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'Badness. Good, isn't it? A bit of badness:'

Frank McGuinness's Dramaturgy of 'Deviance' and the Irish Theatrical Tradition

Submitted for The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
to
The School of Drama, Samuel Beckett Centre
Trinity College

2003
David Cregan
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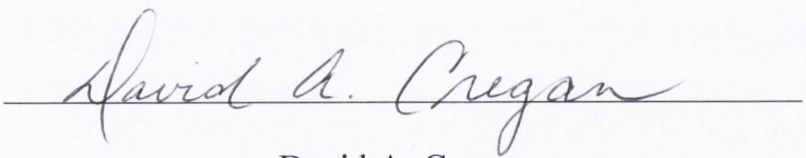

David A. Cregan

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Summary

This thesis is a study of the original plays of the contemporary Irish dramatist Frank McGuinness. McGuinness was born in Buncrana, County Donegal, Ireland in 1950. His first play, *The Factory Girls*, was produced in 1984. For the past twenty years he has consistently produced plays in Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Besides his original plays he has written versions of classical drama, mostly nineteenth century realism. Besides being an award winning playwright of international standing he is also a published poet and academic. I have chosen in this study to focus on original plays for the purpose of uncovering what I describe as the 'queer' elements of his dramaturgy.

In utilising the term queer I engage a wide variety of theoretical tools and philosophical positions for my analysis. The theoretical term queer has emerged out of the poststructuralist project, with its attention to the deconstruction of essentialist notions 'truth' and 'nature.' It has also been influenced by feminism and its concurrent attention to issues of gender and politics in society and culture. Perhaps most directly, however, Queer Studies has grown out of gay and lesbian studies and their considerations of issues of sexual diversity and homogenous systems of gender construction and political and social exclusion. The theoretical use of queer theory challenges all previous assumptions about gender and sexual identity politics articulated by feminism and gay and lesbian studies in order to further challenge established ideologies.

In my attention to Irish theatrical criticism surrounding the work of Frank McGuinness it became more and more apparent that it was neither appropriate nor possible to autonomously analyse McGuinness and his work outside of the history of the Irish theatrical tradition which has its foundation in the Irish Literary Theatre of the turn of the twentieth century. In so doing I began to realise that McGuinness's work, its means of production in Ireland, and its reception in the public forum were very much impacted by the idea of theatre itself in Ireland. In other words, a certain ideology has arisen around the concept of what could be uniquely described as 'Irish' theatre. That ideology not only defined the classification of Irish theatre, largely as a realistic and

naturalistic genre, but as my research concludes, has served as a means of regulating and controlling the growth, development and reception of the contemporary theatre in Ireland. What this has meant in direct relation to Frank McGuinness's original plays is that his unique contribution to the theatre in Ireland of diversity and 'deviance' as a strategy were virtually undetectable within the tradition itself. A critical language does not exist to interpret diversity in a theatre and a nation only recently emerging from a century of severe conservativism and culturally constructed homogeneity. The type of language which has developed around the theatre in Ireland, along with the expectations of what theatre actually is in production, has so acutely focused the comprehension of critics that the queer aspects of McGuinness's dramaturgy have, more often than not, gone unnoticed, or at the very least undocumented.

This thesis seeks not only to draw out and analyse the queer in McGuinness's work, but also to contribute to the widening of the conversation and criticism in Irish theatre in general. Its implementation of the internationally recognised paradigm of analysis, queer theory, promises to be cutting-edge in its contribution to the general field of Irish studies as well. As a result of this two-fold agenda of theatrical and cultural analysis not only does my research bring together theories of the queer and the theatre of Frank McGuinness, but also attempts to map out the way in which this queer dramaturgy intersects with contemporary Irish society as it faces an new era of cultural re-invention.

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Introduction

Frank McGuinness has been one of the most successful Irish playwrights of his generation both at home in Ireland, and internationally. Ever since his first production of *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) in the Peacock Theatre, Dublin (The National Theatre of Ireland), he has received major critical acclaim, winning the Evening Standard's 'Most Promising Playwright' Award; The Rooney Prize for Irish Literature; Harvey's Best Play Award; the Cheltenham Literary Prize; the Plays and Players Award; the Ewart Biggs Peace Prize; the coveted Tony Award, and the London Fringe Award. No other Irish playwright of his generation[1] has had the professional consistency, or occupational longevity that has characterised McGuinness's theatrical career. In the pages that follow I will attempt to uncover what I believe has made him a principal player on the Irish dramatic scene, and helped enshrine him in the canon of prominent Irish playwrights, following in the footsteps of figures such as W.B. Yeats, Samuel Beckett, Brian Friel and Tom Murphy.

In the introduction to his book on Frank McGuinness, *The Feast of Famine*, Eamonn Jordan describes McGuinness as "one of the most challenging, prolific, inventive"[2] Irish playwrights. And yet, in my own investigations into McGuinness's work it became clear how little critical attention had been paid to what seemed to be the most unique and challenging aspect of his writing: his diverse representations of gender

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[1] In making a generational comparison I am basing this judgement on time periods. Brian Friel and Tom Murphy are successful Irish playwrights whose work was produced initially in the 1960s. McGuinness's first play, *The Factory Girls*, was produced in 1982 and although all three are still producing successful plays I judge them as representing different generations of Irish artists.

[2] Eamonn Jordan, *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1997, p.v.

and sexuality. McGuinness's plays fit nicely into the Irish theatrical tradition in their comparable narrative choices and their traditional literary techniques, however, his work most radically diverges from the drama of his predecessors in the distinctive and diverse ways he approaches character and character development. Where other Irish playwrights have engaged themes as complex as politics and psychology in their representations of subjectivity, none have dealt with issues of gender diversity and sexual 'deviance' as McGuinness has. In a unique way, McGuinness communicates theatrical narratives employing the traditional conventions of the Irish stage, representing stories set in the much cherished location of the Irish country kitchen as in *Dolly West's Kitchen* (1999), to the traditional family based drama of *The Bird Sanctuary* (1994); but, in an interesting twist, he includes and often conveys these narratives from the perspective of individual types never so fully or continually represented on the Irish stage: homosexuals.

In his article "Frank McGuinness and the Ruins of Irish History" James Hurt briefly mentions the homoerotic themes in McGuinness's writing. Although Hurt's project is focused on representations of history in McGuinness's work, he claims "The homosexual thread in McGuinness's plays deserves separate and extended treatment."[3] In this dissertation I will respond to that challenge, and examine in depth the issues raised by McGuinness's engagement with themes of same-sex relationships, sexual diversity, and homosexual subjectivities. However, this study is not aimed at reiterating the obvious by focusing on a textual or, even, a performative analysis of his plays simply to point out which of his characters may or may not be homosexual. Instead, I am interested in exposing a complex range of 'queer' themes, practices, and sensibilities which, I

[3] James Hurt, "Frank McGuinness and the Ruins of Irish History" in *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage*, ed. Morgan, Eileen, Mustafa, Shakir, and Watt, Stephen. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000, p.280.

argue, infect even the most 'normative' aspects of McGuinness's body of published original material. Additionally, in consequence to his principal position in the canon of twentieth-century Irish theatre, I will explore how his work effects the greater tradition of Irish dramatic writing and performance.

It is essential at the outset of this project to define and delineate my use of the reoccurring term 'queer,' and the theories which are labelling themselves thus, in the contemporary academy, for this is the primary theoretical perspective I will engage in order to analyse McGuinness's dramaturgy. The theoretical use of the term 'queer' is taken from the set of interpretive tools and critical perspectives originating in the post-structuralist project, continued by feminist attention to issues of gender and subjectivity, and grounded in gay and lesbian theories of sexuality and identity politics. The critical perspectives and political objectives of these theories of deconstruction combine in what has now become known as 'queer theory.' In her seminal article "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" Teresa de Lauretis describes how these theories convey "a double emphasis – on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own [gay and lesbian] discourses and their constructed silences."[4] De Lauretis's observations on queer theory were generated out of a conference held in February 1990 which sought to theorise gay and lesbian sexualities, imagining these sexualities as "forms of resistance to cultural homogenisation, counteracting dominant discourses with other constructions of the subject in culture."[5] And yet, 'gay and lesbian' was directly juxtaposed with the term 'queer' in order to fulfil the double emphasis of destabilising both normative

[4] Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities, An Introduction" in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. Providence: Brown University, Summer 1991, iv.
[5] Ibid., p.iii.

homogenous discursive structures (i.e. heteronormative), and previously established analytical and linguistic categories employed by gay and lesbian theories (i.e. homonormative). This new theory is not meant as an effort to dispose of discursive protocols all together, for that would be impossible, but it is, rather, an attempt to problematise *all* essentialist theories of gender and sexuality in an endeavour to transcend, or even transgress, their ideological limitations.

As I stated, in my analysis of McGuinness's work I wish to examine what Hurt describes as the 'homosexual thread' in his writing, but at the same time I do not want to become engaged in a debate that simply creates binaries out of sexual difference. However, I do wish to broaden the conversation by employing the discursively indefinite term of 'queer' in order to include a set of artistic and aesthetic strategies. Therefore, I will use the perspective of 'deviant' sexualities, and their greater theoretical challenges to concepts of culture and nation, in order to illustrate how McGuinness puts pressures on issues of both identity and ideology in his plays.

Throughout this dissertation I will refer to the word queer in much the same way that queer theorists do, as a term used to destabilise essentialist notions of the categories of gay, straight, transgender, and bisexual, etc. It is a term which, consequently, permits fluidity and cannot, or should not, strictly be associated with homosexuality. In other words, you do not need to be gay to write queer, nor are all gay writers queer. Not all aspects of homosexual subjectivity are queer, but some aspects of heterosexual subjectivity are. This being said, it is a term that certainly emerges out of the experience of disenfranchisement encountered by dissident subjectivities and sexualities, which most certainly include homosexual and bi-sexual identities.

The aspects of the discursive and theoretical perspectives afforded by queer theory which are related directly to gender and sexuality are the most obvious and identifiable; talk of gay sex, representations of gay characters or relationships, and claims for gay identity and rights, all indicate traditional understandings of the use of the word queer. However, in this thesis I have claimed that I wish to expose queer as more than a subjectivity or identity and, additionally, utilise it as a strategy for writing and other dramaturgical choices less obviously 'gay' in McGuinness's work.[6] I will attempt this by continually framing his work within the Irish dramatic tradition from which he has emerged, a tradition that has been largely naturalistic, an issue I will address in more detail in Chapters One, Three, and Six. This contextualised analytical objective seeks to

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[6] McGuinness's 1985 play *Baglady* demonstrates the strategic discursive aspects of my use of theories of queer. This example does not detract from the significant position of homosexuality in his writing, but, instead, draws attention to the more difficult to comprehend challenge that the term queer can be to all discursive classifications. *Baglady* premièred in 1985, at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin, directed by Patrick Mason. It is a one-act play in which a homeless woman, simply named Baglady, recounts her life, and the trauma of the events which have led her to destitution. The play tells the story of the woman's abusive father, a traumatic rape, and the suppressed account of the death of her son by drowning. And yet, the narrative technique employed by McGuinness in this piece continually evades a linear projection of a clearly discernable plot. Instead, McGuinness writes dramatic monologue which reflects cyclical repetitions of fragmentary memory, leaving a jumble of discourse to the audience to piece together. Homelessness and trauma are metaphors for Baglady's personal alienation and pain. McGuinness creates an interior landscape of terror and mental illness that are reflected in the physical condition and mental position of Baglady. She tells a piece of her story:

> **Baglady** My mother was married. She was a married woman. My father and my mother lived in our house. It was white with a red door, and there were black windows everywhere. Even the door had a window. The windows were cut from glass. Sometimes you could look into the window and see your face. It moved, not like your face in the river swallowing you forever. You could take your face out of the window. I looked through my face one day in the window and I saw my father and my mother. My mother wasn't there, and my father was moving. He called me by my name. It was my mother's. My mother. My mother told fortunes. She could read people's cards. Their faces told her stories.
>
> Frank McGuinness, *Baglady* in *Plays 1*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996, p.388.

Certainly this dramaturgical technique of scrambled memory and unresolved narrative is not original and is reminiscent of Tom Murphy's *Bailegangaire*, but it is certainly queer in the sense that it challenges knowledges and postpones the certainties of narrative realism which, in itself, suggests a particular essential 'truth' in storytelling. Naturalistic dialogue implies a type of understanding which complies with the 'normal' because it provides a much more succinct level of cognitive comprehension. On the other hand, scrambled and disjunctive dialogue confuses audience perception, and creates a dramatic atmosphere of disunity, forcing an effort on the part of the audience to make sense of what a linear plot makes clear and precise. Consequently, this type of construction of dramatic narrative fits into my use of the term queer because it articulates confusion and disunity rather than normality and secure knowledge of narrative, or the unified identity which cohesive narrative represents in character formation.



Baglady, IMP Productions, SS Michael and John (Viking Centre), Dublin, 2002. Directed by Pat Burke. Imelda McDonagh as Baglady. Photograph by Garrett Byrne, with permission.

re-theorise McGuinness's work, not just his plots or his characters, in order to problematise the theatre itself and reframe some solidly established, engrained meanings within Irish theatre practice and theatrical criticism. This intention to reframe and re-theorise is already vigorously present in queer cultural practices which have made matters of difference simultaneously include issues of sexual identity and transcend them to acknowledge the political, ontological, and epistemological effects of 'normativity' on those who fail to succeed in attaining 'mainstream' identities.

Acknowledging that queer is not an attempt to escape gay and lesbian, but, rather, uses gay and lesbian positions (physical and ideological as this thesis will illustrate) to re-imagine a different social or cultural order, it is important not to abandon the specifics of the unique homosexual representations continually repeated in McGuinness work; but, rather, to keep issues of identity politics and aesthetic strategies in a unique balance. In order to identify the particular social and cultural context in which McGuinness's plays function as a challenge to traditional ideas of identity it is imperative to historicise the ideological, and indeed legal, classifications of homosexuality in modern Ireland. Perhaps the best way to begin a study which seeks to highlight the alternative realities which McGuinness's drama offers to Irish culture is to present a personal perspective of his own ideas surrounding 'deviance' in contemporary Ireland, written in the Autumn of 2002 in the *Lincoln Center Theater Review*:

> Some years ago while I was travelling through Europe, I was casually informed by a fellow traveller whom I had the misfortune of meeting that the Irish were all united in one respect: "We all hate the homos." And many did. Too many still do. Why? I'm not going to blame the churches. Despite the idiocy of many – and, yes, I think of the Saint Patrick's Day parade in New York City – there have been many genuine voices raised in protest against hatred. No, I'm going to look at the race instead. There is something self-lacerating in us. Look at our sorry

> intellectual history. Ireland has loved its censors as much as it admired its writers.[7]

McGuinness's language is confrontational and direct, forcing attention to an aspect of Irish culture that is difficult, and requires self-conscious recognition. Queer theorists have adopted the word queer because of its associations with negative homophobic stereotypes in order to illustrate the shifting ground on which all identity politics are based. By co-opting the word queer, queer theory confronts the discursive categories which have regulated and restricted non-mainstream identities in order to effect a different level of consciousness about the fluidity of all identities, especially those of gay and lesbian. Although McGuinness does not use the word queer itself, I suggest throughout this dissertation that his dramaturgical strategies reflect the basic principles of confrontation through representation which lie at the heart of the intention behind queer theories. His characters and his topics show realities that are rarely represented in Irish culture, making the queer (person, place, or thing) highly visible by placing it centre stage. The aforementioned quotation from McGuinness articulates some of his personal opinions about modern Irish thinking in relation to attitudes towards sexual diversity. His opinions have been public, and at times aggressive, as I will illustrate and interrogate in the pages to come. His plays have creatively linked Irish concepts of national and personal identity; and his topical engagements, his dramatic structures, and his character development fit quite comfortably into queer theory's anti-essentialist assault on those ideologies which wish to essentialise marginalised groups into containable categories for exclusion. The slippery nature of the theoretical concept of queer allows for a

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[7] *Lincoln Center Theater Review*. Fall 2002, Issue Number 33, p. 19.

multivalent perspective on the various ways and multiple levels on which McGuinness's theatre confronts ideas of Irish identity and theatrical practice.

Since my project is aimed at a representation of what I have previously described as queer aspects of his dramaturgy I will be continually referencing the theories of the French philosopher, historian and political activist, Michel Foucault (1926-84). If McGuinness's dramatic corpus can be analysed in order to reveal certain aspects of Irish culture or sociology, a particular method must be employed in order to expose its evidence, and Foucault's theories provide that structure. Foucault was one of the foremost post-structuralist thinkers of the twentieth century, and a seminal reference for the sexuality-based theories of Queer Studies. His work sought to analyse the connections between power, knowledge and sexuality. He is considered the major intellectual catalyst in the emergence of the disciplines of queer theory. I believe it is important at the offset then to briefly describe what Foucault is referring to when employing the principal concepts of his theories of *power*, *knowledge*, and *sexuality*.

In Foucault's work *power* is the social and political ground on which gender issues are examined and interrogated. And yet, post-structuralist theories of power, such as those of Foucault himself, characteristically do not accept traditional definitions or classifications of the word. Foucault explains the subtleties of his understanding of power in his book *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*:

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallisation is embodied in the state apparatus, in

> the formation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. Power's condition of possibility...must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point.[8]

This rather exhaustive attempt to define and classify the profusion of power is Foucault's assertion that power exists everywhere from the private, to the social, to the political spheres of life. He rejects the notion that power is an institution or a structure, but states instead that power is "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."[9] Foucault destabilises the accepted definition of power. Similarly, in McGuinness's plays, power structures are subverted through alternative narratives and diverse representations of subjectivities. Unlikely characters and scenarios are given voice and influence in situations which outside of the 'fiction' of the stage, would otherwise be impossible to imagine. This gives way to an examination of the next term central to Foucault's theories, *knowledge*.

Foucault's theories of *knowledge* lie at the centre of what is most useful for my analyses of the queer aspects of McGuinness's writing and its position within the Irish theatrical tradition. Foucault has a tendency to analyse the discourse which creates knowledge strategically rather than substantively. In other words, he is interested in the process of thought and the history of its development rather than continual preoccupation with what has actually been said. He is less concerned with refuting discourse than he is with showing how it functions in order to produce 'legitimacy' or 'illegitimacy.' *Knowledge* is intrinsically linked to *power* for Foucault, as it generates meaning and legitimises ideologies through discourse in any particular society or culture. "For Foucault, discourse 'unites' both language and practice and refers to the production of knowledge through language which gives meaning to material objects and social

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[8] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Vol. 1.* London: Penguin, 1978, p.93.
[9] Ibid.

practices...Discourse constructs, defines and produces the objects of knowledge in an intelligible way while excluding other forms of reasoning as unintelligible."[10] For Foucault, this is a historically specific phenomenon in which different eras produce their own "regimes of truth (what counts as truth)"[11] and subsequently marginalise others. This is where McGuinness's work is quite proficiently analysed through a Foucauldian lens: rather than rejecting Irish historical memory, or for that matter the conventions of the Irish dramatic tradition, McGuinness theatrically renegotiates the 'facts' of this history through alternative representations and fictional 'truths' which disturb economies of power and practical theatrical knowledge within the Irish tradition.

Sexuality is one of the tools McGuinness repeatedly employs to strategically deconstruct knowledge and perspective in his plays. Foucault, similarly, explores *sexuality* in an attempt to analyse discourse and its construction of 'reality' in Western history in his three-volume work *The History of Sexuality*. "A vital feature of Foucault's argument is that sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural, rather than biological, origins."[12] For Foucault *sexuality* is additionally a strategy, rather than simply a personal or subjective matter which engages psychological aspects of the inner life of an individual. Because of my interest in employing Foucault, and for that matter queer theory itself, in my analysis of McGuinness's original plays I have opted to focus primarily on strategy rather than substance. In other words, I will be using these theories as strategical tools in order to illustrate how McGuinness's dramaturgy expresses a type of queer resistance to issues of knowledge, power and sexuality, mostly in the context of

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[10] Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications, 2000, p.78.
[11] Ibid., p.79.
[12] Tasmin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory*. New York: Totem Books, 1999, p.12.

engaging twentieth-century Irish issues of identity and collective memory. Although it could be argued that McGuinness is establishing a type of sexual subjectivity in his character development, a theatrical model which expresses an aspect of a modern Irish homosexual identity, more often than not he is using facets of sexual identity in order to interrogate issues which are far more political or cultural than individually psychological. McGuinness's narratives and structures provide an alternative discourse, utilising sexual diversity as an idea that applies pressure to a whole series of cultural, religious, and political belief systems. As a consequence of this strategical perspective, I am not primarily interested in a substantive analysis of McGuinness's work which seeks to uncover underlying psychological issues at play in his drama. Instead, indebted to Foucault's attention to the function of discourse, I am interested in examining the complex production of knowledge and 'truth' his plays continually refer to.

Foucault's work with *sexuality* is not concerned with the discovery of an ever-illusive 'truth' of human sexuality, but is instead preoccupied with how sexuality has been produced by a particular culture at a particular time in human history. His productive concerns are strategical, and consequently effective, through this matrix of power, knowledge and sexuality. In other words, politics, ideology and sexual practice work together in an alliance to stimulate new strategies that alter material realities and challenge belief systems which support prejudices by arguing against the idea that there is a 'normal' which justifies the exclusion of 'abnormality.' The entire apparatus of the theatre has the potential to be an exceptional laboratory through which these philosophical strategies can be tested and experimented with representationally. I believe, because McGuinness employs the multi-dimensional mechanisms of the theatre

(i.e. performance/representation, text/fiction/history, aesthetic, space/place, etc.) to literally show us how things look, his work is an ideal place to examine how the above-mentioned deconstructive strategies interrogate and renegotiate particular 'realities' by representationally embodying the alternative aspects of political or social life these theories suggest.

But what exactly makes queer theory a more ideal or appropriate theoretical strategy for the analysis of McGuinness's work than theories of postmodernism, which also contain vast and diverse intellectual apparatuses of interpretation? Postmodern writers share with Foucault the idea that knowledge is not transcendental or universal, but, instead, is culturally and historically particular and specific. Consequently, postmodernism is equally as anti-essentialist as queer theory, rejecting metanarratives and alternatively advocating fragmentation and diversity; offering deconstructive theories of narrative and storytelling, which I deal with in more depth in Chapter Six regarding the construction of conventional histories. Recognising the similarities in these overlapping anti-essentialist theories of fragmentation, both of which seek to denaturalise the 'natural' within culture and society, queer theory is unique in that it foregrounds sexuality, making issues of gender and sexual 'deviance' the primary operatives in its strategical agenda. Queer theory characteristically interrogates discourse in a unique way, particularly the discourse on sexuality and gender. Queer theorists simultaneously recognise the biological aspects of sexuality or gender, while expanding their perspectives into how they constitute forms of ideological categorisations which affect a broad range of cultural issues. While both of these complimentary theories advocate the crisscrossing of traditional discursive, iconic, or representation boundaries, queer theory relies on

complex understandings of the broad scope of influences gender, sexuality, and desire offer when employed for the interrogation of subject matters as diverse as politics, religion, representation, and identity.

Similarly, McGuinness makes a unique contribution to contemporary Irish drama in that gender and sexuality are often the starting points for many of his alternative narratives. He is not the first Irish playwright to mention sexuality, homosexuality, or sexual 'deviance' in his plays, but he is the first to place these types of characters and narrative perspectives at the centre of his work. Plays ranging from Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1954), to Thomas Kilroy's *The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roche* (1968), and Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island* (1971), address homosexuality, but as a secondary element in plot structure and character development. Emma Donoghue is an Irish playwright who writes about lesbianism in her plays *Ladies and Gentleman* and *I Know My Own Heart*, but her work is produced primarily in London, not in Ireland. Other works such as J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) elicited sexual tension in Irish society, but hardly used sexual 'perversity' as a central theme in their writing. Other Irish playwrights such as Marina Carr or Anne Devlin have written plays with unconventional gender types, but their plays have focused largely on the politics of gender and not on the politics of sexual diversity. In Friel's *The Gentle Island* the homosexuality of the central character is consigned to offstage sex and veiled meanings, and in Behan's *The Quare Fellow* there was concern that "the homosexual should not be performed as such"[13] for the 1956 Abbey production. In *The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roche* Kilroy

[13] Christopher Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, p.173.

certainly made the homosexual visible through the marginalised character of Roche, but ultimately the play acts as a sort of platform in which homosexuality can be spoken of and culturally critiqued, finally focusing on the broad issue of stereotyping in general. McGuinness, on the other hand, unabashedly exhibits sexuality and homosexuality, and, at times, writes his plays from the perspective of the gay man, rather than the homosexual or homosexuality being merely spoken about. Sexuality and gender, and their concomitant political, cultural, and representational implications, are repeatedly employed in his work as the means by which he crosses borders and challenges the discursive boundaries of accepted knowledge and meaning in contemporary Ireland, as this thesis will illustrate.

Remaining faithful to Foucault's insistence that discourse is culturally fabricated and historically specific, it is vital to acknowledge the shifts that have taken place in contemporary Irish society and culture which have influenced McGuinness's ability to use sexuality and gender as a dramaturgical strategy and, then, to theorise those social and cultural shifts which his work engages. In the introduction to their book *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, editors Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons, and Michael Cronin identify a contradiction of terms in the development of contemporary Irish identity which may be helpful in explaining why McGuinness's drama is important at this particular time in Irish cultural history. They begin by quoting the National Economic and Social Council's (NESC) strategy document published in 1999 which states "Ireland reinvented itself during the 1990's."[14] The editors of this collection of essays on modern Ireland recognise that the idea of reinvention has caught on rapidly in

[14] Michael Cronin, Luke Gibbons, Peadar Kirby, eds., *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*. London: Pluto Press, 2002, p.1.

Ireland, but has created a sort of cultural confusion. The idea of reinvention is based on Professor Rory O'Donnell's theories of social partnerships which, in turn, have created the foundations for the innovative economic strategies which have transformed the financial landscape of the country through what has come to be known in economic terms as the Celtic Tiger. Professor O'Donnell eventually turned his attention to the cultural aspects of these changes which have accompanied the transformation of the economy in Ireland:

> Lamenting what he described as the excessive and unhappy dualism between the economic and the cultural, the material and the moral in contemporary Ireland, he defined a new project 'to reunite our account of the cultural and economic, the normative and the material, the actual and the ideal.' In offering a cultural reading of Ireland's immediate past, he drew on [Declan] Kibred's notion that modern Ireland was invented in the cultural revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries...In April 1999 he specified further in claiming that 'changes in the public sphere' such as European integration and social partnership can be seen as part of the reinvention of Ireland, a new culture closely related to the successful economy.[15]

In the conclusion to the book, which strives throughout to measure the contours of a nation engaging this rapidly changing culture, its editors summarise themes that pervaded most of the previous chapters. They suggest "the reinvented Ireland of the Celtic Tiger is based on the creation of a 'modern, liberal, progressive, multi-cultural' image fashioned on the need for international acceptance rather than through engagement with Ireland's past...In denying the past, contemporary Ireland has also denied sources of creative tension out of which a better future could be built."[16] This denial has been characterised by sanitised versions of a successful society, and has moved away from previous engagements with its colonial past that traditionally have focused attention on issues concerning the margins and the under-represented in its own society.

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[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p.197.

Reinventing Ireland suggests that in order to generate success Ireland has created a new image for itself by forcing a sort of historical amnesia, largely determined by the economic factors of stimulating international attractiveness to encourage multi-national investment in the country. Queer theory's attention to the formation of ideology through discourse, and the concomitant pressure it puts on historical memory in order to achieve its goals, serves Irish studies well by encouraging a recognition of the constructed nature of the present through an acknowledgement of the past. McGuinness also challenges this cultural memory loss in his plays, re-presenting the historical past, and forcing an acknowledgement of deeply conservative cultural ideas quickly fading into the Irish past. I believe that we must situate McGuinness's queer subjectivities and aesthetics within their particular cultural context by examining the social history, and the discursive constructions of ideas of sexual 'deviance' in the recent, and not so recent, past in order to determine their relevance for the present.

Perhaps one of the best places to begin this scrutiny is to examine legislation that regulates social 'deviance.' Recognising that the issues surrounding gay and lesbian theories of identity and politics lie close to the surface of any project which understands itself as queer, I believe that it is essential for my project to outline the history of the position of homosexuality in the Irish legal system. I will purposely begin at the end, and work my way backward in order to illustrate the complex process which brought about this legislative liberation:

> On Wednesday 30 June 1993, the Minister of Justice, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, crossed the floor of the Senate chamber and, smiling broadly, shook hands with the lesbian and gay men in the public gallery. The Seanad had just passed all remaining stages of the Bill decriminalising homosexuality and providing for equality with heterosexuals. Cutting through decades of judicial and political fretting and centuries of criminalisation, the Bill stated with elegant simplicity

> that 'any rule of law by which virtue of which buggery between persons is an offence hereby abolished'. The same legal regime would now apply to homosexual and heterosexual behaviour with a common age of consent of seventeen and the same privacy codes.[17]

Although this account of the legal triumph is rather hopeful, it is not at all illustrative of the long and messy public struggle that led to that liberating day.

The 1970s in Ireland saw major legal reforms in relation to equality, based largely on the Irish official inclusion in the European Economic Community (now known as the European Union), but these changes were largely commercial in address, and sought primarily to end gender discrimination between men and women in the work place. Dr. Noel Browne, an advocate of gay rights, was literally laughed at in Dáil Éireann (the Irish Parliament) when he appealed to the Minister of Justice to reform the laws on homosexuality. The law in Ireland had been based on two nineteenth-century laws which had not been amended after Imperial rule had ended in Ireland in the early twentieth century. The two laws, which legally prohibited homosexual relations, were the 1861 Offences Against the Persons Act, and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. "The 1861 Act specifically criminalised sodomy (anal intercourse) and carried a sentence of up to life imprisonment. The 1885 Act criminalised any act of intimacy between two men."[18] The grossly general statement of banning intimacy between two men provided a broad base by which the law could extend its homophobic objectives.

It must be acknowledged that both of these Acts were part of British Law, which included colonised Ireland at the time they were implemented. These laws were

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[17] Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland.* Cork: Cork University Press, 1994, p.1.

[18] Clodagh Boyd, Declan Doyle, Bill Foley, Brenda Harvey, Annette Hoctor, Maura Molloy, and Mick Quinlan, eds., *Out For Ourselves: The Lives of Irish Lesbian and Gay Men.* Dublin: Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men's Collectives and Women's Community Press, 1986, p.190.

specifically directed towards men because of the widely held Victorian belief that homosexuality was impossible between women. However, it would be inaccurate to reduce Irish compliance with these laws by discounting them as offensive or exclusive laws of the coloniser. The British courts had overturned these same laws twenty-five years before the Irish courts had even begun to address them. In the United Kingdom "The 1967 Sexual Offences Act made legal homosexual acts in private between males over twenty-one in England and Wales."[19] Although this law was imperfect, seeking to change foremost the law and not general attitudes, it at least accomplished a precedent for abolishing laws of gross discrimination against gays. In Ireland the process was considerably slower, and met with a great deal of political resistance.

After Dr Browne's failed attempt to introduce a Bill in the Dáil which would legalise homosexual activity, it became apparent to gay activists that a "constitutional action was the only possible avenue for reform, and it was on that basis that a plenary summons was issued in the High Court by Mary Robinson SC on behalf of her client David Norris[20] on 21 November, 1977."[21] The case was heard in the Irish High Court almost three years later, in the summer of 1980. David Norris, Lecturer in English at Trinity College Dublin at the time, and a future senator in the Seanad Éireann (Irish Senate), brought the case forward to break what he described as the "conspiracy of silence"[22] surrounding cultural issues of homosexuality in Ireland at the time. As a result of intense media attention on the case the silence was broken. The case received largely positive media coverage. Public interest focused on various aspects of what it meant to

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[19] Philip Osment, ed. *Gay Sweatshop: Four Plays and a Company*. London: Methuen, 1989, p.xii.
[20] For an interesting, and entertaining, insight into Senator Norris's views on homosexuality and Irish culture, as well as his opinions on the theatre and representation, see Appendix II.
[21] Rose, p.35.
[22] Ibid.

be a homosexual in Ireland. "The Government called not witnesses to back up its case but argued trenchantly that sexual relationships outside of marriage were unacceptable and that the state should do all in its power to stop the spread of homosexuality."[23] The High Court Judge, Mr Justice McWilliams, found against the plaintiff on 10 October 1980, and he further defended his judgment by citing the Irish Constitution's Christian foundation; thus reinforcing the general consensus that homosexuality was itself immoral, and, consequently, homosexual people did not deserve legal protection.

Although David Norris was convinced that his arguments against the stereotyping of gay men, and his further evidence of the extent of the size of the 'gay community' in Ireland, had been effective, many gay people were not so much surprised at the judgement against them as they were with the rationale that supported it. In *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland* Kieran Rose outlines the judgment's shocking moral stance, allegedly based on Christian ethics and morality:

> In delivering the majority judgement, the Chief Justice began by stating that there were 'a large number of people in this country with homosexual tendencies', and that after decriminalisation, the small number of people who were exclusively homosexual would entice this larger group into 'more and more deviant sexual acts to such an extent that such involvement may become habitual. So many more people, in the view of the Chief Justice, would have, as a result, to endure the 'sad, lonely and harrowing life' of the exclusive homosexual man.[24]

This judgement shows that as late as 1980 issues surrounding morality and ethics applied considerable tension not only on the Irish legal system, but additionally on concepts of diversity in relation to just who was considered a defendable citizen of the Irish Republic. It is also significant to point out that at this juncture in history McGuinness's first play,

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p.36.

The Factory Girls, was only two years away from its debut on the Irish dramatic scene in 1982.

David Norris and his team did not end their campaign for gay rights with the judgment against them in The High Court in Ireland. They brought their case to the continent and appealed to the European Commission on Human Rights. After hearing the cases of both the Irish Government and Norris's team the Commission gave the parties involved the opportunity to settle outside of court. The Irish Government refused a settlement, and the European Commission ruled that a hearing would take place in the European Court in April of 1987. The Irish Government argued that although the laws against homosexual sex only existed on the books, and were never enforced, they were, nevertheless, necessary. "It also argued that 'the moral fibre of a democratic nation is a matter for its own institutions and the Government should be allowed a degree of tolerance in their compliance' with the Convention."[25] The European Court settled in favour of David Norris on 29 October 1988, stating that the Irish laws were in violation of Article 8 of the Convention on Human Rights which prohibited discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation. The Court passed in favour of Norris by eight votes to six, and, interestingly enough, the Irish Supreme Court representative, Mr Justice Brian Walsh, was one of the six judges who voted against the action. His post-trial comments denounced the judgement of the Court, stating that those who voted in favour of Norris appeared to be "persons un-versed in the precepts of natural law."[26] When the Fianna Fáil Government in power at the time received the results of the European case they promised to consider the judgement; a consideration that consequently took the better

[25] Ibid., p.39.
[26] Ibid., p.40.

part of the next five years, but eventually was implemented in the aforementioned triumph of the gay community in the Seanad on 30 June 1993.

One of the few books about the lives of gay men and lesbians in Ireland is titled *Out for Ourselves*, published in 1986 by the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men's Collective in the midst of David Norris's appeal to the European Commission on Human Rights. Much of the book's content expresses the tension and prejudice that the gay community was experiencing at the time, and in their chapter on 'The Legal Situation' they acknowledge that the outcome of the case in Europe would probably be positive. They further speculated about the action that the Irish Government might take if David Norris won the case:

> It's probable that they will introduce a version of the British law...Our stance is that no special law is needed to cover lesbian or gay sexuality. This is the case in Sweden and elsewhere where laws against sexual coercion, rape violence, harassment and 'public decency' apply equally to lesbians, gay men and straights. Any other legislation should be regarded as an unacceptable compromise. Such a change requires, of course, a complete change in the country's attitude towards lesbian and gay sexuality and this change will occur not by legal reform but by continuous educational and political action.[27]

Eventually, an equality-based law was passed, rather than the option to follow the precedent laid out by British lawmakers. But the hope of the editors of *Out for Ourselves* for continued education and political action was quickly overtaken by the intense economic zeal which has dominated the country from almost that exact period onward. Ireland's bitter, moralistic and stereotypical attempts to control and marginalise the gay and lesbian community, both at home and abroad in Europe, were quickly forgotten in popular memory as the Celtic Tiger required a fiscally ambitious populace, rather than an ethically driven Christian people. It became important to repress the piety of the past in

[27] Boyd, p.191.

favour of the technology of the future if Ireland was to be commercially attractive. A quick veneer of diversity and multiplicity was required for a national image of openness and receptivity. McGuinness's plays are written through and in this turbulent and liberating period of Irish history, and thus provide essential information for insight into modern attitudes and opinions as they threaten to be swept under the carpet in the cosmopolitan wave of global values washing over contemporary Ireland.

Why was there such a resistance to gay liberation in Ireland? What took the country so long to finally amend the homophobic laws which other Western nations had addressed decades before? In order to deal with this topic it is important to go beyond the legal battle through which gay and lesbian rights were won, and into more dated entrenched ideology which may provide concentrated information on what lies below the recent Irish resistance to same-sex equality. By foregrounding both sexuality and history in his plays, McGuinness's dramaturgy encourages a similar examination of entrenched beliefs in Irish society. Consequently, it is useful at the offset of this queer enquiry to expose some of the earliest possible symptoms for the remarkable homophobia which characterised recent Irish political history.

In his book *Coming Out, Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* Jeffrey Weeks examines the foundations for the emergence of the laws which David Norris and his team fought all the way to the European Court. He states, "The year 1885 was one in which imperialism and national decline were on everybody's mind. The issue of Home Rule for Ireland and the Threat of the break-up of the United Kingdom were looming."[28] As a result of this anxiety new codes of aggressive masculinity began to emerge, and homosexuality became more and more

[28] Rose, p.6.

associated with weakness, both moral and political. Those in Ireland with nationalist inclinations were using the hint of homosexuality as a means of destabilising central figures in the British civil service responsible for the civic management of Ireland. As the nationalist press preyed on rumours of homosexual scandal to undermine British rule in Ireland, one media report, directed at an allegedly 'homosexual' British diplomat, accused him of bearing "the odium of contaminating the running stream of Irish moral purity by stirring up the stink of pollution planted by foreign hands."[29] When examined historically it becomes clear that homosexuality was one of the ways in which Irish identity was set in opposition to British identity: the stain of imperial injustice was tainted with the infection of moral impurity, an infection which threaten to spread into the 'uncontaminated' character of the 'true' Irishman. Thus, it may be recognised, that in Irish history nationalist ideologies and discourses were emerging within the context of a particularly homophobic moment in imperial history, and they employed this hysteria to their advantage in order to simultaneously associate Englishness with moral depravity, and effectively disassociate Irishness from anything resembling such weakness in character as gay sex.

And yet, despite contemporary denial and political opposition, homosexuality and homosexual communities have existed in Ireland throughout the century, and even before the British arrived. The ancient Irish law, the Brehon Law, was non-judgemental towards homosexuality. "Early and medieval Irish poetry is frequently homoerotic, and the pre-famine era is generally accepted to have had a more open attitude towards sexuality."[30] The focus which the nationalist press placed on the homosexual activity of British rulers

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., p.8.

in Ireland as corrupting the 'pure' Irish people points towards the fact there must have been an identifiable subculture in which this 'corruption' was taking place in late nineteenth-century Ireland. "According to a Government Committee in the 1930s, 'gross indecency between male persons' was 'spreading with malign vigour,' due in part, they believed, to a lack of parental control and responsibility during a period of general upheaval, and the proliferation of places of popular amusement such as dance-halls, picture houses and motor cars."[31] And later in the century, during the 1940s, the Labour Party published a report on the conditions at Portlaoise prison in which it was documented that "homosexuals constituting 30 percent of the total are kept apart from other prisoners."[32] This type of cultural information highlights how useful it is to foreground queer issues surrounding sexuality, diversity, and 'deviance' in the effort to dispel essentialised notions of identity and exclusive gender classifications. Quite clearly, sexuality can be seen here to be the strategy for historical interrogation and cultural deconstruction. This is the queer strategy I implement throughout my analysis of McGuinness's work. Unfortunately, as of yet there has been no basic historical project aimed at uncovering the history of homosexuality in Ireland. As a result of this historical oversight we are forced to turn to creative and aesthetic representations to look for hints of this oppressed subsection of Irish cultural memory.

Where David Norris has sought to politically uncover the silences which have characterised this apparently very queer Irish reality, Frank McGuinness has represented them in his drama. McGuinness's personal history provides some basic insight into what has influenced his queer artistic and cultural vision. Frank McGuinness was born in

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[31] Ibid., p.9.
[32] Ibid.

County Donegal in the small town of Buncrana, and so found himself in the unique political position of being part of the twenty-six counties, which eventually became the Republic of Ireland, and, simultaneously, part of the geographical, as opposed to political, reality of Northern Ireland. His birthplace is near to the border, and the closest major city to Buncrana is Derry, in Northern Ireland. Consequently, McGuinness's artistic vision and theatrical topical engagements have been strongly influenced by proximity to these two divergent communities living on the same island. By living in such a liminal geographical location ideas of homogenous Irish identities naturally come under more pressure than those who are not directly impacted by the differences which the border demarcates. This is one of the aspects of McGuinness's background which I believe has queered his perspective, producing an artistic insistence on diversity in representation.

However, homogeneity and conservatism have characterised most of the content of critical social, cultural and political analysis of twentieth-century Ireland, but McGuinness's work continually refers to a more complex social ordering, an ordering which puts pressure on the idea that there is an essence to Irish society, a purity to Irish culture, and an exclusively 'Irish' subjective identity. As the Celtic Tiger disappears into the realities of twenty-first century fiscal recession it is, once again, crucial to renegotiate concepts of Irishness to accommodate modern national self-consciousness. McGuinness's plays provide insightful fictional documents that reveal within themselves the complexity in Irish society, a multifaceted national character which has been generally suppressed in the past, and conveniently created in the present. His plays provide an artistic engagement with culture which helps retrieve its innate diversity in

spite of its largely conservative memories. McGuinness explores issues of memory and history throughout virtually all of his work, interrogating the ideology which supports them, and destabilising those traditional knowledges through unexpected, and historically unchronicled, representations of character and gender identity. Gender becomes a principal thematic subject McGuinness continually employs for queering the Irish collective recollection of itself and its history. It is his strategy to recall Irish cultural memory to its post-colonial empathy with the marginalised, and away from the prosaic artificiality of economically driven ambivalence and relativity.

Using Frank McGuinness's contribution as a dramatist in the task of interrogating the historical discourse of Irish identity is not altogether arbitrary. Although his plays are fictional, they serve as a chronicle of what society is saying about itself. In *The Inward Gaze* Peter Middleton offers a theory which acknowledges the difficulties in defining the complexity of contemporary versions of gender identity, and proposes a viable source which modern theorists could explore for information on historical versions of how these categories were shaped. He claims that literary, and I further would argue dramatic, texts are preoccupied with notions of subjectivity, and consequently can give interesting and informative insight into how societies constitute themselves. He continues: "Literary and cultural texts are one of the means by which our societies generate their knowledges of self, society and the natural world."[33] Middleton emphasises the instructional possibilities of literature which, within its own form, exposes multifaceted social, cultural, political and sexual influences and patterns. I would extend that position to argue that the dramatic creation, which includes both text and performance, not only

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[33] Peter Middleton, *The Inward Gaze: Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture*. London: Routledge, 1992, p.10.

points towards these discourses or knowledges, but actually shows them in three-dimensional representation of the body in performance. Consequently, McGuinness's drama is a vital cultural source that, effectively, can be excavated for social and cultural information, as well as a reference point for the formation of a theory on the state of modern struggles in Irish identity.

In Chapter One, 'Queer Nation,' I examine *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* and *Dolly West's Kitchen.* These two plays are placed against the historical backdrop of World War I and World War II, respectively. This chapter sets the tone for the entire dissertation in that it examines how McGuinness uses sexuality as a subject through which he interrogates ideological issues of Irish identity. It specifically focuses on the male homosexual kiss as a strategy for the interrogation of the ideologies which have supported and maintained historical concepts of what it means to be Irish and patriotic. By choosing to build his narrative around these two specific moments in Irish memory McGuinness puts pressure on history as he fictitiously creates characters that would not represent typical subjectivities of the period. Instead of rejecting the 'reality' which history has mythologised, McGuinness creates queer scenarios and queer individuals that stimulate broader versions of memories which have, through time, become two-dimensional in the national psyches of modern Irish people.

Foucault's theory of co-optation contributes greatly to this chapter. His theory that knowledge is power suggests that within the discursive categories which serve to exclude and marginalise is the potential for reversing their restrictive control. In other words, by appropriating scientific language or political categories which have been traditionally used to define and regulate 'deviance,' alternative meanings can be

generated and the very terms used to control can be resignified. The word queer itself is a perfect example of this strategy. Queer theorists have taken a word which has, in the past, been associated with negativity, containment, and exclusion and have resignified it with a system of thought that sees this identification as a potentially liberating position. McGuinness does a similarly incongruous re-signification of Irish identity in *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* through the presentation of the homosexual kiss: In staging military men in uniform – zealous symbols of patriotism and national honour – and by representing these men as homosexuals he applies ideological pressure to include homosexuality as a patriotic virtue, rather than a cultural vice.

Chapter Two, 'Camping in Utopia,' is an analysis of *Carthaginians*, a play which attempts to deal with the devastating residual effects of the violence of Bloody Sunday in the city of Derry, Northern Ireland. In this chapter I utilise a queer theoretical performance strategy, gay camp, to pinpoint an aesthetic which I argue effects the content of the play, as well as its structure, its character development, and its general representation of gender and political categories. Using the seminal text written on camp by Susan Sontag "Notes on Camp," along with a variety of other camp theories, I illustrate how McGuinness has taken this queer political and representational strategy and used it to try and shed new, and perhaps ultimately, healing light on the deep wounds that continue to haunt the collective memory in Northern Ireland of January 30 1972 when thirteen young men were shot and killed while on a civil rights march through the city; a day recorded in Irish history as Bloody Sunday.

All through this chapter I argue that evidence can be uncovered in this play to claim that McGuinness uses the full grammatical categorisation of the word 'camp' as a

noun; as a person, place or thing, in the complete structure of his dramaturgical approach. The main protagonist in this drama is Dido, a cross-dressing drag queen, writes a play *The Burning Balaclava*, which is, in turn, acted out within the greater drama of the piece. His play-within-the-play employs gender bending, and a playful engagement with many of the precious identifying icons of both the Catholic and the Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. McGuinness comically engages these otherwise dangerous and divisive signifiers which symbolise sectarian difference in the North, providing the audience with a theatrical narrative which truly queers all aspects of life in Derry, a city second only to Belfast in its sectarian violence and geographical community divisions. McGuinness extends this queer aesthetic to include place and space. The play is set in a cemetery in the city of Derry, a location which symbolises the ravages of hatred and division in Northern Ireland because of the presence of the graves of the thirteen men killed on Bloody Sunday. In *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* Foucault provides relevant theories which allow for an analysis of the cemetery in the social psyche as a public space. He claims that there are places and spaces within each culture which exist simultaneously within, and outside of, ordinary social spaces; this theory of space permits my analysis to be extended into a full definition of the word camp as an aesthetic which infects persons, places, and things throughout *Carthaginians*.

Chapter Three, 'The Wilde Irishmen,' continues my thesis of power, knowledge and sexuality as dramatic strategies in McGuinness's work. This chapter is an analysis of his most recently produced play, *Gates of Gold*. Staged in April 2002 at the Gate Theatre in Dublin, *Gates of Gold* was directed by veteran McGuinness director Patrick Mason. The play was critically anticipated to be a dramatisation of the life of the infamous

founders of the Gate Theatre, Michael MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards. However, to the bewilderment of the contemporary theatrical community, the play seemed to only remotely reflect the lives of these theatrical innovators of the Irish stage.

Throughout this chapter I argue that McGuinness employs a queer strategy in his writing technique. Although the play is sprinkled with hints that might point towards the 'actual' lives of MacLiammóir and Edwards as understood through public perception, it creates a unique, and largely fictional, story which tempts the audience by identifiable details, indicating recognisable aspects of their public celebrity lives. However, McGuinness withholds complete recognitional gratification by creating unidentifiable fictional distractions within the narrative which disrupt the 'reality' of the play because of how seemingly irrelevant or alien they are to what the Irish public feel they know about MacLiammóir and Edwards. In so doing, he challenges the popular perception in Ireland that the public know with a degree of certainty the often-discussed 'story' of these high-profile homosexuals. The sexual orientation of MacLiammóir and Edwards is the best known memory of the couple, regrettably, not the tremendous contribution they made to the life of twentieth century Irish theatrical history. The 'knowledge' of their homosexuality, I would suggest, is the piece of 'private' information which allows the public to feel that they know all about this eccentric couple. McGuinness rejects building a play around well known events such as MacLiammóir's adventures into public toilets along his daily journey from the Gate Theatre where he worked to his home, or any of the other clichés surrounding the oral tradition of gossip that the couple have left behind. What he does create in this play is an unapologetic long-term relationship between two men that love each other; his exposition is far more emotional than documentary or

biographical. McGuinness employs a type of dramaturgical 'lying' in order to reveal the commitment that was the foundation of this unrepentant relationship. I argue that McGuinness implements a writing aesthetic that Michael MacLiammóir and Oscar Wilde employed in their representation of homosexual love; as the chapter reveals, both of these men used the 'lie' in order to reveal the 'truth' of their sexual orientation at historical and cultural moments which invariably would have prohibited explicitness.

Chapter Four, 'Holy Irreverence,' is unique in the sense that it is the only chapter in which I deal with an unpublished McGuinness manuscript. This chapter focuses on a one-act play titled *The Gospel According to Judas* (2001). The play is an extended monologue, performed by a characterisation of the biblical apostle of Jesus, Judas Iscariot. In the stage directions to the piece McGuinness describes Judas as being played by a woman, dressed as a man. The play is set in an ambiguous room cluttered with books, newspapers and letters. The gender reversal of the character of Judas is the first of many indicators that this story is not going to be told in a conventional or biblically canonical fashion.

Judas was the disciple of Jesus who betrayed him in the Garden of Gethsemane, a betrayal which ultimately led to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. In the play the character of Judas reflects on the many people through the ages whom he refers to as his 'children.' The play unfolds with graphic sexual metaphors and erotic innuendos about the relationship between Jesus and Judas. The language and the sexuality are violent, and yet, time and time again, Judas returns to the initial attraction or love he felt for Jesus in his overwhelming desire to follow him. However, Judas, in the play, is caught in a type of purgatory in which he relives his own betrayal, and the countless betrayals of Christ

through the ages by men and women who have deviated from the norm or failed to fit in. McGuinness introduces the theme of AIDS into this play, playing with the religious fundamentalist idea that homosexuality is a betrayal of God, and AIDS is the punishment for such a crime. Judas, with his gender confusion, stands as a sort of everyman/woman in this play which transhistorically deals with the apparent contradiction of love for Jesus and 'deviance' as constructed through the Christian story.

Finding a queer paradigm through which to analyse this piece was easier than I imagined. Feminist theologies, such as those of Elizabeth Johnson, provide powerful insight into the ways in which institutional language and structures have sought, through the ages, to exclude those whom Jesus actively tried to include in his ministry during his life on earth, the marginal and disenfranchised. Johnson's work is a seminal feminist interrogation of theological discourse which does not reject the Christian tradition, but rather seeks out alternative stories within the grand narrative. Her approach to language and marginalisation works remarkably well for interrogating religious ideology from a queer perspective. However, the intensely sexual aspects of the play were more complex. For this analysis I have turned to the queer theologian Robert E. Goss. In his book *Queering Christ* Goss emphasises that the "battle for truth about queer sexuality has focused on churches' use of the bible to exclude translesbigays."[34] The term 'translesbigays' is an inclusive conflation of terms which have traditionally been constructed as sexual betrayals of conventional Christianity. In his theology, Goss seeks to liberate God from what he describes as the 'erotiphobia' projected onto the Divine by the Christian tradition, and developed through the teaching of the Church in relation to sexuality and sexual identity; a process which has constructed sexuality as the binary

[34] Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002, p. xvii.

opposite of spirituality. Goss seeks to reintegrate sexuality into concepts of theology by focusing on such fascinating concepts of the tradition of male homodevotionalism in the intense love directed towards the person of Jesus. The feminist challenge to discourse, combined with the queer integration of sexual passion and devotional love, come together to allow me to assert that McGuinness's alternative dramatic scripture in *The Gospel According to Judas* is a type of queer liberation theatrical theology, designed to claim a space for representations of queer theological impulses and ontological confusions.

In Chapter Five, 'Defective Histories,' I focus on how McGuinness engages the representation of documented historical figures of the past in his plays *Innocence* (1986), *Mary and Lizzie* (1989), and *Mutabilitie* (1997). *Innocence* focuses on the life of the Italian painter Caravaggio, *Mary and Lizzie* on the Irish lovers of Fredrick Engels, the sisters Mary and Lizzie Burns, and *Mutabilitie* on Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser. In these plays McGuinness writes alternative fictional historical biographies in an attempt to re-engage historical perspectives by confronting the type of cognitive certainty of the past encouraged by canonical accounts of people and events in conventional histories.

In this chapter I return, once again, to the primary texts of Foucault in order to theoretically interrogate McGuinness's dramaturgical use of concepts of writing history. My idea of 'defective histories' is based on Foucault's theory of *effective history*, a theory which encourages an examination of the past in order to uncover discontinuities, rather than continuity between the past and the present. In all three of the plays which I examine in this chapter McGuinness engages well known figures in Western history, and creates fictional versions of their lives. These fictions exploit the creative prerogative of the theatrical experience in order to unsettle the certainty of a cohesive historical past

which, often times, locks the present into ideological justifications based on notions that the present evolved 'naturally' from the past, giving it validation through memory. This interrogation of the past, in order to release the present from the grip of historical validation, is particularly important in relation to the aspects of the relationship between England and Ireland which still effect present realities in Northern Ireland. Although difference is a paradigmatic tool which McGuinness employs in character, narrative and dramatic structure, he is continually searching in his work for new ways to imagine the problematic relationship which history has passed on and, to this day, still remains unresolved between Ireland and England.

However, McGuinness is not simply an historian, but is, rather, an artist, using the genre of theatre to affect historical imagination. It is therefore vital to never lose sight of the fact that his project is theatrical and not academically scientific. In order to theorise the intersection between drama and history I have employed the performance theory of Freddie Rokem in his book *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*. Rokem's analysis of the performative techniques involved in the dramatic representation of history allow for an identification of what is queer in McGuinness's own historical dramaturgy, and how this cultural project we call 'theatre' participates in the ongoing debates about the past, so important for our present and future national and personal understandings.

In my final chapter, 'There's No Place Like Home,' I deal with, perhaps, the most enigmatic aspect of McGuinness's plays: the queer emotional undercurrent which transforms his work from a simple social commentary to a captivating theatrical experience which touches his audiences and, ultimately, secures and confirms his

continued privileged position as a popular and successful Irish playwright. In so doing, I focus in this chapter on the transforming identity of family and notions of home in postmodern western culture as represented in his plays *The Bird Sanctuary* (1994), *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992), and *The Factory Girls* (1984).

In *The Bird Sanctuary* McGuinness represents the struggle of an ageing Irish family of social privilege to support one another emotionally and financially in the changing conditions of modern Ireland. This play offers interesting challenges to the idea of the 'Irish family' as established by the 1937 Constitution in the early days of the Irish Free State. *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* recounts the experience of three hostages, one from the Unites States, one from Ireland, and one from England. This play is loosely based on the experience of the kidnapping in Beirut of John McCarthy, Terry Waite, and Brian Keenan. McGuinness characteristically engages a topic of immediate relevance, through which he explores the nature of relationships between men. In *The Factory Girls*, McGuinness's first play, he portrays the struggle of a group of working women to overcome both oppressive job conditions and depressive family responsibilities.

These three plays link issues of the intense social pressure placed on personal identity and the individual search for fulfilment in modern times, with the dramatic technique of spatial representation. Characteristically, McGuinness does not reject the aesthetic customs that have informed his dramatic talent, i.e. the Irish theatrical tradition of the twentieth century. In *The Bird Sanctuary* McGuinness represents the family, a mainstay of Irish realist dramatic narrative, and yet, he uses the very structure of the family house, the building itself, to speak of the condition of the family's relationships with one another and society. The once grand family, living in this once grand house, is

represented as dysfunctional, and the very edifice of their house as decaying. In her book *Staging Place* Una Chaudhuri identifies the transformation of theatrical space as a tool in reflecting the transformation of ideological space, providing insight into McGuinness's own project of interrogating interior places by his representations of exterior spaces. *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and *The Factory Girls* use space in a similar fashion. Both represent a collection of people, one involuntarily the other voluntarily, confined in a tight space. This spatial claustrophobia creates a dramatic tension that in turn reflects the social tensions experienced in the configuration of relationships which provide the type of support that cultural ideas of 'family' are purported to provide. All three plays represent queer families, each searching for the reconciliation and salvation promised by solidarity, honesty, and emotional support based on need rather than obligation.

In the following pages I hope to use the theatre of Frank McGuinness to imagine and uncover queer issues which exist within a diverse range of intersecting discourses which, in turn, affect Irish theatre, Irish society, and Irish identity. Queering his work is not to assert a definitive reading, but, instead, to make a plea for diversity and difference; a postponement of essentialist judgements, and an entertaining interrogation of theatrical clichés which lock not only McGuinness's work, but much of the tradition of Irish theatre, into a conservative category which, in turn, effects the growth and development of theatre in Ireland. It will be my goal to bring forward and, consequently, make visible the queer subordinate desires within McGuinness's dramaturgy which, I argue, seek reconciliation and equality, and to illustrate how these queer dramatic fictions, through the complex medium of theatrical representation, contest notions of identity, truth, and nature. Ultimately, my goal is to offer a diverse decoding of the queer within his work,

not as an end in itself, but as a means of encouraging disparate analysis of theatre in general, and Irish theatre specifically.

1

'Queer Nation'

Homosexual Representations of National Identity in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*

> *In this chapter I examine how McGuinness challenges the project of shaping national identity through the Irish theatrical tradition in his plays* Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme *(1985) and* Dolly West's Kitchen *(1999). Contemporary Irish theatre, from its very foundations in the Irish Literary Theatre, has been tied together with the project of forging national identity in post-colonial Ireland. By exploring the factors which influenced the type of theatre that has been popular in twentieth-century Ireland, and some of the cultural and political ideas which have influenced these preferences, I examine McGuinness's unique and innovative dramaturgy, his physicalisations of sexual diversity and homosexuality, and the critical response to what is distinctive in his work from within the tradition itself.*

In *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness* Eamonn Jordan writes the following description of the thematic content found in McGuinness's drama:

> In his writing the playwright deals with the constitution of the male mind, the role of women in Irish society, the homosexual imagination, the function of art in society, the legacy of religion, the centrality of memory to the Irish psyche, the importance of fiction in the lives of individuals and the possibility of people accepting, freeing or forgiving themselves.[1]

Although Jordan's description is accurate, it fails to identify, arguably, the most significantly unique aspect of McGuinness's writing, his persistent representation of the embodied homosexual. McGuinness certainly deals with what Jordan describes as the 'homosexual imagination,' and yet, there is nothing imaginary about the sexually charged homosexual body engaged in the passion and sensuality of the male-male embrace or erotic kiss he offers to his audiences. It is the repeated representation of the homosexual body and gay intimacy that makes McGuinness's drama distinctive

[1] Eamonn Jordan, *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1997, p.v.

among the canonical writers with whom he shares theatrical honours on the Irish National Stage (The Abbey Theatre), and it is because of this inimitable contribution to Irish drama, I would argue, that his work is both politically energised and culturally subversive.

McGuinness sets *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* against the historical backdrop of World War I and World War II respectively. In so doing, he places his characters in the all-male environment of the military in order to examine and explore various issues in relation to gender and masculine identity. The military backdrop of these two plays also creates a setting which not only focuses attention on the exclusively male surroundings of military life, but, additionally, encourages a critique of ideas of national identity, tribal loyalty, and patriotism during times of war.

In both *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness creates homosexual characters with nationalistic and patriotic inclinations; men exhibiting bravery, savagery, integrity and passion for land and nation. By placing these men in military costume he specifically identifies them with the ideals of nation and, consequently, offers a queer[2] perspective, and a model of diversity in national identity. McGuinness extends issues of queer identity beyond the ideological and into the physical by allowing his men in uniform to erotically touch one another and passionately kiss. This queer kiss, through which he 'outs' his gay characters, is a performative moment charged with the potential for the subversion of unitary or

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[2] As I mentioned in the Introduction, this term will be developed throughout the dissertation, but for further clarification, and in order to create a connection with the representational strategies of the theatre queer may be additionally understood as a theoretical term which "describes a diverse range of critical practices and priorities: readings of the representation of same-sex desire in literary texts, films music, images; analyses of the social and political power relations of sexuality; critiques of the sex-gender system; studies of transsexual and transgender identification, of sadomasochism and of transgressive desires." See: Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999, p.9.

essentialist notions of Irish identity. In both of these plays McGuinness also offers a queer version of historical events, showing the world from the controversial and 'deviant' position of the homosexual perspective.

"*Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* was McGuinness's first major play,"[3] and was performed in the National's Peacock Theatre, directed by Patrick Mason.[4] The play is based on the legendary history of the 36th Ulster Division of the British Army who participated in the Battle of the Somme in France during World War I. The men who joined this particular regiment volunteered not only as an expression of loyalty to the British crown, but also as a symbol of their opposition to the controversial plan for Home Rule[5] in Ireland. The legend that surrounds this regiment and the way it was formed "is that, almost as one, the Protestant men of the nine counties of Ulster offered themselves for service in 1914." [6] The reality of the historical circumstances which saw these men rally to the call of country and crown is, of course, markedly more complex than the idealistically homogeneous portrait that myth and legend have passed on through generations, but its legacy has nevertheless shored up notions of Loyalist identity and its continued resistance to Northern Irish separation from the United Kingdom for decades. This artificial sense of unanimous opposition and collective community response in time of threat

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[3] Jordan, p.25.

[4] See Appendix III for an interview with Mason.

[5] The political phrase 'Home Rule' is synonymous with the term 'Home Government,' and relates to "a developed parliament at Dublin, for Irish affairs, emphatically within the Empire, and compatible with a federalised arrangement for United Kingdom Government" (R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*. London: Penguin, 1989, p.397). The movement for Home Rule in Ireland began in the mid-nineteenth century, and was spearheaded at Westminster by the Irish politician Charles Stewart Parnell. During World War I there was resistance in Ireland to conscription into the British Army. Those in favour of Home Rule saw this resistance as an opportunity to push their agenda forward by putting this particular wartime pressure on the British government. Home Rule became irrelevant after the Easter Rising of 1916 and the subsequent events which led to the establishment of the Irish Free State and the partition of the North of Ireland from what is known today as the Republic of Ireland.

[6] This quotation is from the programme note to the 1995 production of *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, written by Kevin Meyers.

continues to inspire the patriotic loyalties that fuel the sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland today.

Dolly West's Kitchen was produced on the main stage at the Abbey and was also directed by Patrick Mason. This play engages Ireland's historic position of neutrality during World War II. In this play, as with *Observe the Sons*, McGuinness draws the audience's attention to the particular nature of individual or specific small group experience in the midst of historic moments of epic proportion which have acquired mythical status in the memory of the western world. In *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness focuses peripherally on the monumental events of Hitler's Third Reich and the bloody war in Europe, and specifically on the impact of these events in the lives of the West family in Buncrana, County Donegal, Ireland. In both plays, through the narrative and dramatic intimacy of lovers and the camaraderie of compatriots, McGuinness re-visits moments in time in order to confront and challenge the commonly accepted mythical parameters of historical legend and partisan cultural myth.

In *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness, once again, puts pressure on an Irish historical political reality, one which is pregnant with the pressure that national mythologies create. During WWII Ireland chose not to support her traditional allies, and remained neutral throughout the war. In *Ireland and the Second World War* Geoffrey Roberts describes the cultural and political myth of Irish neutrality that, I argue, bubbles below the dramatic anxieties in *Dolly West's Kitchen*:

> The conventional narrative of Irish neutrality during the Second World War goes something like this: The Irish Free State's declaration of neutrality in 1939 was undoubtedly the wisest and safest course of action. It protected the Irish people from the perils of war, asserted the country's sovereignty and

> independence from Britain, and, crucially, maintained the unity of the state at a time of great national danger.[7]

Roberts critiques this traditional ideology, which has uncritically justified Ireland's neutral position, and contests the idea that there was just one unified narrative which explains the complexity of national sentiment around Irish participation in the war. Ireland's resistance to supporting either side of the conflict has gone largely unchallenged in post-war histories. Traditional histories have detailed the national policy which asserted that neither side in the conflict was completely justified, and consequently neither deserved the assent of the moral majority in Ireland. This version of history in fact may be quite valid, and yet, it fails to acknowledge that a large part of the reasoning behind the Irish government's reluctance to side with the allies during the war was the reality that this would be perceived by Irish republicans as siding with their long-time enemies, the British. Resistance to any type of alliance with the British forced a type of neutral moral indifference that has been historically justified and validated by traditional narratives of Irish neutrality. Consequently, neutrality has been sentimentalised as a purely moral stance against the evils of war, reducing the nation's culpability in the face of the horrors of genocide, not to mention their obligations to their traditional allies, by opting for an unexamined explanation rather than acknowledge bias.

