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Landscapes of the Socio-political: Irish Women Playwrights from 2000

Doctor of Philosophy

2017

Rosie Patricia O'Keeffe Doyle

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Summary

This thesis looks at intersections between women, theatre and Irish society since the turn of the millennium. There is a history of internalized misogyny throughout Irish theatre and, in part, the impetus for the study has been to resist the overlooked and unregarded presence of Irish women playwrights over the last sixteen years. Use is made of fifteen contemporary plays by women to illustrate five important social themes: the position of motherhood in Ireland, queer and gender identities, sex and sexuality, violence against - and by - women, and issues surrounding aging processes. The thesis develops arguments along three key strands, that: (i) these playwrights craft techniques of violence and resistance to contest patriarchal production of meaning, to de-objectify women, and oppose oppression in all its forms; (ii) they engage in an overarching desire to address pressing social inequalities in Ireland, not least those that place women in groupings outside of certain power-holding elites (for example, LGBTQ communities, sex-workers, people with disability, teenage mothers, elderly women, female prisoners), (iii) these fifteen plays trade duality for multiplicity and challenge essentialist binary categories of identity (good mother–bad mother, hetero-homo, victim-perpetrator, mad-bad, progress-decline) that determine, and are determined by, proscriptions of social existence. From this direction, these playwrights celebrate the power of human agency and stress ways in which their women protagonists are not solely passive victims of social structures. The arguments are made under a broad theoretical umbrella, not least the current feminist thinking of Judith Butler, Elaine Aston and Lois McNay. From this perspective, these playwrights call for an expansive heterogeneous gaze, to address taboos, deconstruct reductive stereotypes, to show the expanse, variation and prominence of contemporary Irish women writers.

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I would like to extend my appreciation to the many people who helped me through this process to source unpublished scripts, provide accesses to production footage, allow me to invade their houses for interviews, endure my relentless emails; Mathew Smyth, Oonagh Murphy, Grace Dyas, Gina Moxley, Stella Feehily, Max Stafford-Clark, Christine Preston, The Abbey Archives, The Royal Court and to all the fabulous playwrights under discussion that provided me access to their phenomenal work.

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Finally, I owe an eternal gratitude to my extensive, varied and dynamic family. Initially, to my grandmother Patricia O'Keeffe of whom I sadly never got the chance to meet but reaped the benefits of her three daughters; my incredible mother Ruth, and her two sisters, Patsy and Jackie. All three have been a constant inspiration in my life. Jackie for her kind words and belief, Patsy for her laughter, and constantly, unquestionably being there for me; but predominantly my mum, for being the strongest, bravest and most inspirational woman I have ever encountered. From this, Elena Savickatie the kindest and most

thoughtful friend, Clare O'Keeffe, technically my cousin but really more of a sister and her daughter Sophie Rose, they have reiterated that there is generational support between Irish women, and these relationships remind me that we will be here for each other always. Then to my incredible men; Ruairí Sparks for his unwavering patience and love, my brother Oscar who challenges and supports me intermittently, my father Rob and our 'left-wing-tree-hugging' tendencies, and finally my second dad, Mike Watts, a man of whom words do no justice. He is an incredible person and one of whom I will be forever indebted; the time, energy and positivity he provided on this at times troublesome journey is insurmountable.

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Introduction

The focal point of my thesis is to mark the presence of Irish women's dramatic writing from the turn of the millennium through a selection of their plays. By focussing on fifteen plays, some well known and some less celebrated, I tease out pressing social issues in Ireland's social landscape and ways in which these women playwrights use techniques of violence and resistance to contest dominant patriarchal modes of existence and an undercurrent of misogyny both within theatre and in society at large. The thesis provides a critical analysis of these women's writing, illustrating how they engage with, and therefore help shape, Ireland's rapidly changing social structures. While I focus on just fifteen plays, these form part of a growing movement of gender equality that indicates an exciting spur for Irish women practitioners.

The early 1990s witnessed the Glasshouse Theatre project: 'There Are No Irish Women Playwrights!'[1] Twenty-four years on, Patrick Lonergan returned to the same issue[2] and points out that women writers must still 'fight for the attention and respect that many male authors are able to take for granted.'[3] Caroline Williams, the theatre producer who established this project, believes that 'chronic amnesia' is at play. She maintains that: 'women writers need to be re-discovered, re-published, by specialist press and given readings. We need to ask why they were lost in the first place, washed away. Yet the work of certain male writers seems to be able to segue into the canon.'[4] Maybe it once seemed possible, if not naively hopeful that, by noting the lack of female visibility in Irish theatre, combined with the rapid advances in gender equality over the last few decades, such problems would be resolved. However, as Williams suggests, a case of 'organised forgetting' seems to be at work, where previous gains are lost because, in Lynn Gardner's terms, there is 'no long-lasting change of culture that ensures individuals and arts organisations act differently over the longer term.'[5] Fintan Walsh asserts that, 'one of the

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[1] A mini series begun by Glasshouse Productions in 1993, entitled 'There are no Irish female playwrights.' They created two compilations, the first documented Irish women's writing between 1920-70 and the second between 1970-92. They were performed at City Arts Centre and Irish Writers' Centre. The aim was to put women centre stage and document a rich history of Irish female playwrights.

[2] Lonergan, Patrick, 'There are no Irish Women Playwrights..?', 12th June 2014, can be accessed at: https: patricklonergan.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/there-are-no-irish-women-playwrights

[3] Ibid

[4] Caroline Williams, speaking at the Waking The Feminist's meeting at Liberty Hall 8th March 2016, part of International Women's Day. Can be accessed at: www.wakingthefeminists.org./2016/03/24/wtf-international-womens-day-spring-forward-videos/.

[5] Lynn Gardner, The Guardian, 28th April 2015, accessed at

criticisms of Irish people often heard during the boom years was that we suffered from collective amnesia about the past, in the giddy rush to get ahead.'[6] Sadly, then, this is not a new conversation. In 2004, as part of the Abbey Theatre's 'AbbeyOneHundred' centenary celebration programme, the only Irish women dramatists produced for stage were Marina Carr (*Portia Coughlan)* and Paula Meehan (*The Wolf of Winter).* Melissa Sihra comments that, 'no other play by a woman was represented at the National Theatre during the centenary celebrations and no woman directed a play on either the Peacock or Abbey stage for the entire year-long programme. Women's minority status as directors and writers is explicit throughout the programming.'[7] A decade on, this damning sentiment runs through beyond 2015. When the Abbey Theatre marked the centenary of the 1916 Rising, only one of the ten plays programmed had been written by a woman. Thus once again Ireland's national stage presented an overabundance of male playwrights and excluded Irish women's dramatic influence on the canon of Irish theatre. In response, a discussion initiated by freelance set designer and arts manager, Lian Bell, exploded on social media under the title 'Waking The Feminists.'[8] The campaign brought together an outpouring from both men and women working in Irish theatre highlighting the dis-enfranchisement and chronic under-representation of women artists, not just at The Abbey but throughout Irish theatre. This motivated a public meeting held on The Abbey stage on 12th November.[9] This momentous event demanded that such gender disparity be addressed, and resulted in the Chair of The Abbey Theatre Board, Bryan McMahon releasing a public statement.[10] He promised the Abbey would develop and implement a comprehensive policy towards gender equality, and that more work by women artists would be programmed for 2016. Statistics compiled by the Irish Theatre Institute illustrate the backdrop to this promise, 'as Ireland embraced modernity and moved towards the new millennium, the production of

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http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/apr/28/nothing-changed-female-playwrights-uk-theatres-gender-equality?CMP=share_btn_tw

[6] Walsh, Fintan, (ed.), *'That was us': Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance,* (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2013), p. 13.

[7] Sihra, Melissa, 'Shadow and Substance: Women, Feminism and Irish Theatre After 1980', The version I was using was pre-publication. Sihra's article has since been published in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre,* Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[8] 'Waking the Feminists' exploded into Ireland's cultural landscape on 17th November 2015, initially in the form of twitter storm hash tag #WakingTheFeminists. Established by Lian Bell, it comprises woman and men who are speaking out for equality for women in the theatre in Ireland, encompassing writers, directors, managers, actors, designers, choreographers, technicians, programmers, producers, artists and audience members. For more see www.wakingthefeminists.org

[9] Following on from that meeting, #WakingTheFeminists began to meet with the major state-funded theatre organisations to make gender equality a reality through their policies and programming. To date, representatives of #WakingTheFeminists have met the boards and directors of the Abbey Theatre, Gate Theatre, Druid Theatre Company, Rough Magic Theatre Company, Dublin Theatre Festival, Dublin Fringe Festival and Project Arts Centre.

[10] The statement can be accessed at: www.abbeytheatre.ie/a-statement-from-the-board-and-director-of-the-abbey-theatre/.

work by women at the Abbey and elsewhere plummeted.'[11] For example, of the 555 playwrights writing new plays in English between 1975 and 2009, only 31 per cent were female,[12] a sure indication that a significant gender imbalance remains in work produced across the country. To bring about real change, gender equality and diversity needs to be a constant conversation – without a real reflection on working practices and the structures of organisations, the output will always remain the same. In the words of Marina Carr's Grandma Fraochlan, 'we repeat and we repeat, the orchestration may be different but the tune is always the same.'[13] Only by modifying both the orchestration and the tune will long-term change occur.

The momentum is moving forward. The volume of women's engagement with theatre is unquestionable. While a large number of female writers have written prodigiously for the stage in their own lifetime, their work has all but disappeared from the canon of 20th-century Irish drama.[14] Many were writing in the last century, when 'feminism and nationalism had the goals of achieving equality for all citizens of Ireland; an independent Ireland was seen as key to enabling that vision. After independence, however, women's rights were effectively sacrificed for the sake of cultural stability.'[15] By the time of the second renaissance of Irish drama in the 1960s, the voices heard on stage were almost exclusively male. More recently, well established figures such as the Artistic Director of Rough Magic, Lynne Parker, alongside Garry Hynes, co-founder of the Druid Theatre Company, who held the position of Artistic Director of The Abbey between 1991-4, have seen women playwrights rise to the limelight. The decade of the 90s conceived the Dublin-based company Glass House Theatre, which produced ten shows with an exclusively female agenda (and the archive project 'There Are No Irish Women Playwrights! 1 and 2') (1992-93) up until 1996. Co-founder of Wet Paint Theatre Company (1984), Hilary Fannin, was joint Writer-in-Association at the Abbey Theatre for the 2004 centenary. In 2009, The Abbey produced a festival, 'The Fairer Sex', which displayed six plays by contemporary Irish women playwrights, albeit that 'festival' gave each writer a meagre twenty-minutes over a two-day period, with a title that assimilated essentialist, reductive,

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[11] Keating, Sarah, 'Fired from the canon: the fate of Irish female playwrights', in *The Irish Times,* December 2nd 2015. Accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/fired-from-the-canon-the-fate-of-irish-female-playwrights-1.2450015.

[12] Findings Report of Playography na Gaeilge, 1975-2009, Irish Theatre Institute, p.11.

[13] Carr, Marina, *Plays One (The Mai),* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), p. 123.

[14] Lady Christine Longford, Lady Gregory, Eva Gore-Booth, Teresa Deevy, Alice Milligan, Dorothy Macardle, Suzanne Day, Geraldine Cummins – to name but a few.

[15] Keating, 'Fired from the canon: the fate of Irish female playwrights', in *The Irish Times,* December 2nd 2015.

sexist rhetoric. I resist listing here the names of the plethora of women playwrights from the turn of the century because, as Sihra notes, 'listing and name-checking would further perpetuate a tokenistic categorisation.'[16] It is neither desirable nor possible to credit to the full the volume of work achieved by Irish women in theatre, from directing, designing to producing. Therefore, this thesis relies on a kaleidoscope of reasons that brings these women playwrights together with key issues consisting of age, gender, motherhood, sexuality, queer identities, memory and violence.

The growing body of academic research and scholarship further illustrates Irish women's intervention in theatre. This is exemplified in the work of Anna McMullan, co-editor of *The Theatre of Marina Carr: 'before rules was made'* (2003), Cathy Leeney, *Seen and Heard: Six New Plays by Irish Women* (2001), and *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (2010), Melissa Sihra's *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (2007) and, most recently, Eileen Kearney and Charlotte Headrick, *Irish Women Dramatists 1908-2001* (2014), and Miriam Haughton and Mária Kurdi co-edited book *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices By Women In Ireland* (2015). It can be seen, then, that Irish theatre, in reflection of past political and patriarchal narratives, has long been a gender- charged space. Brian Singleton affirms that, previously, 'twentieth century Irish theatre practise is remembered almost exclusively for its contributions and intervention by men.'[17] Prolific male Irish playwrights, secured in the canonical work of W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, leading to Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, John B. Keane and Frank McGuinness, to name but a few, and the subsequent publication of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in three volumes in 1991, mark Ireland as the home of literary genius. The dominance of the male playwright is remarkable. The fact that the female voice is absent from the *Field Day* publication and the consequential recognition of a need to produce the fourth and fifth volume purely for Irish women writers highlights the problem. It became overtly clear that Irish culture, as for political and social discourses, was a victim of severe gender prejudice.

A second intention of the thesis is to discuss dramatic writing that encompasses some of the key social upheavals of the day. The last decade in Ireland's history has been 'post boom and bust', with the consequent bursting of the country's economic bubble in 2008.

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[16] Sihra, Melissa, 'Shadow and Substance: Women, Feminism and Irish Theatre After 1980'
[17] Singleton, Brian, *Masculinities and The Contemporary Irish Theatre,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 1.

While it is difficult to ignore the economic and political turmoil generated, this thesis explores the parallel social tumult. The plays under consideration challenge the socio-political landscape, dominant social codes and place alternative experiences centre stage. They raise awareness of previously marginalised or seemingly minor stories, and directly capture the changing mores and attitudes in Ireland, and where the gaps and elisions lie.

In the context of traditional Irish culture, the category of 'woman' has long constituted a charged locus for both the subordination of women to the role of the domestic, and as a container for the identity of women as passive, maternal and sexually chaste. The parameters of Irish society have been defined through a gender binary system, inscribed in the images of the Republic as a post-colonial nation, and reinforced by the ideologies of the Catholic Church and Irish Free State. The church was by far the largest and most powerful institution in the new Irish state that emerged six years after the rebellion, and was determined to shape it. The first Free State government tried in its initial constitution to reflect a pluralist state. Writing in *The Irish Citizen* in 1919, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington said, 'we stand for the rights of all Irish women as women, independent of party or sect...no party, unhappily, is yet quite free from sin where women are concerned'[18] However, in Eamon de Valera's 1937 constitution, women's standing in the struggles were ignored and rather the church was given a special position and its social teachings were enshrined. Contraception and divorce were expressly banned – and women were to reside solely within the home. Article 41 of the constitution declared that the state shall '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.'[19] This was used not to give state support to women who stayed at home, but to discriminate against women who went out to work. Women were denied certain rights according to their gender, could not hold jobs in public service as doctors, nurses, in teaching, television or in banks if married, were barred from jury service, unable to collect children's allowance, obtain a restraining order, own their own familial property, refuse marital sex, divorce, receive equal pay to men or have access to contraception. Even when the European Economic Council insisted on equal pay in 1975, the Irish government that included the Labour Party put off its implementation. It was only when the civil rights lawyer, Mary Robinson, later elected Ireland's president,

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[18] Sheehy-Skeffington, Hanna, *The Irish Citizen,* October 1919, Sheehy-Skeffington and Margaret Cousinis launched the feminist newspaper *The Irish Citizen* with the motto –'For Men and Women Equally The Rights of Citizenship; For Men and Women Equally The Duties of Citizenship'. See Margaret Ward, 'Hanna Sheehy Skeffington' in Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy (eds.), *Female Activists: Irish Women and Change 1900-1960,* (Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2001).

[19] Article 41.2.2, can be accessed at: www.constitution.ie.

told people to write to the European commission – which they did – that the government was shamed into implementing equal pay. While Ireland remained isolated, ardently nationalistic and inward looking in this way, women would not be able to prosper.

However, the 1970s onwards witnessed a significant increase in public discourse surrounding the realities of sexual and domestic violence in Ireland. This was largely due to the advances and impact of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) and feminism in general, but is perhaps marked best by the publication of the IWLM manifesto entitled 'Chains or change'[20] and the establishment of Women's Aid in 1974. Nell McCafferty, a founder member of IWLM, prolific feminist journalist and also a playwright at the Abbey Theatre, was a 'powerful and provocative voice' in Irish society. Such women spurred the first legislation on domestic violence in 1976, enabling Irish women to make use of legal barring orders, and the establishment in 1986 of the first custom-built refuge for women in Ireland. These factors debunked the idea of the family and domesticity as a site of safety and security, and demanded a voice for women trapped in the private, silenced 'home'. Monica O'Connor remarks that,

> Feminists [referring to the new wave of feminism in the early 1970s] recognised that the focus of men's violence against women was to maintain the privilege and power that men held, both as a class and individually, controlling women to ensure that they were available for sexual gratification without consent, negotiation or consequences.[21]

This ever-present movement of Irish feminists was gradually changing the landscape, and as Ann Louise Gilligan and Katherine Zappone note, 'refusing myths and stereotypes of domesticity, resisting silencing and exclusion, and blunting the edges of gendered legislation.'[22]

When Mary Robinson was inaugurated as President of Ireland in 1990, she famously spoke of representing a new Ireland, one that is open, tolerant and inclusive. In particular she

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[20] *Chains or Change* was published in 1971, and the pamphlet laid out five key demands – equal pay, equality before the law, equal education, contraception and justice for deserted wives, unmarried mothers and widows. See, Aibhe Smyth, *Irish Women's Studies Reader,* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993).

[21] O'Connor, Monica, 'Silencing Feminism: Making Sexual Exploitation Invisible and Legitimate' in Ursula Barry (ed.) *Where are we now?: New Perspectives on women in contemporary Ireland,* (Dublin: New Island, 2008), p. 130.

[22] Gilligan, Ann Louise and Katherine Zappone in the 'Foreword' to *Irish Feminisms: Past, Present, Future,* Clara Fisher and Mary McAuliffe (eds.), (Dublin: Arlen House, 2016), p.11.

advocated for women's rights, the need for women 'who have felt themselves outside history to be written back into history, in the words of Eavan Boland, "finding a voice where they found a vision."'[23] This very exclusion of women from history has arisen from gender ideologies that promote sexist, patriarchal and hierarchal thinking and imagining, and Robinson's speech was seen as an extraordinary impetus for inspiration and change.

Indeed over the past few decades, Ireland has undergone enormous social change and cultural shifts. Society has become progressively more liberal, as has Ireland's national identity, enabling alternative subjectivities to become increasingly more apparent in meta-narratives of the state. Writing for an article in the *Guardian* entitled 'Why, 100 years after the Easter Rising, are Irish women still fighting?' Olivia O'Leary argues that she 'preferred to be inspired by the living, rather than the dead'[24]. She continues, currently in Ireland,

> We have a female chief justice, a female attorney general, a female director of public prosecutions, a female head of the Garda Síochána (police), a female minister for justice, a female deputy prime minister, and a whole new crop of members of parliament to swell women's numbers in the Dail. They all represent battles hard won. But there are more to be tackled... The fight for Irish freedom goes on.[25]

As Robinson contends 'a society that is without the voice and vision of a woman is not less feminine. It is less human.'[26] There are many more examples of Irish society fighting for, and succeeding in, achieving equality. In 2015, a public referendum voted for same-sex marriage in a landslide victory,[27] a dramatic social shift considering that homosexuality was decriminalised only two decades previously. Similarly, the Gender Recognition Act[28]

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[23] Robinson, Mary, Inaugural Speech as President of Ireland in Dublin Castle on Monday 3rd December, 1990. It can be accessed at: prelectur.standford.edu/lectures/robinson/inaugural.html.

[24] O'Leary, Olivia, 'Why, 100 years after the Easter Rising, are Irish women still fighting?' in *The Guardian,* 25th March 2016, accessed at: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/25/100-years-after-easter-rising-irish-womne-still-fighting-gender-equality.

[25] O'Leary, Olivia, 'Why, 100 years after the Easter Rising, are Irish women still fighting?' in *The Guardian,* 25th March 2016.

[26] Robinson, Mary, quoted in Alida Brill (ed.), *A Rising Public Voice: Women in Politics Worldwide,* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1995), p.156.

[27] May 22nd 2015 Ireland approved changing the Constitution to extend civil marriage rights to same-sex couples, with a vast majority of 60.52%, with only one of the 43 constituencies voting against the proposal. Huge momentum in the younger generation, many of whom travelled home to Ireland simply to vote. The campaign 'Get the Boat to Vote', surged many Irish living in London to make the trip.

[28] Gender Recognition Act was passed by the government on 15th July 2015. Prior to this, transgender people in Ireland had no legal avenue through which to change their legal gender. This legislation provides a process

was finally implemented and the 'Repeal the 8th'[29] movement concerning abortion, with strong support from Amnesty Ireland, has gathered increasing momentum. The Children and Family Relationships Bill[30] was passed through Ireland's Seanad, which extends guardianship, custody and adoption rights to different, non-conventional, family models. This reflects the evolving nature of Irish society, whereby the family is no longer confined to a traditional, heterosexual, patriarchal structure. Alongside such milestones towards a more liberal society, the current zeitgeist is one of remembering, witnessing and taking responsibility, attempting to dignify and open up the experiences of certain violated and previously peripheralised lives. This is indicative in the 2009 Ryan Report,[31] which documents the complicity of the state and religious-run institutions in the abuse of children. Similarly, in 2013, the McAleese Report was published detailing the state's involvement in the incarceration of women and girls in Magdalene Laundries between 1922 and 1996.[32] Homi K. Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* argues that a nation's self-image is shaped and marked by the form and content of the stories it tells about itself.[33] It follows then that Ireland's national performance often discloses the desirable narratives, skirting and leaving hidden those of pain, violence and abuse, to foster a fully positive self-image in public narrative. Choosing to focus on these legislative changes is not arbitrary, and my thesis aims to show how the dramatic writings I discuss here are clearly intertwined with the social and political background that gave rise to these Acts. It is misleading to imagine that theatre acts alone in the political arena, or has a direct and seamless relationship with society. It can, though, be seen to intersect with other causes

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enabling trans people to achieve full legal recognition of their preferred gender and allows for the acquisition of a new birth certificate that reflects this change. Ireland is the third European country, after Denmark and Malta, to allow transgender people aged over 18 to change their legal gender without intervention. A full copy of the Act can be accessed here:
http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2015/a2515.pdf.

[29] Article 40.3.3 was brought about after a referendum in 1983 (8th amendment) and reads 'the State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees to respect, and as far as practicable, by its laws to vindicate that right.'

[30] The Children and Family Relationship Bill was passed through the Senead on March 31st 2015, it extends the definition of family and provides guardianship and adoption rights to new categories, including same-sex couples. It also updates the law on the status of children born by donor-assisted methods, and of their parents. The Bill can be accessed at:
http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/bills28/bills/2015/1415/b1415dnew.pdf

[31] *The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse,* also known as the Ryan Report was published on 20th May 2009.

[32] The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalene Laundries was published on 5th February 2013. It can be accessed at:
http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/MagdalenRpt2013

33 Bhabha, Homi K., *Nation and Narration,* (London: Routledge, 1990).

and movements to produce what Elaine Aston calls a 'chain' of counter-hegemonic knowledge.[34] She states,

> To conceive of 'counter-hegemonic' performances as a 'network of resistance' is to think of theatre's manifold, resistant sites as links in a chain agitating for change to the neoliberal hegemony. This eschews the difficulty of attributing the burden of resistance to any one particular form and conceives the making of political subjectivities as occurring across multiple sites of potential emancipatory possibility.[35]

She develops this from the argument by Janelle Reinelt that theatre can operate as a 'communication node within a network of highly varied and sometimes contradictory nodes that together make up public discourse'. Reinelt coins the phrase 'theatre as a democratic worksite', one that can act to 'modify or challenge, or possibly even sometimes support, other information or modes of knowing that are addressing the polity.'[36] With this in mind, I see the playwrights in the following chapters to be active nodes within such networks, using techniques of resistance to contest patriarchal production of meaning, challenge gender power relations and universalise the multi-form complexities of women's lives.

