of landlordism and the demise of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. It is true that class boundaries in Ireland are less ritualized, or less marked by cultural difference, than in some other countries" but in spite of this "class barriers in Ireland are substantially more rigid than in other countries."<sup>27</sup> Comparing the lower levels of career mobility in Ireland to those of England, the authors note the "basic differences in the occupational structures of the two countries" and in particular "the greater proportion of skilled manual workers in England" with other possible explanations being that "the lower levels of career mobility in Ireland include the small size of Irish private sector organizations, the continuing significance of family ownership, and the rigid nature of the Irish educational system which provides little in the way of second chance opportunities." Finally, and perhaps most pertinent to McPherson's and O'Rowe's subjects, they state that it "seems entirely possible that high levels of unemployment in Ireland and associated qualification inflation may well have contributed to a restriction in career mobility opportunities, particularly for those from working-class

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Breen and Christopher T Whelan, *Social Mobility and Social Class in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1996), 1.

backgrounds.”<sup>28</sup> The romantic representation of Foley and the death of a singular Anglo-Irish way of life and cultural outlook has not unproblematically unshackled the country from a rigid class hierarchy; it has in fact led to a more insidious form of a social order in which the aforementioned factors maintain firmly intact a classed society, sustained by an illusion that the all too visible English class system has left Irish shores for good. At the end of his ramblings, Foley reflects that “I am the first of my line, the last of my line, the end of the line, it all ends with me. I have seen my name, his name, on our grave.”<sup>29</sup> The end of the Foley genealogy, symbolic of an old Anglo-Irish order, may be seen to give way to the new, urban Celtic Tiger protagonists of McPherson and O’Rowe.

Foley rues his inescapable Protestant Ascendancy heritage which is figured in the shape of the Big House. Recalling, or imagining, riding a dapple-grey horse through the countryside until a big house in a field comes into view and believing the house to be owned “by some angry farmer or someone as mundane,”<sup>30</sup> he realises that this may be his own house: “Perhaps it was my house. Perhaps it was my house I cursed, my life in that valley. Perhaps I was going home and that was the cause for my fury, that I had made it . . . home. And I did not recognize it.”<sup>31</sup> Foley, now embodying and marking the end of an Anglo-Irish dynasty, celebrates the simplicity and freedom of his grey horse, unencumbered by assigned upper class obligations. One of Foley’s rambles carries him from the urban to the rural, from a street to a country road: “the buildings began to decay, crumble and dissolve into trees and shrubs and ditches. Fields grew out of the ground and absorbed the asphalt. Lights grew dimmer and less frequent and transformed into birds, branches, clouds . . .”<sup>32</sup> I now want to move in the opposite direction, away from

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<sup>28</sup> *Idem*, 81.

<sup>29</sup> Michael West, *Foley* (London, Methuen, 2001), 40.

<sup>30</sup> *Idem*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> *Idem*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem*, 38.

narratives of the dying Anglo-Irish family on expansive estates and into the confined social and theatrical spaces of Dublin; from the Big House to the small houses of Dublin's theatre landscape.

***"Imagining Mischief"*<sup>33</sup>: *McPherson at the City Arts Centre and the Crypt***

On 9<sup>th</sup> August 1994, the illustrious Gate Theatre staged the premiere of Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney*, which marked Friel's return to a form which had provoked much critical debate with his 1979 play *Faith Healer*. Three weeks later, across the River Liffey, in the City Arts Centre on Moss Street, another monologue play received its first professional production: Conor McPherson's *Rum and Vodka*.<sup>34</sup> Friel's play received mixed reviews and familiar debates regarding the validity of the monologue form were rehearsed. McPherson's play, on the other hand, established a new direction for monologue drama. The contrast in the plays' aesthetic qualities was amplified by their respective sites of performance. The Gate Theatre, despite some disruption from the refurbishment of its lobby in the early 1990s, had remained in its permanent home since 1961. The vagrant City Arts Centre had moved location several times although enjoyed the support of U2, who provided a rehearsal space in the basement at Moss Street for emerging bands. The two productions thus contrasted starkly in respect of their different material environments and audiences: the former established and culturally dominant, the latter nascent, subversive and edgy. The City Arts Centre had witnessed a McPherson monologue earlier that year: *The Light of Jesus* (subsequently titled *The Good Thief*) had received its premiere on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1994, produced by Fly by Night Theatre Company, although, according to the playwright, it cost the company

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<sup>33</sup> Gerald C. Wood, *Conor McPherson: Imagining Mischief* (Dublin: The Liffey Press), 2010.

<sup>34</sup> The first professional production of *Rum and Vodka* took place at the City Arts Centre, Moss Street, Dublin 2 on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1994. It was performed by Jason Byrne and directed by Colin O'Connor. *Rum and Vodka* was first staged in University College Dublin on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1992, performed by Stephen Walshe and directed by Conor McPherson.

“a fortune because nobody came.”<sup>35</sup> It was performed by Kevin Hely and directed by the author with Paul Kinsella doing the slide photography.<sup>36</sup>

The City Arts Centre, originally named the Grapevine Arts Centre, was founded in 1973 and occupied a number of premises in Dublin, beginning at Mary Street, followed by North Great Georges St, North Frederick Street, Moss Street and finally Bachelor’s Walk, ultimately winding up operations in 2014. The Grapevine/City Arts Centre was part of a community arts movement in Ireland with an ideology and practice of making arts accessible to as broad a range of patrons as possible. Sandy Fitzgerald says that “during the 1970s, pockets of arts practice began to emerge around Ireland that drew more on local circumstance than (sic) on any notion of formal art history or tradition. And these local groups were informed by the *realpolitik* of the community in question, combined with new techniques in creative participation and driven by idealism.” These groups included “Neighbourhood Open Workshops in Belfast, Waterford Arts for All, and Grapevine and Moving Theatre in Dublin, all operating by the end of the 1970s. By the early 1980s the number of such groups had grown from a handful to something more substantial and they began to gravitate towards the ideas of community arts.”<sup>37</sup> The community arts movement proliferated largely as a reaction to prevailing arts policy and ideology, which was viewed as supporting theatremaking by a middle-class university-educated coterie for middle and upper class audiences.

The political and social contexts of the McPherson productions resonate with the status of the speaking subjects. Both *Rum and Vodka* and *The Good Thief* are single character monologues delivering

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<sup>35</sup> Conor McPherson, *The Weir and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999), 291.

<sup>36</sup> It was subsequently performed as *The Good Thief* as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1994 (a Loopline production) at the Furnace, Price’s Lane, Dublin 2. It was designed by Anne Layde with slide photography by Robbie Ryan. McPherson directed his uncle Garret Keogh.

<sup>37</sup> Sandy Fitzgerald, “The beginning of community arts and the Irish Republic” in *An Outburst of Frankness*, Sandy Fitzgerald, ed. (Dublin: New Island, 2004), 70 – 71.

punchy economic narratives about men embarking on odysseys; one a hard-drinking civil servant at a dead end, the other a career criminal attempting to escape a ruthless boss.<sup>38</sup> The speaker in *Rum and Vodka* is unnamed although he identifies himself as Michael to Myfanwy, a student with whom he has a brief sexual relationship. In a key scene, Michael's manager Eamon Meaney shouts at him to complete a task. Reaching breaking point, Michael protests against his low paid civil service job: "I went red from my shoulders to my scalp and . . . I picked up my terminal, and I swung it out the window. It sailed down two flights and right through the windscreen, and I didn't mean this, of Eamon Meaney's car."<sup>39</sup>

After effectively terminating his own career in the civil service, Michael embarks on a drinking binge with his friends Declan and Phil. When they attend a late night gig at the Olympia Theatre, Michael claims that the audience is made up of "civil servanty types. Nurses and guards";<sup>40</sup> and "housewives and queers."<sup>41</sup> Having been a civil servant, this economic class is now othered and dismissed, as are the social classes of "housewives and queers." The following day, he tells Myfanwy's friend Jane "a joke about niggers"<sup>42</sup> and is rebuffed. Self-ejected from a lower-middle class economic identity of a clerical officer in the civil service, Michael is now positioned at odds with that class and alienated from its norms. What emerges in tandem with this is a disenfranchised subject who normatively utters speech acts of hate, which underline the monologist's own sense of low self-esteem. If Michael is represented as a figure of protest, his monologue is laced with a troubling undercurrent of racism and homophobia, attitudes and policy positions historically more attributable to authoritarian,

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<sup>38</sup> McPherson's *The Good Thief* was not the first Irish monologue play to feature a criminal. Declan Burke-Kennedy's *Hoods* (1976), for example, features two hitmen sitting in the back of a car, discussing the consequences of having just shot a man. Johnny Murphy, a Focus Theatre stalwart, performed both roles directed by Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy. *Hoods* prefigured monologues of the 1990s, which delivered accounts of male violence.

<sup>39</sup> Conor McPherson, *The Weir and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999), 252.

<sup>40</sup> *Idem*, 265.

<sup>41</sup> *Idem*, 265.

<sup>42</sup> *Idem*, 282.

oppressive governments and their social regimes - which consequently themselves attract protest movements.

There is sensitivity in the narratives to the class geography of the city. After abandoning his wife and children in a supermarket because he has inadequate funds to pay for the groceries, Michael ventures to The Flowing Tide pub on Abbey Street for a pint and a short and subsequently “crossed over by the Abbey down towards the quays.”<sup>43</sup> The Flowing Tide is a famous pub for Abbey Theatre actors and the reference to the Abbey Theatre itself may be understood as both Jason Byrne’s own aspirations as an actor and McPherson’s as a playwright and director; or a periperformative utterance (the City Arts Centre) acknowledging the prestige and dominance of an explicit performative (the Abbey Theatre).

Gerry Colgan notes that “the solo performance by Jason Byrne, directed by Colin O’Connor, comes across as a controlled reading. There is no attempt at variety in his acting; he stands virtually motionless, and delivers his lines in a good, natural voice without varying his facial expression.”<sup>44</sup> Monologue plays are generally directed with a view to adding variety to the spectacle of the lone speaking body through onstage movement, use of props and changes in standing and seating posture. The static and monotonous style of Byrne’s delivery places a heavy premium on the spoken word above spectacle, perhaps conveying a sense of class immobility despite his audacious anti-establishment narrative. Michael ultimately returns to his home and his family, having been humiliated by Myfanwy. Colgan concludes his review prophetically by observing that “beginnings are always interesting.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Idem*, 260.

<sup>44</sup> Gerry Colgan, “Too much of a thin thing”. Rev. of “Rum and Vodka” by Conor McPherson. *Irish Times* 31 Aug. 1994.

<sup>45</sup> *Idem*.