When pressure is applied to the unity of such a national myth fissures begin to appear, and alternative versions of reality emerge through the cracks. De Valera's government imposed a censorship of material relating to sympathies which might favour either side of the conflict, and consequently those who chose not to remain neutral were marginalised, especially those volunteers who joined the British army in support of the allies. In the Republic, "special powers were introduced to prevent the

[7] Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts, *Ireland and the Second World War: Politics, Society and Remembrance*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, p.165.

wearing of the uniforms on leave. Action was taken to prevent the collection of funds in the State on behalf of the British war effort."[8] In *Dolly West's Kitchen*, Alec, the only member of the British Army represented in the play is also the only military man not to appear in his uniform on stage. The policies of censorship were established to neutralise Irish domestic life as well by limiting the possibilities of "the danger of disorder and disruption"[9] within a state still struggling in the wake of years of conflict and civil war. Understood in this light, Irish neutrality can be interpreted as a political way of controlling moral positions in the name of social stability or for the greater benefit of the nation. Censorship can then be justified as a legislative tool employed to stifle whatever debate may arise, or any alternative positions which might exist, for the protection of the greater good. However, this value-ridden censorship was also a rejection within the Irish national debate of the documented "contribution made by at least 40,000 of its citizens to the war effort."[10] McGuinness explodes the credibility of justified cohesive national myth in this play in much the same way as he does in *Observe the Sons*, except here he challenges the myths of the Republic, as opposed to the North. In both cases he provokes his audience to see the past differently in order to create space for new and diverse contemporary Irish ideologies.

In his article "Frank McGuinness and the Ruins of Irish History" James Hurt describes McGuinness as one of the few Irish playwrights to take up the challenge of identifying the conflicting pressure points in Irish history that haunt the countries national consciousness. Hurt refers to McGuinness as a "writer of history plays,"[11] describing his historical engagements as dramatic opportunities to apply pressure to historical moments which have been reduced to collectively convenient memories

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[8] Ibid., p.89.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] James Hurt, in *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage*, ed. Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan and Shakir Mustafa. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p.275.

and, subsequently, endowed with the untouchable status of sacrosanct cultural mythologies. In *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness interrogates cultural historical memory, theatrically creating alternative positions within rigid mythologies that still exist in contemporary Irish society. Whether it be the tensions within the myth of the Loyalist 36th Ulster Division or the anxiety lurking behind the Irish position of neutrality during WW II, McGuinness's attention to the individual lives of his characters serves as a theatrical means of blasting a new awareness of the configurations of history which have not only solidified the past, but have also locked the present into its artificial standardisation of a singular historical interpretation.

As I mentioned, the culturally interrogative potential of McGuinness's work is intrinsically tied up in his representations of gender and sexual identity. Homosexuality and gay characters are often the sexual dynamite McGuinness ignites to blow-up the organisation of history which dominates and dictates solidified or essentialised identities. Sexual typologies and images of persons who engage in particular 'deviant' sexual acts are part of the vast historical discourse which has served to crystallise concepts of identity, and limit the flow of thoughts and ideas which might lend validation to less orthodox histories or alternative subjective positions. In these two plays McGuinness specifically exploits the historic 'deviance'[12] of homosexuality, using it as a dramaturgical device to puncture pressure points in Irish history and disseminate ideologies that have become congested and stagnant in the politics of both gender and national identities.

In a 1997 interview in *The Irish Times* McGuinness gives some insight into the metaphoric potential of homosexual identity in his writing:

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[12] For more information on the history of homosexuality as deviant behaviour see: David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

> I think there has been a tentativeness with showing a gay relationship on the stage, and I would like to think in the history of Irish theatre, I had some influence in that. Particularly in – my God! – *Innocence*, when there was roaring in the theatre. It was quite scary at the time. Even in *Observe the Sons*, the first time, around twelve years ago people weren't comfortable with this possibility between brave men – it shows you what they know about soldiers...If there is to be a new relationship between the islands – and the metaphor that we have looked at is between a man and a woman – maybe we should be looking at different images of peace and communication, and this is a perfectly valid way of presenting imagery of a new way forward...[13]

In these plays McGuinness uses the specific perspective of individual lives to develop and give voice to alternative versions of Irish history. By giving expression to those whose voices have been consistently marginalised, McGuinness is putting artistic pressure on areas of Irish history. Not since the days of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*[14] or O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*[15] has an Irish playwright shocked the Irish stage with their sexualised versions of Irishness as McGuinness has done with his queer writing. In McGuinness's plays, notions of queer identity intersect with ideas of national identity and fragment essentialist concepts of who or what constitutes both contemporary and historical Irish national identities.

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[13] Mic Moroney, "Coming Home." *The Irish Times*, 29 November 1997, section 3, p.16.

[14] "On the second performance of *The Playboy of the Western World*, about forty men who sat in the middle of the pit succeeded in making the play entirely inaudible...For days articles in the press called for the withdrawal of the play...On the last night of the play there were, I believe, police keeping order in the theatre and in its neighbourhood". These quotes are from an article written by W.B. Yeats entitled "The Controversy over *The Playboy of the Western World,"* in *Modern Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington, p. 460-62. There is also a journal account by Joseph Holloway in this same publication, p. 454-9, in which he describes the evening of Saturday, January 26, 1907 when the riots broke out. When asked by Lady Gregory what the cause of the disturbance was he replied "Blackgaurdism!" She asked him on which side, and he answered "The stage!" The major complaint which these articles report is that the audience did not think Synge's play was an accurate representation of Irishness or Irish peasants at an historical moment when identity politics were being defined and delineated in anticipation of Irish independence from colonial Britain.

[15] Riots erupted on the fourth night of this play in February 1926. Christopher Murray, in *Twentieth – century Irish Drama*, describes the play as "an open attack on the ideology of republicanism" (p. 96). Murray explains the plays historical project: "It was a revisionist play before ever the term was coined. The Rising, in this account, was the fruit of vanity, demagoguery, and romantic idealism, entrenching further the dispossessed into dispossession and the poor into greater poverty" (p.94). O'Casey's treatment of the events of the 1916 rising critiqued an historical moment which was still very much alive in the psyche of the Irish people, and, consequently, the pressure he applied to that idealised period of Irish history was too much to take for many of the plays earliest audiences.

McGuinness strategically introduces the theme of homosexuality into both of these dramas. In *Dolly West's Kitchen* he eases his audience into his queer representations with the character of Marco, an American soldier preparing to join the battle on the continent, temporarily stationed across the border from Donegal in Northern Ireland. Marco appears in U.S. military uniform, and immediately proceeds to 'out' himself to the West family, as exhibited in the following dialogue with Esther, Dolly West's sister:

> **Marco** I'm Marco Delavicario, this is my Irish-American cousin, Jamie O'Brien. We signed up together. Jamie brought the clothes he was standing in and a change of underwear. I brought one taffeta dress and a change of high heels. Who knows what might happen in the heat of battle?
> **Esther** They let a man like you into the US army?
> **Marco** Right now they'd let a man like you into the US army.[16] (25)

However, the possibility of the homosexual is introduced to the Abbey audience through the safety of ethnic and national distance. Marco is an American, and for that matter an Italian-American. His homosexuality is dissociated from Irishness both patriotically and ethnically, preserving the notion of the homosexual as the 'other,' a vital positioning in the dichotomies of both national politics and sexual identity.

McGuinness introduces homosexual themes with subtlety in PART TWO of *Observe the Sons*, aptly titled 'INITIATION.' In this section of the play we are presented with the character of young Pyper, the homosexual protagonist, as he meets David Craig, his would be lover. Pyper is provocatively eating an apple with a knife, creating a biblical creation-like scene reminiscent of the temptation of Adam by Eve. Pyper seductively offers Craig some of his apple:

> **Pyper** Like a piece of apple?
> **Craig** I've work to do.
> **Pyper** I can't tempt you?
> **Craig** Get on with your business and stop this foolishness.
> **Pyper** Have you ever looked at an apple?

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[16] Frank McGuinness, *Dolly West's Kitchen* in *Frank McGuinness: Plays 2*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002. All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this edition.

Craig Yes.
Pyper What do you see?
Craig An Apple.
Pyper I don't. I see through it.
Craig The skin you mean?
Pyper The flesh. The flesh. The flesh.
Craig What about it?
Pyper Beautiful. Hard. White.[17] (104)

Pyper's verbal seduction of Craig is sexually stirring; creating a sense of erotic unease as the homosexual character cruises, testing the openness of his potential lover for physical contact. But even subtler is McGuinness's use of allegory and innuendo as he initiates the rather timid yet curious character of Craig into the erotically charged, often veiled, seductive and sexual language of the homosexual. The scene continues:

Craig begins to undress, Pyper watching him intently. Craig glares at Pyper. Pyper shrugs, turns his back. When Craig is undressed, Pyper turns rapidly. Craig starts.
Craig Will you for God's sake –
Pyper You're as scared of me as I am of blood. (106)

In production, as the scene unfolds Pyper's language and his body are continuously confrontational with all the actors onstage, causing disruption and discomfort to the other characters with his unsettling conversation and his menacing physical presence. His language is sarcastic, threatening, and metaphorically loaded, and the men struggle to understand this unconventional verbosity. Throughout the scene other characters continually refer to Pyper as 'rare,' attaching the stigma of madness and sickness to him. Pyper is violent in both speech and action. As the scene draws to an end Pyper produces a penknife as a verbal confrontation unfolds between himself and Roulston, a fellow enlistee:

Roulston Get out of the army now. Go to a doctor. You're mad. He'll sign you out. Don't stay in this company. Get out. Go.
Pyper I will get out Roulston, and do you know how? I'll die willingly. Will you? Yes. (*He raises his knife to Roulston's throat.*) You can feel that.

[17] Frank McGuinness, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* in *Frank McGuinness: Plays 1*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996. All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this edition.

> Death. You fear that. Death. And I know death. I'll let you know it. I'll take away your peace, and that's the only disturbance I'm responsible for in this company. Right? Right. More than right. (*He pretends to slash Roulston's throat.)* (136)

Pyper is hostile and brave, deviant and confrontational. He is unlike the other men in the play in more ways than one. His harsh honesty, his heroism, and his anger define his masculinity, and make him queer in comparison to the other soldiers. His voice is disruptive, and causes confusion as the other men in the company are forced to confront their own motivations in joining the army by the brutal candour with which Pyper fragments any sense of artificial security or unity amongst these Ulster men. Pyper is the queer presence which haunts this play with the threat of taking away any sense of peace that the men of the regiment may feel in answering the patriotic call to arms. The others unquestionably accept their duty to nation while Pyper's aggravation seems to embody the perpetual question 'Why? Why? Why?', challenging national mythologies which validate war and the bloody sacrifice of young men to its purpose.

By penetrating and exploring the myths of nation in these plays McGuinness dislodges fixed notions of history and inserts alternative perspectives and influences. By making Pyper so unique in both language and action McGuinness clearly places him in the position of the outsider within the greater group, a place commonly inhabited by the homosexual in society. And yet, it is this type of alienated perspective, the homosexual point of view, which McGuinness describes in the aforementioned interview as "a perfectly valid way of presenting imagery of a new way forward."[18] The agitation which Pyper causes throughout the play disturbs the other men by shaking the ideological foundations which artificially support their notions of purpose, and breaking up any false sense of certainty or conviction which

[18] Moroney, p.2.

valorises war and death. Pyper stands alone as a voice of opposition to the cultural myths which have historically beatified those men sent to the slaughter from the 36th Ulster Division of the British Army, rejecting the glamour of self-sacrifice for nation and embodying an alternative memory of the ravages of violence and loss for the emptiness of empire.

Similarly, queer theory also inhabits an alternative stance against what is otherwise considered mainstream ideology, discourse, and imagery. "Queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire."[19] As a theoretical tool for analysis of McGuinness's drama, queer theories help move the conversation about representations of sex and sexuality through the depiction of gay lives and bodies, and into the more complex layers of issues of sex and sexuality as dramaturgical strategies implemented in order to challenge both Irish national ideologies and the Irish theatrical tradition. "Queerness should challenge and confuse our understanding and uses of sexual and gender categories...[It] should challenge commonly accepted notions of reality."[20] The word itself is confrontational, and seeks to be dangerous enough to impose a threat, a threat which ultimately seeks to disrupt the status quo as defined by conventional standards. McGuinness embodies this type of queer confrontation in the very character and dialogue of Pyper. Pyper is disruptive and threatening while being simultaneously courageous and authoritative, drawing together, in one person, seemingly contradictory characteristics. The play opens with Elder Pyper, and as if dreaming backwards his memories take on the flesh of the body of the play and its characters. Young Pyper's antagonism could thus be interpreted as an attempt to redirect the course of history, and show these men an

[19] Spargo, p.9.
[20] William G. Tierney, *Academic Outlaws: Queer Theory and Cultural Studies in the Academy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997, p.29.

alternative way, possibly a way to save themselves in order to relieve his guilt and the memories which continue to haunt him into old age.

In *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness nuances the voice of cultural confrontation against national mythologies begun in *Observe the Sons* by adding a touch of linguistic and cognitive contradiction for the purpose of ideological inversion. Marco is introduced to Justin, Dolly's only brother, and an officer in the Irish Army. Towards the end of SCENE TWO McGuinness begins to pair his characters off. As they exit the house for a walk on the beach Marco reveals himself to Justin:

> **Marco** I shall refuse your arm, young man. I do not trust men in uniform.
> **Justin** What the hell are you?
> **Marco** An angel fallen from the skies.
> **Justin** Where exactly are you from?
> **Marco** Paradise. (29)

And moments later, as Dolly and her mother Rima are left alone in the family kitchen, Dolly asks:

> **Dolly** What have you brought into this house?
> **Rima** Badness. Good, isn't it? A bit of badness. (30)

McGuinness is playing with the traditional construction of the homosexual as both deviant, and the moral opposite of the heterosexual. Queer theories have identified the constructed nature of homosexual identity in western society as "the name of a natural kind of dumping ground for all sorts of mutually incompatible, logical contradictory notions."[21] McGuinness is emphasising the artificiality of such a projection by allowing the 'homo' a moment of self-definition, as Marco describes himself as an 'angel' from 'paradise.' But, Rima's comment at the end of the scene introduces the real ideological paradox McGuinness is offering in his homosexual representation. Rima subverts traditional discursive constructions of homosexuality

[21] David M. Halperin, *Saint=Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.45.

in her clever play on words: 'Badness. Good, isn't it?' In this dramatic instance the audience is presented with a linguistic contradiction which asks them to imagine 'goodness' in what has otherwise been constructed as 'bad.' This theatrical moment is charged with subversive potential as McGuinness tries to upset the sexual flow of thought which rejects the homosexual voice by projecting onto it all of the contradictions inherent in the myths of culturally sanctioned heterosexuality.

However, in these two plays McGuinness goes beyond the mere ideological and historical confrontation of the content of his drama, and moves into the physical challenge of the representation of the homosexual body and homosexual desire. If PART TWO, 'INITIATION,' in *Observe the Sons* contains the subtlety of innuendo PART THREE, 'PAIRING,' clearly represents homosexual desire. McGuinness himself refers to the 'roaring in the theatre' during his play *Innocence*, and the fact that 'people weren't comfortable' with the gay relationship and themes in *Observe the Sons*. Something about gay bodies threatened the audience enough to elicit a physical response. "The continuing shock value of open demonstrations of homosexual affection or desire shows not only the continuity of heterosexism but also the theatrical principle that bodies contain the greatest potential danger for a contemporary audience, and theatre's power stems from this danger."[22] McGuinness's brand of queer theatrical danger is, once again, reminiscent of the threat posed by the dramatic representations of Irish identity in the earlier work of both Synge and O'Casey. Scandal ensued in *The Playboy* at the mere mention of Pegeen's slip, and the possibility of prostitution in the character of Rosie in *The Plough* stimulated social and moral discomfort, however benign, through the mere mention of sexuality.

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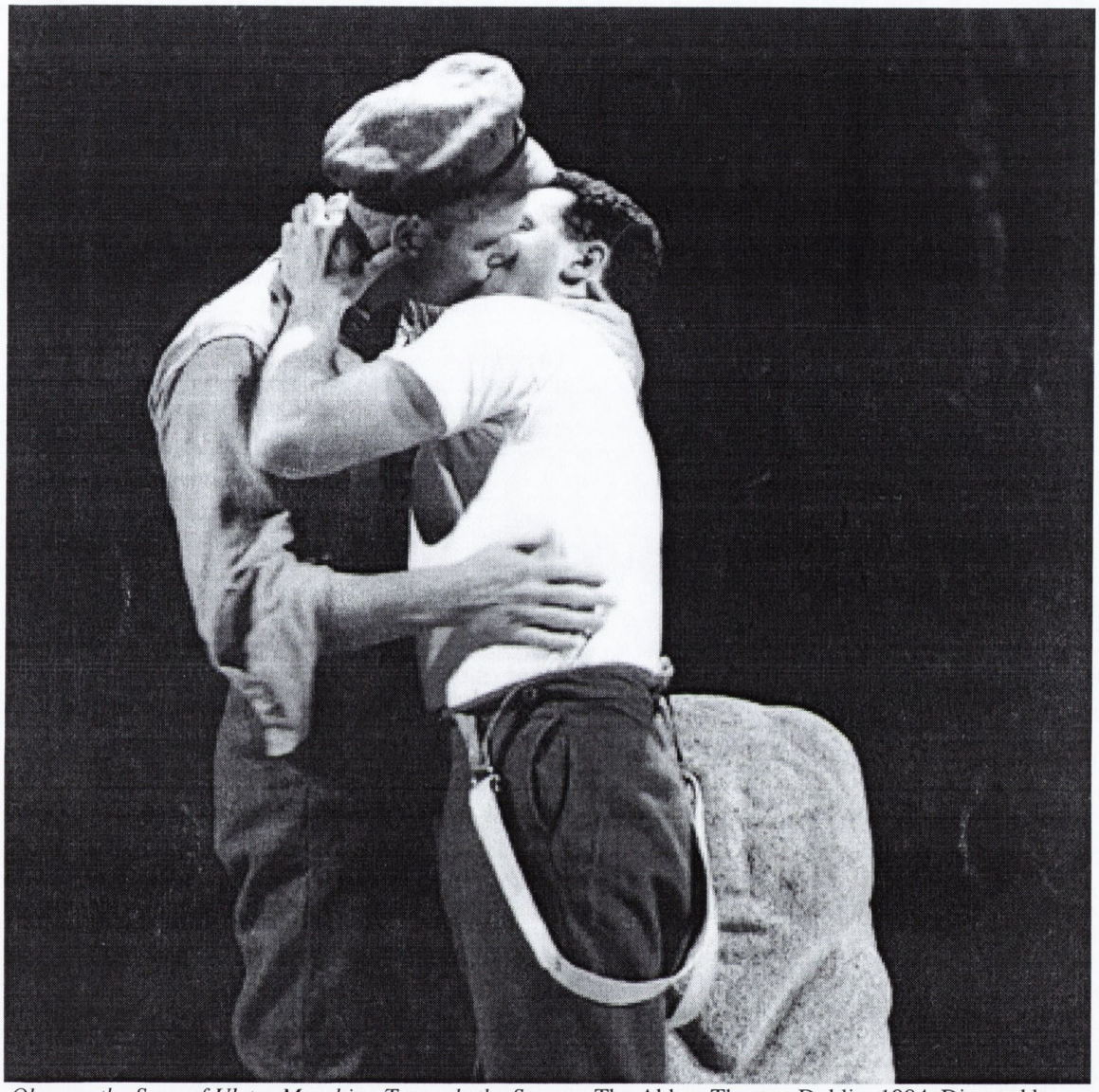
[22] John M. Clum, *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000, p.7.



Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme, The Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 1994. Directed by Patrick Mason. Peter Gowan as Pyper, and Conor McDermottroe as Craig. Photograph by Amelia Stein,with permission.



Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme, The Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 1994. Directed by Patrick Mason. Peter Gowan as Pyper, and Conor McDermottroe as Craig. Photograph by Amelia Stein,with permission.

What makes sexuality and homosexual bodies potentially dangerous in the specific context of theatre and performance? The theatre, in both convention and genre, is transparently fictional, and yet, if my theory about McGuinness's use of gay bodies as a dramatic strategy for the disruption of basic national ideologies is true, then cultural concepts of homosexuality must somehow penetrate the theatrical imagination to impact an audience's sensibilities. In his book *An Anatomy of Drama* Martin Esslin describes the unique character of drama in relationship to the body and performance and its subsequent effects on audiences:

> Most drama is fiction put before us in performance by real human beings; unlike purely literary fiction, it is thus made visible and palpable, given as it were, the power and the impact of the living flesh. These elements constitute a strong dose of reality in the fiction... [23]

McGuinness's plays combine the physical 'reality' of Esslin's theory of the body in drama with queer theories' objective of destabilising the normative to create a theatre that is erotically charged and, consequently, politically subversive. The veiled language and innuendo of PART TWO of *Observe the Sons* are initially more palatable, gradually introducing the audience into the much more threatening physical action of PART THREE when Pyper and Craig touch one another erotically, eventually leading to a sexually electric embrace and kiss. In the case of the Irish theatrical tradition, representing sexuality historically has been disruptive to notions of nation and national identity. McGuinness's gay bodies contribute to this disruption as they fictionally associate homosexuality with Irish identities.[24]

Audiences are generally accustomed to seeing men touch on stage, but the kiss is hardly ever, or in the case of Ireland's National stage at the time of the first

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[23] Martin Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1976, p.106.

[24] For more information on this refer to Appendix III. In an interview with Patrick Mason on 19 May 2003 he informed me that when he was the artistic director of the Abbey he produced the Irish première of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. He claimed that the production was poorly attended mostly due to the fact that word had gotten around that this play, representing the ravages of AIDS on the gay community in the United States, had nothing to do with "us," meaning the Irish people.

production of *Observe the Sons* in 1985, never shown. The kiss in *Observe the Sons* is the matrix of ideological confrontation in McGuinness's theatre, and an essential element to a queer representation. This dramatic moment dissolves all of the detected and undetected threats of homosexual desire, manifesting homosexuality in such a way that the audience is forced to confront the 'reality in the fiction.' In the moment of the kiss the audience is compelled by the presentation of what is otherwise unseen to make a decision about how they feel about witnessing gay bodies, whether positive, negative or indifferent. This is particularly interesting when contextualised and considered in light of the impending social and political debate surrounding the legalisation of homosexuality at this period as illustrated in the Introduction.

In his book *Still Acting Gay* John Clum describes specifically the impact of the gay kiss when represented on stage:

> The sight of two men kissing each other on the lips can evoke enormous fear and hostility in some audience members...Everyone knows that sex between men happens, but the sight of two men kissing is often a transgression of the gender order, taken by many to be "natural." A kiss is a sign of affection, of love, not merely of lust. A kiss, to paraphrase the old song, isn't just a kiss. Hence its theatrical power.[25]

A play can contain all the homoerotic innuendo in the world, and yet, it is the kiss on the lips that ends all speculation, and confirms the 'deviance' of the characters involved, further forcing reality to come through the dramatic fiction. Consequently, in order to fully exploit the radical nature of a queer theatrical dramaturgy, "the kiss is crucial in making gayness onstage more than a safe matter for words."[26]

In *Dolly West's Kitchen* the kiss between Justin and Marco introduces the possibility of a gay Irish military officer. Marco's homosexuality, as mentioned, is safely distanced by his ethnicity, and so is Pyper's. Pyper, although Irish, is a Northern Irish Loyalist wearing the military uniform of the British Army; a fact that

[25] Clum, pp.13-14.
[26] Ibid., p.19.



Dolly West's Kitchen, The Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 1999. Directed by Patrick Mason. Perry Ojeda as Marco, and Michael Colgan as Justin. Photograph by Amelia Stein, with permission.

would allow audiences in the Republic of Ireland to maintain a distance from his sexuality through his politics. *Dolly West's Kitchen* is, consequently, the first play in which an Irish playwright has represented the possibility of an Irish military person being gay on the National stage. By making Justin a uniformed Irish citizen in *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness has opened the closet to the possibility of queers within Irish society, pointing to the work of contemporary Irish historical revisionists who are now beginning to recognise homosexual men as practical and purposeful in achieving the goal of independence sought after by Irish nationalists at the turn of the twentieth century.[27] Pyper, Craig, Marco, and Justin all possess qualities of character associated with good military men: bravery, loyalty, and courage. McGuinness takes these heroic qualities and, in the moment of the kiss, queers ideas of both masculinity and patriotism. No one expects fearless defenders of national interests to be 'faggots' or 'queers.' This disruption of expectation through the kiss disposes of the fiction which disguises McGuinness's queer version of history, breaking through the drama and upsetting the regulated gender codes of citizenship and national identity.

In *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness appropriates military identity, and associates gays with the defence of national character, connecting homosexuality with issues of nationalism, and, simultaneously, interrogating artificial unitary myths which support restricted and regulated masculine identities. In so doing, he uses the queer to point out where thinking has stopped in relation to citizenship, and achieves this by representing diverse masculinities within the assumed restrictive context of uniformed military men. The violence expressed by Marco in *Dolly West's Kitchen* and Pyper in *Observe the Sons* can be interpreted

[27] I am referring here to Padraig Pearse and Roger Casement, both of whom were involved in Irish republicanism, and both of whom were allegedly homosexual. One such article referring to Pearse's homosexuality is titled "A Different Profile of Padraig Pearse" and can be found in *The Irish Times*. Saturday, April 7, 2001, p.2 Weekend Review.

as the homosexual internalisation of the hatred and loathing of their sexual 'deviance' imposed on them by society. McGuinness's unique homosexual representations are men who have been affected by the homophobia of their cultures, but, in a twist of fate, they reverse their anger and alienation for the benefit of the very societies that seek to exclude them. McGuinness implies that his gay men appropriate violence and anger in order to conform their masculinity to traditional masculine categories, and, in turn, validate their national character or prove their position within society.

Appropriated violence is the weapon of McGuinness's gay characters both in the context of the world wars, and the inevitable personal battles which are part of the persecution of those who dare to claim a homosexual identity. In *Dolly West's Kitchen* Marco's initial recognition of Justin's homosexuality is through identification with the anger that defines Justin's personality in the opening scenes. Marco, who is openly gay, creates an inroad for identification between himself and Justin. He also provides a sense of acceptance, and personal safety for Justin, a release from the repression of his hidden same sex desire through the promise of physical intimacy; a internalised repression which has created such deep tension and anger within in him.

> **Marco** I like your hatred. Don't lose your hatred.
> **Justin** What would you know about it?
> **Marco** Everything.
> **Justin** What would you know about me?
> **Marco** What you've told me.
> **Justin** What have I told you?
> **Marco** Everything.
> *Marco touches Justin's face. Justin kisses Marco's hands.* (38)

In performance, this moment triggers a physical change in Justin as he releases his pent-up anxieties. Hatred is filtered into recognition of the difficulties involved in living homosexual subjectivity, and is eventually transformed into physical passion. And yet, ultimately, McGuinness recognises that unreconciled queer anger can eventually become a means of self-destruction. Later in the play Marco has returned

from the war on the continent having proven himself in battle by loyalty to nation, but is still plagued by the self-hatred of which his military victory has failed to purge him:

> **Justin** Hate, you're full of it. You hate women, you hate men who love women –
> **Marco** I fought better than any straight man.
> **Justin** You fought the same as any straight man. (76)

By his use of history and patriotic identities McGuinness appropriates traditional masculinities only to reject those constructions, and critique modern notions of all masculine categories. In this scene he illustrates that pain and violence are realities that all men suffer; he taps into a universal masculine anxiety, drawing together the ravages of war and violence on men regardless of their sexual orientation. As Justin tells Marco 'You fought the same as any straight man' McGuinness's writing becomes conciliatory, creating a masculine pathos which Eamonn Jordan identifies in his writing as 'the possibility of people accepting, freeing or forgiving themselves.' Imagining this redemptive possibility, along with McGuinness's refusal to sentimentalise or glorify homosexuality, is what is so remarkably queer about these two dramatic works which re-imagine national identities and possibilities for men.

In his book *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson describes the nation as "an imagined political community."[28] He goes on to say that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it *invents* nations where they do not exist."[29] Anderson's insights into the constructed nature of the concept of the 'nation' points to the artificiality of a national essence, and contributes to a queer deconstruction of national identity. McGuinness represents culturally contradictory discourse and incongruous performances of masculinity and homosexuality to foreground sexuality as a means of exposing the constructed nature of concepts of essentialised national identity. He re-imagines a form of nationalism which is broad

[28] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1991, p.6.
[29] Ibid.

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[28] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1991, p.6.
[29] Ibid.

enough to include those of a more 'deviant' sexual orientation. By unsettling issues of identity his audiences are also forced to confront the reality that a part of their national communion includes his versions of diversity never before imagined on the Irish stage.

McGuinness uses sexuality as a dramatic tool to point towards the constructed nature of singular national identity by suggesting multiple identities within the individual, rather than a single unitary sense of self. His depiction of international characters in his plays attest to the notion that Irish identity was not formed in a vacuum, but rather has been heavily influenced by British and American ideas of nation and gender. The character of Alec Redding in *Dolly West's Kitchen* is British, and McGuinness uses his character to deconstruct traditional notions of British Imperial masculinity and sexual identity. Almost immediately we are introduced to the rather amorphic sexual identity of Alec as he exchanges greetings with Dolly, his former university girlfriend:

> **Alec** ...I'm also nanny to a gang of extremely lively American boys, and while I can hit on many of our acquaintances who would think they had died and gone to heaven if they were in my position, the fresh smell of cock has not been to my liking since I was fifteen.
> **Dolly** You had a fling with a man in your twenties.
> **Alec** I was drunk.
> **Dolly** It went on for three months.
> **Alec** I was very drunk. I have not been similarly tempted. (19-20)

Alec is the Imperial soldier, with all the historical expectations of that role embodied in his character. The traditional image of masculinity constructed during the Victorian and Edwardian period of British history was centred on the bravery of the colonial soldier. "British (and, in particular, 'English') masculinity was held to be superior to other 'races' and a civilising force at the heart of the Imperial mission. Subordinated native masculinity, on the other hand, was depicted as idle, lascivious

and sexually decadent."[30] British masculinity was consequently a mythical moral position of discipline and control, making Alec into a paradigm of Imperial masculinity and further serving to deconstruct notions of national essence in relation to identity.

If a true queer analysis of this play is one that rejects the fixed and essential notions of gender identification, whether straight or gay, then Alec becomes a paradigm of queerness in his fluidity of identity. Alec's body problematises the accepted social binary of heterosexual and homosexual by being both neither/nor. He cannot fit cleanly into either a social construction of gender or a natural construction of the oppositions which have been commonly held as inherent in homosexuality. His equally significant love of both Ireland and England simultaneously makes this straight man remarkably queer, as he seemingly rejects all traditional personal *and* political binaries.

McGuinness refuses to ally himself on any one side. He will not choose gay or straight, Irish or English, but instead settles for variety. Diversity is his attack on artificially constructed ideas of the 'normal' or the 'true.' Each of his diverse identities reflects the other in an exchange which encourages reflection rather than certainty of judgement. Queer theory holds that homosexuality is a marked term which is identified and classified not for its own recognition, but rather for the recognition of its opposite, or other; heterosexuality:

> If the term "homosexuality" turns out, as we have seen, not to describe a single, stable *thing* but to operate as a placeholder for a set of mutually incompatible, logically contradictory predicates, whose impossible conjunction does not refer to some paradoxical phenomena in the world so much as it marks out the limits of the opposed term, "heterosexuality," that is because homosexuality and heterosexuality do not represent a true pair, two mutually referential contraries, but a hierarchical opposition in which heterosexuality defines itself implicitly by constituting itself as the negation of

[30] John Beyon, *Masculinities and Culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002, p.29.

> homosexuality. Heterosexuality defines itself without problematising itself, by abjecting and problematising homosexuality.[31]

McGuinness's representation of gender and sexuality, viewed through this queer sexual prism, consequently becomes as much of a commentary on heterosexuality as a liberation project for homosexuality. By drawing attention to that which is 'marked' he brings into focus that which is otherwise unrecognised, or invisible, and subsequently assumed to be normative. Homosexuality and its 'deviance' is well detailed in the annals of cultural normativity, and yet the inconsistencies and incompatibilities within heterosexuality remain unexamined because of the 'natural' construction of this orientation in western society. "By constituting homosexuality as an object of knowledge, heterosexuality also constitutes itself as a privileged stance of subjectivity – as the very condition of knowing – and thereby avoids becoming an object of knowledge itself, the target of a possible critique."[32] McGuinness's plays create a chorus of voices never allowing any individual perspective to completely dominate or impose its own version of reality, denying even a gay 'normativity.'

By showing the audience the world from the queer standpoint of his homosexual protagonists, McGuinness is pointing to the frailty of the fiction of 'heterosexuality' in modern history; attempting to puncture, if you will, historical memories swollen with tensions and unarticulated oppositions. The contradictory characteristics of his gay men contest the objectification of the heterosexist worldview and its subsequent classifications of homosexuality. Pyper's accusatory and unsettling tone, along with his promise to take away the 'peace' of the other men in the company, is a promise to turn the objective mirror on the 'straight' men in order to reveal the unquestioned, culturally sanctioned, elements of their interior world, and

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[31] Halperin, p.44.
[32] Ibid., p.47.

perhaps even force a self-conscious realisation of the myth of heterosexual unity in subjectivity and ideas of nation or citizenship.

I have already established that in both *Dolly West's Kitchen* and *Observe the Sons* McGuinness is applying artistic pressure to cohesive national identities and strained concepts of unitary sexualities in the history of modern Ireland by using homosexuality. I have also pinpointed 'the kiss' as the particular moment in his dramatic representations that forces his audience into a moment of self-consciousness as they are confronted with the controversial display of gay bodies and homosexual passion. And yet, I would not describe McGuinness's plays as 'gay drama' in the conventional sense that 'gay plays' as a genre are generally written for predominantly gay audiences and deal, for the most part, with exclusively gay subject matters. Instead, McGuinness is writing for the national stage, and consequently a sexually, if not ethnically, diverse audience. By choosing such a mainstream forum to introduce queer issues McGuinness is not rejecting the 'normative' venue of national representation (The Abbey Theatre), passed on to him as an artist through the Irish theatrical tradition, in order to define an alternative and exclusively homosexual space within which to explore the repression and marginalisation of the gay subject; but is, rather, using this presumably 'straight' space to further challenge identity politics which have otherwise been accepted as normative.

McGuinness describes his queer writing as 'presenting imagery of a new way forward,' in which he is directly referring to the historically stagnant political relationships which have dominated and terrorised Northern Ireland, as well as the relationship between England and Ireland. McGuinness's aspiration seems to be that his controversial dramatic representations will somehow transform old ideologies which have become congested and hopeless. I would further suggest that his venture

is as equally artistic as political, as he explores new dramaturgical possibilities. The power of McGuinness's representations have yet to be fully recognised critically, perhaps because Irish audiences, as of yet, are unaccustomed to seeing in such a queer way. Perhaps the critical response to his drama is a symptom of what Irish audiences and critics have been accustomed to expect from an Irish playwright or an Irish play?

Before turning to the specifics of the contemporary critical perception of McGuinness's work which, I argue, has overlooked sexual diversity as his dramaturgical strategy, it is important to trace how expectations of the content and practice of Irish theatre were formed in its earliest manifestations. If I argue that McGuinness's theatre effects both ideas of nation and the Irish theatrical tradition, then I must maintain the Foucauldian imperative to expose the historical and cultural specifics of discourse on theatre as well as identity. In other words, if there is an idea of an Irish citizen in Ireland, then there is also an idea of 'Irish theatre' which requires investigation to illuminate the connection between art and politics. McGuinness's position as an established playwright for the National stage associates him with the cultural institution which continues the national project begun by the Irish Literary Movement at the turn of the twentieth century, a movement which seminally wove together Irish politics and Irish culture. The cultural nationalism born out of the Irish Renaissance, initiated by such esteemed artists as W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn, was an artistic nationalism that encouraged a primordial search beyond the British presence in Ireland, and back into a pre-colonial Celtic Irishness by means of poetry, drama, and music. Irish artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sought to stimulate self-awareness in Irish people of their unique cultural heritage through what has been described as the 'Irish movement,' and aspired to bring about change with the pen rather than with the gun, which was the

preferred instrument of the Fenian rebel. Irish artists, writers and dramatists tried to imagine a nation through creative rather than military means.

Republicans of a more military inclination, however, became doubtful of the effectiveness of the ethereal objectives asserted by cultural nationalism. "This aesthetic invasion of the Irish movement was obvious enough to the people of the time: the veterans of the Irish movement, the O'Duffys and Morans, spoke sourly of the effeminate character of the new Irish literature."[33] Political activists were suspicious of the lyrical nature of the Irish Literary movement and worried that this artistic development 'feminised' the Irish character in a way which would inhibit an Irish nationalism that would lead to an armed rebellion against the coloniser. "Nineties cultural nationalism was, after all, susceptible to being thought of as an appropriation of the female sphere, 'culture;' nationalism pure and simple, and mid-nineteenth-century Irish cultural nationalism, was male – a matter of guns behind the hedge, cigars in the lobby of Westminster, and ballads to Mother Ireland."[34] These early anti-feminine and homophobic sentiments influenced what became acceptable and not acceptable representations of national identities for the National stage. This artistic preference was certainly a factor in the foundational ideological aesthetic which favoured the certainty of dramatic realism over the more dangerous fluidity of dramatic art forms which, in turn, encourage multiple and diverse representations of Irishness.

An ideological link begins to emerge between how McGuinness's sexualised dramaturgical strategies in these two plays actually confront notions of citizenship and national identity by his placement within the greater Irish theatrical tradition. In

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[33] Adrian Frazer, "Queering the Irish Renaissance: The Masculinities of Moore, Martyn, and Yeats" in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland* ed. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997, p.9.
[34] Ibid.

the introduction to his book *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival* George Watson describes "[T]he last ten years of the nineteenth century and the first thirty or so years of the twentieth century" as the "shaping and making of modern Ireland."[35] It was during these forty years that Ireland began to develop a sense of national self-consciousness which was born out of an increase in the activities of both radical politics and cultural revivalism as the nation struggled to define itself against its British Imperial occupiers. Culture became a sociological tool through which the nation began to define what was, as well as what was not, labelled as Irishness.

This national project was not, however, individual to Ireland, but, rather, was part of a greater European movement towards establishing identity to support and defend political boundaries, and these political projects, interestingly, were closely linked with issues of sex and sexual identity.

> Part of each of the forms of European nationalism after the French Revolution was an attempt to control sexuality, to establish national norms of sexuality, and to create a sexual dimension of its own...As nationalism was a quasi-military movement, which had to create unity by crushing forms of diversity within its borders and by entering into rivalries for spheres of power beyond those borders, it also promoted only certain kinds of masculinity.[36]

Those who were responsible for defining the parameters of Irish identity in its most juvenile form strove to create a more 'natural' national character in direct opposition to the decadence of the British national character. By the time of the foundation of the Free State in the 1920s Irish cultural and sexual identity was largely defined by the limits and morality of Roman Catholicism. In these two plays, McGuinness uses a new type of gender representation for the Irish stage, the homosexual and the sexually liberated individual, to disrupt and critique many of these well-established ideas of sexuality in relation to the tradition of nationalism within Ireland.

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[35] G.J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce and O'Casey*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994, p.13.
[36]Frazer, p.10.

Ultimately, theatrical form and genre were absorbed and standardised in the project of 'appropriate' cultural representation for an independent Ireland. Drama and the national theatre continued to be an important influence in the search for national identity in the early days of the Free State, and realism/naturalism became the favoured mode of theatrical writing and representation for all subjects concerning the nation. The realistic nature of the majority of twentieth-century Irish drama helped to clearly delineate boundaries of Irish identity, eliminating ambiguity, and limiting the theatrical imagination to a naturalism which restricted and objectified interpretation to the culturally determined 'real.' The Irish theatrical preoccupation with dramatic realism and naturalism will be explored more fully in Chapter Six, but what interests me here is the association of effeminacy, and its implied chauvinism and homophobia, with early, and much more expressionistic, Irish writing and theatrical production values. McGuinness's flexibility with sexual identity, filtered through his use of history, can be interpreted as a challenge to national identity as well as to the conventions of the national stage and its favoured choice of a theatrical form which has contributed to limited expressions of subjectivity. Naturalism, with its certainties of representation, would appear to have been constructed as the less suspiciously 'effeminate mode' of artistic expression and, subsequently, a preferred genre for portraying Irish national character and patriarchal identity. Consequently, an expectation of what 'Irish drama' actually was began to conflate around these basic theatrical and aesthetic principles of representation, which, in turn, can be associated with a sexualised form of forging national identities.

In light of the above mentioned predominant custom of producing and writing naturalism/realism, it is interesting to examine the critical response to *Observe the Sons* when it was originally performed in February 1985. In *The Sunday Tribune* of

17 February 1985, the day before the première of *Observe the Sons* at the Peacock, Fintan O'Toole produced a publicity interview he conducted with McGuinness in anticipation of opening night. In the interview McGuinness reveals some of the ideas which the play seeks to convey, as well as hinting at the type of queer reading of history and national identity represented throughout it. O'Toole claims that McGuinness had written *Observe the Sons* in order to confront the traditional polemics in the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. He quotes McGuinness: "The only challenging statement which can be made about the North is to say that if you believe in unity, disunity is the best way to approach it. To recognise difference is the best way to begin the process of unity."[37] McGuinness claims that what he wanted to do in "taking eight men from a single tribe, with a single destiny, meeting a single end was to show the diversity within them."[38]

Seven days later, in *The Sunday Tribune* of 24 February 1985, O'Toole reviewed the play after having seen it in performance. He describes the production as inhabiting the stage in such a way as to make it a "theatrical space where McGuinness's often ambiguous but never obscure language finds physical realisation."[39] O'Toole emphasises the physicality of the play, highlighting the 'physical image' and the 'physical inventiveness' of the piece in relation to how bodies are represented, and yet, as with all the other critics of the play, he fails to specify what he felt was unique about what McGuinness was doing with his fictional bodies. In 1985 the play was continually critically referred to as being 'important' and 'bold,' and yet there is no explicit reference to the play's queer perspective or homosexual bodies. The kiss between Pyper and Craig is certainly a new physical experience for audiences at the National Theatre, and serves as a particular moment

[37] Fintan O'Toole, "Over the Top" in *The Sunday Tribune*, 17 February, 1985, p. 19.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Fintan O'Toole, "Life on the Brink" in *The Sunday Tribune*, 24 February, 1985, p. 19.

where McGuinness's queer narrative finds physical realisation. Although O'Toole hints at the connection between McGuinness's narrative and his gay representation of such an undeniably queer embodied moment as the kiss, he never mentions this important staging of physical inventiveness. This theatrical moment contains within it a perfect example of how sexuality and the construction of gender can be forgrounded to interrogate broader issues of identity and politics. McGuinness theatrically exhibits diversity within the allegedly 'homogeneous' community of Ulster Unionists, and yet, if the analytical response is any indication, Irish critics could sense the diversity, but failed to articulate it beyond the familiar, and arguably safe, borders of well established identity politics and clichéd sectarian binaries.

A lively editorial debate about the play began after David Nowlan, the theatre critic for *The Irish Times* at the time of the original production, published his review of Tuesday, 19 February 1985. Nowlan describes *Observe the Sons* as "one of the most comprehensive attacks ever made in the theatre on Ulster Protestantism."[40] On Saturday, 23 February, 1985, in the Letters to the Editor section of the paper, two replies appeared in response to Nowlan's review, both of which fixated on his description of the play as an 'attack' on Ulster Protestantism. The first letter, written by the acclaimed author Jennifer Johnston, stated that, in calling the play an attack Nowlan reduced its complexity to polemics. The second letter, written by the journalist Kevin Barry, accused Nowlan of implying that the play was hostile to Ulster Protestantism. Nowlan refuted their contestations of his choice of language in *The Irish Times* on Thursday, 28 February 1985, defending his use of the word 'attack' as the most accurate description of what he felt the play was about. He further defended his choice of such definitive language, claming that "the attack was

[40] David Nowlan, "'Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme' at the Peacock" in *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, 19 February, 1985, p.10.

implicit and oblique rather than direct or polemical."[41] In the same article he carefully reasserts his belief in the excellence of the drama, and the significance of its position within the Irish dramatic tradition.

This debate is revealing in two similar, and yet unique ways. First, I believe that the response to the severity of the word 'attack' in Nowlan's initial review betrays an anxiety in making any precise value judgements about the play. The diversity of perspective, and the bodies which this drama presented seemed to have crippled critical response to the play, as is evidenced in the absence of any significant analysis of the themes of homosexuality which constitute the lens through which the entire story is told. O'Toole identifies this confrontational physicalisation, and yet never explores its significance. I believe that Johnston and Barry both try to neutralise the identity politics of the play by denying the possibility of hostility, and reducing the play to the sentimental level of wit or compassion.[42] Although both letters in response to Nowlan's review refer to discomfort in associating or reducing the play to an attack on Ulster Protestantism, I believe that they tap into a general cultural discomfort which lies at the very foundation of the effectiveness of the play's political message. Violence and war itself have served to solidify national ideologies to the point where any criticism whatsoever is avoided in order to maintain peace between The North and the Republic. Differences are glossed over in an attempt to pretend that if they are not mentioned people may all start to feel the same. And yet, the insecurities, regrets, and doubts which plague Pyper throughout the play serve as a theatrical device certainly aimed at attacking and revealing the cultural dysfunctions which tribal myths secure as sacred and untouchable. The *Irish Times* debate highlights how inapproachable the political and personal issues in *Observe the Sons*

[41] David Nowlan, "A Lively Fortnight" in *The Irish Times*, Thursday, 28 February, 1985, p.10.
[42] See: "Letters to the Editor" in *The Irish Times*, Saturday, 23 February, 1985, p.19.

can be. The disunity that McGuinness strove to represent in the play seemed to create a critical anxiety which was reflected in the debate about its point and focus. Nowlan's review recognises and acknowledges the unpleasantness of such a queer fictional representation which, ultimately, I argue, *seeks* to create discomfort and disrupt the status quo through confrontation, or 'attack.'

This brings me to my second observation about the public debate: Nowlan further describes the 'attack' which he sees this play as being on Ulster Unionism, as an assault which is 'implicit and oblique rather than direct or polemical.' As the critical conversation around the play struggled to find a common language Nowlan's defence served to identify, what I would describe as, the disquieting subtlety woven into McGuinness's contestation of Irish identity implicit in *Observe the Sons*. The entire debate reveals the queer character of the play and its ability to confuse understanding and challenge accepted modes of classification. Finding the right word to use in critical response to the play indicates a struggle for definition, and points towards the disturbance in conventional categorisations strategically written into McGuinness's narrative. *Observe the Sons* would certainly appear to be an attack of the most direct type, designed at disorienting notions of reality, as well as categories of homogenous national identities. The critical debate that appeared in *The Irish Times* served to incite a reengagement with the ideologies that support tribal binaries, and highlight how a play such as this forces a type of negative language which requires potent words. Nowlan's use of definitive, value oriented, language, and the subsequent unease created by its implicit directness and perceived negativity, support the queer reality of the play which festers below the surface of these historical mythologies; cultural legends which have lost their danger due to acceptable neutralised, even politically correct, language. The tension inherent in any queer

drama requires the severity and directness of explicit and volatile language, and is ultimately defused and devalued by a critical linguistic neutrality which, in the end, serves only to maintain the status quo. Nevertheless, this critical debate illustrates how McGuinness's plays queerly force a new type of discourse for theatrical criticism.

But how was the play received in Northern Ireland where its political themes are directly relevant to its audiences, and the theatre is less weighted with the expectation of a type of 'Irish' theatrical genre? In November 1985 the Abbey production of *Observe the Sons* toured to The Grand Opera House in Belfast as part of the annual Belfast Arts Festival. Taking the play to Belfast was a test of the credulity of the identity politics within the play since McGuinness's work would be evaluated for the first time by the people it attempted to represent, a Northern Irish audience. Unionist critiques would be watching carefully to see if they recognised themselves in this representation of such a central loyalist myth. David Simpson of the *Belfast Telegraph* begins his review of the play the morning after its Belfast première with the line "Donegal playwright Frank McGuinness gets right into the soul of the Ulster Unionist with his *Observe the Sons of Ulster*..."[43] A similar observation was made of the production by Eugene Maloney of the *Irish News*, as he described the play as a "searing search into the soul of a man."[44] The reviews of the play were conclusively positive; Protestants in the North could, and did, relate to and sympathise with the characters and the action of the play. McGuinness, a Donegal Catholic, had succeeded where few Protestant playwrights had before, and the result was the creation of an artistic bridge between opposing ideologies. In the dramatic moments of this play, which are charged with political and religious impulses, McGuinness

[43] David Simpson, *Belfast Telegraph*. Wednesday, November 6, 1985, p.6.
[44] Eugene Maloney, "Searing Search into the Soul of a Man" in *The Irish News*. Wednesday, November 6, 1985, p. 1.

offered an alternative vision in which all sides, if only for an evening, could see the humanity behind the sectarian façade. The overall positive reception of the play in the North reveals how its sensitive issues and physical inventiveness stifled the expectations of critics in the Republic, an issue I will deal with in a moment.

But first, in fact, *Observe the Sons* did achieve McGuinness's vision of imagining a 'new way forward' in stagnant political relationships. In October 1994 the Abbey Theatre revived *Observe the Sons*, once again under the direction of Patrick Mason, but this time, due to its critical and box office success, on the main stage. The second production was truly historical, as its opening night literally became a public space in which politics collided with art as in the early days of the Irish Literary Theatre and cultural nationalism. The revival of Mason's (the artistic director of the Abbey at the time) version of the play took place one week after a loyalist ceasefire was agreed upon in the politically volatile British Province of Northern Ireland.

In an article in *The Irish Times* titled "Warm Smiles All Round as Ulster Takes Centre Stage" correspondent Robert O'Byrne reported on the political celebrities who were in attendance that evening:

> Now that peace between the parties has been negotiated, the Government chose to watch drama rather that create it by turning out in force for the opening night of the revival of Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* at the Abbey Theatre...So the party – or should that be parties? – on this occasion was led by the Tanaiste, Dick Spring...They were closely followed by Ministers Mary O'Rourke, Niamh Bhreathnach and Maire Geoghegan-Quinn...[and] a group of 24 from Belfast's Shankhill district.[45]

The Ulster politicians present that evening in Dublin for the play included such heavyweights as David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist Party, and Joe Hendron of the SDLP. Beginning with the title, and continuing throughout the article, O'Byrne

[45] Robert O'Byrne, "Warm Smiles All Round as Ulster Takes Centre Stage" in *The Irish Times*. Thursday, October 20, 1994, p.8.

describes the congenial atmosphere and the "benign goodwill extending throughout the building"[46] as political divisions were set aside for an evening of artistic pleasure.

The popularity of the play, both North and South, in its original production could hardly be overlooked in the timing of its revival in 1994. Amidst rumours that the Abbey was bringing this powerful and successful play back in order to bolster falling ticket sales, Patrick Mason defended his decision to revive the play claiming instead that "the play reflected the enormous importance of the IRA ceasefire and the momentum of the whole peace process."[47] The historical circumstances of the 1994 ceasefire in Northern Ireland collided with the historiography of McGuinness's play. The entire theatrical moment that *Observe the Sons* represented had the power in its artistic content to intervene socially and make some kind of difference: the play, aided by the public's memory of its success and their consequent affinity towards it, literally created a space in 1994 for politicians to cross borders and re-imagine possibilities for the future.

The artistic and political reality triggered by this play provoked the outspoken social critic and *Irish Times* columnist Kevin Barry to describe it on the occasion of its 1994 revival as "one of the most important pieces, perhaps *the* most important piece, of Irish theatre of this generation."[48] His comments would otherwise not have stood out among the general accolades for the play had he not simultaneously and uniquely highlighted the homosexual nature of the drama. Barry notes that the character of Pyper, played in 1994 by Peter Gowan, and Elder Pyper, played by Clive Geraghty, "have some of the most important observations to make about identity, self

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Peter Thompson, "'Somme' Play for Revival at the Abbey" in *The Irish Times*. Wednesday, September 14, 1994, p.2.
[48] Kevin Barry, "An Irishman's Diary" in *The Irish Times*. Saturday, October 22, 1994, p. 15.

and sexuality."[49] In so doing, he identifies how McGuinness had used sexual identity as a dramatic strategy to achieve theatrical catharsis. Barry's comments on the significance of the sexuality of Pyper drew much needed critical attention to what I have previously described as unique in McGuinness's writing in the Irish context. Through the characters of Elder Pyper and Pyper, McGuinness gives voice to the homosexual, allowing for the fictional articulation of a queer voice whose theatrical observations were evidently valid enough to have found resonance in the ears of Irish people on both sides of the political divide seeking resolution to congested historical problems of identity.

Almost without fail, the reviewers of this production of *Observe the Sons* mention the historical myths which surround the Battle of the Somme, as well as the ingenuity and insight of McGuinness as a playwright in such an accurate and sensitive understanding of the 'soul of an Ulster Unionist'; but few mention the homosexual themes and actions of the play which are woven throughout. Barry, however, does focus some attention on these themes, drawing the significance of the play together with its strategy of diversity through sexuality, and finally shedding light on a sort of queer-blindness which prevented critics of the play from recognising this dangerously provocative representation of Irishness on stage:

> ...if a play which deals with myth – the attack of the 36th Ulster Division at Thiepval – is so unquestionably welcome by both those who celebrate the myth and those – like myself – who question it, then surely people are taking away from the play what they want and ignoring the bits they don't want: they neglect the broader truth.[50]

McGuinness's queer voice seems to have created a unique space in which all sides could identify their own message. And yet, Barry claims that each group hears is own sound at the expense of 'the broader truth.' I, on the other hand, would claim that the

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

queerness of McGuinness's writing does not strive to create a systematic or conceptual framework in which to resolve all differences, but instead, it seeks to expand the parameters of mainstream ideology in order to challenge and confuse validated and entrenched binary ideologies in relation to Irish history. In other words, *Observe the Sons* creates a diverse symphony of complex ideologies which allows for a less reductive interpretation of Irish identity and difference in general. It remains fully queer by its refusal to settle in any one place, and its repeated hospitality to variety rather than singularity. And yet, in following the logic of the dramatic narrative, this complex and sympathetic representation of Irish identity is told through the memory of Pyper; its diverse identities are seen through the eyes of a gay man, a theatrical reality largely ignored or unseen by its Irish critics, both North and South.

In *Observe the Sons* McGuinness's deviant dramaturgical form also effects broader critical interpretation in its non-naturalistic complexity. The play is divided into four Parts: REMEMBRANCE; INITIATION; PAIRING; and BONDING. In 'PART ONE: REMEMBRANCE' McGuinness introduces us to Elder Pyper, years after the Battle of the Somme, lying in bed, tormented by the memory of the past. As he lies on the bed the ghosts of the other men gather around as he reflects on the history of Ulster and the men of the 36th Division. 'PART TWO: INITIATION' materialises seamlessly, creating an imaginative bridge between present and past. 'PART THREE: PAIRING,' however, is the section of the play which most exemplifies resistance to realistic form. The eight men in the play are 'paired' with one another on the stage in four separate areas. The actors are all placed in different spaces and on different levels on the stage, as the men of the company symbolically enjoy a weekend apart from the greater company before heading to battle. The action is local and specific, and yet each location is placed within the greater frame of the

single stage. The pairs deal respectively with issues of sexuality, religion, bravery and sectarian politics. By using this particular overlapping form of dialogue and space McGuinness is able to metaphorically recreate the complexities involved in Unionist identity. He literally fragments the artificial unity of the myth of the 36th Division and the legend of the Battle of the Somme by the very structure of the play and its necessary refusal of a central perspective or 'reality' in staged performance. These factors contribute to disorient theatrical criticism which assumes naturalism and has only developed a discourse capable of realistic interpretation.

The reviews of *Dolly West's Kitchen* exhibit a similar critical blindness to the homosexual themes and bodies that appear in this play as with *Observe the Sons*. The play opened at the Abbey Theatre on 7 October 1999 as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. The next afternoon on the RTE Radio 1 – Arts Show, hosted by Mike Murphy, a conversation was held about the opening night performance with Brid McBride, an arts reviewer for RTE. McBride describes the play as "very interesting" and "seriously entertaining."[51] After a brief discussion of the historical improbabilities of the West family having a functioning solid fuel cooker in their home during wartime rationing, Murphy makes the statement that "[t]here's no huge message in the play," he continues, "I don't think McGuinness was going for anything major." McBride responded: "No, but...but why do we want a message?...I mean it's seriously entertaining."

The *Irish Independent* on Thursday, 7 October 1999 reviewed the play in an article titled: "War Drama Had No Real Theme."[52] In this review the critic, Bruce Arnold, had a similar problem with the authenticity of the play, but this time in

[51] RTE Radio 1 – Arts Show. "Review of *Dolly West's Kitchen*". 7th October, 1999. Report number O.135.
[52] Bruce Arnold, "War Drama Had No Real Theme" in *The Irish Independent*. Thursday, October 7 1999, p.12.

relation to the historical references McGuinness makes surrounding World War II. He questions Rima's comments in the play on the atrocious fate of the Jews in Europe, and claims that "unless old mother Rima was in direct contact with Eamon de Valera[53] she could not have known for another six months how awful it had been under the Nazis."[54] Similarly, David Nowlan of *The Irish Times* described *Dolly West's Kitchen* as an "ambitious play with a logical fallacy."[55] The fallacy, he claims, is that "sexual love or hate is not compatible to love or hate of country," themes which are woven in and out of McGuinness's characterisations. Nowlan describes McGuinness's writing as 'strong,' and yet ultimately complains "there is no persuasive conclusion nor any semblance of catharsis at the end."

What is remarkable about the critical response to this play in particular is the preoccupation of its critics with the historical accuracy or probability of plot, props, and setting, and their general dismissal of it, claiming it contained no new insights. And yet, even with the fixation on the literal and the materialistic within the drama, once again, no critic remarked on the homosexual kiss performed by a man wearing Irish military uniform. This physicalised reality alone defines this play as radically different from any previously attempted theatrical insights into the Irish neutrality during World War II.

McGuinness's queer dramaturgical technique is subtler in *Dolly West's Kitchen* since in structure and performance it looks very much as an Irish country-kitchen play should look, realistic in structure, performance, and plot. However, character development, and specifically sexual diversity, apply pressure to what, otherwise, appears to be 'normal' in this play. The flamboyancy of Marco's in-your-

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[53] Eamon de Valera was the Taioseach (Prime Minister) of Ireland during the war.
[54] Arnold, p.12.
[55] David Nowlan, "Ambitious Play With a Logical Fallacy" in *The Irish Times*. Friday, October 8, 1999, p.12.

face-homosexuality, the multi-layered variable sexual identity of Alec, and the brutal honesty and humour of Rima are theatrical devices that McGuinness uses to disturb the realism of the play.

The theatre critic Deborah Ballard reviewed the 1999 production of *Dolly West's Kitchen*, and critiqued the play for the same characteristics of inauthenticity asserted by the aforementioned reviewers. Instead of criticising the historical accuracy of the cooker and its fuel, or the 'logical fallacy' contained in its connections between sexual love and patriotism, Ballard focuses on the likelihood of the gender identities represented by McGuinness. She describes the "implausibility, in the early-1940's, of a Donegal mother trying to secure her children's sexual happiness before her death, or an out gay GI in downtown Derry."[56] Ballard recognised the sexually charged nature of the play in a way in which the other reviewers did not, and yet, what she failed to discern is the complexity of what could be interpreted as McGuinness's queer dramaturgical agenda. What had caused the other reviewers to become preoccupied with the reality of the set, at the expense of recognising the density of the plot, is exactly what prompted Ballard to expect an historically accurate system of gender possibilities: a theatrical pre-occupation with dramatic realism. This preoccupation limits perception while simultaneously allowing the reviewer, as Kevin Myers suggested in relation to *Observe the Sons*, to take from the production what they want while ignoring the pieces they don't. In doing this most critiques missed, I argue, what Myers describes as "the broader truth,"[57] opting instead to focus on material or historical probability in representation.

In ACT ONE, SCENE TWO Rima crosses the border from Donegal to Northern Ireland, returning home a little tipsy, with two American GI's in tow, Marco

[56] Deborah Ballard, "Sexual Perversity in Donegal" in *The Independent*, Wednesday 13 October 1999, p. 12.
[57] Myers.

and Jamie. The actual border becomes a metaphor for the sexually orientated reading of history which McGuinness offers in this play. By crossing the border and bringing the foreign homosexual Marco home, along with his straight cousin Jamie, Rima breaks down traditional barriers which had previously determined and shaped Irish sexuality. The possibility of Rima, Marco, and Alec, or for that matter any of the other characters in the play, being 'realistic' or 'plausible' for the time period, I argue, is utterly irrelevant. Through character representation McGuinness presses historical imagination. Imagination, and the possibility of diversity in personality become the dramatic tools McGuinness employs to create the condition for the possibility of new modes of subjectivities, making the play as much about today as yesterday.

McGuinness defies traditional representations of sexuality and gender from a historical standpoint to stimulate new political possibilities as well as to indicate the artificiality of accepted gender codes. Rima's crossing the border[58] is an act of defiance that ultimately causes her son Justin to recognise his sexual orientation. Rima, perhaps, is the queerest character in the play. She functions as a catalyst for the disruption of sexual categories, as she forces a confrontation with desire in the lives of her children, and these sexual disturbances, in turn, disturb notions of national identity. Rima's radical interference confuses essentialist notions of sexual identity within the family, and ultimately creates the space for the reality of diverse sexual identities. Alec's sexual fluidity and Marco's extravagant homosexuality all contribute to the population of McGuinness's own 'imagined community.' In the

[58] In 1984 McGuinness wrote a play for TEAM theatre-in-education company titled *Borderlands*, directed by Martin Drury. This play also deals with the crossing of borders. It is about four young men from the North, two Protestants and two Catholics, who cross into the Republic for a charity walk from Derry to Dublin. The play exhibits similar themes of bridging differences by crossing borders as *Dolly West's Kitchen*. It would appear that *Dolly West's Kitchen* develops this metaphor which originally appeared in the TEAM production. For more information on TEAM and for a script of *Borderlands* see: *Team Theatre Presents Three Team Plays*, ed. Martin Drury, Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988.

sense in which Benedict Anderson speaks of nationalism as a force that "invents nations which do not exist,"[59] McGuinness's sexual identity project is creating a dramatic political community which shares in common an openness to diversity. 'Reality,' as understood by both heterosexual norms and predominant Irish theatrical forms, is necessarily suspended in order to find a safe space for more varied options in Irish sexual identity politics.

Perhaps the anxiety which I identify in the debate surrounding *Observe the Sons* is based on a cultural investment in maintaining a semblance of political peace. If the play itself is dangerous, as I suggest it is, then the language around it must be as well. And yet such danger can cause disruption if unleashed. *Dolly West's Kitchen* contains similar ideas that seek to uncover false presumptions, revealing some difficult contradictions about the Irish past. The Irish State worked diligently to dress their position of neutrality in the disguise of moral principles, and yet, alternative narratives reveal that a large motivation in such a political position was simply a familiar stance of resistance against an old enemy. In *Ireland and the Second World War* Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts claim that, in fact, World War II offered an historic opportunity which may have potentially healed the divisions between the North and the South of Ireland at the time:

> In the context of being on the same side, and perhaps engaged in a common war effort, there would, at the very least, have been opportunities to secure some forms of North-South co-operation and unity. As it was, neutral Ireland and Northern Ireland drifted further apart as a result of the war and Unionists were able to use their support for the British war effort as a means to safeguard partition and Protestant supremacism.[60]

Observe the Sons and *Dolly West*, thus, can be seen as companion pieces which theatrically speak to one another about the historical falsities that are culturally imparted in order to maintain alienation on both sides of the border. Both plays

[59] Anderson, p.6.
[60] Girvin, Roberts, p.178.

dialogue with one another for years of pain and division based on ancient hatreds, denials, and historical self-justifications. Such a theatrical conversation will inevitably cause disruption based mainly on each side having to admit mutual culpability. The critical maintenance of political correctness not only preserves ideological distance, but fosters a misunderstanding in the general public of the danger in these plays, ultimately preventing the potential efficaciousness of these two plays ideologically debating with one another.

To return for a moment to the issue of how, or why, the representation of sexual diversity and homosexuality in these plays, which I argue are central, could have been overlooked or ignored in trying to reveal their thematic or dramaturgical significance. What factors allow for an audience or critic to see or hear particular themes in a drama while ignoring others? I have already suggested that the Irish theatrical tradition has established particular expectations and codes for what constitutes Irish drama, but how does this apply to the queer themes I suggest permeate McGuinness's dramatic writing? In *Still Acting Gay* Clum asserts, the audience itself, and their ability to interpret the play which they are watching, influences the effects of the themes which the drama represents. This is particularly important for interpreting the more subtly presented topics surrounding homosexuality and queer tropes. Those in attendance "effect both the erotic dynamics of the production – how the audience views representations of gay sexuality and the extent to which the audience feels, resists, or simply does not respond to the erotics of the spectacle – and the politics of the production."[61] What the audience is capable of hearing within the content of the fiction is often determined by society's consciousness of queer issues and their ideological significance.

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[61] Clum, p.8.