Throughout the thesis it has been essential to name the problem of representation and gender inequality, and the need to categorise these playwrights based on their gender, as 'women playwrights', 'plays by women', 'women writers' and the like. These writers may not actually wish to be labelled in such ways, but it is important to create a space and give platform to this inequality – the under-representation of Irish women in theatre – albeit the focus here is on writers. Anne Devlin appropriates Judge Harry Blackmun's belief about race and racism, 'In order to get beyond racism, you have to take account of race.'[37] Devlin suggests instead, 'in order to get beyond gender you have to take account of gender, to

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[34] Aston, Elaine, 'Agitating for Change: Theatre and a Feminist 'Network of Resistance', in *Theatre Research International,* Vol. 41, No. 1, 2016, p. 8.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Reinelt, Janelle, 'Performance at the Crossroads of Citizenship' in *The Grammar of Politics and Performance* Shirin Rai and Janelle Reinelt (eds.), (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 35-50, p. 43
[37] Blackmun, Harry, part of the ruling in the court case 'Regents of the University of California v. Bakke', 438 U.S. 265, (1978).

treat someone equally you have to treat them differently.'[38] The risk is that 'naming' the problem enhances discrimination and ghettoises or patronises women writers. This happens in demarcations such as the 'women's fiction' tags in the commercial market that suggest, for some reason, that women's writing fails to be an integral part of general literature. There is, for example, no sub-heading called 'male fiction.' Anthea McTeirnan argues that 'the prism of the male gaze, through which all of human endeavour is judged, has to change as part of the shift towards gender liberation.'[39] 'Women's fiction' is not a genre or some sub-category. My naming of the problem, then, does not promote a 'female' tradition or aesthetics as determined solely by the biological category of sex. By isolating these women playwrights there is no attempt to unify them by any kind of reductive feminine subject matter of concern only to women. All the plays discussed here articulate, in different ways, a feminist perspective on matters such as sexual agency, sexuality in general, class, aging, abuse and power. Melissa Sihra argues that,

> From the birth of the Irish Dramatic Renaissance up until the first decade of the twenty-first century, women have essentially been regarded as making theatre *despite* themselves and have been quantified against a normalized 'universal' (male) standard. Women's gender-identity has persisted as a categorising process, perpetuating the phenomenon of 'female-playwrights' and so-called 'women's theatre', insidiously positioning the work of women as a 'genre' or sub-category of the (male) norm. Looking back at Irish theatre history and criticism we can see how, time and again, women's work is situated in a negative relationship to the 'canonical' values of the 'classical', perpetuating the notion that theatre by women is of less significance to humanity as a whole.[40]

However, it does seem pertinent to find a space and give platform to, at least for the meantime, the minority of women voices on stage. That we need to aspire to a place when calling someone a woman playwright is purely descriptive rather than political. I intentionally exclude male representation: at its core, my dissertation rests in the under-representation of Irish women playwrights, and it therefore seems necessary that I look

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[38] Devlin, Anne, speaking at the Waking The Feminist's meeting at Liberty Hall 8th March 2016, part of International Women's Day, https:wakingthefeminists.org/2016/03/24/wtf-international-womens-day-spring-forward-videos.

[39] McTeirnan, Anthea, 'Give Up Yer Aul' Power The Challenge To Men' in *Irish Feminism: Past, Present and Future,* p. 136.

[40] Sihra, Melissa, 'Shadow and Substance: Women, Feminism and Irish Theatre After 1980', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre,* Nicholas Grene and Christopher Morash (eds.).

towards the female body/experience on stage. However, as will be exemplified in the following chapters, this certainly does not suggest that women playwrights fail to address universal experiences. The plays are by women and do address issues specific to women's experience, but these are as equally universal as those addressed by men. For example, expressions of sexuality are teased out in Neil Watkins *The Year of Magical Wanking*, (2011)[41], and Frank McGuinness pays attention to aging populations and dementia in *The Hanging Gardens,* (2013)[42]. It is not the case that issues raised by women writers are solely of women's concerns. To add to this, most of the playwrights discussed began their career as actors, but felt compelled to take to writing as the parts for women in theatre were few and far between and they could not locate their own experiences represented on stage.

While gender itself is an artificial separation, in the thesis I have chosen a specifically feminist focus and I make some claim for a general 'womanly' direction through the subject matter. As previously stated, these plays challenge patriarchy and contain messages about power and gender inequalities, tell a myriad of women's stories and assert that women's personal experience is not trivial. They use the ordinary details of women's lives as their material, draw upon fractured and fragmented lives, create inclusive rather than exclusive groups and break down the barriers between art and life. Although women do not write in a different imaginative sphere to men, nor use a particular artistic aesthetic, they do deserve 'special treatment' – even temporarily – due to past exclusions. While I look towards the womanly body/experience on stage from a feminist perspective, I appreciate Lizabeth Goodman's suggestion that 'attaching the feminist label to women's work in the theatre is complicated, due not only to the shifting definition of the term, but also to the shifting priorities and concerns of individual practitioners at different stages in their lives and careers.'[43] Mine is an interest in the ways that women's perceptions of the world change when they become a 'knower' and 'explorer' rather than an object to be known and explored. The issues these writers embrace include the balance and limits of the relationship between the personal, the political, and the tension between individual freedom and collective responsibility. This tackles the relationship between 'generations' and about the politics of location in the broadest sense (national, social, regional, cultural,

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[41] Watkins, Neil, 'The Year of Magical Wanking' in *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays: 'This is just this. This isn't Real. It's Money',* Thomas Conway (ed.), (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2012).
[42] McGuinness, Frank, *The Hanging Gardens,* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013).
[43] Goodman, Lizbeth, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres To Each Her Own,* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.31-32.

sexual, etc.). Collectively, as Geraldine Harris suggests, they also raise some of the 'key challenges for feminist theatre and performance critics: about the need to acknowledge and respect not just different feminisms but the distinctions between a play 'about' feminism, one written as a feminist play, and one simply written by a feminist, so as to avoid judging women dramatists through prescriptive 'formulas' of the sound and the unsound.'[44] As Sihra contends, 'the fraught relationship between women and theatre in Ireland is a mirror of the complex relationship between women and the feminist movement itself... While feminism sought to emancipate women and highlight their secondary status in theatre and everyday life, many women working in theatre in the 80s and 90s were ironically less inclined to self-identify as feminist for fear of further marginalization of their work.'[45] However, as Sihra continues, unlike many women during the 1980s and 90s, 'the younger generation of women in theatre now largely self-identify as feminists, due in part to the integration of feminist discourse in education, the visibility and vocalization of LGBTQ[46] groups, the dismantling of its misogynist bra-burning 'man-hating' associations and the move towards equality for all.'[47]

To crystallise the central arguments of my thesis, I take a three-prong approach. First, I argue that these playwrights use techniques of violence and resistance to contest patriarchal production of meaning, challenge gender power relations, to de-objectify women and universalise the multi-form complexities of their lives. Irish womanhood is described by no single narrative, but rather by a plurality of new voices spawned from the turn of the century. Second, these playwrights engage in a commentary on social inequalities in Ireland, not least those that place women in groupings outside of certain power-holding elites (LGBTQ communities, sex-workers, people with disability, teenage mothers, elderly women, female prisoners). These inequalities are too often grounded in stereotypes that are stigmatised by society. Third, these writers trade duality for multiplicity and challenge essentialist binary categories of identity (good mother–bad mother, hetero-homo, victim-perpetrator, mad-bad, progress-decline) that determine, and are determined by, proscriptions of social existence.

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[44] Harris, Geraldine, 'Post-postfeminism? Amelia Bullmore's Di and Viv and Rose, April de Angelis's Jumpy and Karen Young's The Awkward Squad', *Contemporary Theatre Review,* 24:2, (2014), p.191.
[45] Sihra, Melissa, 'Shadow and Substance: Women, Feminism and Irish Theatre After 1980', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre,* Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[46] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer.
[47] Sihra, Melissa, 'Shadow and Substance: Women, Feminism and Irish Theatre After 1980',

Alphabetically, the playwrights and plays are: Ioanna Anderson's *Six Acts of Love* (2008), Amy Conroy's *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* (2010), Stella Feehily's *Duck* (2003), Nancy Harris's *Love in a Glass Jar* (2008), Genevieve Hulme-Beaman's *Pondling* (2013), Deirdre Kinahan *Halcyon Days* (2012), Elizabeth Kuti *Treehouses* (2000), Lisa McGee's *Girls and Dolls* (2006), Una McKevitt *The Big Deal* (2011), Paula Meehan's *Cell* (2000), Elaine Murphy's *Little Gem* (2008) and *Ribbons* (2009), Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* (2006), THEATREClub's *The Game* (2015) and Carmel Winter's *B for Baby* (2010). These fifteen plays form the body of the thesis, have been produced between 2000 and the present, and so represent Ireland's rapidly changing socio-political landscape. They tackle anti-hegemonic issues and develop narratives around the plight of the disenfranchised. Questions of sexual identity, inversions of gender, anxiety towards motherhood, acts of violence, aging and memory, escapism, and angst in youth lace their work. The actualities of life are represented in these women's plays and the thesis explores the relevance and importance of such stories in relation to social policies in Ireland. My research entails a critical commentary of five key subjects to highlight some of the topical social and political issues addressed by this wave of dramatic writing by women. The main areas of focus are: the changing mores of motherhood, challenges to proscribed female sexuality, realities of violence against women, transgressive violent acts by women and, finally, social narratives of aging and memory. I chose three plays per chapter in order to create a triadic tension within each area, providing at times contrasting but also complementary perspectives. Of course all the plays under consideration in this thesis could be read in a myriad of ways and are by no means limited to the angles I discuss. From my perspective, they speak directly to, reflect, explore, challenge and engage with the genderised socio-political landscape of Ireland by placing survivor narratives, in particular the displaced female body, centre stage. They dismantle systems of traditional representation, to become effective agents of action and radical change. Interestingly, many of the plays are set in environments that are 'no-places', that represent characters in liminal spaces: a treehouse, a prison cell, an isolated farm, a care-home, an hotel room, or a non specific/multiple site, so resisting traditional tropes of house and home in Irish drama. They stage a mood of 'in-betweeness' – neither one place or the other, to contest oppressive structures and provide sites of resistance. It is in these fissures that new identities, and experiences can arise. Throughout the thesis I consider how these new ideas and possibilities and experiences of womanhood in Ireland have emerged and how they are reflected and challenged through dramatic representation, illustrating, in Aston's terms, 'networks of resistance'.

Although my thesis focuses on fifteen contemporary plays from the turn of the century, it is important to comment on the rich and diverse landscape of Irish women playwrights who surround this fifteen. Melissa Sirha's appendix in *Women in Irish Drama*[48] provides a long list of these, overlapping with my point of departure in 2000. Prior to my timeframe, for example, are the foundational plays of Marina Carr[49], a formidable playwright who exists as the beacon woman to dominate the Abbey stage. Much more recently, Louise Lowe of ANU Productions has made a remarkable impact upon Ireland's theatre landscape using site-specific, immersive theatre in the tetralogy of performances known as *The Monto Cycle*[50]. In terms of the range of social issues, the plays of Ursula Rani Sarma[51] on the angst in youth, and of Stacey Gregg about porn, technology and life in Belfast, both stand out for their contemporary relevance. Similarly, Rosemary Jenkinson writes about tensions in Northern Ireland in her plays *The Bonfire*[52], *White Star of the North*[53], and *Here Comes the Night*[54]. New plays, such as Stefanie Preissner's *Solpadeine is My Boyfriend*[55] and Rosaleen McDonagh's *Mainstream*[56], are impressive explorations of the plight of those marginalised through ethnicity, addiction or disability. Extending this, the solo performances by Sonya Kelly, *The Wheelchair on My Face*[57] and *How To Keep An Alien*[58], rely on autobiographical material to fuse stand-up comedy with theatre. The playwrights I have chosen also write extensively in other areas. For example, Grace Dyas explores Dublin's heroin epidemic, the polemic of the Irish family, and the housing crisis in *The Ireland Trilogy*; *HEROIN, HISTORY and The Family*[59]. Stella Feehily has teased out issues of human rights in *Bang*. Carmel Winters has been staged at The Abbey with her plays *Best Man* and *The Remains of Maisie Duggan* and Nancy Harris's play *No Romance* appeared on the Peacock stage[60]. From this, there is clearly a plethora of Irish women's rich dramatic writing, displaying wide-ranging scope and talent. However, gender disparity remains deeply ingrained, the conversation is on-going and needs to remains so. It is vital

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[48] Sihra, *Women in Irish Drama,* p. 225.
[49] Carr, Marina, *Plays One Marina Carr,* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999); Carr, Marina, *Plays Two Marina Carr,* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009); Carr, Marina, *Plays Three Marina Carr,* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015).
[50] See Singleton, Brian, *ANU Productions The Monte Cycle,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[51] Rani Sarma, Ursula, *Touched/Blue,* (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2002).
[52] Jenkinson, Rosemary, *Bonfire,* (London: Methuen Drama, 2006).
[53] See: http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com/events/event/350/white-star-of-the-north-by-rosemary-jenkinson/.
[54] See: http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/here-comes-the-night-review-a-1960s-jukebox-sweet-spot-and-an-optimistic-take-on-progress-1.2637918.
[55] See: http://solpadeineismyboyfriend.blogspot.co.uk/.
[56]See: http://fishamble.com/mainstream/.
[57] See: http://fishamble.com/the-wheelchair-on-my-face-by-sonya-kelly/.
[58] https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/aug/09/how-to-keep-an-alien-edinburgh-festival-review-sonya-kelly.
[59]See: https://www.abbeytheatre.ie/whats_on/event/the-ireland-trilogy/
[60] https://www.abbeytheatre.ie/whats_on/event/no_romance/.

to recognise the presence of Irish women playwrights over the last fifteen years and challenge the enormous gender imbalance operating within Irish theatre.

The thesis draws upon several congruent theoretical strands, not least Pierre Bourdieu's reflections on society, with particular reference to the family. Michel Foucault's work is highly relevant, as Diarmaid Ferriter has noted, 'not just because of his association of the control of sexuality with power – and the history of sexuality in Ireland… but also because of his fascination with the theme of sexuality as transgression.'[61] I draw on, and challenge, Foucault's theories of discipline and his interpretation of sexuality to highlight the constructed nature of dominant social codes and ideologies, and how these chosen women playwrights seek to disrupt and perhaps transform them in – and therefore through - their plays. Their resistance to monolithic ideas of sexuality, identity and the body, with the underlying drive towards violence and disruption, reveal subliminal currents of discipline and control. Foucault asserts, 'there are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think any differently than one thinks and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.'[62] In *The Will to Knowledge* Foucault suggests sex as a key element of policing bodies in evolving social, economic and political forces. While Foucault looks to the treatment of sex and its evolvement through history, he marks a crucial deployment in the 19th Century, where by sex moved into the family home, grounded roles and ensured social and economic structures.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of 'becoming woman' is important, asserting that becoming-woman has nothing to do with gender but is rather a moving away from patriarchy and man as the central subject of history.[63] All such 'becomings' must pass through becoming-woman, because to become-woman is to become-other than man. This is not a simple binary mode in which 'woman' is 'man's' other, but rather the process of becoming necessarily involves a move away from majoritarian concerns towards a minoritarian ethic. As Jenny O'Conner suggests, 'in order to begin any process of

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[61] Ferriter, Diarmaid, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland,* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2009), p.463.
[62] Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality Volume Two, The Use of Pleasure,* trans. Robert Hurley, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p 8.
[63] Batra, Anupa, 'Women and Becoming-Woman: Delueze and Feminism', in *Movements in Time: Revolution, Social Justice and Times of Change,* Cecile Lawrence and Natalie Churn (eds.), (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

becoming, one must first disentangle oneself from the binding ties of phallocentrism.'[64] Deleuze and Guattari posit that all becomings must engage with becoming woman as a natural progression in the process, for they will be unsuccessful if they do not first distance themselves from the established sphere of 'phallocentric hegemony.'[65]

On becomings, Delueze and Guattari say,

> the only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo – that is what Virgina Wolf lived with all her energies, in all her work, never ceasing to become. The girl is like the block of becoming that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult. It is not the girl who becomes a woman; it is the becoming-woman that produces the universal girl.[66]

As Mimi Marinucci, suggests 'an alternative approach is to regard such mismatches as gaps in the established paradigm, and to use those gaps as points of entry in an examination of the social constructions of that paradigm.'[67] It is in the gaps, the fissures, or Deleuze and Guattari's 'intermezzo', that social structures can be resisted, unpicked, to be re-woven in a more inclusive, tolerant fluidity.

Bourdieu proposes that cultural norms, or habitus, like these are enduring social structures that are subconsciously maintained and, because certain social groups have more power and cultural dominance than others, habitus serves to maintain those hierarchies. It is through reflective practices that one becomes aware of the structures and thereby changes and transforms them.[68] Through the playwrights and their plays, this thesis proposes instead that women's knowledge and experiences need to be embodied in order for habitus to change and for transformative reflection and understanding to take root. Our bodies and emotions are primary modes for communicating in and interpreting the world; arguably our very capacity to imagine and empathise with others is based upon a shared human

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[64] O'Connor, Jenny, 'The Body in Pedro Almodovar's Work: A Site of Rhizomatic Symbolic Violence', in *Essays In Irish Literary Criticism: Themes of Gender, Sexuality, and Corporeality,* Deirdre Quinn and Sharon Tighe-Mooney (eds.), (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), p. 212.
[65] O'Connor, *Essays In Irish Literary Criticism Themes of Gender, Sexuality, and Corporeality,* p. 214.
[66] Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans Brian Massumi, (London: Athlone Press, 1987) p. 277.
[67] Marinucci, Mimi, *Feminism is Queer The Intimate Connection between queer and Feminist Theory,* (London & New York: Z Books, 2010), p. 12.
[68] Bourdieu, Pierre, and Wacquant, Loic, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

embodiment.[69] In a more particular sense, Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity' and her intervention in queer theory acts as a useful tool throughout the thesis. Identities are composed through performance and the plays explore how people 'perform themselves into being' over time and what happens when ruptures occur. Our identities, particularly gendered identities, are constituted by the actions we are conditioned to perform, and the actions we choose to perform. In this sense, rather than stemming from some innate, inherent biological 'nature', identities offer the possibility of change, to be constituted in the world differently. According to Butler 'the norm... allows for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social.'[70] Deviance from social orthodoxy only becomes possible where a 'norm' or average standard exists and which provides a constant regulator for evaluation and control of the normal.

Chapter One analyses Elaine Murphy's *Little Gem,* Carmel Winters's *B for Baby*, and Nancy Harris's *Love in a Glass Jar* and their representations of the changing nature of motherhood in Ireland. All three plays, in different ways, challenge idealised, hegemonic, notions of motherhood particularly the varying 'means' of becoming pregnant, and by doing so seek to liberalise female sexuality within Irish society. In this purposeful move away from historical oppressions to women's sexual and reproductive health, I argue these plays reclaim the sexualised, female body from a society that has manipulated fertility for centuries.[71] The plays contest limited visions of the family and place reproductive control firmly in the hands of its female protagonists. In a society that embeds discrimination into its constitution and denies women the right to control their own bodies through abortion, it is telling that the women in these plays have full body autonomy. Through these three plays, the chapter looks at complex power relationships between sex, the State and the individual, the fraught relationship between social dictate and personal acquiescence, and critiques respective manifestations of the post-independent and post-feminist Irish idealisation of womanhood and motherhood. In particular, the use of the family structure to manipulate reproduction, sexuality and the economy, whereby a proscriptive, heterosexual family unit is too fragile a container for identity.

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[69] Gallese, Vittorio, 'Embodied simulation: From neurons to phenomenal experience', in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 4(1), 23–48, 2005. Accessed at: http://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-005-4737-z.
[70] Butler, Judith, *Undoing Gender,* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.42.
[71] As is evidenced in the horror stories of the Magdalene Laundries, literally places of incarceration, the multiple Mother and baby homes, and most recently Tuam Baby scandal, where nearly 800 baby corpses were discovered on the land previously occupied by a Sisters of Bons Secours mother and baby home.

Chapter Two develops from the 1990s, which saw the legalisation of homosexuality, and a counter narrative arise to traditional hetero-normative representations in Irish drama.[72] However, within this there lies the under-representation of certain women's perspectives and representation, predominantly that of the lesbian or transgender experience. The chapter considers the plays of Elaine Murphy, *Ribbons*, Una McKevitt, *The Big Deal*, and Amy Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* to explore female-authored queer performance interventions in Irish theatre, and Ireland's social and cultural landscape more generally. These texts champion gay performance since 1993 while concurrently navigating a shift in focus from male homosexual desire to a broad representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender experience. The multifarious nature of these performances and their challenges to dramatic form are indicative of the potential of queer culture to disrupt traditional narratives. They interrogate representational visibility and complexities of the queer narrative that fuses the intimate experience of personal identity with social commentary. Hetero-normativity plays strongly into cultural, legal and institutional practice, and helps to maintain and protect these normative assumptions. Given the constant need to contest discrimination in all its forms, it is imperative to find a platform to bear witness to a pluralism in sexual and gendered experience – not least because legislative and institutional practice are both slow and imperfect. On varying levels, Murphy, McKevitt and Conroy foster a resistance to hetero-normative narratives and provide a unique intervention into shifting dynamics of gender and sexuality. Collectively their plays trouble restrictive and oppressive identity formations that can be enshrined in legislative, medical and social powers, while simultaneously creating a potential space in which other identities can be imagined.

Chapters Three and Four tackle the complex and multifaceted issues of women and violence. These two chapters are concerned with addressing nuanced accounts to analyse both violence 'done to' and 'done by' women, and the ethical demands of such dramatic representations. First, Chapter Three discloses the prevalence of sexual and domestic abuse in contemporary Irish society alongside an unnerving silence surrounding the violated female body in performance. Through THEATREclub's *The Game,* Stella Feehily's *Duck,* and Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl,* the vivid, albeit contrasting, representations of physical and sexual violence cast light on the complex relationship between sex, violence and gender, each seeking to break the victim/perpetrator binary that dominates, and perpetuates

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[72] As exemplified in productions such as Gerry Stembridge's *The Gay Detective* (1996), Loughlin Deegan's *The Queen and Peacock* (2000) and Brokentalkers' *Silver Stars* (2008).

patriarchal discourse. These plays delicately represent abuse and sexual violence to render violence as a visible problem within contemporary culture and place an ethical demand on the spectator as witness. In *Duck,* Stella Feehily uses violence to show the female body as a commodification by men, and as a means to control women who refute subordination. Conversely, she always deploys acts of spontaneous violence by women as an act of resistance to oppressive misogyny. *Pumpgirl* contains a gang rape of a relatively young woman by three older men. The pathetic situation directly reflects common rape narratives in which the woman knows the perpetrator, drugs and alcohol are involved and accountability problematic. The harsh social reality of prostitution, misogyny and violence is exposed in *The Game,* which uses a game show formula to explore the impossibility of choice in prostitution. Each play deals with the reality of abuse, the difficulty of addressing such emotive issues and how to represent without voyeurism. They interrogate the reality of certain sectors in society and present male violence to women as largely sexually motivated. Issues of rape culture, victim blaming and societal reactions to sexual violence frame the chapter, alongside the socio-political implications of accountability by bearing witness. Through dramatic representation the plays under consideration seek to make the invisible visible, and implicate the audience ethically in the performance of violence.

Chapter Four explores the representation of women who challenge social expectations and deviate certain boundaries through a propensity to violence toward other people, themselves or both. The characters in Paula Meehan's *Cell,* Lisa McGee's *Girls and Dolls* and Genevieve Hulme Beaman's *Pondling* disregard authority, challenge power dynamics and transgress societal codes of behaviour. Acts of violence by women can be seen as more disturbing than by men, because it disrupts normative gendered proscriptions – women are supposed to be nurturers and carers, the feminine ideal does not sit comfortably with the idea of violent murderess. Thus women in this chapter become doubly damned, firstly for transgressing social behaviour and committing acts of violence, and secondly for transgressing normative gender binaries. The feelings of loss, isolation, and frustration are weaved through the narratives, often stemming from a lack of education or institutional abuse. In order to develop the idea of isolation all are set in liminal places – a prison, a field, a farm. The places are in-between spaces, set in a limbo of neither here nor there whereby inside and outside become hugely loaded as the women are confined in both physical and mental spaces. In *Cell,* the prison is not part of society, but it is not isolated from it either, it is an in-between space for the inmates, a waiting area, from which they may or may not be allowed to re-enter society.