The anonymous man in *The Good Thief* (1994) starkly claims that “I hate people with skills who can do stuff.”<sup>46</sup> Working to a criminal boss by the name of Joe Murray, he was formerly employed in the Irish Defence Forces and like Michael, finds himself outside the legitimate social order.

Let’s begin with an incident. I was sitting in Joe Murray’s bar one night, as I usually did. I was talking to this couple I liked and having a few beers. I was working for Joe Murray at this time as a paid thug. I scared people for him. Set fire to places. Shot people. As warnings. My girlfriend Greta had just left me but I still saw her most days because she had left me for Joe Murray. Power attracts women. Also, I was beating her up and I knew it was wrong but I’m not the issue here, so let’s leave it.<sup>47</sup>

Tasked with intimidating Mr Mitchell, a debtor of his boss, he arrives at Mitchell’s house to find two men waiting for him. Murray had been extorting one-and-a-half thousand pounds from Mr Mitchell on a monthly basis on threat of destroying his warehouses “but with the recession Mitchell was asking for some leeway.”<sup>48</sup> After a shoot-out resulting in the death of one of the men and the injury of the other, the narrator flees the scene with his target’s wife Anna Mitchell and her daughter Niamh. Escaping to County Sligo, he is eventually found by his boss, beaten up and framed for several murders. If *Rum and Vodka* is an urban odyssey in the capital, *The Good Thief* draws on the conventions of the road movie. However, the style of the monologue is more elaborate than *Rum and Vodka*, which is composed of single statements throughout. Derek West observes that “McPherson allows his bully-boy to hold the stage alone for nearly two hours” and that Kevin Hely’s acting is “at once casual, conversational and icily gripping, as the surreal horror unfolds.” He adds that “on improvised screens,

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<sup>46</sup> Conor McPherson, *The Weir and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999), 200.

<sup>47</sup> *Idem*, 200.

<sup>48</sup> *Idem*, 204.

the storytelling is illustrated by image after image. The texture of the events (floors, door handles, skies) is brilliantly evoked. The photographs are literal, clinical, pointedly humorous on occasion.”<sup>49</sup> The world-making discursive power of theatrical language is juxtaposed with images of material objects, signalling McPherson’s evolving use of the monologue form.

If Michael symbolically returns home, there is no such compromise for Joe Murray’s man, who is eventually incarcerated. But the journey he takes resonates with an anti-authority narrative that may fit with the politics of the City Arts Centre. His post in the army is figuratively rejected in favour of criminal activity and his professed hatred of people with skills echoes Michael’s disdain for pretentious middle class students. The target of the vitriol for both is a skilled and educated, socially mobile middle class who are economically dominant. *The Good Thief* may therefore constitute spectators as virtual conspirators in acts of anti-authority criminality.

McPherson’s next monologue play, *This Lime Tree Bower*, was staged in another basement space: the Crypt Arts Centre, Dublin Castle.<sup>50</sup> The Crypt is situated beneath the Chapel Royal at Dublin Castle, its location subordinate to the prestigious and visible ground level of the Chapel.<sup>51</sup> Judith Hill comments that “in 1970 John Cornforth, visiting long after it had lost its viceregal role, was willing to

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<sup>49</sup> Derek West, “The Light of Jesus: City Arts Centre”. Rev. of “The Light of Jesus” by Conor McPherson. *Irish Times* 26 Apr. 1994.

<sup>50</sup> *This Lime Tree Bower* premiered at the Crypt Arts Centre, Dublin Castle, on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1995, in an Íomhá Ildánach/Fly By Night co-production. Ian Cregg, Niall Shanahan and Conor Mullen performed the play, directed by Conor McPherson and produced by Philip Gray.

Fly By Night Theatre Company staged a second monologue play at the Crypt in 1997. Colin O’Connor’s *All Those Trammelling Dreams* featured Michael McElhatton as an unnamed narrator, exploring the themes of homosexual love, transvestism, transsexualism and revenge. The production was also directed by O’Connor, who along with McPherson, wrote most of Fly By Night’s plays.

<sup>51</sup> The Latin etymology of the word “crypt” supports notions of the underground and invisible. “Crypt” developed as an alternative form of the Latin “vault” as it was carried over into Late Latin and came to refer to the ritual rooms found under church buildings. “Crypta”, however, is also the female form of the word “crypto”, meaning “hidden”.



engage with the spirit in which it had been built, remarking that inside there was still the ‘feeling of a court building with a sense of theatre.’<sup>52</sup> If the ground floor of the chapel retained a dominant theatrical sense, the Crypt Arts Centre may have produced an alternative, subversive feeling of theatricality, situated as it is below a space often reserved for official State functions. Depending on the seating configuration, the Crypt could seat between 60 and 90 spectators, who would be in reasonably close proximity to actors Niall Shanahan (Frank), Ian Cregg (Joe) and Conor Mullen (Ray). One could argue that the subterranean, intimate space of the Crypt added to an atmosphere and reception of dramaturgical rebellion and innovation. The lifetime of the venue as an arts centre, however, was limited. Due to a loss of its Arts Council and Community Employment Scheme funding, the Crypt Arts Centre did not operate as a theatre venue beyond October 11<sup>th</sup> 2003, functioning instead as a media centre during Ireland’s EU Presidency in 2004.<sup>53</sup>

In a formal break from his earlier single-character monologues, McPherson adds complexity and depth to his monologue offering with the co-presence of three speakers onstage, following Friel’s template of *Molly Sweeney*, which had been staged at the Gate Theatre the previous year. Joe, Frank and Ray (17, twenties and early thirties respectively) deliver alternating monologues centring on a family-run chip shop in a north Dublin seaside town. Joe’s and Frank’s father is struggling financially and owes money to a local bookmaker and county councillor, Simon McCurdie. Frank commits an armed robbery of the bookmakers, stealing thirty thousand pounds. He laments his descent into crime and departure from the working class respectability of his family but claims that his father “had done everything by the rules in his life and look what happened. He was left on his own and shagged by

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<sup>52</sup> Judith Hill, “The building of the Chapel Royal, 1807-14” in *The Chapel Royal, Dublin Castle: An Architectural History*, Myles Campbell and William Derham, eds. (Dublin: Office of Public Works, 2015), 39.

<sup>53</sup> The Crypt Arts Centre’s annual funding loss for 2004 was between €150,000 and €200,000, according to former director of the Arts Centre, John O’Brien. He added that “Mary Harney has no interest in CE (Community Employment) schemes which support and build viable arts organisations and provide valuable training and life experience for people.” (Deirdre Falvey, “What next for the Crypt?”, *Irish Times* 26 Jul. 2003).

bastards like McCurdie. But he was right. That was the thing. Well I didn't want to be right anymore. That's a load of meaningless toss."<sup>54</sup> The turning away from gainful employment is another illustration of male crisis in a socio-economic order and disavowal of ethics once prized.

In both monologues, class is constructed through occupation of classed spaces, which are either consistent or discordant with the class of the narrator. Michael lives on a housing estate in Raheny with his wife and two daughters but believes the south side is "nicer"<sup>55</sup> and spends time drinking in Temple Bar and the surrounding district. The front door of Myfanwy's large house in Clontarf "was a huge slab of oak".<sup>56</sup> The morning after going home with Myfanwy, Michael examines the family's photographs, videos and CDs in the living room. Auditors hear the names of famous Dublin street names (Dame Street, Suffolk Street, Grafton Street), which materially orientate Michael in terms of his class and his northside origins. The narrator in *The Good Thief*, accompanied by his captives Anna and Niamh and his friend Jeff, turn through "a pair of huge gates" and drive up "a tree-lined avenue. And in a wide hollow was a house as big as the GPO. . . We went in through high narrow doors. We were in a tiled hallway."<sup>57</sup> The economic class of characters is therefore established through entry into material domains, which may be streets, houses or other sites denoting class, such as a chip-shop, a bookmakers or a university lecture theatre – in this way, places perform their own class and interact with the class of those persons that occupy them.

Fintan Walsh's *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (2010) seeks to explore the performance of masculinities in crisis across a wide range of performative categories. Walsh contends that "to think of masculinity as an embodied, social, and political domain in which crisis might

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<sup>54</sup> Conor McPherson, *The Weir and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999), 188.

<sup>55</sup> *Idem*, 260.

<sup>56</sup> *Idem*, 271.

<sup>57</sup> *Idem*, 224.

be performed is to conceive of gender and sexuality as a performative arena of sorts, where ostensible disorder does not simply signal the radical dissolution of form but rather its reorganisation.”<sup>58</sup> The narrator of *The Good Thief*, Michael in *Rum and Vodka* and the monologists in *This Lime Tree Bower* all perform their own crises in masculinity, which have been precipitated by a change in economic class. The crisis provides an opportunity to resignify class through the agency of hardened masculinities, as evidenced in the dangerous behaviour of Frank in robbing the bookies and in the unnamed criminal’s facing off hoodlums and enduring torture.

If a crisis in economic class is the catalyst that drives the performances, the resultant emotional state is shame at the collapse in their economic status and resultant loss of place in the social order. Sedgwick states that “shame floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication. Indeed, like a stigma, shame is itself a form of communication. Blazons of shame, the “fallen face” with eyes down and head averted – and, to a lesser extent, the blush – are semaphores of trouble and at the same time of a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge.”<sup>59</sup> The speaker in *The Good Thief* says “I sometimes wonder about the type of person I am, but not for long. I’m no good.”<sup>60</sup> Ray O’Sullivan confesses that “it was a good thing our souls don’t have smells. Because mine would stink. But at the same time I was proud. Because I was getting away with it.”<sup>61</sup> Michael is humiliated by his boss in the office, before he throws his computer out of the window. Sedgwick adds that “the conventional way of distinguishing shame from guilt is that

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<sup>58</sup> Fintan Walsh, *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010) 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 36.

<sup>60</sup> Conor McPherson, *The Weir and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999), 238.

<sup>61</sup> *Idem*, 159.

shame attaches to and sharpens the sense of what one is, whereas guilt attaches to what one does.”<sup>62</sup>

But the shame of McPherson’s protagonists is masked by a defiant, reckless and anti-social behaviour.

Sedgwick notes that:

Austin’s rather bland invocation of “the proper context” . . . has opened, under pressure of recent theory, onto a populous and contested scene in which the role of silent or implied witnesses, for example, or the quality and structuration of the bonds that unite auditors or link them to speakers, bears as much explanatory weight as do the particular speech acts of supposed individual speech agents.<sup>63</sup>

For Sedgwick, the City Arts Centre and Crypt spectators here are conferred with the same performative power as the speaking subjects. The emotions of guilt, shame and self-denial performed on stage are circulated and taken up by spectators. The interlocutory circuits that are established are forged through an anti-establishment stance in which economic precarity gives way to acts of violence and recklessness. Within the intimate auditoria of the City Arts Centre and the Crypt, spectators may view the speakers with a high degree of proximity. The proximal actor/spectator relationship generates an intimacy with the speaking body, forging an intense theatrical relationship with auditors. The relatively small performance space figures the actor’s body as proportionately large and domineering.