And yet, how, within such materialist, 'realistic' critical interpretations of McGuinness's productions, could an audience possibly miss the homosexual kiss and all the political and cultural commentary contained within such a radical representation of Irishness? In his book *Out on Stage*, Alan Sinfield provides insight into how some audiences may or may not be able to interpret particular themes in dramatic writing. He does so by highlighting an interpretational concept he calls the "resisting reader."[62] Sinfield suggests that interpretation is a series of negotiations in which the observer "may locate and recognise a set of specific inflections" within the fiction, but then translates their comprehension "into a different discursive framework, to make them 'mean' differently."[63] Homosexual audience members are accustomed to interpreting fictions through their particular frame of reference, one which would be more sensitive to issues relating to sexual nonconformists. In *Dolly West's Kitchen* an audience member sensitive to queer issues would interpret the play as a fiction latent with themes of marginal subjectivity. Whereas "gay people are adroit at deriving their own meanings from ostensibly mainstream texts,"[64] some non-gay audience members may not even see or hear what comes through loud and clear to a gay audience member; a point I will explore in relation to gay camp in the next chapter.

Until this point I have attempted to argue that McGuinness is using sexual identity, and even sexual acts, as a means of putting pressure on concepts of cultural and national identity which are assumed as natural and, thus, go unquestioned. The types of issues inspired by gender and sexuality, perhaps most apparently, have strained Irish theatrical criticism. Obviously, McGuinness's representations of sexual

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[62] Alan Sinfield, *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p.20.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., p.21.

diversity are not simply an attempt to display erotic inclinations and titillate his audiences, but are, rather, more complex strategies of representation in a dramaturgy designed to artistically stimulate diversity and political possibility. The work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault invaluably illuminates the strategies behind McGuinness's gender project, allowing for an interpretation of sexuality as a political position, not merely a physical one. Foucault held that "sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural, rather than biological, origins."[65] McGuinness's gender project is not an account of gay lifestyles and subjectivities in historically specific moments, but is rather a critique of the systems and circumstances which have traditionally held diverse gender options at bay. Consequently, McGuinness's artistic design is not a dramatic representation which seeks the accuracy of an historical autopsy of Irish bodies or even histories, but is, instead, an imaginative reconfiguring which seeks to unsettle present ideas and ideologies by pointing to absences in the past. These plays are not necessarily plays about documenting gay lives during World War I or World War II as much as they are fictions of the possibilities of these lives existing somewhere in the delicate recollections of a nation formed and solidified by so many rigid myths and narrow legends of identity.

Although I have asserted that McGuinness's drama is not 'gay drama' as a particular genre, I do believe that in form as well as content he utilises some of the same techniques employed by international playwrights creating gay plays. In both *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness attempts to liberate the oppressive traditional reliance on dramatic realism which has defined generations of Irish playwrights. *Observe the Sons* refuses the restrictions of realism in its very

[65] Spargo, p.12.

form, alternatively, *Dolly West's Kitchen* rejects realism in plot and content. As a result, however, both remain fundamentally queer in their ultimate goal to threaten essentialist notions of reality.

As I have illustrated, McGuinness uses allegorical language to reveal the taboo sexual identity of Pyper in *Observe the Sons*, but his use of allegory also extends to his reliance on the historic backdrop of his plays. In order to challenge and widen issues of identity McGuinness co-opts the historical narratives which have helped to form a sense of national consciousness, and, subsequently, re-tells the story in a queer fashion. By using history McGuinness inserts his particular queer narrative into the culturally recognisable discursive framework of myth and legend, and through queer alterations he translates those stories of identity to 'mean differently.' Those who were concerned with the discourse of the early national project for an independent Irish identity would have been cunningly aware of the allegorical language contained in a politically subversive play such as W.B. Yeats's *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* in much the same way that a gay person would be attuned to the subliminal indications of homosexuality in the less direct opening scenes of *Observe the Sons.* 'gay people are adroit at deriving their own meanings from ostensibly mainstream texts' in much the same ways as republicans were in interpreting the nuances of the drama born out of cultural nationalism.

Thus another parallel can be drawn between the project of Irish national identity and McGuinness's queer project: both co-opt the framework of traditional ideologies in a way which can be recognised by those whose interests are served by such subversions; the marginalised and the disavowed. In *Transformations in Irish Culture* Luke Gibbons claims that the unique characteristics of the particular type of nationalism created by a culture which has experienced colonisation, like Ireland, is

their subsequent intent towards "fragmentation and dissagregation, motivated by separation rather than unification."[66] The confrontational nature of such nationalism is born out of a rejection of the dominant culture which has previously defined and determined, as well as alienated and marginalized, any viable sense of national identity. Translated into the language of gender, this brand of identity politics parallels the intent of queer theory in its attempts to challenge and confuse our understanding of sexual and gender categories. It also highlights the type of recognition of the past McGuinness is calling modern Ireland to in this time of cultural amnesia, as discussed in the Introduction.

McGuinness makes use of this relationship between Irish nationalist identity and queer versions of gender identity in these two 'history' plays in order to sexualise Irish citizenship. If 'Irishness' has been born out of the experience of being the 'other,' as well as defining itself against the 'other,' McGuinness's sexual 'deviants' exemplify this process of othering for the purpose of internal self-examination for Ireland. His homosexual men live within the endorsed boundaries of mainstream society, i.e. the military, the family, and yet act and respond out of their own sense of, as natives, being 'considered strangers in their own land.' Although his homosexual characters take up identities which have been inscribed within the marginal category of sexual misfits, they ultimately seek recognition within the greater story of Irish memory and society. Through the process of co-optation McGuinness suggests an integrationist politics which seeks to expand the limits of identity within the mainstream discourse surrounding Irish identity; as opposed to a complete rejection of the dominant ideology and the subsequent establishment of a separatist camp of queer nationals.

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[66] Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*. Cork: Cork University Press in Association with Field Day, 1996, p.135.

"There are competing views about the likelihood that struggles around sexuality might serve as a way in which to reimagine national identity in a less exclusionary fashion."[67] Many of the camps involved in such a revolution-of-sorts believe that the system of heteronormativity is beyond redemption because of its dependence on essentialist ideologies. McGuinness attempts to address this gendered scepticism in his dramatic work by weaving his queer characters into the greater fibre of the story of the nation, as opposed to creating a completely gay fictional world that stands in absolute opposition to its heterosexual counterpart in 'reality.' In his re-imagining of the nation what is queer is 'valid,' and even possibly 'a new way forward' in the seemingly dead-end struggles of sectarian division in Ireland today. He dissolves the boundaries of sexual identity in order to encourage and promote transformation in the entrenched fixed identity borders of modern Irish society.

The sexual theories of Michel Foucault, once again, provide a theoretical structure for the inclusive identity project which I have suggested McGuinness is working towards in both of these plays. Foucault held that "resistance cannot stand in pure opposition to the powers that be, but that, instead, struggle and change always takes place through co-optation."[68] He believed that in the process of assimilation the terms of power change, because in this process the issues come to light through articulation, and the problems presented offer within themselves a 'new way forward.' Foucault saw criticism as essential for progress. His "project – in both his politics and his histories – was not to lay out solutions, but rather identify and characterise problems...[his] aim, in short was not *liberation* but *resistance.*"[69] He sought to be a catalyst for progress through his interrogation of social systems of power and

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[67] Carl F. Stychin, *A Nation by Rights: National Cultures, Sexual Identity Politics and the Discourse of Rights*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998, p.15.
[68] Halperin, p.54.
[69] Ibid., pp.55-56.

knowledge in order to highlight how these systems produce exclusion and domination. McGuinness uses this queer approach to interrogate and fragment rather than accuse myths and legends surrounding Irish national identity. His gay protagonists shift the balance of power for the homosexual from the object of power and knowledge to the position of "legitimate subjective agency – from the status of that which is spoken about while remaining silent to the status of that which speaks."[70] By boldly and unapologetically representing gayness, as well as gay bodies, McGuinness places before his audiences a stumbling block in Irish identity simultaneously creating the condition for new possibilities.

In *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness uses gayness and gay bodies to disrupt any perceived continuity in the myths which support concepts of national identity in the North and the South of Ireland. McGuinness uses homosexuality and sexual diversity as a tool to expand the parameters of diversity within the myths, not as a weapon to dismantle and destroy them. Societies and cultures are too strongly attached to, and dependent on, their myths to simply dispose of them over a short period of time. Mircea Eliade describes the cultural fascination with myth: "Myth is thought to express the absolute truth because it narrates a sacred history; that is a trans-human revelation which took place in the holy time of the beginning...Myth becomes exemplary and consequently *repeatable*, thus serving as a model and justification for all human actions."[71] By dialoguing with national myths McGuinness risks violating their sanctity, but he does so in order to demythologise and point out how the interpretation of these stories have led to immovable impasses in Irish national politics and sectarian relationships which, in turn, limit and control diversity on the personal level as well. He attempts to illuminate the reality that myth

[70] Ibid., p.57.
[71] Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1997, p.108.

"is a two-way street. It can lead to perversion (bigotry, racism, fascism) or to liberation (the reactivation of a genuine social imaginary open to universal horizons)."[72] By historicising McGuinness urges his audiences to reject the tendency to stagnate within national histories, and, instead, recognise that myth can and must be engaged and re-engaged generation after generation.

Inclusion, belonging, and liberation are political and emotional sentiments which permeate these plays. Who is written in and who is written out of our collective stories are embodied in McGuinness's dramatic representations *and* dramaturgical techniques as his narratives broach new topics and his bodies exhibit new actions never before shown by Irish playwrights. The first hand knowledge of exclusion and marginalisation, so common to the homosexual, seems to have motivated McGuinness to use his theatrical voice in the project of demythologising Irish national identities. In an article in *The Irish Times* on Friday, 1 March 1985, Peter Thompson interviewed McGuinness about *Observe the Sons*:

> Now, says Frank McGuinness, he's reluctant to use the term "Irish," to describe himself "not because I'm ashamed of it or anything, but because it's not enough, because Ireland has been associated with a philosophy, a nationalism, that just cannot accommodate what is going on this island, this rock in the Atlantic. I don't think it does justice to this rock of ours.[73]

Even though he expresses an anxiety over limits on national identity in this interview, the reality is that he does not emigrate, or reject writing for the Irish stage in favour of his international successes. His commitment to what he calls 'this rock of ours' reveals an optimism, and a dedication to the emancipation of an identity more reflective of contemporary Irish openness to diversity. By engaging and expanding, and not rejecting and destroying national myths of identity, McGuinness brings hope to the stage, showing that by demythologising we can also remythologise, creating

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[72] Ibid., p.121.
[73] Peter Thompson, "Frank's Views" in *The Irish Times*, Friday, 1 March, 1985, p.8.

fluid and more inclusive cultural spaces that reflect changing times. His imagery, his physical representations, and his theatrical remythologising offer a dramatic re-imagining of political possibility and diversification in Irish citizenship and national identities.

2

Camping in Utopia
CARTHAGINIANS and the Queer Aesthetic

In Carthaginians, *first performed at the Peacock at the Abbey in 1988 and directed by Sarah Pia Anderson, McGuinness continues his interest in Irish history, but, he focuses specifically on a modern event which lives on in the immediate memory of contemporary Irish experience, Bloody Sunday. In this chapter I extend my assertion that queer theories serve as an ideal strategy for analysing McGuinness's work by arguing that the specific theories of gay camp, also known as the queer aesthetic, not only enhance an interpretation of this play, but in fact, provide a theoretical structure which supports both the ideology of the play and the particular type of performance technique at work in the production of this drama. In focusing exclusively on gay camp, this chapter will stand as an example of the application of a multivalent queer strategy, and its usefulness for providing an alternative reading of one of McGuinness's most popular plays.*

Reading McGuinness's texts and analysing performances of his plays through a queer theoretical lens is not to project onto the work an analysis which desires to justify queer elements within the writing, but is, however, the illumination of the queer space which these plays fundamentally inhabit. As I detailed in the last chapter, the queer position in which his writing exists is within the greater canonical context of the Irish dramatic tradition, regardless of its popular or critical recognition. Consequently, a queer reading is not simply an academic or ideological aspiration, but is, instead, an archaeological-type uncovering of a hidden, or subverted aspect of Irish culture.

In *Carthaginians*, McGuinness contributes to clearing away the dust which, for generations, has covered this often anomalous culture of queer physical positions and alternative ideological visions. This play focuses on a diverse gathering of some citizens of the city of Derry in Northern Ireland, camping out in a cemetery

on the outskirts of town, waiting for the resurrection of the dead. McGuinness presents a community of individual characters struggling with meaning in their lives. Maela, the eldest of the group in her forties, keeps vigil by her dead daughter's grave, speaking to her, and of her, as if she were alive and present. Greta, in her thirties, is grieving her inability to have a child, while Sarah, also around the same age, has tried to numb the pain of the violence and hatred of the sectarian problems in Derry through self-abuse and drugs. Paul and Hark, both in their thirties are angry and cynical, Paul blames the religious establishment for the persistent division in the North, and Hark turns to brutality and aggression as a means of filtering his own anger and frustration over the difficult life living in Derry offers its inhabitants. Seph, in his twenties, spends virtually the entire play in silence, watching and trying to build an edifice out of rubbish scattered in the graveyard and the city. The ages of the characters in this play are quite relevant to its narrative. Dido, the central protagonist of the piece, is the youngest character, and is, consequently, the only one whose direct memory of the events, which have scarred the others, does not impact on him as radically. He is also a homosexual, a campy queen with a flair for cross-dressing. Bearing the name of Virgil's Dido, Queen of Carthage, he is McGuinness's queen of *Carthaginians*, and through his queer fun and vogue frivolity he represents a glamorous glimmer of laughter and hope for a cast of characters burdened with emotional sobriety and psychological anguish.

As I mentioned, all of the characters are dealing, in one way or another, with the effects of a specific historical event, Bloody Sunday, and its impact on themselves and their city. On 30 January 1972 thirteen unarmed men, participating in a civil rights march through the city of Derry in Northern Ireland, were shot and killed by the Parachute Regiment of the British Army on what has become known as Bloody

Sunday. "Two days after Bloody Sunday, on 1 February, Prime Minister Edward Heath announced in the House of Commons that the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, had been appointed to inquire into the deaths in Derry."[1] The British establishment and the media saw the appointment of Widgery as a sign of how seriously the government were taking the fatal events of that afternoon. And yet, there was a degree of anxiety from the Catholic Bogside and Creggan communities as to whether he could be trusted to reveal the truth:

> In the Bogside and Creggan there was discussion and even disagreement about the details of how things had happened. But as to the questions which the media were suggesting were crucial – had the Paras opened fire in response to an IRA attack, or had they engaged in an unprovoked massacre of unarmed civilians? – there was no argument. A large percentage of the local population had been in the vicinity of the shooting; hundreds had actually witnessed killings happen. Local people knew the truth of it. The question was not what truth would Widgery find, but whether Widgery could be trusted to tell the truth, and whether in light of that, local people should give evidence to his inquiry.[2]

Confirming initial suspicions, Widgery's eventual conclusion was that the British soldiers had acted justifiably in defence against IRA attacks. His report was filled with "inconsistencies, illogicalities, and untruths."[3] He was accused of viewing the events "through a prism of class and national prejudice"[4] which rendered a biased impression of reality. It is this very sense of betrayal, confusion, alienation, and distortion felt by the people of Bogside and Creggan by the findings of the British authorities that McGuinness thematically engages in *Carthaginians*.

And yet, in the title of the play, McGuinness parallels the modern world of Derry not with the world of the British Empire, but, rather, with the ancient Greek world of Carthage as described in Virgil's *The Aeneid*. Although traditional analysis

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[1] Eamonn McCann, *Bloody Sunday in Derry: What Really Happened*. Dingle, Co, Kerry, Ireland: Brandon, 2000, p.91.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., p.129.
[4] Ibid.

of the play[5] has often drawn on a political comparison between the oppression of both the city of Carthage and that of Derry based on imperialist domination, the former by Rome, the latter by Britain, my analysis hopes to illustrate McGuinness's doubling of space and time as a dramatic technique employed, almost irreverently, to reveal the queer artefacts of domination and prejudice in historical *and* contemporary eras.

Where historical and political comparisons of space and time bear the weight of similarities in imperialist oppression and domination, my comparison seeks to unearth a far less serious, although equally politically ambitious connection contained within McGuinness's use of this classical text. Although Virgil's text certainly contains within it vast examples and valid comparisons between the political realities of the past and the present, I believe that a queer reading of McGuinness's *Carthaginians* reveals a much more playful use of this epic of antiquity while still making use of the political problems it implies. McGuinness's employment of this classic epic, which "has inspired some fifty tragedies and twenty-five operas,"[6] is merely one in a series of highly identifiable western cultural artefacts he retrieves in order to create, what I argue, is a 'queer aesthetic' in his play.

This queer aesthetic, which, I argue, *Carthaginians* embodies, is caught up in the notion and practice of *camp*, a word which I will seek to define more clearly throughout this chapter, and a practice which I assert McGuinness exercises in diverse aspects of the play. The noun camp implies a variety of meanings. It could denote a place or a temporary location; a group of persons or political parties united in a common cause; or, in the case of gay camp, a particular affectation or manner which fosters humour or tastes usually considered eccentric, vulgar, or clichéd. These rudimentary descriptions of camp indicate the word's illusiveness in relation to a

[5] For an in depth reading of the classical influences on this play see: Eamonn Jordan, *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1997, pp.71-91.
[6] Ibid., p.74.

single definitional categorisation, while simultaneously indicating its elasticity as a term in denoting either person, place or thing.

As I established in the last chapter, McGuinness uses diversity as a technique, continually evading judgements which are simple or unitary, and instead, opting for subjective variety and ideological disorder, a practice which frustrates those who wish to perceive clear conclusions and logical closures in Irish drama. Consequently, the epistemological expedition of applying a word such as camp, and its definitional vagueness, to this play would seem a fruitful venture for anyone looking for a more complex roadmap for interpreting McGuinness's drama of diversity. The above mentioned tri-fold definition of camp allows a queer analysis of *Carthaginians* which includes a closer look at the public, geographical, space which McGuinness's citizens inhabit; the particular subjective positions which these characters represent; and finally, a common aesthetic which binds together the political signifiers which effect this peculiar dramatised Derry subculture. In the combination of place, person and aesthetic in this play, McGuinness brings together the political, the dramatic, and above all, the excessive performative characteristics of gay camp in order to artistically revisit the tragic events of Bloody Sunday in *Carthaginians*.

The camp aesthetic is not, however, a completely unproblematic means of representation for McGuinness to employ in relation to an event and a topic which continues to serve as a major cultural depository for deep and complex feelings of injustice in Northern Ireland.[7] "Taken for granted to be apolitical"[8] camp's frivolity

[7] "Twenty-eight years after Bloody Sunday, relatives of those killed, and the survivors among the wounded, were able to attend the opening of the Saville Tribunal on March 27th 2000, and hear Christopher QC, Counsel for the Tribunal, say that this time, 'the truth, the truth plain and simple,' would be unearthed and laid out for all to see. It had taken a long struggle to reach this day, and for many it was a time of mixed emotion: sadness for the loss of loved ones; anger compounded by the frustration of the long wait; of relief and pleasure that there was now some prospect of a great wrong being, not righted, but at least recognised; and a sense of achievement, too, that the indomitable of ordinary Derry people had, in the end, compelled a recalcitrant British government, for the first time in

and comedy can, at first, appear to mock a serious and sensitive subject. In this chapter I argue that camp functions in *Carthaginians* as a type of cultural resistance that challenges meaning and reality in much the same way as his treatment of historical myth does. As I suggested, instead of rejecting the mythical status of the oftentimes static historical memories which support and uphold versions of national identity, McGuinness alternatively employs them in order to point out their fictional instability. *Carthaginians* works within the crippling collective disappointment, confusion, and sense of loss in Derry in order to re-present the ongoing complexity of people's relationship to this dangerously sensitive incident. The performance practices of gay camp help in making sensitive issues more approachable through their fun and frivolity. In *Saint=Foucault* David Halperin attempts to define camp by describing its ability to work within social or political systems of meaning:

> Camp, after all, is a form of cultural resistance that is entirely predicated on a shared consciousness of being inescapably situated within a powerful system of social and sexual meanings. Camp resists the power of that system from within by means of parody, exaggeration, amplification, theatricalisation, and literalisation of tacit codes of conduct – codes whose very authority derives from their privilege of never having to be explicitly articulated, and thus from their customary immunity to critique.[9]

McGuinness make use of the performance strategies of camp in an effort to resolve deep-rooted feelings about Bloody Sunday. Camp's dependence on insider signifiers makes it a culturally rooted queer prism through which inconsistencies and untruths can be highlighted, and a move towards reconciliation may begin through recognition.

The complexity of both categorisation and definition of the word camp, combined with its co-optation of cultural signifiers, creates a sort of "discursive resistance, a semiotic excess, which translates directly into the exuberant, virtually

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legal or political history, to repudiate the findings of an official inquiry and to institute a new inquiry to look again at the facts of the Derry massacre." McCann, p.255.

[8] Moe Meyer, ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. London: Routledge, 1994, p.6.

[9] Halperin, p.29.

inexhaustible camp corpus of reference. Representational excess, heterogeneity, and *gratuitousness* of reference, in constituting a major *raison d'etre* of camp's fun and exclusiveness, both signal and contribute to an overall resistance to definition."[10] The mobility and inconclusiveness of the term makes it a particularly strong analytical tool in any queer study which, fundamentally, seeks to disrupt essentialist categories. "Tentatively approached as *sensibility*, *taste*, or *style*, reconceptualised as *aesthetic* or *cultural economy*, and later asserted/reclaimed as *(queer) discourse*,"[11] camp offers a multivalent lens through which to interpret something as complex and layered as dramatic representation. *Carthaginians* is so peculiar in setting, so diverse in character, and so completely excessive in iconic representation and reference that it requires just such an interpretive tool of great breadth (if not depth) to match its intensity.

And yet, what good is any theoretical apparatus of interpretation if it cannot be, in one way or another, categorised in order to provide an organised insight into the text or performance it seeks to illuminate? It would seem that in the clarification of theories of camp, and camp's consequent allusiveness in relation to definition, that what has been exposed could actually become the paradigm of practice for the post-structuralist project of proving that we are living in a *decentred universe*. McGuinness's play is a living example of such a cosmos, based on radical, spatial, and subjective uncertainty, and while that theatrical world is well interpreted by the epistemological diversity of camp, the play itself becomes an event by which the diverse consortium of camp qualities may themselves be viewed and flimsily categorised. In other words, a reflexive relationship can be established between

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[10] Fabio Cleto, "Introduction: Queering the Camp" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002, p.3.
[11] Ibid., p.2.

theories of camp and *Carthaginians*, as the subject gives light to the object, and vice versa.

McGuinness always weaves a little insurgency into the type of information he provides narratively in order to stimulate a sense of general disorientation, ultimately aimed at his own goal of dramatic reorientation of perspective. In SCENE TWO of *Carthaginians* Paul and Greta are the only two characters still awake in the darkness of the cemetery late on a Wednesday evening:

> **Paul** Can you not sleep?
> *Paul sits beside Greta.*
> I was at a quiz tonight, but I said nothing. I used to run it. Questions and answers. What's the capital of – ? Who won an Oscar for –? Who captained Arsenal –? Fuck sports questions. Selling out. Who wrote the *Aeneid*? Virgil. Who did Virgil guide through the city of hell? That's a tough one boys. Who will guide me through this city of hell?
> **Greta** Do you not guide yourself?
> **Paul** Through Derry? It's grown foreign to me, Derry.
> **Greta** How's it foreign? Didn't you work in it? Teach in it? We taught together in it. We live in it. Weren't we born in it?[12] (309-10)

In this scene geographical reference collides with an ideological sense of disorientation. Paul and Greta know where they are and where they are from, yet, Paul finds himself disoriented and unsure of his surroundings. The general knowledge quiz serves as a means of questioning knowledge in general. Paul 'used to run' these evenings which tested information, but now he says nothing. What was familiar has now become foreign, and McGuinness introduces his audience for the first time to the excess of reference which makes this play camp, and dominates the dramaturgy from this point onward.

The theme of the quiz, and the types of knowledge introduced by it, is an extravagant engagement with a popular form of entertainment, one which draws from every area of life, including the 'sell out' of sports. In a single paragraph McGuinness

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[12] Frank McGuinness, *Carthaginians* in *Frank McGuinness: Plays 1*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996. All subsequent quotation from this edition.

draws his audience into an engagement with everything from the Academy Awards to classical Virgil, but in what way is this theatrical device classified specifically as camp, and not simply as postmodern?[13] Both perspectives share the bricolage technique, shamelessly utilising often contradictory aspects of historical and contemporary life in order to destabilise meaning, or more specifically destabilise an older order and, subsequently, create new modes of meaning through montage representation of knowledge and iconography. The distinction is in the very *sensibility* which defines camp itself, a vision which not every eye is able to perceive, nor every ear able to hear.

In her seminal text on the subject "Notes on Camp" Susan Sontag describes camp as "sensibility – unmistakably modern, a variant of sophistication ...esoteric – something of a private code, a badge of identity" and as a "taste [that] tends to develop very unevenly."[14] It is a quality which is discernable within a person, a style of behaviour, or an object. Camp people or things usually reside on the margins of the mainstream, and are always playful in relation to the persons or objects which capture their fancy. Sontag goes on to classify camp as "a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylisation."[15] Although camp is not exclusively a homosexual aesthetic, historically it has become associated largely, if not entirely co-opted, by the gay community. Camp gravitates towards androgyny, and celebrates the exaggeration of

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[13]Postmodern: "A sense of the fragmentary, ambiguous and uncertain quality of the world marked by high levels of reflexivity is said to be a characteristic of post-modern culture. This goes hand in hand with a stress on contingency, irony and the blurring of cultural boundaries. Texts are typified by self-conscious, bricolage and intertextuality...Poststructuralism and postmodernism are anti-essentialist approaches which stress the constitutive role of an unstable language." Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications, 2000, pp.21-22.

[14] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, pp. 53-4.

[15] Ibid.

sexual personality and characteristics. "Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgement. Camp doesn't reverse things. It doesn't argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different – a supplementary – set of standards."[16] This refusal of judgement on the good-bad axis also ties in well with the refusal of binaries I argued characterises *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* in Chapter One.

The camp sensibility or aesthetic relies heavily on artfulness, revelling in the extremities of artificiality, and is considered marginal in both social practice and critical theory. *Carthaginians* contains many of the camp characteristics described by Sontag, and yet, McGuinness has not written a play with marginal characters who behave extravagantly in order to simply exhibit a drag queen, or entertain his audiences with the perversity and irony of gender reversals. He has written a play which attempts in general, through its artifice and indulgence, to achieve a level of the subversion of knowledges and sedimented ideologies within the society for which he writes, and in particular, to the information and experience surrounding Bloody Sunday. Thus, camp occupies a more radical political position, one which contains the goals of cultural displacement found in postmodernism, and extends those objectives into direct confrontation with the normative. Camp is a type of embodied activism that utilises the representational strategies of postmodernism, and takes them one step further through the body of the queer subject who avails of its extravagance: the campy queen.

What then are the characteristics of a person described as camp? In "*Campe-Toi!* On the Origins and Definitions of Camp" Mark Booth extends Sontag's theories

[16] Ibid., p.61.

of camp by emphasising the marginality of the type of person who chooses camp as a mode of political self-representation, rather than simply as an aesthetic or sensibility:

> To be camp is to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits...Camp self-parody presents the self as being wilfully irresponsible and immature, the artificial nature of the self-presentation making it a sort of off-stage theatricality, the shameless insincerity of which may be provocative, but also forestalls criticism by its ambivalence.[17]

Dido, McGuinness's gay, drag-queen protagonist in *Carthaginians*, is just this type of character; an individual involved in a project of self-representation and identification with the margins. Like Virgil's Queen Dido of Carthage, McGuinness's queen is a monarch charged with the care of her citizens; those citizens of Derry who can no longer live within the boundaries created by the city and the Province, and now find themselves exiled to the peripheral space of the local graveyard. Dido's work in the play is directed towards sustaining and providing for the disenfranchised as he supplies food, drink, and information from the city to the other characters stuck within the walls of the cemetery. Dido's sense of extravagance and fun as a camp homosexual combine with his dedication to the group of people living on the periphery of society in the cemetery, allowing McGuinness to establish in character representation the sensibility suggested by Sontag combined with the more radical project of self- presentation and commitment to the marginal described by Booth.

It is interesting to examine how McGuinness introduces the character of Dido, whom I would suggest is the representational embodiment of the queer aesthetic which permeates this production: the 'person' in the tri-fold grammatical definition of camp as a person, place or thing. The play opens with three women, Greta, Sarah and Maela, sitting separately on the stage with the sombre and somewhat haunting music of "When I am Dead and Laid in Earth" from Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas*. In

[17] Mark Booth, "*Campe-Toi!* On the Origins and Definitions of Camp" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, p.69.

the semi-darkness of morning light Greta attends to a wounded bird, Sarah is restlessly pacing, and Maela is spreading clothes on her daughter's grave as if dressing her. One of the men, Seph, also sits silently onstage, away from the group. McGuinness creates an atmosphere of sadness and death, an ambience which reflects the inner moods of the characters onstage, and the broken, wounded realities which have brought each of them to this place of isolation.

Into this macabre melancholia appears a creature clad in a colourful suit with trousers cut about six inches above his shoes in order to reveal a garish pair of striped socks, and blue leather Dr. Marten boots, which exploit and exaggerate the norms of fashion. Under his suit he wears a T-shirt which reads "ARM THE UNEMPLOYED." He enters pushing a child's pram, and irreverently singing "Danny Boy," in sharp contrast with the high drama of Purcell's classical ode-to-morose previously filling the aural space of the stage. As he distributes various goods such as cigarettes, coffee, and sandwiches, which he has procured for the residents of the cemetery, he proceeds to fill his dependents in on the events which deterred his arrival:

> **Greta** Where the hell were you?
> **Dido** What do you mean, 'Where the hell was I'?...I had to fight my way to this graveyard through three army checkpoints. There could have been an assault. I could have been detained.
> **Maela** What did they threaten to do to you, Dido?
> **Dido** It was more what I threatened to do to them. No luck though. No Score. I think they were on to me as a health hazard. One of them was nice. Blond. From Newcastle. Interested in football. Fancied him. (301)

McGuinness uses the character of Dido as a means of dramatic disruption, as he dispels the gloom and darkness, the sadness and anguish, of both the graveyard and its living residents with the frivolity, the humour, and the sexually charged subversive language of the camp character. In the opening moments of the play McGuinness

draws his audience into an engagement with the painful memories and ongoing sagas of the people closest to the political turmoil of Derry, and simultaneously offers new access to what has become tragic by using both the camp aesthetic and a campy drag-queen.

The reversal of expectations which camp's comic resistance offers in performance, the ability to create laughter in the face of sorrow, is what makes camp a queer aesthetic. These general contradictory characteristics of camp allow it to function as a performative praxis in the queer project of unsettling what has become the normative approach to either histories, ideologies or subjectivities. Fabio Cleto describes the nature of camp as something which encourages what he calls 'transvestic thinking':

> Camp certainly debunks seriousness...This is not to say, though, that camp can't envision a horizon of seriousness, or that it simply works through a conversion of the serious into the frivolous...on the contrary, seriousness always takes part in the production of a camp effect, and it does so through the self-undermining, queer strategy of its 'transvestic thinking'...you can't camp about something you don't take seriously, for camp requires that [y]ou're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance.[18]

In its queerness, camp has the capacity to hold together what otherwise might be considered antithetical: the authentic and the theatrical. Through Dido, McGuinness not only sexualises and fetishises the soldiers of the British army, but he also neutralises their overwhelming power and presence in the Northern Irish psyche (based largely on their politically sanctioned ability to intern[19] and interrogate at any moment) by asking the audience to envision this outlandishly dressed man actually

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[18] Cleto, p.28.

[19] Internment is the prerogative of the police to arrest without warrant. "Internment had been introduced almost six months previous[to Bloody Sunday]when British soldiers and RUC men had smashed their way into houses in Catholic areas across the North and taken away 342 men for detention in prison camps for unlimited periods[...]the purpose of internment was to stop the violence which had been escalating in the North since 1968, when the civil rights movement had begun its challenge to unionist rule." McCann, p.16.

enjoying the potential threat of their assaults and interrogations. Through the queer gender-bending of camp, and the employment of camp sensibility, McGuinness attempts to theatrically reconfigure the trauma of life and death in Derry which haunts all the characters in this play.

The seemingly ridiculous self-representation of Dido allows for comedy to enter through absurdity, and, for a theatrical moment, allows ostensibly unsurpassable tensions to coexist in a non-threatening way. Comedy, therefore, must be understood as an intrinsic quality of camp. "Camp is for fun; the aim of camp is to make an audience laugh. In fact, it is a system of humour...a system of laughing at one's incongruous position instead of crying."[20] It becomes a means of laughing at what, otherwise, can only be imagined as horrifying: it is a queer way of re-interpreting life. Camp for Dido becomes a creative strategy for dealing with his homosexuality in a public way. Through McGuinness's artistic genius camp is also transcribed into a strategy for dealing with the horrendous realities of Bloody Sunday.

Camp itself is the combination of theory/ideology and practice, a perfect companion for drama, which often seeks a similar unity. The extravagance and frivolity of camp behaviour relies on a brand of theatricality which is reminiscent of the exaggeration so often attributed to the theatre itself. Like camp, "theatre falsifies the self, encourages insincerity and promotes frivolity,"[21] and camp, like theatre, involves both a performer and an audience as a basis of its very structure. Susan Sontag was the first to describe camp as the playing of a role that sees life itself as theatre. Therefore, performance is the common antecedent which allows theatre and camp to merge together in a shared artistic purpose or intent. In the theatre an actor, using his own body, creates a character which is simultaneously *another* and the *same*

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[20] Esther Newton, "Role Models" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, p.106.
[21] Booth, p.79.

as the 'real' self. He impersonates another human being in his role as an actor. Impersonation is also an intrinsic component in camp, and represents a type of 'acting' to define self, a reality which helps one understand how and why camp is such a unifying factor in the identity project of the homosexual community.

Although not exclusively gay, camp has, however, been passionately adopted by the gay community as a means of self-representation and mutual recognition. Impersonation is the key to understanding this queer infatuation with the fabulous:

> The homosexual is stigmatised, but his stigma can be hidden...information about his stigma can be managed. Therefore, of crucial importance to homosexuals themselves and to non-homosexuals is whether the stigma is displayed so that one is immediately recognisable or is hidden so that he can pass to the world at large as a respectable citizen. The covert half (conceptually, not necessarily numerically) of the homosexual community is engaged in 'impersonating' respectable citizenry...homosexuals 'passing' are playing men.[22]

Homosexuality is, consequently, a subjective context in which camp and camp language have a particular recognition based on a shared mode of self-representation, of revealing and concealing 'true' identity.

In "It's Being so Camp As Keeps Us Going" Richard Dyer describes the significance of camp to gay men when gathered together exclusively. He explains campy behaviour as a type of gay identification that indicates a distinctive way in which gay men relate and communicate: "Camp is the one thing that expresses and confirms being a gay man."[23] McGuinness employs camp as a queer badge of identification in this play, what Sontag refers to as a 'private code,' which incites an early recognition of a coded alternative language privy primarily to the sexually marginalised. Dido's mode of communication, clothes, and all around campy

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[22] Newton, p.104.
[23] Richard Dyer, "It's Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, p.110.

behaviour, speak clearly to the audience of his homosexuality long before he makes sexual innuendos explicit.

The above mentioned sections of *Carthaginians* contain somewhat coded references which may catch the attention of those with ears attuned to gay camp-talk. In the middle of his brief speech about the general knowledge quiz Paul says, "Who captained Arsenal –? Fuck sports questions. Selling out." Contained within this seemingly innocuous distaste for the trivia topic of sport is a sort of inside-joke pointed at issues of masculinity which have a particular impact on gay men, and thus on the gay sensibility which undergirds camp. Many of the institutional practices which shape, define, and control gender in society provide structures for 'normative' development in gender identification. For example, in the school system "the formal structure of organised sport provides a temporary resolution for developmental problems of masculinity."[24] Sport consequently becomes a defining category for what is appropriately masculine and what is otherwise classified as effeminate. McGuinness injects this culturally contradictory rejection of sport as a viable field of knowledge, a rejection which might otherwise go unnoticed, but nevertheless stimulates a recognition, and possibly a laugh, from members of the audience who have failed to assimilate this institutionally encouraged masculine interest.

And yet, keeping in mind that never far below the surface of what otherwise might be considered merely fun in camp is the criticism of a political or social agenda. McGuinness appears to be commenting on the culturally constructed concept of gender asserted by masculinity, and, ultimately, supported by sport. In *Masculinities and Culture* John Beynon identifies the contemporary glorification of sport as an echo of the superiority of imperial masculinity. "Sport remains one of the main arenas for

[24] R.W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, p.132.

the acquisition and expression of socially desirable masculinity...It links masculinity and nationality and, at its worst, it can engender the worst kind of nationalistic xenophobia."[25] The iconic social stature of sport, consequently, has an insidious effect which subordinates and alienates those who do not adequately acquire national mainstream masculine identity. McGuinness's subtle remark is suddenly heard as remarkably queer when interpreted in this alternative camp way.

Dido's description of the young, blond British soldier from Newcastle who interrogated him is also encoded with the same reference to the mainstream exclusive version of masculinity promoted by sport. The fact that Dido describes the soldier as 'interested in football' casually indicates which 'camp' he falls into. The expression of an interest in sport becomes simultaneously a rejection of homosexuality, and an assertion of conventional national masculinity. Dido is attracted to this type of masculinity which, unfortunately for him, is untouchable, and essentially serves to emphasise just how marginal Dido's position is as a homosexual within society at large. Through Dido's desires and attractions, McGuinness is speaking a type of camp-talk which sparks a queer empathy from those who can comprehend this anxiety of exclusion from access to national masculine identities, an exclusion which even threatens one's acceptance in society in general. Combined with Benyon's observations of the connections between masculinity and nationality McGuinness can thus be interpreted as expressing a marginalisation which extends beyond the subjective and into the political. Analysed in this fashion, it becomes clear that the queer thing about McGuinness's writing can be distilled to a general sense of disenfranchisement which touches a cord of recognition within all those longing for a sense of belonging. This marginalised recognition is expressed in a language and

[25] John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002, p.51.

sensibility which, in turn, becomes the queer aesthetic that informs every aspect of the play. The homosexual and his campy behaviour serve as a glamorous and comedic performance strategy that draws the audience into the general ethos of longing for belonging which underlies the anxieties of each character in the play. In other words, McGuinness is accessing the pain and alienation of each character, and, simultaneously, offering a camp way of coping with the harshness of reality, as demonstrated by the queer optimism of the gay character in the face of oppression.

But how does Dido offer an alternative response to alienation in this play? One can only imagine how un-romantic and un-seductive the actual encounter with a soldier would be at an army checkpoint in any troubled country for a person like Dido. And yet, Dido reverses the rejection, and even revulsion that a 'straight' soldier may feel about his gender-bending homosexuality, by using his flamboyancy and humour to reinterpret his otherwise bleak, and potentially dangerous, world:

> **Dido** Greta, you know my ambition in life is to corrupt every member of Her Majesty's forces serving in Northern Ireland.
> **Greta** Jesus, that should be difficult.
> **Dido** Mock on. It's my bit for the cause of Ireland's freedom. When the happy day of withdrawal comes, I'll be venerated as a national hero. They'll build a statue to me. I'm going to insist it's in the nude with a blue plaque in front of my balls. (*holds an imaginary plaque before himself*) This has been erected to the war effort of Dido Martin, patriot and poof.
> **Greta** You dirty wee pervert, you –
> **Dido** You're right Greta. Give us a hug, Sarah. Prove my manhood. (302)

Below the surface of this raunchy, sharply witty section of dialogue is the fear that a homosexual lives with in the face of homophobia and licensed social violence, which threatens the very life of a gay man. Greta calls Dido, albeit affectionately, a 'dirty wee pervert.' The sentiment is not meant as an attack, but Dido, nevertheless, chooses to interiorise her affable approbation, and accepting this friendly label of the implied perversity of his homosexuality, he turns to Sarah, a woman and the more socially acceptable object of his affections, to 'prove' his 'manhood.'

Camp may provide a coded subtext of humour, but it also provides an oblique suggestion which reveals homosexual self-hatred as discussed in the previous chapter, and a proclivity towards self-abasement. Although Dyer suggests that camp provides a sense of "identity and togetherness, fun and wit"[26] for gay men, he also proposes that camp is simultaneously a form of "self-mockery" and "self-hating,"[27] once again, obvious in the frivolous character of Marco in *Dolly West's Kitchen*. In other words, the wit and the extravagance are an impersonation because what the subjective reality of the camp person actually is, is simply not good enough for public performance. Dido admits, as many gay men do, to what others describe as his perversion. In admitting that, he fails to realise that, in fact, it is the system which labels and limits him which is dysfunctional, not himself. His campiness may help him to laugh instead of cry in the light of his marginalisation, but that same self-degradation becomes a force which prevents him from seeing that it is not he who should be mocked, but, rather, the organisation of cultural standards and rigid national gender categories which do not allow him to take his subjective position seriously, that is to blame.

Humour is also used in additional multifaceted ways for the camp person or character. McGuinness employs it throughout the play in narrating Dido's attempts to find a lover. Hark is the object of Dido's affection, and yet Hark is another version of the social construction of the 'masculine' icon which excludes the homosexual, a prohibition which consequently stimulates a desire to belong in Dido. Hark's affection, thus, becomes the object of Dido's longing for greater social acceptance. McGuinness establishes the dynamic of their relationship upon Hark's entrance in ACT ONE:

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[26] Dyer, p.111.
[27] Ibid.

> **Hark** ...I'm sick of seeing you. Why are you following me? I walk home at night and you're behind me. I walk out the door and you are in front of me. Jesus, when I'm locked in the lavatory I expect to see you dancing under the door. You are known as a queer in this town. I do not like being seen with queers. I don't like you. Fuck off.
>
> *Hark exits*
>
> **Dido** I still say there is hope.
> **Greta** Really?
> **Dido** Definitely. He's just playing hard to get. (305)

Once again, humour is a defence system which postpones embarrassment and rejection. But, McGuinness's queen of *Carthaginians* knows how to use humour in complex and creative ways. In SCENE TWO, Hark and Dido are the only characters awake during the early morning hours. Their conversation turns to Dido's infatuation with Hark. The stage directions read the following: *Hark touches Dido on the face...Hark caresses Dido's face again* (314). What first appears like a seduction turns into a violent police-like interrogation:

> **Hark** ...I'll let you go if you tell me. Tell me what's between your legs. Is there anything between your legs? Is there one between your legs? (*Hark grabs Dido's groin.*) Is united Ireland between your legs? What happens when cocks unite? Disease, boy, disease. The united Ireland's your disease. (314)

Hark not only humiliates Dido, he physically hurts him. But the queen gets her revenge. And humour is her weapon of choice. The following morning Dido returns to the graveyard, campishly dressed in tight satin football gear, and is immediately met with a barrage of light-hearted humiliations from Hark: the generic everyday variety of homophobic barbs which help maintain the masculine hierarchy between the men and the queers. Although Dido appears to be mocking himself in his outward show, the queen is not prepared to allow herself to be the 'butt' of the joke. By co-opting a signifier of masculine identity, the football uniform, Dido asserts the threat of his own queer masculinity:

> *During this Dido has stood, silent and unmoved. He then produces from behind his back a handful of sausages.*

Dido Pick a sausage, any sausage.

Hark points to a sausage. Dido flamboyantly displays the sausage to the rest of them. Opens Hark's shirt, crams the sausage into the shirt, takes out the resultant mess, points to it.

Is this your sausage? Then have it.

Dido flattens the sausages into Hark's face, rubbing the meat in vigorously. Silence. Sarah laughs. (324)

"Humour is the campy queen's weapon".[28] Because Dido's personality is so dependent on how he represents himself, whether in clothing or language, the spectators of his self-representation are conditioned to respond to his performance. Although Hark is angry and dangerous, Dido relies on the allurement of his continual 'performance' in order to disorient Hark, and lure him into his plot for revenge. Dido appears dressed in an exaggerated and flamboyant football uniform which calls out 'laugh at me,' and yet this is a clever camouflage for a reversal of fortune. The clown suddenly becomes the bitch as McGuinness reveals the reality that "a lot of camping is extremely hostile; [and] it is almost always sarcastic."[29]

This type of viciousness reveals the benign fun of androgyny which represents the façade of camp persons, and exemplifies the danger which queerness poses to what otherwise might be described as mainstream normativity. Jack Babuscio describes the gay sensibility of camp as "a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feelings that spring from the fact of social oppression; in short, a perception of the world which is coloured, shaped, directed, and defined by the fact of one's gayness."[30] He describes the irony and absurdity of camp as being based on the basic social perception of the incongruity of the homosexual himself. Sex or love between two men is considered 'abnormal,' 'unnatural,' and 'unhealthy' in society; a

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[28] Newton, p.107.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Jack Babuscio, "The Cinema of Camp: (*AKA* Camp and the Gay Sensibility" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, p.118.

reality which Hark so aggressively expresses in his attack on Dido. Consequently, as a result of their social dispossession, the homosexual is continually aware of himself as an anomaly. This inner knowledge expresses itself, in one form, by the gay relationship to camp, and its "heightened awareness of the discrepancies that lie between appearance and reality, expression and meaning."[31] Camp exploits these discrepancies, and McGuinness makes use of this queer semiotic and performative strategy to offer an alternative response to entrenched social and political troubles.

Based on the inner awareness of already being a social misfit, the camp homosexual is, consequently, more comfortable expressing himself outwardly as a social aberration. In *Carthaginians*, Dido's costumes alone challenge the accepted order of appearance in their stark contrast to the clothing of the others, or any apparel which is socially endorsed as appropriately masculine. His simple refusal of the conventional habits of dress is an expression of individualism, and also a form of protest against the system which determines the categorisation of sexuality by the cultural coding of dress.

In the introduction to his book *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault argues that sexuality in the last one hundred years has become a powerful component in what he describes as the regulation of social order. Historically, Foucault describes society as accepting a 'Victorian regime' which gave root to the sexual personality and outlook of the 'imperial prude' which haunts our modern sexual identity, creating a "restrained, mute, and hypocritical sexuality."[32] He pinpoints this period of history as a time which defined, and subsequently confined, western sexual practice, an era which subverted and repressed any and all forms of sexuality that did not belong to the realm of the procreative or reproductive. The Victorian age sought, more than any

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[31] Ibid., p.120.
[32] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: 1: The Will to Knowledge*, p.3.

other age, to identify and classify all forms of sexual practice, and in thus doing, they created systems of designation and sexual classification that led to official legislation which policed and controlled sexual practice as never before. Sexual categorisation created a language for repression and an organisation of power which served to justify heterosexuality as normative and homosexuality as deviant. This categorisation was not merely ideological, but affected the legal system, as indicated in the imperial laws prohibiting gay sex in Ireland outlined in the Introduction, which in turn made it politically dangerous to be sexually 'deviant.' Foucault defines this era of sexual ordering as a period in which sexuality, for the first time, became a component in the economy of regimes of authority which generally manage and determine cultural, political, and moral mechanisms of power within society; evident in the 'regime of authority' which nationalism in twentieth century Ireland controlled, as exhibited in Chapter One.

Through the use of camp in *Carthaginians* McGuinness addresses the 'economies of power' which regulate Irish sexuality. Dido refuses the forces which would prefer his compliance with the system, even when those forces become physically threatening to him. His association with the queer aesthetic of camp overtly displays his sexuality, and thus, his self-representation stands as a form of social or cultural protest. His very character becomes a voice of defiance, clearly speaking a discourse of sexual liberation, and, through his unique performance of self, flamboyantly announcing a sexual resistance. McGuinness uses camp to access and confront traditional signifiers of 'normative' gender identification and sexuality, and he does so as a way of challenging the political and cultural powers that be; socially encouraged sectarian divisional powers which continue to hold the 'real life' citizens of Derry in an ideological and political headlock. Foucault addresses the agenda

behind this modern impulse to publicly speak about sexualities which have previously been rigorously and institutionally repressed:

> For decades now, we have found it difficult to speak on the subject without striking a different pose: we are conscious of defying established power, and we ardently conjure away the present and appeal to the future, whose day will be hastened by the contribution we are making. Something that smacks of revolt, of promised freedom, of the coming of age of a different law, slips easily into this discourse on sexual oppression...the existence in our era of a discourse in which sex, the revelation of truth, the overturning of global laws, the proclamation of a new day to come, and the promise of a certain felicity are linked together. Today it is sex that serves as a support for the ancient form – so familiar and important in the West – of preaching. A great sexual sermon – which has its subtle theologians and its popular voices – has swept through our societies over the last decades; it has chastised the old order, denounced hypocrisy, and praised the rights of the immediate and the real; it has made people dream of a New City.[33]

The apocalyptic language Foucault uses to illustrate the shift in significance for the discourse of sexual politics in contemporary society illuminates McGuinness's use of camp and sexuality in creating dramatic alternatives for the traumatised city of Derry. Just as in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, McGuinness is seeking alternatives to the established order and accepted institutions of Irish political and social life. His implementation of the queer aesthetic of camp dresses resistance in the clothing of a queen as he searches for an option for Derry other than the fate of ancient Carthage. Foucault's connections between sexual revolution and political transformation provide insight to how issues of sexuality and gender liberation represent, in McGuinness's work, performative strategies which envision a new social future.

McGuinness preaches his own sermon for the establishment of a 'new city' in the structure of his play as well as in character and aesthetic. In SCENE FOUR of *Carthaginians* the character of Dido writes his own play titled *The Burning Balaclava*, allotting new 'roles' to each member of the cast. This play-within-a-play

[33] Ibid., pp.6-8.

serves as a parody of life in Derry since the beginning of the troubles as it literally 'theatricalises' the violence of sectarian divisions in the North. The heroine in Dido's play is Mrs. O'Doherty, a fifty year-old Catholic Derry mother tormented by the troubles, yet consoled by her devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her oldest son, Padraig O'Dochartaigh is a patriot grappling with the decision of whether or not to take up the gun for Ireland. He is dating the beautiful daughter of a Protestant RUC[34] man named Mercy Dogherty, whose father interrogates Catholic suspects and is a "murderous, vicious brute" (333). Father Docherty is a Catholic priest who has completely stopped speaking out of torment that no one listens to his preaching; he now communicates using white flags only. Jimmy Doherty is an unemployed alcoholic. Dido plays two roles: Doreen O'Doherty, who loves animals and won't leave the house without her dog Boomer, as well as a "faceless, nameless" (334) working class British soldier, tormented because his job compels him to oppress similar working class people of Derry. The play is an interchange of comic, farcical encounters which would be, otherwise, frightening in 'real life.' In the end, all the characters, except Mrs. O'Doherty, die by shooting one another with the water pistols Dido supplies as props.

McGuinness uses the dramatic technique of a play-within-a-play to focus audience attention while simultaneously disrupting the unity of plot which has been established in the previously undisturbed linear narrative of the play. In *Post-Colonial Drama* Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins describe the particular way in which the dramaturgical device of the play-within-a-play focuses audience attention by fracturing the unity of the greater established narrative which contains it:

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[34] The RUC is the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Northern Irish police force implicated in maintaining the social order in Northern Ireland which oppressed Catholics and favoured Protestants.

> It follows that a play-within-a-play always creates a dialogical tension between the various levels of performance: it mimics and reflects the original (either the original action or the original text) and it refracts the entire texts meaning. The refracted play-within-a-play thus has the potential to articulate a different interpretation of events, or de-emphasise the power of axiomatic ways of seeing.[35]

The fracturing and refracting power of this particular theatrical device contributes to how queer McGuinness's dramatic imagination is. *The Burning Balaclava*, working in line with the camp aesthetic of the play itself, becomes a queer moment that challenges and confuses the audience's perception of 'reality.' The new 'reality' established by this dramatic technique disturbs the illusion of authenticity the greater play has encouraged in its subsequent plot. Although McGuinness's play-within-a-play is highly exaggerated in its campiness, the audience is, nonetheless, easily carried from one plot to the other, making transparent a central objective in queer theory at work in his drama: the disruption and disturbance of dominant narratives, and the subsequent addition to them of alternative, albeit extravagant, versions of reality. This device furthers the queer aesthetic of the play by creating a performative platform on which to exhibit multiple 'realities.' The play-within-a-play advances the queer poststructuralist agenda of deconstructing reality by making it even more obvious that, what the audience has been accepting as the 'reality' of the structure and narrative of the play is easily adapted to the expectations introduced by a new queer plot. Suddenly the gaze of the audience is overtly diverted by the camp character, and McGuinness offers a new plot; this time the story is based clearly and solely on the creative vision of the queer. In this moment of narrative revolution Dido takes control of the story, and he decides who plays what roles in the world he creates. Just as Hark was readily drawn into Dido's plot for revenge by his comic extravagance, now the audience is led into his world of sexual and gender anarchy, and they willingly assent

[35] Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. London: Routledge, 1996, p.250.

to the new plot, enchanted by the queen's extravagant performance and wit. *The Burning Balaclava* allows McGuinness to not only subvert traditional gender roles, but just as significantly, to engage volatile aspects of Northern Irish cultural/political assumptions which solidify sectarian divisions as Dido's play allows him a privileged moment to give his queer interpretation of events and create a type of Foucauldian 'New City.'

The camp-space created by this dramatic technique points to the fragility of role-playing in general. Dido arrives in the cemetery with manuscripts for all the other characters, and sets about distributing the different roles which he has created. In the greater play the "tension between rehearsed roles and unrehearsed ones"[36] emerges. The professional actors playing their respective parts naturalistically are suddenly asked to play unprofessional actors struggling to take on their new role in the play-within-a-play. The question that this double-acting reveals is "[d]o we become what we play? Or is what we play the thing we act out most."[37] At this moment in *Carthaginians*, acting is foregrounded in a way in which we are forced to recognise the seminal camp posture of performance which asserts "the metaphor of life as theatre."[38] At this pivotal stage in the play McGuinness brings together cultural iconography, gender reversal, and drag, in a clash of cultural and gender signifiers which seeks to destabilise traditional role-playing and critique the entrenched ideology which dominates a narrow or essentialist idea of Northern Irish individual and cultural identification and character. His use (or abuse) of central iconic props in Northern Irish politics and society is also foregrounded in the play-within-a-play, and allows for an examination of, what I argue, is the second use of the principles of camp performance: an engagement with, and adjustment of, the

[36] Jordan, p.81.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Sontag, p.56.



Carthaginians, The Druid Theatre, Galway, 1992. Directed by Frank McGuinness. Pauline McLynn as Greta, and Maelíosa Stafford as Paul. Photograph by Amelia Stein, with permission.

meanings society has, often uncritically, invested in material objects which represent cultural and political ideology. *The Burning Balaclava* permits McGuinness to playfully engage untouchable icons of Northern Irish cultural/political life such as flags, balaclavas, guns, and religious symbols such as crosses, rosary beads, and statues of the sacred heart which bear existential witness to sectarian division. Dido's play allows a privileged moment where incongruity *is* the story, giving a queerly humorous interpretation of otherwise incontrovertible signifiers of difference in Northern Irish life.

The scene in *Carthaginians* in which *The Burning Balaclava* is performed begins when "*Dido enters in drag. He wears a black miniskirt, black tights, high heels and beret*" (330). The frivolity of Dido's exaggerated costumes up to this point in the play are a type of cross-dressing which subtly prepares the audience for the full-out gender subversion of drag in this scene. Esther Newton describes the connection between drag and camp: "The role of female impersonator is directly related to both the drag queen and camp roles in the homosexual community...Drag and camp are the most representative and widely used symbols of homosexuality in the English speaking world."[39] In his campy football uniform or flamboyantly coloured, uniquely tailored suit, Dido exhibits an informal type of drag which opposes visible social gender-specific norms for dressing. By placing him in full drag McGuinness intensifies his critique in this queer drama by moving beyond a criticism of social convention, and into an expanded protest against the complex systems of cultural 'reality' which maintain the binaries that strictly appropriate individual subjectivity and political affiliation based on what is judged to be 'normative.' Dido's appearance

[39] Newton, p.98.



Carthaginians, The Druid Theatre, Galway, 1992. Maelíosa Stafford as Paul, Pat Kinevane as Dido, and Pauline McLynn as Greta. Photograph by Amelia Stein, with permission.

in drag is the forewarning of McGuinness's intention to attack structures of 'reality' and 'normative' essences, performed so extravagantly in *The Burning Balaclava*.

In his book *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* Laurence Senelick provides interesting insight into the role and function of clothing in society; information which illuminates how Dido's role as a fashion-misfit signifies that he is actually a social activist who struggles into the constriction of black tights for a higher cause. Senelick claims "cross-dressing rarely intends fusion...but rather gender division between choice of one polarity or another,"[40] a choice which ultimately seeks "the transfer of experience of the other."[41] By cross-dressing, Dido refuses the categories of masculinity imposed on him, and by impersonating the gender 'opposite' he identifies with the 'other' in a new and unique way. If camp can be understood as a paradigmatic practice in the process of decentring and destabilising a world of fixed essentials, drag or cross-dressing can thus be described as the paradigm of camp itself. Drag's oppositional stance in relation to sartorial conventions places the aesthetics of camp into practice as it playfully engages the tension between 'appearance' and 'reality.' Dido's language and humour meet corporeal expression in cross-dressing, as his wardrobe becomes the praxis of his sexual and political politics by symbolising identification with what is otherwise markedly opposite of that which is deemed 'normal.'

Dido is not the only character in *Carthaginians* who dabbles in a little cross-dressing. Hark is the first of the characters to receive a 'role' in *The Burning Balaclava*. As he distributes the manuscripts Dido unconventionally castes Hark:

> **Dido** ...Hark, you play the heroine. (*He produces a headscarf.*) She is a fifty year-old Derry mother, tormented by the troubles, worn away by worry to a frizzle.

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[40] Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag, and Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2000, p.2.
[41] Ibid.

Hark Why am I playing her?
Dido You have the looks for it. Her name is Mrs Doherty.
(*Hands Hark an apron*) (331)

In the spirit of camp, Dido hands him a decorative frilly red apron as his new costume. Sarah is then assigned the role of Jimmy Doherty, an unemployed disgruntled Derryman. For her role she is given a long brown coat and a cap. Dido's cross-dressing is representative of his homosexual identity and marginality, and yet McGuinness is obviously not suggesting to us through Sarah and Hark, or Jimmy and Mrs Doherty as they are known in the play-within-a-play, that their cross-dressing is an indication of an alternative gendered subject position to that of 'heteronormativity.' He is, however, further demonstrating the different tensions between the levels of performance within drama, creating a reflexive theatrical experience which allows for a self-conscious awareness of theatre's representational strategies. This is a perfect example of how theory and practice in theatre itself are supported and defined by camp's own theories of performance. It seems that in *The Burning Balaclava* McGuinness is reaching for the experience of those individuals whose realities exist outside what is considered 'normal' in a more intensely political way. Dido's drag is a rejection of the polarities which gender-norms impose on the individual, while Sarah and Hark's situational cross-dressing, along with the other gender reversals within the play-within-a-play, stand as a sexualised metaphor for reaching across sectarian division of difference; to metaphorically walk in the shoes of another in order to, perhaps, reach new levels of personal and political empathy. The reversals, transparencies, and 'acting' in the performance of *The Burning Balaclava* is a technique McGuinness uses to cleverly propose the possibility of the transfer of the experience of the 'other' to an Irish audience fixed in the despair of what seems to be irreconcilable sectarian disagreement in Northern Ireland.

McGuinness is exploiting theatre's intrinsic fictional character which allows for fluidity of representation in both form and content. Where sexuality was his strategy in *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, broader issues of gender become his *modus operandi* in *Carthaginians*. In *Re-Dressing the Canon*, Alisa Solomon describes the fundamental connection between theatre and the project of gender deconstruction. She claims that theatre

> makes visible what culture has made invisible – the accomplishment of gender...On stage there is a radical synergy between theatre that displays its performance conventions, and the real-life, theatre-like conventions of gender roles. In such works theatre and gender take shape as critical images of one another, as mimetic – though not identical – twins.[42]

Gender role and gender identity are disoriented in *The Burning Balaclava* in a way which is innocuously presented through camp's complex alluring and comedic layers. In his dramatic form, McGuinness creates a theatre which deconstructs 'reality' as it self-consciously displays acting and performance, thus highlighting the process of creating 'roles' of any type, whether theatrical or social.

By using gender signifiers to destabilise reality McGuinness deconstructs the cultural codes which supply us with individual identity, pointing to the performative nature of all gendered personality. Theatrical transvestism becomes a contradictory site in which we are made aware of how, what may otherwise have been considered 'natural,' is basically a cultural construct. This presses an evaluation of identity politics. During *The Burning Balaclava* the audience simultaneously laughs at Hark dressed as a fifty-year-old woman, and is drawn into the 'reality' of his feminine character within the newly established plot. This transfer of identity is made possible by the performance structure of the theatre which not only permits, but requires imagination.

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[42] Alisa Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender*. London: Routledge, p.3.

McGuinness creates a kind of 'gender trouble' in *Carthaginians* which, according to Judith Butler, has more power than simple performance or representation. In her book *Gender Trouble* Butler examines how restrictive masculine/feminine gender binaries point to the basic fragility of all such accepted strict oppositions. Building on the philosophies of Foucault, Butler asserts that within the gender project, which itself points to the performative and constructed elements of 'reality,' is the potential for social revolution. This is obviously a part of McGuinness's own ideological agenda in this play, as he tries to make sense of the suffering and confusion felt by the people of Derry in relation to the events of Bloody Sunday. Gender-bending is employed as a theatrical device in McGuinness's greater goal, as mentioned in relationship to Chapter One, of "presenting imagery of a new way forward"[43] in the troubles that plague Northern Ireland.

Butler introduces a theory of gender to the discourse of sexuality and the human body which creates a bridge between McGuinness's political agenda and his implementation of the queer aesthetic in his dramaturgy. *Carthaginians* is McGuinness's attempt to deal with the events of Bloody Sunday and their residual effects on the community of Derry at large; the trauma which the community faced during that definitive day in the modern history of Northern Ireland has not been resolved or healed for the characters of this play. The sectarian divisions which came to a head in the conflict of Bloody Sunday provided a definitive moment for the already divided communities in Northern Ireland. Politically and socially that event defined a generation, creating and delineating boundaries which have encouraged a seemingly irreconcilable hatred of the other. McGuinness represents the effects of alienation on the bodies of each of his characters, and Butler, in turn, provides a

[43] This is a reference to the Mic Moroney article "Coming Home" which I mentioned in Chapter One on *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen.*

theory of the body which helps us to understand more completely the significance of his theatrical bodies. McGuinness displays the body on stage, playing with identity, and through the fun of camp, loosens the more restrictive essentialist expectations of the audience. Through transvestic techniques of gender reversal, and the sexual politics and perspective of the homosexual, McGuinness creates a type of body language which challenges and subverts the cultural history which has inflicted such trauma on the citizens of this drama. His bodies in performance try to rewrite the pain which history has inscribed on them in extravagant and mutinous queer displays, such as the riotous action of *The Burning Balaclava*. Butler's theories help further map the details of McGuinness's queer performance strategies by connecting the effects of theory/ideology on the body itself:

> History is the creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body. This corporeal destruction is necessary to produce the speaking subject and its significations. This is a body, described through the language of surface and force, weakened through a "single drama" of domination, inscription and creation.[44]

Butler is, once again, building her theory of the constructed nature of gender identity on the work of Foucault[45] and borrows from him the notion that history creates for the body a 'single drama' that is subsequently 'acted' out on its corporeal surface. She understands the individual person as the embodiment of social values with "history as

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[44] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1999, p.165.

[45] In this section of *Gender Trouble* titled "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," Butler builds on the theories of the effects of sexual discourse as proposed by Foucault. She interestingly interrogates Foucault's idea of historical inscription by saying that it presupposes a body which has a "materiality prior to signification and form" (166). She consequently takes Foucault's observations on the discursive construction of sexuality which sought to analyse how ideas are gathered together around the concept of sexuality, and moves deeper into the issue to search for the origins of gender. Where Foucault's interests lie in the effects of institutions, discourses, and practices on sexual identity, Butler's interests extend the argument into what is known as the sex/gender distinction: "If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then gender cannot be said to follow from sex in any one way [...] When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (10). In her search for the source of sex/gender identity she argues for the performative nature of gender, thus further encouraging the theoretical connection between Foucault's theories and McGuinness's theatrical practices.

a relentless writing instrument and the body as the medium which must be destroyed and transfigured in order for 'culture' to emerge."[46] In *The Burning Balaclava* McGuinness literally provides his characters with another drama through which to act out their traumatic experience. Cross-dressing and drag provide a performative confrontation to single or unitary notions of identity, fighting history's narrow narrative by rejecting normative cultural practices. However, in all its farcical playfulness *The Burning Balaclava* eventually embodies the 'corporeal destruction' which history seeks in its suppression of the body. The success of the gender-bending in opening up the experience of the 'other' in both gender and, consequently, politics, ends with all of the characters within the play-within-a-play shooting one another and dying. Even though McGuinness re-engages the events of Bloody Sunday through all the indulgence of camp, the outcome is the same as Butler's idea of history's effect on the human body. All the bodies on stage are ultimately conquered and destroyed by the values and meanings forced upon them by the political and social circumstances of being citizens of Northern Ireland and Derry. The queen is given the last word in the play-within-a-play:

> *They all rise and shoot Dido*
> **Dido** They've got me. I join the dying. What's a Brit under the clay? What's a Protestant under the ground? What's a Catholic in the grave? All the same. Dead. All dead. We're all dead. I'm dying. They've got me. It's over. It's over. It's over. (*dies*) That's it. What do you think?
> *Silence*
> Tell me the truth. Isn't it just like real life? (344)

With all of the melodrama expected of this campy creature, Dido, with his dying breath, cries out three times "It's over. It's over. It's over." This declaration heralds the end of *The Burning Balaclava* with the defeat of the body by the system of cultural and political binaries which have produced such a violent plot of

[46] Ibid., p.166.

irreconcilable differences. With this pessimistic ending McGuinness seems to confess the impossibility of admitting a 'second drama' into the fractured lives of these citizens of Derry. With the end of *The Burning Balaclava* the greater play never returns to the fun and extravagance of the previous scenes. A certain melancholia returns and dominates the play to the very end, turning its back on the possibilities of rebellion which sizzled below the surface of the camp fun which preceded it. Maela laments the death of the possibility of a new look at the trauma of Bloody Sunday as she struggles to assert her version of reality, denying the ravages of Derry's history, historical ravages which have killed both the living and the dead:

> **Seph** Bloody Sunday. Everything changed after Bloody Sunday.
> **Maela** Nothing changed. Nothing happened that day. Nobody died. I should know, I was in the hospital. If there had been anyone dead I would have seen them, and I saw no one dead. (*jumps to her feet*) I saw no one dead. I saw no one dead. You're telling lies. You've driven away the dead. I hope you're satisfied. I hope you're satisfied with your lies. (*She exits.*) (346)

The Burning Balaclava seems to be the last burst of frivolity, extravagance, and humour before the setting of the graveyard begins to work its macabre influence on *Carthaginians*. The alternative reality which McGuinness has created with gender reversals, camp references and cross-dressing intersects with the dramatic setting of the play which, after all, is set on the geographical sight of bereavement and loss: the cemetery.