Chapter Five deals with the importance of story-telling in narratives surrounding aging and memory. It advocates turning to the past to find new ways of thinking about the present, similar to the Roman God Janus whose two-faces look back and forward simultaneously. It could be considered that the past can be left behind, but more than likely it will continue to exert a gravitational pull upon the present. The trio of plays discussed in relation to this are Ioanna Anderson's *Six Acts of Love*, Elizabeth Kuti's *Treehouses* and Deirdre Kinahan's *Halcyon Days*. The instability of memory is highlighted through the plays, but also the importance of the past to understand and come to terms with the present. The stories and recollections of the women in the plays shape the narrative and their haunting histories continually mark the present. The playwrights experiment with varying techniques for staging memory, such as overlaps of time between characters, places and situations, changes in grammatical tense between present and past, repetition of lines and mirror imagery, and staging dementia which serves as a metaphorical device and as an increasingly prevalent social reality. The women in the plays are haunted, either by the ghosts of their past or what their future affords. There is a rich and complex field of historicity in the way individuals are summoned to recognise themselves as ethical subjects, and the process in which the individual delimits that part of herself. Elements of these plays underline that the elderly should not be forgotten or invisible - not just because they have value in their own right, but also because their past helps to explain our present. They ask for recognition about how we got where we are and how we can choose different pathways into the future, to bring about the process of forgiveness, on a personal and national scale.

In summary, the broad aims of the thesis are to acknowledge the presence of Irish women playwrights from the turn of the millennium through fifteen plays, to illustrate how these playwrights dismantle systems of traditional representation and become effective agents of action and radical change. The intention is to provide a critical analysis of the women's writing, illustrating how they develop and engage with Ireland's social landscape. In doing so, I explore the complex nuances of the actualities of life represented in these women's plays and the relevance and importance of such stories in relation to social policies in Ireland. I consider how new ideas, possibilities and experiences of womanhood in Ireland have emerged and how they are reflected and challenged within the theatre. The plays emphasise the benefits of diversity, dismantling monolithic social attitudes embedded in patriarchy. They embrace the balance and the limits of the relationship between the

personal, the political, and the tension between personal freedom and collective responsibility. Moreover, it is the on going need to check 'privilege', not just the singularity of women's voices but the multiplicity of experiences, to insure the vocalisation of all minorities, from queer, ethnic, class, ages and all bodies.

Chapter One: Confronting Motherhood

This chapter considers renegotiations of family and motherhood and, in particular redefinitions of 'mother'. Cast within Irish theatre, I consider how the themes of each play engage with current debates germane to maternal subjectivity and its representation and validation through the female characters and their diverse experiences. I use the plays of Elaine Murphy, *Little Gem* (2008),[73] Carmel Winters, *B for Baby* (2010), and Nancy Harris, *Love in a Glass Jar* (2008) to probe and explore the ideological and cultural constructs of motherhood, the effect these have on the lives of the characters and, therefore, how this develops the changes taking place within contemporary Irish society. The three plays commonly breach the socially constructed gap between the idealised maternal subject and the actualities of women's lived experience. Andrea O'Reilly suggests that motherhood is *not* a natural or biological function, she sees it specifically and fundamentally as a 'cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and social factors.'[74] That said, I would argue that motherhood is in parts biological, social and cultural, and my aim is to demonstrate that, primarily as a social construction, its meaning varies with time and place and there need be no essential or universal experience of motherhood. My broad intention is to illustrate the re-moulding of traditional familial practices in order to confront conventional definitions of motherhood and move toward less prescriptive models of family.

Common to all three plays is their resistance to idealised representations of motherhood that complicates essentialist binary categorisations of 'good' versus 'bad' and 'young' versus 'old'. Such prescriptions are in abundance in national discourses, particularly in relation to age, socio-economic status and sexual orientation. Enormous pressures are placed on the women in all three plays, and the playwrights tease out and voice the evolving ideologies and cultural constructions of 'mothering' and of family. Motherhood can be many conflicting things for each woman, and is also always in process. Elaine Murphy's *Little Gem* deftly explores the ways in which modes of motherhood need to be modified to accommodate changing cultural and sociological parameters of the family. The play acknowledges that some unplanned teenage pregnancies are, or become, wanted

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[73] *Little Gem,* produced by Guna Nua premiered at the Dublin Fringe Festival in 2008 in the Project Arts Centre and subsequently toured to the Traverse Theatre the following year as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The original production was directed by Paul Meade, Amber was played by Sarah Greene, Lorraine by Amelia Crowley and Kay by Anita Reeves.

[74] O'Reilly, Andrea, in *From Motherhood to Mothering the legacy of Adrienne Rich's 'Of Woman Born',* Andrea O'Reilly (ed), (State University of New York Press: New York: 2004), p. 4-5.

pregnancies in a way that 'challenges the idea of adolescent pregnancy as 'maladaptive'; instead, it moves towards considering adolescent pregnancy as 'normative and as a potentially positive life event'.[75] Such stigmatisation extends to Carmel Winter's *B for Baby* and I examine this play through the perspective of infertility to shed light on the harrowing emotional strain, both personally and culturally, of *not* becoming a mother and creating a 'family'. The play is complex and it would be possible to view the action as a controversial exploitation of the cared-for by the care-giver, or indeed as an exposition on the sexual rights of the mentally disabled. However, my choice here is to explore a nuanced view of the biological-versus-sociological desire for motherhood. *Love in a Glass Jar* develops a further element of the sexual revolution in Ireland, surrounding advances in reproductive technology. In particular, such innovations challenge traditional perceptions of motherhood and, as Peter Crawley's review suggests, instigate a 'poignant meditation on family.'[76] The play scrutinises social transformations in women's commitment to family, parenting and work, and centres on a single career woman's wish to initiate a family on her own. This successfully divides motherhood, or even parenthood, from marital status.

Women's sexuality in Ireland has a problematic history, largely due to the Catholic Church's preaching and obsessive desire to control women through their bodies and reproductive rights. Tom Inglis adds, 'the realms of pleasure, desire and sexual being were censored in public life and silenced in the family.'[77] It is no coincidence that Anne Fogarty draws attention to the numerous court cases about infanticide, abortion rights, teenage pregnancy, and sexual abuse that have caught the public attention in Ireland in recent years, some of which will shortly be exemplified. She believes that 'many of the most virulent moral and ethical battles have hinged on the issues of women's rights and female sexuality.'[78] Lisa Fitzpatrick makes the additional point that access to contraception has allowed Irish women to be sexually active without the fear of unwanted or multiple

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[75] Lohan, Maria, Peter O'Halloran, Sharon Cruise, Fiona Alderdice (Queen's University Belfast) and Abbey Hyde, 'If I were Jack? Adolescent males' attitudes and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy', *Crisis Pregnancy Programme Report* No. 26, p. 5.

[76] Crawley, Peter, *The Irish Times,* 7th March 2013, accessed at http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/love-in-a-glass-jar-ribbons-1.1319371

[77] Inglis, Tom, *Moral Monopoly: Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland,* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1987), p. 5.

[78] Fogarty, Anne, 'The Horror of the Unlived Life' Mother-Daughter Relationships in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction', in *Writing Mothers and Daughters*: *Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*, Adalgisa Giorgio (ed.), (Berghahn Books: New York and Oxford, 2002), p.87-88.

pregnancies.[79] Social support for deserted wives, widows and unmarried mothers has not only allowed women to cope financially with difficult family circumstances but has also had the effect of making those circumstance visible, and giving them a place in the social discourse. These issues are controversial because Ireland is a society that has historically shunned pregnancy 'out of wedlock' and at the same time has denied women opportunities for contraception or abortion. As Fitzpatrick says, '[contraception] had a profound impact in a society that, in the early 1970s (and for many years after) was still incarcerating pregnant single women in Magdalene Laundries and forcing them to yield up their 'illegitimate' babies for adoption, and hiding evidence of anything that contradicted Catholic social teaching.'[80]

Ireland has a long-regarded view of the family as a key institution, evidenced in oft-discussed Article 41.1[81] and 41.2[82] of the Constitution. These constitute woman as mother in home, exemplifying the 'phallocentric language' embedded in the Irish Constitution. As Fogarty states, 'The ideals of femininity and maternity set up in the constitution as a bulwark against social disorder and the ills of modernity are now fiercely contested in contemporary Ireland in the continuing upheavals caused by the clash between entrenched patriarchal values and an advancing feminist ethos.'[83] Article 41.1 actually asserts that '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.' Bourdieu's[84] writing on the family challenges this and maintains that, although it may appear to be an essential and stable bedrock to society, it is in fact a social and cultural creation, as are certain ascriptions of motherhood and sexuality. This chapter develops the complex nature of motherhood and the broadening scope of the definition of the family, which will tease out the multi-layered experiences of

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[79] Fitzpatrick, Lisa, 'Introduction' in *Performing Feminism in Contemporary Ireland,* Lisa Fitzpatrick (ed.), (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2013), p. 3-4.

[80] Fitzpatrick, *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 3-4.

[81] Article 41.1 states that 'The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptibly rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.'/ Article 41.1.2 'The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State. Accessed at https://www.constitution.ie/Documents/Bhunreacht_na_hEireann_web.pdf, p. 162.

[82] Article 41.2.1 – '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.' / Articles 41.2.2 – '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.' Accessed at https://www.constitution.ie/Documents/Bhunreacht_na_hEireann_web.pdf, p. 162.

[83] Fogarty, in *Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women*, p.87-88

[84] Bourdieu, Pierre 'On the Family as a Realized Category' in *Theory, Culture & Society,* (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 13 (3), 1996, p. 19-26.

women as mothers and a move away from heteronormative proscriptions of family. Of course, motherhood and sexuality are intrinsic to human nature and therefore not solely imposed by external forces of society and culture. However, the family's historical structure in Ireland, as laid out in the Constitution, guides experience and secures in language the definition of woman as mother in home, and to whom 'family' applies. Foucault, in *History of Sexuality: 1, The Will to Knowledge*, considers the family's position as an anchor, or a 'permanent support,'[85] he argues that it does not necessarily sit as an essential, 'natural' unit that exists more fundamentally than society itself, but is part of a complex power organisation between sex, the state and the individual, grounded in wider patterns of social and economic relations. He proposes that, 'the family cell... made it possible for the main elements of deployment of sexuality (the feminine body, infantile precocity, the regulation of births, and to a lesser extent no doubt, the specification of the perverted) to develop along its two primary dimensions: the husband-wife axis and the parent-child axis.'[86] In this sense he argues that sex, and its influence upon the family 'axis' has been used as a crucial tool in the control of marriage, labour, and reproduction. One can deduce from this that, while many societies have used the family as an organising principle, of land ownership, patri-lineal continuation of inheritance and basic reproduction, what is intrinsic to the Irish situation is that the family and the role of women as mother are formally enshrined into the constitution.

In this way, the family has long been regarded as one of the key institutions of Irish society. Families, like individuals, are never independent entities; they are always enmeshed in Foucauldian relations of power. The Irish sociologist Tom Inglis contends that Irish families

> are shaped by institutions, discourses, and long-term processes of change, by the state and its educations, health, and social welfare services, by the Catholic Church and its teachings in relation to marriage, divorce, sex, and fertility control, and by the market and the media and their messages of consumption and entertainment and the fulfilment of pleasures and desires.[87]

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[85] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, p. 108.
[86] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, p. 108.
[87] Inglis, Tom, *Meanings of Life in Contemporary Ireland: Webs of Significance*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 44

Carol Coulter remarks in her essay 'Hello Divorce, Goodbye Daddy' that, 'As Irish society changes - with the grip of religion weakening, the growth in male unemployment, the rise in female employment, and the fundamental shift in sexual mores and attitudes toward personal rights and liberties – a huge vacuum appears at the level of public policy and official ideology.' [88] The Constitution, however, fails to offer effective public acknowledgment of women as independent individuals: 'thus far woman has been regarded not as an autonomous person but as a site of contest,'[89] with not even a legally recognised agency on her own body, as the strict anti-abortion legislation in the Republic of Ireland demonstrates. [90] Ireland's 8th amendment [91] remains hotly contested and enormously problematic. A referendum in 1983 introduced the Eight Amendment into the Irish Constitution, recognising a right to life of an unborn child and thereby criminalizing abortion. A subsequent referendum has allowed women to seek abortion services abroad. According to statistics from the Irish Family Planning Association[92] at least 165,438 women and girls travelled from Ireland to access abortion in the UK between 1980 and 2015. Around nine are believed to travel daily. The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act was enacted in 2013 to provide legal abortions when there is risk to the woman's life due to physical illness or suicide. Despite this, in 2014 a young, suicidal woman was denied an abortion, and a family of a woman pregnant but sadly declared brain dead was denied a request to terminate her pregnancy. This current law forces the pregnant body to be that of the maternal, which not only assumes the pregnant and the maternal body are mutually inclusive, but also removes choice: it is the State's right, not the woman's, to make these decisions. The plays by Murphy, Winters and Harris chosen for discussion here convey the complexity of the difference between the pregnant and the maternal body - not every pregnant body is a maternal body. As Elizabeth Grosz argues: 'bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural and class

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[88] Coulter, Carol, 'Hello Divorce, Goodbye Daddy": Women, Gender and the Divorce Debate' in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland,* Anthony Bradley, Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (eds.), (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) p 295.

[89] Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 362.

[90] Calchi Novati, Gabriella, 'Challenging Patriarchal Imagery: Amanda Coogan's Performance Art' in *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture,* Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh (eds.), (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 183.

[91] Article 40.3.3 was brought about after a referendum in 1983 and reads 'the State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees to respect, and as far as practicable, by its laws to vindicate that right.' Women's bodies are therefore ensnared in a system of control by state intervention on their reproductive rights.

[92] Irish Family Planning Association, 'Sexuality, Information Reproductive Health & Rights; Abortion in Ireland: Statistics', accessed at: www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/Statistics.

particularities.'[93] These plays try to develop a richer, more interrelated and nuanced notion of the aesthetics and ethics of the maternal body, the pregnant body and what comprises a family. The plays effectively problematise and resist traditional beliefs of what constitutes a mother, to whom this label applies and by what means. Through such representations it is possible to dismantle ideological understandings of motherhood and consider them in relation to class, race, chronological age and even to sexual orientation. The desire is to recognise wide-ranging multi-voiced and multi-faceted aspects of motherhood that are seldom addressed but are pertinent to present Irish society.

Little Gem: De-stigmatising sexuality and the 'bad' teenage mother

Elaine Murphy's debut play *Little Gem*[94] premiered at the Dublin Fringe Festival in 2008 and subsequently toured to the Traverse Theatre the following year as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Perhaps aided by the minimal set, the play has toured to numerous countries and a range of venues across Ireland. For example, in January 2010, with the support of Culture Ireland, it was premiered in the United States by the Carol Tambor Theatrical Foundation and continued this tour to Ireland[95] before concluding in March at the Bush Theatre in London where it ran for seven weeks.[96] The play has been awarded multiple recognitions across the board, receiving the Fishamble New Writing and Best Actress award (2008) and nominated for Best New Play and Best Actress at the Irish Times Theatre awards. Murphy herself received the BBC Northern Irish Drama Award in 2009 from The Stewart Parker Trust. Considering that Murphy was relatively unknown as a playwright, this is admirable success. The popularity of *Little Gem* is reflected not only by the many awards the play has received,[97] nor the varied venues in which it has been produced, but perhaps more tellingly its propensity to sell out large theatres, reaching a

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[93] Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies : Toward a Corporeal Feminism,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xiii, p. 19.

[94] *Little Gem,* produced by Guna Nua premiered at the Dublin Fringe Festival in 2008 in the Project Arts Centre and subsequently toured to the Traverse Theatre the following year as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The original production was directed by Paul Meade, Amber was played by Sarah Greene, Lorraine by Amelia Crowley and Kay by Anita Reeves.

[95] The United States production was part of the Best of Edinburgh Award; at The Flea Theater, New York City, it ran for eleven days, 5th-16th January 2010, with the same cast as the Edinburgh performances.

[96] Theatre venues – Peacock Theatre January 2010, then will tour five venues around Ireland: Draiocht in Blanchardstown; The George Bernard Shaw Theatre in Carlow; The Belltable in limerick; The Axis in Ballymun, and Civic Theatre, Tallaght. (2010). Re-productions: Richmond Shakespeare Society, London, on 30 October – 3 November 2011. City Theatre, Pittsburgh, March 30 – May 5th 2013. Played Everyman Cork 11th- 15th November (no year) and has been in continuous production since then… etc) The Rose Centre, Auckland, November 2013.

[97] On returning to Dublin it won the Best Theatre Script awarded by the Irish Playwrights and Screenwriters Guild

vast and extensive audience demographic. The power of *Little Gem* rests in its empathetic nature and accurate depictions of everyday life regardless of age, class but, controversially, maybe not gender.

Prior to writing *Little Gem,* Murphy had been a part-time worker in a women's health organisation and the play is clearly influenced by her first-hand experience of the heart-felt, true-life stories she encountered.[98] She attests that *Little Gem* is 'a mishmash of all the women I've met over the years: hard-working, not particularly rich or poor, ignored by the Celtic Tiger, and the recession probably won't make much of a difference to them either, you know, women like us, getting on with it.'[99] The comic power of the play relies on these accurate, delicate and often indelicate depictions of true-to-life scenarios to which the audience can relate and empathise. Significantly, given my earlier remarks, she continues, 'being an actress for the last couple of years, I always had a yearning to write something myself. Decent parts are thin on the ground and I rarely recognised any of the women portrayed on the stage in front of me.'[100]

With comic tenderness and honesty, Murphy employs interconnected and intercut monologues delivered by three generations of women, to tease out the trials and tribulations they face through one year of life. Although it is true that in *Little Gem* 'there is a neat balance struck between risqué humour and the tragedy of family,'[101] an overview of the characters' stories appears quite bleak. Amber, with the restless insouciance of late adolescence, has recently left school and has found employment in a call centre. Besotted by her on-off boyfriend Paul, her narrative is fuelled initially by drugs and alcohol, until she becomes pregnant. She then captures precisely the way young motherhood produces an enforced maturity. Her mother, Lorraine, works as a shop assistant for a large department store and has long been abandoned by her thieving husband whom it transpires is now a homeless drug addict. She is haunted by the hardships of her past and, alongside her acute symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, she has recently been diagnosed with depression. Her mother Kay, Amber's grandmother, is trying to come to terms with her husband Gem's recent stroke, and deeply misses the emotional and sexual life that she

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[98] Murphy, Elaine, 'Author's Note' in *Little Gem,* (Guna Nua Theatre Company and Civic Theatre Tallaght, in association with The Bush Theatre) (no page)
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Harvey, Julie, 'Theatre Review: Little Gem' on 13th October 2010, accessed at http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/3566/theatre-review-little-gem

used to lead. Murphy skilfully examines how birth, copulation and death thread their way through the matrilineal line of these women's lives.

As previously stated, sexuality in Ireland has a long legacy of containment, repression and control, particularly over the female body. In Foucault's analysis of sexuality he remarks that from the 19th century onward 'sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses and injunctions settled upon it.'[102] What becomes crucial, he says, is 'to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all "discursive fact," the way in which sex is "put into discourse".'[103] In his article 'Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality', Inglis asserts that 'much that Foucault says about the history of sexuality applies to Ireland.'[104] As Inglis goes on to suggest, 'the habitus of Irish sexuality, the unreflective, immediate, on-going disposition which people had when encountering sexuality, began to change from fear, doubt, suspicion, guilt and shame more towards positive pleasure and enjoyment.'[105] The confinement of what was written or said about sexuality in Ireland was largely due to the historic, insidious relationship between Church and state: these are the institutions of which Foucault talks. He makes the point that, in certain circumstances, the state can appropriate sex as a mechanism of control. He argues, 'one had to speak of it [sex] as of a thing not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered.'[106]

This was certainly the case in Irish society where precise constitutional amendments such as Article 40.3.3[107] took control of sex as a means to regulate the family, marriage and reproductive rights, with the aim of structuring society as a whole. Foucault contends, 'It is worth remembering that the first figure to be invested by the deployment of sexuality, one of the first to be 'sexualized,' was the 'idle' woman. She inhabited the outer edge of the 'world,' in which she always had to appear as a value, and of the family, where she was

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[102] Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume One*, p. 26.
[103] Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume One*, p. 11.
[104] Inglis, Tom, 'Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality', *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 7, 1997, p. 9.
[105] Ibid., p. 6.
[106] Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume One*, p. 24.
[107] Article is cited earlier, footnote – 76.

assigned a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligations.'[108] Sexuality, and in particular female sexuality and reproduction, is centred on the policing of bodies by the institution of marriage, the family and motherhood.

What is missing in Foucault, though, is an analysis of the self as constituted 'within the symbolic interactive process of everyday life and as an active agent who strategically uses culture as a tool-kit.'[109] Inglis argues that this individuality, this agency, is absent in Foucault's writing on sexuality. And it is an important absence, since 'it helps provide an understanding of how discourses change and develop; how some have become dominant while others fade away and how new discourses emerge.'[110] Inglis's essay points out that Foucault is a master in illuminating discontinuities and ruptures in the writing of sex so that it is now possible to say with confidence, that Ireland has 'moved from a system of well-codified Catholic ethics to a more individually constructed art as well as ethics of existence.'[111]

While a sexual revolution may have been happening for Irish youth, in relation to older generations, particularly older women, open discussions of sexuality have been a rarity. *Little Gem,* on the other hand openly and firmly places sexuality at the forefront, as grandmother Kay reinforces, 'I know it's not the done thing talking about your sex life, but jaysus, I'm the wrong side of sixty, not dead.'[112] Far from sexually repressed or conservative, Murphy's script endorses Kay as an ebullient, hilarious older woman, able to deliver laughter and loneliness by turn. She candidly and shamelessly discusses her strong sexual urges, frankly informing us that: 'I'm dying for me bit' and addresses her continued desire for an orgasm. The legacy of repressed sexuality in the older woman is comically inverted and challenged through Kay. She asserts: 'We've always been very compatible in that department, which is a miracle by itself, because by the time you get to our age you'd normally be lacing the cocoa with arsenic not Viagra.'[113] Her sexual relationship is firmly grounded in personal pleasure, and Murphy comically debunks disabling views of older women.

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[108] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p.121.
[109] Inglis, *Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 7, 1997, p. 24.
[110] Ibid. p. 17.
[111] Ibid. p. 15-16.
[112] Murphy, *Little Gem,* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2008), p. 10.
[113] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 10.

Inglis notes that sexuality in Irish society began to operate within 'individuals as a positive pursuit of an ethical, healthy, pleasurable lifestyle.'[114] Grandmother Kay illustrates this through a particularly comic encounter with her friend in Lidl supermarket, who recommends that she purchase a Rampant Rabbit, apparently 'she got one six months ago and wouldn't be without it. Little does she know she's just put a stop to all those face-lift rumours; the woman is glowing from good old-fashioned orgasms.'[115] The sexual honesty and desire in a woman past sixty, alongside her earthy wit, endears her immediately to the audience. Kay would remember the late eighties, when plans for the first Ann Summers store to open in Dublin came to light. Ferriter remarked that 'some saw this as representing the normalization of sexuality by its being transformed into a commodity, though this development was also presented as a threat to collective and individual well being.'[116] This is evident in the moral horror that spread through both public officials and certain parts of society, resulting in the chief executive of the store, Jacqueline Gold, receiving a bullet through the post.[117]

But even Kay seems a little trepidatious about her expedition to the store, hiding her concern in a comic misconception that she might have to 'untie the staff from some dungeon before they can serve ye'[118] or that they will all be parading around in leather cat-suits. Murphy's reference to Ann Summers indicates the rapid progression in Irish society over the last two decades and the play challenges the idea that the older generation, born at a time of this ingrained anxiety and prejudice towards sex, still abide by such ethics. Although, Ferriter warns that,

> an evident confidence (some would say crassness) in sexual expression does not mean that conflict, guilt, uncertainty and anger over sexuality, marriage, chastity, feminism, masculine identity, censorship, sex education and public health policy ceased to exist. The preoccupation with what is sexually acceptable is still of relevance in modern Ireland.[119]

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[114] Inglis, 'Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality', *Journal of Sociology,* p. 9.
[115] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 10.
[116] Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, p. 535.
[117] McTeirnan, Anthea, *The Irish Times*, '15 Years of Ann Summers: has the sky fallen in?', 17th November 2014. Accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/15-years -of-ann-summers-has-the-sky-fallen-in-1.1999649.
[118] Murphy, *Little Gem*, p. 10-11.
[119] Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, p. 545.