McPherson’s monologue drama illustrates masculinities that are disempowered, rather than enjoying a patriarchal hegemony. The seeking of a verbal and visual dominance offered by male monologue performance is a symptom of disempowerment and not an affirmation of a prior extant

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<sup>62</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 37.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7.

patriarchal hegemony. The theatre functions as a refuge for embattled masculinities and underscores very much a state of male defeat. Monologue performance is the final opportunity to assert masculine control. It reveals a need to display linguistic dominance when it has failed to maintain this control in real-world discursive exchange. Instead, male actors are reduced to delivering monologues of judgemental self-absorption in an artificial discursive environment that does not permit interjection. The theatre spaces and the associated artistic ideologies that accommodate these monologues echo the desperate economic circumstances of the narrators. The outcome is an actor-audience interchange based on shared attitudes of disaffection at societal and theatrical hierarchies but alleviated for spectators by the affirming spectacle of monologists subverting the established social and economic order.

***“Savage Quarter”<sup>64</sup>: O’Rowe at Henry Place***

Similar to McPherson, Mark O’Rowe has come to be associated by critics and the theatre-going public with the monologue form - his greatest success to date has been *Howie the Rookie* (1999). O’Rowe has indelibly marked the monologue form with a singular theatrical vision, engendering violent underworlds in which harsh urban contexts coalesce with mythic and fantastic elements, “producing narratives of despair and depravity occasionally uplifted through moments of redemption.”<sup>65</sup>

Project at the Mint was the venue for O’Rowe’s *Anna’s Ankle*<sup>66</sup>, O’Rowe’s only single-character monologue play. The Project Arts Centre had temporarily relocated to The Mint, located at No. 6, Henry

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<sup>64</sup> Mark O’Rowe, *Plays: One* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), 353.

<sup>65</sup> Tim Barrett in “Performativity and Class in Mark O’Rowe’s Monologue Drama”, *Sullied Magnificence: The Theatre of Mark O’Rowe*, Sara Keating and Emma Creedon, eds., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 63.

I have examined class in O’Rowe’s four monologue plays in terms of Austinian and Butlerian performativity, in the above chapter.

<sup>66</sup> *Anna’s Ankle* was first performed on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1997 as part of Bedrock Theatre Company’s *Electroshock: A Theatre of Cruelty Season*. It was performed by Patrick Leech and directed by John O’Brien.

Place, Dublin 1 in early 1997, the lease of which expired in November 1999.<sup>67</sup> The temporary venue was located above a snooker club and a fortune-teller, two forms of non-theatrical performance which provided a performative background for *Anna's Ankle*. Unlike purpose-built theatres, the performance environment at Henry Place was more complex, offering different modes of entertainment. Spectators attending the production of *Anna's Ankle* may have had some consciousness of these other performance modes which possibly framed their reception of O'Rowe's monologue, in particular the fortune-teller, whose narration of the future is similar to the future tense adopted by the narrator of *Anna's Ankle*, who relates how the remainder of the film of *Anna's Ankle* will play out. The complexity of the performance space marks it as periperformative in its relationship to the established theatres of the city, the explicit performatives. With seating capacity for 120 patrons, the auditorium provided the conditions which would allow for a close spectator/actor relationship.

As *Anna's Ankle* has not been published, I will accordingly provide a brief synopsis. The play features an unnamed snuff video director who, during a break from filming a video, narrates a monologue describing his relationship with Anna, a young painter from Ennis who has travelled to Dublin to find work. He offers her employment as an actor in his video and begins a relationship with her. He films Anna and Liam, the narrator's creative partner, in a friend's house. Anna becomes restless waiting for the equipment to be set up and the director assaults her twice to impose his control over her. While Liam detains Anna in his "gaff", the director smokes cigarettes, goes over the script and tells the audience how the film will end: Liam will bring her downstairs, tie her to a table, make love to her and then give her an enema. He will then inject her with amylbarbitone followed by cocaine. Liam will then amputate both of Anna's ankles, bandage her legs, inject haemostat into her wounds and cauterise them

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<sup>67</sup> It would later be known as The Theatre Space at Henry Space. Colin O'Connor's *The Last Days of God* was first performed in this space on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2000. The single character monologue was a Fly By Night production, directed by O'Connor. Valerie Spelman played the devil, who narrates the tale of the final day of a Dublin man with drug addiction problems.

with a solder blade. He will then untie her, inject her with more drugs, and threaten her at gunpoint to stand – if she succeeds in standing, the narrator will secure his desired shot. Liam will kill her whether she stands or not and the narrator will keep the film for his own personal viewing.

*Anna's Ankle*, written by a working class playwright, may be read as a parody of liberal middle class avant-garde pretensions. Written in 1997, it draws from the prevalent black comedy of Tarantino, as well as Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. It also resonates strongly with the in-yer-face movement that originated in the UK in the 1990s. *Anna's Ankle* could be described as a monologue play framing the narrative of a snuff video, also entitled *Anna's Ankle*. The two are conflated from the outset when the stage directions indicate that the narrator "shows us the front page – it says 'Anna's Ankle'"<sup>68</sup> before the narrator utters "Anna's Ankle" and proceeds with his monologue. In saying these words, he is bringing into being both the monologue play and the half-filmed snuff video to which it refers. The narrator's techniques as snuff video director and monologist appear to be indistinguishable. Throughout the monologue, he envisions the subject of his planned video, Anna, and in particular fetishising her ankles:

Her ankles, man, sitting on that step. See, that's all I could see as I was approaching her, walking up the street. Dark tanned ankles and white canvas shoes. The contrast, you know? Canvas and skin. Light and dark. Rough and smooth. Superb. I'm thinking to myself, she'll wear those shoes in the film, or something white anyway. The contrast will fuel the fetish.<sup>69</sup>

Mirroring the narrator's imaginings is the audience's own necessary imaginings of the narrated action. And as the narrator is monopolising the narrative, spectators must participate imaginatively on his narratorial terms in order to follow the narrative. They must thus inevitably become complicit in the fetishisation of Anna's ankles, regardless of their ethical position, as to disengage will render them

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<sup>68</sup> Mark O'Rowe, *Anna's Ankle* (Unpublished script, 1995), 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Idem*, 2.

unable to comprehend the action. If the narrator is “always imagining, creating shots”,<sup>70</sup> the spectators are creating reciprocal shots, and thereby being drawn in to his image-making venture:

Right. I don't know whether to keep her canvas shoes on or not here, but anyway, then he cuts her feet off just below the ankle. We shoot this bit lingeringly, once again concentrating on the ankles themselves. The blood flow over them. The contrast between white bone and crimson.<sup>71</sup>

There is no difference between how the anticipated, imagined violence and the past violence of the double assault and abduction is narrated. Spectators are left with the impression that the future events have already taken place. And although there is a basis for spectators to believe that the imagined violence is bound to happen, given the intent of the director and his assault and detention of Anna, there is no certainty that he will go ahead with his plan. O'Rowe's temporal strategy forces the audience to actively engage in the *production* of the monologue play and snuff video.

Unlike the majority of O'Rowe's other works, the characters in *Anna's Ankle* converse in a language that is educated, middle-class and liberal. The narrator and Anna discuss and assess her education, her artistic ambitions and what kind of paintings she paints (“good paintings or that Picasso shite?”).<sup>72</sup> After having sex, Anna complains of his “misogynistic crudity” after he describes their coupling as “me fucking you” rather than “making love”.<sup>73</sup> He details the many prescription drugs he will require for the making of the video and their supposed effects on Anna:

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<sup>70</sup> Mark O'Rowe, *Anna's Ankle* (Unpublished script, 1995), 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, 10.

<sup>72</sup> *Idem*, 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Idem*, 5.



First of all, analgesics. Diamorphine linctus, probably. Come in twenty milligramme doses, vial injections, we'll only need about two. Or else, we'll be using, if he can get it, amylbarbitone; another pre-operative pain killer, depresses the central nervous system.<sup>74</sup>

The narrator discusses his art extensively and is keen to distinguish his own contribution to the project from Liam's ("I'm about artistry, Liam's about technicals, and I think we strike a good balance in our work. We're like the partners. I write the scripts, though. I'm the idea man.")<sup>75</sup> His monopoly of language and narrative allows him to self-construct as the "idea man" whilst relegating Liam to merely a technician. At the core of this is a narcissistic desire and need for recognition as a film-maker, which is ironically accommodated not by the medium of film but by the theatrical form of monologue. The narrator is necessarily alone because no-one else can ethically work with him on his project. With no onstage interlocutors, spectators fulfil the function of collaborators. After disclosing how he intends to film the remainder of the video, he proclaims:

The standing up without feet represents her will to live, to stay alive, and that's my theme. The strength of the human spirit. The instinctual need to survive. This is film as art without having people sitting in restaurants babbling about their problems. My film cuts to the chase and makes it's (sic) point, bam!<sup>76</sup>

Writing in the *Evening Herald*, Mary Carr describes the play as "degenerate" and notes that it "takes a literal interpretation of the concept of cruelty and it's one of the most offensive pieces of work ever to be seen on the stage. It quickly becomes apparent in this play that the protagonist is a psychotic

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<sup>74</sup> Mark O'Rowe, *Anna's Ankle* (Unpublished script, 1995), 9.

<sup>75</sup> *Idem*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> *Idem*, 11.

director of a snuff movie. The absence of a voice or action to counteract this obscenity makes Anna's Ankle a gratuitous and objectionable play. It certainly shocks, but that's no justification."<sup>77</sup> With *Anna's Ankle*, which has not been published to date nor received a second production, O'Rowe made a subversive statement of intent, instituting a theatre that sought to represent worlds and individuals designed to unsettle audiences constituted by canonical favourites. It seems clear that O'Rowe was not deterred by the *Evening Herald* review. If we consider O'Rowe's consistent representation of disturbing and graphic violence in monologue plays following *Anna's Ankle*,<sup>78</sup> the reaction elicited by the latter play from the *Evening Herald* may in retrospect have been precisely the uptake O'Rowe desired, mischievously illuminating the dominant conservative theatrical tastes of the mainstream press. *Anna's Ankle* stages "impossible speech" not because its speech is unsayable in a real world context due to various forms of hegemonic oppression and censure (as I have argued previously in contexts of gender and nationality) but because the acts narrated are illegal acts and punishable by criminal law in a real world setting; "impossible" to perform without legal consequences outside the aesthetic context of the theatre.