In the attempt to define camp thus far I have considered the ways in which a person, or a thing can be considered to embody camp qualities. In so doing, I have also acknowledged certain elements of camp which make it an affectation, a sensibility or an aesthetic; qualities that allow it to stand out as distinct from other tastes or knowledges. In my final consideration of camp I would like to return to the possible definition of the word I presented in the beginning of the chapter which

suggested camp as a location. This final attempt to engage camp as a place or a location is a similar fantastic venture of employing the camp aesthetic to *Carthaginians*, because McGuinness takes advantage of many of the same techniques of extravagance and artifice in setting as he does in iconography and personality. In this play he creates a marginal place for his group of characters; a geographical space to camp in, a common ground for those bound together in the collective experience and perspective of trauma and disenfranchisement on which to act out their alienated situations.

The word camp itself implies a temporary dwelling, a place outside the normal stable quarters of everyday life. The characters of *Carthaginians* are living in this makeshift environment, and the "burial ground" (297) on the outskirts of Derry is transformed into a camp society of the disenfranchised. McGuinness creates a camp based on the feelings and reactions to the space itself: a graveyard is a location which heightens emotional response, and brings to the forefront sensations and feelings which induce excitement at the possibility or fear of horror. In SCENE SEVEN the group sit in a circle, as if at a séance, and discuss their location:

> **Dido** Do you ever get afraid of this place?
> **Greta** What of?
> **Dido** Ghosts.
> **Greta** Do you believe in ghosts?
> **Dido** Yes. Do you?
> **Greta** Why do you think we're here?
> *Silence.*
> **Dido** I'm scared shitless.
> *Silence.*
> I hope there are not going to be any poltergeists. I saw a film once about a poltergeist. It bit people's heads off and disembowelled them. I had to be carried out of the cinema every time I saw it. (374)

McGuinness draws attention to the eeriness of the setting of the play, as the graveyard suddenly stimulates a dramatic place with the heightened status of a psychologically

extravagant space; a location in which the 'normal' is, once again, suspended in this play, this time in favour of the paranormal.

Dido's allusion to the film involving a poltergeist introduces the genre of the horror movie into the vast array of cultural artefacts McGuinness references in the play. The horror movie is a unique filmic genre which Jack Babuscio describes as being particularly "susceptible to camp interpretation."[47] These types of films with their "conventions for expressing instant feeling, thrills, sharply defined personality, outrageous and 'unacceptable' sentiments, and so on"[48] provide a sensationalised atmosphere which contributes to camp's overall attempt to transform the mundane into the extraordinary. Dido's remark that he 'had to be carried out of the cinema every time he saw' the horror film points to the reality that camp is continually drawn back to those effects which elicit exaggerated emotional responses, to experiences which exploit "how you respond to things rather than qualities actually inherent in those things."[49] By simultaneously drawing audience attention in SCENE SEVEN back to the setting of the play, and associating that location with the raw, heightened emotion of the horror genre, McGuinness connects the environment of the cemetery, with all its implications of death and fear, to the psychological struggles of his characters. The play's location, and the feelings this 'dead' space conjures, are an extension of the situation and collective experiences which have pushed these individuals out of the city and into the extremities of their society. The physical setting serves the queer aesthetic of *Carthaginians* because, like the drag queen or the overt use of contradictory cultural icons, the cemetery amplifies reality in a way which gives access to the extraordinary over the expected or the ordinary. In much the same way as a camp sensibility, the cemetery acts as a cultural contradiction: the

[47] Babuscio, p.121.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Dyer, p.113.

cemetery is for the dead and yet McGuinness uses it as a camping ground for the living.

If the camp person stands as a type of protest against what might be described as prescribed 'normativity,' as a challenge to the ideological boundaries which defend essentialist notions of subjectivity by performing alternative identities, then McGuinness's graveyard can be understood as a space for oppositional politics as well. In his book *Cities of the Dead* Joseph Roach describes cemeteries as the "behavioural vortices of death"[50] which, for Western society, are a "revolutionary spatial paradigm"[51] which seeks to segregate the living from the dead. Roach describes a shift in the traditional space for the burial of the dead from the localised churchyard, to the segregated space of the designed cemetery, as an architectural reflection of an ideological renegotiation of the place of the dead amongst the living. This shift in the planning and design of what to do with the remains of the dead reflects a shift in the belief in the influence the dead have upon the living. By moving the dead literally out of town, the living are not haunted by proximity, the visual memory of the dead, or by the inevitability of their own mortality. The cemetery can thus be understood as another one of the complex ways in which McGuinness rejects mainstream ideology by acknowledging the direct relationship between the living and the dead, spatially placing those living with the effects of Bloody Sunday with those who died because of the events which unfolded that fateful day. By locating the play in a graveyard McGuinness draws attention to how even the most mundane and seemingly 'normal' practices of society have a direct impact on how we negotiate our worlds. The use of the cemetery as a dramatic location could then be understood as an engagement with memories which, no matter how hard we try, cannot be

[50] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p.48.
[51] Ibid.

consigned to the past and separated or disconnected from modern realities. In this sense, McGuinness is theatrically expressing in his setting for *Carthaginians* the continual effect that living with the dead from Bloody Sunday has had on the people of Derry.

Roach refers to graveyards as 'Cities of the Dead.' He relates the emergence of this type of bodily segregation, that of the living from the dead, as part of a greater plan for classification begun by the rationalising project of the Enlightenment. He describes these schemes of classifications as follows:

> Under a regime of newly segregationist taxonomies of behaviour in several related fields of manners and bodily administration the dead were compelled to withdraw from the spaces of the living...As the place of burial was removed from local churchyard to distant park the dead were more likely to be remembered (and forgotten) by monuments than by continued observances in which their spirits were invoked.[52]

The process of classification brings place and aesthetic together in McGuinness's work through the recognition that the space in which *The Burning Balaclava* is performed is actually a perverse mortal location which contests how bodies are ordered in an attempt to administrate relationship between the living and the dead. Gender and geography join voices to preach a great sermon decrying the so-called truths which organise and regulate bodies and lives. Roach continues: "The cemetery grows on the margins to define the social distinction of the fictive centre."[53] If *Carthaginians* is an attempt to deal with the events of Bloody Sunday, then it would seem that McGuinness is calling for an end to the myth-of-memories which have defensively fragmented and compartmentalised that day, and, ultimately, fictionalised its impact. He is expressing the anxiety that, although the dead have been buried, their memory still haunts the psyche of the people of Derry. This anxiety stems from

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[52] Ibid., p.50.
[53] Ibid., p.53.

the lack of public resolution to the causes and events which led to so many deaths on that fateful day. The 'monuments' which memory has erected certainly haunt the characters of this play, and as they wait for the resurrection of the dead, perhaps they are calling on all of Derry to remember and heal by invoking the spirits of those who have died, and recognise that these ghosts still live in the centre of the sectarian ideology which claims centre stage in Derry life.

The contradictions, alienations and segregations which McGuinness engages in his drama reflect the same series of experiences which trouble the actual events of Bloody Sunday. What started off as a civil rights march "when thirteen civilians were shot dead by paratroopers,"[54] turned into an event which led to countless sectarian acts of violence over several decades. Issues of civil rights collided with ideas of political authority and lost. The established relationship of animosity between Catholics and Protestants was upheld by the event, and made martyrs of the thirteen killed. But the killings only served to officially endorse the reality that social and cultural constructions of established identity were the governing standard in Northern Ireland. Bloody Sunday was a day which had the potential to bring about understanding, and shift the balance of power away from segregation and towards integration. Instead, it launched an era which forced identity politics into their respective oppositions, and stimulated a defensive entrenchment of differences. Each party claimed to have the centre of truth, thus eliminating the in-between space, a common ground for reconciling difference. McGuinness has engaged these identity differentials by violating borders that limit the possibilities for subjective identities as well as trespassing on culturally determined spatial boundaries which rely on the

[54] For more information see: R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*. London: Penguin, 1989, p.591.

categorisations of what it means to be living or dead. In so doing, he has created his own utopian camp of possibilities.

McGuinness's camp is a place where the entrenched symbols of cultural and political opposition are exposed as performance through transformation in theatrical form and practice: a very queer place that seeks to offset the sacrosanct space which houses the altar of normativity. Foucault provides insight to enlighten the anxiety of the confined and restricted ideological space of Derry which provoked McGuinness to create such a queer camp:

> The space in which we are living, by which we are drawn outside of ourselves, in which, as a matter of fact, the erosion of our life, our time, and our history take place, this place that eats and scrapes away at us, is also heterogeneous space in itself. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, within which individuals and things might be located. We do not live in a void that would be tinged with shimmering colours, we live inside an ensemble of relations that define emplacements that are irreducible to each other and absolutely nonsuperposable.[55]

Foucault associates spatial and aesthetic realities in a similar fashion to McGuinness in *Carthaginians*. He explains the ideological space of utopias, which he describes as "emplacements having no real place...that maintain a general relation or direct inverse analogy with the real space of society,"[56] but he also asserts that there are real places and actual spaces, "places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realised utopias."[57] Foucault calls these places "heterotopias" and defines them as "sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localisable."[58] These heterotopias are specific to a culture, but always signify difference within the social economy. 'Heterotopia' would, perhaps, make an ideal name for McGuinness's dramatic space in this play.

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[55] Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion. London: Penguin, 1998, p.177.
[56] Ibid., p.178.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

As McGuinness does in *Carthaginians*, Foucault locates the cemetery as an example of a location that is simultaneously the same as *and* different from the society that surrounds it. This space is a kind of denial of individuality, and a proclamation of the interrelatedness of life. McGuinness exploits the notion that life is not lived in a void through his unapologetic, politically incorrect, camp use of political, spatial, and cultural iconography. He incongruously links cultural markers such as The Flintstones and Virgil in an absurd clash which exemplifies camp's ability to juxtapose high and low culture. He draws together objects and individuals impossibly contradictory in 'real' circumstances. Fabio Cleto labels this camp practice as a "constructionist epistemic[...]in which the elements of determination are disturbed on both subject and object of perception."[59] When Dido is allocating roles in *The Burning Balaclava* he assigns Greta the role of an RUC man:

> *Dido hands Greta rosary beads and a crucifix*
> **Greta** What would a Prod want with these?
> **Dido** When he interrogates catholic suspects he beats them over the head with a crucifix and strangles them with rosary beads. He's a murderous vicious brute. (*They both giggle.*) (333)

McGuinness uses the liminal space of the graveyard as a context to bring together that which by all standards is considered at odds. The graveyard is juxtaposed with the city in a relationship similar to that of the dead and the living. Location, objects and persons create a paradoxical camp in which diversity and reversals are a virtue, a heterotopia which flamboyantly thrives on the fundamental incongruence of 'reality.' McGuinness's dramatic project aligns itself spatially and ideologically with Foucault's conceptualisation of the heterotopia in relation to what this unique, and yet ordinary space does to the remaining social spaces in which it is contained: "the heterotopias have the role of creating a space of illusion that denounces all real space,

[59] Cleto, p.28.

all real emplacements within which human life is partitioned off, as being even more illusory."[60] McGuinness's camp space shares the expository characteristic of the heterotopia in exposing fault-lines in the artificial unity of culture in Northern Ireland, an exposition that seeks to renegotiate all kinds of political and cultural borders and boundaries.

McGuinness unabashedly uses Virgil's *The Aeneid*, but relies on camp's paradoxical prerogative to invert 'reality,' as he twists Virgil's version of the story. Like Virgil's Queen Dido, McGuinness's queen haunts the stage with her queer antics, but, unlike Virgil's Queen, she is not content to remain silent; she chooses to haunt more aggressively, as she rules this camp in Derry with textured meanings and persistent resistances. Like Virgil's Dido, she is troubling, but we are not sure why, and so we move on amused by her antics. Through its artifice and fun, camp postpones judgement in much the same way as it confuses perception. Through her theatricality, her incongruity, and her complex humour McGuinness's Dido lures those who are content with the rigidity of 'reality' into a world of inverted excess: "The 'normal' man remains comfortable with [this] camp because it amuses him,"[61] but below the amusement lies a confrontation which requires a queer translation.

Unlike Virgil's Dido, McGuinness's queen refuses to be consigned either to silence or living amongst the dead. She is too queer for that. Subtly she creates a space for 'transvestic thinking,' but moves on to find a 'New City' when her gender-bending irreverent preaching fails to bring about change. McGuinness transforms his Dido as she rejects the traditional immovable narrative, and chooses, instead, to write her own future:

Dido What happened? Everything happened, nothing happened, whatever

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[60] Foucault, p.184.
[61] Philip Core, "Camp: The Lie That Tells the Truth" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, p.85.

> you want to believe, I suppose. What do I believe? I believe it is time to leave Derry. Love it and leave it. Why am I talking to myself in a graveyard? Because everyone in Derry talks to themselves. Everybody in the world talks to themselves. What's the world? Shipquay Street and Ferryquay Street and William Street and the Strand and Great James Street. While I walk the earth, I walk through you the streets of Derry. If I meet one who knows you and they ask, how's Dido? Surviving. How's Derry? Surviving. Carthage has not been destroyed. Watch yourself. (379)

The story is changed, the narrative rewritten, and this queen goes off to find a new place to camp.

3

The Wilde Irishmen

'Theatre Theatrical' in *Gates of Gold*

The last chapter outlined theories of camp as a system of queer strategies which provide a diverse aesthetic for interpreting the multi-dimensional performance levels involved in theatrical practice which range from character and plot, to props and setting. In this chapter I examine McGuinness's most recent play, Gates of Gold, *and its simultaneous attempts to both reveal and conceal the 'real life' story of the Irish theatre practitioners Micheál MacLiammóir and Hilton Edward. Instead of focusing solely on the details of the narrative, or even the techniques implemented in the performance of the play, I attempt to access what I feel is a representational aesthetic in writing which most characterises what I determine to be queer about this play. I focus less on the details of the plot, and more on the way McGuinness has chosen to tell the story of these well loved gay men of twentieth-century Ireland.*

> ...the modern western world has become cluttered with sexual stories...Somehow the truth of our lives lies in better communication: in telling it all. There should be no 'sexual secrets'. Tell your partner exactly what you desire. Tell your children every nook and cranny of the erotic world. Come out to your parents if you're gay, tell your teacher if you've been sexually abused, tell your therapist if your husband is a sex addict. Stand in the public square and shout through a microphone the story of your rape, or your abortion or your gayness. Go on television to announce your impotency, to demonstrate your sadomasochism, to reveal the innermost secrets of your heart, to get a 'Blind Date' or find a 'Hunk'. Tell, tell, tell.
>
> Ken Plummer[1]

The sexual story has become a hallmark of contemporary popular western culture, and Frank McGuinness promised to be the latest in this erotic tell-all frenzy in his most recent play *Gates of Gold*, which premièred at The Gate Theatre, Dublin in the Spring of 2002, directed by Patrick Mason. In pre-production, this play was widely marketed as a drama based on the celebrated international theatre practitioners, and openly gay

[1] K. Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. London: Routledge, 1995, p.4.

couple, Micheál MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards, the founding fathers of The Gate Theatre.

Perhaps the erotic preoccupations and anticipated revelations so widespread in contemporary society were part of the play's curious anticipation. *The Sunday Times Magazine* on the 21 May 2002, nine days before the première of the play, contained an article by Liam Fay titled "Camp Followers." The article caption, referring to MacLiammóir and Edwards, read, "Liam Fay explores the enduring creative and loving relationship portrayed in *Gates of Gold*."[2] *The Sunday Independent* contained similar pre-production promotional information, describing McGuinness's play as exploring the "closeted love affair between Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir."[3] And in the *Independent* article McGuinness himself, although emphasising the fictional qualities of the characterisations, admits that the men in *Gates of Gold* were "inspired by Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir."[4]

Micheál MacLiammóir represented himself as a Cork-born Irishman, but was actually born Alfred Willmore in London, England, some time in the late 1800's. He was a child star on the London stage, working with such famous nineteenth century stage practitioners as Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and Dion Boucicault. The young Willmore came to Ireland as an actor in the nineteen-twenties with Anew McMaster's Shakespearean Company. At some point during this experience he decided to create his Irish identity, changing his name and learning to speak the Gaelic language. Throughout his life he successfully managed to conceal his Englishness, becoming one of the most important figures on both the English-speaking and Irish-speaking stage. He was a famous actor, designer, and writer of plays and books. MacLiammóir died in 1978. Hilton Edwards was an English actor/director who met

[2] Liam Fay, "Camp Followers," *Sunday Times*, 21 April 2002, p. 15.
[3] Joe Jackson, "The Healing Touch" in *Sunday Independent*, 21 April 2002, p.17.
[4] Ibid.

MacLiammóir during a stint with McMaster's company in Ireland. Together in 1928 they founded the Gate Theatre in Dublin. They were affectionately referred to as 'the boys,' and although never articulated directly by themselves, they were 'known' to be a homosexual couple. Edwards died in 1982.

Edwards and Mac Liammóir were powerful innovators in Irish theatre for the better part of the twentieth century, but the subject of their rich and diverse artistic careers was hardly the most eagerly expected revelation of McGuinness's new drama: rather, the titillating promises of personal revelations about this uniquely visible yet never officially 'out' homosexual couple excited the prospect of new erotic exposures. Fay's article in the *Sunday Times* begins by describing MacLiammóir and Edwards as "Ireland's first gay saints" and renders popular gossip in Ireland surrounding their alleged homosexuality as being "patronisingly downplayed as though it were not more than a quaint backstage affection, like a weakness for cigarette holders or a tendency to greet friends with air kisses."[5] His article, written in order to generate pre-show interest in the play, asserts that the patronising tendency in relationship to the couple's homosexuality in Ireland is one of the distortions around their myth which McGuinness "hopes to subvert with his new play."[6] The article contains an interesting, if not melodramatic, photo of Edwards and MacLiammóir inset with small headshots of the actors playing the title characters, as well as a shot of McGuinness himself: all contributing to the correlation of *Gates of Gold* with the infamous lives of what Fay describes as "the queen mums of Irish cultural history."[7]

However, Edwards and MacLiammóir had their own unique way of representing themselves publicly, a method which simultaneously revealed and concealed information about their intriguing lives. This technique of representation

[5] Fay.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

created a blend of certainty and uncertainty about the 'facts' of their lives, a balance that stimulated the interest of the Irish public, however patronisingly, in their story for decades. The aesthetic of *Gates of Gold* engages this balance of the nature of the public/private, fact/fiction myth which surrounds these colourful men, much more so than it does any attempt at historical biographical precision.

As with *Carthaginians*, this play is very queer in both narrative and structure, revealing and concealing simultaneously as it tells its unique story of 'Irish' homosexuality. I hope to demonstrate how *Gates of Gold* is part of a legacy of queer writing and representation employed by select gay Irish artists over the last century: a queer legacy that is woven through the work and personality of McGuinness himself backwards through Edwards and Mac Liammóir, eventually finding its legacy in the creative genius of Oscar Wilde. I will illustrate how this play narrates a sexual story that has unfolded through time, and how that story is told on queer terms, in defiance of the greater normative expectations of authenticity, truth and accuracy generally associated with drama that engages historical figures.

In his programme note for the world première of *Gates of Gold*, Thomas Kilroy hints at the type of biographical play McGuinness has written. He describes the drama as "a construction of pure imagination [a] spare play about very public, extravagant figures...Above all this is a play about the theatre, about the kind of mercurial imagination, the mysterious deceptions which create theatre magic."[8] The theatre was the profession through which Edwards and Mac Liammóir made their living, and was also the place whose dramatic conventions influenced the public performance of their intentionally chosen personas. Principles of theatricality and aesthetics influenced not only their professional creativity, but also the orchestrated,

[8] Thomas Kilroy, Programme Note: *Gates of Gold*, 30 April 2002.

calculated, public presentation of their lives as celebrities of the Irish and international theatrical communities. In *Gates of Gold*, McGuinness narrates the complex way in which Edwards and MacLiammóir produced their personal lives for public consumption by applying pressure to traditional concepts of 'fact' and 'truth,' and opting, alternatively, for stylistic, theatrical and aesthetic accounts of intimates.

McGuinness immediately disrupts any prior anticipation of factual or historical authenticity that the audience may have assumed before coming to the play. The character names are unfamiliar, and apparently unassociated with the recognisable forenames promised in this 'real' story of renowned Irish celebrities. The characters are listed in the programme in order of appearance: Conrad, Alma, Gabriel, Kassie and Ryan. Searching for allegory or metaphor in association with these fictitious names leaves one unsatisfied in the attempt to make qualified and informed connections with ' real life' and 'truth.' This story promised to be familiar, and to reaffirm, or perhaps confirm, all that was publicly known about MacLiammóir and Edwards: to shore up and validate all the things that have been unspoken and yet allegedly clearly understood about the lives of these illustrious and well loved adopted sons of Ireland. If one anticipated that Edward's and MacLiammóir's homosexuality, which was patronisingly tolerated in Ireland in the past due to its discretion and ambiguity, was going to be clearly articulated in the present, disappointment seemed to be lurking on the stage at the Gate.

The play tells the story of an aged gay couple dealing with illness and death. It portrays the ravages of immanent separation by death on the couple, and the complex emotions experienced by their bereaved family and their 'outsider' caregiver. As the performance begins, and McGuinness's narrative unfolds, the audience realises that McGuinness is beginning this story at the end of a relationship

between the vaguely familiar main characters of Conrad and Gabriel. These two men, reflections of Edwards and Mac Liammóir respectively, are on the stage in two separate rooms, Conrad in the living room, and Gabriel in the bedroom. When the lights go up Conrad is hiring a nurse, Alma, to care for Gabriel who is dying. If the audience were tempted by the personal living and sleeping spaces represented by the set to believe they were going to get a glimpse of the intimacy of a gay couple, or even be privileged to perhaps see the 'action' that takes place in their bedroom, their curiosity and erotic anticipations were intercepted by the reality of two aged men, one close to death, instead of encouraged and excited by queer masculine youth and sexual vitality. From the offset of the performance, McGuinness makes it clear that he is not going to tell the story quite the way it may have been anticipated.

And yet, while the play rejects immediate factual transparency and 'truth,' McGuinness continually seduces the Irish audience's power of association with familiar aspects of the lives of MacLiammóir and Edwards, drawing them into the unfamiliar with the consoling lure of random familiarity. The set itself discloses the theme of homosexual love that silently screams through the Irish collective memory of Mac Liammóir and Edwards: In the living room there is "*one large joint portrait of Conrad and Gabriel in their youth,*"[9] and in the bedroom, Gabriel is sitting at "*a mirrored dressing table, covered with different types of make-up,*" a cosmetic menagerie which MacLiammóir was notoriously noted to employ, both on and off the stage. These iconic set pieces and props provide visual consolation that, even though the names do not match, the anticipated gay story of MacLiammóir and Edwards will eventually be exposed.

[9]Frank McGuinness, *Gates of Gold.* London: Faber and Faber, 2002, p.1. All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this edition.



(a) *Gates of Gold*, The Gate Theatre, Dublin, 2002. Directed by Patrick Mason. Donna Dent as Alma, and Alan Howard as Gabriel. Photograph by Tom Lawlor, with permission.



(b) *Gates of Gold*, The Gate Theatre, Dublin, 2002. Directed by Patrick Mason. Alan Howard as Gabriel. Photograph by Tom Lawlor, with permission.

My analysis of this play seeks to illustrate how McGuinness has woven a queer dramatic pattern through this production, one which tells a provocative story through an artistic representational technique employed by MacLiammóir and Edwards in their careers; an aesthetic approach to signify love between men, seminally employed by Oscar Wilde in his career. The queer blend of 'fact' and 'fiction' which comes together in *Gates of Gold* is not merely a dramatic technique established to disorient then to re-orient, as was the case in Chapters One and Two, but it is, rather, a type of queer dramaturgical language constructed to adjust our ability as an audience to see and to hear homosexuality. In a Foucauldian sense, McGuinness is confronting the production of knowledge and discourse about homosexuality strategically in his elusive biographical style. Instead of being purposefully vague, I suggest that McGuinness tells this sexual story with a queer directness, a method of gay representation which has contributed to the formation of contemporary homosexual sensibilities and knowledges. The dramaturgy is part of a queer writing aesthetic which refuses transparency as a means of rejecting notions of 'fact' and 'truth' in mainstream expectations of fictional representations of historical lives.

Consequently, issues of 'truth' in representation need further examination to uncover what makes this queer style of writing attractive to these homosexual artists in presenting the story of their 'deviant' sexual subjectivity. In *Telling Sexual Stories* Ken Plummer traces how western culture has made the theme of sexuality central in the quest for what is 'natural' and 'true' in our human condition. He asserts that contemporary society assumes these types of stories are the most accurate reports in the search for a truly authentic comprehension of human nature. But his position is nuanced in a way which contributes to an understanding of how I will analyse

McGuinness's play. He contends that instead of taking sexual stories as "givens – as providing rays of real truth on sexual lives – *sexual stories can be seen as issues to be investigated in their own right.*"[10] They can be appreciated as "topics to investigate, not merely resources to draw upon."[11] McGuinness's narrative technique in *Gates of Gold* investigates the story of MacLiammóir and Edwards, rather than simply reporting it, by disorienting the myths and assumptions which have given the Irish public confidence in the 'truth' they have come to believe about this colourful couple.

This is where McGuinness's project collides with contemporary expectations of the titillating revelations anticipated in the telling of sexual stories, and the expectation of 'truth' which makes these stories so alluring. McGuinness has rejected the temptation to write a play which promises, albeit fictionally, to expose the intimacies of MacLiammóir and Edwards. Sexual stories are as old as time, and yet they have been told in different ways in different eras. The erotic candour of the contemporary chat show stands in strict opposition to the scandal of sexual stories which were barely whispered in times not so long past. The subversive style and technique McGuinness employs in representing a queer story in an age of relative sexual liberation and libidinal freedom can be traced to other gay artists long since dead. Plummer describes stories as "the continual quest for understanding human meaning,"[12] and as ways in which we recognise and articulate our identity. *Gates of Gold* is an articulation of both a specific and a general queer identity which has its roots in a queer ideology forged within the past century.

McGuinness writes, with an aesthetic and artistic peculiarity, about the particular unique identities of Edwards and Mac Liammóir, but it would be short sighted to think that these flamboyant and visible queer personalities were completely

[10] Plummer, p.5.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

original. Gay men have been attempting to create and represent the 'truth' of their experience for, at least, the better part of the twentieth century. In his book *The Wilde Century* Alan Sinfield outlines what he describes as "the emergence of a queer identity"[13] around the life and trials of Oscar Wilde. He asserts, "the plays, the trials, and the whole package that we call 'Oscar Wilde,' were key sites upon which a modern queer identity has been constructed. They did not produce male homosexuality, but they helped to produce it in a particular cultural mode"[14] bringing together the idea of homosexuality and the public image of it through the person of Wilde. McGuinness, Edwards and MacLiammóir, and Wilde are all in the business of telling queer stories, representing 'deviant' identities, and imaging gay men in order to contribute to the formation of a modern homosexual identity. The theatre, and its conventions of performance, is consequently the shared *modus operandi* in their common endeavour to represent and embody alternative subjectivities.

In his article "Under the Sign of Wilde" Moe Meyer identifies what he believes to be the pivotal moment in Oscar Wilde's struggle to represent his own homosexuality. During Wilde's tour of North America in 1882 he was exposed to a method employed for the training of actors and public speakers in continental Europe in the middle of the eighteenth century. The founder of the movement was the Frenchman François Delsarte, who devised a philosophy of art and life which provided a method for turning one's entire life into a self-conscious creation of artistic beauty. Delsarte's system[15] offered Wilde a detailed method through which to

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[13] Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.11.
[14] Ibid., p.21.
[15] Moe Meyer, "Under the Sign of Wilde: An Archaeology of Posing" in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. M. Meyer. London: Routledge, 1994. "Delsarte taught that art-making involved the construction of an exterior surface (the art object) that would signify the artist's interiority. In other words, the purpose of art was the display of the artist interiority. Accordingly, one could create true art through a studied composition of exterior bodily signifying codes whose purpose, like a painting or a

express his own aesthetic aspirations, for it was during this American tour that Wilde represented himself as "a master aesthete"[16] who himself "advocated turning one's life into art."[17]

It is not difficult to make the connection between Oscar Wilde's intentional and self-conscious plan for making his life into a work of art and Micheál MacLiammóir's life-long pursuit of an identity which adequately represented his gifts and talents. Christopher Fitz-Simon uncovers some of the layers of 'performance' that went into MacLiammóir's creation of self in his biography of Edward's and MacLiammóir *The Boys*. Although MacLiammóir continually asserted that his beginnings "had been in Cork at the end of the last decade,"[18] Fitz-Simon reveals that MacLiammóir had "made the conscious decision to become an Irishman"[19]and that in fact he had been born in an undistinguishable terraced house at "No. 150, Purves Road, Kensal Green, London N.W. 10."[20] Not only did Mac Liammóir alter the geography of his birth, thus recreating himself as Irish instead of English, he also changed his name from Alfred Willmore to the Gaelic Micheál MacLiammóir, further solidifying the Irish identity he wished to portray.

McGuinness incorporates this idea of the intentional creation of an identity into the text of the drama in *Gates of Gold*. Gabriel, the 'MacLiammóir' character, is continually making up his story as he goes along, shifting as he pleases. SCENE TWO opens with Gabriel lying awake in bed while Alma, his latest nurse in a succession of caregivers he has systematically driven away, is sitting by his bed,

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sculpture, was to communicate the artist's inner state. In this way, one could – based upon a self-aware semiotic manipulation – collapse the distinctions between subject and object thus transforming oneself into a living work of art." p.80.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Micheál MacLiammóir, *Enter a Goldfish: Memoirs of an Irish Actor, Young and Old.* London: Granada, 1981, p.11.

[19] Christopher Fitz-Simon, *The Boys: A Biography of Micheál MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards.* London: Nick Hern Books, 1994, p.22.

[20] Ibid.

humming the melody to "I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls." Gabriel begins to tell Alma the story of his background:

> **Gabriel** My mother sang that when I was a child, in Spain.
> **Alma** I didn't know you were Spanish?
> **Gabriel** I was born in Salamanca. My mother was Irish descent – a descendant of the Wild Geese, the Irish aristocrats who fled to Europe. My father was a priest – a student priest at the Irish Seminary of Salamanca. They could not be married but she reared me. Each year on her birthday, May the twenty-second, a yellow rose would be left on her doorstep. That was her name, Rosa – for St Rose of Lima, a Peruvian anchorite willingly buried alive in the walls of a convent, burning with love of God... (9)

And again, only moments later, as Alma picks up the melody of a new song, he picks up a new version of his life story:

> **Gabriel** You have a good voice, but a man should sing that song. I can remember my father used to, when I was a child, on our ranch in the Argentine. He emigrated from Ireland to work as a cowboy and he met my mother –
> **Alma** St Rose of Lima –
> **Gabriel** That was her name, yes. Lima. She was born there.
> **Alma** In Peru?
> **Gabriel** Peru. Now she was performing with a circus troupe in Buenos Aires. The woman was a natural on the flying trapeze. The night he attended, didn't she fall? He raced into the circus ring and caught her in his arms... (10)

Alma's songs seem to trigger new 'memories' for Gabriel. In this seemingly ridiculous scene, McGuinness is using the comedy of such an artificially concocted biography of whim and convenience to point towards the queer way in which Alfred Willmore self-consciously created and performed the exterior persona of Micheál MacLiammóir. The flexibility of identity which McGuinness represents in relation to how Gabriel tells his own story mimics MacLiammóir's own autobiographical techniques.

In the play, Gabriel was an actor on the Dublin stage, as was the case with MacLiammóir, and in 'real' life MacLiammóir, as is the case with the character of Gabriel, continually re-told the story of his life in a series of autobiographies. In his

article "Sodom and Begorragh" Éibhear Walshe describes the features of MacLiammóir's particular brand of memoir: "MacLiammóir's autobiographies turn on a series of evasions and screenings, obscuring his English origins and veiling his sexual identity, delicately treading a balance between artistic license and downright 'fiction,' i.e. invention."[21] McGuinness portrays Gabriel as self-aware and unapologetic for his fictions, as only moments later Alma confronts him:

> **Alma** How many fathers and mothers do you have?
> **Gabriel** As many as are necessary to survive them. They tend to die but not fade away. So it's imperative to remember every detail about them, particularly those details they could never have known themselves. (11)

Walshe refers to MacLiammóir's homosexuality as what "characterised him most directly in terms of public perception in Ireland."[22] He also refers to Edwards and MacLiammóir as "Ireland's only visible gay couple."[23] If their queerness was perceived and *visible* it was hardly *audible*: in no direct way did either men publicly declare themselves gay, and yet, as Walshe emphasises, their notoriety was largely based on speculation surrounding the intimacies of their personal lives, at the expense of an interest in their enormous professional achievements. It would be difficult to find a Dublin man or woman, of the relevant generation of course, who would not have some type of insight, if not direct experience, with these infamous queers (see Appendix II). Although never articulated, and thus never fully 'out,' most Irish people would feel proud of the fact that a homosexual couple lived so 'openly' and were so 'accepted' in the conservative climate of Ireland in the mid-twentieth century.

Walshe interprets the life of MacLiammóir as a series of personal events and a progression of artistic expressions that eventually led him to a more open articulation of his sexual subjective position. I would nuance Walshe's expectation of a more

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[21] Éibhear Walshe, "Sodom and Begorrah, or Game to the Last: Inventing Michael MacLiammóir" in *Sex, Nation and Dissent in Irish Writing*, ed. Walshe. Cork: Cork University Press, 1997, p.152.
[22] Ibid., p.168.
[23] Ibid., p.151.

'out,' and consequently self-implicating, way of expressing his queerness in order to explore the volumes which the apparent 'silences' speak in his life and career with Edwards as they attempted to less directly articulate their homosexuality. I would argue that the theatrical influence of performance, which combines the narrative *and* the symbolic, on their lives requires a more complex interpretation; one that is, perhaps, less dependant on revelation through language and more dependent on the complex range of signifiers offered through performance aesthetics. Contemporary society may be fascinated by explicitly articulated sexual stories, and this may seem modern and liberated, but sexual stories have been articulated by less explicit means for ages before the advent of the tell-all genre of popular entertainment.

In *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault writes: "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consign sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret."[24] This articulated 'secret' is a type of public silence that speaks of unresolved sexual issues and unarticulated sexual stories. Foucault highlights the importance of silence in the way that society deals with issues of sexuality:

> Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies.[25]

Combining Foucault's theory that silence is an important element in the articulation of the sexual story with Plummer's assertion that contemporary society is obsessed with the explicit erotic articulation as an insight into the 'truth' of human nature points to a weakness in the historical process in which homosexuality has been articulated as a subject position. What is valued as ownership of one's 'truest nature' in present times

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[24] Michel Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: 1*. London: Penguin, 1978, p.35.
[25] Sinfield, p.5.

is not what it was in the past. Modern queer theorists or sexologists cannot criticise their gay predecessors for a less-than-clear articulation of a subject position that was, and arguably still is, in an adolescent phase of self-recognition. The enunciation of the queer sexual story has apparently changed in nature, finding a voice, and limited acceptance, in the public sphere where once it spoke as a silent menace through the hush of speculative private lives. McGuinness's play is subtle in how it articulates silence, thus, in a very queer way, *Gates of Gold* rejects contemporary inclinations towards explicit identification of sexual identity as a means of achieving an authentic sense of self-actualisation.

However, McGuinness does not attempt to camouflage the sexuality of Conrad and Gabriel, but, instead, he 'outs' them through Alma's confession of her knowledge of the public rumours of their homosexuality, and not through their own agency. Here he allows the Irish perception of the lives of MacLiammóir and Edwards to continue to speak, refusing to have them 'out' themselves onstage, even fictionally. In this sense, the story that surrounds the legend of their lives is spoken to them, not by them. This highlights McGuinness's interrogation of knowledge and discourse by foregrounding popular opinion and rumour. Once again, the story itself is being examined rather than merely reported or rearticulated through a contemporary lens of openness. McGuinness represents how public and private are blended by Gabriel and Conrad in relation to their professional and personal lives, but he allows them a certain personal integrity in their private choices. I have already illustrated how Gabriel clearly mingles the fictive and the theatrical in his stories geared towards the creation of his identity, but Conrad also blends the language of the stage with the language of everyday life in the fashion in which he conducts his interview with Alma:

> **Conrad** I don't believe you're right for this job. I too have a sharp tongue. You have failed this audition.
> **Alma** Audition? (5)

Alma persists, and Conrad continues to test her endurance:

> **Conrad** ...I warn you, Gabriel does not like the truth. (6)

This comment encapsulates and prefigures Gabriel's, and subsequently MacLiammóir's, disregard for 'truth.' But, as Éibhear Walshe points out, it also implicates a perceived resistance to the revelation of his homosexual identity. McGuinness, however, continues to interrogate the imaginative speculations about the nature of Edwards and MacLiammóir's relationship, which so many people in Dublin had enjoyed gossiping about while 'The Boys' were still alive. He 'outs' Gabriel and Conrad in the first scene of the play:

> **Alma** I know next to nothing about you. I know you're queers – I couldn't give a tinker's curse. I've been warned and I don't care. I need a job. You said it, I'm desperate. (7)

Alma is the outsider who asserts her knowledge of these queer lives; the Foucauldian voice which speaks *ad infinitum* about their sexual lives while pretending it's the big secret. In the play, Gabriel and Conrad's public and private lives have a cohesiveness which articulates their position, but Alma signifies a social persistence to compartmentalise their lives, and violate their privacy through vindictive sexual hearsay. Conrad ignores Alma's accusation, thus highlighting a public curiosity which he chooses to leave unsatisfied by disregarding outside opinion of the nature of their relationship. What Alma 'knows' is hardly of any concern to these two men.

By withholding any 'revelations' McGuinness further resists the urge to merely tell the story of MacLiammóir and Edwards, and opts, instead, to investigate how the story has been told. He does so by playing on the silences that surrounds what has been understood as clear in Ireland about the articulation of the 'true' story

of MacLiammóir and Edwards. If the audience anticipated the unravelling of a series of events that they perceived they already knew, McGuinness delays gratification, selecting to interrogate the surety of knowledge learned so 'obviously' by public observation. He turns the focus away from the 'facts' and details anticipated, and reflects them back onto the audience in order to examine hearsay and, alternatively, unravel what the silences, which haunt the cultural memory of this couple, have to say.

In failing to meet expectations in the way that he tells the story of MacLiammóir and Edwards, McGuinness is protecting what is, perhaps, most queer about their lives. The apparent compulsion to speak one's sexual story, to 'out' oneself publicly for the sake of 'authenticity,' threatens the queer project in general. Our 'liberal' society not only accepts, but actually expects the queer to be spoken, and thus assimilated into the modern story. By rejecting the expectation of explicit revelation, McGuinness is attempting to prevent this queer story from being too rapidly assimilated into the models of self-actualisation which plague a sexually 'enlightened' culture. He seems to be artistically expressing dissatisfaction with the public knowledge which, so unanimously, appears to have been gained from Irish versions of the story of MacLiammóir and Edwards.

This anxiety with the 'truth' that people seem to have gained by the half-heard articulations of homosexuality in the lives of MacLiammóir and Edwards reveals a tension about the boundaries between the public and the private in queer lives. The explicit articulation of a homosexual subjectivity can be simultaneously a liberation, and a tool for policing gay people. MacLiammóir and Edwards were forced to be creative in their subjective representations as gay men by the very fact that homosexual acts were illegal in Ireland well beyond the dates of their deaths, as

documented in the Introduction. In *The Sunday Business Post* McGuinness himself addresses the changing attitudes towards homosexuality in contemporary Ireland: "At the level of society...Irish people are much less open to homosexuality than is commonly imagined. In the past twenty years the surface has changed beyond recognition...Scratch too deep and there are plenty of the old bigots around."[26] In that same article McGuinness reveals a certain unease with what he interprets as a persistent critical fascination with the fact that he writes gay characters in his plays: "If I were heterosexual would they make a big deal about the fact that there's always a heterosexual character in them? It is perfectly normal to have gay characters in plays. It's not because I'm gay. It's not because I've got an agenda. It's life. Face it!"[27] The fact of the matter is, it is not 'perfectly normal' for there to be representations of gay characters in mainstream Irish theatre. What McGuinness's anxiety over this "relentless focus"[28] on his work reveals is that homosexuality, once openly exposed, is a means of regulating, controlling and containing what may otherwise be considered the transgressive sexual identity of gay people. Although Alma in *Gates of Gold* 'couldn't give a tinkers curse' about the fact that these two men are lovers, she represents a public voice and a public position which continually seeks to contain the homosexual based on knowledge of sexual 'essence,' and thus reduce homosexuality to gay sex.

If McGuinness is expressing discomfort with the public certainty surrounding the intimacies of MacLiammóir and Edwards, and, for that matter, issues of knowledge surrounding homosexuality in general, what alternatives is he offering through his dramaturgy in *Gates of Gold*? In order to answer that question one can examine the representational strategies of other queer artists who wished to confront

[26] Nadine O'Regan, "Electra Magnetic" in *The Sunday Business Post*, 11 August, 2002, p.a7.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

the flow of sexual information and reconfigure the narration of less-than-mainstream sexual stories. Although I would agree with Éibhear Walshe's perception that MacLiammóir's 'fictions' were distractions to avoid the topic of his national identity, I would challenge his assertion that they were tools to veil his sexual identity. Instead, I believe his 'fictions' were his means of representing what was thus unrepresentable in Irish society. It is at the point of the question of representing 'truth' in the telling of the homosexual story where I believe McGuinness's work aesthetically collides with the sexual storytelling strategies of MacLiammóir, the theatrical principles of Edwards, and the unique narrative invention of Oscar Wilde.

Before Oscar Wilde had travelled to the United States, and before he became familiar with the Delsartean method of self-representation through art, he was already in search of a way to articulate and "formulate a homosexual social identity."[29] At this particular time in history there was yet to be a social or cultural concept of a homosexual, the only certain identifiable characteristic of homosexuality was the same-sex sexual act. Wilde was searching for a way to create a discrete identity in order to publicly signify his sexuality. In other words, he was in search of a way to make homosexuality a more complete cultural subject position, not just a sexual one. He wanted to create a set of signs for the outward identification of what was an interior experience of self. Meyer describes Wilde's aesthetic strategy:

> Constructing a sign by fixing, stabilising and giving permanence to desire was a necessary first step in order to prepare for the appropriation of the sign that would render him as a living work of art while simultaneously bestowing a homosexual identity. The way in which this was accomplished was through a concept of "posing," which in the Delsarte system represented the highest form of art because it collapsed the distinction between subject and object.[30]

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[29] Meyer, p.81.
[30] Ibid, p.82.

This system situated desire at the centre of art, and posing as the highest form of art. Wilde's aestheticism, or his love for the finer things in life such as art, poetry, fashion, etc., was the tool he used to discretely articulate this homosexual identity.

Wilde designed his entire aesthetic on the deviance of homosexual desire, becoming an advocate of transgression. But, "Wilde's experience of deviant desire...leads him not to escape the oppressive ordering of society, but to a reinscription within it, and an inversion of the binaries upon which that ordering depends."[31] McGuinness's plays often embody this same desire for re-inscription of meaning within traditional cultural signifiers, as was illustrated in both Chapters One and Two. Jonathan Dollimore describes Wilde's artistic technique as a "transgressive aesthetic"[32] which seeks to disrupt essentialist notions of truth and reality. In his particular aesthetic the 'truth' is besieged by the 'lie.' "The liar is important because he or she contradicts not just conventional morality, but its sustaining origin, truth."[33] In his short play "The Decay of Lying", Wilde himself wrote, "Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art."[34]

MacLiammóir, obviously, held the same belief in the beauty of 'untrue things' as he unabashedly fashioned his life, on and off the stage, on the convincing lie. Although he was a writer, a designer and a director, it was acting which provided his artistic success. He consequently spent the greatest part of his artistic energy on making the lie believable from the stage. He described his art in his own words: "One thing is certain: 'acting is believing': The actor, more than any other worker, has need of the gift of faith in what his reason knows to be the trickiest image of truth, or how

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[31] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p.14.
[32] Ibid., p.64.
[33] Ibid., p.11.
[34] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde: Stories, Plays, Poems, Essays*. London: Collins, 1991, p.992.

can he become, even for one moment, somebody else?"[35] MacLiammóir, although perhaps unconsciously, also shaped his life on Delsartean principles of performance and posing in order to intentionally shape his life into a work of art.

McGuinness represents how this type of transgressive belief in the untrue is not 'natural,' but is, instead, an acquired way of interpreting the world. In SCENE FOUR, Alma, Gabriel's nurse, and the only character in the play outside the history of Conrad and Gabriel's personal lives, has been tending to Gabriel while his sister Kassie, a woman as imaginatively inspired as Gabriel himself, has come to say her final farewells to her dying brother. After a moment of silence:

> **Alma** I was not let be what I wanted to be.
> **Gabriel** What did you want to be?
> **Alma** A fucking professional poker player in Las Vegas. Someone who lost her money on the last throw of the dice. She goes to blow her brains out with a silver pistol in the backseat of a blue sports car and just when she's about to do it, just when she feels the beautifully cold metal against her sweating skin, she doesn't do it because she has a son. To die would be to sentence him to the mercy of his father. His lost lousy father. (30)

Alma, who up until this point in the play has been the only character to be solidly grounded in 'reality,' creates a dramatic lie about her life which is much more interesting than the truth. Kassie bursts out:

> **Kassie** She believes, Gabriel. Where did she get it from? (30)

Alma, who from the beginning of the play is portrayed as representative of the outside perception of the life of this famous pair, is suddenly re-presented as acquiring this queer approach to life herself. Structurally this moment marks when Alma ceases to be an outsider and becomes part of this queer family. This scene marks a turning point in the way the play treats information through narrative. Once the distinction between the inside world and the outside world is collapsed by Alma's indoctrination

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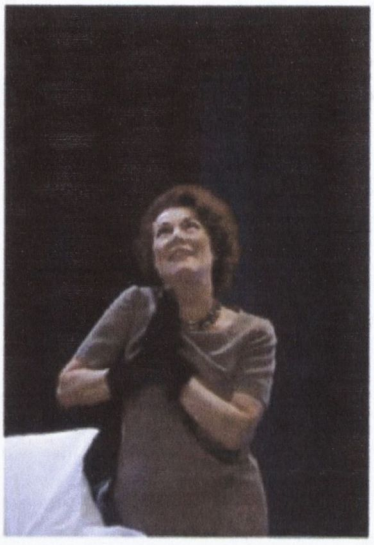
[35] Micheál MacLiammóir, *Theatre in Ireland.* Dublin: The Three Candles, 1964, p.82.



Gates of Gold, The Gate Theatre, Dublin, 2002. Directed by Patrick Mason. Rosaleen Linehan as Kassie. Photograph by Tom Lawlor, with permission.

into the aesthetic of the beauty of untrue things, McGuinness finally allows Gabriel and Conrad to begin to tell their own story, an unsensational story of lifelong love and commitment between men.

If 'truth' in narrative is inverted by the beauty and artifice of the 'lie' as implemented in the artistic aesthetic of both MacLiammóir and Wilde then their projects of performing and identity are further supported by the theatrical theories of Edwards and his directorial vision. Perhaps the most unique contribution that Edwards and MacLiammóir made to the Irish stage throughout the twentieth-century was the continual contestation of the naturalistic methods favoured in Irish dramatic writing, performance, and design. Dublin audiences preferred a more realistic theatre that reflected nature, and consequently 'truth,' a proclivity which is explained in my observations on nationalism in Chapter One. Edwards criticised this preference for dramatic realism in the Irish theatre:

> When applied to the presentation of a play that deals with normalities, realism is fitting and proper; but when works which have not been written with a view to the expression of normality, when characters and incidents are portrayed that belong to the world of imagination, their presentation in the naturalistic medium destroys any impression of their probability, and realism becomes no longer a valuable asset to the theatre, but a menace.[36]

Edwards and MacLiammóir continually worked for the re-establishment of what they called the "Theatre Theatrical."[37] They wanted to create an "International Theatre for the production of plays of unusual interest, and experimenting in methods of presentation free from the conventional limitations of the commercial theatre."[38] The Gate Theatre, Dublin eventually became the permanent space where they could give life to their artistic and creative imaginations. Keeping Edwards' theatrical theory in mind, a link between McGuinness's inversion of 'truth' in biographical narrative for

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[36] Hilton Edwards, "Production" in *The Gate Theatre Dublin*. Dublin: The Gate Theatre, 1934, p.22.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p 21.

the expression of queer subjectivities in *Gates of Gold*, and the concomitant theatrical technique of the 'Theatre Theatrical' which rejects naturalism because of the 'normalities' it implies can be made. When combined, the tradition of narrative aesthetic employed by MacLiammóir and Wilde, and the performance strategies of Edwards can be detected in the overall project of McGuinness's attempt to pay homage to the lives of two men of the Irish theatre whose lives were anything but 'normal.'

Beneath all of the 'untruths' which reflect the lives of MacLiammóir and Edwards in *Gates of Gold*, is a historical and material reality which affected their careers in the theatre in Ireland. Throughout *Gates of Gold* McGuinness repeats themes of insecurity in relation to the success of The Gate Theatre and the individual careers of Edwards and MacLiammóir through the characters of Gabriel and Conrad. In SCENE THREE Conrad and Ryan, Gabriel's nephew, are having a vindictive conversation in the living room, while Gabriel, Kassie and Alma are chatting in the bedroom:

> **Ryan** And you failed, both of you. Gabriel and Conrad failed.
> **Conrad** Yes, we did. Failed.
> **Ryan** You'll leave nothing behind you.
> **Conrad** We leave a theatre.
> **Ryan** That nobody wants. (31-32)

And, a little later, when Conrad and Gabriel are alone, insecurity about their success sneaks in again:

> **Conrad** You have a good eye.
> **Gabriel** I can run up a frock, paint a set, write a good line, and I know how to act.
> **Conrad** Yes, you do.
> **Gabriel** Are you sure?
> **Conrad** I'm certain. (38)

This insecurity is a reflection of the very real tumultuous professional years associated with MacLiammóir and Edwards' lifelong efforts to make The Gate a permanent

fixture on the Irish theatrical scene. In his 1961 autobiography *All For Hecuba* MacLiammóir recounts a discussion he had with Edwards, a conversation which has the similar tone of consolation in the face of insecurity or justification of a lifetime's worth of artistic and administrative work. MacLiammóir quotes Edwards advice as to what to include in this 'theatrical autobiography:'

> The public is what we work for, and the Irish public is quite as good as any other in the world. Put it down in that book you're writing – it's quite simple really – that you and I have tried to make a theatre...Put it down that we have influenced the theatre in Dublin because its true...Put it down whereas the Abbey set out to show Ireland to herself and then to the world.
> A better and clearer line it may be than our own, we in the Gate began by attempting to show the world to Ireland. [39]

The tone of his writing is one of both self-assurance, and justification for their already well-established influence on the art of the Irish stage. McGuinness recreates a dialogue of personal and professional validation between Conrad and Gabriel in order to reflect the insecurity which plagued the careers of these theatrical innovators.

Although MacLiammóir and Edwards obviously had an entirely different artistic agenda than the Abbey Theatre, there was a continuous tension between the two giants in the production of drama for Irish audiences. When the Dublin Gate Theatre Studio began in the Peacock Theatre of the Abbey in October of 1928 a mission statement was released. That statement politely deferred to the Abbey, making clear its non-threatening plan for Irish drama: "It is not the intention of the studio to encroach upon the activities of any existing Dublin theatrical organisation; rather it is the desire of the Gate to introduce a new element, both in the play and its production."[40] If The Gate had stuck strictly to international playwrights perhaps they may have drawn less audience attention away from the Abbey. By 1940 "it proved

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[39] Micheál MacLiammóir, *All For Hecuba: A Theatrical Autobiography*. Dublin: Progress House, 1961, pp.354-5.
[40] Luke Peton, ed., Enter *Certain Players*. Dublin: Doleman Press, 1978, p.13.

that the Gate was capable of treading on Abbey ground in presenting popular new plays by Irish dramatists – but giving them much better-mounted productions."[41] By the 1950s criticising the Abbey was a favourite interest of the press, and the Gate profited from this animosity. Niall Carroll of the *Irish Press* published an article asking, "Is the centre of influence in the Irish Theatre gradually shifting from the Abbey to the Gate?"[42] The presence of the Gate provided for the Abbey its most persistent competition throughout the twentieth century.

MacLiammóir and Edwards may have been the occasional darlings of the Irish critics, and the main rival for the Abbey in the production of popular drama, but their status was not as stable as it might have appeared. In 1978, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Gate, Colm O'Briain, the director of An Chomhairle Ealaíon/The Arts Council, provided insight into the bleak realities which faced the Gate in its first fifty years:

> The support from the State, which the Gate Theatre now receives, came late in the day – after forty years of unacknowledged hard work and battling against seemingly impossible odds. The genius of Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir flourished in spite of the educational and financial restrictions of the time. These restrictions made it virtually impossible to train, to develop, to hand on the unique perspective and skills which these two men brought to the theatre...If at this point Micheál MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards were to begin again, they might not choose to envelope themselves in a tradition which would suffocate their talent.[43]

These financial struggles must have caused the partners to wonder more than once what public opinion really was, and to what extent their work was valued, even in light of their critical acclaim.

McGuinness expresses Edwards and MacLiammóir's insecurity about the productivity of their life work through reproductive metaphors in *Gates of Gold*. Like Oscar Wilde before him, McGuinness does not reject the 'oppressive ordering of

[41] Fitz-Simon, p.132.
[42] Ibid., p.174.
[43] Peton, p.90.

society' which defines and delineates procreative relationships, but rather he re-inscribes them with new queer meanings. During a bitter conversation between Ryan and Conrad, Ryan stabs at Conrad with sharp words, implying Conrad's sterile contribution to life:

> **Ryan** You have no children. I am my father's child.
> He did more than you did. (32)

This jab comes right after Conrad had offered Ryan the theatre which he and Gabriel had spent their lives building, and although Ryan's father is an alcoholic who has abandoned him and his mother, Ryan chooses biological procreation over the pro-creative nature of the theatre which these two queers have established. The futility of Conrad and Gabriel's lives spent in creating theatre is the cold hard reality of the legacy left after two old queers die.

The idea of progeny can also be seen as a metaphor for the importance of their creative contribution to the Irish theatre. O'Briain claims that restrictions made it virtually impossible to hand on MacLiammóir and Edwards' 'unique perspective and skills' which were their legacy to the Irish theatre. In *Gates of Gold* McGuinness writes a section of dialogue between Gabriel and Conrad reminiscing on their decision to open the theatre:

> **Gabriel** Then will we take a risk? Start a company?
> **Conrad** Start a theatre?
> **Gabriel** Christ, yes. We're young enough, we'll do work that no one else does, the great Europeans, new plays the like of which this country – this city –
> **Conrad** We shall turn this town into –
> **Gabriel** A new Athens?
> **Conrad** I was thinking of Sodom.
> **Gabriel** That's more realistic.
> **Conrad** We shall conceive a child in Sodom - (38-39)

This dialogue reflects a strange blend of the concepts of biological and artistic creativity, and Gabriel and Conrad's contribution to life. McGuinness's characters, once again, ignore the boundaries of 'life' and 'theatre,' of 'fact' and 'fiction,' as they try to make sense of their lives together. By blurring these boundaries McGuinness dramatises the tension that homosexuals experience as they create acceptable fictions of self in order to avoid social and political alienation. Although homosexual couples live within the structures which order heterosexual relationships, and move between 'straight' models of relationality, they must continually struggle to discover new paradigms for their own lives, a struggle which I explore in my final chapter. Inevitably the language of 'heteronormative' concepts are borrowed and adapted from mainstream ideology, creating new queer logic out of old categorical conventions.

As McGuinness has done with myths of nation in *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, and with collective traumatic experience in *Carthaginians*, he does for the type of language used to represent queer lives; he co-opts mainstream thinking and re-inscribes the familiar with new queer meanings. The fact is that gay people live in the greater world of relational codes and rules created to foster heterosexual models of relationality. In *The Men and the Boys* R.W. Connell claims that stable couples within the gay community are not the norm, "but most admire them and would like to live in them."[44] Building on the binaries created by the culturally endorsed constructs of male-female relationships he also contends that "to desire a man, and even more so to be desired by a man, is very probably to experience oneself at some level as feminine."[45] The 'acting' out of queer relationships based on heterosexual concepts of male/female, masculine/feminine is not uncommon in the gay community. Because of their popular success, and high level of social

[44] R.W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, p.114.
[45] Ibid., p.120.

acceptance, MacLiammóir and Edwards could be classified as "assimilationist gays"[46] who "occupy a safe place in the dominant culture,"[47] opting to live comfortably and not overtly controversially. The image and metaphor of the child in *Gates of Gold* is passed back and forth between the anxiety that the couple's professional life may, in fact, have been unfruitful, and also that their personal life may have been sterile; exhibiting both the tenuous nature of their artistic position in Ireland and the inherent self-distrust of queer logic which continually haunts homosexuals living within heterosexual paradigms of relationship.

Gabriel and Conrad share a moment of intimacy through which McGuinness articulates the queer anxiety created by living what *they* feel is right and *society* deems as wrong:

> **Gabriel** Babies.
> *Silence*
> Do you regret –
> **Conrad** No.
> **Gabriel** You didn't want a child?
> **Conrad** Perhaps. What point wanting now?
> **Gabriel** Who knows how it would have turned out?
> **Conrad** Disastrously.
> **Gabriel** Inevitably. Sad, isn't it?
> **Conrad** No, not remotely.
> **Gabriel** I'm thinking of the child that might have been. A sad character. A misplaced person. Friendless, and so inclined to talk to itself. Mocked by other children. Possessing a good mind, but really not of this world, and never really for the next, a boy rare as lapis lazuli. (42)

McGuinness draws the audience into the intimacy of same sex love as he represents one lover comforting the other in his fear of a pointless life. Gabriel's speech about the type of youngster their relationship would have given birth to is a portrait of alienation, as well as a personal testimony to the life of a queer boy. His lover comforts him in his insecurity:

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[46] John M. Clum, *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000, p.266.
[47] Ibid.

Conrad I think I would have liked such a child. (42)

Gabriel is unmistakably camp, as was MacLiammóir, and throughout the play employs camp's "system of humour,"[48] a "system of laughing at one's incongruous position instead of crying,"[49] as described in Chapter Two. McGuinness allows this comic/tragic system to reveal itself in these moments of queer uncertainty, permitting the dark side of reality that the camp performance distracts people from seeing. This tension between right and wrong plagues Gabriel up to the end of the play, and through his veiled humour and theatrical reference he speaks his fear to Conrad in their bedroom:

> **Gabriel** Oh Jesus, it's Medea.
> *Conrad sits.*
> Come to kill your children, darling? You're a little late. They passed away some time ago. They were never born. All those useless nights in this useless bed when we entertained our fantasies, but there is nothing left. It was all for nothing... (64)

MacLiammóir's performance in life was flawless; his pose was publicly confident and deceptively self-assured. By exhibiting the cracks in the surface of this 'performance' through Gabriel in *Gates of Gold*, McGuinness interrogates the story itself, revealing how the myth of MacLiammóir and Edwards has veiled the reality of the fear and insecurity that these two sexual outlaws must have lived in to a certain degree. McGuinness's play dramatises the contradictions between the common concept of the acceptance of MacLiammóir and Edwards in Irish society, and the reality of what he describes as Ireland's commonly imagined openness to homosexuality. In his own words, through *Gates of Gold* McGuinness is 'scratching the surface' of the story in order to reveal the bigotry that this cultural myth of the 'acceptance' of the queer, whether in theatrical production or personal life choices, tries to conceal.

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[48] Newton, p.106.
[49] Ibid.

Once again, Foucault's theories help illuminate what McGuinness has dramatised through his use of the seemingly contradictory notions of homosexuality and reproduction. For Foucault there are diverse ways in which one can contradict dominant discourse in order to resist its persistent pressure to conform. He refuses the notion that all resistance must be reactionary, but instead proposes that dissident texts can often gain their greatest power for resistance through their co-optation of dominant discourses, metaphors and ideologies. His specific focus on the text, and my supplementary description of the text *as* performance of a specific identity in *Gates of Gold*, extends Foucault's theories of co-optation mentioned in Chapter One in relation to McGuinness's technique of working from within national mythologies to include his dramatic project as a text-based strategy for disrupting accepted knowledges of sexual stories. Foucault asserts that a resistant text derives "its leverage, its purchase, precisely from its partial implication with the dominant; it may embarrass the dominant by appropriating its concepts and imagery."[50] By appropriating heterosexual models of relationship, and even the pro-creative legacy of 'natural' love, McGuinness provides a kind of 'heteronormative' framework to enable a deeper appreciation of a homosexual reality; same sex love and relationship between men. Like Oscar Wilde, McGuinness rejects the classification of homosexuality simply as a sexual preference or a sexual position in his art, and instead struggles to represent the sincere intimacies of commitment between men. In this way he universalises the love story, distracting those who came to hear the sexual story, and subsequently creates the possibility for imaginative and empathetic (as opposed to voyeuristic) associations with homosexual love.

[50] Sinfield, p.16.

By co-opting dominant concepts and discourses of marriage and relationship in *Gates of Gold* McGuinness coerces the familiar story of MacLiammóir and Edwards to retell itself in a way that makes its issues relevant once again. Society tells its stories to itself over and over to reinforce its basic values and powerful dominant ideologies. "Despite their power dominant ideological formations are always, in practice, under pressure, as they strive to substantiate their claim to superior plausibility in the face of diverse disturbances."[51] The Irish dominant cultural perception of openness to homosexuality, clearly brought into question by the recent homophobic history of the legalisation of homosexuality presented in the Introduction, is imaginatively brought into conflict by McGuinness as he implicates the audience in the alienation that this gay couple experienced as they struggled to make themselves productive members of society.

Once again, McGuinness's writing and aesthetic project reflects that of Oscar Wilde: In *Sexual Dissidence* Jonathan Dollimore describes Wilde as an anti-essentialist who in his advocacy of transgression did not desire to flee the rigid structures of society, but rather advocated a reinscription within it through unsettling traditional binaries. He claims that Wilde sought to invert conventional ideological opposites such as nature/culture as an aesthetic way of expressing, and consequently representing the deviant desire of homosexuality. McGuinness, similarly, inverts notions of nature/culture in his dialogue which interrogates notions of productivity and legacy. Dollimore explains Wilde's method:

> Wilde's transgressive desire is both rooted in culture and the impetus for affirming different/alternative kinds of culture...Wilde's position might seem to rest on a confusion: how can the desire that culture outlaws itself be thoroughly cultural? In fact it is because and not in spite of this shared cultural dimension that Wilde can enact one of the most disturbing of all forms

[51] Ibid., p.17.

> of transgression, namely where the outlaw turns up as inlaw, and the other as proximate proves more disturbing than the other as absolute difference.[52]

Wilde does this by using the very heart of culture as his medium: art and the aesthetics. Using the categories of cultural aesthetics and art he appropriates them, and "transvalues them through perversion and inversion, thus making them now signify those binary exclusions by which the dominant culture knows itself (thus abnormality is not just the opposite, but the necessarily always present antithesis of normality)."[53] For example, in his work he substituted lying for truth, abnormal for normal etc., all to illustrate the anti-essentialist notion of the interrelatedness of all types of desire and atypical realities. McGuinness's domestic version of homosexual life in *Gates of Gold* utilises traditional notions of home, love, and family, and dissolves them into what otherwise might be considered their antithesis: gay relationships and lifestyles. McGuinness appropriates and re-inscribes the cultural icon of heterosexual relationships, making them seem queer, and, subsequently, representing a homosexual subjectivity, not just a homosexual sexuality.