Historically, this represents continuity rather than change, a reminder that, despite the extent to which Irish sexuality has become less restricted by the demands made by family, religion, society and economy, a narrative of Irish sexual history that 'moves seamlessly from repression to liberation is incomplete and simplistic.'[120] Although we are dealing with different issues in the early twenty-first century, there is still much confusion and pain being caused by sexuality. Ferriter continues, that 'sexual liberalization and advanced secularism have not necessarily resulted in an all-encompassing freedom.'[121] In this respect, *Little Gem* is a clear example of the playwright presenting the complex relationship between sexuality, family and motherhood - and the importance of such life stories in relation to the social policies in Ireland. In this emergence of new possibilities and experiences of womanhood in Ireland, the theatre is used to stage previously deeply uncomfortable issues.

It is necessary to comment further on Ireland's problematic history in regard to 'sexually promiscuous' women in order to discuss the importance of Murphy's sympathetic portrayal of Amber's unplanned pregnancy. Not conforming to the family model, unmarried pregnant women were excluded from society and forced into convents, homes and asylums. Such women were heavily ostracised, as evidenced by the many Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes. Kayla Hertz denounces these as, 'cruel and medieval institutions in which women were imprisoned, stripped of their human rights and abused sexually and otherwise.'[122] Women sent to such institutions were deemed 'mischievous' or 'scandalous' at an incredibly young age, and spent many years of their lives in penance for their 'sins' of sexual promiscuity. This is indicative of the deeply entrenched sexual double standards in society, as Inglis asserts, 'sexually transgressive women are more likely to be pilloried and demonized than men who violate accepted norms.'[123] The last Magdalene Laundry closed as late as 1996, and it was not until 2001 that the Irish government actually assumed accountability for such systemic abuse. Louise Lowe with Anu Productions created an innovative performance of this abuse in *Laundry*[124] a performance that was part of their 'Monto Cycle' series, a four-part history of north inner

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[120] Ibid. p. 543.
[121] Ibid. p. 544.
[122] Hertz, Kayla, 'Today marks 19 years since the first Magdalene Laundry in Ireland closed', October 25th 2015, http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/Today-marks-18-years-since-the-last-Magdalene-Laundry-in-Ireland-closed-.html. Accessed on 28th June 2015.
[123] Inglis, Tom, 'Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in modern Ireland' *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 40 (3/4) Fall-Winter 2005, p.33.
[124] *Laundry* was first performed in 2011 Ulster Bank Theatre Festival, and later won 'Best Production' in 2012 *Irish Times* Theatre Awards.

city Dublin. This site-specific, devised performance was set in a former Magdalene Laundry, and closely knitted the horrors of past abuse of some women firmly into the present. Although there are signs of major change, Gabriella Calchi Novati points out that, 'the Irish state ... still exercises its patriarchal 'right' to legislate over the female body by subordinating women's reproductive rights.'[125] Given this, it is sadly unsurprising that lingering anxiety orbits women's reproductive rights and that a legacy of stigma is still attached to single mothers. Inglis reasserts that even in contemporary Ireland, 'sex and sexuality are still seen as problems rather than pleasures.'[126]

Murphy's Amber is herself fully conscious of the social prejudice attached to teenage pregnancy and is anything but casual about the realisation of her predicament. Stage directions have her crying constantly and clearly experiencing enormous vulnerability coupled with shame: 'I'm going to have a baby. A baby. I'm so fucked'[127] and fully comprehends the impact this may have on her family. She believes her 'mam' will think she is a 'waster' and wishes she could find the words to say 'I'm sorry for letting you down or fucking hell I'm scared shitless.'[128] This use of language is couched in a history of shame, repentance and fear. In this way, *Little Gem* trades on a residue of stigma towards the 'young, single and pregnant' - which remains problematic. In one incident, Amber is publicly humiliated by one of her peers who, 'breaking her shite laughing' shouts 'brought his ticket forward, he did, didn't want to be stuck with yer little bastard.'[129] Amber recalls, 'the more of a scene she makes, the more the other girls are watching me.'[130] Such scenes indicate, that although sexual mores and attitudes may have progressed, a lingering prejudice remains in the public psyche. It is the girl that is shunned by her surrounding social environment, gossiped about and publicly scrutinised for her sexual 'promiscuity'. Maurice Devlin has observed that situations like these underline 'the extent to which it was the behaviour of young females that was highlighted as deviant; the idea being that the reputation of young women is at stake in a way that does not apply to men.'[131] It would seem that insidious gender prejudice remains deeply embedded and the instinct to 'slut shame' and applaud the 'lad' is a very prevalent reality. This is indicative of 'rape culture' working in Ireland at large, as will be exemplified later in Chapter Three.

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[125]Calchi Novati, Gabriella, in *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture,* p. 181
[126] Inglis, *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 40 (3/4) (Fall-Winter 2005), p.33
[127] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 22.
[128] Ibid. p. 24.
[129] Ibid. p. 31.
[130] Ibid. p. 31.
[131] Devlin, Maurice, 'A Bit of the Other: Media Representations of Young People's Sexuality', *Irish Journal of Sociology,* 12(2), 2003, p. 97.

In 1987 the status of 'illegitimate' children was formerly abolished in Ireland.[132] Despite this, there has still been lingering hostility towards single mothers, and these dispositions beg the question, what is it about lone motherhood that still provokes such rage and suspicion? Anne Byrne believes that 'stigmatizing attributes vary across cultures and eras, but stigma as a social process is ubiquitous and is linked to stereotyping. The targeted groups are perceived to be a disturbance to the social order and the beliefs that sustain it.'[133] Teenage lone mothers seem to be a double 'deviance'. In a *Guardian* article entitled 'Never mind the data. Teen parents simply must be bad,'[134] Zoe Williams makes the point that the difficulty comes in trying to establish what type of parents are the most inadequate. Obviously, she says, 'you can't do it by class: that would be either bigoted or revolutionary. It is easier to do it by age; and easier still to blame teenagers. The trouble is, many of the preconceptions about teenage-parents, on which actual policy is based, are wrong.'[135] Williams, although referring to teenage pregnancy in the UK, believes that negativity appears to arise because the majority of teenage pregnancies are 'unplanned' however she makes the point that a third of births are unplanned and yet society is not proscripted or judgemental to these. Somehow it seems that these young women have become demonised as the 'poster girls' for a scroungers' society. Amber is a spectacle of 'failed' /bad motherhood on account of her age, class and status as single, that socially renders and judges her as unacceptable. As Ferriter has remarked, this seems to be rooted not just in concerns about sexual morality, but 'economic concerns about the drain of resources on the welfare state in spite of a plethora of studies indicating that lone parent families are over-represented in poverty statistics.'[136] Patricia Kennedy also suggests the reason teenage pregnancy has been constructed as a problem 'lay in the fact that such behaviour violated traditional assumptions about acceptable adolescent behaviour and highlighted the teenagers' sexual independence at a time when they are unable to achieve financial independence.'[137] The image of the single mother on welfare is particularly

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[132] Feritter, *Occasions of Sin,* p. 524

[133] Byrne, Anne, 'Single woman in Story and Society', in *Are The Irish Different?* Tom Inglis (ed.), (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 83

[134] Williams, Zoe, 'Never mind the data. Teen parents simply must be bad', *The Guardian,* 17th February 2010, accessed at: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/feb/17/teenage-pregnacies-conservatives-numbers-mistake.

[135] Williams, Zoe, 'Never mind the data. Teen parents simply must be bad', *The Guardian,* 17th February 2010, accessed at: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/feb/17/teenage-pregnacies-conservatives-numbers-mistake.

[136] Feritter, *Occasions of Sin,* p. 524

[137] Richardson, Valerie, 'Young Mothers' in *Motherhood in Ireland Creation and Context,* , Patricia Kennedy (ed.) (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004), p. 244

vulnerable to public scrutiny and feeds much of the 'good' versus 'bad' mother essentialism previously mentioned, binary categories that underline social prejudice. Kennedy notes that good parents are socially constructed as people who make independent economic provision, those who depend on welfare payments cannot fit in with society's definition of adequate parenting, 'thus the conclusion drawn by society is that teenage parents on welfare benefits are not good parents and are, therefore, a problem. However no research to date has demonstrated this as being a fact rather than a myth.'[138] In this way, the play reveals how lone mothers and their life experiences, although ontologically defined as 'other' within the 'family romance of the hegemonic idealization of the maternal subject', manage to 'breach the socially constructed gap between idealized maternal subject and what actually happens in women's lives.'[139] Such mothers can be seen to negotiate their subject positions within a hierarchy of maternal legitimacy, all of which allows a more permissive society to emerge. In *Little Gem*, the unmarried working-class teenage mother becomes a more readily visible and accepted member of Irish society. Markers of difference, 'badges to define groups'[140] such as working class, teenage mother, can be applied to Amber and label her but they do not constitute her. As Tony Fahey asserts, 'badges work not because of the objective reality they capture but because of the images, identities and associations they conjure up and the thoughts, emotions and actions they inspire.'[141] In this way, Sineád Molony believes, for example, that Irish documentary films during the recession, were dominated by 'an unquestioned middle-class gaze' which presents the working-class female body as 'a site of national shame and disruption that troubles ordinary hetero-normative domesticity.'[142] Those who do not abide by middle-class gender norms are pathologised as 'other' and framed outside the national collective. *Little Gem*, refuses to do this, as embodied in the representation of Amber.

Little Gem certainly challenges the idea of 'bad' mothers as young, single, and less financially secure. This otherwise vulnerable social category is represented positively through Amber and the vital supportive role of her extended family. The reactions from Amber's family to the pregnancy are essentially benign, if not actually immediately

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Caporale Bizzini, Silvia and Andrea O'Reilly, (eds.), *From the Personal to the Political Toward a New Theory of Maternal Narrative*, (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2009), p. 17.
[140] Fahey, Tony, 'The Irish family – different or not?' in *Are the Irish Different?*, p. 65.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Molony, Sineád, 'House and Home: Structuring Absences in Post-Celtic Tiger Documentary' in *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity,* Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (eds.), (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 184.

supportive. Grandmother Kay is the first to be informed of Amber's pregnancy and, although she was almost driven to take up cigarettes again, her support was evident. Amber acknowledges, she 'didn't even bother ripping me out of it, said it was a bit late for all that now.'[143] Her mother Lorraine admits she felt like kicking her daughter and breaking Paul Devlin's legs, but most of her upset stems from Amber confiding first in her grandmother. These reactions suggest Amber has solid support systems in place. As Lorraine reminds us, 'you hear all these horror stories of kids ending up in awful situations because they'd no one to turn to.'[144] Amber, on the other hand, is afforded agency, it is clearly her choice of how to proceed. Both her mother and the doctor ensure she understands her circumstances, and so Amber does not experience the isolation, exclusion and shame that historically other Irish women have faced.

The panic at becoming a mother is not lost on Amber, predominately the fear that she 'wouldn't be able to manage on her own.'[145] But she does manage, and Murphy creates a much-needed positive portrayal of single motherhood and female intergenerational camaraderie. Amber herself attests, 'We've been grand though; I've enjoyed having him all to myself. My Nanny was around earlier and she even said I was doing a great job. *(The phone rings.)* Bet you that's her, checking up on me. *(She ignores it, but it's persistent.)* Ah… fuck off. *(She finally gets up to answer it.)* Stalker!'[146] This chimes with Kennedy's rejection of poor parenting by simple virtue of youth and economic dependence, Amber is portrayed managing even at a young age largely due to the support mechanisms in place from her extended family. Kay stresses the importance to – 'let her do it her own way.'[147] To this extent research by Ireland's Crisis Pregnancy programme shows that, in many circumstances, the life course of parenting adolescents may not differ substantially from that of their socio-economic peers; at the very least, it indicates that 'the impact of childbearing in the adolescent years may not be as negative as once thought.'[148] Murphy's *Little Gem* dramatises such findings. Amber is far from being emotionally malnourished and socially transgressive as typically enshrined by traditional myths of teenage motherhood. Furthering my general argument, by normalising Amber's unplanned pregnancy, Murphy promotes social progression in society's sexual mores and customs

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[143] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 22.
[144] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 26.
[145] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 37.
[146] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 38.
[147] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 48.
[148] Crisis Pregnancy Programme, http://www.crisispregnancy.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/If-i-were-jack.pdf, p. 5.

and, in doing so, resists traditional hegemonic social attitudes. As Inglis notes, 'moving from a traditional religious moral regime of sexuality to one which is more secular, does not mean that the contemporary sexuality is unethical, but that it is operating within a different system of ethics.'[149] No longer the spectacle, Amber turns herself into a 'spectacular' demonstration of 'failed' femininity. In this way, the theatre is an important resistive playing field for such renegotiations.

As might be expected, the patriarchal role in the script is contorted. While old 'grandfather' Gem's death in the course of the play is portrayed with sadness, his place is taken by baby Little Gem, born into a new hopeful world, signifying the death of patriarchy and his entry into a more hopeful matriarchy. In part it is a view of failed fatherhood and as womanhood divorced from the patriarchal frame. Amber's father, a homeless alcoholic provides an image of men wandering with no secure place of home. They are only afforded a voice through the monologues of the women. Little Gem's father, Paul has all the trappings of failed masculinity. When Amber tells Paul she is pregnant, his last word is an aggressive 'out'[150] as he reaches over and opens the car door for her to leave. After attending the first hospital scan he declares 'I'm not ready for this,'[151] abandons Amber and the pregnancy and departs for Australia. Paul's lack of involvement, though, is slightly contrived. While his reaction suggests a continuation of a gendered model that locates reproductive responsibility firmly in the arms of the female, he is not actually indicative of the average Irish male adolescent. The report commissioned in 2012 by Crisis Pregnancy Programme revealed that, though an unplanned pregnancy was not necessarily viewed positively, the majority (83.3% of the boys questioned) said the news of pregnancy would not change their feelings towards their partner and, in general, the adolescent males expressed the view that they would take responsibility.[152] This report also assures that the rates of adolescent pregnancy in the Republic of Ireland are lower than in the US and the UK and have been steadily falling: the pregnancy rate for under 20 year-olds per 1,000 was 26.1 in 1980 and 19.8 in 2009. [153]

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[149] Inglis, 'Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality', *Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 7, 1997, p. 23-24.
[150] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 25.
[151] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 30.
[152] Lohan, Maria, et al. 'If I were Jack? Adolescent males' attitudes and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy', *Crisis Pregnancy Programme Report No. 26*, p. xiv.
[153] Crisis Pregnancy Programme, http://www.crisispregnancy.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/If-i-were-jack.pdf, p. 4.

A comment is also appropriate here about the lack of knowledge and understanding of sex and pregnancy that litters the play. Amber rationalises why her periods have stopped by naively accepting a work colleague's story: 'a girl in work told me about her sister, who started Ashtang yoga, dropped to six-and-a-half stone and stopped getting periods altogether.'[154] Similarly, she misunderstood the results of her pregnancy test: 'Give over, an 'X' means no'. When her friend alters the angle, she realises: 'Plus means positive. Bollix.'[155] Although comical moments, they are indicative of a wider, more serious concern around adolescents and sex education. In 2004, the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (CPA) published research revealing that a quarter of 19 to 25 year-olds failed to use contraception when they had sex. Murphy constructs a particularly troubling scenario of Paul entering the bedroom, when Amber was already half asleep with a headache, and has sex with her. Amber, recalls: 'Did the starfish – you know – decked out, no energy. He's going at it like a mad thing and I don't know… Must have nodded off – only for a minute, mind – 'cos then I heard – 'Oh shite, Amber, it's split! Amber! Amber!'[156] She adds, bitterly, 'We hardly made a baby outta that, did we?'[157] Two perturbing things arise. First there is no mention of Amber and Paul responding to the situation by discussing options such as the 'morning after' pill and, second, although the sex is consensual, it appears unwanted. These incidents are indicative of a larger social narrative in which, despite social and educational advances, there is still a lack of real information and support for adolescents in regard to sex and sexual health.

Little Gem enables a dialogue between generations of women to emerge, exploring a contemporary Ireland that experiences sexuality in a different and more liberal way and, with it, brings a warm sentimental glow of strength, possibility and hope. Reviewer Charles Spencer remarked that, 'it is one of those rare plays that leaves you feeling better about life when you leave the theatre than you did when you entered.'[158] Perhaps an exemplary moment of Jill Dolan's 'utopian performatives' which are generated by 'catching the audience in its generous, provocative embrace and by knitting us close together, even temporarily, in rapt attention to the simultaneous past/present/future of our

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[154] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 24
[155] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 14.
[156] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 15.
[157] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 15.
[158] Spencer, Charles, 'Little Gem at the Bush Theatre Review' in *The Telegraph UK* on 20th April 2010. Accessed at: www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/charles-spencer/7611491/Little-Gem-at-the-Bush-Theatre-review.html.

own lives.'[159] Utopian here is not some else-where unobtainable perfection, it is a real possibility in everyday life. The family in theatre often appears as a site of contention and in particular ancestral rivalries between women are constantly disinterred and re-enacted. The final scene of *Little Gem* depicts the three generations of women lying in bed together with Amber's new baby nicknamed Little Gem, on the first night after 'big' Gem has died. Kay describes, 'the girls snuggle in beside me. Listen to Jamie breathing softly in and out. Whisper goodnight to Gem...close my eyes, trying to trick myself into sleep on my first night without him.'[160]

As discussed more fully later in the context of Carmel Winter's *B for Baby*, it is commonly posited that the family, in whatever shape or form, combines as an unconditional unit regardless of the trials and tribulations. Michael Billington has suggested that 'only at the end does Murphy become a mite manipulative as if wanting to give us a glowing, feel-good conclusion.'[161] Perhaps Billington is perturbed that the women in *Little Gem* seem less interested in changing the world, than resisting defeat by it. This critique seems marginal to the play's attachment to womanly kinship and maternal lineage; it would seem that far from being 'manipulative', Murphy offers hope, enshrined in the birth of the play's title 'Little Gem'. The composition of the traditional patriarchal family is reconfigured to create a matrilineal bond that challenges hetero-normative prescriptions of the family, and gives birth to a new mould, one that can celebrate survival, empowerment and hope. Lois McNay argues that 'the questioning of conventional notions of femininity does not arise from exposure to and identification with a greater array of alternative images of femininity but from tensions inherent in the concrete negotiation of increasingly conflicting female roles.'[162] Such a process McNay suggests, is 'both the effect of representation and that which remains beyond representation – that is the cross-cutting and conflictual practices of self-representation.' [163] It is reassuring, however, to observe Murphy's positive representations of single, teenage mothers and expressions of the maternal love and support between three generations of women. Perhaps this young mother with her surrounding support network in generations of women can afford a celebratory edge, one

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[159] Dolan, Jill, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 25.
[160] Murphy, *Little Gem,* p. 49,
[161] Billington, Michael, 'Little Gem, Bush London, Review', *The Guardian*, Tuesday 20th April 2010. Accessed at: http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/apr/20/little-gem-michael-billington.
[162] McNay, Lois, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', in *Theory, Culture & Society,* February 1999, Vol. 16. No. 1, p. 111.
[163] Ibid.

which imagines a more inclusive, heterogeneous modality of 'belonging' than those encountered elsewhere, socially and culturally.

B for Baby: Fertility and the non-mother

While *Little Gem* focuses on unplanned pregnancy and the stigmatisation of teenage mothers, *B for Baby* charts the vicious pressure when infertility prevents a planned family. Both playwrights work with the stigmatisation of non-conformative motherhood. In a society in which the parameters of patriarchal, hetero-normative structures are becoming increasingly porous, Carmel Winters's *B for Baby* explores the desperate search for stable containers of identities (family, mother, father) when to pretend - and 'have to *keep* pretending'[164] - is becoming increasingly exhausting. The play is set in a residential care home for adults with intellectual disabilities, which is home to Dee (Michele Moran) and a man, B (Louis Lovett), both of whom are in their early forties. They are cared for by an off-stage woman, known only as Housemother, and Mrs C, a weekend carer. In a very literal reading, Mrs C is caught in a downward spiralling relationship with her husband Brian that is brought to the point of destruction through their inability to have a child. The agony of infertility between the couple pushes Mrs C beyond her limits and she abuses her position of power as a carer and sexually exploits B. The counter-conventional representation of female sexual manipulation in the play is an interesting tool to explore maternal subjectivity. The contrast is between two worlds, the 'Mother on the ward' that oversees people's behaviour and is supposed to care and protect, and the 'mother in the head' that becomes internalised voices and ideas that are meant simultaneously to police behaviour and thinking. The play explores what happens when these two worlds collide. Winters says, 'I have a responsibility to people as a storyteller to not shy away from experiences that need to be aired, through sharing experiences, people can feel the burden being lifted. It can generate insight and lead to some healing.'[165] *B for Baby* brings us close to understanding the bite of social conformity in which a failure to adhere to normalising systems, in particular to obtain a 'family', can result in transgressive consequences. In a challenging way, the play inverts typical narratives of men in positions of superiority sexually violating or grooming the younger more vulnerable.

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[164] Carmel Winters, *B for Baby,* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p. 37.
[165] Winters, Carmel, in interview with Colette Sheridan, 'Carmel Winters' play bears Witness to power of the theatre', in *Irish Examiner,* 8th August 2013. http://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/artsfilmtv/carmel-winters-play-bears-witness-to-power-of-the-theatre-239174.html.

The stage space cleverly interchanges between two singular settings, a care-home for the intellectually disabled, and Mrs C's 'family' home. This technique blurs the boundaries between institution and home, and during the play these places of security become sites of volatile instability. Similarly, Winters layers the script so that the role of Dee and Mrs C are played by the same actor and, likewise, B doubles as Brian. In these overlays, the audience is left unsure to whether Mrs C is real or actually an imaginary 'make-ey-uppey friend'[166] in B and Dee's role-play. Winters manipulates this plot device to explore a life where 'pretending' seems to be the only viable option, whether it is a devised one or not: 'We're all pretending B, we have to *keep* pretending.'[167] Consistent with this, Mrs C's dialogue is peppered with the language of pretence: 'Maybe I'm imagining it. Did I imagine this, B? Did I dream it up? Maybe all this – none of this – really happened… if we were making this up there would be a baby in side there…'[168] Such references to 'making up', 'imagination', are a clear indication from Winters that nothing is secure, the care home and those within it appear in limbo, part of and yet not part of a 'real' world. There is a constant interplay between the real and the unreal, the actual and the imagined, the mental and the physical. The characters are limited by narrow social, cultural and political ideologies in which the desire for 'a normal wife and a normal house and a normal dog and two normal children 'cause *I'm normal*'[169] becomes a near doctrine. In these layers of deceit and self-deceit, the overriding need for normalcy is paramount, the ostracised 'others' plead to be regular, average, standard.