O'Rowe's monologue may be construed as a protest play in that it intertwines a middle class artistic sensibility and language with the criminal medium of snuff films. Middle class cultural taste is the aim of O'Rowe's parody and monologue, along with the intimate performance space in which it is delivered, is an effective vehicle in which to entrap spectators in the warped mind of the narrator. The

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<sup>77</sup> Mary Carr, "Anna's Ankle Appalls – Electroshock: The Mint". Rev. of "Anna's Ankle" by Mark O'Rowe. *Evening Herald* 18 Feb. 1997.

<sup>78</sup> I will discuss the violence in both *Crestfall* and *Terminus* later in the chapter. In an interview with Cormac O'Brien, O'Rowe was asked if his decision to use the monologue was based on how that form could "circumvent the logistics of representing acts of sex and violence onstage?" O'Rowe responded: "Not sex and violence, because they *can* be represented; but scale, pace, variety of location, fantastical elements which simply can't be created onstage except with language. And so, if I want to have a demon made out of worms flying around, I don't have to show it. I can just tell it." (Mark O'Rowe, "A Tallaght of the Mind"; Int. with Cormac O'Brien, in *Sullied Magnificence: The Theatre of Mark O'Rowe* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 150).

confined space of Project at the Mint adds to the claustrophobic and disturbing sense of sharing the presence of a snuff film director. If McPherson's early monologues are protests at an established socio-economic order, O'Rowe's is an aesthetic challenge to middle class cultural hierarchy. His double movement is to address a middle class spectatorship with a middlebrow cultural discourse and then direct that middle class spectatorial interest onto the abject nature of his material.

***"Storming the Citadel": Port Authority and Crestfall***

Both McPherson's and O'Rowe's careers would take them to London, and the Bush Theatre, Shepherd's Bush, west London.<sup>79</sup> Following the transfer of *This Lime Tree Bower* from Dublin, McPherson became Writer in Residence at the theatre, where *St Nicholas* was subsequently produced. The premiere of O'Rowe's *Howie the Rookie* would also be staged at the Bush.<sup>80</sup> In a remarkable narrative twist, O'Rowe claims that, along with Beckett's novel *Molloy*, the inspiration for *Howie the Rookie* came from seeing McPherson's *This Lime Tree Bower* (1997).<sup>81</sup> Although the writers' three productions were well received, Mike Bradwell, director of *Howie the Rookie*, noted that:

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<sup>79</sup> McPherson's themes of masculinity in crisis are visible in *Howie the Rookie* and other works, although O'Rowe fashions a distinctive, heightened urban idiom for his characters and frequently sets his action in imaginary locations.

<sup>80</sup> *Howie the Rookie* was first performed at the Bush Theatre, London, on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1999 with Aidan Kelly as the Howie Lee and Karl Shiels as the Rookie Lee, and has been performed in Ireland and internationally to popular and critical acclaim. It was revived in the Peacock Theatre in 2006 with Kelly and Shiels reprising their roles. It was produced again in the Project Space Upstairs in June and July 2013 with Tom Vaughan-Lawlor playing both parts.

<sup>81</sup> O'Rowe is not the only playwright to have been influenced by McPherson's early monologues. Ken Harmon's *Wideboy Gospel* premiered in the Project Arts Centre on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2000, performed by Ronan Leahy and directed by Jimmy Fay in a Bedrock production. It features Snorkey, a philandering petty criminal and his alcohol-soaked antics on the night of the Lansdowne riots on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1995. The monologue, in its language and context, owes a debt to McPherson's *Rum and Vodka* and *The Good Thief*. An earlier version of *Wideboy Gospel* had been presented by 13 Spanner Theatre Company at Bewley's Café Theatre on September 27, 1999, as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival.

*Howie* was a bit of a sleeper. The reviews at the Bush were fine and the audiences were OK, but we clearly suffered from the peculiarly English prejudice about monologues. It's as though the audience feel in some way short-changed if they know no one else is going to come on. Straight after the London run we were invited to open the brand-new Civic Theatre in Tallaght, where Mark O'Rowe comes from and where the play is set. The show was a sensation in Dublin, quickly transferring to the Andrews Lane theatre in the city centre."<sup>82</sup>

Bradwell's comments suggest a different reception to monologue drama in London than in Ireland, whose strong oral tradition may condition audiences to be more culturally receptive to the monologue form. However, it may also point to a specific movement and appetite on the part of both practitioners and audiences within Irish theatre at the time for alternative theatrical forms to challenge a hegemonic dialogic dramaturgy. The trend in the monologue form was now approaching its peak in the early 2000s. The movement had reached a critical juncture in terms of its cultural validation by the dominant theatres. As is familiar with the career trajectories of Irish playwrights, musicians and other artists, McPherson's and O'Rowe's favourable critical reception in London would now lead to productions of their plays being staged in the major theatres of Dublin. In the introduction, I referred to Shakespearean soliloquy's conspiratorial function of privileging spectators with knowledge of their plotting. The monologue plays of McPherson and O'Rowe in their intimate venues may be said to carry this conspiratorial menace, delivered to patrons of theatre spaces who may very well not be patrons of

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Gavin Kostick's *Fight Night* (2010) is about Dan Coyle Junior, a boxer from west Finglas attempting to live up to the achievements of his boxer father. It was originally produced in Bewley's Café Theatre on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2010 as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival. Aonghus Óg McAnally performed, with Bryan Burroughs directing.

<sup>82</sup> Mike Bradwell, *The Reluctant Escapologist: Adventures in Alternative Theatre* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010), 227-228.

the dominant houses. The movement of their monologue plays into those more esteemed houses would now test their conspiratorial, subversive qualities.

McPherson's *Port Authority* was his first production of a monologue play with the Gate Theatre<sup>83</sup> following the dialogic plays *The Weir* (1997) and *Dublin Carol* (2000), which were Royal Court co-productions. The three male characters in *Port Authority* hail from working class and lower middle class backgrounds from the city's northside. Kevin, 20, has left home for the first time and shares a flat with two other young men and a woman he loves. Joe lives in a retirement home in his 70s and reflects on a past brief encounter with his next door neighbour Marion Ross, which had profound personal consequences. Dermot is in his mid to late thirties<sup>84</sup> and despite having a poor employment record, is offered a job with a money management firm when his employers mistake him for another candidate of the same name. Dermot's monologue, however, appears to articulate a class disjuncture between upper-middle class spectators and the play's represented characters.

Cocktails in Gogarty's Monday night to say hello. Griffen, Staunton, Crawford. Strong handshakes. What I presumed was Armani. All ex-rugby. And then one or two of their wives suddenly. And I was like, 'Holy fuck, easy Tiger!' Me in my Penny's blazer and my loafers from Dunnes. Hardly able, but trying to swallow these Glenmorangies being pressed into my fist.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Port Authority* was first produced by the Gate Theatre, Dublin, at the New Ambassadors Theatre, London, in association with Ambassador Theatre Group and Old Vic Productions on 22 February 2001. The play opened at the Gate Theatre, Dublin, on 24 April 2001. The play was performed by Éanna MacLiam (Kevin), Stephen Brennan (Dermot) and Jim Norton (Joe). McPherson directed.

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Brennan was 45 years old when he played the role of Dermot in the 2001 production.

<sup>85</sup> Conor McPherson, *Port Authority* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), 14.

Patrick Lonergan says that many Irish monologues “feature characters on the social margins, who are generally shown to be involved in activities deemed in some way anti-social, such as drug-use or gangsterism. There is certainly a class divide between the middle-class audiences before whom most of these plays were premiered and the mostly working-class characters that populate the stage.”<sup>86</sup> If this were true of the earlier McPherson monologues, *Port Authority* represents a development to a more subtle class mismatch between characters and audience. None of the three characters are involved in anti-social or criminal activity – the “class divide” Lonergan refers to is now between a respectable working/lower-middle class and largely upper-middle class Gate audience.

The following Friday, Dermot is invited to the house of O’Hagan, one of his new employers, in Sutton. Having fortified himself with gin and tonics, he crosses the threshold of the house, which reminds him “of when I was younger and my mum tried to get me into a posh school in Dublin run by the Jesuits. It was all wooden staircases and arched hallways . . . And that’s what this house was like. Only all white. White on the walls and white funny carpet like tight fishing net.”<sup>87</sup> The demarcation of material class domains, utilised by McPherson in earlier monologues, is again deployed to constitute class. The upper-middle class domain is othered, emphasising Dermot’s own class dislocation. But unlike *Rum and Vodka* and *The Good Thief*, Dermot’s transgression into the alien class environment has a comic outcome (“A tableful of people had just watched me transfixed, I mean transported by my bosses wife’s boobs”).<sup>88</sup> In the previous monologues, Michael begins a meaningless relationship with Myfanwy in her parent’s house, and in *The Good Thief*, the narrator’s visit to a large country house is ultimately marked by a brutal slaughter of a woman and her daughter. The class anxiety expressed by Dermot

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<sup>86</sup> Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 184.

<sup>87</sup> Conor McPherson, *Port Authority* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), 23-4.

<sup>88</sup> *Idem*, 32.

evokes the step-up of a monologue play to an established theatre. The unease is comic, though, and affirms rather than challenges the Gate Theatre audience's identity.

The desperation of the earlier monologues has been superseded by calm reflections on significant life events, both romantic and professional. There is no reference to any economic difficulties by the characters. Joe is retired having worked all his life at Cadbury's and Dermot also has stable employment. Kevin, twenty years old, is on the dole. David Nowlan, in a favourable review, comments that "McPherson's writing is richly detailed, affectionately amoral and always compelling, even if it demands the closest of attention to make the most of its nuances. But at moments the words falter into silence or mere implication and the audience is left to its own imagination to work out the good or the bad of a situation."<sup>89</sup> Far from a barrage of single sentences, the language of *Port Authority* is not the language of crisis but of meditation. The shift in language is supported by the dimensions of the theatre space, with a seating capacity of 371, far exceeding those of the City Arts Centre and the Crypt. Within a proscenium arch setting, the speakers are further from the audience. There is a consequent loss in intercorporeal intensity that a smaller auditorium might generate – the type of venue that served to amplify the more direct and frantic narratives of the earlier plays.

When Mark O'Rowe met Michael Colgan to discuss producing *Crestfall* at the Gate,<sup>90</sup> O'Rowe recalls that Colgan "said he didn't know if it was right for the Gate, that maybe we should do it at the

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<sup>89</sup> David Nowlan, "Port Authority: New Ambassadors Theatre, London". Rev. of "Port Authority" by Conor McPherson. *Irish Times* 24 Feb 2001.