Because Wilde was trying to represent homosexual subjectivity, which itself was the 'abnormal' in relation to the 'normal,' his artistic intent had to be aimed at a perverse inversion of knowledges. "Wilde aspired to make his own homosexual desire inseparable from a *repudiation* of the depth model of identity."[54] Once Wilde's 'perversion' was discovered, art was to be forever implicated with homosexuality and creativity with deviance. This implication may well have contributed to nationalism's anxiety over their association with the theatre in modern Ireland; an anxiety which, consequently, required an intentionally tailored, more 'masculine,' brand of Irish theatre as described in Chapter One. Wilde's co-optation of the aesthetics implicated

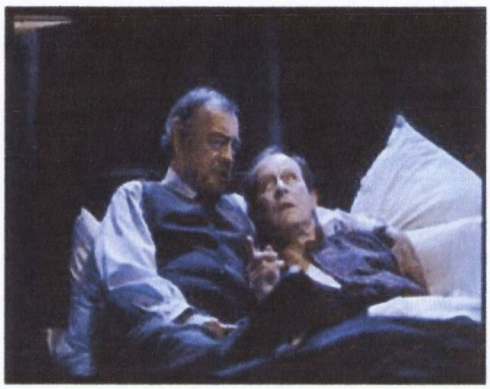
[52] Dollimore, p.15.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., p.42.

art as "amoral,"[55] but created the possibility of the model of the homosexual as aesthete, a type which MacLiammóir exploited in his own expression of his 'abnormal' sexual desires. McGuinness's play also rejects a depth model in relationship to historical biography through character identity, and consequently dramatises an 'inauthentic' version of the lives of these well-known men. This is just another example of how the story is not just told, but is, alternatively, interrogated to allow a rethinking, and not just an affirmation of perceived truths.

Although the concept of inversion may appear to be the same as, or similar to, the idea of the 'lie' previously mentioned, it actually has a far more subversive power. Dominant discourse has a tendency to 'naturalise' those subject positions which it perceives to be valid or appropriate. Inversion seeks to give voice to a homosexual subculture by using the discourse of the prevailing forces which determine the boundary between natural and unnatural. By associating homosexuality with the 'natural' categories of biological reproduction which, in turn, are linked with 'normal' sexual relationships, McGuinness has aesthetically perverted the concept of 'nature.' Throughout *Gates of Gold* Gabriel and Conrad carry on a conversation which debates the idea of the natural in relation to their life together. Conrad always has the last word in these discussions as he calms Gabriel's dying fears, convincing him that there is nothing more natural than love. At the end of the play Conrad holds the dying Gabriel in his arms, and McGuinness delivers his 'perverted' sexual story at last:

> **Conrad** Two men met. They had a marriage. It lasted. The one man was dying, and the other let him. He held this good man, this great man in his arms, for though they hurt and could hate each other more than man could bear, he did not want to let the love of his life pass away. He said, "Stay with me, obey me,' but love is not obedient, for it must defy all the odds and that is why it lasts. My most disobedient, my most defiant, my most strange boy, and we will outlast all the lies we've ever told each other. I have achieved nothing without you. How do I say, without you? For then there is nothing, I am

[55] Sinfield, p.133.



Gates of Gold, The Gate Theatre, Dublin, 2002. Directed by Patrick Mason. Richard Johnson as Conrad, and Alan Howard as Gabriel. Photograph by Tom Lawlor, with permission.

nothing, but you tried to make me something. This something lets me tell you I believe you. I always have. Are you alive? Breathe.

Silence.

Conrad Gabriel, breathe.

Gabriel Open the door. Open the gate. The gates of gold.

They kiss. (65)

This section of dialogue contains within it the idea of the 'lie,' and the inversion of binaries – which also entails the perversion of natural categories, i.e. marriage. At the conclusion of the play, homosexuality, with all its Wildean tools of aesthetic representation, finds its moment of 'truth.' In the final moments McGuinness dissolves the debate about the natural and the unnatural by presenting a rather anti-erotic, and anti-climactic image of homosexual love. Conrad fully affirms Gabriel's story which has continually defied truth and obedience to dominant narratives. In their disobedience, their defiance, and their strangeness, Gabriel and Conrad have defied the odds and, building on the work of Oscar Wilde, pushed the doors of the closet open a little wider on their own terms.

Although I believe that McGuinness has employed many inherited queer methods of representing homosexual subjectivity, I do question whether these systems are appropriate for contemporary accounts of gay storytelling. Dollimore highlights similar problems with the effectiveness of Wilde's transgressive aesthetic: "It is said that inversion disturbs nothing; by merely reversing the terms of the binary, inversion remains within its limiting framework: an inverted world can only be righted, not changed."[56] He claims that the continued relevance of binary structures of exclusion must be repeatedly renegotiated due to the shifting nature of contemporary politics and thinking. Although people were "terrified by Wilde...because of a perceived

[56] Dollimore, p.64.

connection between his aesthetic transgression and his sexual transgression,"[57] the same cannot be said for MacLiammóir and Edwards. Audiences would be intrigued by their perceived sexual transgression, as they traditionally were by their aesthetic transgressions from normative dramatic practice in the Irish theatrical tradition. Dollimore would describe this shift as a consequence of the post-modern era which is no longer indebted to the strict boundaries of binaries and their exclusions. He claims, "With the post-modern era there is no longer any subject to be alienated from, authenticity having been less rejected than merely forgotten."[58] He describes post-modern culture as a "dispersed, decentred network of libidinal attachments, emptied of ethical substance,"[59] in direct contrast to the modern era in which Wilde, MacLiammóir and Edwards lived, which was concretely concerned with issues of alienation, depth and authenticity. Wilde may have been imprisoned literally for his transgressive desire, and MacLiammóir and Edwards may have caused gossip and intrigued sexual imagination, but McGuinness's dramaturgical technique in this play seems to have stimulated a general apathy towards the play, if not a direct disappointment. This historical pattern of representing homosexual subjectivity might suggest that, although it was perverted and subversive in the past, today we seem to need more sophisticated means of representing the inherent divisions between 'heteronormativity' and what has become the recently established 'homonormativity' of such innovators as Wilde, MacLiammóir and Edwards. It is also at odds with a queer performance strategy which requires direct representational confrontation, as argued in Chapter One.

However, this new praxis of homosexual subjective representation has not yet emerged in Irish aesthetic or theatrical practice. McGuinness would appear to have

[57] Ibid., p.67.
[58] Ibid., p.71.
[59] Ibid.

given a more accurate account of queer lives than it may seem. When all of the factors of artifice and perversion combine, what other type of drama could McGuinness have written to reflect the lives of these great men of the Irish theatre? Their lives were not an 'expression of normality' and thus a 'realistic' epitaph would be of no value, but only a 'menace.' And to return to my questions about Éibhear Walshe's assertion that MacLiammóir's 'evasions' were ways of veiling his sexual identity: I would assert that his 'evasions' and his 'lies' were his transgressive ways of speaking his 'deviant' identity loud and clear. Edwards and MacLiammóir rejected 'normality' in art and in life and McGuinness's play reflects that transgressive aesthetic. By rejecting 'truth' McGuinness insists on the 'Theatre Theatrical' in representing these men whose lives belong so much to the sexual imagination of twentieth-century Irish society.

Interestingly enough, McGuinness's own life as an author and celebrity of the Irish theatre has increasingly become a site for the performance of modern Irish homosexual identity, an issue I will address in depth in my conclusion. In the aforementioned article from *The Sunday Independent* of 21 April 2002, written by Joe Jackson, the subject of McGuinness's own sexual history and homosexuality take centre stage. Jackson transposes McGuinness's own long-term relationship onto the lives of MacLiammóir and Edwards, and associates McGuinness's 'coming-out' process with the anticipated revelations of *Gates of Gold*. The connections between dramatic fiction and life that Jackson is trying to make further emphasise of the modern tendency to search for authenticity and truth in the sexual story. McGuinness reveals a formative influence on his creativity in this article, confessing that his homosexuality as a boy forced him to live in his own "fantasy world"[60] and that this

[60] Jackson.

imaginative time period continues to influence his current creativity. It is not abnormal for homosexuals to fantasise, to create unique worlds, languages, modes of self-representation or methods of story telling: they have been inculturated to believe that their world is too twisted, their language too queer, their modes of self representation an abomination, and their stories just plain wrong or sinful. Wilde, Edwards, MacLiammóir, and McGuinness were, and are, theatre artists who attempt to tell their story through aesthetic sensibility, not with historical or scientific accuracy which, by its search for 'truth,' threatens to exclude or silence them.

Ken Plummer remarks on this creative, and very queer, model of storytelling: "The realm of aesthetics gives a concern with the grace and beauty of the story. Stories that enrich our imaginations help us to see wider and further, that stir the spirit or that may capture sensed nuggets of wisdom. These are the poetic and creative texts that pull us into them so that we may savour the new understandings and sensibilities of them."[61] This search for a way to express a homosexual identity brings together this unique circle of poetic storytellers, this queer family of Wilde Irishmen whose goal has been to help us to see wider and further by stirring the imagination and inspiring new types of queer wisdom and queer knowledge.

[61] Plummer, p.171.

4

Holy Irreverence
The Gospel According to Judas

The play I focus on in this chapter is an unpublished manuscript of McGuinness's. It is McGuinness's opinion that The Gospel According to Judas *is severe, and perhaps even blasphemous. In this chapter I combine theology with principles of queer theory to establish a reading of the play which is particular to my general observations about the queer subversive, and yet, redemptive 'deviant' qualities found in the greater body of McGuinness's work. Characteristically, in* The Gospel According to Judas *McGuinness is not rejecting the dominant Christian narrative of Irish society and culture, but is, I argue, preaching a theatrical type of sexual liberation for the ontological reality which leaves queers feeling religiously abhorrent.*

The Gospel According to Judas, thus far, is an unperformed monologue written in one act. The play itself, as the title implies, is a fictitious dramatic articulation of the perspective of Judas Iscariot, the disciple of Jesus Christ whose betrayal of Christ triggered the series of events that ultimately led to his crucifixion and death. In an interview with McGuinness (see Appendix I) in which we were discussing the homosexual tropes which permeate his writing, I stated that I would not consider him to be a 'gay playwright,' an opinion which I articulated in Chapter One. He agreed with me and, interestingly, identified himself primarily as a Catholic, albeit disenfranchised, playwright. Generally, issues of homosexuality and religion stand in confrontational opposition to one another on the grounds of morality and spiritual righteousness; a dialogue between these two apparent conflicting positions threatens to be irreverent, exclusionary, and judgmental. And yet, the ostensible incompatibility of religion and

homosexuality finds a synthesis in a homosexual subjectivity which identifies itself as both gay and Catholic in perspective; creating a queer spirituality which in turn seeks a queer theology in order to articulate the reverence in what is traditionally understood as wholly irreverent. In this chapter, I illustrate how, through *The Gospel According to Judas*, McGuinness uses the art of dramatic representation to convert the experience of these seemingly incompatible ontological and moral positions into a queer theological narrative which seeks to give voice to marginalized theological positions.

Homosexuality has been constructed by political and cultural forces, as well as mainstream theological discourse, as a betrayal of religious righteousness, just as the biblical Judas betrayed Jesus Christ: it all seemed to go downhill after the touch and the kiss. Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve original disciples chosen by Jesus of Nazareth for his prophetic mission to the people of Israel. Judas ultimately betrayed Jesus, handing him over to the Roman authorities of the time who considered Jesus' message of the coming of the kingdom of God as a political threat to the presence of the Roman Empire in Israel in the first century. Judas's betrayal of Jesus is described in the New Testament:

> When it grew dark he reclined at table with the Twelve. In the course of the meal he said, "I assure you, one of you is about to betray me." Distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, "Surely it is not I, Lord?" He replied: "The man who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will hand me over. The Son of Man is departing, as Scripture says of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. Better for him if he had never been born." Then Judas, his betrayer, spoke: "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "It is you who have said it."
>
> Matthew 26: 20-25[1]

Judas is portrayed as the insider who 'dipped his hand into the dish' with Jesus, only to place himself on the outside by his actions against Jesus and the other disciples. In *The*

[1] *The New American Bible*. New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1971, p.1078.

Gospel According to Judas McGuinness gives voice to a biblical character who is virtually voiceless in canonical gospel accounts in order to imaginatively create a new queer interpretation of the general history of salvation proclaimed by Christianity.

Although the biblical character of Judas Iscariot historically locates this play, it is as equally a-historical in its conceptual design, its gender identification, and dramatic narration. McGuinness provides a precisely ambiguous Beckettian setting of timelessness in his initial stage directions: "The stage is littered with books, newspapers, letters, sheets of scrawled paper. There is a simple wooden chair. Judas, played by a woman, wears a black suit, black shoes, black socks, a white shirt, a red tie. The clothes are immaculately clean. The suit is impeccably cut."[2] Information and knowledge are represented by the scattered presence of the variety of written materials found in everything from books to hand-written letters. Gender is dislocated in the person of a woman, playing a historical male figure, dressed in costume traditionally coded as masculine. The gender reversal and cross-dressing technique, combined with the questionable temporal location of the piece, suggests an existential location and a universal human condition in its ambiguity. The setting and casting unite to invent a trans-historical space in which issues of 'everyman/everywoman' create an illusive circular connection between the past, the present, and the future.

Judas is the only character on stage in the play. Genealogy and issues of heredity are introduced in the opening lines as Judas articulates the trans-generational nature of betrayal and sinfulness in the human condition:

> As a rule, the men in my family, we die young. My father was the exception. He reached thirty. Maybe a little more. I can't remember exactly. I am the

[2] Frank McGuinness, *The Gospel According to Judas*, 2001(Unpublished, p.2). All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this manuscript.

> exception to that rule. I look at my grandchildren, I look at you all. I hope you too will be exceptions. I do pride myself on my eternal youth. It has been a great consolation for me in eternity. In my youth, what I did then, I remember that with clarity. When I tell my grandchildren that story, I look in their faces and I see my face. A great consolation. And I make one earnest wish for them. May they never believe in, may they never become rulers. (3)

The legacy which the opening section of the play illustrates is a genealogy of early death and suicide. Judas describes the countless stories of the lives of those who died too young, or took their lives by their own hand pointing to the letters, books and newspapers which surround him. As he speaks he randomly stoops to pick up a letter from the ground and reads the words written to him by a dying person he once knew:

> By the time you receive this letter I shall be dead by my own hand. Sweet Judas, if I held command of your hand I would let you do to me what I now am to do to myself. I have lived for your love. Without it, Judas, there is nothing…The letter continues in a similar vein. Professions of love. The cry of the suicide. Was it a man or a woman who wrote to me like that? I can't remember. How strange. (3)

The connection between the countless numbers of men and woman who have killed themselves, and the suicide of the biblical Judas is apparent. However, the reason that the biblical Judas killed himself is linked both to the betrayal of Jesus, and his immediate regret after selling-out for a mere thirty silver pieces. Material greed and selfishness win out for a moment in Judas's life, and the consequence of this betrayal is the death of Jesus. Moral remorse, the desperation of a person who sees no chance of forgiveness, and the inevitability of eternal damnation are the motivating forces which draw the biblical Judas into his final act of self-destruction and moral erasure. McGuinness's Judas arbitrarily chooses story after story from the piles of written material surrounding him, each detailing those whose lives have also been obliterated by greed, deception, or lust.

In the play, Judas is a contemporary figure, looking back in time, and identifying historical moments of upheaval and insurgency such as the Battle of Waterloo, the October Revolution, the Spanish Armada launched and defeated, the Reformation, the fall of Constantinople, women's suffrage; historical periods of political transformation, suppression, and ideological shifts serve as an introduction to his discussion about his relationship with Jesus. The mention of these historical moments serves to mark a further move into the queer ideological revolution against systems of power begun in the opening monologue when Judas expresses his wish that his grandchildren never believe in or become rulers. Problems with struggles for power are certainly at issue here because the outcome of those struggles ultimately determines how stories are told and passed on: the winners of the battles for dominance determine the identity and motivation of the losers, and, ultimately, control how the story gets told in the history books. Judas begins to speak his 'loser' version of Jesus:

> ...Christ born, Christ crucified. From Jerusalem it is reported that a man claiming to be –. Dear Jerusalem, so full of gossip. I adore gossip. Do you believe gossip? My main reservation about gossip is that it would tend to turn good men against bad men, it could make good men out of bad men – and he was a bad man, believe me. (5)

McGuinness indicates an inversion of historical religious knowledges and moralities in this section, a dialogue pattern that will subsequently define the queer voice of 'deviance' for the entire drama. In a reversal of fortune, Judas is established as the protagonist, and against traditional understandings of knowledge, Jesus is the antagonist. In the play, Jesus is uncharacteristically described as 'a bad man,' McGuinness inverts traditional religious perspectives, in much the same way as he did with heterosexual paradigms of procreativity in *Gates of Gold,* and creates a discourse which allows the betrayer to

articulate his own point of view and his own motivations. This inversion serves as a means to articulate an historical subject who has traditionally, through gospel accounts and religious tradition, been branded evil, and, subsequently, silenced under the rigid binaries of the ontological axis of good and bad as determined by institutional hierarchies. McGuinness reverses traditional hierarchies of power to highlight disjunctions and to dissolve crystallised strategies that control and define 'deviance.'

The untraditional fictionalised version of the gospel this play creates represents a one-sided confrontation of Jesus by Judas. This monologue theatrically accounts for the motivations and emotions of Judas, transforming the biblical character into more than a two dimensional repository of evil and betrayal. The character of Judas refers to the solitary chair on the stage, informing the audience that this chair was made by Jesus, the carpenter, and goes on to explain that the chair is magical, allowing him to tell wonderful stories when he sits on it. Making use of a particular biblical genre, Judas tells a parable to describe his relationship with Jesus:

> Once upon a time there was a dog who deserted his master. The dog saw in his master's eye the death that was in store for both. The dog being a smart animal, knew his death, the dog's death, would come earlier than the master's, and the master, who was alone, would mourn for his animal. To teach the master to turn from mercy, the dog cruelly, most cruelly, wandered away from him sitting in the park. The dog lived happily ever after. The master, he was crucified. At his crucifixion, the master's, that is, the dog returned to eat the bones, thirty bones he had buried in the body of the master for the dog had decided to do something decisive by the age of thirty. Thirty was a decisive age for the dog. I feel sorry for the dog. Others, of course, feel sorry for the bones of the dead man... (5)

The co-optation of the parable form of storytelling from the biblical tradition taps into the revolutionary perspective in the teaching of Jesus as passed on through scripture. Biblical parables offered an alternative perspective on established existential issues and Jewish religious moral imperatives. Intrinsic to the message of a parable is the fact that

they mean more than they say. "The original Greek word is *parabolē*, meaning a juxtaposition or a comparison,"[3] but is more fully understood in the New Testament context when combined with the understanding of the Hebrew word *mashal*. "In Hebrew this word had a whole range of meanings far beyond a mere 'comparison.' It could be a representation or a type, a simile or a metaphor, a maxim or a proverb or pithy saying, a symbol or a riddle."[4] The Hebrew nuance of the Greek word for parable more obliquely infers "the quality of a 'dark saying,' something involving mystery."[5] Jesus employed this traditional mode of rabbinical preaching by taking the standard meaning of these humble stories of everyday life and creating something entirely original. In other words, using this standard genre of theological pedagogy of his period Jesus queered the Jewish religious teaching tradition. Ultimately, this queer project led to his crucifixion.

McGuinness's use of the style of the biblical parable employs the accessible metaphor of the relationship between a dog and his master in order to illustrate the loyalty and love between Jesus and Judas. The human/animal metaphor is employed to represent the relationship between humanity and divinity. McGuinness juxtaposes the sacred and the profane by placing the dog in the position of narrator, giving the canine the power of choice and the ability to both rationalise and emotionalise the relationship between himself and his master, thus reversing traditional economies of power. This sinister story of the reversal of the hierarchy of power between human and beast functions as a type of theatrical 'dark saying' revealing the ambiguous nature of the little detailed relationship between Jesus and Judas as reported in the canonically endorsed gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. McGuinness's Judas says, "I feel sorry for the

[3] Wilfred J. Harrington, O.P., *Parables told by Jesus*. New York: Alba House, 1971, p.5.
[4] Ibid., p.6.
[5] Ibid.

dog. Others of course feel sorry for the bones of the dead man." In commenting such he creates an alternative perspective of sympathy for the biblical Judas who has, otherwise, been seen historically only as the cause of Jesus' death. Consequently, McGuinness's 'deviant' dramaturgy characteristically reverses traditional and natural perspectives through the use of an ordinary story to create an original account of a relationship long consigned to the limitations of time and memory.

This play, however, is not simply a dramatic exercise which seeks to give voice to a biblical character otherwise silenced by scripture scholars and theological authorities, all of whom attribute Jesus' death to the selfishness of his betrayal. This alternative voice of dissidence created by McGuinness for the stage is intermittently nuanced with the language and emotion of love and hate, defiance and remorse, arrogance and guilt. The parable of the master and his dog, or should I say, the dog and his master, gives way to an overtly unsettling play which continually raises the stakes in its reversals of power and its attacks on traditional theologies. McGuinness moves from the somewhat innocuous story of reversals of wisdom into a direct in-your-face offensive on sacrosanct religious ideology.

McGuinness returns to the 'everyman' theme of the generational implications of betrayal, sin and damnation as Judas begins to speak once again of his children's children:

> My children have never forgiven me that they were born disfigured. On their faces there is a trace of a kiss. They call it a mark. A birthmark. I call it a mouth…
>
> *He starts to spread lipstick expertly on his lips.*
>
> They speak about me –
>
> *He purses his lips*
>
> They kiss me –
>
> *He puts his lips together*

> They kiss me on the mouth. I smell their breath. It is like a knife on my cock. The steel against the purple flesh. The hard against the soft… (6)

The text takes a crucially violent and sexually confrontational turn at this point. The visual signals of the actress, playing the man Judas, expertly applying lipstick and referring to her cock, heightens the resistance of the play to conflate itself into the precise historical person of Judas or the chronological timeline of a specifically biblical temporality. In his visual and textual design McGuinness appears to be posing universal and existential questions by employing the scriptural character of Judas as a type of parable himself in order to make the familiar unfamiliar. Through the body and voice of the actress, Judas becomes a metaphor for all of those people in history who have been constructed as 'betraying' the traditional narrative of western normativity so strongly supported by Christian ideology.

Homosexuality is inserted into this metaphor in the next parable McGuinness offers: the story of a young man, "fearing he may have caught an infectious disease" (6). AIDS is introduced to this trans-historical evangelical fiction. The moral and theological judgments made by Christian churches and fundamentalist theologians about AIDS are foregrounded in the play as the character of Judas continues to grapple with the ontological relationship between God and humanity. Referring to this young man with the infectious disease Judas says:

> …let us call him Judas, let us call him Christ – call him what the hell you like – he borrows a shotgun from a friend – call the friend Christ or Judas or hell – and he blew his red brains out all over the front lawn of the family home. When his blood fell, roses grew instantly. He was quite an Adonis much loved by God. When cross examined God blamed himself. I sent the plague among the young, he confessed. It was my fancy. A whim I should have controlled. God added that he was a kind and merciful man, but when crossed he was a duplicitous bastard. Let this be a warning to you… (6)

Judas articulates confusion and identity transference between himself, Jesus, and the young man. Once again the balance of power is shifted and God is 'cross examined' by the human voice. The reference to 'plague' contains within it the loaded accusation of many right wing reactionary Christians in relation to the emergence of AIDS in the West in the 1980s, some of whom preached that the disease was God's wrath being brought down on the immoral and sinful gay community.

If the first section of this play interrogates God and attacks versions of secular authority, the next part confronts the ontological issues of religious authority and teaching by introducing the topics of sex and sexuality; further supporting my thesis that McGuinness often foregrounds sexuality as a tool for the discursive disruption of traditional knowledges. Judas has already implied the presence of Jesus in the workmanship of the chair in the opening of the play. He claims "It was made by a man who was a most wonderful carpenter…When I sit on it I can tell wonderful stories" (5). McGuinness further extends the metaphor of Christ-as-the-chair in a more sexually charged and erotically explicit moment following the AIDS parable:

> What do you think, old friend?
> *He pats the chair*
> My old friend here feels sorry for the young man. He has a hard spot for young men. And sorrow – sorry – he would feel sorry for any young ass that would perch on his face and confess their secrets to his silent wood. Wood silent. But then he stood on the hill of Calvary and watched young men die. (6)

By explicitly relating Jesus, sex, and homosexuality to one another McGuinness is dramatically confronting the dichotomy between the sensual and the spiritual so common in western cultural and religious development.

Sexuality has always been a central preoccupation in Christian morality. In his book *Queering Christ* Robert Goss identifies that "At the heart of the opposition of the

religious right, there is an incredible fear of human sexuality, needing to regulate it through a politics of sexual shame, exclusion and legislation."[6] He claims that all types of sexuality have suffered from this type of suppression, but none more than those which are considered 'deviant.' Goss believes that the sex/spirituality binary is not the only subject which should be interrogated, but also the type of Christian ideology which has portrayed God, in Goss's own terminology, as 'erotophobic,' or fearful of the sexual. McGuinness's seemingly irreverent associations between sex and God ostensibly offend western religious sensibilities because of years of conditioning which have made the erotic not only the opposite of the sacred, but its enemy. By juxtaposing the sacred and the profane in *The Gospel According to Judas*, McGuinness is imagining a different 'reality,' using the irreverent to apply pressure to traditional notions of reverence. Goss provides insight into the significance and importance of such 'irreverent' associations and visions of reality for queer sexualities and spiritualities:

> The reenvisioning includes a thorough reembodying of queer spirituality. Reembodying queer spirituality leads to a redefinition of the divine to include the erotic dimensions of queer love and lives. Thus, the liberation of queer sexuality and the liberation of God from erotophobia are interrelated and have become an ongoing project for this century. The reembodying of queer spirituality involves not only freeing our sexuality from narrow regulations but also freeing God from traditional antisexual theological constructions.[7]

In this light, *The Gospel According to Judas* could be interpreted as a dramatic attempt to reconcile queer sexualities with queer spiritualities. McGuinness is queering the gospel in much the same way that Goss is in his methodology which queers theology in order "to spoil or interfere with"[8] accepted knowledges.

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[6] Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002, p.xiii.
[7] Ibid., p.xiv.
[8] Ibid.

The association between erotic and spiritual in this play becomes more graphic as Judas's tone becomes progressively angry and resentful. The play seems to take a position of ontological defiance, as the balance of power in the relationship between the human and divine is overturned in order to allow the otherwise historically silenced biblical Judas the opportunity to defend his position. In *The Gospel According to Judas*, the voice of Judas represents the voice of the damned, as his parables take on a hell-like tone of violence, anger and orgasmic vividness:

> …Jesus was like that – he would have made a marvellous woman – big eyes, good tits, a loincloth like a pair of knickers that hid no cock – I heard the rumours about his size, but could not confirm them. I never listened to rumours about him. Rumours were not the reason I betrayed him. We did not fuck – that is a lie. He was not my lover. I kissed him on the mouth because his was the mouth of God… (8)

Judas's alienation, and its accompanied anxieties, overtakes the initial tone of trans-historical destiny portrayed in the 'everyman' allegories of the beginning of the piece. At this stage in the play McGuinness presents a more personal attitude, expressing resentment through vulgarity as Judas bitterly enunciates how he was predestined to betray, and, consequently, predestined to live in his own personal hell. He defends his innocence, claiming he was seduced by Jesus:

> The curse on this world is that he demanded men like me to love him.
> Love him like the dogs sitting on his lap. Love him licking his salty cock…I will not love him. I cannot. He was never innocent. He knew what he was on about. I on the other hand was innocent. I marvel at myself. My survival. My innocence…He let me betray him. (8)

This section of the play gives way to a dramatic tug-of-war between self-determination and destiny. In a theological context this dialogue would appear to represent the tension between nature and nurture which so often characterises the conversation about the moral and ethical validity of 'deviant' forms of sexual desire and lifestyle. For many

theologians and fundamentalist Christians the solution to the tensions experienced by gay men and women between knowing themselves to be created as good, and the subsequent social and cultural classifications which define their desires as aberrant, is to suggest that they just stop being gay. "There are actually two versions of this prescription. One is the literal version: turn your life over to Jesus, and you will no longer be gay. God will deliver you from this lifestyle,"[9] and the more liberal solution, "You cannot help being gay...it is something you must bear, with the help of the church and the sacraments. Under no circumstances, however, may you 'do' anything about it."[10] These are the traditional spiritual solutions for 'deviant' sexualities suggested by the church, solutions which create a sort of schizophrenia for the homosexual Christian. If we read *The Gospel According to Judas* as a fictionalised rendering of a queer book of evangelical spiritual direction we can hear a liberation theology crying out for reconciliation between the physical and the spiritual in order to free those morally condemned sexual prototyped 'betrayers' from a gospel which consigns them to perpetual internal alienation.

Robert Goss describes the growth of this internal division and anxiety in the development of a young Catholic homosexual based on 'inappropriate' desires. He recalls asking God to remove his sexual desire for his male friends, convinced that this desire would ultimately lead to his damnation. However, he confesses, "Despite my sinfulness, I sensed that Jesus loved me. He was my friend, a companion. And I genuinely loved him and felt his presence. I always felt a dissonance between the Jesus I knew as a companion and friend and the Jesus represented by priests and

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[9] Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, p.1.
[10] Ibid.

nuns...Sexuality and the church's portrayal of Jesus were at war within me."[11] The violence and the sexual explicitness of *The Gospel According to Judas* seems to dramatise this spiritual tension, as it battles between Judas's predestination and 'innocence,' and his self-assertions and erotic implications of how Jesus used and abused him. In the play, Judas reveals in his dialogue all of the guilt, shame and self-loathing encouraged by mainstream theologies in order to purge the sexually and morally deviant faithful of their 'improper' desires; a remorse which is purported to empower them to give up their 'betrayal' of Christ and the church.

And yet, Goss reveals a grave contradiction in traditional Roman Catholic practices of devotionalism which focus particularly on Jesus; a series of devotional practices which have certainly shaped Irish spirituality. Goss claims that "Catholic piety stimulated a certain erotic love for Jesus"[12] as it encouraged prayer before the naked corpus hanging on the cross, and promoted the image of Jesus embracing and loving his disciples. Catholic aestheticism subsequently encouraged denial of the body through sensual images of male love. He describes the consequences of such contradictions in the corporeal spiritual lives of Christians:

> The body must be denied; it must be disciplined, bound and restricted. The body must be abused in the name of self-conquest and spiritual transcendence. The ascetic self is disembodied and fragmented; it is split from the body. The separation of the self from the body has had tragic results. It degrades the body and degrades human sexuality in particular. Bodily spontaneity is feared and denigrated. Embodiment is seen not as mediating spirit but as blocking spirit.[13]

This perspective provides further insight into the gender divisions within the casting and the costuming of the character of Judas in the play. While the casting of a woman to play

[11] Gross, p.7.
[12] Ibid., p.10.
[13] Ibid., p.11.

an historical man, dressed as a man, but, simultaneously, using props like lipstick, McGuinness certainly implies a universal association around human nature and issues of culpability, sin, and betrayal; but it additionally signifies a division between biological gender identification and social constructions of identity. Physically, the fluid gender choice creates tension between the body and traditional gender ideology, further suggesting the fragmented and disembodied ethos of this queer version of a well known biblical story.

The anger and violence in the language and memory of Judas in this play are converted into a sadomasochistic love/hate relationship between himself and Jesus. Judas cries, "I enjoy being in rage against you. My rage restores my youth" (10). The dialogue vacillates from the language of alienation and hatred back to the seemingly contradictory language of intimacy and love in the theatricalised relationship between Jesus and Judas. McGuinness's Judas holds a one sided conversation, based on recollection, with Jesus:

> You felt no fear, for even in youth, you maintained he was your father and yet you feared women. And they were everywhere around you. You said, Judas, I love you, and let the word pass. The love, the love passed. Do you remember one night, I lay beside you, a bottle of wine between us, I felt your ribs. I rubbed them – roughly – to see was she there, the woman we created, the woman we were. You slept as I counted your bones. So loved, your bones – your hands, your feet, all blood my Christ crucified. I loved your hands, your feet. (10)

While he is extending the connection between the erotic and the spiritual in this reflection of the intimacy and love between Jesus and Judas, McGuinness adds another particularly queer confrontation of religious thinking to this piece: the fear of women so deeply woven into the fabric of religious systems of politics and sexuality. He associates the alienation of women with a general Christian discomfort with the body as he highlights the fact that the church, often in the name of Christ, excludes the full participation of

women in the life of the community. This serves as another queer juxtaposition of the reality that women not only make up the majority of active participants in the life of any faith community, but also that they are central figures in the biblical stories that are used as justification to keep them out of certain circles of power within the institutional Church itself. Consequently, women's issues are added to this dramatic contestation of the position of marginalised persons by the ancestral patriarchies of Christianity based on hegemonic readings of canonical accounts of the life of Christ.

Religious refusal to identify with the central position of women in Jesus' message of justice – one on the ways Jesus used gender to queer Jewish religious discourse –goes hand in hand with the refusal of the implications of incarnation itself. Before elaborating on the subject of historical devotional refusals of the doctrine of God's incarnation in Jesus, I would like to further examine McGuinness's introduction of the theme of the fear of women to this illicit version of theatrical scripture. In her book *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* Elizabeth Johnson illustrates how sexism functions in a similarly destructive way as the aforementioned concept of 'erotophobia:'

> Feminist theology explicitly recognises that the contradiction between the theological identity of women and the historical condition of women in theory and practice is glaring. This leads to the clear judgement that sexism is sinful, that it is contrary to God's intent, that it is a precise and pervasive breaking of the basic commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as they self" (Lv 19:18; Mt 22:39). It affronts God by defacing the beloved creature created in the image of God. Faced with this sinfulness, church and society are called to repent, to turn around, to sin no more, to be converted.[14]

McGuinness, as a sort of theatrical evangelist, appears to be preaching a fictional sermon of justice against the mariginalisation of particular groups within the general ethos of

[14] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroad: 1994, p.9.

Christianity and its contingent obligations. Violence, eroticism, and anger are the voices he employs to write this queer confrontation, and call people to justice and conversion. Tension and incompatibility apply pressure to areas where traditional evangelical interpretations have drawn the line in relation to compassion and equality for all human beings. By introducing issues of women to the traditional apprehensions around sexuality in this play McGuinness illustrates how the fear of bodies in general puts pressure on issues of equality and justice in the radical Christian imperatives of universal compassion and charity.

Returning to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation: The tension between the physical and the spiritual in *The Gospel According to Judas*, brought out by the use of themes of sexism and eroticism, points towards a greater inconsistency and historical discrepancy within the theories and practices of Christianity. This conflict can be traced back to the earliest theological debates around the subject of just who Jesus actually was. "The doctrine of the incarnation (John 1:14) means that God became human in Jesus Christ"[15] and was officially established as church teaching by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 in order to resolve ongoing debate over questions[16] of whether Christ was human or divine. Although the Christian faith opted to assert Jesus' full humanity *and* his full divinity, the controversy points to the reality that "virtually every disputed position sought to shortchange the genuine quality of Jesus' humanity."[17] These disputes served to place within Christian devotion and asceticism a suspicion of God's affirmation

[15] William L. Portier, *Tradition & Incarnation: Foundations of Christian Theology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1994, p.187.
[16] "The controversies leading up to Nicaea's affirmation of the divinity of Christ raged among Alexandrian Christians' and involved the interpretation of the legacy of Origen, Alexandria's greatest theologian. Subsequent controversies would bring into play the diverging perspective of Christians from Antioch in Syria. Their Christological had a strong sense of the human freedom of the one Lord Jesus Christ and his importance as a moral model for Christians". Ibid., p.189.
[17] Johnson, p.164.

of the flesh in His choice to assume our corporeality. This tension is in itself heretical, for it is also the position of the doctrine of the Church that "what is not assumed is not redeemed."[18] In other words, it was necessary for Jesus to take on full humanity in order to free humankind fully from its alienation from God caused by the fall of Adam and Eve. McGuinness's piece is a voice in the wilderness confrontationally forcing us to acknowledge flesh and blood, in all its messiness and vulgarity; realities which have been tidily displaced and denied through asceticism and Christian piety.

Robert Goss points out that both Catholic and Protestant theologians most frequently and consistently have associated notions of sin and sinfulness with issues of sexuality. "The creedal formula 'Jesus is like us in all things, save sin' has been frequently understood to refer to sexuality...the underlying premise is that God became human but not sexual."[19] Goss was personally influenced by the Roman Catholic Bishop John A.T. Robinson's writing on the humanity of Jesus in his book *The Human Face of God.* Bishop Robinson claims, "To think of Jesus as having had sexual desires of any sort has seemed to offend against his purity...Consequently, the Church has appeared to present him as sexless...Of course, there is no answer. The Gospels are not there to answer such questions. It is however a good question to ask ourselves, to test our reaction."[20] Understood in this way, McGuinness's writing can be seen as a dramatic interrogation, presenting irreverent erotic scenarios that serve as theatricalised theological questions to test the reaction of western audiences largely familiar with Christian theology.

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Goss, p.114.
[20] Ibid, p.115.

As *The Gospel According To Judas* draws to an end, McGuinness writes a final confrontation of this, so-called Christian 'erotophobia':

> I have an erection. The things one does for pleasure. For money. Thirty pieces of silver. Some drops of spunk. In the Potter's Field I wondered. I remembered my life. My birth came as a surprise to me. So I cried. I kept crying throughout my childhood, for it lacked surprise. Rain fell on me. I grew. Winds blew. I skirted into a man's shape. As a man I followed the crowds choosing women for my loves, and love led to the cruel bed. Then I suffered shame but strove to please my mad mistress. Her madness made a man of me. I left her bed and ran into the open arms of Christ. I loved him like the light of day, til he rejected women. To please my Christ well, look at me – I turned into a woman. I crucified my crimson cock and circumcised this cunt I hide between my legs. His curse be upon me and my children. I have many children and more grandchildren. This is a large family. (13)

This section of the play is the final instance of McGuinness's rage against the dichotomy of sexuality and spirituality in human experience. Here he moves from the innocence of childhood, into the awakening of sexual pleasure, and the unleashing of its insatiable appetites, and, finally, into a genital violence which represents the angst of sexual expression experienced after the embrace of the love of Christ. This monologue speaks the anxiety of living a full humanity when faced with a relationship with divine expectations as articulated by the Christian tradition in regard to the regulation of the body.

And yet, in conclusion, McGuinness does not have Judas completely reject Jesus in his anger:

> I am carrying your cross. I have been carrying it since your death. I will carry it all my life. Eternal life. Forgive me as I have not forgiven you. Forget me as I have not forgotten you…I did not tell you to die. I did not say, die. You chose it. Death. (14)

Judas knots the tie he is wearing around his neck about the chair, and begins to walk around the stage, dragging the chair. As the lights fade Judas is seen pulling the chair

and weeping in the darkness. McGuinness suggests a continued eternal dialogue of love and hatred, of life and death, where the 'betrayed' and the 'betrayer' are timelessly bound together. This theatrical exchange points to the divergence between the person of Jesus as depicted in the canonical gospels, and the Christian legacy of Christ. Although the endorsed gospels do not provide any explicit information regarding the personal life of Jesus or his sexuality "There are indications that Jesus spent his life in the company of men and that his relations with women were open, sensitive and honest."[21] These realities, combined with the institutionally supported doctrine of the incarnation, logically lead to an endorsement of the divinely sanctioned holiness of human existence; including aspects of sex and sexuality. Jesus' continual identification with outsiders, and his repeated contestations of institutionalised and exclusive aspects of Judaism align him with the queerest constituents of spirituality. McGuinness's piece rejects the separation of body and soul in its dramatic language and multidimensional gender identifications, and appears to be working towards a reconciliation of these historically constructed opposites in the eternal repetition suggested by Judas's location in a limbo-like state of perpetual conversation between himself and Christ.

The Christian tradition has continually neutralised just how queer Jesus Christ was. It has used the name of Christ to sponsor anti-homosexual legislation,[22] as well as for the justification of the marginalisation of women within the church, ignoring how Jesus sought out the disenfranchised and told parables which scandalously replaced the

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[21] Goss, p.135.

[22] For more information on this see: David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990, 252. For the Irish situation in particular see Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities*, Cork: Cork University Press, 1994.

religiously queer as the morally upright person.[23] *The Gospel According to Judas* vocalises and physicalises these contradictions, compelling its audience to listen to a dialogue which brings together graphic physicality with notions of spiritual love and devotion, while, simultaneously, challenging gendered oppression through cross-dressing and gender-bending. Contemporary Irish Catholicism has been plagued with the consequences of the dichotomy of body and spirit as it faces its history of hidden sexual abuse by priests; the very men who were to embody the asceticism which encouraged denial of the body for the benefit of the soul. The sexual violence and erotic explicitness of this piece seem to test the very boundaries of acceptability in relationship to issues of religion and the sacred historical memories of Jesus. McGuinness's unorthodox gospel poses questions which test reactions and expose new queer realities, just as the parables of Jesus did for the early Jews. McGuinness's writing exhibits a type of holy irreverence which does not reject Christianity, but, rather, seeks to graphically liberate this pervasive sexual silence and incarnational denial, restoring the queer to the radical institutionally subversive message of the biblical man, Jesus of Nazareth.

[23] For an excellent reading of the scandalous nature of the parable of the Good Samaritan, see: Cleaver, pp.2-7.

5

Defective Histories

Re-presenting History in *Innocence, Mary and Lizzie,* and *Mutabilitie*

I have illustrated in the previous chapters how many of McGuinness's dramatic fictionalisations have focused on precise moments of history such as World War I and World War II in Observe the Sons *and* Dolly West's Kitchen, *and Bloody Sunday in* Carthaginians. *Additionally, his plays have concerned themselves with bringing to life historical figures whose real lives somehow nostalgically inhabit the modern Irish secular and religious psyche as in* Gates of Gold *or* The Gospel According to Judas. *This chapter explores how McGuinness reaches back into history in order to retrieve historical celebrities and breathe new imaginative life into these personages in order to create fresh visions of the past, which, in turn, have the potential to influence the present. In* Innocence *McGuinness explores the life of the Italian painter Caravaggio. In* Mary and Lizzie *he considers the lives of Mary and Lizzie Burns, two Irish sisters who were the lovers of the English Marxist author Frederick Engels. In* Mutabilitie *the persons of Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. McGuinness creates queer fictional accounts of various historical persons in order to trouble traditional understandings of the relationships between issues as diverse as faith, gender, sexuality and politics. Consequently, this chapter will focus on historiography, or the way that history is written, and the theatre's influence on interpreting the past.*

In defiance of dominant canonical historical narratives *Innocence, Mary and Lizzie*, and *Mutabilitie* each create, what I describe as, 'defective' versions of historical biography; versions of history which confront one-dimensional accounts of the past with contemporary perspectives and physicalised debates on the subject of history itself, ultimately producing alternative theatrical stories through vivid historical re-imagination. In this chapter I argue that McGuinness's representations of history are part of an ongoing struggle to retrieve queer subjectivities, and highlight contemporary queer rejections of traditional economies of power in order to open the debate on how the past

continues to influence the present and vice versa. I argue that through his dramaturgical techniques and theatrical devices of representation McGuinness helps to create a queer version of history which, simultaneously, serves to stimulate new fictions for subverted subjectivities, and point towards the fragility of dominant discourse in narrative versions of traditional history. In so doing, he confronts the power structures which use history to crystallise social and political hegemonies by disrupting the organisation that traditional histories imply, and substituting them with 'fictional' representations of the profusion of power through divergent political and biographical historical analogies.

My concept of a non-traditional version of a dominant historical narrative as a 'defective' history is primarily based on Michel Foucault's idea of *effective history*. In his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" Foucault describes how dominant versions of history are fraught with power struggles; battles over which elements of a story are most significant, and who the principal actors within the particular story actually are. As with *Gates of Gold*, McGuinness disrupts assumptions of 'truth' within grand historical narratives by focusing on under-explored intimations of information and incongruities within historical stories. The plays dealt with in this chapter theatrically initiate disruptive versions of history, as they represent ruptures in otherwise cohesive traditional histories, in much the same way that *The Gospel According to Judas* disrupts theological thinking which alienates and marginalises queer spiritualities. This queer dramaturgical technique is employed in order to instigate alternative accounts, and give voice to silent realities which underlie normative versions of traditionally accepted historical truth and ideology: queer because each of these plays explores hints of sexuality, and the politics of

gender to analyse the discourse of history, and expose how this discourse has constructed 'reality' in western culture.

Foucault's accounts of 'traditional history' and 'effective history' provide interesting insight into the process of the formation of history itself, and contribute greatly to an analysis of what is queer about McGuinness's dramatic historical engagements:

> The former transposes the relationship ordinarily established between eruption of an event and necessary continuity. An entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity – as a teleological movement or a natural process. "Effective" history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. An event, consequently, is not a decision, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination which poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked "other."[1]

Foucault's philosophy encourages explorations of alternative versions of the past based on disparate criteria of authenticity in order to expose the discontinuity of the past as a cohesive series of events that explain, and ultimately, validate contemporary dominant social structures. McGuinness's dramaturgy provides 'defective' versions of 'authentic' stories in order to stimulate new perspectives of the past, and encourage points of view which may serve to break older economies of power which have supported marginalisation, sectarianism, sexism, homophobia, and political enmity in modern life. Sexuality and gender are the disparate criteria he uses to challenge the ways in which history have been written.

Foucault continues, "We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p.88.

confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference."[2] By dramatising perverse versions of the past and queer perspectives of historical personages McGuinness is denying the desire for continuity and postponing a validation of the present by the past until a larger variety of approaches are investigated. *Innocence*, *Mary and Lizzie*, and *Mutabilitie*, in representing unorthodox, and consequently canonically unrecognisable, fictionalisations of the past, use theatre to approach history as a 'masked other.' They oftentimes reverse relationships; making the unimportant important, and representing the unrepresented fractures which threaten the essential beliefs of a present which depends on the idea that it has naturally evolved from the past. These transgressive narrative techniques point to what makes his historical interventions queer, aligning his theatrical use of historical discourse with the other queer variables argued throughout the greater thesis.

In the following pages I would like to examine each play individually in order to expose how each puts a particular dramatic pressure on different aspects of historical writing. I will begin with *Mutabilitie* (1997) in order to expose McGuinness's historical inventiveness which, in this play, re-imagines the troubled and complex relationship between Ireland and England through unconventional gender casting and hints of Shakespeare's alleged 'homosexuality.' *Mary and Lizzie* (1989) will serve as a bridge between *Mutabilitie* and *Innocence* (1986), as this play provides insight into how drama itself can embody ideological uncertainties in historical narrative construction. *Mary and Lizzie* will take my argument beyond the 'reality' of plot, with all its political inferences, and into an exploration of how McGuinness's work grapples with theatrical design, or *mise en scène*, in order to reflect modern debates around the issue of the construction of

[2] Ibid., p.89.

history and its effect on women. Finally, I analyse how in *Innocence* McGuinness does not simply use the past haphazardly to conveniently support his agenda for the present, but rather, remains true to the historical context of his subject, and uses that same context to raise awareness of the effects of history on homosexuality, modern society, and culture. Each of these plays confrontationally represents fictional subjects of the past in order to dissolve notions of continuity which hold Western history in place. Instead of confirming old relationships, McGuinness creates tertiary biographies which confuse and dislocate historical certainties by resurrecting personalities from the past and allowing them to act out unfamiliar, staged realities. These unfamiliar realities question notions of a fixed past, and favour a theatrical version of the past based on mutability. In turn, this perspective offers potential for ideological flexibility in the present.

Mutabilitie premièred at the Royal National Theatre in London in November 1997, and was the first production directed by the new high-profile artistic director of the National, Trevor Nunn. The play is set in Ireland, in the Province of Munster, at Kilcolman Castle, the home of the English poet and British civil servant, Edmund Spenser. The history of the period is characterised by a shift in the political strategy the English employed in their management and control of Ireland. This gubernatorial adjustment produced a rivalry between what was known as the *New English* versus the *Old English* occupational strategies. The rivalry between these two factions and their colonial styles of government was rooted in the accusation asserted by the *New English* that the *Old English* in Ireland "had so degenerated by contact, marriage and fosterage with Gaelic society that Ireland's 'chiefest abuses' are grown from the English, and the

English that were are much more lawless and licentious than the very wild Irish."[3] *Mutabilitie* offers a fictional glimpse at the person of Edmund Spenser who, perhaps, was the most conservative and reactionary English civil servant in Ireland during the Elizabethan era.

In 1596 Spenser had written a political and cultural tract on Ireland titled *View of the Present State of Ireland* in which he recommended a more widespread and militaristic plan for colonisation. Spenser's tract "coldly advocated a policy of general starvation, wholesale expropriation and ruthless transplantation of the natives"[4] in order to simultaneously disempower the English who had gone 'native,' secure the interests of the conservative Queen Elizabeth, and implement her Tudor strategy for aggressive maintenance of a unified state. McGuinness shrewdly weaves a narrative of fact and fiction through the play in order to explore more complex aspects of this period in Irish history; a period which saw the end of Irish rule in Ireland, and the spread of tighter English political intervention on the island; a colonial era which continues to effect the attitudes and politics of the island today.

In *Mutabilitie* McGuinness attempts to create a general theatrical impression of Ireland during the Spencer period, and does so by depicting a fictionalised collision of three separate and distinct groups which, in a rather stereotypical way, represent political differences between Ireland and England. First, there are those who inhabit the castle itself: Spenser, his wife Elisabeth, their children and their servants. The second group is associated with the castle through the servants, The File (an Irish poet) and Hugh, both of whom belong to the native, and rather feral, Irish population living in the forest

[3] Steven G. Ellis, *Ireland in the Age of The Tudors, 1447-1603: English Expansion and the End of Gaelic Rule*. London: Longman, 1998, p.326
[4] Ibid.,p.333.

surrounding Kilcolman Castle. Hugh is the son of the now senile and politically defeated High King of Ireland, Sweney, and his wife Maeve. The File and Hugh move back and forth between the inside and the outside worlds of English colonisation and Irish dispossession. The third group is made up of a trio of opportunistic theatre practitioners seeking fortune in Ireland. The group consists of Richard and Ben who have followed their colleague, William Shakespeare, across the Irish Sea. McGuinness ties together the disparate Irish and English in this play by introducing this third group and, thus, creating a common ground on which all sides can meet: poetry and drama. The arrival of the thespians in Ireland serves as the opening for the play, and sets a tempestuous and rather ominous tone for the unravelling of the plot:

> *A patch of light in a forest.*
> **Ben** This is Ireland. We are in it. We are alive, breathing the air of Ireland, unknown, unwanted, unloved. The air though is sweet, so maybe it bids us welcome. I love air, don't you? Where would we be without it?
> **Richard** Dead.
> *William groans loudly.*
> I think William is dying.
> **Ben** I think William deserves to die. He brought us here.
> *There is a faint beat of drums.*
> Oh dear, is that thunder? That's all we need. William sick, you sulking, and now rain.
> **Richard** It didn't rain last night. It should have.
> **Ben** Taking an axe to the stage was a bit much. Really, I was prepared for the passionate Irish, and I can handle a rowdy audience, but I'm not prepared to sacrifice my life –
> *The drumbeats intensify.*[5] (1)

The opening of the play points towards the theatricality of the piece itself by giving the 'actors' of Shakespeare's company the first lines. In the style of the storyteller, Ben begins pedantically framing the play, explicitly pointing out the location, and reflexively questioning the place of the artist in the politics of the nation. He begins

[5] Frank McGuinness, *Mutabilitie*. London: Faber and Faber, 1997. All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this edition.

with 'We are alive, breathing the air of Ireland, unknown, unwanted and unloved.' This sentence is ambiguous enough to cast doubt on whether he is referring to himself and his aesthetic companions, or to Ireland and its relationship to England: unknown, unwanted, unloved. It is important to remember that this play was first created for, and performed in front of, a London audience at the Cottesloe Theatre at the Royal National. Just as I asserted in Chapter One in relation to The Abbey Theatre, The Royal National frames a production in a more political way by its position in both the psyche of the nation, and the expectations of its audiences for it to address issues of national interest. The opening dialogue establishes how McGuinness will theatrically engage the relationship between Ireland and England, and immediately puts into question issues of the position of the artist/playwright in the historical dialogue between these two islands. By focusing on poets like Spenser, Shakespeare, and The File, McGuinness is directly inserting a consciousness of himself as artist and writer into the play. In so doing, he transparently exposes both the role of the artist in the shaping of history, and the process of writing itself, whereas in the plays mentioned in previous chapters he has veiled his own creative prerogative, his own 'tampering' with history, through less obvious artistic associations.

Ben, Richard, and William were evidently involved in a production in England the previous evening, before the action of *Mutabilitie* begins, in which an axe was taken to the stage and the audience became quite rowdy, at which point the actors lives were put into danger so they fled the country. McGuinness sets forth from the beginning the dangers of theatrical fictional representations, and the fickle nature of audience reception. Perhaps this is a forewarning to the contemporary audience that they may or may not like what they are about to see brought to life before their eyes.

Mutabilitie received different reception on either side of the Irish Sea, which further serves to illustrate the political nature of McGuinness's theatrical engagement with characters and events which have unfolded with a confident sense of certainty in both the Irish and the English traditional historical memory. The building intensity of the beating drums in the opening scene, combined with the threatening storm approaching the fragmented and injured members of this company of thespians, creates a portentous atmosphere which forewarns of dangerous imaginings to come. By reflexively acknowledging its own theatrical power to disrupt and threaten, *Mutabilitie* confesses its queer dramatic intention to intervene in history, an intervention which seeks to create a new space to engage a critical moment in Irish and English history. The play aligns itself with Foucault's *effective histories* in its interventionist strategy which attempts to deconstruct traditional histories, refusing the transparency of simply writing a new narrative to replace the old, but instead points towards its dramatic fictionality unapologetically. As with *Carthaginians*, the theatre is framed within the production, and thus serves as an imaginative space which exposes its own constructedness in order to create an ideological non-space within historical debates. This self-conscious awareness of performance and theatrical fiction stakes out an inventive space, a space which distinguishes itself from the 'real' space of history in order to creatively mangle the plot. The three groups which McGuinness brings together in this play are, after all, spearheaded by three poets; Spenser, The File, and William Shakespeare, all of whom implement imagination and fiction in their interpretations of life, and further contribute to the creative impulse to re-imagine, which this play embodies.

Mutabilitie was poorly received at its London première. It is particularly interesting to see how the 'Irishness' of the piece was foregrounded in the critical rationalisation of its failure to deliver an acceptable theatrical version of the historical past. *The Financial Times* theatre critic Alastair Mcaulay on 22 November 1997 titled his review of *Mutabilitie*, "Blarney About The Bard;" the review by Charles Spenser of *The Daily Telegraph* was titled "Bard Dragged In To A Load of Blarney;" and Roger Foss of *What's On* describes how he felt Trevor Nunn "ought to have taken a shillelagh"[6] to some of McGuinness's indulgences within the play. The use of pejorative and patronising cliché 'Irish' expressions such as 'blarney' and 'shillelagh' serve as ethnically demeaning anecdotes through which these critics systematically attack the production and the inconsistencies of its historical narrative, especially in relation to its treatment of the beloved national icon, Shakespeare. Charles Spenser, referring to Trevor Nunn's choice of the play for his second production as the new artistic director of The Royal National writes, "For his second trick he has chosen to stage at the Cottesloe the première of Frank McGuinness's incredibly turgid Irish allegory, *Mutabilitie*, one of the worst new plays by a major dramatist in recent memory."[7] He goes on to describe the play as "hapless" and McGuinness himself as possessed by the spirit of a "ranting wildman." Roger Foss apparently found the production so incredulous that he states, "it wouldn't come as a surprise if Shaun Davey's folksy Emerald Isle song were to suddenly segue into a chorus of 'How Are Things in Glocca Morra.'" Robert Gore-Langton of *The Daily Express* wrote "Not even Trevor Nunn can help this cartload of Celtic rubbish from

[6] Roger Foss, "Mutabilitie" in *What's On 53*, 26 November 1997, p.26.
[7] Charles Spenser, "Bard Dragged in to a Load of Blarney" in *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 November 1997, p.10.

the distinguished playwright Frank McGuinness."[8] The critical disappointment with the production is linked inextricably to the Irishness of its author, and, thus, its historical imagination is doubly discredited for its outlandishness.

The Royal National's production of the play did reflect the type of clichéd Irishness which the critics picked up. The set was an awkward attempt at a naturalistic ancient Irish castle, and the untamed landscape which would have surrounded it. There was a running stream through the centre of the set which, although technically impressive, made the set difficult to use for the actors. The Cottesloe Theatre at the National is a black-box studio space, which created an almost claustrophobic environment because of the sheer size of the set. Beyond the technical problems created by a visually impressive, yet practically problematic, set design was the general aesthetic of the direction. The Irish characters reflected a type of New Age Celtic mysticism in the ethereal way in which they spoke and moved on the stage to the ever-present background music of Irish wind instruments, an affectation which, I argue, neutralised the political violence that *Mutabilitie* reflects in its action. Overall, the production seemed to be designed on the marketability of its 'Irishness' for a largely non-Irish audience, riding the wave of popular Irish entertainment which reinforces a sort of modern stage-Irishness which is Celtic, spiritual and politically removed from the reality of the violence which has characterised the island for centuries. The oversized set seemed to reflect how large the geographical place of Ireland is in the English psyche while, simultaneously, the etherealised characterisations of the Irish and Irishness in the production defused any honest re-engagement with the moment of history McGuinness attempts to revisit in this play.

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[8] Robert Gore Langton, "Mutabilitie" in *Daily Express*, 25 November 1997, p.7.

The English reviews of the play often express a discomfort with the extent to which McGuinness requires flexibility of historical imagination as a precondition for his audiences. John Gross of *The Sunday Telegraph* states, "McGuinness asks us to accept that Shakespeare made his way to Ireland;"[9] Terri Paddock of *What's On Magazine* writes,

> Assuming you can swallow the idea that Shakespeare visited Ireland at all, of which – no surprise- there's no historical evidence, you'll have the opportunity to chew on some even more alarming fat about the bard. Shakespeare the closet Catholic, Shakespeare the idiot ("he's never had a thought in his head" says one of the actors in his band), Shakespeare the fraud (he's only allowed stay because he writes down what we say"), Shakespeare the meowing homosexual (he allegedly has a feline fixation), Shakespeare the aspiring civil servant (he wants to chuck in playwriting for service to the queen) or perhaps most preposterous of all, Shakespeare the messiah. The evil-looking Irish seer, known as The File (Aisling O'Sullivan), believes that Shakespeare, through his magical English invention called 'theatre,' can raise the Irish dead and bring the war-torn country back to life. A tall order for a man who can't even write his own Hamlet.[10]

Paddock's criticism, combined with the following segment from the aforementioned article by Alastair Macauly, reveals an unease with the historical liberty McGuinness has taken with *Mutabilitie*: "None of the characters are real, and each of them keeps doing things for mere theatrical effect."[11] The failed expectation of 'historical authenticity,' and its corollary 'reality,' disorients the reviewers, and produces great anxiety about McGuinness's fictionalisation of Shakespeare. Paddock does not seem to be able to decide which is more offensive, the fact that he went to Ireland, the fact that he was gay, or the fact that he was Catholic. The unreality of McGuinness's representation serves to infect deep-felt traditional knowledges of exactly what Shakespeare means to English

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[9] John Gross, "Synthetic Cynicism and Hard-Boiled Honky-Tonk" in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 23 November 1997, p.19.
[10] Terrie Paddock, "Mutabilitie" in *What's On*, November 1997, p.27.
[11] Alastair Macauly, "Blarney About the Bard" in *The Financial Times*, 22 November 1997, p12.

identity with a sort of queer defective version of imagination, the effect of which resulted in vicious, and ethnic critical responses.

McGuinness aligns himself, once again, with Foucauldian *effective histories* as his dramatic version of history abruptly dispossesses the certainties of traditional histories and discloses bewildering perspectives. Foucault claims that "History has a more important task than to be a handmaiden of philosophy, to recount the necessary birth of truth and values; it should become a differential knowledge of energies and failings, heights and degenerations, poisons and antidotes. Its task is to become a more curative science."[12] McGuinness's fictional characterisations could thus be interpreted as counter-ideological dramatisations which poison solidified notions of Englishness embedded in the historical and national memory of who Shakespeare is in the English psyche. Shakespeare's sexual orientation could then be understood as a strategical tool in character representation employed to apply pressure to congested notions of identity: an issue I will treat in depth shortly. Could it be interpreted, thus, as surprising that an Irish playwright such as McGuinness would be considered a foreign trespasser on what is sacrosanct about English identity, as he audaciously poisons the 'Bard' with an identity which exceeds the boundaries of what 'Shakespeare' has been discursively shaped into being for the English? In this sense, McGuinness queers the idea of 'Shakespeare' in much the same way that he does Irish identity in *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*.

As I have argued throughout, in any queer theatrical project seeking an anti-essentialist representation of identity, dramatic realism is devalued in favour of a more illusive aesthetic which allows for multiple interpretations. Linear narrative and

[12] Foucault, p.88.

chronological consistency allow the conditions by which fixed essentialist positions can be validated and reconfirmed; whereby disruption of plot and confusion of time sequence serve any dramatic project which aims at reconfiguring inflexible intellectual or political positions. In many ways, this tension between essentialist and anti-essentialist issues of ideology and identity serve to explain the difference between the reception of *Mutabilitie* in Ireland and England.

Mutabilitie opened in Dublin in September 2000 at the Samuel Beckett Theatre, Trinity College. The play was produced by the Irish theatre group, The Theatreworks Company, and was directed by the company's artistic director Michael Caven. In contrast to the critical failure that the play was in London, the Dublin theatre critics received the play with enthusiasm. The Irish critic Emer O'Kelly wrote, "*Mutabilitie* at the Samuel Beckett Centre in Trinity is a Theatreworks production and it is quite simply breathtaking."[13] David Nowlan of *The Irish Times* admits that the play is dense and requires a great deal of focus and attention, "But it's well worth seeing by anyone who wishes to experience a genuine theatrical imagination at work."[14] The issue of why the play was received so differently on each side of the Irish Sea is more than simply a difference of taste, but rather touches directly on what makes this play queer in its defective version of historical imagination; it speaks a familiar enough story in a disquieting, and consequently disruptive, way through plot and character.

Joe Jackson uncovers some of the ideological tensions which exist in the shared, but differently perceived or interpreted, history between Ireland and England. Touching again on many of the British critics concerns with the play he begins by stating, "So what

[13] Emer O'Kelly, "Spellbound By This Faerie Epic" in *The Sunday Independent*, 10 September 2000, p.10L.
[14] David Nowlan, "Mutabilitie" in *The Irish Times* 8 September 2000, p.12.

is worse? The suggestion that William Shakespeare was 'queer' or bisexual or the notion that he may have been a Catholic?"[15] But Jackson's supplementary query serves to highlight an ethnic twist which *Mutabilitie* offered its audiences when performed in another country. He continues, "What about the idea that all British people should feel responsible for the tyrannisation of Ireland for 800 years? Or the counterview: that the souls of the British were eroded by their history of colonisation?"[16] Jackson goes on in his piece to interview Michael Caven, and includes some of Caven's own insights into the variable reception of the play in England and Ireland. Caven describes one of the possible reasons for the severe difference in critical and popular opinion was "the fact that they (the British audiences) didn't know Irish history." This is a very important factor in placing McGuinness's work within the historical project of Foucault's *effective histories*. As previously mentioned, effective histories do not seek to establish alternative narratives aimed at dislocating mainstream histories, but rather, they seek to expose the discursive processes by which these stories become canonical and, ultimately, unquestionable facts in collective national memory. The very framing of the fictionality and theatricality of McGuinness's play, which I have argued takes place within the opening moments of the drama, forewarns a creative confrontation with dominant histories, a strategy which in turn seeks to confront histories of dominance which continue to haunt the ideological and political relationship between Ireland and England.

What then does McGuinness do in *Mutabilitie* to expose the process of how history has been told? Christopher Murray describes McGuinness's work as one which

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[15] Joe Jackson, "Mistaken Identity" in *Hot Press*, 27 September 2000, p.3.
[16] Ibid.

"likes to introduce and deconstruct stereotypes,"[17] and he describes *Mutabilitie* as an "Irish history play" inspired by the uniquely Shakespearean genre. Murray asserts that in this play McGuinness portrays the two cultures as rivals, but also as equals. Edmund Spenser and his household are represented as tortured by their exile in service of the crown. Spenser "has written his great national epic, *The Faerie Queen*, and now seems in mental turmoil because the native population has suffered too much."[18] In his characterisation, and the natural liberties which come with fictional representation for the stage, McGuinness takes artistic licence by portraying Spenser as "a guilty representative of colonialist oppression,"[19] a queer dramaturgical alternative to the more ruthless archetypal legacy of the poet and statesman painted by traditional histories. McGuinness ultimately makes him a sympathetic character in his regret and remorse. But, McGuinness's portrayal of the Irish poet The File takes an even greater historical liberty by overturning conventional gender restrictions in ancient Irish history. By imaging The File as a woman, McGuinness blatantly defies "a patriarchal tradition in the Irish academy. Gaelic poets were officially male."[20] Perhaps, had the shared knowledge of history been sufficiently equal in both London and Dublin the English audiences may have recognised this trans-national violation of historical integrity which effectively and defiantly overturned both traditions through theatrical liberty; furthering the self-conscious construction (or destruction) that this play never attempts to deny. The resultant effect of such authorial tailoring in representation is to "introduce a possibility

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[17] Christopher Murray, "Of *Mutabilitie*" in *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002, p.162.
[18] Ibid., p.166.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

which conflicts with what otherwise stands as unalterable history."[21] *Mutabilitie*, subsequently, subtly engages the certainties of both Irish and English national historical memory, using the stage to ruse history with an alternative gender/sexuality discourse in order to effect alternative models of relationality from both the English *and* the Irish archives of history.