In his writing, Bourdieu maintains that 'nothing seems more natural than the family; this arbitrary social construct seems to belong on the side of nature, the natural and the universal.'[170] However, 'family' is a word without a specific definition and yet so readily oppressively defined by society. For Bourdieu, it is not the individual but society in the shape of the state that, through its official operations, '… performs countless constituting acts which constitute family identity as one of the most powerful principles of perception of the social world and one of the most real social units.'[171] As he argues, the family is 'a fiction, a social artefact, an illusion in the most ordinary sense of the word'. That said, it is 'a well-founded illusion' because it is 'being produced and reproduced with the guarantee

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[166] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 82.
[167] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 42.
[168] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 48.
[169] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 71.
[170] Bourdieu, Pierre, 'On the Family as a Realized Category' in *Theory, Culture & Society,* (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 13(3), 1996, p. 21.
[171] Ibid, p.25.

of the state, it receives from the state at every moment the means to exist and persist.'[172] And the complexity lies in that people still wish to form family-units, regardless of church or state intervention and expectation. Bourdieu's point is that, although the family is only a word, it is an active 'watchword' or, rather, a category, a collective principle of construction of collective reality. 'It can be said without contradiction both that social realities are social fictions with no basis other than social construction, and that they really exist, inasmuch as they are collectively recognised.'[173] He argues that each time a classificatory concept like 'family' is used, we are making both a description and a prescription, 'which is not perceived as such because it is (more or less) universally accepted and goes without saying.'[174]

In an Irish context, Anne Byrne notes that 'the 'family' represents a particular vision of a stable social world, proscribing relationships between women and men, children and parents'[175] and therefore becomes a system of representation from which other social fields such as motherhood and fatherhood take value. Inglis points out that the Irish family may have undergone radical transformation through long-term processes of change, but the majority of Irish people still take it as second nature (normal) that they will marry and have children, and most children grow up in a 'family' with their natural parents.[176] Inglis uses the Census of Population in 2011 to show that the majority of Irish people still marry and have children - although no longer necessarily in that order. While there have been some changes in the structure and culture of family life in Ireland there is, however, a picture of overall stability.[177] Although it is shaped by similar institutions and discourses, families are never realized in the same way. Inglis proposes that 'there are many different families in Ireland as there are individuals that make them. And yet the notion of 'the' family is invoked as if it meant the same thing to everyone. The task, then, is to try to capture the nuances, differences, and complexity of family life in Ireland.'[178] A crucial problem with a 'family norm' in Ireland is that it is both taken for granted and sacred. While the Children and Family Relationship Bill, mentioned earlier, extends guardianship, custody and adoption rights to different non-conventional family models, the image of the 'normal'

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[172] Ibid.
[173] Bourdieu, ''On the Family as a Realized Category', p. 20.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Byrne, Anne, 'Single Women in Story and Society' in *Are The Irish Different?*, p. 80.
[176] Inglis, Tom, *Meanings of Life in Contemporary Ireland Webs of Significance,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.), p. 44.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Inglis, *Meanings of Life in Contemporary Ireland,* p 45.

family is commonly assumed, and: 'comprising husband, wife and children living together at home becomes an ideal that *has* to be achieved'[179] (emphasis my own).

The pressures of this ideal normality are readily visible in *B for Baby*. B informs us that, 'after we're married ... we could have two babies then. A boy and a girl. And a dog.'[180] He imagines his perfect future: 'we'll have to get a house. For the babies and the cat. A proper house with a garden. One in the front and one in the back. And in the back one we'll have swingswongs and a slide in the front; we'll have roses where everybody can see.'[181] B's depiction of the family he imagines with Mrs C is the obvious, iconic, middle-class construct that is so easily recognised. In the play, Mrs C forges a distinction, for example between a family and merely being a couple:

> Mrs C: a couple is not a family... A couple is two people splitting the rent, two-flat mates halving bills and scoffing Marks and Spencer's meal-deals instead of growing up and having kids. That's what people think, you know! [182]

She is deeply concerned by what other people think, her constant mention of 'the others' who 'all have family.'[183] Her strong urge to be one of the 'others' becomes clearly articulated, and she desperately strives to fit within a typically heterosexual family mould. Images of traditional familial structures centred on heterosexual union and child litter the narrative. The Winter Wonderland snow globe is a central and recurring prop, it contains not Mary, Joseph and 'the stupid baby Jesus' but 'a woman farmer, a man farmer and a baby farmer' - 'just people, ordinary people.'[184] However, by the end of the play this happy idyll has been punctured and leaks dry. The iconic family it contained are now 'just rattling around bashing their heads off the glass.'[185] This provides a metaphor to the breakdown of many families, such as for Mrs C, when the proscribed happy ideal becomes a broken, unobtainable dream. In an attempt to build a familial façade and alleviate some of their feelings of incompleteness, Brian buys a puppy. In cases of infertility secondary choices and replacements, indicative here by pets, tend to take on consolation prizes. Through the course of the play, however, the puppy is replaced with a 'more lifestyle-

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[179] Inglis, *Meanings of Life in Contemporary Ireland,* p 45.
[180] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 49.
[181] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 50,
[182] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 33.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 29.
[185] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 55.

appropriate pet'[186]of a snake, and the freezer swarms with 'the snake's Marks and Spencer's...baby mice'[187] that resemble 'foetuses.'[188] The replacement pets, and their deterioration into macabre mice foetuses, serve as metaphor for the deterioration of Mrs C and Brian's relationship and the mounting tension a lack of 'family' places them in.

The guile of Winters's play leaves the audience in limbo between the creation of disturbing thoughts, the articulation of the private, and the reality of (particularly Mrs C's) actions in the moment. It exemplifies Bourdieu's proposal that the private is actually a public matter:

> A social history of the process of state institutionalization of the family... would show that the traditional opposition between the public and the private conceals the extent to which the public is present in the private, and in the very notion of *privacy*... The public vision is deeply involved in our vision of domestic things, and our most private behaviours themselves depend on public actions, such as housing policy or, more directly, family policy.[189]

Mrs C's otherwise private, internal narrative is made public in this way. She says, 'I saw a house today... Family on one side, old woman on the other. There was a slide in the garden and a trampoline... the old woman was watching me through the window. I think she liked the look of me. I think she approved... said it was a good neighbourhood. Lots of young families...'.[190] In this image there is a clear demarcation of family on one side and the singular spinster woman on the other, there is little room for the multiplicities of other lives and identities. She operates a classic binary divide between generative young family and barren old woman. It is a direct and common association of youth with fertility and old age with infertility. As I develop in my commentary in Chapter Five, this picture of an aging women is redolent of a 'decline narrative': placed in a care home, separated from family, always looking out the window to the 'families' on the other outside.

The normative value of the family must not be underestimated, the desire to procreate, within the 'correct' time frame provides the marked steps of socialisation and biology. Such values are attached to strong social identities that follow from marital status. Much

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[186] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 59.
[187] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 60.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Bourdieu, 'On the Family as a Realized Category' in *Theory, Culture & Society,* p.25.
[190] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 31.

can be learnt about the mechanics of society by the effects of normativity in everyday life choices and human relationships. Byrne suggests, 'normative values express collective judgment about what is desirable, shaping how society ought to be structured, encouraging attachments to particular institutions and practices, discouraging others... when we 'bump up' against a norm we begin to understand its constraints.'[191] In this way, fetishised (media) images of motherhood (Ikea Box set family life) and the inability of women to live up to motherhood, or even family 'ideals', point towards their constitutive instability and displacement. Such constraints are evidenced in the fraught relationship between Mrs C and her husband, Brian, and their inability to conceive. Mrs C attests: 'I don't want to be young all my life. I want to have been lived in!'[192] Childbirth for Mrs C is a fixed part of growing older, without the former the trajectory of her life is suspended. Later in the play she pursues this by saying, 'when I die I'm afraid I'll still be a little girl... some people don't know how to grow up.'[193] Mrs C articulates her internal polemic in which, without children, she believes she cannot grow to be an adult - having a child is the vehicle by which she can develop, without which she appears to be stuck in puberty, never able to take the steps towards her perception of womanhood, to age and therefore progress. In a sequence in which B announces that, 'women aren't supposed to have children when they're forty', because it is 'dangerous,'[194] Mrs C reacts heatedly. She questions whether it is 'very wrong' of her to want a child at her age - why is that 'dangerous?'[195] Mrs C desperately wants to try IVF for a third time but, as Brian acidly points out, 'three per cent... is the success rate at your age'[196] 'We've been here before. And back. It's a dead end.'[197] Byrne argues that 'normative expectations are attached to strong social identities that flow from marital status; it is expected that women of a certain age ought to be married and, if married, a mother. Normative identities are valued while non-normative identities can be targets for social stigma and self-stigma.'[198]

Flo Delany recognises the debate within an Irish context, where feminism's valiant battle against the Church/State's misogynist control of women's reproductive freedom (contraception, abortion, Assisted Reproductive Technologies) seems to have blinded the argument to the more silent realities of infertility. She argues that, 'In Ireland, the issues

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[191] Byrne, *Are The Irish Different?*, p. 82.
[192] Winters, *B for Baby*, p. 17.
[193] Winters, *B for Baby*, p. 19.
[194] Winters, *B for Baby*, p. 17.
[195] Winters, *B for Baby*, p. 16.
[196] Winters, *b for Baby*, p. 36
[197] Winters, *B for Baby*, p. 35.
[198] Byrne, *Are The Irish Different?*, p. 82.

that face infertile women remain lost somewhere between patriarchal control and feminist choice.'[199] The initial characterization of Mrs C as 'defective' makes it difficult to detach a feminine identity from reproductive capacity and the institution of motherhood. While this may happen theoretically, subliminal messages rest within the subconscious and do not necessarily register overtly with women who are unable to have children. Delaney proposes the feminist argument 'that 'I' as an individual woman own my own body and have absolute control over it is a fallacy for the infertile woman.'[200] She argues that, 'this personal loss coupled with the non-mirroring of them by society, creates their very real feelings of defectiveness, 'otherness', failure and banishments to the border of deviancy.' [201] In light of this, it is possible to suggest that Mrs C's lack of control of her own body and feelings of estrangement propelled her actions to engage sexually with B. Her desire seemed so powerful, that she duped herself into believing her actions were plausible and acceptable: 'We wanted a baby. I got us a baby... I got me and you a baby. We don't need to get embroiled in the details.'[202] This ambivalence continues so that her desires, stories, fantasies create an enmeshed web of meaning. They become embodied in her identity as mother and sense of self, and thus legitimate the moral implications of her actions. She suggests to B, 'maybe we should run away together... somewhere where nobody knows us. Where you're just a boy, and I'm just a girl and we could make a baby together.'[203] This childlike fantasy can legitimate her taking advantage of a person who was in her care. In this respect, Winters's play allows for the representation of unconventional female sexual manipulation and so becomes a useful tool to draw attention to some of the harrowing realities of infertility not readily voiced. Mrs C finds herself – and puts herself - in a liminal position, neither one thing nor the other, married but not with a family, woman but not a mother, a maternal body but not a pregnant one, carer but not-carer, 'all to produce an egg that someone someday might actually be man enough to fertilise.'[204] Winters moves the setting of the play between a family home and a care home for adults with intellectual disabilities and, through this interplay, seems to imply infertility as a form of disability. Both those in the care home and Mrs C in society might be seen to be othered. It is this outsider status, 'outside' motherhood, 'outside' society - looking in to a snow globe at a hyper representation of normality – that highlights the exclusion. She breaks the boundary of her professional relationship with her patient, exceeds regulatory

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[199] Delaney, Flo, 'Infertility: The silent period', in *Motherhood in Ireland, Creation and Context,* p. 72.
[200] Delaney, in *Motherhood in Ireland Creation and Context,* p. 72.
[201] Delaney, in *Motherhood in Ireland Creation and Context,* p. 69.
[202] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 62.
[203] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 49.
[204] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 36.

practice, and by doing so she situates herself doubly outside social norms. Mrs C's troubling act of sexual transgression is articulated by Dee, who says, 'She's a worker and you're a client. She could go to jail for what she did.'[205] 'What she did was dirty. Dirty, filthy, vile and evil. Did she warn you to keep your trap shut? Did she tell you you'd be locked up if anyone found out?'[206] B's stricken howling at the realisation of Mrs C's deceit linger as a chilling and gruelling memory. The extremity of her exploitation haunts the stage.

Winters succeeds in drawing out the harrowing effects of infertility treatment through the emotional and psychological drain it has on her characters, the depressing side effects when, every month, hope turns into deep resentment. Brian bitterly recalls the monthly 'period of mourning, curtains closed, the indictment of your stained knickers left on the bathroom floor – oh and the silent 'fuck off and DIE' treatment.'[207] Delaney goes on to suggest that 'infertility has no symptoms, causes no disability and is invisible to the naked eye.'[208] In fact, the onset of infertility is when a couple begins to fear or suspect that something is wrong. The effect of this worsening apprehension is the real 'disease' of infertility, and it runs rife in the marital relationship of Mrs C and Brian. As Brian puts into words: 'There are limits. I have limits. I'm tired of wanting what we can't have. I'm fucking exhausted with it! That's all there is now – lurking in very corner of every conversation, lying in the bed between us night after night like a fucking unborn corpse!'[209] Their relationship has been stripped bare and has been replaced with timetables of ovulations, medical intrusions and failures through IVF, and the constant haunting of the 'others' who have successfully managed what they cannot. The non-existent baby becomes the only 'real' thing. The living are reduced to vacuums, while the unborn takes up their whole living space.

The association of infertility with failure is picked up by Jozefina Komporaly, who notes that 'despite such advances in technology, the public perception of childlessness has traditionally been gendered and associated with a language of failure and incompetence orientated at women.'[210] Language used to describe childless women is particularly

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[205] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 71.
[206] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 73.
[207] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 61.
[208] Delaney, in *Motherhood in Ireland, Creation and Context*, p. 64.
[209] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 37.
[210] Komporaly, Jozefina, *Staging Motherhood British Women Playwrights, 1956 to the Present,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.163

negative in society at large, including terms such as 'non-mother and not-mother.'[211] Delaney maintains that such descriptions are 'more rooted in a sense of 'lack' or 'absence' and come from a negative derivation of the term mother, which is seen as 'positive and primary.'[212] The psychological implications of such terminology are clearly embodied in Mrs C. When she does become pregnant, albeit through a highly controversial method, she declares, 'all this time thinking there was something wrong with me – or in me – something sterile and stunted and selfish that refused to make a life...'[213] Her reactions make direct reference to this idea of 'lack': images of sterile, barren, empty, stunted, she felt physically disconnected from her not-pregnant body. This taps into the language used to describe infertility and the negative undertones that become deeply internalised in her thought process. Her reaction also highlights the heavily gendered system of fault and failure when it comes to infertility in couples. Mrs C assumed it was she who was disabled, she had been the 'one to blame' and Brian seemed to assume the same. Komporaly recognises that 'despite numerous cases of male infertility, the condition is predominantly perceived as a female problem that requires intervention.'[214] This emotional weight now lifted from Mrs C, she could have chosen to hide her adultery and pretend the child was theirs; she did not. Brian believes, 'you wanted to punish me... to obliterate me'[215] and - perhaps - she did. Perhaps she wanted Brian to realise and experience the burden that it was his 'fault'.

Mrs C's obsessive desire drives the play. Foucault has suggested it is necessary to analyse the practices by which individuals are led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognise and acknowledge themselves as 'subjects of desire.'[216] Gayle Rubin utilises Foucault's theory on desire, and argues that 'desires are not pre-existing biological entities, but rather that they are constituted in the course of historically specific social practices.'[217] One analysis might be to see desire as driven by an absence, a lack or need. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's comment in *Anti-Oedipus,* however, that 'what exists in fact is not lack but passion, as a 'natural and sensuous object.' Desire, they argue, is not bolstered by need, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire: they are counter

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[211] Poovey, Mary, 'Feminism and Deconstruction' in *Feminist Studies,* 14(1), 1988, p. 51-65.
[212] Delaney, in *Motherhood in Ireland, Creation and Context,* p. 64.
[213] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 63.
[214] Komporaly, *Staging Motherhood British Women Playwrights, 1956 to the Present,* p.112-3.
[215] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 63.
[216] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure,* p. 5.
[217] Rubin, Gayle, 'Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory for the politics of sexuality', in *Culture, Society and Sexuality A reader Second edition,* Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (eds.), (London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 2007), p.156.

products within the real that desire produces.'[218] To coin Deleuze and Guattari, then, desire produces reality. From this prespective they might view Mrs C's 'desiring – production' to be a mother as only a 'social production':

> There is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand, and a desiring-production that is mere fantasy on the other... the truth of the matter is that *social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions.*[219]

Lois McNay takes a third perspective and suggests that at the point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological, the body is a dynamic, mutable frontier. The body is the threshold through which the subject's lived desires of the world are incorporated and realised. In relation to Mrs C, desire for motherhood is personal and individual, there is no monolithic motherhood, no simple 'Mother'. Nor can the individual be driven solely through the socio-sexual economy, reproductive economy or economic labels. The woman is both a desiring subject and the subject of desire, so motherhood and family are nuanced and complex, the plays offer openings into these. To continue with McNay, the desiring body is neither pure object nor pure subject, 'it is neither pure object since it is the place of one's engagement with the world. Nor is it pure subject in that there is always a material residue that resists incorporation into a dominant symbolic schema.'[220] McNay argues that, 'embodiment expresses a moment of indeterminacy whereby the embodied subject is constituted through dominant norms but is not reducible to them.'[221] In Mrs C's case, the female body needs to become that of the maternal body. Mrs C's actions make her desires real, and she is able to justify her sexual exploitation of B: 'It wasn't sordid. It was sweet and good... like we were two innocent children just... playing.'[222] The stage directions confirm her desperation so that, in response to her action, '*Mrs C starts to laugh – the more she tries not to, the more she does – hysterically, painfully.*'[223]

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[218] Holland, Eugene, in *Gilles Deleuze Key Concepts Second Edition,* Charles Stivale (ed.), (Durham: Acumne publishing ltd, 2001), p. 56.
[219] Deleuze, Giles and Guattari, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (trans.), (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p.29.
[220] McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', in *Theory, Culture & Society,* p. 98.
[221] McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', in *Theory, Culture & Society*, p. 99.
[222] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 64.
[223] Winters, *B for Baby,* p. 64.

Although Mrs C desperately yearns for a child and, at a surface level, this desire appears to be voluntary, 'sweet and good', the play allows an exploration of other levels, where personal will is less than free. It is a well-established debate, the role of individual agency within and against social structures. Such 'agency versus structures' debates are rooted both in the subjectivity of orchestrated mental structures and in objectivity of social structures. Bourdieu continues, 'they present themselves to experience with the opacity and resistance of things, although they are the product of acts of construction which, as a certain ethnomethodological critique suggests, apparently relegate them to the non-existence of pure figments of thought.'[224] One side sees the body as an autonomous active agent, where Mrs C's excruciating desire for a child, for a family, is not driven by external social control. From this perspective, as Inglis says, 'family is an embodied space in which people are constituted and reconstituted as individuals and from which they emerge into the network of social fields in which they operate. It is a space in which members create and sustain meaning and where emotional controls of public life are more readily and easily decontrolled.'[225]

Furthering my observations in this chapter, motherhood can be many conflicting things for a woman, and is always in process. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris comment that some plays, 'like the vast majority of our culture (and other cultures) rightly or wrongly, *do* assume that while 'not her destiny' a woman's body manifestly remains 'one of the essential elements in her situation in the world' and equally that the commonalities of women's lived embodied experiences can and often do form the basis of an affective solidarity between women who may be very different from each other.'[226] The complexities of motherhood are teased out in *Little Gem* and *B for Baby* through the dramatic representation of Amber's teenage pregnancy and Mrs C's difficulties in conceiving. As previously noted, the act of being a mother is part biological and essentially driven but also quite clearly cultural, it is both a lived reality and social expectation. In the following play, *Love in a Glass Jar*, Nancy Harris critiques the idealised hetero-normative family depicted in *B for Baby*, placing full reproductive autonomy with protagonist Eve.

Love in a Glass Jar: Reproductive autonomy

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[224] Bourdieu, 'On the Family as a Realized Category' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, p. 21.
[225] Inglis, *Meanings of Life in Contemporary Ireland: Webs of Significance,* p 62.
[226] Aston, Elaine and Geraldine Harris, *A Good Night Out for the Girls: Popular Feminisms in Contemporary Theatre and Performance,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 17-18.

In 2007, with the intention of introducing 'new voices'[227] to Irish theatre, the Abbey created a series of public reading's entitled *20: Love*. Six up-and-coming playwrights were commissioned to write short plays, twenty minutes in length and for two characters. This turned into an annual tradition, with Nancy Harris's *Love in a Glass Jar* a product of that initiative. Wayne Jordan directed the original reading in 2008, Eve played by Karen Ardiff, and Patrick by Bosco Hogan. It transferred to radio as a drama for BBC Radio 4[228] and was subsequently re-staged by the Abbey, directed by Oonagh Murphy, the parts taken by Michele Moran and Arthur Riordan. It was published fully in 2013 with seven other young playwrights in a volume entitled *Irish Shorts, Two-handers from the Abbey Theatre, Ireland*, each being the writers' debut for the Abbey Theatre. Aideen Howard, Literary Director of the Abbey, cites the aim as being to vocalise and provide space for new voices and their concerns, 'to overhear the dialogues of a young generation.'[229]

Harris, as part of the Post-Celtic Tiger generation, initiates a dialogue in *Love in a Glass Jar* focused on bodily autonomy and the sexual, reproductive liberation of women. The plot is centred on Eve, in her late thirties, and Patrick, late forties, strangers who meet on a dating website, then agree to a face-to-face encounter in a hotel room with the aim of carrying out an unofficial sperm donation transaction. These details are slow-revealed; teasing clues that draw expertly on audience preconceptions and assumptions. The setting of a hotel room sustains this device because it carries the associations of sexual liaison and enclosed, sensual intimacy. Eve is single, successful, but has not found anyone with whom she would like to settle. She wants the option to have a child and is seeking possible donors, not least because she is insistent that his participation is unnecessary in her own or the child's life. She would prefer, pragmatically, to meet the potential donor beforehand, much like a candidate interview.

Eve is quickly established as the organiser of this meeting and is in control of the interaction and arrangement. She is openly concerned that the hotel staff might think she is 'an old – slut' and to which Patrick chimes 'a bit wanton', with little concern to how he might be perceived. That aside, she treats the somewhat unusual circumstances in a direct

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[227] Howard, Aideen, 'Introduction' in *Irish Shorts Two-handers from the Abbey Theatre, Ireland,* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013), p. vii.
[228] BBC Radio Four, Afternoon drama, last aired on 20th September 2014, on BBC Radio Four Extra. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00mx8rh
[229] Howard, in *Irish Shorts Two-handers from the Abbey Theatre, Ireland,* p. vii.

and transactional manner, fully believing that 'less information'[230] is best and that the venture should not be emotionally charged. Patrick, on the other hand, is determined to 'get to know' Eve and becomes caught in a brief fantasy that their meeting might actually lead to a romantic relationship. But Nancy Harris strips bare the association of a hotel room as a comfortable space for warmth or even friendliness and replaces this otherwise cosy ambiance with a clinical chill. With business-like efficiency, Eve produces a stack of pornographic magazines from her bag, a sterilised cup with 'a wide rim apparently… for catching,'[231] a syringe 'for collecting the fluid' and a catheter 'for insertion. See?'[232] All of which she purchased quite simply on e-Bay. Conventional associations of sexual intercourse with reproduction are detached entirely and replaced with disconnected, sterilised objects, replete with the language of disinterested commerce. Anything personal becomes utterly depersonalised. Ironically the hotel room they occupy is called 'Serenity', the very antithesis of the atmosphere conjured between the pair, fuelled as it is with nervous discomfort.

The play locates the female body precisely at the intersection of material and abstract processes, resisting customary social relations and depictions of motherhood that are conditioned by traditional tropes of patriarchy. Eve exploits the 'bio-capital' of her body for her own benefit. She forms her own strategy of resistance by undoing established power relations. She approaches the task of artificial insemination in a direct, unemotional manner, clearly well prepared and informed, and asserts that 'they make is easy, really. It's weird to think that that's all it takes.'[233] There are powerful political ramifications in the possibility of disconnecting heterosexual sex entirely from biological reproduction, not least because it serves to further dismantle heteronormative family modes. Eve is able to take full autonomy of her reproductive capacity, she is a self-sufficient 'unruly' mother who refutes traditional sexual routes and obtains motherhood through 'non-conformative' means, for whom such 'misbehaviour' is a source of celebration. As she articulates, 'It might seem sad to some people but I actually think we are lucky to live in an age where women like me have that choice.'[234] Choice is the affirmative argument that runs through the plot – particularly considering the history of oppression over women and their sexuality.