<sup>90</sup> *Crestfall* was first performed at the Gate Theatre, Dublin on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2003 and later received a production at Theatre 503, London, on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2007. Aisling O'Sullivan, Marie Mullen and Eileen Walsh played the three roles in the original production, directed by Garry Hynes. With *Crestfall*, O'Rowe said that he had decided to "write a play for a cast which was exclusively female, though it would retain the extremity and darkness and vulgarity and violence . . . of the earlier work." (Mark O'Rowe, *Plays One* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), ix.)

Project Arts Centre instead. He was smart enough to predict how the audience would react.”<sup>91</sup> The Project Arts Centre, although subsidised more heavily than other fringe venues, might have been a more suitable home, closer as it is politically and socially to the theatre spaces that hosted McPherson’s and O’Rowe’s earlier monologue pieces.

My critique of the play in this section is based on the 2011 published text of *Crestfall*, a revised version of the unpublished text that was used for the original 2003 production in the Gate Theatre. The published text differs from the original script both formally and in terms of content. On re-reading the 2003 script, O’Rowe decided to rework “mostly the language, which I found too spare, too humourless, and almost wilfully contradictory in its lack of flow or rhythm.”<sup>92</sup> Perhaps the most highlighted change to the original script, though, was O’Rowe’s removal of a brief episode of suggested bestiality: “there was a woman and a dog, and the woman had the dog’s dick in her hand – it went no further than that.”<sup>93</sup> Using a play text in conjunction with a production to which it does not fully correspond poses an obvious challenge for critical analysis of a production of that play – the textual mismatch unavoidably limits the analysis. Nevertheless, in this case, the production/text disjuncture allows a consideration of how the playwright perhaps sought to remedy not only an eight year old text with perceived deficiencies, but, retrospectively, the original text *in performance*, which he witnessed in 2003. In particular, his excision of the aforementioned dog scene points to both his evolution as a playwright and his increased appreciation of audience reception and manipulation, which I will discuss later.

The play consists of three monologues, delivered sequentially, accounting for a single day’s events in a bleak, rural Irish town. The monologues, which both overlap one another and advance the

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<sup>91</sup> Mark O’Rowe in “Crestfall: A Production Study”, *Sullied Magnificence: The Theatre of Mark O’Rowe*, Sara Keating and Emma Creedon, eds., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 50.

<sup>92</sup> Mark O’Rowe, *Plays: One* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), x.

<sup>93</sup> *Idem*.



narrative from the preceding monologue, are delivered by Olive Day, a prostitute married to Jungle Day but conducting an affair with Inchey Bassey, the father of her child Poppin' Eye; Alison Ellis, the wife of the Bru Ellis, whose son is compelled by the townsfolk to torture and kill his own pet horse that injured him; and Tilly McQuarrie, a prostitute aggrieved at her treatment by Inchey Bassey and determined to exact revenge. If the language of *Howie the Rookie* is compact and concise, reflecting the clipped, macho speech patterns of the characters that use it, with the occasional deployment of poetic features, *Crestfall* signals a shift to a more explicit, formal, poetic structure in which the characters narrate their monologues through rhyming verse, most of which are rhyming couplets. The play is O'Rowe's darkest, most abject and explicit work to date, featuring narrated accounts of incest, drug abuse, suicide, indecent exposure, murder, abortion, animal torture, aggravated sexual intercourse, medical malpractice, depraved communal entertainment and bestiality, an episode of which O'Rowe omitted from the published, revised version of the play.

Francis O'Connor's non-naturalistic design included "a frame of three panels of shattered mirror, one of which floated above the actors at an angle. The effect was to reflect the actors, but in a way that you could never see the actor's entire body at any one time."<sup>94</sup> This, combined with all-black outfits for the three actors and a side-lit stage, produced an effect of "a hard bleak ugly world",<sup>95</sup> a daring set for an audience more accustomed to naturalistic sets. The mirror effect of the set, denying spectators a full view of the actors' body, is consistent with the monologue form and its demands on spectators to imaginatively produce the drama for themselves. Rachel Andrews, in a review more critical of the play's form than its content, writes that "one is asked to give immense concentration to what is being said, in

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<sup>94</sup> Francis O'Connor in "Crestfall: A Production Study", *Sullied Magnificence: The Theatre of Mark O'Rowe*, Sara Keating and Emma Creedon, eds., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 52.

<sup>95</sup> *Idem*, 52.

order to figure out where the story is going. It is a lot to ask.”<sup>96</sup> The often negative reaction that O’Rowe’s language evokes may be attributable to the spectator’s roles in mentally co-authoring the described scenes.

Perhaps conscious of the Gate’s audience, O’Rowe’s character of Alison Ellis appears to be a device to ameliorate the impact of Olive’s and Tilly’s graphic monologues and be more addressive to middle-class spectators. Alison Ellis’ monologue is the second featured narrative, bridging those of the two prostitutes and displaying a greater awareness of her abject surroundings. Her narrative is coloured by a social and class consciousness, which carries the illocutionary force of persuading spectators to assign her a position above both Olive and Tilly. Alison describes finding her husband with another woman:

They were on a bed, you see,  
and he was licking her out.  
(I know. That’s a horrible phrase,  
but it’s hard to watch your mouth,  
your Ps and Qs,  
after you’ve caught your husband right,  
in the middle of going down on  
some filthy cooze.)<sup>97</sup>

Alison’s parenthetical address to the audience, which functions as a self-chastising aside and has the effect of foregrounding the foul language uttered by both Olive and Tilly, seeks favourable identification from middle-class spectators and attempts to relegate the prostitutes to abject social

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<sup>96</sup> Rachel Andrews, “Audience Crestfallen”. Rev. of “Crestfall” by Mark O’Rowe. *Sunday Tribune* 25 May 2003.

<sup>97</sup> Mark O’Rowe, *Plays: One* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), 340.

positions. Her projected middle-class attitudes have the effect of framing both the preceding monologue and final monologues from a position of social concern and propriety.

In contrast, Tilly's lowly position in the town's hierarchy, caused and exacerbated by a drug dependence and vulnerability to sexual violence, is illustrated graphically by a liaison with an unnamed one-eyed man, the grim results of which are revealed:

And the sky continues to piss  
 down rain  
 as, later, I lie, doubled over in pain,  
 bleeding  
 from my vagina,  
 my arse,  
 alone in a kind of sparse  
 little clearing near to what we call the wood.  
 And my mouth is filled with blood  
 as well,  
 my teeth are loose,<sup>98</sup>

Tilly's need for money and drugs renders her unable to discriminate between her clientele. Unlike other direct representations of violence in the play, the above passage is suggestive of gratuitous vaginal and anal rape, as well as injuries to her mouth and teeth. Spectators are left with images of Tilly's bodily trauma, markings of past violence. O'Rowe puts to work the imagination of spectators to

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<sup>98</sup> Mark O'Rowe, *Plays: One* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), 359.

construct a horrific scene of abuse. Mindful of the graphic language and imagery, O’Rowe concludes the play on an upbeat note, when Tilly finds a moment of happiness with Poppin’ Eye:

And the kids upriver jump back in,  
 and the sun shines on,  
 and the splashing and squealing recommences,  
 and I frown at the child,  
 ‘cos common sense is  
 saying he’ll soon be taken away from me.  
 And, of course, it’s true.  
 But, live for the moment.  
 Live for the now.  
 Isn’t that what they always say?  
 They do.<sup>99</sup>

His strategy of tempering the impact of the graphic narratives through the expression of Alison Ellis’ devout faith and narrated moments of optimism, however, does not ultimately lead to an untroubled audience reception. He recalls and speculates on the several perlocutionary effects of the 2003 production of *Crestfall* at the Gate Theatre “whose seats I can still here banging up one by one as people fled the theatre in horror or outrage (or boredom? Or incomprehension?).”<sup>100</sup> Garry Hynes also reflects on the original production that the play’s “ideas proved a step too far for the usual Gate audience (. . .) I doubt there was a performance where we ended with the same audience that we started with. A lot of the audience were quite shocked by it and either left – ‘I don’t want to have this

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<sup>99</sup> Mark O’Rowe, *Plays: One* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011), 369.

<sup>100</sup> *Idem*, ix.

kind of experience' – or expressed their protest by staying away."<sup>101</sup> Even if spectators remained until the end, the departure of other members of the audience would have shaped their own reception of the play.

The lessons of *Crestfall* appear to have registered with other directors working at the Gate. Selina Cartmell, speaking about her approach to programming prior to her appointment as Artistic Director of the Gate in 2017, says that "it would be totally foolish of me to rip it all up, and start again, because that loyal Gate audience is as important to me as the new audiences that could be potentially be coming into the Gate as well."<sup>102</sup> O'Rowe's *Crestfall*, radical in its violent imagery and made the more powerful through direct address to the audience, had entered a dominant theatre, a privileged explicit performative in Sedgwick's terms, and although receiving some positive reviews, generated a troubled reception. The contained world of *Crestfall* denied Gate spectators easy access. Brian Singleton writes of *Howie the Rookie* that "the narratives do not speak about the other more successful world. Their world is exclusively insular, and thus any action that takes place within it is not at all motivated by opposition or protest against social status, as a middle-class audience might interpret it."<sup>103</sup> The bleak, insular domain depicted in the Gate similarly bore no relevance to urban middle-class experience. The addressivity of *Crestfall* misfired upon an audience cultivated on canonical and the often innocuous fare of late Victorian comedies or adaptations of literary classics, producing a marked class disjuncture between O'Rowe's abject language and conservative middle-class spectators. The discord that was produced reinforced the class identity of the Gate audience and positioned O'Rowe emphatically as a radical and subversive playwright, relative to the benign reception of *Port Authority*.

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<sup>101</sup> Garry Hynes in "Crestfall: A Production Study", *Sullied Magnificence: The Theatre of Mark O'Rowe*, Sara Keating and Emma Creedon, eds., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 51-52.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Crawley, "The Gate attracts drifters. It's about making it a beacon." *Irish Times*, 01 Apr. 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 80.

### ***Terminus***

If O'Rowe's *Crestfall* resisted an easy absorption into the Gate Theatre's spectatorial tastes, his next play *Terminus* would do exactly that: constitute a terminal point in the journey from fringe space to National Theatre, rendering culturally legitimate the provocative nature of his drama. *Terminus* was performed in the Abbey Theatre's studio theatre, the Peacock Theatre, which is generally used to produce new writing and more experimental work. The seating capacity of the Peacock Theatre varies according to configuration, but generally seats approximately 120 patrons. The Peacock Theatre thus offered the production of *Terminus* a greater degree of intimacy than the Gate Theatre and the prestige of the National Theatre.