A reading of *Mutabilitie* such as this seeks also to uncover the dramaturgical processes. McGuinness's engagement with history in this play is highly imaginative and hopeful in its creative possibilities. If the beginning of the play announces a theatrical hijacking of history, the end envisions an equally synthetic idealisation of the future. As the play unfolds, the two actors travelling with William are killed by their Irish captors, while William, who had been protected by Spenser, has subsequently been nursed back to health in the relative safety of the castle. However, at the end of the play the castle is burned and Spenser and his family are forced to flee. Spenser's son has been lost in the chaos and is found wandering in the forest by the disenfranchised Irish rebels:

> *Niall enters, leading a bedraggled, terrified Child by the hand.*
> **Niall** Look what the forest has found.
> *Silence. The Child recognises the File and Hugh.*
> **Child** Are you our servants?
> **Hugh** Aye, your servants.
> **Child** You were kind.
> **File** Kind.
> **Annas** Why are you lost in the forest, child? (100)

The Child goes on to describe how he got separated from his parents in the chaos, and was abandoned for dead as he ran away and hid, out of fear of the flames. The Irish continue:

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[21] Ibid.

Annas We have a child.
Niall An English child.
Donal A hostage.
Hugh We have a child. He is to be fostered as our own, and natured like his own, as decreed by our laws, our customs, our religion. (100-101)

Here McGuinness brings his engagement and reversal of stereotypes to a crafted conclusion. As is true for much of his work, his exposure of stereotypes and binary opposites is geared towards a desire for reconciliation, an issue I will focus on in my final chapter. The child represents the hybrid reality of the English and the Irish cultures, regardless of the ethnic imbalances and inferences which still characterise the relationship between the two nations. Although the play is epic in its historical reference, and heavily weighted with the politics of the affairs of state, topics which are further complicated by the question of theatre's dramatic engagement with these issues, the liberty of its historical imagination frames its opening and its closing scenes, confessing to its fiction and its invention.

The play itself is dramaturgically crafted to guide audiences through the turbulent connections which characterise the ongoing relationship between Ireland and England, and much less to reflect factual representations of political realities. In ACT TWO, SCENE THREE, McGuinness's dialogue reveals the emotional complexity of both sympathy and hatred which has historically bound the two countries together. This scene is set "*Early in the morning in both the forest and the castle*" (39), locations which represent Irishness and Englishness respectively. The dialogue is a symphony of individual voices and choral sections both spoken and sung. McGuinness weaves the voices together in this scene; Irish and English voices which are mourning for loss of home. In so doing he blends sympathies, and artistically represents the suffering which

both countries have experienced in their mutual history. In a sense, history is emotionalised in this scene, and a place is created where oppositional voices unite in bereavement. One side's pain is no greater than the other's as the audience is forced by the fractured choral-like dialogue to abandon clear cognitive understandings of individual stories to the power of a symphonic emotional poetic dialogue that finds common ground in the human experience of loss and suffering. McGuinness seems to be creating a dramatic moment through which both sides of this historical binary can admit their grief, and find some solidarity in their suffering. His queer historiography, in a Foucauldian sense, dramaturgically exposes the profusion of discourse and power below the surface of unified histories which simply describe the 'winners' and the 'losers.'

Perhaps *Mutabilitie* enjoyed greater success in Ireland as a result of the nature of Michael Caven's production. The play was performed on a set which left more to the imagination than it did to create the specifics of place. The Irish production was also much more violent. Spenser and his family were trapped by their civility, and the Irish who surrounded them were portrayed as insidious and dangerous, as opposed to ethereal and contemporarily New Age Celtic. This, however, is not to say that the Irish were portrayed more sympathetically. In fact, the Royal National Theatre's production reflected a much more palatable representation of Irishness for both Irish and non-Irish alike, postponing the violence and hatred which the Irish have historically used as their weapon against the coloniser for centuries. In this sense, Caven's production, although scenically unrealistic, touched closer to the tumultuous emotional realism of national relations that seems to lie at the centre of the play. It could also indicate the positive

influence of McGuinness's non-naturalistic style, form, and structure on Irish audience perception by the year 2000, eighteen years after his first play *The Factory Girls*.

But how do McGuinness's fictional engagements with historical characters seek to achieve the type of political resolutions and broader queer cultural understandings I have suggested his drama strives to effect? The post-modern theories of Jean-Francois Lyotard's *narrative imagination* shed some interesting light onto just how McGuinness's 'defective' versions of the past are actually appealing for more effective versions of history. Like Foucault, Lyotard argues against any totalising knowledge or perspective. Rather, he asserts multiple truths in his basic belief that knowledge is perspectival and, consequently, he supports a variety of small stories rather than a grand narrative such as defended by traditional history. Lyotard "argues that the ultimate reference of every narrative is not some totalising reality but *other narratives*; and he thereby proposes to deflate the time honoured metaphysical claim to a concept of *identity* subjugating *differences*."[22] *Mutabilitie* quite clearly works on this level as it suppresses a grand narrative, and opts instead for the shared perspective of three main groups within the structure and plot of the drama. Although the characters of Spenser, Shakespeare, The File, and Hugh, and additionally the mythical characters Maeve and Sweney, all function as individual protagonists or antagonist in their 'real-life' historical legacy, McGuinness disrupts any individual memory from dominating the action of the drama and decides on multiple voices speaking in an imaginative symphony in order to stimulate notions of similarity *through* difference. Instead of settling for the traditional perspective of recognising each of these stories as independent grand narratives, McGuinness chooses a

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[22] Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988, p.204.

medley of stories in order to destabilise the historical impulse to compartmentalise and hierarchically prioritise recorded history and its actors.

But how exactly does Lyotard's theory of narrative imagination actually differ from the already argued multi-perspectival position of Foucault's *effective histories*? Lyotard's work sheds interesting light on many of McGuinness's historical projects because of his ideological connections between multiple narratives and a strategy for justice. This differs from Foucault in the sense that its concentration is on directly achieving a change, rather than simply analysing systems of thought, but it also shows how queer theories and post-modern theories blend and complement one another. Lyotard rejects the idea of a meta-narrative which supports all other narratives, i.e. traditional history, because this supreme story, by the very nature of its status, then seeks to subordinate all other stories and order them in a hierarchy of significance. McGuinness's own refusal of a singular protagonist similarly represents an imaginative variety of political positions at a pivotal point in Irish history, and by so doing he simultaneously postpones a moral judgement on this era, which has served as the axis for negative relationships between England and Ireland for centuries. Where history supports a *consensus* Lyotard credits the imagination in fiction as stimulating *dissensus*. This type of narrative structural perspective contributes to a queer reading of these plays in its disruption of essentialised versions of the past. The critical response to *Mutabilitie* illustrates how McGuinness created his own queer fictional dissensus, using the theatre as a strategy to try to effect historical justice by displacing historical discourse on gender, sexuality and politics.

In his book *Poetics of Imagining* Richard Kearney illustrates how Lyotard's narrative imagination aims its disturbance at hegemonic institutions in the quest for justice:

> Lyotard describes this narrative imagination – committed to ethical judgements – as 'impious'. By this he means a refusal of the piety of absolutist politics: a piety embodies not just in tradition-bound monarchies but more subtly in the modern ideologies which legitimate the power of the Nation-State. In short, piety refers to those institutions and ideologies which totalise, and thereby suppress, differences.[23]

Lyotard's theory helps to make the connection between the fiction of McGuinness's drama and its dissident justice orientation, which I describe as queer throughout this project. Lyotard legitimises small fictional stories, like the theatrical re-imaginings of McGuinness, by claiming that they stimulate the imagination and ultimately serve to erode the "tyranny of Grand Narrative"[24] which suppresses difference and marginalises the non-normative.

Since Lyotard was primarily interested in attacking the Marxist Science of History, his work creates an ideological bridge between *Mutabilitie* and *Mary and Lizzie*. *Mary and Lizzie* premièred at The Pit at the Barbican in London on 27 September 1989, directed by Mary Pia Anderson. This play was written by McGuinness, but in the published version of the text he acknowledges, "the assistance of all who participated in the workshop on *Mary and Lizzie*, organised by the RSC at Stratford-upon-Avon in July 1988."[25] The play is about the Irish sisters Mary and Lizzy Burns who lived in the city of Manchester in England during the 1840s with the writer Fredrick Engels while he was composing his Marxist treatise *The Condition of the Working Class in England.* And yet,

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[23] Ibid., p.206.
[24] Ibid., p. 205.
[25] Frank McGuinness, *Frank McGuinness: Plays 2.* London: Faber and Faber, 2002, p.5. All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this edition.



Mary and Lizzie, Smashing Times Theatre, Dublin, 1991. Directed by Jo Mangan. Mary Linehan as Mary, Rita Hamill as Lizzie, and Margaret Twomey as Mother. Photograph by Isabelled Surrey, with permission.

the play transcends time and space as the two sisters travel through various historical eras and geographical locations in a supernatural dreamlike voyage of the imagination. "*Mary and Lizzie* is a truly subversive play, revolutionary in its pithy, exact portrayal of a new, utterly Irish, indomitability, achieving its freedom by discarding all the myths and the mess of ideological propaganda (Irish and English) that are often believed to be inexorably shaping the Irish consciousness."[26] In form and content it is fluid and fantastic, thus allowing it to elude the strict boundaries of historical limitation.

In *The Feast of Famine* Eamonn Jordan describes the movement of the play scene by scene:

> The Opening Scene of the play takes place amid the 'Women of the Trees'. The Second Scene positions the two sisters...in an exchange with Mother Ireland. The Third and Fourth Scenes take place in the underworld. The Fifth Scene offers an imaginary meeting of the sisters with Queen Victoria. The Sixth Scene presents Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels in bed together. The Seventh Scene shows the two sisters escorting Engels through the social underworld of the Manchester working classes. The Eighth Scene offers a dinner party, and the Final Scene takes place in a visionary future.[27]

This complex play uses similar devices of historical liberty in character development and interaction as *Mutabilitie* but, perhaps most significantly, it unapologetically transgresses boundaries of time and place within the dramatic confines of the play, consequently effecting a much more obvious dialogue between the past and the present. The temporal movement of the sisters through the ages is complimented by their trek between the 'real world' (the places where they encounter the historical personages recognisable to the audience such as Queen Victoria or Marks and Engels), the mystical space of the underworld, and the imaginative futuristic place of a world yet unknown.

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[26] Richard Allen Cave, 'J'Accuse – McGuinness: Stage and Screen, *Theatre Ireland* 21 December, 1989, pp. 58-62.
[27] Jordan, p.123.

Although the play is fragmented, and refuses a linear projection of actual time and space, the sisters act as a mobile and temporally flexible dramaturgical tool to apply pressure to concepts of historical continuity. While the scenes appear to create a decentred universe the characters of Mary and Lizzie serve as representatives of how ideas move through time and space. While the other characters, imaginative, mythical or historically documented, remain confined to their own scene in the montage of queer 'realities' that this play represents, Mary and Lizzie themselves are itinerant; suggesting that particular, if not obscure, voices from traditional history can be creative ways to articulate a relationship between the past and the present. Toward the end of the play Mary speaks of this past/present dialogical juxtaposition:

> **Mary** Is anyone listening?
> *Silence.*
> Is there one to hear me?
> *Silence.*
> Fredrick, when I call, will you come to me?
> *Silence.*
> Are you not there? I have something to tell you. I remember you. And you will be remembered, because you loved the earth and loved me, little knowing either. I will be remembered by a line in your life. Fredrick Engels lived with two Irish women, Mary and Lizzie Burns. Little does that tell. Little do they know. Little did we know. You'll fail, but you'll be forgiven, for you loved and love forgives. Forgive? Love forgets. Forget Fredrick. Forget Karl. Forget Jenny. Forget Lizzie. Forget Mary. Their hearts were human, beating, and I hear mine, breaking. The heart, Jesus, the human heart, beating, breaking. (74)

This section of dialogue illustrates the tension between voices from the past and voices from the present. The character of Mary reveals a previous knowledge of what has been said about the 'real-life' person of Mary Burns in history, and also what has been said about the other characters. McGuinness, once again, is directly emphasising the artificiality of his historical representation by allowing the character of Mary a fluidity of identity to match her temporal fluidity throughout the play. Mary is both historical and a-

historical in this dramatic characterisation which combines the living and the dead in an overtly self-conscious fashion.

McGuinness appears to be using the characters of Mary and Lizzie as embodied queer dramatic voices that interrogate issues of knowledge and the past. At the top of SCENE TWO, titled "THE EARTH OPENS," Lizzie explains the historical purgatory that she and Mary are subject to:

> **Lizzie** They say long ago in this world there were two women, Mary and Lizzie Burns. Why were they in this world? To wander it. Wander through time, through place, for that was their way, their story. This is the telling of Mary and Lizzie, and the way they walked through lives together. (16)

It would seem that the virtual silence in recorded history which envelopes these two women is the impetus for the play, as McGuinness invokes their spirits to tell their story of wandering. Perhaps it is the apparent contradiction of the fact that although the Burns sisters lived with Frederick Engels, they were Irish, and his observations of nineteenth-century Irish people living in Manchester England were less than flattering. Historical curiosity about the nature of the unconventional sexual relationship between these two Irish sisters and the apparently anti-Irish Engels generates a queer historical curiosity that this play simultaneously embodies and interrogates.

In SCENE EIGHT, titled 'DINNER WITH KARL AND JENNY,' McGuinness imagines Engels, the Burns sisters, Jenny and Karl Marx gathered in the Marx's apartment for an evening meal. Jenny is immediately hostile to the sisters, and questions why they would be interested in living with Engels:

> **Jenny** ...Have you heard how he talks about you? Have you seen what he's written?
> **Mary** We don't read.
> **Lizzie** He's never mentioned our name.
> **Jenny** He's named your race however. Do you think he loves you? Listen to

> *The Condition of the Working Class*. This extract is so amusing. 'Drink is the only thing which makes the Irishmen's life worth living. His crudity which places him little above the savage, his filth and poverty, all favour drunkenness. The temptation is great, he cannot resist it, and so when he has money he gets rid of it down his throat.' (*Laughs loudly.*) Forgive me, it is so amusing. You would agree there is some truth in it... (64)

This piece of dialogue, along with the other two sections noted above, illustrate what is unique about the historical *mise en scène*[28] which this play presents to its audiences. Although the audience is asked to see the characters of Mary and Lizzie as representing the historical reality of the two 'real life' sisters, the dialogue, the a-historical nature by which the sisters move through time, and the non-realistic, often times surrealistic, settings of each scene establish a rhetorical relationship with this historical theatrical exploration of lives lived in the past. The sisters in this play both testify to their historical personages, and, simultaneously, witness themselves and what has been said about them; they tell their story by their physical presence, and listen to it by self-reference and attention to what the other actors have to say about them. McGuinness would appear to be concurrently exploring the master narrative of history and self-consciously watching the construction of his own queries and questions about how the theatre engages collective memory. The play, thus, embodies a complex dialectic which self-consciously exposes the experimental nature of dramatic historical representation of subjectivities in an even more methodical fashion then he did in *Mutabilitie*. This dialogue literally performs the idea that history is itself a discourse ideologically fashioned by the creator of the narrative, and perpetually re-enacted by those who accept its information through time.

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[28] The term '*mise en scène*' is taken from Patrice Pavis's book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1992, and is defined as "the bringing together of or confrontation, in a given space and time, of different signifying systems, for an audience," p.24.

In his book *Performing History: Theatrical Representation of the Past* Freddie Rokem explores the theatrical device in representing history of the actor as both *presenter of*, and *witness to* the past. He suggests that the energies of acting are the aesthetic embodiment of history, "making it possible for the spectators to 'read' the energies of the stage metaphorically, as a sort of displacement or transposition of that historical past."[29] He contends that by showing these energies of the past on stage the actor becomes what he calls a 'hyper-historian:' "In presenting or demonstrating the event, this hyper-historian becomes painfully 'present' at the event itself, carrying the mimetic force of the theatrical event as it is presented on the stage in a Stanislavskian mode of 'as if.'"[30] Rokem's theory highlights the rhetorical nature of McGuinness's placement of Mary and Lizzie as both actors and witnesses in the play. By making the sisters 'painfully' present to the derogatory references to the Irish in the quoted section of Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class*, as well as the general degradation by Jenny throughout that complex and confrontational scene, McGuinness would appear to be asking questions of history; as if to speak to the historical memory of the Burns sisters and ask them why they would have been with a man who had such negative opinions of, as Jenny puts it, their 'race'?

Rokem asserts that the actor-as-witness, in the type of theatre that engages history, can serve as a possible source of catharsis. He admits that this device is not "exclusive to the genre of performing history"[31] but, that used within the general *mise en scène* of the play, it can serve "as a filter through which the 'truth' about the past can be

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[29] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000, p.201.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., p.203.

examined and critiqued."[32] If this can be accepted then the question of what McGuinness is examining or critiquing is important. The play most certainly strives to articulate the voices of women[33] through the ages, using the obscurity of reference to the Burns sisters as a starting place. The trans-historical technique of the play does eventually deposit the audience in the future. The final scene, SCENE NINE, titled 'WHERE,' is the scene from which I took the aforementioned section of dialogue in which Mary begins by asking the question, "Is anyone listening?" (74). The following dialogue points towards the catharsis McGuinness appears to be seeking in this play:

> **Mother** Why are you here?
> **Mary** I died, Ma.
> **Mother** What from?
> **Mary** Heart.
> **Mother** Pity about you.
> **Mary** Pity.
> **Mother** I suppose you're looking for something. You wouldn't be here if you weren't.
> **Mary** What am I going to do?
> **Mother** You can't come in here. I've just cleaned it. You're going back to life. I'll come with you for the laugh. Don't argue with me. I miss the earth. Where's Lizzie? (75)

Rokem asserts that the catharsis brought about by the actor-as-witness technique usually translates thematically into "pity and fear."[34] Although, in his queer fictional representations McGuinness overturns traditional economies of power, and gives Mary and Lizzie more authority than conventional histories, which infer their racial and sexual submission, have previously done. But ultimately he opts for a resigned sympathy for the endless plight that voiceless women have in history rather than a fictionalised re-writing

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[32] Ibid.
[33] For a detailed feminist reading of the play see Eamonn Jordan, *The Feast of Famine*, p.121- 142.
[34] Rokem, p.202.

of oppressive hegemonic systems. The women return to earth to continue their purgatory:

> *Lizzie appears*
> **Mary, Lizzie** *and* **Mother**
> No rest have I, nor liberty,
> For love is lord of all.
> **Mother** Well, so be it.
> **Lizzie** Aye, so be it.
> **Mary** So be it. (76)

Love is why Engels is forgiven by history, and love is why these women are compelled to repeat the past over and over again. McGuinness's catharsis seeks, therefore, not to be revolutionary, but rather raise awareness of the cyclical nature of continual marginalisation of voices of those who live on the fringes of history.

Although the lack of resolution, or the failure to re-write and thus liberate history in this play, seems to disappoint an impulse which would seek to alter dominant histories, I suggest that McGuinness is being true to the *mise en scène* of the play itself. This play rejects resolution because it embodies in its aesthetic the rhetorical nature mentioned previously. It poses questions rather than positing answers, thus aligning itself with the overall objective of queer theory, and my general project of interrogating thought structures more than narrative articulations within McGuinness's drama. In its surrealistic representations it points towards construction rather than fulfilling a plan for imaginative re-construction. It thus aligns itself with Foucault's *effective histories* which expose more than just those people who have been elided by history, "but instead lays bare the *process* and *operations* by which these elisions occurred."[35]

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[35] Jennifer Terry, "Theorizing Deviant Historiography" in *Differences*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Volume 3, Number 2. Providence: Brown University Press, 1990, p.55-73.

Consequently, form and content collide in *Mary and Lizzie* in order to point towards the constructed nature of history rather than resolve historical tensions. Through its manipulation of time, its inverted historical viewpoint (i.e. that of the Burns sister rather than that of Engels), and its self-conscious witnessing, the play points not only towards the instability of narrative, but also the possibilities created by theatrical performance for the creative manipulation of histories. The play's fragmented form combines with its denial of a linear narrative to shape a queer theatrical dramaturgy which embodies many of the ideas of feminist theory and theatrical practice. The feminist theatre scholar Elin Diamond describes the significance of the awareness of the inherent instability of historical narrative for feminism:

> To understand history as a narrative is a crucial move for feminists, not only because it demystifies the idea of disinterested authorship, but because the traditionally subordinate role of women can be seen as the legacy of narrative itself. With its relentless teleology, its ordering of meaning, narrative accrues to itself the power to define and legislate; it is, as Mária Minich Brewer puts it, the 'discourse of authority and legitimation.'[36]

By placing the characters of Mary and Lizzie at the centre of the plot and action in this drama McGuinness inverts the dominant 'actors' in the historical accounts that only touch on the Burns sisters presence, disrupting the teleology of their story by making the more thoroughly documented persons of Marx and Engels stagnant and one-dimensional. Once again he queerly foregrounds issues of gender and sexual identity in his dramaturgy. *Mary and Lizzie* functions as a form of aesthetic resistance to the subordination of women by traditional historical narrative: in its fragmentation, and timelessness, in its dismantling of narrative and refusal of closure, it uses the very inner workings of the performative nature of theatre to indicate the constructed nature of

[36] Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. London: Routledge, 1996, p.143.

history and the particular stories it has chosen to tell. This is another example of how McGuinness uses not only content, but also form to queer traditional knowledges and practices.

Thus far I have explored how McGuinness has used his dramatic fictions to gain a new and unique perspective of the tumultuous historical relationship between England and Ireland, and also to explore the fragility of the project of writing history itself through his dramaturgical *mise en scène*. In both *Mutabilitie* and *Mary and Lizzie* McGuinness is practising a type of theatrical historiography as he attempts to contemporise the past in relationship to the present. Historiography is defined as "the study of history as an intellectual practice, distinct from the 'movement of history' itself. Historiography is concerned not with the past, but with the relationship between the past and the present."[37] In the final section of this chapter I argue how McGuinness's work is not only preoccupied with the intentions of historiography as mentioned above, but is further concerned with deviant or queer aspects of history which serve his overall dramatic desire for reconciliation. I will do so by demonstrating how sexuality, and specifically homosexuality, function as ideological tools in this theatrical project. Using his play *Innocence*, and referring to both *Mutabilitie* and *Mary and Lizzie* I will illustrate how McGuinness's theatrical research into the past makes him what Jennifer Terry would describe as an "archivist of deviance."[38]

In her article "Theorizing Deviant Historiography" Terry attempts to map out a theory of new historiographic practices which seeks to trace hints of deviance from

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[37] Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method" in *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, eds. Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz, David Sutton. London: Hutchinson, 1982, p.8.
[38] Terry, p.60.

historical subjectivities in order to contribute to the conversations of such atypical subjectivities in the present. Her theories are also based on Foucault's *effective history*, but she extends his critique of genealogy to focus on the methods, practices and intentions of the historian himself. This is an extremely interesting way to tie together thematically the three plays I am focusing on in this chapter, and useful in my overall thesis of exposing what is most queer about McGuinness's drama. Terry describes this 'archivist of deviance' as "a reader-against-the-grain who recognizes traces of deviant subjects revealed through conflict in dominant accounts."[39] McGuinness's work as a theatrical archivist is most creative and fictional in his treatment of the incongruity or conflict in the inadequately documented relationship between the Irish Burns sisters, and the poor opinion of their race recorded for posterity by their lover Engels in his book *The Condition of the Working Class*. But *Mutabilitie* and *Innocence* are examples of another project of historiography, focused more specifically on the murmurs of alleged homosexuality which haunt the memory and work of William Shakespeare, and the Italian artist Caravaggio, the central figure in the play *Innocence*. These plays come together in a unique way to make McGuinness a queer archivist of deviance in his dramaturgical method and practice as he searches the past for queer subjectivities to represent theatrically.

Innocence was produced during the Dublin Theatre Festival on 7 October 1986 at the Gate Theatre, and was directed by Patrick Mason. The play is set in post-Renaissance Italy. The subtitle of the play is "*The Life and Death of Michelangelo Merisi,*

[39] Ibid., p.59.

Caravaggio"[40] and it is structured in two acts titled 'LIFE' and 'DEATH.' Despite the biographical promise offered by the subtitle, this play is similar to *Mary and Lizzie* in that it immediately presents a world which defies any naturalistic attempt at specific location. McGuinness offers a montage scene in which all of the characters in the play appear on stage in an oddly choreographed sequence of disjunctive scenarios. The initial stage directions offer a cameo of a world of contradictions brought together in a paradox of dramatic unity which represents the diversity and contradiction which will be the hallmark of the entire play. For the purpose of my argument the extensive opening stage directions are worthwhile presenting:

> *Music, Vespers, Monteverdi.*
> *A circle of characters.*
> *Detached from them,* **Caravaggio** *observes, fingering a skull.* **Lena** *caresses a red cloak, like a child.* **Antonio** *and* **Lucio** *caress each other.* **Whore** *rocks herself to and fro, weeping.* **Cardinal** *recites the offertory from the Tridentine Mass, holding a host.* **Servant** *kneels at Cardinal's feet, with* **Brother**. **Sister** *moves through the circle repeating her prayer.* (205)

McGuinness then takes this disjunctive pastiche scene and transforms it into a surrealistic nightmare:

> *Wrapping the red cloak about herself, Lena moves to comfort whore. Cardinal raises the host in elevation. Servant and Brother fall prostrate before it. Caravaggio raises the skull. Lena tears the red cloak from herself. Sounds resembling the Latin from the Mass start to pass among the characters. The cloak starts to stretch about them. The noises increase, breaking into animal sounds, eventually becoming a horse going mad, as the cloak now moves wildly through the characters...* (205)

This opening sequence is unique in McGuinness's work, and stands out from the other two plays which I have examined in this chapter in how it sets its dramatic tone. Many of the critical responses to *Mutabilitie* and *Mary and Lizzie* complained of the density of the

[40] Frank McGuinness, *Innocence* in Frank *McGuinness: Plays 1*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996, p.201. All subsequent quotations from this play will come from this edition.

narrative information contained within the plays, an informational intensity which, ultimately, they assert, left the audience confused and disappointed. *Innocence*, on the other hand, uses imagery rather than language to set its tone and convey its dramatic intent, a technique he also uses in *The Bird Sanctuary* which I will discuss in my next chapter. Obviously McGuinness is taking his aesthetic cue from the creative genre of fine art based on the life of the legacy of the painter Caravaggio, and consequently he paints his own tableau for the stage.

This dream-like sequence makes transparent the performative quality of this queer theatrical exploration of history. *Innocence* utilises many of the same dramatic qualities of the disruption of 'real' time and 'real' place as *Mary and Lizzie*, but additionally it creates a dramatic visualisation for the principles of discordance, disruption and contradiction which lie below the surface of any queer project. In the opening scene McGuinness draws together traditionally incongruous images, such as the two men kissing and the Cardinal raising the Eucharistic host, in order to support his deviant archival exploration of constructed binaries. Throughout *Innocence* McGuinness continually draws opposites together; he juxtaposes life and death, creativity and destruction, love and hate, light and darkness.

In this play McGuinness's deviant historiography, I argue, is focused in two distinct ways. Through his interest in the work and biography of the post-Renaissance painter Caravaggio McGuinness picks up a queer curiosity for the retrieval and development of hints or allegations of homosexuality in the past in order to effect new understandings in the present. In the following pages I hope to illustrate how, first, he uses the historical rumours of antique versions of what today we call 'homosexuality' to

highlight modern contradictions surrounding gender and sexuality, and second, how this play, although topically unrelated to anything ostensibly 'Irish,' is a theatrical effort geared towards a specifically Irish context.

First, I would like to examine how McGuinness implicates himself in the larger project of homosexual historical archivists of deviance, a queer project which re-examines the under-belly of history in order to uncover what has otherwise been hidden. Jennifer Terry calls this type of historical research '*vengeful countersurveillance*,' a type of investigation of the past "interested in exposing the ways [homosexuals] have been constituted as deviant subjects."[41] Essentially, this type of project aims at developing a history of homosexuality within the greater canon of historical memory. In his fictionalisation of Caravaggio, McGuinness uses the theatre's power of embodiment in order to show his audiences a fictional account of the life of a man who allegedly fits, albeit roughly, into the subjective identity category of the modern 'homosexual.'

The traditional debates surrounding the development of a 'Gay History' are themselves caught up in theoretical binaries. The discussion moves back and forth between essentialist ideologies which assert the universal timelessness of homosexuality and homosexual subjectivities, and the constructionist position which claims that homosexuality is a cultural construct initiated by particular societies at specific instances in history. I argue that *Innocence* theatrically engages this historiographic debate within its own complex representations of binary opposites. But, first, I think it is important for my analysis of the play to explore what the project of 'Gay History' actually implies.

In his book *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University* John D'Emillo describes the emergence of what he explains as a 'new field of study':

[41] Terry, p.59.

> "Gay History:" in 1970, this phrase was an oxymoron. Homosexuality had no history. It was a medical condition, a psychopathological state embodied in aberrant individuals. It had been and remained hidden, isolated, and marginal, a set of disconnected and fragmentary life stories. In addition, since the triumph of Christianity, Western attitudes towards homosexuality had been unremittingly hostile, and state policy uniformly repressive. At best, then, the history of homosexuality might consist of forays into the civilisation of the ancient Greeks and the biographies of famous men whose sexual predilections remained contested.[42]

Innocence reflects this early movement to uncover 'Gay History' by focusing on the often contested life stories of 'homosexual' individuals mentioned by D'Emillo. In ACT ONE, the character of Caravaggio, rather pedantically, speaks biographical facts about the famous Italian painter:

> **Caravaggio** OK, we're off.
> **Lena** I was in Navona today and I saw a midget.
> **Caravaggio** My name is Michelangelo Merisi.
> **Lena** She had a hump, the midget.
> **Caravaggio** Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. (*He strokes Lena's back.*)
> **Lena** I swear to Christ I looked at her and she was happier than me – hump and all.
> **Caravaggio** Michelangelo for the angel and not for that chiselling Florentine cocksucker. (207-8)

As the scene unfolds the character of Caravaggio continues to reveal the biographical information passed on through history about this much acclaimed innovative Italian artist, and yet McGuinness's dramaturgy successfully weaves into the recognisable evidence of this documented life story the pathology and insecurity inherent in the underdeveloped inferences to his homosexuality in history.

In the play he writes parallel dialogue in which a conversation between Lena and Caravaggio is occurring, and even though the dialogue passes from one character to the other, they are actually telling separate stories. Neither of them, in fact, is listening to the

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[42] John D'Emillo, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University*. London: Routledge, 1992, p. 96.

other, and yet their speech blends together dramatically. This technique reveals a tension between what is spoken and what has been heard, essentially telling two stories at once. Lena's story of the midget is placed side by side with the solid biographical information about the historical person of Caravaggio. Lena tells the personal story of how her interior conflicts, how her life as a prostitute, makes her more unhappy than someone who bears a physical handicap. In this dialogue McGuinness juxtaposes what is on the inside of a person with what is on the outside, revealing a tension between what is easily known, and not so easily known about history. He would appear to be bringing together the fragmentary pieces of information about the historical Caravaggio with the dramatic representation of a subjectivity which might show a more complete individual than history has passed on. And yet, this fictional representation of a person who has become two-dimensional due to the confines of the annals of history is not a very hopeful one. Lena is a whore, and the character of Caravaggio is struggling with his desire for men. The interior conflict of these two 'deviant' characters complies what D'Emillo calls the 'psychopathological' nature of the homosexual in history. Lena makes this pathology more explicit:

> **Lena** I mean I'm not a midget but I feel at times as if I've a hump. Maybe it's not too late to become a nun. I was mad about Our Lady when I was a girl. Christ, would you believe that? I used to imagine I was her daughter and Jesus was a right pup who tormented me. The innocence of it. (209)

D'Emillo also points out the role Christianity has played in historical attitudes towards homosexuality which I touched on in Chapter Four on *The Gospel According to Judas*, and is also a major theme in *Innocence*. The sexual 'deviance' in the play of both Lena and Caravaggio is what binds them together in an alliance which a heterosexual

impulse might see as a common ground on which to 'cure' their moral 'abnormality' by forming a 'normal' conventional marriage. Caravaggio's desire for sex with men prevents this impulse from being fulfilled, but nevertheless it serves as a point of tension in this tortured depiction of fictional post-Renaissance 'homosexual' subjectivity. However, as an archivist of deviance McGuinness presents the impossibly incongruous combination of a whore who wants to be a nun, in order to tap into the contradiction that a man such as the historical Caravaggio could be one of the greatest representors of the Christian faith through his art, and, simultaneously, be condemned by that same faith for his love of sex with men. In ACT ONE Caravaggio speaks of his vocation as an artist:

> **Caravaggio** (*running his hands along Lena's body*) I paint as I see in light and as I imagine in darkness, for in the light I see the flesh and blood and bone but in the dark I imagine the soul of man for the soul and the soul alone is the sighting of God in man and it is I who reveal God and it is God who reveals my painting to the world.
> **Lena** (*sitting up*) What in under Jesus are you rabitting on about, Lello?
> **Caravaggio** I am Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, called Lello by cretins, who do not know that he with whom they dare to be familiar works with his hands, paints with his hands, and his hands are the hands of God alone. (209)

He recognises the fact that God is working through him in his art, and yet the 'deviant' nature of his sexuality serves as the source of what he believes to be a betrayal of the same God who uses him to communicate the great mysteries of faith.

In *Still Acting Gay* John Clum describes what he calls the 'historical impulse' in drama which seeks to represent the gay past. This is a desire "to depict and define the collective past of gay men to affirm a sense of identity and solidarity and to educate the dominant culture about the brutal effects of its heterosexism."[43] Clum identifies a two-fold impulse: the desire to retrieve historical characters from the past, and the desire also

[43] Clum, p.161.

to dramatise the devastating effects of historical homophobia on the psyche of gay men and women. McGuinness re-presents the historical person of Caravaggio in his characterisation as the celebrated painter, but his fictionalisation draws out the inner torture experienced by the homosexual in a world which condemns same sex relations. In so doing he retrieves the proud aspects of the inspired painter, exemplified by the powerful, self-confident dialogue mentioned above referring to his inspiration and his divinely commissioned vocation, and, simultaneously, illustrates the internal effects of his painful awareness of the cultural prohibitions against his same-sex desires. In this way McGuinness completes the theatrical equation in Clum's 'historical impulse' by representing back to the audience the 'brutal effects of heterosexism' on this fictionalised hero of gay history, while concurrently exercising a dramatic historiography that uses the past to point to the lingering effects of this brutality in the present.

Innocence shares a common mode of representation with *Mary and Lizzie* in its employment of metatheatrical techniques. In *Innocence* McGuinness uses the dream to juxtapose the binaries which he experiments with in this play. In ACT TWO, Caravaggio arrives at Lena's home after killing a man during a night of debauchery. The exhausted Caravaggio rests his head on Lena's lap and falls into a dream in which he has a conversation with his sister:

> **Caravaggio** It's wrong. My flesh is wrong. My body's all wrong. My mind knows better.
> **Sister** What does it know?
> **Caravaggio** Knows itself. Knows everything. See everything. Lets me paint other flesh. Loves it hates my own. Hates body. Wants body to die.
> **Sister** Flesh had a dead son.
> **Caravaggio** Mind was glad, mind laughed.
> **Sister** Mind all right alone.
> **Caravaggio** Son had flesh like body and body did not laugh at dead son. Forgive my body. (272)

In the dream McGuinness allows the character of Caravaggio to speak of the insecurity and self-loathing that lies below the surface of his great artistic work. Art and history come together in this drama to liberate two-dimensional historical narrative. This liberation allows for a more complete three-dimensional understanding of the past and its effects on the present.

How though could it be argued that in a play like *Innocence*, which apparently has nothing to do with Ireland per se, but was certainly written and performed for the Irish stage, seeks to impress an opinion about the present state of queer affairs by its performance of the past? On the other hand, it could quite easily be argued that to perform a play about an Italian homosexual could be a safe way to distance an Irish audience from the destructive effects of 'heteronormativity' on contemporary Irish homosexuals; reducing their culpability by its lack of specific accusation in much the same way that in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* Pyper's Northern Irish Protestant identity was a safer way of engaging homosexual identity in Ireland, as argued in Chapter One. In order to fully support my thesis, which claims that *Innocence* was in fact directed specifically towards a contemporary Irish audience, I must once again turn from content to dramaturgical technique in McGuinness's 'deviant' historiographical theatre.

It is worth noting not only the dialogue, but also the dialect employed in *Innocence*. In ACT ONE, especially, McGuinness makes use of an identifiably Irish way of speaking English in his text, one which he does not employ in the text of either *Mutabilitie* or *Mary and Lizzie*, both of which have more explicit Irish references. In the abovementioned sections of dialogue, when the character of Caravaggio is describing his work or his history, McGuinness heightens the language, allowing Caravaggio to speak in

a florid and articulate fashion. But during the less pedantic moments of ACT ONE, the moments which try to create a human characterisation of the historical Caravaggio, the language is much more earthy and culturally specific. Immediately following the elaborate dream sequence which opens the play we find Caravaggio in conversation with Lena:

> **Caravaggio** Yea, give us some wine.
> *Silence*
> Look, I pay for my fair whack of the booze in this kip, so where is it?
> **Lena** I hid it.
> **Caravaggio** Did you? Fetch it.
> **Lena** You can wait. You're not getting a drop until you compliment me. Compliment me.
> **Caravaggio** You look grand.
> **Lena** No. I don't. I look old. I am old.
> **Caravaggio** Jesus, preserve me.
> **Lena** It's terrible to grow old.
> **Caravaggio** Jesus, protect me. (207)

The structure of the language such as 'give us some wine,' the contemporary Irish-isms such as 'fair whack,' 'kip,' or 'booze,' as well as the phrase 'Jesus, preserve me,' are semiotic clues which implicate the present in what otherwise looks like the past. By presenting such specifically identifiable Irish-type English, and interweaving it with the heightened language geared towards revealing the narrative elements of the life and art of the historical Caravaggio, McGuinness culturally codes the piece and further implicates the present in his version of the past: the more sophisticated, less culturally specific, dialect serves to articulate traditional historical information about the painter Caravaggio, and the Hiberno-English articulates the, otherwise, un-represented nuanced personality of McGuinness's artistic rendering of the tortured gay man.

But it is important to return for a moment to notions of the formation of a 'Gay History' in order to examine how, and if, McGuinness's plays and, for that matter, drama itself, contribute to this project of historiography as earlier defined. In creating the character of Caravaggio McGuinness, once again, has used traditional historical information as a skeleton on which to drape modern ideas of homosexuality and homosexual subjectivity. David Halperin, one of the foremost historians of sexuality, puts much of his scholarly energy into discerning how to measure erotic experiences of the past against modern categories and classifications of sexuality. He asserts that all gay historians begin with "the modern notion of homosexuality, which, explicitly or implicitly, defines the horizons of (their) immediate conceptual universe and inevitably shapes (their) inquiries into same-sex sexual desire and behaviour in the past."[44] He claims that without a recognition of this ideological 'horizon' the gay historian is led into the "conceptual tyranny of homosexuality"[45] which in turn forces a conveniently artificially constructed idea of same-sex relations in the past which simply serves to bolster up essentialist notions of modern homosexuality. Halperin's theories seek to bridge the divide between the essentialist and constructionist debates by highlighting an awareness of the very constructed nature of homosexual histories themselves, putting queer pressure on the construction of gay and lesbian reflections on the past. How then does drama, and specifically McGuinness's drama, contribute to the debate on how to interpret the past in order to develop a history of homosexuality?

An initial interpretation of McGuinness's characterisations of both Shakespeare in *Mutabilitie* and Caravaggio in *Innocence* may appear to be pure dramaturgical

[44] David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002, p.107.
[45] Ibid.

convenience; a fictionalisation of the rumours of their homosexuality which, rather than simply interpreting history, seeks to challenge contemporary national identities and international relationships, or confront modern audiences with the ravaging effects of historical heterosexism on modern notions of homosexuality. I would argue, however, that McGuinness's work does not avoid the warnings of David Halperin mentioned above, but, rather, it seeks to contextualise his historical fictions with an eye to the period as well as to the present. Upon further examination, an examination that goes beyond issues of historical narrative authenticity, it becomes clear that McGuinness, once again, is using 'reality' to disturb notions of the 'natural.' This could be said of all three plays. The presence of Roman Catholicism within each of these plays serves as a link between situating the action of the drama in the past, and also pressing its relevance for the present in both *Mutabilitie* and *Innocence*, and the future in *Mary and Lizzie*.

In *Mutabilitie* the character of William Shakespeare is homosexual, but is also a closeted Catholic. In ACT THREE, SCENE ONE, William is left alone in a room in the castle with The File. She approaches him with a gift:

> **William** A gift?
> *She gives him a yellow flower*
> Beautiful.
> **File** Most delicate and graceful stem.
> **William** Graceful, yes.
> **File** A flower for our Lady's Day. Your devotion to the Virgin Mary is great. You called to her without cease in your illness. I nursed you when you were fevered. You spoke of Our Lady as one who believes in her. (53)

This revelation frightens William, and he begs her not to tell his host, the Protestant representative of the Queen, Edmund Spenser.

In his book *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* Alan Bray provides some conceptual evidence on notions of same sex relations which shed interesting light on how

McGuinness uses the period perception of both Catholicism and 'homosexuality' in creating political allegory in his drama. Bray claims that during this period in English history, when Catholic/Protestant tensions were high and accusations of heresy were flying "the identification of religious deviation with sexual deviation"[46] was a common assumption. He also claims "Rebellion against the Church (Protestant) and rebellion against the State were not concepts easily distinguished in Tudor and Stuart England and, as might be expected, homosexuality played its part in the folklore of treason as it did in the folklore of Popery."[47] Homosexuality was therefore caught up in a symbolic universe and served as an indicator in the distinction between a loyal subject and a traitor; "the Papist was a sodomite and a traitor."[48] Interesting when considered against the fact that nineteenth-century Irish nationalist ideology, in turn, constructed the British coloniser as enemy and homosexual, as argued in the Introduction and Chapter One. In *Mutabilitie* William is not embarrassed to make a sexual pass at Hugh, a pass which Hugh in fact casually rejects, but, on the other hand, he is terrified that he may be exposed as a Papist.

It is worth noting how McGuinness appears to use the historical perception of homosexuality in order to create some dramatic resolution in *Mutabilitie*, rather than simply to advance the alleged homosexuality of Shakespeare gratuitously. The File and William create a bond with one another based on poetry, and she believes this theatre that William speaks of will have great effect on restoring the Irish sense of nation; a rather overt reference to the influence of theatre in early twentieth-century Ireland. In ACT ONE, SCENE THREE, Edmund asks The File if she is a sorcerer:

Edmund Are you a witch?

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[46] Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p.19.
[47] Ibid., p.20.
[48] Ibid., p.21.

File What is a witch?
Edmund An evil woman.
Silence.
File What is evil?
Silence.
Edmund This magic is not magic. It is the legacy of your faith in Rome… (7)

Alan Bray claims that English civil authorities understood treason against the State as symbolically represented not only by the heretic and the sodomite, but, additionally, by "the sorcerer."[49] In Renaissance England these three types combined to form a threat to society and culture.

McGuinness employs notions of treason, sodomy and witchcraft, a trinity of anarchy, to imagine unity between the two countries rather than division. This was materialised in the London production as The File reached across the water to William, creating the possibility of a cultural bridge based on the perceived 'deviance' of the two characters. William and The File, the homosexual Catholic and the Witch, promise to threaten society as their historical countertypes in the Renaissance would have, but they threaten the society which has historically thrived on the division between Ireland and England as they find a common ground and a connection in their alienation symbolically blessing one another and reaching across the water. In *Mutabilitie* McGuinness conflates this trinitarian anarchy around Catholicism. Perhaps this is what is at the root of the divergent reception of the play in the two different countries where the history of Catholicism is a different cultural signifier and historical memory in each place.

In *Innocence* Roman Catholicism combines with art to reflect its own interpretation of historically contextualised homosexuality. In his article "Homosexuality in the Renaissance: Behaviour, Identity, and Artistic Expression" James Saslow describes

[49] Ibid.

the significance of same sex relations in this period: "First, for many individuals homosexual relations were only one element in what we would call bisexuality. Second, homosexual activity occurred mainly, though not exclusively, between adult men and boys or adolescents."[50] He claims that sexual relations in this period were based on relations of power where "the powerful tended to prefer their sexual objects subordinated by gender, age, and/or socioeconomic status."[51] McGuinness represents this interpretation of homosexual relations in the hierarchical relationship which descends from the Cardinal, who controls Caravaggio through a patronage which includes sexual pleasure, and through to young Antonio and Lucio who are the subordinate boys whose social status forces them to pleasure both the Cardinal and Caravaggio. McGuinness brings to life these subjects in order to physically represent the different layers of historical consciousness embedded within the extraordinary paintings and talents of Caravaggio. The artist Caravaggio depicted scenes from ordinary life and "drew on his own model-catamites and his wealthy patrons' boy entertainers"[52] as subjects. McGuinness in turn brings these subjects to life in order to analyse these complex relations of power through sexuality.

But how then do issues of Catholicism play into McGuinness's interaction with history and the queer intention of this engagement as I have previously outlined? I have argued that *Innocence* represents the ravages history has made on the subject of homosexuality. James Saslow asserts that the art of Caravaggio represents "a

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[50] James M. Saslow, "Homosexuality in the Renaissance: Behavior, Identity, and Artistic Expressions" in *Hidden From History*, ed. Chauncey, George, Duberman, Martin, and Vicinus, Martha. London: Penguin, 1989, p.91.
[51] Ibid., p.92.
[52] Ibid., p.102.

rudimentary sense of (a) homoerotic visual tradition,"[53] a tradition rooted in a particular cosmology which forced a sublimation of the homoerotic into artistic expression. He explains:

> The Renaissance, like the Middle Ages before it, operated mentally by means of Platonic poetic or metaphoric analogy: Individual human actions were conceptualised and judged by their adherence to eternal, transcendent paradigms. But the twin cosmologies of the time, classical and Christian, could not accommodate the realities of homosexuality any more than the telescope or the factory.[54]

Art, Catholicism/faith, and homosexuality collide to illustrate the ideological tension of the period. McGuinness's Caravaggio represents the emerging sensibility of homosexuality in its own sense of alienation in a world which could not conceptually comprehend it. Although McGuinness's Cardinal is patriarchal and reptilian, he provides the necessary patronage, and thus the possibility for Caravaggio's work. The fictional Cardinal in *Innocence* is based on the historical Cardinal Francesco del Monte, "the first known client with homosexual interests"[55] who combined his religious fascinations with his sexual appetites in his patronage of art. Although in *Innocence* the cleric is sinister, he is nonetheless the patron of the lasting art which continues to inspire modern homosexuals in their identification with Caravaggio and his work. *Innocence* produces a living example of the incongruity and tensions involved in the multi-dimensional nature of Renaissance sexual and spiritual identity, as well as an illustration of how these tensions have contributed to anxieties of dominant histories which distort sublimated histories by their bias.

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., p.104.
[55] Ibid., p.102.

Catholicism is also a central theme in *Mary and Lizzie*. ACT ONE, SCENE THREE is titled "THE MAGICAL PRIEST." In this scene, McGuinness continues to employ his trans-historical technique in a rhetorical way. The scene begins with a long monologue delivered by the character Priest, and then continues with a dialogue between Priest and Old Woman. Old Woman is established as a type for Mother Ireland, who in turn represents the construction of women within the nation. As the play seeks to illustrate the fragility of historical narrative itself it continually deconstructs constructed images of the past. McGuinness deconstructs the traditional construction of Ireland in this scene by putting Old Woman in conversation with her son Priest. Using irony, Priest offers his apocalyptic vision of faith:

> **Priest** ...Shall I spell out the faith of the future? Christ is amongst us with a new commandment. Hate one another as I have hated you. Jesus it was who tempted Satan, promised him the throne of Rome. Satan agreed on one condition. Amend the commandments of the Lord. In this island I preach new religion. Where there is God, take his name in vain. Remember thou keep the Sabbath savage. Kill the honour of father and mother. Steal thy neighbour's wife and neighbour's goods. Convert, convert and covet, covet. (20)

Priest speaks of the contradiction inherent in the Irish history of conflict between Catholic and Protestant, Irish and English. The historical brutality of sectarian division, under the banner of Catholicism and Protestantism, is exposed as Priest articulates the principles of faith in an anarchic sermon. Old Woman/Ireland laments her son who rejects this divide as he claims: "I am no Catholic, no Protestant. I worship both faiths with new eyes" (20). Through Priest, Catholicism is a referent to historical reality, albeit ironically. The dialogic *mise en scène* of the piece deconstructs Irishness in its metaphorical representation by its frank and brutal acknowledgement of the hatred and



Mary and Lizzie, Smashing Times Theatre, Dublin, 1991. Directed by Jo Mangan. Ned Denehy as Priest, Mary Linehan as Mary, Rita Hamill as Lizzie, and Margaret Twomey as Mother. Photograph by Isabelled Surrey, with permission.

division inherent in the Irish historical narrative; a division which McGuinness seems to be claiming has become a religion in itself in modern Ireland.

This type of interpretation of McGuinness's queer use of history points to the unique quality that theatre has in the project of representing the controversial subject of homosexual histories. The theatre, inherently, has a variety of tools it can implement in the task of representation, from the direct reference of didactic narrative to the more subtle use of symbol and metaphor. These tools can be implemented effectively in order to reveal the complexity of issues of historical interpretation. Thus, McGuinness can take a character or event and create a whole system of meanings around that historical reality by the *mise en scène* of the particular piece. McGuinness is, therefore, truly a 'deviant' historiographer, as these plays focus not only on the familiarity of traditional historical reference, but intervene directly in the debate by showing all of the instabilities inherent in any type of narrative construction.

Freddie Rokem offers a useful insight into the theatre's general contribution to the historical consciousness:

> Collective identities, whether they are cultural/ethnic, national, or even transnational, grow from a sense of the past; the theatre very forcefully participates in the ongoing representations and debates about these pasts, sometimes contesting the hegemonic understanding of the historical heritage on the basis of which these identities have been constructed, sometimes reinforcing them. By performing history the theatre, at times even more forcefully than other discourses about the past like historiographic writing or novels about historical events, engages in such ideological debates, frequently intervening in them directly. What may be seen as specific to the theatre in dealing directly with the historical past is its ability to create an awareness of the complex interaction between the destructiveness and the failures of history, on the one hand, and the efforts to create a viable and meaningful work of art, trying to confront these painful failures on the other.[56]

[56] Rokem, p.3.

Theatre that engages issues of homosexuality adds gender into the mix of both the ideological debates about how history is done, and the struggle to effect a queer sense of the past. John Clum claims that dramaturgical techniques, such as the metatheatricality of McGuinness's work in all three of the plays this chapter concerns itself with, are most certainly a way of debating issues of homosexual identity existing in other disciplines such as history, but specifically it is a way of pointing towards the "essential fact that acting has been, to some extent, an essential part of the gay man's (woman's) life."[57] Where many of McGuinness's plays treat history in one way or another, *Mutabilitie*, *Mary and Lizzie*, and *Innocence* combine the techniques of the theatre with the narrative of history in order to engage collective identities and interrogate the ways in which these identities are formed. Through creative fictions and self-conscious dramatic conventions these plays stand as ideological engagements with the past in order to imagine contemporary realities, ideological, political and religious, in new and inventive ways. Ultimately, McGuinness focuses on unique fictional hints of the 'deviant,' disrupting artificial notions of historical continuity, and replacing them with his defective theatrical versions of queer historical 'fact.'

[57] Ibid.

6

There's No Place Like 'Home'
The Bird Sanctuary, Someone Who'll Watch Over Me, and *The Factory Girls*

Much of the material in the previous chapters has dealt with the distinctive techniques McGuinness utilises to dramatically address the challenges of representing difference and alternative ideologies. His enquiries into the realms of solidified notions of historical memory, the political and personal divisions which isolate human beings or nations from one another, or the oftentimes painful consequences of ontological imperatives which marginalise and ostracise those who deviate from religious moralities, make for a type of drama which in its content seems to concern itself more with the confrontation and disassembling of systems of exclusion; and yet, at the heart of McGuinness's plays is a powerful impulse of reconciliation and a desire for belonging. This impulse is difficult to articulate, as it is the sentiment that lies below the language, and the emotional force that drives his drama towards healing rather than the mere satisfaction of deconstruction for its own sake. And yet, in order for my study to be complete I feel it is essential to take on the challenge of attempting to articulate this dramatic impulse which, ultimately, lies at the centre of McGuinness's popular appeal as a dramatic artist. In this chapter I deal specifically with The Bird Sanctuary, Someone Who'll Watch Over Me, *and* The Factory Girls *to explore what I consider to be the driving force in all of McGuinness's plays: the search for a queer type of 'home.' In the complex and changing world of modern identities where old notions of stability are being dismantled both institutionally and domestically, these plays provide insight into unique versions of home and family which can find their models in the queer social and interpersonal structures which have begun to take shape in contemporary times.*

Hints and allegations of sentimentality and emotional catharsis can be detected in structure, character, and narrative resolution throughout McGuinness's plays. *Observe the Sons* is structured in a quad-like progression of unity as it moves from PART ONE through PART FOUR, each section respectively titled 'REMEMBRANCE,' 'INITIATION,' 'PAIRING,' and 'BONDING.' The character of Rima in *Dolly West's*

Kitchen considers her purpose in life the matchmaking of her children to provide the type of secure relationship for them which would sustain them emotionally after her death; an objective which extends very queerly from her daughters all the way through to her gay son. *Gates of Gold*, as its greatest strength, has the essence of love and dedication which characterises and sustains lifelong relationships, and *Carthaginians* offers the representation of a strange, and yet, committed community seeking healing and hope in each other's challenge and companionship. These are but a few examples of how reconciliation and collaboration form an emotional structure which supports his characters in their personal difficulties and their communal struggles towards healing. Within the Irish tradition of theatre McGuinness has taken on divisive and dangerous topics, as has been illustrated in my previous chapters, and yet, these difficult confrontational subjects are nuanced with raucous comedy and tender love, ultimately making him a playwright of hope rather than one of rage.

In my attempt to define what I mean by queer versions of 'home' I will look at how McGuinness creates relationships between the characters who inhabit his homes, and also the actual space which he evokes to represent the physical conditions which contain his queer 'families.' I will begin by examining the type of family structure McGuinness represents in *The Bird Sanctuary*. Other than *Dolly West's Kitchen*, this is the only McGuinness play which treats the traditional Irish family structure, characterised by immediate and extended family, and related by ties of blood and/or marriage. In analysing this play I will illustrate how McGuinness queers the notion of traditional twentieth-century family structures in modern Ireland. I will then move on to *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* in order to examine how issues of gender, and in particular issues

of masculinity and homosociability, impact or impede the type of dramatic sensitivities which embody the desire for acceptance and belonging his work continually yearns towards. And finally, I will analyse *The Factory Girls* to illustrate how queer notions of friendship and community are providing new alternatives for personal and communal growth, new 'families' which defy the historical, financial, and emotional dependency of traditional families of origin. These plays are particularly distinct from his other plays which embody versions of 'home' or 'family' in their treatment of space and place: each play represents a restrictive place, a constrained space which impacts the development of individuals and group relationships. I am choosing to work with these plays in particular in my elusive attempt to pinpoint an emotional impulse within his work because they provide insight not only into the queer structures of relationality which exist prolifically throughout all of his plays, but because, additionally, they create a type of dramatic geography which reveals some of the deepest aspirations for integration in spite of difference at the heart of his 'deviant' dramatic sensitivities.

The Bird Sanctuary was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in February of 1994, and was directed by Robin Lefevre. The play is set in the old, rundown Victorian house of the Henryson family, located on the seafront in Booterstown, south County Dublin, and overlooking a protected bird sanctuary. The only permanent resident of the old Henryson family home is Eleanor, a reclusive painter with a penchant for witchcraft and painting. Eleanor is assisted in her work by her nephew Stephen, who has recently been disenfranchised by his parents because of his disclosed homosexuality. The play focuses on a family dinner party as Eleanor's siblings, Robert and Marianne, gather in their childhood home, along with Robert's wife Tina, in an attempt to reach an

agreement about the sale of the family property which is owned equally by all three siblings. In ACT ONE the image of the house, and the ever-present image of the nearby bird sanctuary which Eleanor is in the process of painting, stimulate an atmosphere of homecoming, safety, and family connections. The eccentricities and alienations of the first half of the play hint at the type of queer family, and the type of queer home, McGuinness is himself theatrically painting.

In an interview with Trish Murphy of the *Dublin Event Guide* McGuinness gives some insight into this family drama, and his vision of home as a type of human refuge as portrayed in *The Bird Sanctuary*:

> This is not a safe place to be, I don't know any safe families. It's an Irish family, with all that means [sic]. They'd kill each other, but they would also kill for each other. We all know that (within a family) the things we can do to each other are appalling, and then the things we can do for each other are inspiring. There is no organisation more determined to survive than the Irish family, and if anybody tries to threaten it, then they are ruthless in protecting themselves. But I hope it is a celebration of resilience as well, a different type of celebration.[1]

McGuinness's comments reveal an idea of 'family' which is simultaneously unsafe and yet unconditional; a key balance to understanding the type of 'home' he is representing. *The Bird Sanctuary* portrays the crumbling notions of home in modern Irish society, but through its use of comedy, it extends a vision of resilience in response to the contemporary shifts and challenges in family life that are threatening traditional structures of kinship. McGuinness paints a family portrait of siblings in dispute over inheritance and lifestyle, but uses comedy to retain a sense of unconditional safety:

> **Eleanor** You're not getting the dinner service.
> **Marianne** Even if it were my mother's last wish?
> **Eleanor** Particularly because it was my mother's last wish. She obviously confused you for me. It would be wrong to disobey. It would be unlucky. She wished it to stay in the family. I'm saving it for a wedding present for young

[1] Trish Murphy, "Bird Sanctuary", *Dublin Event Guide*, 16 February-1 March 1994, p.19.

> Stephen. The good boy is queer as a coot, but who knows, his mother's prayers may be answered. Do you know Tina blames me for it all? I think it's a new theory of the Catholic Church. What causes homosexuality? Aunts. My aunt made me a homosexual. That's all the rage in confessionals. Isn't it an extraordinary faith?
> **Marianne** You're a witch, Eleanor.[2] (288)

Issues of inheritance, and its concurrent economic implications for different members of the family, lie at the heart of this play. Although Marianne is a successful doctor living and working in England, Robert, their brother is a chronic gambler whose addiction continually jeopardises his family's financial status. Eleanor's comic dialogue about her potential influence on Stephen's homosexuality unconventionally contributes to the economic concerns which are creating tension in the Henryson family in order to form a portrait of what the prominent cultural critic Judith Stacey refers to as the "postmodern family."[3]

In her book *In the Name of the Family* Stacey describes how family life has evolved in the postmodern era. She uses the term postmodern family "to signal the contested, ambivalent, and undecided character of our contemporary family cultures...Like postmodern culture, contemporary Western family arrangements are diverse, fluid and unresolved. Like postmodern cultural forms, our families today admix unlikely elements in an improvisational pastiche of old and new."[4] In *The Bird Sanctuary* McGuinness brings together the strong family values of a traditional Irish family of prominence, who can trace its success in Dublin back to the foundation of the Free State. And yet, the apparent strength of the solid social position of the Henryson

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[2] Frank McGuinness, *The Bird Sanctuary* in *Frank McGuinness: Plays 2*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002. All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this edition.
[3] Judith Stacey, *In the Name of the Father: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, p.7.
[4] Ibid.

family in Dublin, confirmed by the prominence and position of their once grand house, is undermined as the play unravels. Stephen describes how the house itself is woven into the historical memory of the family:

> **Stephen** Built in 1843 at the bottom of Booterstown Avenue, some say it is the loveliest house in Dublin, for from its windows may be viewed every watery inch, every reed and rush, all the wildness of the bird sanctuary, that is truly God's blessing on this boundary. (278)

Using the site of the family house, McGuinness begins to weave together place and familial memory, creating an interior dramaturgical landscape which reveals the inner expectations and tenuous longings for home and belonging which serve as a foundation for this queer family drama. Eleanor, the last of the family to remain living in the house, exposes the cracks in the foundations of the family's memory:

> **Eleanor**...It is said that when Queen Victoria visited Dublin, she stayed in Booterstown. Her carriage drove down the avenue and she saw this house and chanced to wonder at its beauty. At her command the carriage stopped, she walked up the path and knocked, but no one answered her. She stood there silent, looking in, still wondering who lived there and why they did not welcome her. My father said that those in the livery attending her watched the great Queen's face and saw on it a shiver passing through her soul as if in sorrow for the wrongs done.
> **Stephen** And seeing the Queen's sorrow, the woman of the house, a beautiful old woman dressed in black, opened the door. This woman said to the Queen of England –
> **Eleanor** All sins are forgiven.
> *Silence*
> All sins are forgiven, as my father said in his superstitious way. Utter nonsense, of course. Completely untrue. Queen Victoria visited Ireland in 1849. We moved here in 1929. I've heard of racial memory, but that fantasy is pushing it, even for this family. (279)

While exposing the fissures in the Henryson family's memories McGuinness is pinpointing significant dates in the collective racial memory of Ireland; dates which served as pivotal moments for the formation of the idea of a national character for an Irish family.

1849 marks the end of the Great Famine in Ireland, and 1929 marks the period after the civil war of transition into the new Irish Free State. Both periods impact on the consciousness of Irish identity and the formation of institutional structures, including that of the traditional Irish family. In his book *Modern Ireland* R.F. Foster describes what he calls a "devotional revolution"[5] in post-Famine Ireland in which the Catholic Church became more influential in the everyday lives of Irish people. "Catholicism in the post-famine age provided a highly organised, coherent identity that helped Irish society cope with the psychological impact of disruption."[6] Roman Catholic influence, in turn, helped to alter social and cultural patterns of relationality at this period in history, "habits of marriage apparently altered."[7] What accompanied these shifts in familial relations strongly affected future Irish ideas of family life and sexuality. "Sexual Puritanism was seen as part of the package; traditional Irish preoccupations with obligations to family and kin militated against irregular sexual connections, and social disapproval of illegitimacy was marked in remote rural areas (where, incidentally, the Church was least influential)."[8] The trauma of the Famine, and its resultant means of psychological recovery, was the single historical event which gave way to the emergence of modern Ireland and modern Irish identities.

What was begun in the formation of interpersonal relations in the nineteenth century found itself enshrined in public policy in the new Free State post-1929. The Constitution of 1937 relied heavily on Catholic moralities. The Southern part of Ireland "was in the main a Catholic society, where the population would expect Catholic social

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[5] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*. London: Penguin 1989, p.338.
[6] Ibid., p.340.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., p.341.

teaching, especially when it touched on marriage and family law to be expressed juridically."[9] Eamonn de Valera and his government did just that in the 1937 Constitution, declaring the family as the centre of Irish society.[10] Although less 'gay,' the issues this play engages are nevertheless very queer. As I mentioned in Chapter One, 'queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire' (see page 48). The dates *The Bird Sanctuary* refers to are significant in the construction and formation of Irish gender and sexuality categories. They thus encourage this examination of the cultural issues and legislative prescriptives related to what has defined and regulated relational possibilities in Ireland. McGuinness seems to be

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[9] Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, p.127.

[10] Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland reads as follows:

> 1. 1° The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.
> 2. 1° The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State.
> 2° In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
> 3° The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.
> 3. 1° The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack.
> 2° A Court designated by law may grant a dissolution of marriage where, but only where, it is satisfied that
> i. at the date of the institution of the proceedings, the spouses have lived apart from one another for a period of, or periods amounting to, at least four years during the five years,
> ii. there is no reasonable prospect of a reconciliation between the spouses,
> iii. such provision as the Court considers proper having regard to the circumstances exists or will be made for the spouses, any children of either or both of them and any other person prescribed by law, and
> iv. any further conditions prescribed by law are complied with.
> 3° No person whose marriage has been dissolved under the civil law of any other State but is a subsisting valid marriage under the law for the time being in force within the jurisdiction of the Government and Parliament established by this Constitution shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage within that jurisdiction during the lifetime of the other party to the marriage so dissolved.

interrogating the formation of familial identities in the above mentioned scene by highlighting that imagination is the primary foundation on which the Henryson family tree is established. Interestingly, McGuinness has Stephen, the gay character, and subsequently the one who is most likely to be excluded from such a rigid idea of family based on his sexual 'deviance,' articulate the longing for this type of noble imagined family legacy stating, "I wish it were true" (279).

As in *Innocence*, central to the overall *mise en scène* of *The Bird Sanctuary* is the fine art of painting. Eleanor is a successful, if reclusive, painter who has immortalised the family through a series of portraits which McGuinness describes in the stage directions in the beginning of the play. As the Henryson siblings gather to decide on the sale of the family home Eleanor is in the process of painting the magnificent view afforded the house of the Booterstown bird sanctuary. The position of the house stands in direct correlation with the position of the family in Irish society; painting is the dramatic device McGuinness uses to portray the inner landscape of both ideas of home and ideas of family in this play. McGuinness paints this story with shades of violence and filial destruction implementing cruel language and vicious straightforwardness. But in so doing he applies the brush of the artist to the dramatic canvas of the stage in order to reflect how art perseveres, trans-historically remaining as a portal to the past, reflecting an aesthetic continuity. This continuity allows us simultaneously to remember the past, but also be reminded of the two-dimensional nature of the pictures of memory we hold in the landscape of our internal psyche.