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[230] Harris, Nancy, 'Love in a Glass Jar', in *Irish Shorts Two-handers from the Abbey Theatre, Ireland,* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013), p. 66.
[231] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 71
[232] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 71.
[233] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 71.
[234] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 81.

In this respect, the availability of contraception, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and legalisation of divorce provide women with a set of tools with which to subvert patriarchal definitions of femininity, and the conditions of motherhood. Harris highlights the transgressive potential in removing sexual intercourse from the process of reproduction in this way: it is a challenge to existing modes of life to create new modes of existence. Her play stresses the particularity of experience through its emphasis on subjective maternal embodiment rather than universalising claims of the biological maternal body as the standard by which all maternal experiences are measured. Located in between the hegemonic narrative of 'natural' mother as fundamental to the family unit, she meets a need to describe a story of mothering outside the conventional order of things. The play challenges prescriptions for when and how women should become pregnant, staging other avenues or practices otherwise marked as deviant. It demonstrates that cultural ideologies and the social structures of the family and workplace, as epitomised in Patrick, have not changed nearly as fast or as substantially as mothers themselves. As McNay demonstrates, 'in this way the relation between symbolic structure and subject is shifted from an antinomy of domination-resistance and to a more differentiated concept of 'regulated liberties.' [235]

The idea of 'regulated liberties' has important implications for a feminist understanding of the relation between women and dominant representations of femininity. It provides a way of obviating simplified theories of oppression and shapes a framework in which to understand some of the 'hybrid' forms that women's autonomy has recently taken. McNay argues that subjectivity is neither fully willed nor fully determined, 'it is neither the outcome of a conscious project of self-fashioning nor is it the effect of the iterative operations of discourse upon the body.'[236] McNay, drawing on the notion of hybridity taken from Bhabha's[237] postcolonial theory, suggests 'a form of change not as opposition or externality but as dislocation arising from the re-inscription of the tools and symbols of the dominant into the space of the colonized'[238]. Such a notion she posits,

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[235] McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', in *Theory, Culture & Society*, p. 104.
[236] McNay, Lois, *Against Recognition,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 6.
[237] Bhabha, Hommi, *The Location of Culture,* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.109.
[238] McNay, Lois, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory,* (Malden, Mass: Polity Press, 2000), p. 58.

> [I]s useful for an understanding of what are perceived to be significant assertions of women's autonomy in the last twenty years which rest on an ambivalent relation to conventional notions and images of femininity. For example, the tentative renegotiation of heterosexual relations beyond the institution of marriage.[239]

Harris's play questions normative assumptions about how society currently operates and, further, its capacity to reflect on this. Lois McNay points out that societal restrictions are 'illustrative of how the feminine subject is synchronically produced as the object of regulatory norms by phallocentric symbolic systems and formed as a subject or agent who may resist these norms. In this view, gender identity is not a mechanistically determining structure but an open system of dispositions.'[240]By 'open systems' she is referring to Bourdieu's 'regulated liberties'[241] – that are 'durable but not eternal... the ideal of "family" and its durable real-world manifestations can be far apart.'[242]

Patrick's dislike of being sexually used and exploited provides the play's comic gender-reversal. He is required to donate sperm clinically in a sterile cup. He had whimsical romantic notions and so considers Eve's actions as 'brutal' and 'selfish'. As he articulates, 'See *that's* what I don't understand. You want me to have a child with you, but you don't want me to know anything about you and it seems... well, it seems a little brutal if you don't mind me saying. All this. It seems a bit unnecessarily cruel.'[243] Unlike Eve, Patrick cannot disconnect emotionally from the situation. Comically, he becomes possessively attached to his sperm, informing her, 'I don't want to just hand my sperm out to anyone. I mean it's *my* sperm.'[244] He is unable to accept that after ejaculation his work is done and his presence as a father simply 'not wanted.'[245] There is some delight in his troubled gaze at her non-conformist method, which directly challenges his sense of power and entitlement. He hands over his sperm and, preparing to leave, already informed of the two other enlisted 'providers', he tentatively asks Eve if she intends to use it. It is clear is that Eve is firmly in command and her fertility is entirely her choice and, bizarrely, Patrick is anxious that her possible rejection of his sperm is a rejection of his masculine identity. An

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[239] McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', in *Theory, Culture & Society,* p. 104.
[240] McNay, Lois, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory,* p. 58.
[241] Bourdieu, Pierre, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.133
[242] McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', in *Theory, Culture & Society*, p. 105.
[243] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 73.
[244] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 74.
[245] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 77.

added comic moment turns on Eve's doubts over using Patrick's sample due to his over-emotional outbursts. Harris provides Eve with self-determination, she is not the 'sad' or 'lonely' depiction Patrick assumes of her, and she is not 'unable to love.'[246] She is endorsed with purpose, agency and authority, while the male remains wholly remote from the picture. Eve muses, 'I suppose men don't have a choice yet do they? A man wanting to conceive a child on his own, I don't know how people would react to that, but you never know. Some day. Modern technology.'[247] Eve is a woman content in her single-hood, pleased that the path to motherhood is no longer solely dependent on her relationship status.

The play's social and political scope trades on Patricia's desire to remove the anonymity form sperm donation. Presently, a sperm donor cannot be realised legally as a father. The Children and Family Relationship Bill[248] states that 'a father or parent of a child shall be construed as not including a man who is the donor of a gamete or embryo that was used in a DAHR [Donor Assisted Human Reproduction] procedure that resulted in the birth of the child.[249] An official donor is anonymous, although this situation may change. Under this proposed Bill, anonymous sperm and egg donation will be banned and a register established to help people, once over the age of eighteen, to trace their genetic identity. The debate surrounding these issues encapsulates a clash of rights, the woman's right to fertility, the basic rights of the donor-conceived offspring to have information about their parentage, and the donor's right to anonymity. Last year, Dr John Waterstone, the medical director of Cork Fertility Centre, argued against such assisted-reproduction legislation and believes it 'would infringe on the fundamental rights of sub-fertile couples to privacy and autonomy with regard to the reproductive choices they make and how they rear their children.'[250] He suggests that such legislation is 'hopelessly incomplete' as the great majority of egg donation couples would continue to seek anonymous treatment abroad, which, he considers 'surely is their right,'[251] and that such regulation is 'unacceptably proscriptive.'[252] A crucial issue is the extent to which the state has the right to intervene in

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[246] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 74.
[247] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 81.
[248] http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2015/a915.pdf
[249] 7 (b), p. 13, accessed at http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2015/a915.pdf
[250] Waterstone, John, in *The Irish Times*, 'Why it's wrong to ban anonymity for egg and sperm donors', 5th March 2015, accessed at http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/why-it-s-wrong-to-ban-anonymity-for-egg-and-sperm-donors-1.2126197
[251] Waterstone in *The Irish Times*, 'Why it's wrong to ban anonymity for egg and sperm donors', 5th March 2015, accessed at http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/why-it-s-wrong-to-ban-anonymity-for-egg-and-sperm-donors-1.2126197
[252] Ibid

decisions about donor anonymity, or whether both donors and recipients should be allowed to choose if they wish to opt for either anonymous or identifiable donation. Waterstone continues that 'the portrayal of the donor-conceived child as potentially disadvantaged and requiring State protection from its parents is as offensive as it is ridiculous.'[253] *Love in a Glass Jar* anticipates and capitalises on this controversy as Eve makes her own reproductive choices, identifies and meets her potential donor for 'assisted reproduction' in the hotel room, and fashions her very own unofficial fertility centre. Since at present there are no sperm donation banks in Ireland, clinics such as Galway Fertility, SIMS IVF Dublin, Cork Fertility and Clare Fertility source their sperm from fully regulated banks in the USA and Europe, in particular Denmark, from where the vast majority of sperm is imported. As a result, an increasing number of scholars and policy makers are actually arguing for more lenient national policies towards assisted-reproduction technologies, hoping to thereby remove the main incentive for aspiring parents to 'resort to foreign reproductive services.'[254] In passing, it seems an oddity that Ireland exports the actuality of abortion of unwanted pregnancies, and yet openly imports sperm donations. Of course there is an argument that people on a small island should always use foreign reproductive services in order to protect offspring from potential sexual relationships with unknown siblings, given a small insular gene pool. However, the direction of this discussion returns to the previous sense of a consumer – economic trading – model rooted in reproductive rights and control.

Performing reproductive autonomy is a way of marking a protest against traditional notions of motherhood that are laced by domestic values. Aston stresses that the importance of performance is to disturb the 'order', and the 'social system which continues to position women within the maternal and the domestic spheres.'[255] Eve, by exercising her rights of reproductive and economic autonomy challenges the role of mother as intrinsically linked to domesticity. Forging the narrative between one's professional and maternal self is an on-going exercise for many women, a practice that is curiously public and private, internal and external, and open to surrounding scrutiny. The feminist writer Sharon Green describes the class and cultural assumptions implicit in definitions of a 'good mother', but argues that these are 'masked by a discourse that has co-opted feminist

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[253] Ibid,

[254] Van Beers, Britta C, 'Is Europe 'Giving in to Baby Markets?' Reproductive Tourism in Europe and the gradual erosion of existing legal limits to reproductive markets' in *Medical Law Review,* 0 , 2014, p. 1.

[255] Aston, Elaine, ''Transforming' Women's Lives: Bobby Baker's Performances of 'Daily Life',' in *New Theatre Quarterly,* 16(1), February 2000, p. 21.

rhetoric, specifically regarding women's freedom to make "choices" between career and work on the one hand, and family and child-rearing on the other.'[256] She believes that by framing 'good' mothering in this way, this discourse creates 'the illusion that "good mother" status is available to all, masking the fact that most of those "choices" are truly only available to those of a particular set of material circumstances.'[257] No longer bound to the institution of marriage and enshrined in the patriarchal family unit, motherhood has been renegotiated to incorporate a wide spectrum of women in alternative positions, whether single, working, lesbian, of an age, undergoing fertility treatment, or through adoption.

As of the most recent census there are over 215,000 one-parent families in Ireland – 25.8 per cent of all families with children (Census 2011). Moreover, 50 per cent of all one-parent families consist of lone mothers who are in the labour market, and one in four families with children in Ireland is a one-parent family (Census 2011). However an underlying stigma attached to singleness is still very much a prevalent reality. Harris forges a dialogue between the process of sperm donation, and also the position of being an older single woman. Eve's 'not very accessible'[258] attitude allows Patrick to question whether she will in fact be a 'good mother'. He claims he might not want 'a child with a woman who isn't capable of love,'[259] an assumption he has made due to Eve's single status. Anne Byrne considers that 'how to be single, how to talk about singleness how to respond to the perception of others is a complicated business as is any portrayal of the single life.'[260] In a similar way to the negative connotations in language used to describe infertility, the overall description of female-singleness is couched in negativity: spinster, a workaholic, mad-cat woman. In the play, Eve articulates, 'I'm the one with the great career. That's what they like to say, 'You're the one with the great career.' That's sort of code for saying I haven't got a boyfriend. Which is sort of code for saying I'm weird.'[261] While Eve is unashamed of her decisions, she acknowledges that 'it might seem sad to some people.'[262] She is acutely aware of external opinions of her and her choices, and manifests the judgement of others in a fashion similar to Amber in *Little Gem*. Her plans

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[256] Green, Sharon L, 'What Does it Take to Be a "Good Mother?": Contemporary Motherhood Ideology and the Feminist Potential of Lisa Loomer's Dramaturgy' in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism,* 28(1), 2013, p. 7-8.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 74.
[259] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 74.
[260] Byrne, *Are the Irish Different?,* p. 79-80.
[261] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 82.
[262] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 81.

for sperm donation remain hidden from her sisters: 'I don't think I want them to know about this. I'm not ashamed… I just – think they'd feel better if they thought I got drunk and shagged a stranger. Much more natural.'[263] However, by staging artificial insemination in this way, Harris challenges this notion of 'natural' or normal, her choice of the word 'natural' indicates a hiatus between the new subject positions women have developed.

All three plays challenge idealised notions of motherhood and tease out issues of control and desire in relation to women's bodily autonomy. Murphy, Winters and Harris liberalise female sexuality and present characters who adopt certain levels of deviance on their route to motherhood. All have shunned normative patriarchal structures and, to varying degrees, have transgressed societal expectations. A priority of this thesis is to contest binary categories of identity - 'good' mother set against 'bad' mother; 'hetero' versus 'homo' - to trade duality with multiplicity and inclusivity. These women's dramatic writing constantly complicates oppressive operational identities such as wife, husband, mother, father, all encapsulated by 'the family': for them, the definition of the 'family' as the bedrock to the nation is a too fragile container of identity. As demonstrated in the next chapter, anxiety towards the definition of the family bleeds into the dramatic representation of the LGBTQ community.

[263] Harris, 'Love in a Glass Jar', p. 82.

Chapter Two: Gender diversity and representations of non-heteronormative sexuality

Historically, the primacy of a particular form of nationalism in Irish writing has led to, according to Siobhán Kilfeather, 'the suppression of a number of counter-discourses such as feminism, radical socialism, lesbianism and the homoerotic.'[264] However, Singleton highlights that a narrative has been constructed to counter traditional hetero-normative representations in Irish drama.[265] That said, within this there resides a lack of exploration of certain female perspectives and representations, predominantly that of the lesbian or transgender experience. This chapter uses Amy Conroy's *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* (2010), Elaine Murphy's *Ribbons* (2009) and Una McKevitt's *The Big Deal* (2011), to explore female-authored queer performance interventions in Irish theatre, and to set these within the social and cultural landscape more generally. Marinucci argues that the established paradigm of sexuality, which initially provided a tidy distinction between homosexuality as deviant and heterosexuality as normal, 'has ceased to accommodate the various and often subtle ways in which sexuality deviates from the heterosexual norm.' [266] She regards this as particularly clear in connection with transgender identity. These three plays broaden representations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender spectrum[267] and, in doing this, widen the focus across LGBTQ politics to explore a more everyday existence for queerness, womanhood and the feminine in Ireland. The multifarious nature of these performances and their challenges to dramatic form are indicative of the potentiality of queer culture to disrupt traditional narratives by de-naturalising the familiar on stage. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick addresses the need, 'repeatedly to ask how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially *mean.*'[268] Categories of identity determine and are determined by the ways in which people understand themselves, and are understood by others. As Marinucci adds,

> Concepts of identity determine and are determined by the prescriptions and proscriptions that structure and are structured by social existence. Additionally,

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[264] Kilfeather, Siobhán 'Contesting Ireland: the Erosion of Heterosexual Consensus, 1940-2001' in Angela Bourke *et al* (eds.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol. IV Irish Women's Writing and Traditions,* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), p. 1040.
[265] Singleton, 'Quare Fellas', *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, p.96
[266] Marinucci, Mimi, *Feminism is Queer The Intimate Connection between queer and Feminist Theory,* (London & New York: Z Books, 2010), p. 29.
[267] LGBT, sometimes under acronym LGBTQ - with the inclusion of queer
[268] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Epistemology of the Closet,* (Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 27.

> categories of identity are often *binary,* established by means of contrast between the dominant group and those excluded from the dominant group.[269]

A recurring purpose of the thesis is to discuss plays that draw attention to women placed in groupings outside of power-holding elites, plays that make 'other' circumstances visible. Theatre and performance are influential in renegotiating social stereotypes, and demonstrate how a repressed position can gain social currency with audiences through performance media. Rather than proscriptive binary categories of identity, the playwrights show multiple perspectives 'at play' at once, how these can be played out differently, and refuse to offer a definitive resolution or convenient morality.

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) 1993 Bill removed draconian laws from Ireland's statute book that criminalised sexual acts between men. According to Keiran Rose, the head of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, 'the passage of the Bill in June 1993 was a watershed in the lives of gay and lesbian people in Ireland... No longer were Irish people to be treated as criminals, just because of who they were.'[270] Interestingly, as Singleton points out, lesbian sexual practices notably 'escaped the eye'[271] of the judiciary because of the Victorian belief behind the legislation that 'women's sexuality was only ever permitted to be performed within marriage and thus compulsorily heterosexual.'[272] Five months after male homosexual acts had been decriminalised, Emma O'Donoghue's play *I Know My Own Heart* was staged in Dublin, and included a sexual relationship between two women that 'probed the choices of a woman trying to understand and express herself in a society based on rules and silences.'[273] In an interview with *Hot Press*[274] at the time, O'Donoghue[275] openly drew attention to her lesbian sexual practices and desires, and highlighted that in Ireland, 'we don't have that many [lesbian] role models.'[276] Ferriter notes that while some Irish women were 'on the boat to England' to obtain abortions,

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[269] Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer The Intimate Connection between queer and Feminist Theory,* p. 6.
[270] Rose, Kieran, quoted in: 'Today marks the 20th Anniversary of the decriminalization of homosexuality', *The Journal.ie,* 24th June 2013, can be accessed at: www.thejournal.ie/anniversary-decriminalisation-homosexuality-ireland-963902-Jun2013.
[271] Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, p.101
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin,* p. 515.
[274] Donoghue, Emma, published in Hot Press on 9th February 1994 entitled 'Causing a Stir: An Interview by Liam Fay'. It has been re-printed in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing IV,* p. 1067.
[275] Emma Donoghue represents a younger generation of Irish Lesbian Feminists who benefited from the women and gay liberation movements of the 1960s to 1980s.
[276] Kilfeather, Siobhan and Eibhear Walsh, 'Contesting Ireland: the Erosion of Heterosexual Consensus, 1940-2001' in Angela Bourke *et al* (eds.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol. 4* (Cork, 2002), p.1065.

another group of Irish women were on the same boat to get pregnant. At the time, Irish lesbian couples were denied access to donor insemination. The catalyst for the 1993 Sexual Offences Bill actually began in 1977 with Senator David Norris's legal battle, concluding when he took the case to the European Court of Human Rights with the help of Mary Robinson. The judges finally ruled in 1988 that Irish laws contravened the Convention on Human Rights, and Irish law was changed five years later. In May 2015, the Republic voted in a national referendum to legalise gay marriage and, despite vigorous and misleading propaganda by the Iona Institute and the No Campaign, secured a landslide victory. Just two decades on, Ireland is now one of the leading countries in the advocacy of gay rights, which is powerfully indicative of the rapid social change in both public opinion and judicial structures.

Despite such rapid progress, hetero-normativity still plays strongly into cultural, legal and institutional practice, as seen by the tenacity of opinions represented by the No Campaign that help to maintain and protect the legacy of such normative assumptions. A central tenet of my thesis is the constant need to contest discrimination in all its forms, to avoid 'chronic amnesia', and it is therefore essential to bear witness to pluralist sexual and gendered experience – not least because legislative and institutional change are generally both slow and imperfect. On varying levels, Conroy, Murphy, and McKevitt's plays accomplish this by fostering a resistance to broad hetero-normative narratives and provide unique interventions into shifting dynamics of gender and sexuality. Collectively these works trouble restrictive and oppressive identity formations that can be enshrined in legislative, medical and social powers, while simultaneously creating a potential space in which other identities can be imagined.

I ♥ *Alice* ♥ *I*: Normalising lesbian lives

Written and directed by Amy Conroy and developed with Clare Barrett, *I* ♥ *Alice* ♥ *I* features both these women, Amy and Clare, as the cast. It premiered at the Dublin Fringe Festival 2010[277] and subsequently went on to be performed as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in autumn 2011.[278] It moved to the Peacock stage in the Abbey Theatre in early

[277] It ran from 22-25th September 2010 in The New Theatre, Dublin, and was produced by HotForTheatre. The following year, 22nd May 2011 at 8pm it was broadcast on RTÉ Radio One, presented by Drama on One and HotForTheatre, produced by Kevin Brew.

[278] A showcase of successful Irish productions were restaged in partnership with Culture Ireland and Irish Theatre Institute, touring venues around Ireland. *I* ♥ *Alice* ♥ *I* was presented at Civic Theatre, 29th

2012,[279] later that year, toured to New York in 2012[280] and then Australia for the World Theatre Festival at the Brisbane Powerhouse. The piece has achieved wide acclaim receiving two ABSOLUT Fringe awards in 2012, the Fishamble New Writing Award and Best Female Performer for Clare Barrett. The play was later revived in 2015 for a week run at The Project Art's Centre, with the same cast. An important intervention at this time as it chimed with the (then) upcoming marriage referendum.

I ♥ *Alice* ♥ *I* takes as its visual frame the tropes of documentary theatre to portray a sensitive exploration of lesbian sexuality. It tells the story of two Alices, Alice Slattery and Alice Kinsella, two very individual childhood friends who have grown up together, experienced life together and, 'in some way, shape or form'[281] always loved each other. The narrative rests on the idea that the Alices, after stealing a kiss by the 'soup and canned goods aisle in Tesco,'[282] were approached by a theatre-maker who sought to forge a documentary of their lesbian relationship and life, for the stage. The show uses this faux-narrative frame to negotiate the structure and story within. Conroy comments, 'the show is two things, it is a play on the form and structure of documentary theatre and it is a love story…the story of Alice and Alice, two 60-something year-old women who have lived a full life together, it's a testament to both women, their lives together and their journey to get here. On the stage.'[283] The play unfolds Alice Kinsella's battle with cancer and her infidelity with a younger American student, intertwined with Alice Slattery's[284] struggle with Catholicism, the guilt surrounding the breakdown of her marriage to Liam, and his sudden heart attack. These hardships are interspersed with trivial frivolities of holidays abroad, breakfast-in-bed, and chips as a treat. Recognisable times of hardship and pain are interspersed with moments of genuine love, and yet the couple express a clear reserve about publicly exposing their relationship.

September-1st October; Projects Arts Centre, 4-9th October; Draíocht Studio, 10-12th October; Pavilion Theatre, 14-15th October.

[279] *I* ♥ *Alice* ♥ *I* ran from 30th January-18th February on the Peacock stage in the Abbey Theatre. It was produced by Maria Fleming, with sound design by Jack Crawley and set and lighting design by Ciarán O'Melia.

[280] It was staged at the Irish Arts Centre, New York, form 4-17th March, 2012;

[281] Conroy, Amy, 'I ♥ Alice ♥ I', in *'This is just this. It isn't real. It's money' The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays'*, Thomas Conway (ed.), (London: Oberon Books, 2012), pp. 185-219, (p.198). From here on in: *I* ♥ *Alice* ♥ *I.*

[282] Conroy, *I* ♥ *Alice* ♥ *I,* p. 190.

[283] Conroy, Amy, interview with Caomhan Keane for *entertainment.ie*, Accessed http://entertainment.ie/theatre/feature/In-Conversation-with-Amy-Conroy-I-Heart-Alice-Heart-I/210/2323.htm. On 26:03:14

[284] shortened from here on in to A. Slattery and A. Kinsella.

The intensity of the bond between the two Alices is illustrated through their relaxed conversational manner, the way their stories interweave, and their own interpretations of how events thread together. To demonstrate how two lives combine through good and bad. Alice Kinsella re-counts tales of London, leaving Ireland in her twenties. It was in London's 'technicolour'[285] that her lesbian sexuality flourished, and she awkwardly recalls a flurry of exciting relationships in which she experienced many different partners. However, running away to London did not complete her sense of self either, as she later admits, 'that's the funny thing about running away is that you bring yourself with you.'[286] In the seventies she returned to Ireland to her childhood home and absorbed herself in the care of her mother. Alice Slattery reflects about her friends return, 'It looked like London had worn her down, but she swore that she was having a ball. She didn't look like she was having a ball, she looked sick.'[287] A.Kinsella now admits:

> You see, I was always on the outside, looking in at my life, trying to figure out how to be part of it. Frantically grabbing at every new thought or idea, thinking that it must hold the answer, but never really understanding the question. I think of it as a 'wanting', I wanted something but I had no idea what that 'something' was.[288]

Her move to London is indicative of her need to transgress the limitations of Irish society in the sixties, in which the misogynistic, homophobic and oppressive limitations for women stifled her own identity. This move was her active separation - economically, imaginatively and sexually - from Ireland's heterosexist patriarchal landscape, and yet her unrecognised love for A.Slattery remained a dormant feature. Her sense of incompleteness is similarly mirrored in A.Slattery's life trajectory, even though their stories remain different. Because she stayed in Ireland, she joined the 'black and white' [289] heteronormative lifestyle that A.Kinsella so feared. She met her husband, Liam, with whom she was 'happy but complacent'[290] and remained a committed Catholic. While she clearly loved her husband, she concedes now that,

> I was operating at half speed, that life is supposed to be faster and more passion filled… I have a lot of guilt when I think about Liam, I feel I let him down, that I

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[285] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, p. 199.
[286] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, p. 198.
[287] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, p. 201.
[288] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, p. 200.
[289] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, p. 199.
[290] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, p. 201.

never loved him in the way that he loved me. He had a beautiful soul, and was a beautiful friend.[291]

Catholic guilt continued to pursue her: 'I prayed about it often. I prayed for answers… I sometimes prayed for forgiveness. I thought I was weak, that I couldn't resist.'[292] For A.Slattery, the layers of a Catholic and lesbian identity find themselves at odds, lacking the cultural cement she needs to cohere simultaneous membership within both communities. Samuel Yeats contends that, 'as queer women, Kinsella and Slattery attempt to rid themselves of the sexual shame imposed on them by the very religious communities they seek entry to.'[293] What emerges from the individual stories of the Alices are the multiple dynamic intersections of the many spheres of influence that constitutes a life. The play teases out each one's individual experiences of exile, their feelings of rootlessness in their on-going search for self - both searching for stability and a secure grounding, neither of which could be found in London or in heterosexual marriage.