O'Rowe again uses a three-character monologue structure in *Terminus* (2007), although the three monologues intersect, and at the end of each sequence, they overlap briefly. *Terminus* features A, a former teacher working for the Samaritans; B, A's daughter, a young woman who meets the earthly form of the soul of C - a young man who traded his soul with the devil for the ability to sing, only to find that his shyness inhibits him from performing. A attempts to prevent the abortion of a former student's child, B's death is delayed by a winged creature and C embarks on an odyssey of murder. Also unlike *Crestfall*, the three actors are co-present onstage throughout which enriches the visual frame for spectators, and dissipates the focus on a lone speaking body.<sup>104</sup>

*Terminus* is notable for its shift to a more explicit middle-class perspective and sensibility. In contrast to the worlds of *Howie the Rookie* and *Crestfall* where brutal acts constitute an unquestioned part of daily existence either to sustain or enhance one's position in criminal hierarchies, acts of violence in *Terminus* are undertaken by characters for whom it is culturally alien, originating either in the desire for psychotic pleasure or self-justified retribution. Rather than immerse spectators into dystopian

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<sup>104</sup> Brian Friel made a similar transition from *Faith Healer* to *Molly Sweeney*: the former play contained four monologues in sequence with no overlapping and no co-presence of actors; the latter had three actors onstage throughout with overlapping monologues.

worlds from the outset, O’Rowe artfully deploys middle class characters to lead spectators into abject environments. A, a former teacher who does voluntary work for the Samaritans, receives a distressed call from Helen, a former student, and determines to visit her house in an attempt to dissuade her from aborting her baby. From the outset, spectators are led to identify with and be guided by A, whose initial movement from a Samaritans call centre, emblematic of a social concern and awareness for public health issues, to a series of abject environments, offers middle-class spectators an initial access point and subsequent narrative thread. When A attacks Celine, following Celine’s earlier brutal assault of her, the violence, though graphic, is represented as justified as A has been constituted as an agent of social services and protector of vulnerable individuals: “Instead, my hands whip out and grip her face like a vice and my thumbs find their way to her eyes and I dig them in and they begin to collapse into her skull as she tries to pull away and pleads for me to stop, to no avail.”<sup>105</sup>

If A’s journey takes her through inner city and suburban Dublin, B embarks on a fantastic adventure with a winged creature composed of worms, the material form of a soul who was sold to the devil by C in return for the granting of a prodigious singing talent. B is represented as having an economically middle-class consumer lifestyle, shopping at Marks & Spencer’s and drinking red wine at home. The demon who rescues her from a fall from a crane prolongs her life until the seven angels come to take her life.

C is represented as an articulate, erudite young man whose description of the clientele in the “community centre doubling as a disco”<sup>106</sup> establishes his personality as narcissistic and voyeuristic: “This copious Cashel congregation of middle-agers, country livers, sundry lonely lovelorn fuckers looking for partners. Though I remark there’s plenty of younger stuff as well.”<sup>107</sup> He keeps his “rage at bay”<sup>108</sup> when

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<sup>105</sup> Mark O’Rowe, *Terminus* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007), 35.

<sup>106</sup> *Idem*, 14.

<sup>107</sup> *Idem*, 14.

three men, who shouldered him aside earlier, mock the girl he leaves with. After stabbing and disembowelling the girl in her house, C returns to the community centre car park to find the three “losers” doing skids in his car:

Number one, I split from crown to chin. He screams and,  
 relishing the din, I hew numbers two across the throat and gloat  
 as he gouts arterial spray and flays and, Jaysus, pirouettes as  
 jets of blood arc round him, like some kind of fountain.<sup>109</sup>

Violence here is narrated as controlled, stylised and performative, referencing ballet and the visual splendour of a fountain. C’s “relishing the din” and his construction of the crime scene as aesthetically pleasing mark out a narcissistic and psychotic personality, but also buffers the audience from a more literal representation of the violent attacks on the two men. Eamonn Jordan, writing about *Howie the Rookie*, contends that “the lenses of performance and irony introduce casualness, and a sort of defiant flippancy, when characters refuse to accept that they will be hurt by interaction. So it is almost a childish defiance, the two fingers to the trauma of existence, and a closing of the senses to darker realities.”<sup>110</sup> A similar mode of representing violence may be seen in *Terminus*. C’s figurative representation of the murders, recalling the snuff film director in *Anna’s Ankle*, contrasts with the violence depicted in *Crestfall*, where the cruelty acted out upon prostitutes by men is a reality and constant threat for hundreds of women working in prostitution in Ireland. The poetic expression of this violence does not mitigate its reality. The exploits of C, on the other hand, is represented as fantastic

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<sup>108</sup> Idem, 15.

<sup>109</sup> Idem, 15.

<sup>110</sup> Eamonn Jordan, “Look Who’s Talking, Too: The Duplicitous Myth of Naive Narrative.” in *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*. Ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006), 143.



and other-worldly. C's movement in a car from Cashel to Dublin, with various violent episodes, bears all the hallmarks of Hollywood serial killer road movies, in which progression through towns and countryside may be read as the protagonist's deteriorating mental state. C's craving for fame and recognition, which remains unrequited following his Faustian pact, seeks fulfilment in a series of violent episodes likely to draw extensive media attention. His desperation for celebrity, fostered by reality television shows such as *The X Factor*, frames the Hollywood-style violence as surreal and ironic. Spectators may more easily disengage with *Terminus'* depictions of violence, packaged as it is in fantastic, Hollywood plots and contemporary pop culture. The monologues of A and C precede and follow fantastical sequences involving a flying demon composed of worms and a battle over the soul of B - this has the effect of diminishing the impact of the violence in A's and C's monologues. In this regard, O'Rowe may be seen to alter the narrative lenses to avoid a reception similar to the one he encountered at the Gate Theatre.

Fintan O'Toole, a vocal critic of the monologue dramatic form, nonetheless finds much to praise in O'Rowe's monologues: "There is an exhilaration in O'Rowe's inventiveness but also a mesmerising quality to the rhythm that gives the ingenuity a shape. . . Yet, as a theatrical experience, the play never matches the writing. However fine the performances . . . the contrast remains between the soaring language and the earthbound staging."<sup>111</sup> *Terminus* secured a *Scotsman* Fringe First Award at the 2008 Edinburgh Festival and Eileen Walsh won the award for best actress at the 2008 *Irish Times* Theatre Awards. O'Rowe had learned from the reception of *Crestfall* at the Gate and accordingly fashioned a monologue drama that was more visually stimulating and which exploited middle class tropes to address an Abbey Theatre spectatorship and ameliorate the effects of graphic narrated violence. O'Rowe's aesthetic adjustments however, did not force him to jettison his trademark abject violent imagery. The

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<sup>111</sup> Fintan O'Toole, "Stage for action as well as words". Rev. of "Terminus" by Mark O'Rowe. *Irish Times* 23 Jun. 2007.

power of O’Rowe’s language had now been absorbed into the dominant house of the Abbey Theatre.<sup>112</sup>

It is noteworthy that O’Rowe has not written a monologue play since *Terminus*: with its insurrectionary power captured and assimilated, a new monologue drama may not have the same periperformative force as its predecessors.<sup>113</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The assimilation of O’Rowe’s and McPherson’s monologues into the dominant houses and into larger auditoria dissipates their power. The performance of those monologues in those theatres is a clear indicator of their attained cultural legitimacy, despite spectator walk-outs. Coupled with the closure of some performance spaces that have hosted key monologic encounters, the hegemonic houses have consolidated their positions and extended their programmes to accommodate the “rebel” forms. The spectator/performer dynamic that generated a subversive energy in its proximity within the smaller theatres is lost in the sizeable capacity of the Abbey (Peacock) and Gate stages. The speaking subject is visually and audibly reduced onstage – with this proportionate diminution in stature, spectators may no longer retain an awe of its supremacy and instead collectively perform a spectatorial dominance in numbers. The proscenium arch maintains intact a safe critical and aesthetic distance from the monologists, who previously would have wielded a menacing presence in the smaller performance spaces. As the City Arts Centre, Crypt Arts Centre, the Da Club, Theatre Space at Henry Space, Focus Theatre<sup>114</sup> and other intimate performance spaces have fallen by the wayside through funding cuts,

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<sup>112</sup> O’Rowe would later direct his play *Our Few and Evil Days* (2014) on the Abbey’s main stage.

<sup>113</sup> McPherson’s and O’Rowe’s radical monologue work loses its subversiveness through its taming by the dominant houses. Butler, situating “subversive performances” within commodity culture, notes that: “Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where ‘subversion’ carries market value. The effort to name the criterion for subversiveness will always fail, and ought to.” (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), xxiii).

<sup>114</sup> The Focus Theatre closed on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2012 due to funding issues, after operating since 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1967.

rising rents or other economic challenges, these closures have removed from the urban theatrical spatial economy opportunities for spectators to encounter monologists within intimate spaces and consequently weakened the challenges to the pre-eminent houses.

The outcome is that the periperformative map shifts in favour of the Abbey, Gate and major receiving houses, enlisting more patrons to support an expanding programme. The spatially produced spectators now become integrated into established urban middle-class spectatorships, exposed to other canonical fixtures on the theatre's programme and interpellated into the growing list of subscribers who enable and perpetuate the dominance of the major houses. With the closure of the small theatre comes a spectatorial foreclosure: the experience of proximal engagement with the speaking subject is forever lost and can only be recalled and reconstituted through reminiscence. The loss of the spaces is significant: Kolarevic and Malkawi say that "in its concrete actuality every room is encountered as something donated to us from a past into which we have no real insight, and over which we have absolutely no control."<sup>115</sup> Theatre spaces have formative powers that create unique environments for theatrical reception. Unless the theatre reopens, the spectating subject cannot relive its prior encounter. It can only watch out for theatres of similar size to open and to reclaim some of its past theatregoing subjectivity. This has happened in recent years, with the opening of two suburban pub theatres: the Dolmen Theatre in Cornelscourt in January 2015 and the Viking Theatre at the Sheds, Clontarf, which opened in November 2011, offering new sites for innovation and rebellion.

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<sup>115</sup> Branko Kolarevic and Ali M. Malkawi, eds. *Performative Architecture: Beyond Instrumentality*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

## Conclusion

In political terms, monologue drama in Ireland may be viewed as a loss of faith and crisis in dramatic realist representation, engendering a body of monologue plays seeking to reassert both neglected male and female subjectivities. Aesthetically, the monologue form has offered Irish playwrights new means of expressing theatrically such themes as the fictive memory, macho violence, class anxiety, social isolation and alienation, domestic violence, and marital/relationship breakdown. Spectators are empowered to view oppressive performative operations and imagine alternative subjectivities and worlds in their place. The anxiety provoked by the increased numbers of productions of monologue plays throws into relief a dominant dramaturgical hegemony, based on an Aristotelian model of dramatic action in which characters interact onstage. I have attempted to both historicise and interrogate this productive discord and determine what it says within the macro-frame of recent Irish political, social and economic history and how it has impacted on the arena of Irish theatremaking. I have drawn upon the critical lenses of performativity to unpack this body of monologue drama and its resignificatory potential; monologue drama has hopefully reciprocated to some degree a critical reflection on theories of performativity and their materialisation within theatrical performance.