The set of the Abbey production served as a frame for the canvas on which McGuinness has painted his internal exploration of family life and home. The action

takes place in the family sitting room. This once grand parlour has paint splattered over the walls, since the room now serves as Eleanor's art studio. The effect of this sitting room/studio furthers the blending of the impact of representation on life and memory. And yet, this curious set, characterised by disorder, became a bone of contention for *The Irish Times* theatre critic Polly Devlin. She wrote the following description of her opinion of the set-design in her rather unfavourable review of the play:

> The set was the first shock. Hideous, architecturally askew, as a setting it was a sinker. There are ways of suggesting a beautiful Dublin house which has gone to rack and ruin, and which has been used as a studio. Proper cornices remain in such houses, crumbling plasterwork, fragments of old fabrics, a hint of faded wall colour, old furniture badly knocked around; but these suggestions do not include the blackened interior of a hanger, an ill proportioned pillar, a truncated fireplace, a dank drop of fabric with no function. Over and over again the characters intone a mantra about the lost glory of this house, "one of the most beautiful in Dublin", and every time they did, the eyes rolled in the head.[11]

Devlin's review reveals two interesting insights into the reception of the play: first, once again, critical preoccupation with realism in contemporary Irish criticism became a stumbling point in the reception of the play, as discussed in detail in Chapter One. Second, it emphasises the sensitive issue of memory and its insistent relation to the specifics of place for validation. If *The Bird Sanctuary* is an exploration of issues regarding home, family, and acceptance, I argue, the non-historical specificity of the set contributes to an a-historical critique of the Irish inheritance of ideal familial structures. The set queers the physical space and consequently contributes to the very queer characters who in turn queer the false notions of coherence and stability inherent in historic ideas of an 'Irish family.'

In her book *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* Una Chaudhuri points out how modern ideas of space in the theatre, like contemporary notions of home

[11] Polly Devlin, "No Sanctuary at the Abbey" in *The Irish Times*, 8 March 1994, p.8.

and family, need to assert an up-to-date language in order to claim new meanings peculiar to modern times: "The formulation of a 'postmodern critical geography' to counter and complement the rigid historicism of twentieth-century thought is a vast and vital project, of which one of the crucial goals is the recovery of *place*."[12] Of particular concern to Chaudhuri is how the home historically has been configured and coded in modern drama:

> The privileged setting of modern drama is the family home. The domestic interior contains the history of a process, begun in the nineteenth century and still unconcluded as the twentieth century nears its end, of a locational stage practice, a way of filling the signifying space of theatre with an *environment*. This kind of environmentalism, which enters the drama through realism and naturalism (and which is intimately related to the figure of the home), relies on and propagates a very special account of place and space. According to (and then thanks to) this environmentalism, placement becomes available to rational understanding and explanation. That is to say, place enters the positivist project as a factor of knowledge and a code of representation.[13]

Chaudhuri's account of the coding of space in the rational project of understanding, begun by realism and naturalism, is particularly significant in the Irish theatrical tradition as I noted in Chapter One in relation to *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, and Chapter Three on *Gates of Gold.*

In Chapters One and Three I focused attention on the proclivity of the Irish theatrical tradition to favour realism in relation to issues of both nationalism and public funding of theatre, respectively. In this chapter I focus on the same genre partiality, but this time, in order to better understand its impact on issues of theatrical space and scenic design. In their book *The Abbey Theatre: The Rise of the Realist* the authors Hogan, Burnham, and Proteet assert that the genre of the Irish play began to turn towards realism

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[12] Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000, p.5.
[13] Ibid., p.6.

between the years 1910-1915. The "aristocratic and enigmatic Yeats"[14] had become a figure of distrust for Sinn Féin and the republican movement. On the other hand, Lady Gregory and, indeed, Yeats himself, ultimately wrote plays that were "a most acceptable kind of national drama,"[15] but it was the plays of J.M. Synge which prompted serious public reaction: "In 1903, Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* had seemed to be a false and perverse defamation of Irish character and life. This feeling was reinforced by *The Well of Saints*, and in 1907 the production of *The Playboy* had exacerbated popular feeling enough to produce spontaneous disruptions of its performance."[16] By 1910, the largely middle-class audiences of the Abbey had begun to expect plays which focused on Irish identity, particularly rural identity, and through protest, demanded that they were 'realistic' in their representation.

It was not until the death of Synge, however, that the more avant-garde style of the earlier theatrical tradition at the Abbey truly began to take on the shape of its characteristic twentieth century realism/naturalism.

> Synge was dead, Yeats was doing little new work, Lady Gregory's new work was falling off in quality...The notable new dramatists were Lennox Robinson, T.C. Murray and R.J. Ray from Cork and St. John Ervine from Belfast: All of these writers were basically realist in manner, and their prose melodramas began to supersede the earlier poetic fantasies and began, indeed, to seem the typical kind of Abbey play.[17]

Although the plays of the rest of the century certainly developed and have gained international acclaim, they still, with few exceptions, engage the dramatic techniques of realism, perhaps most significantly in setting and stage design.

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[14] Robert Hogan, Richard Burnham, Daniel P. Poteet, *The Abbey Theatre: The Rise of the Realist*. Dublin: Doleman Press, 1979, p.17.
[15] Ibid., p.16
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., pp.9-10.

This historical information about the genealogy of the Irish theatrical tradition which, in turn, has given birth to McGuinness's dramatic imagination is vital for, if he frames *The Bird Sanctuary* within the aesthetic of art, the entire project itself is framed by its performance on the National stage. By allowing his plays to be produced in the Abbey, particularly a play which involves issues of family and home, a subject which dominates twentieth-century Irish theatrical narratives, McGuinness's plays, and in the case of *The Bird Sanctuary*, their versions of home, are subject to what Chaudhuri describes as place entering into the 'positivist project as a factor of knowledge and a code of representation' based on the formation of traditional Irish representations and performances of that same spatial and ideological reality. When McGuinness challenges or alters place in this family drama he comes into direct contact with the type of knowledge of what signifies 'home' in the Irish theatrical tradition, thus pressing the boundaries of the criteria which the tradition uses to evaluate representational 'authenticity.' The realistic settings of the previously established plays within the tradition which regard issues of family and home have laid a theatrical foundation by which the 'normal' is determinable and, ultimately, a graspable position whereby criticism of alternatives is possible. 'Home' has become a clearly identifiable certainty in modern Irish drama. McGuinness's indeterminacy in setting in *The Bird Sanctuary* combines with fantastic notions of witchcraft, family mythology, expressionistic painting, and even homosexuality to create an all-together queer version of home, improbable to an Abbey audience which has historically come to expect a certain type of drama from the National Theatre.

The Bird Sanctuary stimulated a series of letters to the editor of *The Irish Times* based on the 8 March 1994 review by Polly Devlin mentioned above. This editorial dispute was reminiscent of the debate about *Observe the Sons* which I noted in Chapter One. Devlin's dislike of the play went beyond the mere setting, extending to the actors whom she considered to be "overacting,"[18] and the writing itself. On Friday, 11 March 1994 *The Irish Times* published two responses to Devlin's critical review of the play, one by the established playwright and author Sebastian Barry, and one by Peter Denman, a Lecturer in English at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Barry wrote that, "The mystery and the misery is, not that she could not see the magnificence of *The Bird Sanctuary*, or its extraordinary and monumental shape...but that she saw fit to write an article so bitter in tone, so personal, and so sadly prejudiced."[19] Denman, who admits he was a teaching colleague of McGuinness at Maynooth, questioned the newspaper itself for allowing the article to appear, and undermines Devlin's qualifications as a reviewer by asserting that contributors to the paper's reviews "need more than simply to be opinionated."[20] On 19 March 1994 another letter regarding the play appeared, written by Denise Meagher of the Department to Anthropology at St. Patrick's, defending the play and claiming that it "is a courageous attempt at synthesis – between the image of a traditional pure Ireland and a modern complex world."[21]

Not all of the letters, however, were in defence of McGuinness's play. On 29 March 1994 a letter appeared stating, "Sir – well, well, well, Polly Devlin has certainly

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[18] Devlin, p8.
[19] Sebastian Barry, Letters to the Editor, The *Irish Times*, 11 March 1994, p.15.
[20] Peter Denman, Letters to the Editor, The *Irish Times*, 11 March 1994, p.15.
[21] Denise Meagher, Letters to the Editor, The *Irish Times*, 19 March 1994, p.11.

put the critical cat amongst the theatre pigeons."[22] This letter welcomed Devlin's honest opinions, claiming that the notable defenders of McGuinness were thin-skinned, and had "no need to cry on each others shoulders."[23] A second letter on 12 April 1994 agreed with Devlin's criticism, and in the correspondence the respondent described his visit to the theatre: "we expected better than literary hocus-pocus put on the stage."[24] This broadsheet debate continued from 8 March through to 12 April, and, as with *Observe the Sons*, indicates the social significance of McGuinness's work, and for that matter the Abbey Theatre itself, in Irish projects of dramatic representation. But additionally, this debate, perhaps, points towards one of the key reasons why the more complex issues in McGuinness's writing are so often glossed over. The initial letters in defence of *The Bird Sanctuary*, and the corollary effect of the position and prestige of the defenders-of-the cause, indicate how closely knit Irish society and the Irish arts scene is; and how personal a bad review can be perceived as being in such a familiar community. Such familiarity reduces the risk of criticism for established and well-liked celebrities such as McGuinness. Although I would critique Devlin's opinions as being restricted or limited by the type of knowledge she feels she possesses in relation to what constitutes 'authenticity' in the Irish dramatic tradition, on the other hand, I do feel that critical deconstruction is essential to properly identify and understand the queerest aspects of his dramaturgy. Debate creates an ideological discord which, in turn, forces diversity in opinion and discourse, and works against the homogeneity of an idea of 'Irish theatre' which, ultimately, contains and restricts interpretation.

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[22] John Gaffney, Letters to the Editor, The *Irish Times*, 29 March 1994, p.13.
[23] Ibid.
[24] P.J. Tynan, Letters to the Editor, The *Irish Times*, 12 April 1994, p.13.

Reverence for the playwright, indeed the enshrined position of the author within the Irish dramatic tradition, stifles the effective power of writing through politely neutral treatment of the complex array of difficult, and at times, confrontational plays McGuinness produces. *The Irish Times* debate indicates how design, and not plot alone, reveal cracks in the veneer of 'normality,' whether in relation to Irish drama in general, or to the more immediate topicality of versions of home and family in *The Bird Sanctuary*. This interesting debate about, and defence of, the play ultimately inspired a more complex analysis of the production which eventually led to the assertion that, in fact, "*The Bird Sanctuary* is a courageous attempt at synthesis – between the image of a traditional pure Ireland and a modern complex world."[25] And yet, in my analysis, this play is the most germane and conservative of the three plays focused on in this chapter, each of which highlight the challenging and changing issues of family and home as represented in McGuinness's work.

Judith Stacey's theories of postmodern families assert that "Like postmodern culture, contemporary Western family arrangements are diverse, fluid, and unresolved. Like postmodern cultural forms, our families today admix unlikely elements in an improvisational pastiche of old and new."[26] *The Bird Sanctuary* certainly engages pastiche in its use of music, ranging from Chopin to *The King and I*, and in its complex subjectivities, ranging from witchery to homosexuality. But Stacey's theories of postmodern families suggest that the traditional definition of family, based primarily on kinship and marriage, no longer adequately serves the types of relational configurations which reflect modern realities. I believe that an exploration of modern relationships, and

[25] Meagher, p.11.
[26] Stacey, p.7.

the new ways that individuals are finding personal support and communal identification, may provide an even deeper insight into the impulses for belonging and acceptance which create such a powerful emotional current in all of McGuinness's plays.

Stacey suggests that the legal definition of family as "a group of individuals related by blood, marriage, or adoption"[27] is giving way to a more inclusive understanding of contemporary living situations which more broadly define family as "a group of people who love and care for each other."[28] Her theories reveal an interesting tension between traditional Irish understandings of family and emerging social and political alliances of relational support. She claims that in contemporary society we have two choices:

> Either we come to grips with the postmodern family condition by accepting the end of a singular ideal family and begin to promote better living and spiritual conditions for the diverse array of real families we actually inhabit and desire. Or we can continue to engage in denial, resistance, displacement, and bad faith, by cleaving to a moralistic ideology of *the family* at the same time that we fail to provide social and economic conditions that make life for the modern family or any other kind of family viable, let alone dignified and secure.[29]

Stacey maintains that postmodern family arrangements which provide economic and emotional support are no longer reflective of the 1950s version of the nuclear family made up of mother, father and children. Instead we are faced with single parents, grandparents raising grandchildren, gay and lesbian partners, and divorced or separated persons, to name but a few configurations. She claims that, in particular, gay and lesbian family systems provide an interesting insight into the way forward for all diverse versions of family and home. This emphasis on queer family structures leads her to assert that gay and lesbian families are "a paradigmatic illustration of the 'queer' postmodern conditions

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[27] Ibid., p. 9.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., p.11.

of kinship which we all now inhabit."[30] The self-conscious formation of communities for gays and lesbians provides a model in contemporary societies which, more and more, are witnessing the formation of family-like alliances to create new opportunities, both economic and emotional, or to face the challenges and difficulties of our fragmented cultures.

Amendments to the original 1937 Irish Constitution reflect evidence that changing patterns of family life are also affecting modern Ireland. The Third Amendment of the Constitution Act was signed on 8 June 1972, allowing the State to become a member of the European Communities, and thus, subject to influence by European social policies in general. The Fifth Amendment of the Constitution Act on 5 January 1973 removed the section of the Constitution which allowed a special position for the Catholic Church in Irish civil life. The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act, signed 7 October 1983, acknowledged the rights of unborn babies, with equal regard for the life of the mother: This was the first of a series of amendments in which the issue of a woman's right to choose an abortion was debated; on 25 November 1992 the Irish people rejected the Twelfth Amendment in a referendum which attempted to open up the debate around abortion; however, on 23 December of that same year the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, respectively, were passed, and asserted that the State would not prohibit travel to another state to acquire an abortion, and further, that the State would not prohibit information about those services in other countries from being distributed in Ireland. A referendum on the right to Divorce was passed in the Fifteenth Amendment on 17 June 1996; up until that point it was not possible to obtain a legal divorce in the Republic of Ireland. And finally, in relation to topics which affect family formation, on 6 March

[30] Ibid., p.15.

2002 the referendum for the Twenty-fifth Amendment to the Constitution on the legalisation of abortion was rejected by the people; this amendment was a blow to pro-choice groups, and an affirmation of a small margin of belief in the protection of unborn life in Ireland.

This legislative information is important in an analysis of notions of home and family in McGuinness's work because it provides a cultural backdrop to the broader social issues which have faced Ireland during his career, and also it helps maintain the Foucauldian methodology which interprets ideology and discourse as historically and culturally specific. Ireland's participation in the European Union has forced the nation to broaden its definition of citizenship and equality, as is evidenced in the debate over the legalisation of homosexuality which I presented in the Introduction. Once again, the dates of these legal debates are extraordinary in relationship to similar movements in other countries, which have traditionally influenced the Irish economy and culture (i.e. The United States and Great Britain). Apart from the amendment that allowed for participation in the European Economic Community, the other amendments, which obviously deal with issues of morality and ethics, were surrounded by heated debate, and the amendments which passed never did so by a large majority. This reveals a tremendous conservatism which lies below the surface of contemporary Ireland, a nation which has so rapidly embraced the commercial and economic realities of more secularised societies; it points to the chasm of identity which the authors of *Reinventing Ireland* have identified in the tension between reinventing the nation economically and reinventing it culturally.

Somewhere behind the legalistic debates and constitutional amendments lie the circumstances of how people actually live their lives. "What for many are the cornerstones of western civilisation – the institution of marriage, the biological imperatives of reproduction, the social conditions of parenting – are being radically challenged by the emergence of new patterns of intimacy and new claims to relational rights."[31] The legal issues mask the reality that what is actually under pressure in contemporary western societies is the deeper questions of what constitutes legal relationships and protectable intimacies? What is relationship? What is family? How can we best live our lives in changing and challenging times? What are the issues impeding these adaptations? These are certainly some of the most important questions McGuinness's plays are asking as he queers traditional relationships, and the language which supports them in search of 'a new way forward.'

In the next two plays I will analyse, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and *The Factory Girls*, I suggest that McGuinness is queering traditional notions of family much more radically than in *The Bird Sanctuary*, which in fact merely raises the questions of what 'family' and 'home' are becoming in contemporary society. He does so in order to explore and reveal essential questions of identity and relationality. McGuinness achieves his artistic goals by creating a queer dramatic place, a theatrical space, in which his new families can emerge, and affectively explore some of the possibilities of new patterns of intimacy available in the postmodern world.

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me premièred in London at the Hampstead Theatre on 10 July 1992, directed by Robin Lefevre. The play is set in a holding-cell, inhabited

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[31] Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy, and Catherine Donovan, *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*. London: Routledge, 2001, p.2.

by Michael, an Englishman, Adam, an American, and Edward, an Irishman. All three are being forcibly retained by kidnappers, chained to a wall in a room with no windows. The play was written, but not performed, before the real-life release of three hostages, two Britons and an Irishman, who were being held in Beirut, Lebanon from the late 1980s; John McCarthy, Terry Waite,[32] and Brian Keenan.[33] McGuinness, characteristically, engages a topic of immediate public and political relevance through which he cleverly explores the nature of relationships between men.

The play opens with Adam and Edward alone in a cell. Edward is chained centre stage, and Adam stage right; an even more significant alignment when Michael is added to the group, placing the men in the geographical/ideological position which has Ireland at the centre of its two primary influences, the United States and Great Britain. From the offset McGuinness foregrounds the significance of imagination in this play:

> *Complete light. Ella Fitzgerald sings 'Someone to Watch over me.'*
>
> *Edward and Adam are together in the cell. They are separately chained to the walls...The chains are of sufficient length to allow freedom of movement for both men to exercise...*
>
> *They exercise in silence. Adam's exercises are vigorous; Edward moves through his paces more sluggishly.*
>
> **Edward** That was Ella Fitzgerald singing, 'Someone to Watch Over Me'.
> **Adam** What was?[34] (89)

Edward exhibits the nebulous space between his internal dialogue and what is actually articulated and subsequently heard by his cellmate. In his mind he has been playing the television game show *Desert Island Discs*, a game which allows its contestants to choose

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[32] Terry Waite was the Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy sent in to negotiate the release of John McCarthy, but subsequently he himself fell captive.

[33] Brian Keenan was born a Protestant in Belfast, and yet he held a passport from the Republic of Ireland. His book, *An Evil Cradling*, was published just after *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* premièred in 1992.

[34] Frank McGuinness, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* in *Frank McGuinness: Plays 2*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002. All subsequent quotations from this play are from this edition.

what they might take with them if they knew they were to be stranded on a desert island. McGuinness sets the tone for a play which explores the interior lives of these three characters as they are forced by their involuntary confinement to identify and, even more difficult, articulate their most prized possessions in life, whether they be intimacy, family, or nationality. Although the play is fictionally based on a factual reality, I would assert that McGuinness uses the captivity and confinement of the Beirut hostage situation to explore the crisis of intimacies and relationality trapping modern men in a changing world.

Place is also a significant factor in this play. Through the confinement of the play's holding-cell location, exacerbated by the additional fact that the men are chained to the wall, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* uses location and dramatic space to literally force together different aspects of sexuality, nationality, and masculinity. The precedence of the imaginative impulse which dominates the entire play through storytelling and game-playing combine with the rigid fixity of place to force a confrontation between public and private experience for the men involved. McGuinness gives these men no way out, and no alternative but to be dependent on one another for all of their emotional survival needs; he creates a confined theatrical world where men depend on men.

Chaudhuri describes this theatrical space as static, and explains its relationship to the project of identity formation, specifically addressing the representation of confinement through imprisonment. She identifies in modern drama a conflict between ideas of change or development, and the undeniable power of place in theatrical performance:

> The tension between these two forces, which Linda Ben-Zvi calls "an espoused escape or freedom and a desired return to fixity," serves in effect to idealise the figure of exile by contrasting it, not with its logical opposite, belonging, but to prison. At its most virulent...this conflict between prison and exile pitches the humanist project of refashioning the self and the world against a reified notion of place as fate. At such times, metaphorised place – in various guises, including such macroconstructs as nation and even nature, as well as more mundane ones such as home or hometown – exerts so powerful and paralysing an influence upon the protagonists that simple *departure* becomes their overriding mission and desire. [35]

If space can be configured to represent an interior landscape which, in turn, represents individual or collective struggles, then McGuinness's prison-like setting can be read as a metaphor for the 'powerful and paralysing' influences which affect the worlds to which these three men exist. National identity is particularly restrictive for the characters of Michael and Edward, as their interpersonal relationship is clouded and impeded by their English and Irish citizenship and all of the rivalry that entails.

Michael, the Englishman, joins Adam and Edward in the cell in the beginning of SCENE TWO. The American and the Irishman have, until this point, been sharing an imaginative and compatible mutual relationship. Although in the beginning of the scene Michael is asleep on the ground stage left, when he awakes his ethnicity immediately changes Edward's congeniality into a condescending hostility. Michael awakens disoriented during a conversation about how large Adam's penis is:

> **Michael** I'm terribly sorry, but where am I?
> **Edward** So it's yourself, is it?
> **Michael** Pardon?
> **Edward** Do you not recognise me? We were at school together.
> **Michael** I don't think so.
> **Edward** Eton, wasn't it? Or Harrow?
> **Michael** No, I don't – where am I?
> **Edward** In the officers' mess, Brit boy. A bit rough and ready but you'll get used to it. We have. So, how's the outside world? (101)

[35] Chaudhuri, p.56.

SCENE TWO initiates a series of English/Irish stereotypes which, at first, seem to be as binding and restrictive to individual identity as the prison of the cell which the men are confined to. Irish, English, and American stereotypes abound throughout the drama, it is only in the telling of their personal stories that the men begin to loosen the metaphorical chains which keep them from the intimacy and support they desperately need from one another in order to survive their kidnapping.

Throughout the play the three men stave off the boredom of their captivity by telling each other the stories of their lives, orally reciting to one another letters that they would write home if they could, and playing imaginative games such as enacting television game shows and filming a movie with a plot they have created. Adam tells the story of his fiancée waiting at home for him, Edward the story of his wife, whom he has been unfaithful to, and his children, and Michael the story of how his wife tragically died in a car accident. These personal stories represent the three men, individually and collectively, attempting to understand the meaning of their lives, and, most significantly, the importance of intimacy for each of them. The space itself intrudes on the play's narrative to provide new insight into the deepest sentiments which sustain the characters, as each man is forced by proximity to articulate his, otherwise, imprisoned feelings.

SCENE SIX opens with Michael eating a meal out of a bowl while Edward sits in silence, not touching his food. A chain, which once held Adam to the wall, lies there empty. Soon we discover that Adam has been taken away by his kidnappers, and has, presumably, been executed. Edward is mourning his departure, and Michael is attempting to help him face the fact that Adam is dead out of a fear that his silence and

his refusal to eat will provoke the anger of the men holding them captive. Michael forces Edward to admit that Adam is dead:

> **Edward** He died. I needed him. Jesus, I needed him...
> **Michael** ...What was he like?
> **Edward** He was gentle. He was kind. He could be cruel, when he was afraid, and while he was often afraid, as we all are afraid, he was not often cruel. He was brave, he could protect himself, he could protect me, and you. He was beautiful to look at. I watched him as he slept one night I couldn't sleep. He moved that night through his sleep like a man not dreaming of what life had in store for him. He was innocent. Kind, gentle. Friend. I believe it goes without saying, love, so I never said. He is dead. Bury him. Perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul rest in peace. Amen. (145)

Moments of intimacy and truth, such as this scene, touch at the deepest core of McGuinness's affective dramatic allure. Just as in the final scene of *Gates of Gold*, McGuinness treads where few men dare to tread: he reveals the beauty and intensity of the love men have for one another. This love is honest, and lacks the threat of homophobic prohibitions which stifle the possibility of men depending on one another for support and companionship; a paralysing fear and restrictive masculine cultural phenomenon which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes in *Epistemology of the Closet* as "homosexual panic."[36]

A description of Sedgwick's theory of homosexual panic must be preceded by her concept of "homosocial desire"[37] which is vitally important for analysing how McGuinness's men love one another:

> "Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by an analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual." In fact it is applies to

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[36] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p.19.
[37] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p.1.

such activities as "male bonding," which may, as in our society, be characterised by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality."[38]

The distinction between homosexuality and homosociability provides an interesting insight into the emotion of 'longing to belong' which lies at the heart of all of McGuinness's plays. McGuinness challenges a continuum which might suggest that love between men always hints at genital love. This is a particularly queer strategy as it struggles to create a new space in which men can relate to each other; a culturally indeterminable space in which men can love each other unapologetically, and without the fear of the social stigma which surrounds the discourse of masculinity and its apparent opposite, homosexuality. In *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* McGuinness's prison is a space which challenges the homophobia behind male bonding by denying the potentially erotic encounter suggested by the love Edward feels for Adam. In SCENE EIGHT McGuinness directly confronts the false connection between the love men feel for one another and its, socially constructed, assumed corollary, gay sex:

Michael Did you sleep with Adam?
Silence
Did you?
Edward No.
Michael Did you want to?
Silence
Edward No.
Silence
Do you believe me?
Michael You didn't have the chance. If you'd had the chance, if you hadn't been chained, if I hadn't been there, would you have slept with him?
Silence
If you had known he was going to die, would you have slept with him?
Silence
Beautiful to look at. Kind, gentle.
Edward No. I would not have slept with him. (156)

[38] Ibid.

Hints of Michael's own homosexuality had been revealed earlier in the play. Edward's 'No' is as much a challenge to homophobic prohibitions of love as to gay preoccupations with masculine relationships which imply homosexuality as a necessary outcome in male love. This moment illustrates McGuinness's queer dramaturgical refusal to settle on stereotype or social assumptions, whether gay, straight or otherwise.

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me emphasises how, as Sedgwick puts it, "the continuum of male homosocial bonds has been brutally structured by secularised and psychologised homophobia."[39] Once again, the prison-like place of the play actually stands as a metaphor for the restrictive and narrow cultural codes of proper masculine relationship. Add to the challenge of restrictive masculinities the political nature of the national identifications of the men held in the cell, and you see how McGuinness not only challenges the way in which individuals relate to one another, but also to the ways nations, based on hegemony and patriarchy, interact. Fear of homosocial desire is identified as a root cause of alienation and separation in the 'space' men map out for themselves, whether national or personal. Sedgwick describes this type of male spatial 'prison' mapped out by homosexual panic:

> If such compulsory male relationships as male friendship, mentorship, admiring identification, bureaucratic subordination, and heterosexual rivalry all involve forms of investment that force men into the arbitrarily mapped, self contradictory, and anathema riddled quicksands of the middle distance of male homosocial desire, then it appears that men enter into adult masculine entitlement only through exceeding to the permanent threat that the small space they have cleared for themselves on this terrain may always, just as arbitrarily and with just as much justification, be foreclosed.[40]

Sedgwick's metaphors themselves, as she certainly intends them to do, extend from implicating the interpersonal, to an implication of larger political relationships. She

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[39] Sedgwick, 1990, p.185.
[40] Ibid., p.186.

suggests that these homophobic prohibitions generate narrow masculine alliances while, simultaneously, preventing inclusion by other more diverse identities because of their perceived threat to the tenuous economy of endorsed male relationships.

It is interesting to return for a moment to the interview I quoted in Chapter One in which McGuinness spoke of a need to create new metaphors of relationship in order to challenge the historical animosity between Ireland and England. McGuinness stated that, "If there is to be a new relationship between the islands – and the metaphor that we have looked at is between a man and a woman – maybe we should be looking at different images of peace and communication, and this is a perfectly valid way of presenting imagery of a new way forward." In Chapter One I suggested that a new metaphor might be one of homosexuality as exhibited through the identity challenge of representing the male kiss. In *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* I believe this metaphor is less sexual, and, rather, offers a breakdown in acceptable masculine protocols for relationality best expressed through theories of homosocial desire.

Towards the end of the play McGuinness exhibits this new queer paradigm for political and personal relationships, between men and nations, as Edward is about to be released from his imprisonment. In SCENE NINE Edward is standing in the cell, free from the chains which bound him to the wall, and he is about to be set free from his imprisonment. Michael, on the other hand is still chained in his position.

> **Michael** ...Move, or they might change their minds.
> **Edward** Right, right.
>
> *From his pocket Edward takes out a comb. Edward goes to Michael. Edward combs Michael's hair, and gives the comb to Michael. Edward bows his head. Michael combs Edward's hair. Michael gives Edward the comb.* (168)

This moment of "remarkable tenderness and love"[41] is the physicalisation of one of Michael's family stories in which he remembers his father telling him "The bravest men sometimes behave like women. Before the Spartans went into battle they combed each other's hair. The enemy laughed at them for being effeminate. But the Spartans won the battle" (158). In this final moment of the play the "two men bid goodbye by enacting the Spartan ritual: they comb each other's hair in a powerful acknowledgment of their communion and love."[42] This prison, this temporary homosocial home, creates a new space in order to negotiate new queer ways of relating for men. The stories that the men come together to tell reveal a new plot which ends with new lessons learned, and new possibilities to make things happen. Imprisonment created the possibility for new freer, queer forms of home, both private and public.

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me shares a common feature with *The Factory Girls*. Although the three men in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* are confined in a cell against their will, the five women in *The Factory Girls* willingly subject themselves to isolation and confinement. *The Factory Girls* was McGuinness's first play. It premièred at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin in 1982, and was directed by Patrick Mason. In his introduction to *Plays 1* McGuinness states that he "wanted to write a play that celebrated the working class culture of women,"[43] claiming that it was inspired by the lives of his mother, his aunts, and his grandmother, all of whom worked together in a shirt factory in his home town in Donegal.

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[41] Helen Lojek, "Watching Over Frank McGuinness's Stereotypes," *Modern Drama,* 38 (1995), pp. 348-361.
[42] Claire Gleitman, "Like Father, Like Son: *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and The Geopolitical Family Drama," *Eire Ireland*, 31. 1 and 2, 1996, pp. 78-88.
[43] Frank McGuinness, "Introduction" in *Frank McGuinness: Plays 1*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996, p.ix.

The play is set in a similar factory. The first scene introduces five women, Ellen, Rebecca, Rosemary, Una, and Vera, working on the floor of the factory. The biting wit and comic banter between the women seems to be characteristic of a normal day's work in the factory, until their jobs come under the threat of redundancy. In SCENE TWO Rosemary reveals to the women a rumour she has heard about the new manager of the factory, Mr. Rohan:

> **Rosemary** It's no joke. Rohan was down with the collars section and the banders yesterday. He told them they'd either take the new rate or there'd be no work for them. They said they never saw him as angry.[44] (22)

In defence of their cause, the women have called on the head of their union in Dublin, only to discover that they are not at the top of the union's list of priorities. In the face of the threat to their jobs, and their abandonment by the very union which was supposed to protect them, the women form an alliance in order to take their defence into their own hands, and make a plan to prevent the new management from bullying them into longer working hours and less pay.

SCENE FIVE opens with the women putting into action their plan of protest against threatened redundancies. It is a Friday afternoon and the women have decided that they are going to lock themselves in Mr. Rohan's office. Once inside, Ellen turns on the factory intercom system in the head office and makes an announcement:

> **Ellen** ...Good afternoon, ladies. This is the representative of the action committee, consisting of the examiners and their message girl. We have decided to take action over proposed unfair working conditions. Our first step is to take over the office until such times as better conditions are offered. This is our last communication with the outside world until then. Good afternoon and good luck. (*She switches off the system.*) (51)

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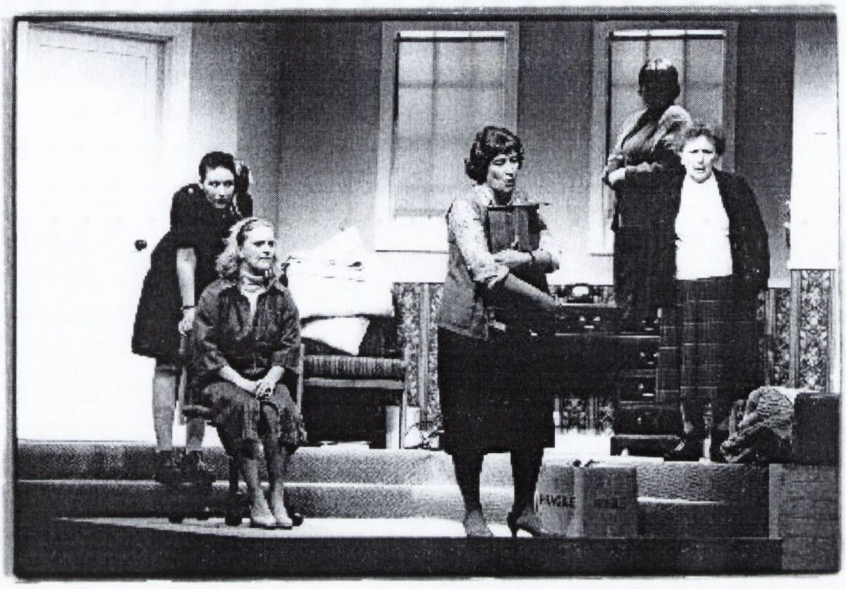
[44] Frank McGuinness, *The Factory Girls* in *Frank McGuinness: Plays 1*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996. All subsequent quotations from this play will be taken from this edition.

After securing themselves into the office by barricading the only door, the women begin to set up a makeshift home. They have hauled with them everything from "*Food, cloths, cigarettes, crockery, cutlery, pots, a kettle, two small gas canisters*" (52) to "*two bottles of Bushmills interspersed with large packs of toilet paper*" (53). With all of the necessities and comforts of home in place the women begin their weekend sit-in.

Once again, McGuinness uses space to confine the bodies he puts on stage, and does so in order to refine the focus of the audience on the issues at hand. In her article "'Isn't it Just Like Real Life': Frank McGuinness and the (Re)writing of Stage Space" Claire Gleitman confirms my aforementioned theory that McGuinness "exhibits a nearly defiant stylistic shift away from the naturalism that has predominated on Irish stages since the inauguration of the Abbey."[45] Glietman asserts that through this defiance McGuinness's "stages serve to displace, to alienate, to remove the constituent of the Irish question from their accustomed places – or to reimagine those accustomed places in such a way that they seem to encompass within themselves several places, or no place at all."[46] Through the seemingly comic menagerie of household goods the women have dragged into the office for their protest, McGuinness presents identifiably domestic props, which characterise the realm of the home, in order to displace notions of home, and in particular, to critique them by placing them in the seemingly incongruous place of an office space. The props are just one of the coordinates he uses to localise the themes of home and family in this play.

Following SCENE FIVE, the play changes in tone and intimacy. Once again, in a similar fashion to the men in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, personal stories provide

[45] Claire Gleitman, "Isn't it Just Like Real Life": Frank McGuinness and the (Re)writing of Stage Space," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Volume 20, Number 1, July 1994, pp. 60-74.
[46] Ibid., p.63.





The Factory Girls, The Lyric Theatre, Belfast, 2002. Directed by Carol Moore. Cathleen Bradley as Rosemary, Jo Donnelly as Rebecca, Eleanor Methven as Ellen, Claire Cogan as Vera, and Barbara Adair as Una. Photograph by Chris Hill, with permission.

the foundation of the narrative, and begin to uncover the points of reconciliation that this play moves towards. The caddy, and often times barbed, language the women hurl at one another in the opening scenes gives way to a series of confession-like moments when the women expose the personal battles which make up their private lives. McGuinness begins *The Factory Girls* by focusing on the outside threat of redundancy on the women's well-being, and moves it into an interior exploration of the built-up personal feelings of alienation which, ultimately, pushed the women to stand up and fight for their rights.

Ellen is the leader of the protest, and the one who seems to maintain the toughest exterior veneer. As the plot unfolds, and she begins to tell her life story, we discover that her three children have died. She admits her ever-present grief, and confesses to the unshakable feeling that their deaths were her responsibility. Vera is dominated by her aggressive husband, and throughout the play she is torn between her belief in the cause for which they are fighting and her obligations to her husband and two sick children in the family home. Una is single, and lives with her alcoholic sister to whom she feels obligated to rescue from drowning herself to death with liquor in the pub. And finally, Rebecca, the youngest of the group, uses her imagination to fantasise about being carried away from her 'real' life by a magnificent horse, ironically without the knight in shining armour! At the end of the play Rebecca describes something she once read to the other women confined in the office with her:

> **Rebecca** I read something once. I didn't know what it meant, but I learned it off by heart. It's stayed in my mind. 'I saw a women sleeping. In her sleep she dreamt Life stood before her and held in each hand a gift – in the one Love, in the other Freedom. And she said to the woman, Choose. And the woman waited long and she said, Freedom. I heard the woman laugh in her sleep.' Yes, I heard the woman laugh in her sleep. (*She closes her eyes*). (89)

Rebecca reveals in this story the central conflict which each of these women feel: the choice between their obligations to themselves and their obligations to their families. For each of them, other than Rebecca, this work-related protest is the first time they have asserted their own identities over the obligations into which familial relationships have locked them.

As I mentioned, *The Factory Girls* employs a similar spatial strategy as *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*. Confinement, in this case voluntary, is a type of liberation from the influences of 'real life.' The play leads the audience into this confined space under the pretence that both their manager and their union are threatening the women, but McGuinness, ultimately, creates a safe place in which the real threats to their lives, fear, loneliness, unhappiness, and guilt can be expressed. This grouping creates an all female family of sympathy, providing, if only temporarily, the safety and belonging that traditional ideas of 'home' supposedly promise. And yet, the real homes of these women are what they long to escape from.

In her programme note for the March 1988 Druid Theatre Company production of *The Factory Girls*, directed by Garry Hynes, Nell McCafferty recalls some of the real-life factory girls she remembered from her childhood in Derry:

> These women were good at planning. The exigencies of their working lives had made them adept in the art, though you'd never think it to judge by their care-free swagger through the streets on the way to the factory. The "factory girls" were different in appearance from all other females. They linked arms as they walked along. This was seen, at the time, as a "common" thing to do. People with ambition, who wished to mark themselves off from the masses, never linked up with anybody else. Grammar-school girls, for instance were warned to walk alone, even when they walked together. Years later, as Derry people linked arms

> to march for civil rights, the camaraderie of the factory girls' walk was understood for what it was – solidarity against woe.[47]

McCafferty's link between the camaraderie of the factory girls and the fellowship of the civil rights marchers in Derry, and her description of it as a 'solidarity against woe,' quite succinctly captures the sentiment which, at the beginning of this chapter, I set out to explore. Solidarity in the face of death, mourning, oppression, marginalisation, and imprisonment is an emotional and political impulse that can be detected in all of McGuinness's plays. In the face of what McCafferty describes as 'woe' McGuinness creates families of choice, and families of circumstance, over and over again in order to represent communities of solidarity in the face of personal, communal, and political struggle.

The stories that the women in *The Factory Girls* tell one another during their weekend of fellowship reveal the fragility of concepts of family in contemporary society. Traditional notions of the family have been structured around a belief that family represents "continuity over time, emotional and material support, ongoing commitment, and intense engagement."[48] The women's stories reveal how their family lives, and their homes, are often the very things that provide the opposite to the stability and support that traditional family unity is purported to offer. It is interesting, once again, to return to the 1937 Constitution of Ireland. Article 41 contains the following statement which locates the woman within the Irish household:

> 1° In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

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[47] Nell McCafferty, "Solidarity Against Woe" in the programme for *The Factory Girls*. Druid Theatre Company, Galway, 16 March 1988.
[48] Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, p.10.

> 2° The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

Until 1972, when Ireland officially entered the European Economic Community and was required to take on the gender equality laws of countries such as France, Irish women were strongly encouraged to leave their jobs upon marriage, not pregnancy. Although this was only enforced in the civil service it was largely held as the social norm. In *The Factory Girls* McGuinness, once again, puts pressure on Irish history by contrasting the idealism of national identity and the reality of the country: in this case the economic hardships which simply did not permit women the supposed luxury of an uninterrupted domestic life upon marriage.

The type of home McGuinness offers in this play is a family of choice based on models of friendship for emotional support, and in the case of the factory workers, economic security. As he foregrounds issues of domestic unhappiness and new forms of alliances for women, as he did for men in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, McGuinness's women are given a space for choosing alternative ways of being in the world. The women's stories of their families of origin serve to highlight some of the issues in postmodern society which are reflecting a crisis in concepts of family relations, and an assertion of claims to new forms of emotional arrangements that meet the relational needs of modern people.

The issues which emerge out of the reflections above may leave the reader wondering, 'how are these sociological and emotional questions of shifting family patterns related to a queer reading of McGuinness's plays?' There is no doubt that new economic and cultural conditions are putting pressure on concepts of family, and it is in

the struggle to identify and, ultimately, establish creative alliances that the queer intersects with the traditional. McGuinness's characters, in all three of these plays, illustrate how individuals have been set adrift by the old verities of family life and conventional domesticity. Gay and lesbian men and women are well aware of the failures of ideas of 'family' both emotionally and materially as they struggle to assert their 'deviant' identities. Consequently, non-heterosexuals have been forging new groupings and creating new versions of 'home' for at least most of the twentieth century; new families not based solely on sex, but, rather, communities and families which stand in solidarity against the woe of homophobia and its concurrent social and cultural exclusions.

> But the emergence of a new discourse concerned with wider aspects of homosexual existence than simply sexuality and identity can be seen as a new set of preoccupations in contemporary cultures as a whole: a recognition of the opening up of all social identities, and of patterns of relationships. On a theoretical level, the poststructuralist and postmodernist challenge of recent decades have stressed the fluid, historical, negotiable, contingent nature of all social identities, including sexual identities.[49]

McGuinness's characters in all three of these plays exhibit the growing awareness of the benefits of these new queer alliances and the effects on individual lives.

Although homosexuality appears in all three plays, Stephen in *The Bird Sanctuary*, Michael in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, and Rebecca and Vera in *The Factory Girls*,[50] it is not foregrounded and, for that matter, does not seem to carry the representational significance it does in many of the other plays I have analysed. And yet,

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[49] Ibid, p.20.

[50] Although there is little overt reference to a lesbian relationship between these two characters McGuinness informed me in an interview on 8 October 2002 that this relationship is in fact a lesbian relationship. See Appendix I. The only hint I can detect in the play is in ACT TWO, SCENE SEVEN. The other women are in the toilet with Rosemary who is sick from too much alcohol. Vera and Rebecca are left alone:

Vera Will they want a hand?

at their foundations these plays exhibit what I have continually asserted as the queer strategy to offset traditional knowledges and inherited forms of identity. This queer impulse, as opposed to a strictly gay and lesbian one, reflects what John D'Emilio claims: "Homosexuality and lesbianism have become less of a sexual category and more of a human identity."[51] If it can be thus accepted that homosexuality is a type of human identity, and not just a sexual position or perversion, then that same identity has a communal character and a system of relational categories which can contribute to shifts in the general social structures of the postmodern era. McGuinness's families in these plays, whether dysfunctional, imprisoned, or emotionally suppressed by traditional structures, all disturb Irish ideas of 'normal' families and homes, while simultaneously queering the Irish theatrical tradition's location of the stage space which indicates these new queer configurations. They obscure the imposition of identity forced on people by historical systems of dependence, and, alternatively, offer divergent collective options which free people from the prisons of traditional identities.

Gay and lesbian men and women have continually formed social alliances and families of choice from the friendships they have made through shared marginal identities. Gay family formations have created alliances which have become powerful political movements organised around stigmatised identities, alliances which have continually confronted the 'normal' in modern western society. "In friendship, people can depart from the routine and display a portion of the self not affected by social control.

Rebecca They can handle it.
They laugh loudly
Vera We'll go to out bed. Leave the light on till they come in. (77)
Earlier in the scene the two women sing a song about loving a Black and Tan which they claim to the others is an inside joke.

[51] John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983, p.2.

That is, friendships allow people to go beyond the basic structures of their cultural institutions into an involuntary and uncontrollable exposure of self – to deviate from public propriety."[52] The concept of 'going beyond basic structures' and 'deviating from public propriety' could just as easily describe McGuinness's engagement with Irish culture and twentieth century Irish theatrical practices. But, it is the foundation of friendship, and the idea that these alliances provide the type of freedom from the restrictive eye of regulated and enforced social conformity, that perhaps most captures the emotional sentiment which I set out to identify at the beginning of this chapter. If *The Bird Sanctuary* indicates an inherent instability in traditional Irish notions of family and home, then *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and *The Factory Girls* seems to offer alternative models of love and support. All three plays attempt to shake off convention to reveal new queer alliances free from old prejudices, and rooted in notions of mutual esteem; a mutual esteem based on interpersonal knowledge and shared experience, not on political or cultural stereotypes or relational conventions.

At the very end of *The Factory Girls*, when Rebecca has told her story of the woman offered the choice of Love or Freedom, Rosemary tries to stir her from her reverie:

> **Rosemary** Come on, Rebecca, waken.
> *Rebecca opens her eyes.*
> **Rebecca** I have, woman, I've wakened.
> *Darkness.* (89)

The women's self-imprisonment, their weekend of solidarity against oppressive regimes, has stirred Rebecca from her dream. Throughout the play she has been indifferent to the

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[52] Peter M. Nardi, "That's What Friends Are For: Friends as Family in the Gay and Lesbian Community," *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience*, ed. Ken Plummer. London: Routledge, 1992, p.116.

cause, going along because she has nothing better to do. But this new alliance, this community of support and friendship, this new version of home, has woken her to possibility. Rebecca has awakened from a dream world into a reality that is, in one way, the same as it was before, but now it is seen with the eyes of new possibilities. As the youngest in the group she understands that she has choices that were not available in the social and cultural circumstances of the older women's lives, and that freedom is her most valuable possession; not freedom without love, however, but freedom before and within all her life choices.

The repeated trope of the individual story being told in the hope of liberation and freedom in these plays reflects a substantially queer reality. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes their significance in the life of queer men and women:

> As each individual story begins in the isolation of queer childhood, we compulsorily and excruciatingly misrecognise ourselves in the available mirror of the atomised, pro-creative, so-called heterosexual pre- or ex-urban nuclear family of origin, whose bruisingly inappropriate interpellations may wound us – those resilient or lucky enough to survive them – into life, life of a different kind. The site of that second and belated life, those newly constituted and denaturalised 'families,' those tardy, wondering chances at transformed and transforming self- and other-recognition, is the metropolis. But a metropolis continually recruited and reconstituted by having folded into it the incredulous energies of the provincial. Or – I might better say – the provincial energies of incredulity itself.[53]

Sedgwick's description of families of choice, and the healing effects of those 'families' on those who fail to assimilate to prescribed models of relationality, encapsulates the essence of what I have sought to uncover within McGuinness's writing in this chapter, and even throughout this dissertation. The 'wondering,' the 'transformation,' and the hope of a 'new city' built on the foundations of what is best about society and culture are the aspirational currents running below the surface of all of McGuinness's plays. He

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[53] Sedgwick, 1985, p. ix.

dramatically points towards possibility, advocating a recognition that hope, reconciliation, peace and healing are within the reach of what is already present in life and in history. I have chosen to end where McGuinness began, using his first major play *The Factory Girls*. The ending of the play may be a touch cliché, but, I believe, McGuinness is camp enough, and queer enough, to allow for happy endings. His new communities, his families of choice, and his alliances of friendship create an emotional sentiment of alternative support systems and hope for relational diversity that end with the optimism which, although deconstructed, continues to hope and believe in the idea or possibility that 'there's no place like home.'

Conclusion

Throughout this project I have been focusing on literary and performative evidence of the queer within McGuinness's writing; a surface project in some respects, since most of the data is clearly and unapologetically detailed within his narrative and his dramaturgy. And yet, what appeared to be glaringly obvious to me in his plays proved, repeatedly, not so obvious to critics. Although convenient, I have resisted the idea that his dramaturgy is completely the result of his queer life, and the evidence of that queer perspective is only clearly detectable to others who themselves live queer lives. I am not discounting the effect his life has had on his work, nor am I doubtful that there is a certain sensibility which some have access to more than others; but such an individual argument would leave me at the end of this study with a rather essentialist conclusion, and, I believe, would invalidate the elusiveness of the paradigm of queer which I have applied so generously throughout the thesis. I cannot allow my study to end with the person of McGuinness, or indeed with his sexuality, for that would leave me with the sort of identity conclusions which queer theory continually contests. In consequence, I must push my own methodology through to the end, and reach a conclusion based more on the ideological deconstruction of all categories of classification asserted by queer theory; allowing for queer to represent a full range of ideological challenges and alternative positions, not just sexual ones.

Although I have focused on the work of one author, Frank McGuinness, many other Irish playwrights have been lurking in the background of this thesis, some more clearly than others. In conclusion, I would like to take a moment to further contextualise

McGuinness and his writing within the Irish theatrical tradition's history of the privileging of the author, as I have done with his dramaturgy and performance strategies in the previous chapters. I do this, not to focus on his biography, but to illustrate how I believe his name, and the authorial influence which accompanies his fame, functions within a greater ideology of what theatre in Ireland, or Irish theatre, actually has become. This is an attempt to recognise a conflation of discourses and politics which lie, oftentimes invisibly, above and below his writing and his productions. In order to place McGuinness even further within the context of the Irish dramatic tradition which, in part, has shaped him and his art I will, once again, turn to the theories of Michel Foucault.

In his essay "What Is an Author?" Foucault describes how, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the authority of the author in the production of literary material gained prominence. In the introduction to *The Foucault Reader* Paul Rabinow states that Foucault's theories claim "The identification and evaluation of a literary work are intimately linked to the fame, standing, and reputation of its author, and from the intellectual world which gravitates towards those in power."[1] McGuinness's own position and prestige within the Irish theatrical tradition has made his name alone a hallmark of 'authenticity' in his theatrical representations, a phenomenon which, in itself, deserves some concluding attention.

Foucault describes the series of events which connect the author with their writing and, subsequently, with the success that their writing achieves within a culture, as a type of "ideological status"[2] which can actually serve to cloud the material they produce. Understood in this light, the author is not a subject or an individual, but, instead, a

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[1] Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 25.
[2] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author," *The Foucault Reader* ed, Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 118.

concept loaded with a diverse range of cultural signifiers. This is certainly true of the Irish theatrical tradition which has valorised the position of the playwright from its very foundations in the Irish Literary Theatre of the beginning of the twentieth century. Foucault argues that "Writing unfolds like a game (*jeu*) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits."[3] But Foucault problematises the ideological effects of the status of the author in relationship to the reception of his work, which highlights many of the conclusions I have reached in my research in relation to Frank McGuinness and his position within the Irish theatrical tradition. Foucault's theories of the author provide insight into what I have identified throughout this thesis as a critical blindness in relation to the deeper more complex queer issues which permeate McGuinness's plays, and influence both their production and reception.

Foucault describes the problem of the ideological construction of the 'author' and its limiting effect on published material. This theory may help in explaining why, oftentimes, the most challenging aspects of McGuinness's queer dramaturgy have been neutralised critically.

> The question then becomes: How can one reduce the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world? The answer is: one can reduce it with the author. The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's own resources and riches, but also with one's discourse and their significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. As a result we must reverse the traditional idea of the author.[4]

Much of the critical material I have presented throughout this thesis points towards a cultural impulse to protect the idea of the author from the tyranny which their dramaturgy may suggest, as it breaks the limits of authorial intention, going beyond its own rules and

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[3] Ibid., p.102.
[4] Ibid., p.118.

transgressing its own limits. Thus, McGuinness's position of prestige within Irish theatre, although one of undeniable privilege, may, in fact, be the 'principle of thrift' which contains his drama rather than freeing it.

In discussion with my colleagues, and presentation of my research, conversation continually returned to the sexuality of Frank McGuinness himself. Time and time again I was asked whether or not I would include the biographical information referring to McGuinness's self-proclaimed homosexuality. In presenting a version of my research on *Gates of Gold* I found it impossible to draw the listener's attention away from 'evidence' of homosexuality in MacLiammóir and Edwards, and McGuinness's 'real life,' and towards the queer writing aesthetic which I argue characterises the most unique aspect of its dramaturgy. The desire to limit what I described as queer within the writing technique of the play through a sort of biographical preoccupation frustrated me because of how I felt, ultimately, it sought to limit the 'proliferation of meaning' which my queer reading asserted. Assumed 'knowledge' of the author, and the historical personages *Gates of Gold* represented, preceded the work in such a way that a queer analysis of the play became congested with the ideology of authenticity grounded in authorship and individuality which Foucault identifies.

Foucault further describes the insidious effects of placing the author in front of his material:

> ...the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work...he is a certain functional principle which, in our culture, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite

> fashion...The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we free the proliferation of meaning. [5]

Foucault is not so much suggesting the possibility that fiction, or in the case of McGuinness's work, dramatic fiction, could possibly function in a completely unfettered fashion within any culture. He is, however, pointing toward the little analysed theory that the author, or in the case of the Irish theatrical tradition specifically, the primary position of the playwright, actually serves as a means of regulating and restricting the political power within the piece itself.

The biographical information about McGuinness's sexuality and the details of his long-term relationship with a man became part of the public discourse that affected expectations of *Gates of Gold* as discussed in Chapter Three. In a less sexual way, the editorial debate in *The Irish Times* surrounding the Abbey Theatre production of *The Bird Sanctuary* proves how the play itself was overshadowed by the status and prestige of the author. The production, and the critical debate around the issues presented in the play, were justified and defended on the reputation of the author himself, as other playwrights along with McGuinness's academic colleagues rushed in to bolster up his status as a national playwright. Protection of the author may also be the reason why critics have been so reluctant to discuss the ubiquitous queer representations within McGuinness's plays. The deeper critique of Irish family structures and their stifling effect on modern identities presented throughout *The Bird Sanctuary* became invisible, as the Irish theatre's untouchable status of the author took centre stage.

It is neither Foucault's intention, nor my own, to suggest that the author does not exist, and that material actually writes itself. He does not even argue against the fact that

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[5] Ibid., pp. 118-119.

the particular circumstances of the author's life may be of some significant use in recounting the content of the piece; nor do I, since I referenced much of McGuinness's opinion throughout. In the discussion which followed the presentation of his above mentioned essay "What Is an Author?" Foucault clarified his thoughts: "It is not a matter of asserting that man is dead; it is a matter… of seeing in what manner, according to what rules, the concept of man was formed and has functioned. I have done the same thing for the notion of the author."[6] It is the author as the principle for the gathering together of a group of discourses that fascinated Foucault, and also the focal point of what is important for my observations about the queer aspects of McGuinness's dramaturgy. I have not been concerned with the annihilation of McGuinness's authorial intent, or even the negation of the tradition through which he has emerged. I have been interested, instead, in 'seeing in what manner, according to what rules' his queer drama has functioned, or not functioned, in Irish theatre.

If what I argue throughout the dissertation is that McGuinness not only represents queer subjectivities in his use of gender as a strategy, but, in fact, extends the parameter of queer to include his narrative structures, his performance principles, and his topical engagements then I am arguing that he has, in fact, conflated an entire system of queer theatrical practices and meanings around every aspect of his writing. I have proven throughout how, even the most glaringly innovative gender strategies of representing homosexuality and the gay kiss in Chapter One, have gone unanalysed in Irish theatrical criticism for the eighteen-year life of the play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. I have also shown, in comparison with the predominant dramatic

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[6] David Halperin, *Saint=Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 129.

techniques of the Irish theatrical tradition, how McGuinness's dramaturgy consistently critiques the very principles which support the idea of the practice of 'Irish' drama. Relying on Foucault's influence throughout my dissertation, I believe that my overall resistance to basing my queer analysis of McGuinness's work on his queer life, or even solely on him as a queer writer, is a good opposition. Throughout I have been more interested in his function rather than his person, and its queer strategical opposition to the very institutionalised expectations and supporting ideologies of theatre and performance in Ireland.

Focusing on the function rather than the documented details can be applied as equally to the author as it can be to the material. When understood in this light it may be said that, throughout his work McGuinness is continually exposing ideology through his subject matter, and how that ideology has itself limited the flow of thought for modern people. In *Observe the Sons* he is questioning the ideology behind cultural mythologies; in *Dolly West's Kitchen* the idea of national identity and masculinity; in *Gates of Gold* the position of the homosexual story in modern society; in *The Gospel According to Judas* the religious systems of meaning which exclude diversity; in *Mutabilitie* the idea of the relationship between Ireland and England; in *Innocence* the idea of the person of Caravaggio, and the historical ravages of homophobia; in *Mary and Lizzie* the idea of the construction of historical discourse; in *The Bird Sanctuary* the idea of 'home' and family in a changing world; in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* the idea of how men are culturally permitted to relate to one another; and in *The Factory Girls* the idea of relationships and personal happiness in the face of hardship and oppression. The focus on ideology raises the level of the discourse around McGuinness's dramaturgy from a

materialist reading to a more complex analysis of systems of thought, not, in fact, to deny material circumstances, but rather to transcend them in order to dislocate the authority which has been granted them by unsettling the notions of 'truth' which legitimise and institutionalise them. By contesting the ideological foundations of the notion of 'Irish' theatre in this thesis, and that of authorship itself, I believe that a 'deviant' reversal of types is at play; the plays themselves are freed from both a reading which is restricted to the interior 'facts' of narrative reference and evidence, and its authenticity based on authorship. They can then be analysed through a more complex system of deconstruction, one that highlights the diverse meanings which they imply; allowing the writing itself, in the words of Foucault, 'to go beyond its own rules and transgress its limits;' truly the ideal aspiration for the embodied representation of live theatre. The simplistic references above to the ideology which McGuinness interrogates in his work are not meant to be merely reductive, but in fact, point to much more complex realities which exist outside the plays rather than fixating on the type of cooker onstage, or the possibility of a particular character living in a particular age which are part of the plays dramaturgical interior. Irish theatre, and the role of the author within it, is safe from critique if it remains a series of historical events and temporal production practices, but much less so if it is understood as a systems of signifiers which, in actuality, limits dramatic fiction by constricting meanings within a changing culture.

It would appear, then, that McGuinness's status within the very tradition that has established him has become a factor which limits the interpretation and reception of his plays. The anxiety he feels over what he considers to be blasphemous in *The Gospel According to Judas* thus could be interpreted as an apprehension about what this piece

might do to his undeniable status as a foremost author of contemporary Irish plays. On the other hand, I believe that this particular play should be produced because of its aggressive nature and explicit sexuality. For in fact, I believe that it may have the effect of disturbing the principles on which *his* theatre has been received and, perhaps, instigate a new wave of queer interpretations of his material; it may disturb the idea of 'Frank McGuinness' as an author. Its aggressive harshness would be difficult to neutralise, even by the most proficiently sympathetic Irish critic. As I discussed at the end of Chapter Three in relation to McGuinness's aesthetic strategy of telling the sexual story of gay love, I further support the idea that, perhaps, the subtly of the 'lie' disguised as the 'truth' is an antiquated mode of queer representation for the modern theatre. I believe that by more explicit representation, and less veiled metaphor, McGuinness may be able to reconfigure his mainstream status and create dramas in which his representational challenge of ideologies makes people ill at ease with what they see on stage.

Perhaps the problem is that his work has become too mainstream: "mainstreaming, by definition, ensures that, if anyone is to be uncomfortable, then it will not be heterosexuals."[7] I continually established throughout the thesis the connections between the interests of Irish nationalism and Irish drama, a project geared towards the formation of a national identity. One has served the other quite faithfully, as the theatre has done a great deal to inform post-colonial Ireland of its character and to challenge its cultural ideology. But, as I have also illustrated, the formation of a theatre based in the aesthetic of naturalism and performed through the principles of realism encourages a perception of 'truth' in representation, and naturalises particular identities as well as

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[7] Alan Sinfield, *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 346.

locations. The Irish theatre tradition has been broad and rich, and yet, I would argue, its project has searched for identity through the overall subjugation of difference. This has been most glaring in relation to the lack of representation of the queer, whether in theatrical practice or characterisation of subjectivities. In a Foucauldian sense, this project of national identity, under the guise of a search for an alternative post-colonial Irishness, in fact, has become a type of ideology which seeks to contain rather than expand the possibilities of cultural difference.

If this can be accepted, I would stand by my position that McGuinness's work is essentially queer in representation and theatrical structure, but I would add that, perhaps, it is not queer enough. He seems to have adapted his queer confrontations to make them more palatable at times, reflecting society rather than resisting it. In my research I noticed a considerable difference between the staging of the kiss in the 1985 production of *Observe the Sons* in comparison to the 1994 production. In 1985 the kiss was quick, almost apologetic, and the lights faded almost immediately. On the other hand, in the 1994 production, incidentally after the legalisation of homosexuality, the kiss was a purposeful and extended display of two men tentatively reaching out, touching one another, and even moving on to more explicit sexual contact (see second photo after p. 51). One could not help but wish the moment of gay love would have been staged more defiantly in 1985 *because* of the political value such a representation stood for, and not the other, less dangerous, way around.

I have shown evidence of the queer throughout his original plays, but one cannot simply blame the tradition for failing to see it. I believe that McGuinness's continual engagement with the same directors is but one of the factors through which he consigns

the interpretation of his work to a system of practical and technical production values which repeatedly drag his imaginative text, and innovative dramaturgy, into the representational paradigm of realism. In working closely with the texts, and having seen most of his productions, it is my opinion that the texts and the dramaturgy have rarely been actualised in production. *Gates of Gold* is clever and complex, and yet, I believe, it was the production which failed the play, not the play itself. For some reason, in the Abbey production of *Carthaginians* in 1988 the actor that was chosen to play Dido, David Healihey, was particularly 'masculine' in the sense that he is large, and, consequently, looked like an awkward rugby player moving around in drag. This hyper-masculine casting choice alone turned, what I argue, the political cross-dressing drag queen into a clown, defusing the confrontational elements of camp in favour of a sort of slap-stick comedy. From an audience perspective, it seemed as though it was acceptable to have such a queer character on-stage, as long as his gender identification was unmistakably performative, and undeniably an uncomplicated joke, which I argue it was not. Perhaps McGuinness's own respect for the ideology of the tradition, and the directorial and design 'stars' it is producing today, prevent him from allowing his plays to queer the tradition with their innovative perspective?

This being said, I have also argued throughout that one of the strengths of McGuinness's work has been what Foucault describes as co-optation, or his ability to work within the signifiers and paradigms of mainstream ideology to effect a change in attitude: resistance rather than revolution. I still hold this to be true, and, in fact, I see it as being one of the greatest strengths of my own queer project. For, to point out the 'ideology' behind Irish notions of the author or the general practice of the Irish theatrical

tradition is not to discount it altogether, or invalidate its valuable project of identity formation in twentieth century Ireland, but is, instead, an attempt to bring about self-conscious critical reflection on the tradition, and not just accept its principles as 'natural.' By accepting them as 'natural' or 'true' we lock the tradition and its contemporary legacy into a paradigm of praxis which risks becoming irrelevant in its undying reverence for the past. In my opinion, and I believe it is supported by my research, this is as much a critical problem as it is a theatrical one.

Irish theatre practices are certainly in debate, and questions concerning authorship are also in flux. Arguments prevail over whether, for instance, Samuel Beckett is an Irish playwright since he was born in Ireland but does not, in fact, employ the theatrical principles which largely define Irish drama; or, on the other hand, whether Martin McDonagh,[8] who was born in England and yet engages Irish locations and subjects in his writing and the Irish theatrical tradition in the overall *mise en scène* of his theatre, is an Irish playwright. These critical debates illustrate the significance of the position of the author and the tension over what exactly defines, what Nicholas Grene calls, the "notably cohesive"[9] Irish theatrical tradition. They also illustrate how definitional boundaries are in question, and ideas of 'Irishness' are themselves bursting forth from the ideology which has previously defined and delineated it for decades.

This queer confrontation of the ideology of the tradition is what I see as the contribution of my research to the field of Irish drama studies. By illuminating queer

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[8] I believe that the overall debate over the status of McDonagh within the tradition is a prime example of Irish theatrical criticism trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. McDonagh would appear to be blatantly, and playfully, engaging the ideology of the tradition itself in his dramaturgy, while many of his critiques cannot move beyond the content of his plays, and are left with the rather thoughtless observations of claiming they are 'not Irish' or this is 'not the way that Irish people are.'

[9] Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 2.

characterisations and queer dramaturgical strategies in McGuinness's work I believe I am pointing towards the fragility of the concepts of 'Irishness' in Irish drama, as well as drawing attention to the invisibility of the tradition and its ideological impact on controlling and containing contemporary dramatic practice. My attention to critical debates, and critical prejudices, serves as reinforcement for my argument that the author and the practice of theatre has become so embedded in a type of theatrical 'knowledge' and 'truth' that the general field of theatre studies needs this type of queer analysis to point out the subjugation of difference in interpretation and practice. Alan Sinfield describes the importance of recognising and making visible the ideology behind the cultural project of art itself:

> ...honorific concepts such as 'art,' 'literature,' 'universal,' 'tragic,' and 'classic' are neither spontaneous nor innocent. They are bestowed by the gatekeepers of the cultural apparatus, and should be understood as tactics for conferring authority upon certain works in the service of certain ideological positions. Though sexual dissidents have not been excluded from this process, they have been admitted on limited terms.[10]

Seen in this light, my study is a type of cultural work aimed at exploring questions which have been ignored by other critics or academics who, themselves, have become 'gatekeepers' who maintain ideological theatrical orthodoxy.