Conroy's delicate treatment of homosexuality reminds us of the stigma people still experience when it comes to sexuality, and that many suppress and hide their sexuality for fear of ridicule and shame. It teases out elements of Ireland's internalised homophobia, particularly enshrined in the Catholic Church, which is still uncomfortable with anything but heterosexual union. A. Slattery tells the audience, 'I'd be mortified, making myself vulnerable, ridiculous, God, the embarrassment? What would people say?'[294] This feeling of embarrassment and shame feeds a desire for lesbian anonymity, to remain hidden and crave privacy. The Alices are clearly shaped by a society where the legacy of oppressive norms of sexuality still prevails. An older lesbian couple caught by the repressive belief that keeping their relationship discrete was 'easier' and 'safer', with 'no backlash.'[295] Their everyday reality is the fear of being recognised, noticed and judged based on their sexual identity. A.Slattery says,

With every person I meet I have to decide, will I remain invisible or will I tell them? How do I tell them? Do I need to tell them? I'm embarrassed to admit that I've lied

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[291] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 210.
[292] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 209.
[293] Yeats, Samuel, "We Will Be Seen": Documenting Queer Womanhood in Amy Conroy's *I (Heart) Alice (Heart) I',* in *Radial Contemporary Theatre Practices by Woman in Ireland,* Miriam Haughton and Mária Kurdi (eds), (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), p. 97.
[294] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 196.
[295] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 190.

about us regularly over the years. It's a horrible guilt, denying the person you love, denying the life you've built together.[296]

Alice Slattery internalises feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment, placed on her from an external gaze. This is an example of how certain bodies are potentialised and signified by normative regimes, grounded by normative assumptions of reproduction and traditional family frameworks. A.Slattery's conscious self, perhaps encouraged by religion, made her uncomfortable accepting her sexuality. A.Kinsella says accusingly: 'You don't Alice, you're ashamed of yourself, and you're ashamed of me. I'm not asking you to live differently, just to think differently.'[297] The Alices' position is inscribed by a set of meanings decreed by those outside: outsiders define and delimit the insider with their presumptions. They represent the ambivalent charge of being a Subject, which denominates not only the capacity to imagine, analyse, decide, communicate and act but also the paradoxical meaning of being the focus of a discourse, in which one is spoken to or about. The panic induced by a momentary kiss in Tesco alludes to wider power structures that capture and control the subjugated body through legislation and social mores and attitudes.

The play presents the complex nuances of the actualities of life represented through the Alices' relationship and the relevance and importance of such stories in relation to social policies in Ireland. At one point in the production A.Slattery reflects on the limiting categories of legal identification in Irish society (pre-marriage referendum): 'What would happen if one of us died? We have no children, no legal binds between us, only a joint bank account and a co-owned house.'[298] Conroy asks the audience to consider what is the recognition of a life? How, beyond essentialist categories of husband, wife, and 'normal' family can we define ourselves? My sense of Conroy's answer is that she dissolves limiting binaries such as a hetero- and homo- by normalising their relationship, creating a recognisable sameness about their lives. The Alices relate the story of their two great friends who tragically died in an autobahn accident. Frank and Jim were flamboyant, in love and had a rich history together. Of their death, a newspaper article simply reported, 'two men, in their fifties, were killed in a road accident.'[299] A.Slattery articulates:

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[296] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 196
[297] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 205.
[298] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 218.
[299] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 217.

> That was it, no details. They could have been strangers. When a husband and wife die you are immediately struck by the tragedy of the loss. A family lost. Their extended family and friends are interviewed in the paper, their funerals are covered on the news, and their community grieves. Frank and Jim were just 'two men in their fifties.'[300]

Here narratives of denial, oppression and silence feed into everyday life. The Alices mourn the loss of richness in Jim and Frank's relationship as it is publicly washed over due to their sexual identity. Personhood is sleekly condensed by such elegant operational entities as *the* mother, *the* father, and *the* family. Conroy works in the spaces outside such limiting categorisation and contests discrimination in all its forms, including legislative.

To-be-looked-at features heavily within the play. A.Slattery recalls the questions she was subjected to: 'Are you gay now? But you were married? Are you sure, maybe you're lonely? Aren't you two just best friends?'[301] All the complex details of personhood and subjectivity of the Alices, their attachments, feelings and sensibilities witnessed in previous scenes, are forcibly reduced here to social categorisations simply to aid an understanding for others. The invasive questions posed to Alice's newly found sexual identification resemble attitudes towards transgender experience I discuss later in the chapter. Such probing seeks a 'truth', the need to define people in simple terms, to fit into social categorisation, not the individual experiences of the Alices. Annette Schlichter comments that, 'central to the queer critique is the deconstruction of the gender binary *and* of the dichotomy of hetero-versus homosexuality. These binaries characterize the hegemonic culture's attempts to produce and regulate dominant as well as marginal sexual subjects.'[302]

The Alices' reluctance to speak publicly about their relationship feeds their awkward physicality on stage and Conroy's aesthetic documentary frame. There are obvious chalk markers on the stage floor for the Alices to find their positions and, throughout, a large map is situated at the back of the stage containing prompts, picture references and a script. These devices uphold the impression that the Alices are new to performance. There is a

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[300] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 217.
[301] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 196.
[302] Schlichter, Annette, 'Contesting 'Straights': 'Lesbians,' 'Queer Heterosexuals' and the Critique of Heteronormativity,' in *Twenty-First Century Lesbian Studies,* Noreen Giffney and Katherine O'Donnell (eds.), (Binghampton: Haworth Press Inc.), p.192-3.

script that has been 'rehearsed' but the Alices are presented as non-actors. They both make allusion to the performance, clearly nervous, slightly uncomfortable and uneasy:

A. Slattery: Walk on, and stand facing the audience.
A. Kinsella: Look at the audience.
A. Slattery: Look left, look right. Take them all in.
A. Kinsella: They are not your enemies, they are your friends.
A. Slattery: There is nothing to be nervous about.
A. Kinsella: Breath. Smile. Relax. *(They attempt this, look uncomfortable and fail.)*
A. Slattery: Just say the words as you said them to me. As we rehearsed them.
A. Kinsella: If you get lost or stuck, stop, find your place on the map and carry on.
A. Slattery: Have fun.
A. Kinsella: Enjoy yourself.
A. Slattery: Don't panic.[303]

In this sense, Conroy's play exists in theatrical conversation with documentary forms, while returning to the illusory mechanisms of conventional naturalist acting methods. The need to accept the authenticity of these women is central to the politics of the piece: the Alices' home has been consciously recreated on stage for them to tell their narrative. Objects from their 'actual' kitchen litter the space. The opening stage directions indicate that, *'The director and set designer will try to make the Alices comfortable on stage... books, tea/coffee, cake, record player, postcards, photos, religious statue.'*[304] These personal effects are intentionally presented to provide sufficient open reference for the characters to engender the appearance of reality.

The stage is the cross-section of a kitchen, opened to the audience who serve to complete the room and create a whole picture. The audience, placed as the other half of a private, interior space, are invited to partake in this personal environment and the lives within. The performance is constructed as an inclusive space: negotiating a relationship between the individual, the audience and queer subjectivity. The traditionally heteronormative family kitchen becomes a queer, inclusive space of the Alices' home. With this in mind, space is inherently politically charged. The audience is asked to bear witness to the lives of an older lesbian couple, in an Irish society that, at the time, was failing to provide equal marriage

[303] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, p. 188.
[304] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I*, p. 187.

rights for LGBTQ citizens. Conroy's comfortable presentation of same-sex lived experience is a conscious jibe against conservative, hetero-normative value systems, and she presents the Alice's relationship and home as a site of openness and possibility.

Baz Kershaw makes the point that in any system of social control, there will most likely be spaces for resistance, 'fissures' in which individuals can 'forge at least a little radical freedom.'[305] Kershaw maintains that performance can create the 'space' for freedom, 'fissures' in form that can constitute part of this resistance. For example, a large cake is cut up on stage and passed around the theatre, crossing the divide between stage and audience. Transgressing the divide between 'them' and 'us' creates a transformative space in which the audience are asked to engage actively in the Alices' world and politics. This is a repeated technique throughout the piece, the stage direction prompts: *'A. Slattery un-pins an old photo from the set and passes it to the audience.'*[306] As food and personal items are shared and populate the room, the space becomes an intimate site and immediately engages with their uncensored private life. The Alices' testimonials combined with the familiarity established between audience and actors foregrounds the corporeal presence of the queer female body on stage. At the same time, this intimacy blurs the oppositional binary of homo-heterosexual identity and, as noted, Conroy destabilises categories of difference by representing them as sameness. The narrative centres on their lesbian relationship, but the welcoming environment challenges positions of assumed hierarchal heterosexuality. The emphasis is not placed on 'othering' lesbian experiences, rather in exploring representations in which the lives of Alice are very much the universal lives of all sexualities. Pronouns slip between 'I' and 'we' and their inter-changeability establishes the individuality of each Alice, alongside their inseparability as a couple. The audience is introduced to their authentic differences and individual personalities, each Alice becomes an 'I,' and yet illuminates the powerful and tender 'we' in their relationship.

By asking the audience to trust this story of 'real' people presenting themselves on stage, albeit reluctantly, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* operates at a series of levels and the full impact of these occurs in the last moments of the play. Here the stage directions indicate, *'slowly the wigs come off and the actors reveal themselves,'*[307] they reveal the much younger faces of Amy Conroy, the writer and director of the piece, and her collaborator Clare Barrett. In placing

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[305] Kershaw, Baz, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard,* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 155.
[306] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 198.
[307] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 219.

before us an overlay of both fiction and non-fiction, the act of unmasking has political ramifications; the story here might not be true, but it is certainly a story that could have happened. Conroy explains how she wants the production to challenge 'the notion that documentary theatre is the most honest theatrical experience an audience can have', arguing that, in any type of theatre, it is 'the writer and actor's job to create and support the honesty and integrity of a piece of theatre.'[308] This final reveal also queers those reductive binaries of reality/fiction, character/actor, seen/unseen, and more importantly, inside/outside of lesbian lives.

Conroy's form contests the validity of interpreting and reading identity from the body. The two characters, masked as 'real' people, are destabilised thus questioning the idea of bodily appearance as truth and the desire to find, and assure authenticity. Conroy's techniques, and her exploration of the body as a container for multiple layers of meaning, follow Lois McNay's construction of embodiment, as discussed in Chapter One in relation to motherhood. McNay's suggestion is that the body is a 'dynamic, mutable frontier', as the point where the physical, the symbolic and the sociological overlap.[309] This dramaturgical style works critically by unsettling existing representational techniques, and visually theatricalising the fluidity of gender and sexual identity. McNay suggests that 'a lack of corporeal finality arises from a mutual inherence between physical interior and corporeal exterior where each is constitutive but not reducible to the other. Such a lack of finality suggests, for example, that the ascription of feminine corporeal identity is never straightforward or complete.'[310] The instability of the body can be prised open to explore multiple meanings, sexualities and identities. The body, along with sexuality, gender and identity is represented as a continual 'transitional entity,'[311] creating spaces for marginal and abject sexualities.

The idea is that 'human entities' are all in transition, and that the process of transformation is on-going, with the potential of inhabiting the spaces in-between. It is within these fractures and fault-lines that the meaning of subjectivity can be generated. Identities are always inherently unstable and unpredictable, and there are a variety of ways in which

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[308] Conroy, Amy in interview with Oonagh Murphy, 1st April 2013. Cited in *'That Was Us': Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance,* p.68.
[309] McNay, 'Gender, Habitus and the Field: Pierre B Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', *Theory, Culture & Society,* p. 98.
[310] McNay, Gender, Habitus and the Field: Pierre B Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity', *Theory, Culture & Society*, p. 98.
[311] Ibid.,

meaning is made and unmade in stage representation, and – by projection - within Irish culture more widely. McNay's reading of Bourdieu suggests that he offers a framework to understand the 'uneven effects of processes of gender restructuring beyond dualisms of the public versus the private or the dominant versus the excluded.' His insistence on the inseparability of habitus from the field suggests a way of considering how the symbolic dimensions of subjectivity connect to over-arching social relations. In terms of the Alices' sexuality, this denotes both 'the ways in which norms are inculcated upon the body and also the moment of praxis or living through these norms.'[312]

A crucial element to the play is the uncomfortable overlay between homosexuality and religion, amplified in A. Slattery's negotiation of personal identity, as both practicing Catholic and lesbian sexuality. Both Alices view this dilemma from entirely contrasting perspectives, and through the course of the play tenderly develop and expand their irreconcilable positions, or as Yates notes, they 'table the issue for love's sake.'[313] Catholicism is a constant within their relationship, and rests incongruously within their lesbian identity. A.Kinsella, having acknowledged her sexuality at an early age, comes to view religion as systemically 'offensive' in its preclusion of queer acceptance by religious congregations. A.Slattery, in contrast, comes to their relationship as a practicing Catholic and a widow from a Church-sanctioned marriage. A.Kinsella recalls refusing to receive communion at a wedding once, and afterwards the pair did not speak for a week. She notes, 'I wasn't trying to upset [Alice], I just... I just couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't pretend to go along with something that offends me for propriety's sake.'[314] She informs us that it is not God, but 'the church that I have a problem with... I think somewhere along the way they both got mixed up, intermingled in her eyes.'[315] However, for A.Slattery religion is part of the layering of her own identity, she recites from 'Corinthians chapter 14 verse 1'[316] which dictates, 'follow the way of love', and Alice can find peace in that. By referencing a foundational text of Christianity in support of homosexuality, Yeats believes she, 'impugns the systemic power of the Church, highlighting hypocrisy of the conditional application of scripture to create dictums in contemporary culture.'[317] That said, it is telling

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[312] McNay, Lois, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory,* (Malden, Mass: Polity Press, 2000), p. 32.
[313] Yeats, in *Radial Contemporary Theatre Practices by Woman in Ireland,* p. 90.
[314] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 202.
[315] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 203.
[316] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 209.
[317] Yeats, in *Radial Contemporary Theatre Practices by Woman in Ireland,* p. 100.

that Alice Kinsella, freed from Catholic guilt, views their participation in this project as 'a testimonial', for Alice Slattery it is 'dangerous'.

A.Slattery attends mass every Sunday and, during this time, A.Kinsella, rushes to the shops to purchase the newspapers and breakfast, a quick twenty minute process so that she 'can be back in bed when [Alice] gets in the door.'[318] They then return to have a 're-morning' together. A.Kinsella reflects: 'I ask if she's been 'saved'. I suppose this sounds silly. We never discuss it... but this reclaims us, if you know what I mean, like the religion is a divide and this ritual brings us back together.'[319] The Alices rejoice in their relationship amid a system that disavows their love, and can find a kind of rapprochement within that discord. While the church might operate as a wedge between their relationship their weekly ritual finds a way to bridge this divide. Each Sunday their practiced routine creates a space of resistance that regenerates their sense of self, and unity. This ritualistic moment becomes a liminal point where their self and relationship is made and remade, carving out a space for communal self-enactments. Yeats comments that, 'for Conroy, the body is a site of transgression, absolved by defining one's own relationship with religion and spirituality.'[320] The cyclical pattern in which the body is rejuvenated – the transgressive time in bed – is a site of resistance within their relationship. Identity politics is very much the politics of the body, and Conroy marks the ways in which a body does not simply exist as a physical manifestation of the self, as if the self is a coherent entity but is filtered through a prism of cultural assumptions that construct a body as normal or abnormal, depending on who is looking at it.

> A.Slattery: I have always been uncomfortable with anything too 'overtly gay'. I used to deem it unnecessary; I thought that 'people like that' gave us all a bad name. I never stopped to think that we are all just responsible for ourselves, moreover that 'people like that' are a celebration.[321]

In the play, the stage and the audience become the inside – a site of release and a space in which to be seen. It encourages boundaries to blur, and navigates the transition between inside and outside. Humanity and dignity depend on our acceptance of otherness and difference: resistance to homo/hetero-sexual categorisation, which is not a transparently

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[318] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 203.
[319] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 203.
[320] Yeats, in *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland*, p. 97.
[321] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 205.

empirical fact about any person. This highlights the further complexities of bodily readings and the fluidity of bodily presentations. The older lesbian body is further marginalised in representation – how these readings conflate with expected responses and how to deflect and unsettle them. As A.Slattery discovers through this process: 'I don't want to hide anymore. I am proud of me, I am proud of us.'[322]

I ♥ Alice ♥ I charts a journey of coming to terms with self, to make peace with the contradiction inherent in any being, and to learn how to reflect on the past to re-engage with the future.

> A.Kinsella: 'I realized that we all have a place, we all belong. We are all just people and we all just do our best.'[323]

The audience is encouraged to join the Alices, in their welcoming and inclusive environment, to inhabit and explore the spaces in-between, those beyond essentialist confines of categorisation. The stage frame is a space in which to resist hetero-normativity, in which to re-make and re-imagine subjectivity. From a feminist perspective, resistance is important because it asserts a countervailing force that might be able to disassemble hegemonic power relations. *I ♥ Alice ♥ I* explores everyday resistance as an embodied reclamation of agency, a demand that 'they will be seen.'[324] It reframes traditional social structures and enables the queer home to be a site of resistance, which insists on a pluralism that accommodates all.

Ribbons: Revealing transgender identities

Elaine Murphy's *Ribbons* was first performed in 2009[325] as a rehearsed reading in response to *'The Fairer Sex'* play-reading series for the Abbey Theatre. The play presents a thoughtful and unsentimental glimpse of a father-and-son relationship, fraught by upcoming gender reassignment surgery. Not only was this 'the first appearance of gender

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[322] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 219.
[323] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 219.
[324] Conroy, *I ♥ Alice ♥ I,* p. 219.
[325] *Ribbons* was performed as a rehearsed reading on the Peacock stage, 10th June 2009, directed by Wayne Jordan. It has later been staged as a full production as part of the Abbey Theatre's '*Short Play Season*' on the Peacock stage from 13th-23rd February 2013. This production was directed by Oonagh Murphy, with Ruth McCabe as Glenda and Chris Newman as Lewis.

reassignment surgery in a new play at the Abbey Theatre,'[326] the originality of the piece is given further political potency in light of the invigorated social and political activity of the LGBT community at the time, and since. Fintan Walsh comments that, '2009 was an especially significant year in Ireland insofar as heightened discussions surrounding the Civil Partnership Bill forced a frequently disparate group of people to reckon with the symbolic and legal status of their relationship in a way that people have not done since the decriminalization of male homosexual acts in 1993.'[327]

Amid this swell of interest was the situation of Dr. Lydia Foy, a legal case that serves as a fairly stark reflection of the social and political attitudes in contemporary Ireland surrounding transgender[328] recognition. In March 1993, Dr. Foy had applied to the office of the Registrar General for a new birth certificate to reflect her gender, which was refused. She then embarked on a long and gruelling court battle until 2007, at which point the Supreme Court (again) found the Irish Government to be in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. Finally, in 2014, the Department of Social Protection published the draft Gender Recognition Bill and The Gender Recognition Act[329] was passed in July 2015, taking Ireland out of the embarrassing position of being the only country in Europe without a legal mechanism to recognise transgender people. High profile cases, like Dr Foy's, cross global borders and help to renegotiate standard narratives and stigmas that orbit transgender experience. It is of interest to note that, as with the decriminalisation of homosexuality, these matters were un-resolvable in Ireland and required external adjudication by the European Courts. The amalgamation of national and international interest in cases such as this has made it impossible to ignore the rights and legitimacy of transgender people, and encourages policy decisions based on inclusiveness and mutual respect.

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[326] Howard, Aideen, in 'Introduction' of *Irish Shorts Two-handers from the Abbey Theatre, Ireland*, p. ix.
[327] Walsh, Fintan, 'Pride, Politics and the Right to Perform' in *Theory on Edge: Irish Studies and the Politics of Sexual Difference,* Noreen Giffney and Margrit Shildrick (eds), (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 107.
[328] The term transgender is an umbrella term describing people who feel the need to present themselves to the world in a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may go onto describe themselves as transsexual, transvestite, cross-dressers, inter-sex or by a number of other terms (including, simply, man or woman).
[329] The Gender Recognition Act will allow all individuals over the age of 18 to self-declare their own gender identity. Young people aged 16-17 can also apply to be legally recognized, though the process is more onerous. Gender recognition legislation provides a process enabling trans people to achieve full legal recognition of their preferred gender and allows for the acquisition of a new birth certificate that reflects this change.

In Murphy's *Ribbons,* Lewis (Simon Boyle in the original reading) has not seen his father, Glenda (Jane Brennan), for five years and the action centres on Lewis's arrival at Glenda's apartment. The play opens with uncertainty about the relationship dynamic of Glenda and Lewis. The permutations of a young man visiting an older woman's home, and the obvious tension between them, leads the audience to mounting suspicion. The crux of the play rests in the 'transgender reveal', from which the audience learn that Glenda is actually Lewis's father, who is transitioning from male to female. The audience is told that Glenda's marriage to Lewis's mother broke down when recognised by his Garda work colleagues when he was dressed as a woman in a nightclub. Glenda, now planning full gender reassignment surgery in Thailand, is hopefully seeking Lewis's support. The narrative explores the isolated reality of transgendered experience, the impact that Glenda's choices have on her son, Lewis, and the tragic breakdown of their relationship.

Murphy's play is not a wholly sympathetic view of transgender experience. Much of the dialogue in *Ribbons* portrays the selfishness of the 'decision' to transition from male to female. This taps into common attitudes that gender variations are a selfish whim bound to lifestyle choice. Lewis encapsulates this by saying, 'You've always done what you've wanted'[330] / 'the only thing that's wrong with you is that you're sick in the fucking head.'[331] Lewis's reaction to the misalliance in his father between gender identity and biological sex, illuminates a general societal belief that it is the choice, and therefore the fault, of the individual. Jana Sawicki counters these prejudices and suggests that, 'individuals place themselves under conditions over which they have little control – conditions marked by systemic inequalities of power associated not only with compulsory heterosexuality but also subordination based on class, race and gender – we have good reason to challenge the adequacy of unexamined appeals to "choice," or individual autonomy.'[332] Glenda's transition took place at a later stage in her life and, for many, this adds to the confusion, as it is difficult to comprehend why such transitions needed to happen at all. Initially, Glenda feels forced to immerse herself in the heterosexual pattern of marriage and a traditionally highly masculine Garda vocation – a vocation that, ironically, upholds the laws that fail to recognise her own gender transition. According to the 2013 TENI report, 'Speaking for the Margins Trans Mental Health and Wellbeing in

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[330] Elaine Murphy, 'Ribbons' in *Irish Shorts Two-handers from the Abbey Theatre, Ireland*, (Nick Hern Books: London, 2013) p.185. From here on in *Ribbons*.
[331] Murphy, *Ribbons,* p. 184.
[332] Sawicki, Jana, 'Foucault's Pleasures: Desexualizing Queer Politics', in *Feminism and the Final Foucault,* Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges (eds.), (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 178.