A cultural materialist frame<sup>1</sup> might view monologue plays as discursive symptoms of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces, which have led to productions of these plays as enunciatory sites of resistance. Monologues in this analysis may be viewed as both sites of negotiation and discursive spectacles which point back to hegemonic institutions that have sought to deny the very speakability that monologue performance allows. This may in turn reveal a body of monologue drama as indicative

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<sup>1</sup> A cultural materialist analysis posits that “the traditional centers of theoretical and critical attention – the author, the canon, the organic text – are here replaced by a study of the forms and flows of power. The dramatic text becomes a site for the negotiation and authorisation, interrogation, subversion, containment, and recuperation of power.” (Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present*. Expanded ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 524).

of, *inter alia*, a rejection of realism, a renegotiation of playwriting practice, an affirmation of the live performing body of theatrical performance situated in an increasingly mediatised culture, and a political need to reconstitute or even simply make visible suppressed or marginalised subjectivities. Irrespective of how the recent growth in Irish monologue drama is interpreted, it has left a significant imprint on Irish theatremaking practice.

Although many social and economic factors may have created an environment that enabled the monologue explosion, it was primarily driven by the aesthetic choices of two of Ireland's most prominent playwrights, Conor McPherson and Mark O'Rowe, the primary exponents of the form during the pre-Celtic and Celtic Tiger era. Although they are both in mid-career at time of writing, their monologue work can now be seen to represent distinct early phases within their oeuvres. McPherson's last monologue play was 2001's *Come On Over* at the Gate Theatre; O'Rowe's was *Terminus*, which was first staged in 2007.<sup>2</sup>

Other playwrights have nonetheless remained with the form – Sebastian Barry's *On Blueberry Hill* (2017), for example, comprises alternating monologues by P.J., a former seminarian, and the older Christy, a son of a tinker and fighter.<sup>3</sup> Arminta Wallace's review of the play is evidence of how the monologue allows playwrights to stage the power of language and actors to enthral audiences with

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<sup>2</sup> Both have since written dialogic plays: O'Rowe has written *Our Few and Evil Days* (2014) as well as two adaptations – *DruidShakespeare* (an adaptation of Richard II, Henry IV (Parts 1 and 2) and Henry V) and *Hedda Gabler* (2015). McPherson has written *Shining City* (2004), *The Seafarer* (2006), *The Veil* (2011), *The Night Alive* (2013) and *Girl from the North Country* (2017) as well as three adaptations – *The Birds* (2009), *The Dance of Death* (2012) and *The Nest* (2016). McPherson still uses monologue within the confines of his dialogic plays, but not to the same extent as his earlier work.

<sup>3</sup> Other than his fully monologic plays *The Pentagonal Dream* (1986) and *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007), Sebastian Barry has made extensive use of monologue in his dialogic plays *The Steward of Christendom* (1995), with the rambling speeches of Thomas Dunne, former Chief Superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police; *Hinterland* (2002), in which Jonny Sylvester (based on Charles Haughey) delivers seductive monologues about his political career; and *Tales of Ballycumber* (2009), where old Nicholas Farquar, a Protestant bachelor sheep farmer, narrates stories from his mountainside home in Co. Wicklow. In these works, monologic scenes featuring the central character alternate with scenes in which that character interacts with other characters.

virtuosic skills: “Few people can spin a world out of words in quite the way that Barry does, and *On Blueberry Hill* weaves a story-carpet that takes the audience out of its claustrophobic prison-cell setting, into the streets of Dún Laoghaire and away to the seas around Inish Mór.” She goes on to applaud the performances: “What ought to be shouted from the rooftops . . . is the achievement of the two actors, Niall Buggy and David Ganly, as Christy and PJ. It’s hard to find a word that captures it adequately. ‘Superb’ will have to do.”<sup>4</sup> The play had a successful run from 27<sup>th</sup> September to 8<sup>th</sup> October 2017 at Dun Laoghaire’s Pavilion Theatre, which has a maximum capacity of 324, indicating the monologue play’s continuing appeal. It would appear that as long as writers are drawn to the monologue’s lyrical qualities, and performers to its virtuosic ones, it will remain strong as a dramatic form in Ireland into the future.

Economically, monologues represent a viable means of staging and touring dramatic works and do not carry the prohibitive cost barriers of mounting large-scale productions. The option of the monologue form is therefore an important entry point to the theatre industry for writers, actors and producers starting out on their careers and who are struggling to either raise capital or secure Arts Council or other funding to stage a play.<sup>5</sup> As I have referenced in the Introduction, economic considerations were central to the composition of plays by Abbie Spallen, Jennifer Johnston and Conor McPherson – without monologue as a viable form, audiences may not have witnessed, for example, McPherson’s *The Weir* (1997).

Individual theatre companies and bodies also facilitate productions of monologue plays. *Show in a Bag*, an artist development initiative of Dublin Fringe Festival, Fishamble: The New Play Company and

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<sup>4</sup> Arminta Wallace, “Hamnet is a child frozen in time to devastating effect (And Sebastian Barry delivers a superb prison drama at this year’s Dublin Theatre Festival)”. Rev. of “On Blueberry Hill” by Sebastian Barry. *Irish Times* 02 Oct. 2017.

<sup>5</sup> To venture outside of the lineage of performativity I have been using, Lyotard may view monologue performance as representing optimum operational efficiency in its need for the scarcest of resources whilst disseminating the greatest amount of dramatic material.

the Irish Theatre Institute, was established in 2010 and currently produces four plays per year, with one or two actors. The initiative has produced numerous monologue plays including Gavin Kostick's *Fight Night* (2010), Sonya Kelly's *The Wheelchair On My Face: A Look Back At My Myopic Childhood* (2011) and *The Humours of Bandon* (2016) by Margaret McAuliffe.

Irish theatre practitioners continue to experiment with the monologue form. ANU Productions, which specialises in devised, site-specific performance and the staging of recent traumatic historical events, has made use of monologue in their *Monto Cycle*, comprising *World's End Lane* (2011), *Laundry* (2011), *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012) and *Vardo* (2014). Spectators enter these productions individually and interact with various performers in different spaces. Without the conventional theatrical comfort of spectatorial distance and mandatory silence, spectators become active participants within the performance. They are confronted with the immediate physical presence and monologues of performers representing prostitutes, drug addicts and residents of Magdalen laundries. The monologues sometimes foreground performance and offer accounts of historical events.<sup>6</sup> ANU's *Citizen X* (2013) takes spectators on a journey around the city guided by audio instructions via headsets. Monologue is used to frame a dynamic, interactive experience of the city. Peter Crawley observes that "it may seem crass to overlay two images of property collapse – the Church Street tenement tragedy and the current mortgage crisis – but Lowe's method has a more impassioned and unsettling purpose. In 1913, tragedy and uproar became huge public displays. Now it takes an artistic intervention to bring countless, isolated sufferings to the surface. The art is elegant and stirring. The city, though, ought to explode."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In *World's End Lane*, a performer asks why the spectator is following her into a dangerous area before narrating an account of how a police detective shot Harriet Butler, a prostitute, in November 1920 after she spurned his offer of a new life with him. A Magdalen resident in *Laundry* begs for assistance to escape the laundry; a taxi driver subsequently gives a monologue about the history of a local laundry and the resident whom he married and later lost. *Vardo* features a Nigerian man's story of being unable to return home to attend his father's funeral.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Crawley, "Return Journeys". *Irish Times* 10 Sep. 2013.

Emmet Kirwan's *Dublin Old School* (2014), features Jason (Emmet Kirwan) and Daniel (Ian Lloyd Anderson), brothers who have had diverging experiences with drugs: the former an aspiring DJ who uses drugs recreationally, the latter homeless and with chronic addiction problems. The actors each play multiple characters and although the interaction is largely dialogic, delivered in a rap style, Jason has a number of monologues that fuse performance poetry with a rave-like atmosphere. Both ANU Productions and Kirwan have imaginatively deployed monologue in ways that bring it, respectively, outside of the theatre into site-specific performative contexts and into contact with other performance genres. The form's adaptability and relationship to a wide range of monologue performance categories make it amenable to writers and artists working at both the literary and experimental ends of the theatrical spectrum.

Spectators will continue to play an essential role in the narrational constructions of monologue drama. Attendance at monologue plays and patronage of theatres that stage them are pivotal to the survival of the monologue form, enabling theatres to continue to programme them.<sup>8</sup> More so than dialogue-based drama, spectators assist in the theatremaking process through their collective imaginary agency and performative gaze. In doing so, they are invested in ongoing political and ethical projects of bringing marginalised subjects into visual and auditory frames where regulatory norms may be viewed, heard, reflected upon and actively stalled or even reversed. Politically, aesthetically and economically, they enable theatre companies to programme monologue plays. In her book *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Butler draws on the work of Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero to support her own enquiries into individual responsibility in the face of limited self-understanding:

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<sup>8</sup> The theatre infrastructure remains in Dublin and in cities outside the capital to provide performative conditions that best serve monologue performance. Despite closures of small theatres over the last decade, new theatres such as Theatre Upstairs, the Dolmen Theatre in Dundrum and the Viking Theatre in Clontarf have opened since 2010. Existing theatres such as Bewley's Cafe Theatre and the New Theatre continue to stage monologue drama.



In her view, I am not, as it were, an interior subject, closed upon myself, solipsistic, posing questions of myself alone. I exist in an important sense for you, and by virtue of you. If I have lost the conditions of address, if I have no 'you' to address, then I have lost 'myself'. In her view, one can tell an autobiography only to an other, and one can reference an 'I' only in relation to a 'you': without the 'you', my own story becomes impossible.<sup>9</sup>

Spectators constitute the "you" of monologue dramatic performance – without them, the stories, that are made by both the storyteller and the interlocutors that receive and co-produce them, cease to be possible.