However, instead of feeling satisfied by my own research, I believe that it has opened much wider questions for me in relation to my study of Irish drama. I do believe that the microcosmic work of queering one author is necessary and innovative in relation, not only to the Irish theatrical tradition, but to theatre studies in general, an issue I will deal with in a moment. But this research has raised questions of overall reception and general critical evaluation of the theatre in Ireland. It never failed to astonish me in my

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[10] Sinfield, p. 346.

research how clichéd many of the reviews of McGuinness's plays were. Additionally, I was surprised that in academic work issues of alternative gender subjectivities and sexualities have often, if not always, been consigned to the margins of analysis in favour of mainstream materialist or historical investigations into the meanings behind the dramatic fictions McGuinness creates. My own investigations into the unarticulated spaces of difference I detect in McGuinness's work, the very 'deviance' of his dramaturgy I was initially drawn to, have left me curious to know how many of these spaces exist within this supposedly 'cohesive' thing we call Irish theatre?

The combination of queer theory and theatre studies provides a fascinating insight into the intersection between drama studies and theory in general. My application of queer strategies, particularly intelligible in Chapter Two on *Carthaginians* and gay camp, exposes the applicational communion possible between broad theories of gender and sexual politics, and the vast performative strategies of the theatre. In this sense I understand this project to exhibit a reflexive relationship between theatre studies and Queer Studies, a marriage that allows for a wide range of interpretation which, ultimately, frees dramatic fiction and its analysis from the confines of 'normativity.'

Finally, it is worth reflecting on how my own queer project aligns itself with McGuinness's dramatic project which, I argue, is a cultural task imbued with a sentiment of longing-to-belong, as I described in Chapter Six in relation to *The Bird Sanctuary*, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, and *The Factory Girls*. Alan Sinfield asserts that culture has two primary functions: "First, it creates a sense of belonging. Many of us value our sense of national, regional and civic belonging, our racial or ethnic identity, our

involvement in a world of work, our sense of shared political or religious commitment."[11] He goes on to claim that queer people want this same sense of belonging, and that the theatre is a place of cultural production which has the power to draw together people who are feeling the pressure of marginal identity and lack of belonging. McGuinness's creativity pulls together the historical twentieth-century Irish search for the fortification of national identity in theatre, and new queer characterisations of marginal subjectivities in the ultimate quest for identification and validation. He does so as vastly as in his assertions that queers are valid citizens, as in *Observe the Sons* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, to the reality that queers have faith and love of God, as in *The Gospel According to Judas*.

It is also in this project of belonging that McGuinness work meets Sinfield's second primary function of culture. Sinfield additionally believes that "culture is where a group addresses contested aspects of its ideological formation."[12] McGuinness's dramatic representations correspond to what Sinfield describes as 'faultline stories.' "Faultline stories take up the awkward, undecided issues...they hinge upon a fundamental, unresolved ideological complication that finds its way, willy-nilly, into writing, the presentation of plays, and so on."[13] All of McGuinness's original plays show evidence of the critique of systems of thought surrounding unresolved cultural or political issues. In this sense, McGuinness's dramatic attention to the past, and the devastating effects of its denial of difference, resists Ireland's contemporary desire to 'reinvent' itself by erasing the memory of its conservative, and often homophobic, cultural history; an erasure which threatens its historic post-colonial identification with marginalisation and

[11] Ibid., p.350.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

justice. His continued refusal to accept binaries or settle on 'one story,' as exhibited particularly in his dramaturgy in *Mutabilitie* and *Mary and Lizzie* discussed in Chapter Five, is an example of the exploitation of cultural cracks, or 'faultlines' as ways of asserting the notion that queer subjects share many of the same concerns, values and hopes as other people.

'Deviance' becomes a theatrical strategy used to preach a dramatic sermon proclaiming difference as the new aesthetic. Diversity is the mirror McGuinness's work turns on the Irish theatrical tradition, and the ideology that supports it, in order to expose its homogeneity. By defecting from the norm and, at times, flaunting social or cultural standards, McGuinness's work struggles to free the imaginative dramatic fiction from the confines of 'reality' which, ultimately, only accommodates normality. He preaches a sermon of contradictions, inversions, 'deviants,' and lovers, all to turn things upside down, and give his audiences a glimpse of the other side of 'normal.' Paradoxically, in the immortal words of Rima from *Dolly West's Kitchen*, McGuinness advocates to his audiences, 'Badness. Good, isn't it? A bit of badness.'

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Appendix I

INTERVIEW WITH FRANK MCGUINNESS **OCTOBER 8 2002**
DC= David Cregan
FM= Frank McGuinness

DC You mentioned in an interview with the Irish Times that you find the media's preoccupation with themes of homosexuality in your work to be problematic. Could you comment on that?
FM The differences with doing interviews, like, with *The Sunday Independent* and what people write in either reviews or in scholarly articles, it's certainly in doing private interviews there is a preoccupation with it. I find that pretty upsetting because it is usually, its usually heterosexual interviewers trying to get some cheap thrill from "spot the queer," and "what do they get up to really?" and that is ridiculous nonsense. In terms of reviewing there certainly is a reluctance to confront certain things that are at the heart of certain plays, whether this is done through the critic's own embarrassment or through their own sexual hang-ups or whether it's stuff on censorship both here and in England. What I find interesting is the level of media censorship that is there even at the level of theatre reviewing. But, certainly in terms of scholarly interpretations, I think you are the first one to apply queer theory to these plays, as far as I know.
DC Why do you think that is?
FM I think you have to remember that queer theory is only about ten years old. It's perhaps the first time that an available language is there for this particular slant or interpretation on it, this way of dealing with the plays. When Elizabeth Butler Culingford, in her recent book on Irish literature, when she applied feminist theory to the plays she applied some theory of sexuality to them, and I think that was a beginning.
When you come from a society as repressed as Ireland you are going to have an embarrassment factor and that embarrassment factor is very deep. What is quite striking in all this is that there has been awareness in audiences to go into areas where the media and academia will not go into or are frightened to go into, and that is a very healthy thing actually. The audience get ahead of the posse there.
DC Regarding *Innocence*: You mentioned in an interview that there was roaring in the theatre during its performance. You also said there was some reaction over *Observe the Sons*. Could you comment on this?
FM *Sons of Ulster* was first written in '83 and first performed in '85 in the Peacock. There was an openness to dealing with the gay issues between Pyper and Craig but at the same time I think everyone, including myself, felt there needed to be a fair level of discretion so that the cock-sucking, you didn't have to see it if you didn't want. *Innocence* was a very different matter. This was dealing with a complex sexuality, and a complex homosexuality that had deeply frustrated heterosexual elements to it. It was actually the heterosexuality that people couldn't deal with in the play, it wasn't the rent-boys that was upsetting them, it was actually Caravaggio's relationship with Lena and the Whore. That they found deeply upsetting. None of it was conveniently packaged. You

see, he screws men, once they saw that the men could be transgressed people got deeply upset.

DC When I teach *Observe the Sons* many of my students don't see the homosexuality.

FM You cannot make sense of that play without that relationship. There was a production that I saw here in Ireland in which there was no homosexuality expressed, and the Third Act made absolutely no sense, and it distorts the Fourth Act. One of the actors was too young and too embarrassed to do it.

DC In the text of the play you do not write the stage direction "They Kiss". When you were writing it did you make a decision to leave certain subtleties in and not be explicit?

FM I use very little stage directions because I believe in giving actors and directors incredible freedom. That said, there are certain rules and regulations that if you do not follow them you are not doing the play.

DC So your intention then was to always have them kiss in that scene?

FM Absolutely. In Patrick Mason's last production Pyper went down on Craig.

DC I noticed a big distinction in how the kiss was dealt with in the 1985 production at the Abbey versus the 1994 production. The later was much slower and more intimate. Does that have anything to do with the fact that homosexuality was legal in Ireland by the time of the second Abbey production where it was illegal at the time of the first?

FM Yeah, absolutely, there's no doubt about that. It was certainly confronted in the first production, the '85 production. Patrick [Mason] and myself insisted on it, and the actors were all fine with it. I but think there was a far more open atmosphere, less embarrassment then there had been in the earlier production actually. I also think it was a big help that the majority of the actors in the '94 production were gay. Not the two guys who played Pyper and Craig, funnily enough, but the rest of the cast were gay so no one would have dared to have said they were embarrassed about doing that.

DC I find one of the interesting things about when I share my work with my colleagues at Trinity College and speculate on why so little critical attention has been paid to the homosexual themes in your work, that their response has been that in Ireland there is an open, tolerant attitude towards homosexuality so a self-conscious response to it would have no point. What do you make of that idea?

FM Well, I don't reckon with this issue to upset people. There is a certain amount of recognition I'm asking for, and a certain amount of responsibility I'm asking for. But I think that that is actually ducking the issue. We are experts at doing that at every level.

DC In an interview you gave with *The Guardian* you commented that if you scratch the surface of modern Ireland below it you will find old bigotry. Do you think that homosexuality is different in Ireland now then it was twenty years ago?

FM Oh, there is no question that it is different. I mean, just look at the plethora of gay bars, and how, certainly in Dublin that it is easier to be gay then it was twenty years ago. It's miraculously transformed from what it was thirty years ago. That carries with it certain openings and certain limitations as well. Yes, it is a lot easier.

DC Do you think there is still bigotry lying beneath the surface?

FM You see, I came from the generation that expected to find bigotry, and you can find bigotry anywhere! I think you have to remember that, actually. So when you come out in Ireland in the 70's it's still a pretty strange occurrence. It's certainly not like now, it's a lot more convenient to be gay now. It's still not particularly easy but it's more convenient. I may well be biased myself in locating bigotry where there isn't, but I

would certainly never feel safe in the company of strangers. I certainly wouldn't count on the kindness of them.

DC The images and representations of homosexuality are certainly more vast now then they were when you were first produced *Observe the Sons*. What do you think of the way that gay people are represented in modern Irish society?

FM Well, I think, I mean at least we've been given more than a funny walk and funny voices. That's changed. Both in the representations of gay men and lesbians. And there have been advances made from straight writers as well, actually, that they wouldn't really dare pander to the prejudices, unless their writing comedy, but even there, there is a desire to return us to the 'screamers'. Again, it's pretty significant that one of the most successful theatrical enterprises this year throughout Ireland, it didn't come to Dublin significantly enough, was a production of a piece of filth called *Run For Your Wife*, that had audiences on their feet cheering. And if you presented a play that dealt with any other minority whatsoever in the way that that play does it would be chased out of the theatre. I still think it is significant that they didn't bring it to Dublin, but I feel if they had they still probably would have packed the place. And it shows you that fundamentally that things, at some level, have remained the same. The other very upsetting thing about that is that actors are so wrong to perform in that kind of degrading spectacle.

DC I wouldn't classify your work as that of a gay playwright, I'm talking about the themes and the type of writing itself. I would, however, classify you as a very 'queer' playwright. What I mean by that is, I am interested in your representations of homosexuality, I think they are important, I think they are significant culturally, certainly in relationship to the development of Irish theatre. But I think there is something very queer about the way you write, about the categories you try to cross, the way that you try to defy a certain realism which is imbedded in the psyche of contemporary Irish drama. What do you think of that perspective?

FM Well, it's a pretty excellent one to make actually. I certainly never saw myself as a gay playwright. When I was asked about that many years ago, "Are you a gay playwright?" No I'm an Irish playwright, probably closer to what I might call a Catholic playwright, a lapsed Catholic playwright. But, I have certainly never tried in a place to repeat what I had done before, and I certainly try to defy my own expectations of what is a play, and what makes a play. And so I take as the starting point the empty stage, the stage itself, and see what can be put on it, what can I disrupt in terms of the last play I have written. You know, the journey from *Dolly West's Kitchen* to *Gates of Gold* was, in terms of time it was a couple of years, but in terms of what you do in that space and what you do with character and what you do with narrative, are radically different, anyway, because I think *Dolly West's Kitchen* was a play that dealt with the tricks of time and dealt with a history in a certain way, one's sexual history as much as anything, and tried to do it with the whole rainbow of sexuality. *Gates of Gold*, it's finished now so I can talk about it with some degree of detachment. *Gates of Gold* is very very different in terms of its concentration on the exclusiveness of sexual relationships. *Dolly West* is very much about the broadness of it and how they affect other people, about how they affect the intimates of a relationship. And, also, what I wanted to try to explore, obsessed with a Shakespearean theatre, is this whole theory of twin, and the breaking of the unit,

and that's very much the foreground in *Gates of Gold.* Whether the production got that or not is another matter.

DC Is that something you were developing through the character of Alma?

FM ...and Gabriel, and Kassie. I mean, this whole idea that Gabriel and Kassie are not twins. Kassie does point that out. But that they have this psyche that is very dependent on each other, the male-female dependency, that is not there in *Dolly West's Kitchen*, it's not there in any of the other plays. It is in the foreground of *Gates of Gold.* As I say, I don't know if the production really came to terms with that, especially looking at the whole developing relationship between Alma and Gabriel and Alma and Conrad, because an emphasis was put on the idea that it was a play about MacLiammóir and Edwards, its not at all. And I didn't help it by allowing it to go on at the Gate Theatre...I think maybe I pushed things in the wrong direction by letting it go on there for its first production

DC What was the relationship between Alma and the nephew? What were you attempting to do with that?

FM What's meant to happen is that Alma sees the dead brother in him, she is a haunted woman, and Gabriel is haunted. They have this psychic power of haunting. She sees the dead brother and in the journey of the play she learns to reject the brother, which is a rejection of this spoiled brat of a boy. He's meant to be the beautiful boy, but again whether the Gate got that or not I don't know. He's meant to be stunningly beautiful.

DC Do you imply in the text that the nephew and Alma have a relationship?

FM It's there in the published text, but I decided to take it out in the rehearsal script. Because I think it's being over subtle actually, in the text it's implied that his mother is seeing this relationship happening when it's not there in the way that she made the mistake with his father, and she 's seeing it all coming around to this big amoral life as she calls it. In the written text you can get away with that but in the play I don't think you can.

DC Were you pleased with the production itself? As a writer, when the text meets the performance...

FM It does happen occasionally, it doesn't happen that frequently. But it does happen occasionally, and we're going to do *Gates of Gold* in London and I'll be glad to get a look at it when we go back there. I think that in a way I was too acquiescent in that production, I should have fought more.

DC Acquiescent to the desires of...?

FM Well, I listen to the desires of too many people, and it was the wrong thing to do in retrospect, now I'm not condemning the production in that respect, but I'm glad we're going to do it again, and this time we're going to follow the letter. I'm happy with the writing in *Gates of Gold*, and weirdly enough there's been interest in France to do it in French. Which I find extraordinary, before it even went on they were trying to get a production in Paris.

DC I feel that in the limited versions of your plays I've seen there hasn't been a production that has equalled your writing yet. I think your writing is in some ways epic, certainly with *Mutabilitie* I felt that way. I'm not so sure that the Irish theatre scene knows how to produce a writer like you. Yet. Do you have any thoughts on that?

FM Well, I do think Patrick's [Mason] production, '94 production, of *Sons of Ulster*, that was a kind of landmark production. It's going on Broadway next year. There was a production of it on in Williamstown, in Boston, and now it's coming to the Lincoln

Center. We'll see what happens there actually. I thought Michael Caven's production of *Mutabilitie*, working with a miniscule budget, came closer to what's going on in the play then the National's [London] production did. But again, he was hampered by the lack of budget simply and sometimes you do need money to achieve certain things. But I'd like to think it's possible that I'm ahead of them and they are still trying to catch up. But then you look at Marina Carr. I think Marina is trying to write in that big way as well. I'm looking forward to seeing *Ariel*, but certainly *Portia Coughlin* and *By the Bog of Cats*, stylistically I lean towards that territory.

DC I think you are pushing the industry to try and respond to your writing. The preoccupation with the critical response to your plays is almost entirely realistic. Do you read the reviews?

FM Oh, no. I never go near them. I don't read other people's either. It's crap.

DC What do you think of the relationship between academia and theatre?

FM There's two things actually. One is that because of my interest in European theatre and my obsession with Shakespeare, they are my two main areas of research, particularly European theatre, and because we get so little opportunity to see European theatre, doing as many versions of those plays that I do is my way of gearing myself up for writing new plays. *Dolly West's Kitchen* would not have happened without *A Dolls House*. *Gates of Gold* would not have happened without *Miss Julie*. Well they might have happened but they would have been very different. I mean one feeds into another. I teach *A Dolls House* and that's the kind of nurturing thing between the two I think, between the two skills. However, there is definitely some break, in the sense that sometimes I go down the academic path rather than down the creative writing path. I don't mind doing that because, as they say, it gets you out of the house. It's quite a liberating thing to immerse yourself in a totally different discipline, and see what happens of it. There was a time when I would do quite a few critical papers, go to conferences and things like that, but I haven't done that for a good few years now, and maybe there is a bit of stagnation creeping into my academic life. Maybe I'm getting lazy.

DC I don't think you are suffering from laziness!

FM You'd be surprised how many *Murder She Wrote* episodes I've actually watched!

DC Around the time of the production of *Dolly West's Kitchen* you were talking about the relationship between England and Ireland, and you were referring to that sort of gendered relationship, male and female, with Ireland being gendered as female. And you suggested that we have been working with this paradigm of male and female and it hasn't been effective, and perhaps it time for a new way to imagine this gendered relationship. Could you elaborate on that?

FM I find that heterosexual paradigm boring. I find that Ireland as victim, and Ireland as passive, and Ireland as a particular type of female, if you like, really dull, and dated and inaccurate. So that's why in *Dolly West's Kitchen* Dolly is anything but those qualities. She's deranged in her own way, she's depressed in her own way, but her depression and her derangement come from her own strength. And also the fact that she has chosen a man like Alec, a bisexual, terrified of nothing. I find that far more interesting actually. Re-writing the rule a bit.

DC I read Rima as the queerest character in that play because of the defiance of expectation in her characterisation. You seem to write with defiance, but you also don't seem to want to deconstruct things as much as you want to reconfigure them.

FM *Dolly West* ends in fragments. I mean the death of the mother wrecks everything, and there are four fragments at the end of the play. There is the hope that they will go on, but what particular type of hope they're going to have I don't know. It does end with some element of hope.

DC When you are thinking about a future project...Do you think that it has gotten to the point where there is an expectation of you to write a gay character into your play?

FM Well, when you describe Rima as the great queer character in *Dolly West's Kitchen* you see there is no reason whatsoever for it. She is clearly a heterosexual woman, who had an unhappy marriage, but...I'm beginning a new play now and all the characters are damaged, sexually damaged in their own ways, but they seem to be straight, but that could change.

DC So it's not an intention?

FM When characters come, voices come, they arrive they materialise themselves.

DC When you were writing *Observe the Sons of Ulster* were you worried about writing a gay character.

FM No, not in the slightest. But you got to remember that I'd done it in *The Factory Girls*. I mean Rebecca and Vera is a gay relationship. In the first production it was completely ignored, there was no way they were going to deal with it. But then when Garry Hynes did the Druid production which I think was about '89, it was finally dealt with. That relationship makes no sense without confronting that. I'm not saying come out and dress the two of them in boiler suits, but certainly the deepest level of that whole play is relationship, its about the relationships between women and if you're not going to confront that, then why are you doing the play?

DC There is certainly within many of your plays a deep impulse for connection, a desire for community, a desire to be understood and accepted, which I think so many gay people live with their whole lives. In *Carthaginians* what was the decision to make Dido, obviously drawing from *The Aeneid*, a man and also a drag queen?

FM Well, first of all in Buncrana, in Derry, Dido is a boys name. And the second thing: he's into dressing up in a big way, like when the first time he appears, you know, he knows how to vamp it up, to camp it up as a posture, and he's as queer in his Derry City football outfit as he is when he's dressed as a woman, and that's the trickery of him. So he'd certainly see the dress as none more feminine than the football outfit. Gender-fuck, you know, that's what he was born to do.

DC What about the graveyard in that play? Why set it there?

FM Well, I did a workshop there in Derry in 1986 and if you got to Derry, particularly if you go to Catholic Derry the whole bloody city is dominated by this enormous graveyard which is right before the football field, and the Bogside and the Creggan, everything, I mean everything, is watched over by the graveyard. It really typifies that city: this massive construction. At the heart of it of course is this row of dead hunger strikers that are up there. So it was from that visit to Derry that the germ of the idea was planted. You could quite easily live there.

DC There seems to be a great deal of courage in your characters and writing.

FM I don't know about courage. I have never had anything to do with the gay scene. I have never had anything to do with gay politics. I have never seen myself even remotely as a spokesperson for this, it was just there and had to be done... if I had believed myself to be brandishing a flag or going out for radical change I wouldn't have done it the way

I've done it. I didn't see myself as doing it. I simply saw that there's something…there's characters that come into my head and this character is gay or a lesbian and that's that. There it is! That's life! Grow up!

DC I see that unapologetic attitude in *Gates of Gold.* I think that people came to the theatre thinking they were going to see the gay life of MacLiammóir and Edwards and you denied them that. Instead you simply showed love between two human beings. I see a great deal of Wilde in that subtly.

FM And also that this girl, this woman, Alma is going to have a very deep relationship with both of them, and that she will have a deeper relationship with them because of their homosexuality not despite it. I knew people would want Wildeisms and impersonations of Oscar Wilde. He's never mentioned in the play. He's there throughout, but he's never mentioned, because he goes without saying. He's everywhere in it. The young man is the Bosie character.

DC I was wondering if the nephew was a bit of Orson Welles in the way he created a sort of triangle of love between himself, Gabriel and Conrad.

FM No. He is too big in every way. You couldn't have Orson Welles as a subsidiary character, or even as a leading character in an ensemble. You're going to have a monster. But that said, in the new play, there is a monster developing, an American monster, and I cannot give the game away, but it bears similarities towards him.

DC Thank you for the interview.

Appendix II

INTERVIEW WITH SENATOR DAVID NORRIS **14 NOVEMBER 2002**
DN = David Norris
DC= David Cregan

David Norris is currently an elected Senator in Ireland. He was responsible for the reform of the anti-homosexual laws of the nineteenth century. He is currently working towards gaining partnership rights for gays and lesbians in Ireland. He is a former lecturer in English at Trinity College, and an actor and writer for the theatre.

DC Regarding *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*: My work has involved an examination of this production both pre and post legalisation of homosexuality. What did homosexuality look like in Ireland pre-legalisation?
DN When I was young? Pretty grim. It really was the crime that shouldn't be spoken about among Christians. It was covered by a complete veil of silence. They were occasional suggestions of scandal, but it was a completely different social complex anyway because people referred obliquely to sex. I mean there was absolutely no upfront honesty about these thing WHATEVER! I mean the kind of tale that is daily currency on the radio and television now would utterly have horrified people in the forties and fifties when I was growing up. I remember the post-war period: Censorship, rigorous censorship of plays book and cinema. And this was very much in the light of the Catholic Church's view of things. The criminal law still existed, and was used. Although occasionally, Ireland being the country that it is, there would be interventions to rescue somebody, from various ecclesiastical or psychiatric sources, you know. Get them out of prison. Don't get them sent to prison and particularly if you had influence. But certainly it was an offence for which people went to prison. There were very few people known to be gay. It was scarcely spoken of. Oscar Wilde: there was a scandalous kind of aroma around his name, which was really exciting. But adults never made it quite explicit what he was in prison for. It was another unspeakable crime. And if you think of England, If you look at E.M. Forester's *Maurice* for example: In that, one of the most moving things in it is when he goes to the doctor and he has no words to explain what he is and he says, "Doctor I am an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort". We hadn't moved much beyond that.
DC Did you ever have any homosexual representations of what it meant to be gay?
DN Absolutely not! No! The reason I was smiling when you said that was, precisely because my mind went to sexual sightings! I mean, people like myself for example, were addicted to the back pages of *Pavy Match Magazine* because they carried underpants advertisements for men, with hairy stomachs! It was simply wonderful!
DC So then, in a way, your generation is partially responsible for creating an identity. In the sense that gay men and women often define themselves by their predecessors.
DN Well, put it this way. I think people created their own identity and there was a whole debate about whether there was such a thing as a 'gay community'. That was one of the early things. A lot of people said there wasn't, that we were only connected by

sexual preference. But certainly, a community is a dynamic, organic thing, and whether or not…it obviously didn't exist in the same way in the past. Except, in as far, there were some examples of considerable courage, where people who were out cottaging for example, would sort of rescue each other, warn each other about the police. There was this *slight* collective feeling underneath things, and there were a few parties about the place and so on and so forth. But there was nothing really approximating to a community until they started making it for themselves. Where I absolutely decided "Yes, there is a gay community' and I'm proud to belong to it was when the AIDS pandemic hit, first of all because it was the gay people who responded, and they responded as a community and they responded with great care and compassion. Not only to their own people but also to drug users and to haemophiliacs. And may I say this? Not knowing if you are a haemophiliac or not! They are the most difficult people to deal with. People with Cystic fibrosis are the most lovely people, most gentle and demure people…So, the gay community responded really well in that. And, can I just say, there would be a couple of role models: Michael MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards, the theatrical producer and actor and so on. They were well known to be gay, and it was an open joke. But then it never actually came to the surface explicitly. There was a kind of a nod-and-wink language, and I remember being at a dinner at Trinity College, I'm a member of the philosophical society, and so on, and Hilton and Michael started off on this word 'gay', which they both hated! They thought it was an abuse of language! You know, these old-fashioned people felt like that, even some of the gay people like Michael and Hilton! Who could be remarkably conservative in their own way. The secretary from the British embassy was there, there was ten or twelve, and he said, "Oh, I do so agree! I mean, after all it's much less frequent in incidence than one might imagine. After all, look around this table, how many of them are there here?!?! And the table rose into mid-air like levitation because he was the only one who wasn't! Eleven pairs of legs started kicking each other under the table! But, that tells you that even these people, and they were gay, were held in great affection. There again, they were bizarre you see. Michael went around in full stage make-up in the middle of the day, I'm sure you've heard this, he was the most remarkable man, and freakish people always get away with murder. It's like in *MR X*, the Gay Sweatshop play from the 1970's, where the Scottish nationalist fellow who takes on the bourgeois apologetic one who said "Oooo, but Michelangelo and Leonardo, and Plato, and…" and he says (in a strong Scottish accent) "I don't give a shite about those people, they were all geniuses. What about the other poor dreary fuckers who never did anything?!?". And that to my mind is where the whole gay liberation thing comes from. Because it is the other poor dreary fuckers who never did anything who work in a factory or a sweetshop they're the ones who really feel the brunt of oppression.

DC Is that what motivated you in the first place to take on the very public task of trying to change the laws?

DN Yeah, but it happened half accidentally, but also half because I was horrified when I came to realise that there had been a generation of influential and distinguished people who were gay before me. Because I started meeting them at dinner parties and such. And I thought, where were they? What did they do? Did they not cry halt, blow a whistle, but that is very a-historical. If I had been in the same circumstances, who knows?

DC I think there is a myth that goes around MacLiammóir and Edwards, that is almost self-congratulatory, which uses them as a token to say, "Look, we have always accepted gay people!".

DN There is an element of truth in that I think people are tolerant by and large. The law was English. It was never even discussed by an Irish Parliament; it was never even probably discussed by an Imperial Parliament. And it reflects very much more an Imperial point of view. Whether it's that of London or Rome. Because, you know of course, that it came in through the ecclesiastical courts historically. But, Irish people are much more subversive than English people. English people would say (English accent) "Frightful, letting the side down! I thought men like that shot themselves!". Irish people would be making a dirty joke about it or have a snigger behind their back, but they wouldn't even really want them to go to prison by and large. But the Roman Catholic Church played a very malign part in all these things, because universally, and especially in Ireland, it regarded control of peoples sexual lives as a very convenient instrument of power, a vehicle for power. And historically there was the famine, which knocked the stuffing out of people. In Ireland in the eighteenth century people were fairly licentious. Even though they had very little they were pretty licentious, they had a bloody good time! And bred like rabbits which was part of the reason for the famine. But after the famine, which was a real cataclysm for Ireland, and created a deep psychic wound, and as in the way with the human animal, when something catastrophic happens which there doesn't appear to be any real explanation that you can understand, science couldn't explain it properly at that stage. People blamed themselves; they've offended the gods, and they must expiate this crime by grovelling and humility and so on. And the church waltzed in and said, "Look, see what happens! It's your fault", and all this stuff! And that led to this rather narrow, Jansenistic, puritan approach. I don't think it is necessarily an Irish characteristic. We've recovered from it, but in my opinion we have recovered far too far! And now I'm going to become narrow, puritanical and Jansenistic!

DC Do you think that your homosexuality and your profile as a gay man have worked against you or to your advantage?

DN It has worked ultimately to my advantage. Because I don't think it is possible to be a complete human being until you have resolved these issues. And I saw too much of people being split in two with their sexual life in a secret compartment from the rest of their life. And I think that is very damaging to a young personality. And I was lucky enough to have been afforded opportunity and to be at the right place and time historically to be able in my own case to bring these two things together and heal them. And to a certain extent part of the public campaign was also a sort of therapy as far as I was concerned. The fact that people opposed it was great! Because it put fire in our belly and there was a target, which was to overturn the law. The other thing is, we organised groups going around the countryside to people who were gay in little small towns, and this sort of business, and we did it very discreetly. But the wonderful sense of relief that we experienced by seeing this occurring in other people. Because you'd have this nice young farmer coming in, you know, sexually illiterate. I mean, I remember one awfully nice young fellow who thought he was gay because he masturbated. He confused the two. What a relief to find out he wasn't! Eventually he got engaged and wrote to us telling us to stop sending him our magazine because the fiancé was very

tolerant but she might not understand! I thought that was a great success because it released him to be himself. But a lot of the gay people you saw, just simply the physical presence of another identifiably gay person was comforting and reassuring, and people were certainly deprived of that. There were no role models. There was nobody who was successful. I mean you would occasionally hear about suicides or scandals, mostly in England. The whole business of the priests had never been revealed. But you would still have in England. "Scout Master denies all! I am innocent says Vicar! Choirboys' accusations repeated in court!" this sort of thing. So it was a very negative type stereotype of dirty old perverts luring schoolboys into their cars with sweeties, and ending up lonely and miserable and dying in their old dirty raincoats in a one-roomed apartment and this sort of thing.

But I think your point is very interesting about the kiss on the stage at the Abbey. Because it was only within a decade of that that you had the *Rose Tattoo* scandal. Where the whole Pike Theatre was destroyed over the whole issue of whether or not there was a condom on the stage. And yet, the kiss didn't cause a scandal at all. And yet, simultaneously, if you look at some of the British soap operas, like *Brookside*, I don't actually watch them, but I followed everything to do with homosexual issues in the papers and I remember there were cuttings about how there was a lesbian kiss and some other kind of a kiss, the HUGE fuss in England over this being broadcast.

DC I think that it ties into my original idea of the void in representation, it makes people feel comfortable, but at the same time they don't really have to deal with it. When you see it...

DN ...And there was a void. I mean when I think back I can think of Oscar Wilde, but the details were kept back from impressionable people until Michael MacLiammóir did this wonderful show *The Importance of Being Oscar*. Then there was Edwards and MacLiammóir. There was also Roger Casement. And that was where it did sort of rise to the surface. Because a certain type of extreme nationalist actually refused to accept that anyone could be gay and an Irish patriot. And there was all this nonsense about the diaries being forged and so on. But that at least was a controversy, and that brought it out in the open because the temperature became so heated. And then of course there was the Wolfendon Enquiry in England, leading to the Wolfendon Report in the '60s, and that was the first time it became explicit. That was the first time I remember seeing the word homosexual in the newspapers.

DC Do you think homosexuality looks different now than it did twenty years ago in Ireland?

DN Yes, I think the whole of society is changing considerably and I think that young people are coming a lot closer together. I think whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, whether they are gay or straight or whatever you want to call it, their lifestyles are getting much closer. Young heterosexual couples live together before marriage, and frequently don't bother getting married at all, ignore the rules of the church in regard to contraception and such, they make their own individual decisions. They frequently have more then one relationship before they settle down with a more permanent partner, and they regard sexual pleasure at least as much for pleasure, comfort reassurance and the transmission of affection and love as for the purely practical procreative purposes which the Church sees it. So that brings them all closer to the gay model. Where on the other hand, particularly in the aftermath of the AIDS situation,

people are becoming more prudent, you might say in their relationships. This may not be affecting younger people anymore, but the sort of middle group, the generation that came after me is inclined to be more responsible about things. Also it is no longer a shame to look for a committed relationship, because in my day it was, you know, it was politically incorrect not to be wildly promiscuous, and I couldn't be bothered. I went through an early stage of that and I got fed up with it. I wasn't interested and I was more or less denounced! Politically you were not really living up to the mark if you weren't screwing as many people as possible, it was a political requirement. And also, public kissing. I mean I used to get kissed from time to time. Every once in a while someone would jump on me on Grafton Street and say, "Oh, David darling" (kissing sound). It wasn't because they gave a shit about me but it was because they wanted to upset the middle classes. To be honest, I wasn't keen on being used as a target. I mean I love being kissed if people really want me. If they want me with the best of intentions. I don't want to be kissed as a political demonstration. No. In the exact same way that I go to Church but I won't get caught up in these obnoxious squirms-of-peace. If you go to church where they go "Peace be with you! And also with you! We will now exchange the sign of peace!" We will in our fanny! I will not do it. It is the ecclesiastical equivalent of lap-dancing! It means fuck all! Gestures mean nothing!

DC But you were a radical, weren't you? I mean politically!

DN Well, I just said things that other people didn't have the freedom of manoeuvre to do!

DC Did you ever have other gay people say things to you like, "why do you have to make such a fuss"?

DN You're joking! Absolutely! The only time I ever got queer bashed was by another queer! For being too political. "We want discos! We want saunas! We want to get our hole! That's it! Bugger off! All these old politics are only drawing attention to us!"

DC There is a trend towards the 'normalisation' of gay life.

DN I like that! I have no problem with that. I mean I have always been aware that it was the drag queens that rioted in Christopher Street and all that stuff. More bloody power to them! But, like myself, they had the freedom to manoeuvre. They had fuck all to lose. In my case, I was employed by Trinity which saw themselves as a liberal institution. My parents were dead and I came from a strong social background, so I was more or less untouchable. I was all right. I couldn't come under pressure from a non-existent family. The drag queens were the same. No pressure was going to be applied to them. They were going to be thrown into the paddy wagons anyhow so they might as well pick up the cobblestones and peg them at the police!

DC Did anyone ever threaten you? I mean police-wise?

DN Ah yes! No, no, no; My telephone was tapped once, yes, right around the time of the trial, which I found immensely useful because I used it to broadcast back in towards the authorities. In those days they were going to conduct a very personalised line of enquiry about who I had sex with, at what temperature, what angle I like to shove it in, who did what to whom. Dreadful, nauseating. So I rang the head of the Dutch Liberal Party in The Hague and said, listen, you would not believe what this crowd are going to ask me in court on Monday morning. I said, would you send an observer over from the Dutch Liberal Party to sit in the court. "Oh, yes!" So I made arrangements to meet them at the airport. That line of questioning was completely dropped.

DC Did they try and have a go at you personally?
DN Well, in the sense they challenged me, asking me questions like "Are you a homosexual?" And you get a thing called 'notice for further and better particulars' which opens up a line of questioning before you get into court. You get a kind of a printed page that lists all these questions, and it's really a kind of fishing expedition. They were asking very personal and intimate questions and I took exception to them and I used my tapped phone because I knew it would travel back. At least I assumed it did.
DC Did you ever get the sense that you are the token queer?
DN Yes, but I wasn't a token queer at Trinity. They weren't terribly comfortable with it, and I got well intentioned advice to say it was all a big mistake and that I was only fooling when I came out first of all. It is exactly like being a woman, you have to be twice as good and the next available heterosexual male. You will never get promotion, and you will be regarded as some kind of a joke and all this stuff. That's the way I would look at it.
DC There were politics in the university?
DN Yes, to a certain extent. You see people said...you know, I was regarded as a good teacher because I amused and entertained the students and they got a certain amount of high-grade information without pain. But I never got promoted and it became a scandal at one point and the Provost intervened to make sure that I did. I was actually held up at the merit bar, which is a kind of penal thing, even though I was regarded as one of the best lecturers they had.
DC Why was that?
DN Well, it was for...well, first of all I didn't publish a great deal, but that was only part of it. I published more than they thought, and I also published things like essays on E.M. Forster. Very shrewd critical analysis of his language and structure to show the impact of his sexual orientation on his work as an artist. The fact that it was that that smothered him! That he could not write and publish about the only thing that he really understood! He had to have these puppets, you know, getting into a clinch! The kind of thing that would be said to me was that you couldn't give your full devotion to the department because you're on the radio, you're out on demonstrations, you're organising help-lines, discotheques, this sort of thing. They were all playing golf, drinking and whoring, but they didn't seem to notice this! But they noticed what I was up to, so how could I be giving my whole devotion to the university if I was agitating out in public.
DC Have you seen any other of McGuinness's plays?
DN Yes. I saw, and was very moved by Caravaggio (*Innocence*). And I saw The Golden Gates (*Gates of Gold*), which I was... it was remarkable...
DC What did you know about it before you went in to see it?
DN I knew what was said in the press. That it was more or less a record of Michael MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards. To my mind it really outgrew that in performance. I didn't see it as that at all. I saw it as, there are types of relationship and it was the type of relationship in which Michael and Hilton were involved, but I didn't see, sometimes I think you can get an effect of theatrical blurring if the play is supposed to be based on historical figures and there is obviously a certain amount of dramatic license and things are changed and this business. So I didn't feel it was just them, I thought perhaps it caught their spirit, and I thought it was hauntingly appropriate that it was put on in the

Gate (Theatre). I felt you could understand them in the light of the play. It was a play about the type of relationship in which they were involved.

DN Do you think it is important to see 'gayness' in the way that McGuinness represents it in a visible way on the stage?

DN Yes! Absolutely, 100 %! It is extremely important. And I can remember, even in the early days, and I suppose this may have been one of the ways that I was radical, that I wrote to RTE about the radio and television soaps and said; you are presenting a distorted view of Ireland and Irish society because you have not once reflected the existence of a gay character, and there are so may hundred thousand in the country even though most of them are in their fox-holes hiding!

DC Did they reply to you?

DN I think they did, but I can't remember. But it was very bland anyway, and people thought it was a joke. I said it in public several times and people laughed! They thought it was the most outrageous thing to have a gay character on a soap! This is all part of the normalisation process, and it was for this reason that it was resisted by the establishment because you see, it was the same thing with the drag-queens, I pay them tribute, but they are not as you would say 'centre-stage', and it is a sentimental evasion of the hard realities of life for gay people to simply put them centre-stage and say "This is the experience of gay people", it's about a lot more practical things than that. Every gay-pride march. The photographs would be of these men with hairy-legs, these sprung tutus and wigs. Very funny, but what does it tell anybody? It just says, "These people are freaks!" I would like to see 'Joe-soap' for instance. I always felt the most subversive thing a gay person could do was to be the boy next door. It's much more subversive than being a drag queen, because that's what everyone expects. But they really have to deal with it when you are living next door and you are saying, "I am as much of a human being, and as much of a citizen as you are, and I pay my taxes and expect to get a return. I want the same pension rights as you. I want to be able to nominate my spouse for free travel on Aer Lingus if I'm a pilot. I want inheritance rights. I want mortgage rights. I want hospital visiting rights ". All these sort of ordinary things.

DC How do you balance that? As a gay man, I think there is a certain expectation of you when you are on the radio or the TV that you are going to 'perform' in a particular kind of a way. There is a certain 'performance' of gayness…

DN …Well, first of all, that is my nature. I will do it about the trees in O'Connell Street, about dog-dirt in Merion Square, about Chernobyl, about whatever it is. That is my nature and I don't know if it has anything to do with sexual orientation because it seems to be the way in my family. My aunt and my grandfather, they are all exactly the same. So, the way I deal with the situations, in practical ways of trying to move the agenda forward, is I will make my position clear and I will make what may seem to people radical demands, but I will place them in a particular context. I was the first person elected to a national parliament as a gay person and I allow that to be forgotten very quickly because I didn't want to turn into a freak. I could easily become a freak, but I wanted to be somebody who was seen as capable of being able to get things done. I worked very hard for the establishment of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I have been on it ever since it started and I'm very much involved in that area. The same, now I'm the spokesman on Transport Committee, and I'm on the committee to put in an underground railway, and we are going to be fighting tooth-and-nail for that, and so on. I

did not always speaking on gay rights, on homosexual issues. I wasn't everlastingly bleating about it. When I did it was listened to because I had a track record on other issue to which people could relate to more easily. I also made sure that wherever I was I would try and make it understandable to people who weren't gay. But, Ezra, my faceless partner, who ran off about 18 months ago with a Muslim, Arab fellow from Ramalah. Can you imagine! Jewish and he ran off with a Palestinian! Very ecumenical. Ezra use to say, (Israeli accent) "David, thank God you is gay! 'Cause is if you not gay, you be most square person in Europe!" And there is an element of truth in that. But that is an advantage, because it means I can understand how somebody would instinctively react against this stuff. For example I never use the phrase gay marriage because it is so easy to pillar. It suggests to men with hairy legs dressed in white going down the stairs! Little bouquets. And you can rubbish it. It also threatens people because they feel marriage is theirs. Politically what I do is, we haven't gotten as far as I like, but I'm on a little committee, and we are drafting a domestic partnership Bill. Now we are doing it that way, it is not a gay marriage Bill. It looks at the situation of every citizen who is in a more or less committed relationship outside marriage. That brings in a lot of heterosexual people and heterosexual couples, so it gives it a much broader appeal in support, and also addresses the principle. I feel if you take up an idea like this you quite rapidly see that there are principles underlying it and you extend it. I mean, that happened to me, because I started off as a very narrow focused campaigner on gay rights and then started seeing analogies with the women's situation, with the travellers, with various groups, and it led to my interest in human rights generally, but it started from some extremely narrow and selfish focus. This is much more powerful.

DC You are a Joyce scholar…

DN …Performance is my thing! That's how I choose to celebrate Joyce because I think the scholars have almost killed him!

DC I think that is one of the ways that you are a very powerful advocate for the gay community in Ireland, because you not only perform, but you have had the courage to perform something that was not performed so publicly before you.

DN I'm not sure about the courage. I have had that said to me before and I don't really believe it. First of all, there was an unbearable pressure building up inside me, and it was as much temper as anything else. Secondly, the day that I came out, it was at a founding meeting of the Southern Ireland Rights Association, and everyone was bleating about how terribly tolerant we were in the South compared to the North and the British and all this kind of stuff, and I got fed up because I knew I was being walked on. There was a very handsome Dutch-boy in the audience and I thought I better run up a flag and say, "Yoo-hoo, I'm gay!" And as I predicted, he did come over! And we became great pals, but he was unfortunately totally heterosexual! Even though he was very Catholic, and he and his friend had a conversation about whether they could save my soul by sleeping with me! We are still very friendly! Anyway, there was indignation and a sort of a build up of anger at the injustice and so on and I would say I wasn't fully in control of the explosion. I think it was going to happen anyway, and it wasn't premeditated or calculated. The other thing is that there were so many other people as well. I mean, I was the visible face because I had the freedom of movement, but the amount of support that we got was tremendous. For the first time there was a tremendous amount of support from other people that were gay.

DC Did you want other people to come out when you came out?
DN Well, I always thought it would be a good thing. I wish more people would come out now. I don't feel I have the right to go and force them to do it.
DC Do you think there is a big difference between living 'in' the 'closet' and 'out'?
DN Yes, I do. Definitely, of course I do. There is a sense of well being, there is a sense of common responsibility. There's always an element of deception or lying. It goes as far as some people getting married to cover it up. I understand that. I cannot blame the people that do it, but I think it is regrettable and I think that it is exploitative of the non-gay spouse. Unless they know and they are happy about it, but that is unusual. I think it must be a dreadful thing to find out after twenty years of marriage that your husband liked you and loved the children and that he's been screwing you gutless every weekend, or every second night, but he's been thinking of Marlon Brando while he's been doing it! I don't think that does your self-esteem much good.
DC Where do you think art, or performance, intersect with these types of issues?
DN I think actors traditionally have been outsiders, bohemians, freer. They dress up, they wear make-up, they project, and the most heterosexually actors will say "*Darling*", so there is all that. There is also the fact that any suppressed minority tends to produce performers. I mean look at the gypsies, look at the Jews, they produce musicians, entertainers, clowns, all this type of things. So there is that intersection, and there is also a mask, the fact that from behind a protective screen of a mask you can actually say things.
DC What about McGuinness's plays? If he has a new play going on would you go see it because you know that he is going to have a gay character in it?
DN No, not necessarily. I like the idea of plays with gay characters in them. They obviously interest me more. I have spent my life reading in a mirror. I read Jane Austin and I'm thinking of Mr Darcy's mad embrace, I'm not thinking of Elizabeth's feminine wiles!
DC So you're reading a different text then really?
DN Totally! I've had to translate all my life. It's like reading mirror writing. That's why I don't want to see these two worlds drawn separately. I think it is good for heterosexual audiences to see plays with gay characters in them, and read books with gay characters in them and all. Frank is a very significant playwright in my opinion, and his significance would be lessened if he addressed his plays totally to a gay audience and dealt solely with gay characters. He reflects reality. And he reflects it in a way that intelligent people, even when he is addressing a gay character or a gay subject in the play, can empathise it, can understand it.
DC As I listen to you I think that he writes in much the same way that you see your political position. Not as something outside the society that wishes to attack and destroy, but something that is on the inside. More like bringing something to the surface rather than bringing it in from a foreign place.
DN Yes. And I think that is terribly important. I think Frank McGuinness has been very important in that. In the beginning he didn't say very much about his own sexuality, but that more and more has come out, but only in a certain context. And he has been very clever at controlling interviews. He will give it the amount of space that he decides is appropriate and then say, "Fine we are moving on to something else. I want to talk about

my plays, I want to talk about academic life, I want to talk about theory…" and I think he is absolutely right.

DC About that idea of 'reading in a mirror'. Do you think when a gay person reads a novel or sees a play, do you think they see something different?

DN Of course they do, because they can se it from the inside, or they can understand what's wrong with it. You know, this world is still so unfamiliar to heterosexual readers that they will take on trust what they are told, and sometimes it can be very…

DC Do you think it makes a difference about who writes what? Do you have to be gay to write gay, or a woman to write women, etc.?

DN It is a question of the calibre of their imagination. I think it is remarkable about the imagination. I'm into putting the whole sexual thing in its place. Not over-emphasising it, but at the same time not minimising it or being coy about it. Writing about it realistically, tenderly, exasperatingly, all these sort of this things.

DC Do you think there is a tension between categories of identity; can you be one thing or another and also gay?

DN Absolutely. Can you be Catholic and gay, can you be Irish and gay, can you be Gaelic and gay, all this sort of stuff.

DC Frank McGuinness shows us that in his plays.

DN Yes, but there was determined opposition to that from a group whose motives I understand. Very human. They wanted to live in a neat ordered world in which the universal experience was a reflection of their own. But, unfortunately, it aint like that! Life is untidy, and people cannot often squeeze into the boxes that people want them to without doing huge violence to themselves.

DC I think that is part of why this culture is exploding right now, because everything was too compressed and now…

DN Yes, but I do think it will go back again. I think there will be a degree of restraint which I would appreciate in one sense because I'm beginning to get exhausted from "Fuck, shit, and bollix and cunt" all over the TV! They suffer from the law of diminishing returns! The first time it was said it was great but now it's boring!

Appendix III

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK MASON **MAY 19 2003**
DC= David Cregan
PM= Patrick Mason

Patrick Mason is the former artistic director of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. He is credited with 'discovering' McGuinness at a writer's workshop in Galway. McGuinness brought a first-draft of The Factory Girls *to this workshop. Mason saw the potential in the play and later directed it. Mason has directed many of McGuinness's plays including* Observe the Sons *and his most recent play* Gates of Gold.

DC What was it that first attracted you to directing Frank McGuinness's plays?
PM Well, first of all there is a personal element because I met Frank first at a playwright's workshop that I was moderating for University College Galway and he had submitted a very fragmentary draft of *The Factory Girls*, and it was in the course of that workshop that I got to know him but also became intrigued by the force of his writing. It is one of those things that you just sort of know when you meet the right thing. I mean here was a real playwright. Not just someone with facility for dialogue and character which many people have, but here was someone with this incredible intellectual fire-power, and a grasp of theatre history, a grasp of literature. I mean all the equipment, fully armed and primed, and it was really that. I took *Factory Girls* to the Abbey and we did the first production in the Peacock and that started the whole kind of thing. So, I suppose initially it was meeting the man and liking him enormously, and recognising from the beginning that this as a major, major talent. So, I suppose on all the early plays we worked, I did most of the first productions and we worked a lot in those years together. My role in Irish theatre is rather odd because I have an English background, my mother's Irish but she lived in London most of life and my father is English. I had a Catholic education in England with the Benedictines. I came to Ireland for a number of reasons, but I happened, straight out of drama school, to get a job at the Abbey as a voice coach and I rapidly became involved in direction and the life of the Abbey Theatre, and met suddenly all these extraordinary writers and found myself all of a sudden in the middle of all this. It was an extraordinary period. I mean it was the early seventies. I went off to Manchester and came back in the late seventies. There was a real burst of writing energy. I mean around that time Frank McGuinness was emerging, Neil Donnelly, Graham Read, Bernard Farrell, these were all authors who premiered in the Abbey in the late seventies early eighties. Tom MacIntyre's work, Tom Kilroy's work, and Brian Friel obviously. I suppose because of my romantic view of Ireland, and also because of being of a theological bent, like yourself, having if you like all the reference to unlock most of the Catholic Gaelic Irish experience, I was able to be assimilated very quickly into that life. And, I suppose with Frank, because of the English thing, because of his awareness from the North with the Protestant thing, and because of a mutual interest in theatre, and I suppose because we were both gay men at a time, and we were both out gay men, when it wasn't exactly the norm, that it seemed to create a level of

trust and understanding and empathy for the work. I was very soon aware that there were strands of a dark violence, a sexual violation in Frank's work, and real physical violence and political violence that with my English background I simply did not share those things, though I rapidly came to understand where they came from. I mean in Dublin; the Dublin bombings in '73, '74 the burning of the British Embassy, and then all the atrocities of the campaign of the seventies...so I very soon learned what that was about. And I think a writer like Tom MacIntyre, of another generation to Frank, but this deeply poetic experimental dramatist, intrigued by physical theatre, gestural theatre, things that now are almost cliché, then were totally cutting edge and avant-garde, we worked in a series of works through the eighties at the Peacock which I know were broadly influential on Frank, extraordinary works like *The Great Hunger* and *The Bearded Lady*, *Rise Up Lovely Sweeney*, dealing in the poetics of theatre, dealing in emblem ,in gesture work enactory language, very physical staging; this was pretty startling, and in Irish theatre terms very startling. McIntyre was part of that group, with Frank and others, who right through the late seventies, early eighties were having their work performed in the Peacock. A real sort of powerhouse actually. I have always found Frank's work totally engaging. It's the most theatrically ambitious in terms of its mixture of passion, gesture, word, spirit; he is an intensely spiritual writer as well as also being a fully sexualised and physical writer. He is up there with Friel and Murphy. In the sort of breadth of his vision, his grasp of the human.

DC What do you think makes him the same and/or different from other Irish writers?

PM Well, he speaks to the 'other.' He is in dialogue constantly with Murphy and Friel, well particularly Friel; another Donegal man, and Friel is the sort of 'father' who has to both talked to and destroyed. There is a level at which *Carthaginians* is a response to *Freedom of the City*. *Dolly West's Kitchen* speaks directly to *Dancing at Lughnasa*. *Dancing at Lughnasa* ends with the breaking of eggs and *Dolly West's Kitchen* begins with the breaking of eggs, and you are going from one kitchen to another kitchen. Frank stands absolutely consciously in that tradition, and he speaks to those other writers; and I think that is all part of this extraordinary venture that Yeats kicked off a hundred years ago, and it is only a hundred years ago, that is the extraordinary thing about Irish theatre.

DC What do you think he does to speak against them?

PM I think he speaks against them because I think he is overtly sexualised in a way that Friel, and to an extent Murphy, are not. They are of a generation that is more reticent of sexual matters. And, obviously, without turning Frank into a 'gay-playwright,' I don't like that narrow classification for a man of such breadth, but clearly that is a more radicalising element within his vision than any of the other previous generations who are notably heterosexual. Frank is the first 'out' gay playwright of stature in Irish theatre. It doesn't define him but it does give him that more radical perspective. He is more acutely aware of gender issues, of the whole politicisation of gender, far more of this century than the last. All of the other, the great divide is the Friel/Murphy divide of the sixties, were challenging the legacy of deValera but were too close to it to take it on fully, although they launched an enormous challenge particularly to the family structure, to the tradition view of Catholic Ireland. They were sympathetic to the gay thing, but never saw it as an essential part of their vision. The only point of reference they say Friel had were MacLiammóir and Edwards, these two wonderful old Edwardian queens, that was an image of gayness that was the flamboyant, bohemian...Frank is the first to feel the

radicalisation of homosexuality brought about in America and England in the sixties and seventies.

DC In *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, did you consciously treat the physical representation of homosexuality differently between the 1985 and 1994 productions at the Abbey?

PM I think it was conscious at the beginning; you are always making a fine calculation. You push too hard and the shutters come down, you don't push hard enough and the shutters won't go up. How do you calibrate it? In any theatre work that you are revisiting after a decade you have to be aware that the whole culture had moved on ten years.

DC Were you conscious of the legal activity that was happening in Ireland at the time?

PM No. That wouldn't have been an issue. I mean, a play like Tom Kilroy's *The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roche* is I think one of the first plays in modern Irish theatre to deal with some sophistication about gay life in Dublin and contradictory sexuality. This was an enormously important play in its time. That meant that it was a subject which had been touched on. But I suppose Frank, as I was myself in a play like *Innocence*, were pushing things further. This is a very instinctively suppressed sexual society. There is a general level of sexual repression which has been really hard to deal with in the theatre because theatre audiences have been more conservative than most for some reason.

DC Did you feel you had a certain safety from the issues because you were English?

PM Well, I was known to be an immoral person anyway! Because I was English that was understandable! Par for the course! Yes, I suppose I did. I did because I was a drama student in London between 1970 and 1972. When I came to Dublin in 1972 I thought 'what's going?' There was a certain type of thing that was like, I know about the Catholic thing, but can we move on? If you say 'fuck' on stage there is still a certain amount of tittering. And, I mean, when we did the kiss, the willingness of the actors between the first production, they weren't comfortable the first time around, Bosco as Pyper and Lorcan as Craig, I don't think those boys were comfortable with going beyond a more cool kind of stylised embrace. Whereas the other boys were much more up for it, and you suddenly come to the moment in rehearsal and they do it and you think OK lets do a little more.

DC Were there differences in the rehearsal process when you came to that moment? Because it is not written in the published text that they kiss.

PM I know. It's absolutely the whole thing, I mean, 'when stone becomes flesh'. No they were much more open to that ten years on. I think because of familiarity with the play. They were slightly younger actors than we had used before. They had been brought up in that period, ten years made a huge difference. It emptied the theatre, but I did do *Angels in America* at the Abbey, and we did the scene in Central Park where they fucked. And there were shouts and people walked out. But the protest was that people just didn't come. They just said 'this play is not about us'. Now that was '95. This was one of the only countries in Europe where that happened. It got fabulous reviews. The reason it happened, there was this sort of reticent embarrassment, I mean no one was sort of saying the rosary outside the doors, it was just the word came back that this is not about us, this is not about Ireland, this is not about us.

DC Do you think that is a typical response?

PM Yeah. In the old days there would have been placards outside and picket lines from the Legion of Mary and all that sort of stuff.

DC Do you think Irish audiences recognise the homosexual representations in McGuinness's play as 'them', you know, from the perspective of the National stage?
PM I don't think so. I think there's always a feeling, an element of 'well it's Frank, Frank's gay so he is going to give us gay people in his plays.' Often you will hear, 'it's a shame really because it was such a good play.' But one more interesting response I had when we did *Dolly West*, from an American producer who came to see it with the intent of maybe taking it to Broadway, who didn't on the grounds that there were no gay GI's! And this was a guy who served in the army, and I just said 'well, what unit were you in?!" It is notorious. I mean in Dublin, they would all come down on furlough from the North because of course Dublin was neutral, the boys used to come down and it was one long orgy and every young man in Dublin was out on the, you know, it was notorious what went on in that time. So you know it's not just the Irish. It's a general unwillingness to recognise that there have always been gay men around, gay men have always been a part of the whole...what is that? I don't get it, and it's still around. I think on a broader scale, it; how Frank connects personal gender politics with the national politics, and indeed with the broader sort of international politics, and he is unique in that. He takes these very personal issues and puts them in the midst of the context of the national struggle, he puts them in the context of the World War, or whatever, and that's a tremendous richness.
DC Do you see a significant difference between staging a McGuinness play at the say the Gate as opposed to the Abbey?
PM No, I mean you go with the play, whatever the world of the play needs. We took *Gates of Gold* to the Gate because of 'the boys'. It just seemed to us that it would be silly to do it anywhere else because it was for them, a memory of them. It was less of an Abbey play, but the Abbey would have done it. It was a richer context for us to have done it at the Gate.
DC What do you think he was doing with that play in terms of what he was trying to represent and not represent about the live of MacLiammóir and Edwards?
PM He was...it is really a play about death, facing death, death and theatre, and the real focus of the play is on those themes and the strategies that the imagination has to either work, to acknowledge death or to deny it. Some people refuse to acknowledge death and others choose to seize it and make a performance of it. I loved it; it was a very beautiful, extraordinary piece. I mean, very esoteric in many ways, and not all the audiences went with it, and, indeed, the audiences who came expecting the bio-pic of Hilton and Michael were disappointed that they got a much more esoteric piece than that. It is a phenomenal theatrical emblem, and the extraordinary moment when the stage transforms and the two rooms bleed into one another, and you suddenly find that with death everyone is in one room.
DC What do you think it is about this play, or any of the other plays, that people don't always seem to understand or get?
PM Sometimes the private imagination doesn't connect fully with the public imagination. That is just what happens with certain plays. I mean a play like *Mutabilitie*, it is a vastly ambitious play. It's problematic because it becomes choked by the presence of Shakespeare. The minute you let Shakespeare into a play you are kind of in trouble. You can keep saying it's about Spenser! It's not about Spenser, it can't be just that! And you try and offset it with The File, and then you've got three poets and the whole thing

suddenly turns into…! But, he wanted to do a five act play and it's a phenomenally ambitious play. It's a huge epic, but the connections, the imagery, the poetry of the play are at times so private, the connections being made are so intimate that audiences just can't make the connections and he hasn't, in some areas, bridged the gap. I mean, in London people were not able to even begin to see what it was about, but that was also to do with the production. When Michael Caven did it here it was much clearer, a much clearer presentation of the text, but even so, the references, the cultural, historical references you have to have are just amazing. But, you say fair enough, a writer can do that, and in a way it's like saying, well, I've done what I can do now it's up to you. But then a writer can't be surprised if people say, I just don't get this.

One of the things the Irish writers love is rich characters. We love rich characters, it's Synge, it's O'Casey, that is what the centre of Irish theatre is, those characters. I mean, Friel, a play like *Faith Healer*, which is very esoteric in many of its themes, and in his time the three monologues were very daring in its form.

DC Do you look for any particular, unique, characteristics in the types of actors you choose for his plays?

PM These are the types of characters we produce in the Irish theatre. We have always produced very good character actors. We never produce great romantic leads or heroines.

DC I saw *Gates of Gold*, as, if you could talk about an arc of representations of homosexuality in his work in general, I saw that play as very unapologetic about gayness, and also, not really problematised like many of his gay characters are. I though he portrayed intimacy really beautifully, a life-long relationship of love between two men, refusing the voyeuristic tendencies of people wanting to know about the intimacies of their private sex lives.

PM I agree with you. That beautiful speech at the end: two men, they had a marriage…It is one of the great speeches. It used to break me up ever time I heard it. "Two men met, they had a marriage, it lasted." Ach! And in a way, what was wonderful about it was that that was the truth of those two boys. I mean all the nonsense, the queeny stuff, that 'two men met, they had a marriage, it lasted' goes right to the heart of it.

DC I appreciated his refusal to gratify people's need or desire for biographical information.

PM Absolutely. I have a feeling about *Gates of Gold* that it marks the beginning of a new period in Frank's writing. I think in one way he was clearing the decks of a lot of stuff. It was the sort of wonderful ruthlessness of Gabriel, that kind of extraordinary resilience in ruthlessness. I mean, ok, you can run from death but then you must turn and face death.

DC That is the kind of stuff I find really difficult to write about academically. The emotion, the sentimentality, the spirituality, the deep poetic impulse at the heart of his plays.

PM You can see, though, in that play, this tremendous defiance. There is a kind of iron that has entered the soul. Not that Frank is ever without iron! I think it may be something to do with the way that *Dolly West* was not particularly well received. It was in London, but not here. A sense that audiences here have grown more sentimental more stubborn on insisting on their sort of kitsch taste and the sort of increasingly market driven culture does not help that.

DC Was that tough as artistic director of the Abbey for you to deal with?

PM Very. The introduction of new material is supposed to be the remit of the National Theatre. That sort of Yeatsian adventure of saying 'not what you want but what we want'. That's what it is supposed to be about. It's also just about making good theatre.
DC When you said McGuinness was clearing the deck with *Gates of* Gold, do you think that McGuinness would have the courage to completely reinvent himself at this point in his career?
PM Absolutely, but all the best playwrights do! Friel did it to a degree. Frank is only fifty, he is moving into a new time period.
DC As a director, what do you feel is unique about conceptualising a McGuinness play?
PM It is a different kind of direction. When you are working with a playwright on the first production of a new play you are ethically bound to try and animate that play as truthfully as you can within the imagination of the author. You cannot make it your conception. You have to go into that world. Otherwise don't do it, or do the second production! My conceptualisation is done absolutely symbiotically with the author and with the play.
DC Is McGuinness open to you're suggestions for what might be wrong with the piece?
PM Absolutely. Frank is from day one doing *Factory Girls*, one of the things I have said to all writers, I expect them in the rehearsal room. They are there with the actors. Theatre is intensely pragmatic and that is one of the greatest fissures that opened up in the nineteenth century about the isolated author sending in the manuscript and sort of turning up for the dress-rehearsal. This divorce between the writer and the business of the theatre, the rehearsal room, the stage, and one of the things when I was artistic director of the Abbey was that I always insisted that the writer was at rehearsal. That's where they belong. You can have an intellectual defence of any line you write, but when you have to put it up on its legs and move around a room, give it the energy to inspire you and move you, it is pretty evident quickly if it works or not.
DC Do you have a favourite play of his?
PM *Sons of Ulster* is just magnificent, mind boggling. I love *Dolly West's Kitchen* and *Gates of Gold* they were such happy productions and such wonderful places to work.
DC Do you think the fact that McGuinness is gay is an important factor in what makes his writing unique, or do you think it is secondary?
PM I think it is secondary. But I think there is a potential for another sensibility, the removal of another layer of skin. I think being gay radicalises you, it did me, and it did Frank as a young man. I mean, there are just certain things you cannot ignore. There are certain things that you are aware of, it is a kind of wake-up call that a lot of people don't get, but it doesn't make you a writer, it doesn't make you a director, it only makes you a more radical type of person.
DC Do you think gay men hear a different story?
PM There is a part of that, but the danger of that is that we convince ourselves that there is some sort of code going on which is not necessarily the case. I think it is more that there is a hypersensitivity to aspects of life that we don't take things for granted. That we are aware of contradictions, that we are aware of paradoxes and that increased awareness means that we are also more aware of clues, signs, words, gestures. I think you watch people much more closely.
It is a way of ignoring Frank, though, to say 'he is a gay writer'. Everyone is much more interested in the life because it spares you from having to deal with the work. The work

is much more demanding, much more complex, and no one wants to deal with the work anymore, this is particularly evident in academia. What about the work? The impact of the work in the theatre.

DC Did you ever get negative feedback about the representations of homosexuality in the work that you and McGuinness did together?

PM Oh, yeah. Privately people would say, 'two queers what do you expect'. I always remember the wonderful thing when we were previewing *Innocence* up at the Gate. There is a deliberate set up in the beginning when the two rent-boys are watching him and one says 'oh, I had him, we went back to his place and there was this bowl of fruit…' and then it goes to the Cardinal's place and we did a scene and the boys were there and the next thing Caravaggio came on with this enormous bowl of fruit, and I swear it happened every night, Caravaggio would enter with this bowl of fruit and the seats would go up. People would run for the exit doors. Because in their imagination they were making all kinds of connections that we did not. I remember coming out at intermission and there was this young woman demanding to see someone in authority. She said to me 'Mr Mason, I always believed that you were a force for good in the Irish theatre until tonight!'

DC Was it the Church stuff?

PM Of course! It would be viewed very differently now.

DC Do you think that Ireland could handle a fully gay playwright in the sense that there is an American or British genre of gay playwriting?

PM I don't know, we are in such a mess right now, I just don't know. I think in the '80s there was a real sense of things changing. There was a sense of acceptance, certainly in terms of the law. But I sense since then things have gone very sour. There has been a sort of reassertion of the moral right wing which has come with new money. There is a new morality which is no longer within the Catholic Church, because the Catholic Church is finished, but this is a sort of private morality which is very right wing. You have had a haemorrhaging of young talent to Europe in the last few years and the European thing has sort of run out of steam, the liberalising influence of Northern Europe. That is gone now.

We are in a low period. The reputation of Irish theatre is its own kind of curse really. The 80's was a period of intense activity and creativity that faltered in the 90's and now we have a very fallow period. These things happen. A writer like Frank is only coming into his middle period. This is a culture which pulls the author away from the rigour of the work.

DC Because of their celebrity status?

PM The lecturing, the commissions, everything pulls them away from the work. The work is the only thing. For Frank the energy that goes into the screenplays, television etc is pulling him in too many directions.