Butler's most recent theoretical concerns offer new critical approaches to monologue drama. Commenting on how resistive public assembly produces a state of vulnerability for those who have gathered to protest against unliveable political, social or economic conditions, she reverses the sequence by positing that it is vulnerability that precedes these modes of resistance:

Yet vulnerability emerges earlier, prior to any gathering, and this becomes especially true when people demonstrate to oppose the precarious conditions in which they live. That condition of precarity indexes a vulnerability that precedes the one that people encounter quite graphically on the street. If we also say that the vulnerability to dispossession, poverty, insecurity, and harm that constitutes a precarious position in the world itself leads to resistance, then it seems we reverse the sequence: we are first vulnerable and then overcome that vulnerability, at least provisionally, through acts of resistance.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 32.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds., *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

The precarity lived by marginalised groups in Ireland bring them to theatrical acts of resistance in the shape of monologue performance. Exposed frontally to spectators, their bodies are vulnerable to the performative viewing of the audience, who may visually constitute them in terms that may not be intended by the playwright or performer. But at the same time, they are resisting hegemonic norms that have previously assigned them to sites of the unspeakable and inaudible. Pat Kinevane, in his one man show *Underneath* (2014), confronts the damaging effects of name-calling and body-shaming through the story of an unnamed girl from Cork who is struck by lightning and suffers social ostracisation before moving to Dublin and befriending two Eastern European prostitutes.<sup>11</sup> Kinevane's vulnerable body in front of an audience recreates those conditions that have given rise to the play in the first instance. Live performance produces a space in which the name-calling may be challenged, reworked and redirected into forms that support a liveable existence for the named.

The chief attractions of monologue for actors are the opportunity for virtuosic performance, direct address to spectators, and exposure to critics and theatre industry. It can allow performers gain valuable experience in front of audiences and give them the requisite confidence for subsequent roles. Nevertheless, the monologue's display of virtuosity is also what serves to dissimulate cultural regulatory norms. Monologue performance foregrounds performance and in that way, draws attention to its performativity, i.e. the qualities that define it as being a performance. What is particularly prominent is the labour of the actor's body as it attempts to cover the entire stage space, which it dominates, its memorizing and recitation of pages of script (recalling the *seanchai's* prodigious feats of memory), its

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<sup>11</sup> Butler comments: "we also undergo linguistic vulnerability, and in this sense who we are, even our ability to survive, depends on the language that sustains us. One clear dimension of our vulnerability has to do with our exposure to name-calling and discursive categories in infancy and childhood – indeed, throughout the course of life. All of us are called names, and this kind of name-calling demonstrates an important dimension of the speech act. We do not only act through the speech act; speech acts also act on us." (Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds., *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 16).

conjuring of multiple characters and its absorption, without respite, of the spectators' gaze. The virtuosic nature of monologue performance puts the taxing physical and mental demands of the actor's solo performance on display, keeping the performance aspects within the minds of spectators and disrupting theatrical illusion.<sup>12</sup> As a critic, there is a need to remain mindful of regulatory norms being dissimulated through such performances whilst not forgetting the production's positive aesthetic aspects - the creativity, stamina and precision of the performer on stage.

The dominant position of speech act theory within the complex, polyvalent genealogy of performativity has perhaps contributed to a critical focus within theatre and performance studies on logocentric qualities and a consequent oversight of its material and non-discursive aspects. Recent scholarship, however, has added to the range of application of the concepts of performativity to theatrical performance. Marcus Tan's *Acoustic Interculturalism: Listening to Performance* expands the utilisation of performativity within performance analysis through his deployment of the performativity of sound in intercultural performance. Countering the dominance "of a visual culture where meaning is often constructed, constituted and mediated by what is seen and less of what is heard/listened to"<sup>13</sup> and the ocular-centric mode of receiving and interpreting performance, Tan argues for the unregistered role of sound and its resignificatory cultural potential.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A large number of monologue performances (particularly monodramas) that I attended as part of my Doctoral studies received standing ovations from spectators; recognition perhaps of the actor's virtuosity in taking on a play that might otherwise have been performed by multiple actors. Monologue actors frequently take the opportunity at the end of the play to ask patrons to promote the play through word-of-mouth (e.g. Don Wycherley at the end of *After Sarah Miles* (2014); Tom Hickey following his performance of *The Gallant John Joe* (2016 production)), or to make other announcements about the play (e.g. Pat Kinevane announced following a performance of one of his monologue plays that it was the first time his son had witnessed him perform on stage).

<sup>13</sup> Marcus Tan, *Acoustic Interculturalism: Listening to Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) 29.

<sup>14</sup> Tan contends that:

Sound is, and exists only as, performance and in considering its mode of materiality as organised forms manifested as music, sound *is* performative. Comprehending sound's performativity reveals an understanding of how sound expresses and enacts culture and cultural discourse with what Austin terms

Aoife Monks has studied the performative dimension of material aspects of performance in *The Actor in Costume* (2010), examining the function of anecdotes and objects in the theatre and the manner in which actors position themselves within citational chains of theatre history.<sup>15</sup> Siobhán O’Gorman has used Butlerian performativity to critique the use of costume in the plays of Suzan Lori-Parks to demonstrate how “theatre-makers can use costumes, in addition to the action of dressing and undressing, as theatrical devices for questioning, subverting, unravelling and opening the possibility of rethinking a range of intersecting performative identities including (but not limited to) gender, race and class.”<sup>16</sup> O’Gorman focuses on the role of directors and designers in executing Parks’ project of revealing and deconstructing the sedimented layers of naturalised subjectivities.<sup>17</sup> These scholarly developments in diversifying performativity’s critical application to include material elements of theatrical performance are encouraging and will similarly add to the critical tools available to scholars seeking to interpret monologue plays in the future.

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‘illocutionary force’ – the function that an utterance performs or the effect it achieves *in* being said. Culture is therefore heard in a performance of prescribed sound patterns and musical compositions; sound is a performative instrument of cultural discourses where musical scales, patterns and processes inscribe the location of cultures. As intercultural performances employ musics of various traditions and cultural origins often intermixed with contemporary styles and performance modes, cultural significations become multifaceted and complicated, possibly bewildering and dislocating; they become, as Butler recognises of the possibilities of gender performatives, a ‘resignification’. (Marcus Tan, *Acoustic Interculturalism: Listening to Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) 34).

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Stewart’s sighting/citing of the ghost of John Buckstone, the actor-manager of the Haymarket theatre in London during the 1880s, invokes a history of sightings and constitutes him as a great actor, as previous “star performers” had seen Buckstone before him. Monks argues that Buckstone’s spectral appearances, their subsequent incorporation into the theatre’s oral history, and objects and images associated with the former manager, “function to re-assert the hierarchies of the theatre.” (Aoife Monks, “Collecting Ghosts: Actors, Anecdotes and Objects at the Theatre.” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23.2 (2013): 146-52. 147).

<sup>16</sup> Siobhán O’Gorman, “(Di)Visible Layers: Bodies, Genders and Costumes in the Works of Suzan-Lori Parks.” *Scene* 2 1 and 2 (2014): 155-67. 156.

<sup>17</sup> O’Gorman illustrates how normative constructions of race are foregrounded through the addition of padding around the performer’s bottom and thighs to denote the stereotypically large posterior of an African woman (the titular *Venus*); how bridal gowns are used to denote oppressive marital norms (*In the Blood*); and how the wearing and removal of suits and hip hop clothing are deployed to highlight constructions of class (*Topdog/Underdog*).

Butler's theories of regulatory performatives, carrying productive and exclusionary forces, posit a legitimate domain of intelligible subjecthood, and an outer domain inhabited by those who cannot claim subjecthood but whose presence nonetheless haunt the legitimate domain and continually threaten its legitimacy. Butler is approaching these topics within the context of gender studies, in which dominant performatives establish a heteronormative matrix and where LGBT subjects are excluded from the dominant regime because they are not intelligible to the dominant script. However, Butler's concepts of normative performatives serve to illuminate the counter-canon of monologue drama and how it functions as a spectre to dominant dramaturgical practice. The rise in the monologue dramatic form, far from threatening normative playwriting practice, re-establishes it as hegemonic and indeed, as long as monologue plays continue to be produced, it will continually position dialogic drama as dominant and function to confirm it as the pre-eminent dramatic form. The canon of dialogic drama, one could venture, spawned an alternative canon of monologue drama to support its own legitimacy.

Despite a preference for dialogue drama within Ireland, monologue's specific attributes (direct address to the audience; visual and aural dominance of the actor) make its unpredictable, subversive potential strong. In this regard, Butler has commented on the unanticipated effects of acts of performative resistance, saying that "one writes into a field of writing that is invariably and promisingly larger and less masterable than the one over which one maintains a provisional authority, and . . . the unanticipated reappropriations of a given work in areas for which it was never consciously intended are some of the most useful."<sup>18</sup> She goes on to say that:

The effects of performatives, understood as discursive productions, do not conclude at the terminus of a given statement or utterance, the passing of legislation, the announcement of a birth. The reach of their signifiability cannot be controlled by the one who utters or writes, since

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<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xxvii.

such productions are not owned by the one who utters them. They continue to signify in spite of their authors, and sometimes against their authors' most precious intentions.<sup>19</sup>

Playwrights, directors and performers maintain a provisional authority over their own work within the ephemeral conditions of performance. Reappropriations of monologue plays – coming either in the course of an individual run or through revivals - may radically alter the original intended meaning for those plays in ways not anticipated by the creative team. Even on the level of individual performance, the performer does not control the cited theatrical conventions, which exceed the performer's intentions and saturate the performance space and its signifying system - there is always a semiotic surplus/excess which is beyond the monologist's intentions. The drama is produced and exceeded by productive disjunctures and audience uptake that is never predictable. Butler's comments on the impossibility of full mastery and unknowable reappropriations support an optimistic perspective of ways in which monologue drama may retain its subversiveness through future revivals.

The corpus of monologue drama and performance in Ireland continues to grow and aesthetically evolve. Practitioners, critics, scholars and audiences have recognised monologue as an effective dramatic and performative tool to address the country's troubled history of maintaining sections of citizens out of sight and hearing. The promise of visibility and audibility, however, demands nuanced dramaturgical and representational strategies to jolt spectators out of familiar narratives that support hegemonic regimes. There is abundant evidence within recent monologue performance in Ireland that playwrights, directors and performers are becoming increasingly theatrically astute when making use of the form. In a complex mediatised culture where dominant social and cultural norms can make use of innumerable channels through which to proliferate, monologue drama and its live speaking body may perhaps grow in significance as a resistive form.

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<sup>19</sup> *Idem*, 185.

The monologue trend that occurred within Irish drama in the 1990s and 2000s forced an important conversation within the industry around dramatic form. If that debate began with the commentary of Aristotle and has endured to the present day, this productive conversation is likely to continue as long as there is dramatic theatre. Similarly, playwrights will continue to write monologue plays for political acts of subject reconstruction, for its aesthetic lyrical and narrative options or out of economic necessity. Actors will continue to be drawn to the showcasing opportunities of the monologue, which offers the chance to demonstrate virtuosic skills. In that respect, little has changed from the principal actors of Greek tragedy seizing upon the chance to deliver an expository speech whilst enacting the demise of a tragic hero.

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