Ireland,'[333] for many trans people, and in this case Glenda, to live in one's true gender entails enormous loss and sacrifice – family, career, and community. Though the report notes that the trans community in Ireland is incredibly diverse with a range of journeys to become authentic selves, many members of the communities are on the margins of society and face high levels of stigmatisation and discrimination. Issues such as 'isolation family rejection, and marginalisation at home, in schools and in the workplace'[334] are a very prevalent reality of trans experience, and therefore can never be reduced to a selfish, spontaneous modern caprice. She articulates this by saying, 'If I could've turned it off believe me I would've. But it's not going away, Lewis. It'll never go away.'[335] For most of her life, Glenda has felt physically and psychically disassociated and has been gradually worn down by a constant charade of masculinity denoted by her male biological sex. Butler emphasis the impossibility of transgender people making a simple 'choice',

> I do know that some people believe that I see gender as a 'choice' rather than as an essential and firmly fixed sense of self. My view is actually not that. No matter that one feels one's gendered and sexed reality to be firmly fixed or less so, every person should have the right to determine the legal and linguistic terms of their embodied lives. So whether one wants to be free to live out 'hard-wired' sense of sex or a more fluid sense of gender is less important than the right to be free to live it out, without discrimination, harassment, injury, pathologisation or criminalisation with full institutional and community support.[336]

Taking up Sawicki's point again, 'we come to see our freedom not simply as something to be secured but rather as something we must exercise in the form of ethical practices of self-construction.'[337] For trans people, freedom and the freedom to choose are complex and constantly in flux. It is not simply integrating transgender identity into our pre-existing culture so much as looking to exceed the limits of historical boundaries, enshrined in binaries of masculine/feminine, homo-/hetero. Marinucci makes the case that,

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[333] McNeil, Jay, Louis Bailey, Sojna Ellis & Maeve Regan, 'Speaking for the Margins Trans Mental Health and Wellbeing in Ireland,' Transgender Equality Network Ireland, 2013.
[334] McNeil, Jay, Louis Bailey, Sojna Ellis & Maeve Regan, 'Speaking for the Margins Trans Mental Health and Wellbeing in Ireland,' Transgender Equality Network Ireland, 2013, p. 6.
[335] Murphy, *Ribbons,* p.185.
[336] Butler, Judith, in interview with Christine Williams, 'Gender Performance: The TransAdvocate interviews Judith Butler', 2014, accessed at www.transadvocate.com/gender-performance-the-transadvocate-interviews-Judith-Butler_n_13652.htm.
[337] Sawicki, *Feminism and the Final Foucault,* p.170.

> Many who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual experience discrimination and violence for deviating from the heterosexual norm, and this is also the case for those who identify as transgender. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities all challenge the wide spread expectation that biological females and biological males should exhibit the specific collection of attitudes and behaviours assigned to each sex category.[338]

Lewis, unable to exceed these expectations, taunts Glenda with grossly stereotypical images of femininity: 'you should apply to FAS, do one of them girly courses like beautician or hairdressing or something. You could practice on yourself.'[339] Glenda's transition is perceived as a threat to Lewis' own identity as male. He retaliates by reducing her identity to limited and reductive feminine categories of identification – hair and makeup. Highly stylised notions of masculinity and femininity are frequently applied to transgender experiences, and Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook believe that, 'cisgender men and women attempt to repair these potential ruptures through the deployment of normatively gendered tactics that reify gender and sexual difference.'[340] In this case Lewis's reaction, an unsettling signal to the wider public sphere, assumes a politics of fear based on one-dimensional versions of femininity, which negate the authenticity of Glenda's transgender experience. While his language is hugely simplistic and intentionally offensive, it does though serve in the play to explore the mechanics of gender at work.

A frequent misconception is that transgender people themselves have an overly reductive and aggressive idea about gender and the performance of stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. That is, transgender does not always move beyond binarism and simply exchanges one for another. Butler, however, warns that 'transsexual desire to become a man or a woman is not to be dismissed as a simple desire to conform to established identity categories.'[341] The goal is not, as Marinucci says, 'to exchange one empirically underdetermined set of categories for another empirically undetermined set of categories. Instead, the goal is the proliferation and multiplication of categories.'[342] Queer

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[338] Marinucci, Mimi, *Feminism is Queer The Intimate Connection between queer and Feminist Theory,* (London & New York: Z Books, 2010), p. 31.
[339] Murphy, *Ribbons,* p. 183.
[340] Schilt, Kristen and Laurel Westbrook, 'Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: "Gender Normals," Transgender people, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality', in *Gender and Society,* 23(4), 2009, p. 442.
[341] Butler, *Undoing Gender,* p. 8.
[342] Marinucci, Mimi, *Feminism is Queer The Intimate Connection between queer and Feminist Theory,* (London & New York: Z Books, 2010), p. 36.

theory is a useful renegotiating tool here. Jagose describes queer as 'those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire,'[343] and Marinucci's adopts this theoretical approach because it avoids,

> binary and hierarchical reasoning in general and in connection with gender, sex and sexuality in particular... Queer theory, which trades essentialism and semantic atomism for social constructionism and semantic holism, recognises that meaning is conveyed not by definitions of individual terms but by contextual relations between and among various terms.[344]

While Foucault's early work is about discipline, it is still apposite in this context to use his argument here that the body is not a natural entity but is socially produced through regimes of knowledge and power. As McNay comments, 'Foucault draws attention to the constructed, socially contingent and hence mutable elements of identity.'[345] Foucault's later work[346] shifts focus from 'technologies of domination' to 'technologies of the self' and claims that identity is not simply imposed from above but is also actively determined by individuals through the deployment of 'practices' of the self. McNay adds, 'When this process of self-stylization becomes conscious, then the potential for a reflexive or ethical form of self-fashioning – an 'aesthetics of existence' – emerges. Self-stylization is an example of what Foucault calls the practice of liberty.'[347] Murphy's play presses for an aesthetic, or technology, of self that does not necessarily adhere to a regime of gender. In the search for personal autonomy, it is necessary to alter the methods through which we categorise ourselves and others, perhaps in search of a more plural framing than the ubiquitous male or female. Foucault suggests that 'the critique of what we are is at the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.'[348] Consequently, rather than investing in singular 'hard-wired' binaries, it is more important to look towards a process of 'becoming'[349] instead of persisting in maintaining that we *are,* or that we have arrived. Transgender undermines

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[343] Jargose, Annamarie, *Queer theory: an introduction*, (New York: NYU, 1996), p. 3.
[344] Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer, the intimate connection between queer and feminist theory,* p. 33.
[345] McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory,* p. 96.
[346] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure,* p.28.
[347] McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* p. 96.
[348] Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' in *The Foucault Reader,* Paul Rainbow (ed.) (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 50.
[349] Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi, (London: Athlone Press, 1987).

traditional forms of masculinity and femininity and the meta-narratives that support cultural identity. In the overlay of male-female, definitions can be renegotiated and it is therefore important to dislocate this oppressive binary of man and woman in representation. 'Becoming' entails the ability to embrace masculinities and femininities without essentialism, in search for liberation beyond the shackles of a gender binary system, and the theatrical frame can provide a powerful landscape in which to envision new modes of being.

In *Ribbons*, Murphy highlights the intense feelings of confusion and emotional trauma that children with gender dysphonia experience, especially during puberty. Without institutionally supported public recognition that validates transgender social identities, generations of people are trapped in a system in which they fail to be recognised. The effect of such invisibility is teased out through *Ribbons* and provides reasoning for Glenda's transition later in life. The audience is informed that at fourteen, Glenda was hospitalised for attempting to cut off her penis, she recalls that 'things were starting to change that I couldn't control. You have to understand I never felt like it belonged.'[350] With little understanding or recognition of gender variation at the time, such behaviour was hidden, dismissed or denied and, for Glenda, any later effeminate behaviour was dealt with by ridicule, hostility and eventually violence. She was 'walloped' as a child, and risked being 'battered'[351] as an adult. The possibility of violence that skirts the everyday lives of transgender people, feeds a constant presence of fear, shame and guilt that can translate to a social, even literal, death. In adult life, Glenda was again hospitalised, this time for attempting to take her own life. For many trans people, required to suppress their emotions, the daily battle with guilt and remorse can result in attempted suicide. This is evidenced in a recent survey by Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) in 2013,[352] that revealed that 80 per cent of trans people in Ireland had considered taking their own life, and half of those has made at least one attempt.[353] Sawiki considers that, 'Freedom is secured, and assimilation to dominant norms resisted, by ensuring that there be a wide range of spaces in which "self-making" might take place – liveable spaces, not spaces in which individuals are so vulnerable that their practices of freedom involve risking or

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[350] Murphy, *Ribbons,* p. 188.
[351] Murphy, *Ribbons,* p. 183.
[352] Transgender Equality Network Ireland Annual Report 2013, p. 9. Accessed at http://www.teni.ie/attachments/a4aedb19-0123-4812-bcd1-cdd4a4d61e77.PDF
[353] McNeil, Jay, Louis Bailey, Sojna Ellis & Maeve Regan, 'Speaking for the Margins Trans Mental Health and Wellbeing in Ireland,' Transgender Equality Network Ireland, 2013, p.

flirting with social or actual death.'[354] The daily dealings with violence are a depressing reflection of recent statistics. In 2013, the Trans Murder Monitoring project[355] documented 238 murders of trans and gender variant people in twenty-six countries worldwide. While there has been no recorded murder of a trans person in Ireland, the Stop Transphobia and Discrimination (STAD) campaign was launched in February 2013 to raise awareness about transphobic violence in Ireland. Their report[356] documented that 'trans and gender variant people regularly experience harassment, abuse, violence and discrimination because of their gender identity or expression,' and that 'transphobia is widespread in Irish society and largely goes unchallenged.'[357] Such violent reaction towards transgender people, in particular by cisgendered[358] men, operates as a disciplinary force on bodies that transgress the so-called 'natural' gender binary.[359]

Ribbons should be valorised for providing a space for individuals that occupy the periphery of society. It is thematically challenging in its representation and provides an alternative reference point for many who could have been tainted by media clichés of transgender experience. That said, Murphy's dramatic 'reveal' or 'shock' device that occurs when the audience learn the history of Glenda's situation, runs the danger of feeding into narratives of the sensational and extraordinary that surround the lives of transgender people. In this sense, the play falls slightly short in empathy as it relies on stereotypical notions of flying to Thailand to undergo surgery, the seemingly justified hatred from children and little exploration of the mental transition. The play is perhaps less self-critical than might be expected – the narrative is based more on the altering of self than the personal struggle with multifarious layers of identity. Sympathy is directed more towards the son, who has lost his family, his house, and is left with a somewhat unsympathetic and patronising father who claims: 'you knew where I was' / 'I thought you being that bit older you'd handle it better' / you think I'm doing this for the drama? / Go easy' - all which sounds more like a petulant teenager than a parent empathising with a son over the break up of a family. This reaches a climax when Glenda explains to Lewis that her reassignment surgery will be paid for by the sale of the family house in which Lewis and his mother are still living. While

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[354] Sawicki, *Feminism and the Final Foucault,* p. 178.
[355] http://www.transrespect-transphobia.org/
[356] TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland), 'STAD: Stop Transphobia and Discrimination Report', 2014, p. 4. Copies of this report are available for download from the TENI website: www.teni.ie.
[357] Ibid.
[358] The term 'cisgender' is used to describe a person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. In opposition to transgender, a cisgender individual has only experienced their mental and physical sexes as being aligned.
[359] Schilt and Westbrook, 'Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: "Gender Normals," Transgender people, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality', in *Gender and Society*, p. 444.

Glenda may be 'entitled to half,'[360] the emotional breakdown of a family home is difficult for children, let alone when this is coupled with a physical breakdown. Though hidden truths gradually emerge in the play there is little indication towards a process of healing for their relationship and, instead, the closed door of Lewis's exit seems to reverberate into Glenda's isolated future. *Ribbons* engages with new ideas, possibilities and experiences of womanhood in Ireland, and the potential of dramatic representation to allow this to emerge.

The Big Deal: To lead the life you are meant to have

The realities of transgender experience are developed further in Una McKevitt's *The Big Deal,* moving beyond Murphy's somewhat bleak depictions in *Ribbons.* First produced at Kilkenny Arts Festival in 2011,[361] *The Big Deal,* is arguably a landmark piece in Irish theatre for its sympathetic and honest representation of transgender female experience. It navigates the subtleties of documentary form to deploy effective narratives of self, creating a space for the transgendered body to be seen and heard. The physical journey depicts a very human account of residually taboo life experience. Una McKevitt describes herself as the editor of the piece, and stresses the importance of the text being built from original material provided by two trans women contributors. The autobiographical narrative, taken from journals, poems, songs and interviews, is collage-like in structure and charts the enormous personal gains and losses each has made to become the women they have always been. Although born male, Cathy and Deborah – formerly Patrick and Sean – grew up identifying as female, both found their biological sex increasingly intolerable and each began the process of transitioning, becoming eventually, to live full lives as women. While grappling with the physical processes of transition is a key feature of their accounts, the emotional strains and joys of simultaneously being son, husband, father and a woman are all central to the narrative.

Despite the authentic first-person testimonials spoken by actors, there is no attempt to mask that this is a performance. The roles of Cathy and Deborah are played by two cisgender females, Una Kavanagh (Cathy) and Shania Williams (Deborah), an important directorial choice because it presents Cathy and Deborah as the women they have always

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[360] Murphy, *Ribbons,* p. 186.
[361] *The Big Deal* premiered on the 10th August 2011 at Kilkenny Arts Festival, it was later performed at Project Arts Centre, Dublin, from 31 October – 5 November 2011. The piece is directed by Una McKevitt.

been. Simultaneously, Kavanagh and Williams, speaking the words of Cathy and Deborah, signify both the biologically female and biologically male body. The same directorial choice in casting was deployed in *Ribbons*, Glenda was played by Ruth MaCabe in the 2013 performance. Two microphone stands '*frame the stage picture*'[362] and two vertical strip lights hang above; '*the actors do not move beyond the circumference they mark.*'[363] The audience is invited into a black box space with props that serve as semiotic markers of performance. Yet the space itself is unmarked, stripped of a setting, time, and geography, striving largely to play down any theatricality. Gender is fluid only within the circumference of the stage space. The austere set, the harsh scrutiny of strip lighting, and the fact that the performers do not move beyond the objects that define them, provides a loose parallel for the experience Deborah and Cathy are to relate, the oppressive nature of a gender binary system.

The piece opens with two clear examples from Deborah and Cathy of the insidious way public discourse objectifies and discriminates against transgender people. At a recent wedding, Cathy recalls a conversation with a woman who is aware she is transgender. When discussing something as banal as a massage on a honeymoon, the woman describes this with distaste and sees it as 'unnatural'. This simple conversation suddenly jumps to a judgement of Cathy: 'Unnatural - Ha! But look who I'm talking to.'[364] This incident of unguarded prejudice and discrimination is mirrored in Deborah's experiences. She begins by reading an article from *The Evening Herald,* entitled 'Men In Dresses':

> Deborah: Her car, parked near the city centre club where she's socializing with her friends, has just been broken into and she's clearly upset. It's only when [she] turns and speaks that you would *really know* – the voice is unmistakably that of a man.[365]

In both cases the idea that there is a 'real', true, or natural gender is subtly constructed through language. Deborah, regardless of the article's use of the pronoun 'she', is *really* something else; Cathy, is simply 'unnatural'. People's use of language is exposed as insidious transphobia fed into everyday conversation. Judith Butler asserts that,

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[362] McKevitt, Una, introducing 'The Big Deal' in *'This is just this. It isn't real. It's money' The Oberon Anthology Of Contemporary Irish Plays,* (London: Oberon Books, 2012), p. 223.
[363] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p.223.
[364] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 223
[365] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 223

> naturalized knowledge of gender operates as a pre-emptive and violent circumscription to reality. To the extent that gender norms… establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be "real," they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression.[366]

The assumption remains that Cathy and Deborah *should* have been 'doing' their gender differently.

At seventeen, Deborah first approached her father about her feelings of being 'a girl.'[367] She was immediately told, 'It's a phase,' in which his remedy is located in the performance of hetero-normative, aggressive, hyper-masculinity: 'Get a new girlfriend and on Sunday go out and kick someone around the football pitch.'[368] Deborah, to maintain regulatory order, must emotionally align herself to the cultural traits that mark her male anatomy. In this case, participation in 'masculine' socialisation is considered the method to 'fix' Deborah, gender can be performatively constituted by a stylised repetition of acts.[369] However, the very attribution of masculinity aligned with male anatomy is one of the mechanisms for the production of gender itself. On the hetero-normative grounds that her biological sex should be aligned with her gender, Deborah's subjectivity as female does not qualify her as a woman. So what, given the contemporary order of being, can Deborah actually be? The conditions of intelligibility, by which the human is recognised and becomes a subject, is composed of complex norms and practices that have become a presupposition, without which we cannot think of the human at all. When, in the production, Cathy attempted transition at twenty-three, she provided her parents with a physical reason – she had a womb. On reflection she remarks, 'That was the cowardly thing to do, not to stand up and say, "These are my feelings. I've no evidence of it".'[370] In order to legitimatise her position, Cathy creates a physical manifestation in her body.

Butler, referring to Foucault's theory of the politics of truth, suggests that there is: 'a politics that pertains to those relations of power that circumscribe in advance what will and will not count as truth, which order the world in certain regular and regulatable ways and

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[366] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. xxv
[367] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p 224.
[368] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p 224.
[369] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* p. 34.
[370] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 240.

which we come to accept as the given field of knowledge.'[371] She continues by probing, 'What counts as a person? What counts as a coherent gender? What qualifies as a citizen? Whose world is legitimated as real? Subjectively, we ask: Who can I become in such a world where the meaning and limits of the subject are set out in advance for me?'[372] Cathy tries to become that for which there is no place, she has no position in this given 'regulated and regulatable field of knowledge'. This is ultimately what Foucault has described as the 'desubjugation of the subject on the play of ... the politics of truth.'[373] Deborah and Cathy's deviation from established behavioural norms has left them illegitimate and 'not real.' They cannot exist under the human umbrella of intelligibility in the politics of truth. Power structures are working here not only in a juridical sense that does not, until very recently, recognise the transgender body, but also by operating to a certain regulatory regime, one that has exceeded and yet informed the law. They are occupying the place of not-being within the field of being, neither fully negated nor acknowledged.

Much of the language adopted by others in order to 'help' or manage Deborah and Cathy's gender dysphoria is that of sickness: 'We'll get you sorted'/ 'We'll get you cured'/ 'We'll help you beat this thing.'[374] The implication being that they are both impaired by a sexual 'disorder', a dis-order from the hetero-normative regime, 'ordered' on the binary of sexuality. The language is again deeply rooted in negative connotations of being unhealthy, unnatural, and subsequently abnormal. Their emotions and feelings are defined as deficient, a lack, and again illustrates the ability of language to produce legitimate and illegitimate subjects. Human possibilities manifest themselves in the fault lines, when such categorisation is subverted, challenged or disturbed. Foucault writes of the body, that 'power relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs... the body becomes a useful source only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.'[375] In this way, Foucault's theory can be seen as a means to highlight the historical process through which bodies are constituted and re-created. Bodies become inscribed in social and political practices, as objects acted upon but which are also the subject of certain political

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[371] Butler, Judith, 'Doing Justice to Someone Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality' in *The Transgender Studies Reader,* Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds.), (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 183-4.
[372] Butler, in *The Transgender Studies Reader,* p. 183-4.
[373] Foucault, Michel, 'What Is Critique?' trans. Lysa Hochroth, in *The Politics of Truth,* Sylère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (eds.), (New York: Semiotext, 1997), p. 39.
[374] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 232.
[375] Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Translated by Alan Sheridan, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), p. 25-6.

technologies. If the norm is an 'average standard' against which individuals are to be measured, the transgender body can highlight the 'unnatural' process of normalisation, and explore the general social need for people to remain within and maintain these standards in order to ensure correct socialisation. According to Butler, 'the norm governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social.[376] Transgender bodies' deviation from the 'norm' exposes the mechanisms of this structure at work, and the underlying inability to regulate the body highlights the oppressive futility of strict categorisation. If, as Butler suggests, the 'Self is compelled to form itself, but to form itself within forms that are already more or less in operation and underway,' then what happens if that self-forming is undertaken in disobedience of the principles by which one is formed? What happens when, 'the self forms itself in 'de-subjection'... which is to say that it risks its deformation as a subject, occupying that ontologically insecure position which poses the question anew: who will be a subject here, and what will count as a life?[377]

Cathy and Deborah, forming what could be considered 'de-subjection', challenge restrictive hetero-normative regimes that define categories of male and female, man and woman. However, the norm serves as a paradox for thinking, as Butler indicates,

> If the norm renders the social field intelligible and normalizes that field for us, then being outside the norm is in some sense being defined still in relation to it. To be not quite masculine or not quite feminine is still to be understood exclusively in terms of one's relationship to the "quite masculine" and the "quite feminine"... those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance.[378]

In this vein, Butler continues that,

> The very criterion by which we judge a person to be a gendered being, a criterion that posits coherent gender as a presupposition of humanness, is not only one that, justly or unjustly, governs the recognisability of the human but one that informs the

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[376] Butler, *Undoing Gender,* p.42.
[377] Butler, Judith, 'What is Critique? An essay on Foucault's Virtue', in *The Political, Blackwell Reading in Contemporary Philosophy*, David Ingram (ed.), (Blackwell Publishers Ltd: Oxford, 2002), p. 226.
[378] Butler, *Undoing Gender,* p.47.

ways we do or do not recognize ourselves, at the level of feeling, desire, and the body.[379]

The recognition of self is fundamental to both Deborah and Cathy's experience.

The narrative frequently oscillates between identities. Cathy articulates, 'I am wearing Patrick's face today', Deborah suggests, 'I won't be me, I'll be Sean.'[380] Cathy relates, 'I lived my life as a man because I had to. When I was a man, I was called Patrick. Now I live my life, thank god, as I always meant to, as a woman and I'm called Cathy. But I'm the same person.'[381] Here the slipperiness of identity is at play, presented as a social construction of the body that is unstable and ever changing. But we are also witness to a personal act of disclosure, a mechanism by which to forge a new community of acceptability. Erving Goffman suggests that 'after laboriously learning to conceal, the individual may go and unlearn the concealment in a private reconstitution of the self.'[382] After gender reassignment surgery Cathy recalls, 'staring at myself in the mirror, and a woman looking back,'[383] the 'myself' Cathy sees is the same person she has always been, just her reflection now provides her with a more aligned image. She continues, 'I smile at myself – still my smile and really my face.'[384] The image that Cathy sees on the outside is a much closer reflection to the person she feels on the inside, from a disconnect to forging a new connection between mind and body. This is reiterated by Deborah, 'Cathy, in your last letter you say you don't feel any more of a woman now than before, why would you? You haven't changed your brain. You only had your penis removed.'[385]

Cathy and Deborah, far from remaining with the strict male/female, man/woman binary frames, suggest fluidity, the ebb and flow between states. In this, it is possible to regard formation of gender itself as perpetual transformation. Kate Bornstein[386] argues that to go from female to male, or from male to female, is not to stay necessarily within the binary frame of gender but to engage transformation itself as the meaning of gender, to see 'becoming' potentially as a radical space. To a certain extent this engages with Simone de

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[379] Butler, in 'Doing Justice To Someone Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality', *GLQ A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7(4), 2001. p. 622.
[380] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 226.
[381] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 230.
[382] Goffman, Erving, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), p. 101-2.
[383] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 234.
[384] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 234.
[385] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 232.
[386] Bornstein, Kate, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us,* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

Beauvoir's legacy, if one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one, then 'becoming' is the vehicle for gender itself. Butler suggests that to be material 'is not only to be obdurate and resistant to what works upon it, but to be the vector and instrument of a continued "working".'[387] Perhaps agency can be found in the very relationship between power and bodies. Butler goes on to say, 'The continued activity of power as it changes course, proliferates, becomes more diffuse, through taking material form.'[388] This idea of a continual working and re-working of the body is central to narratives of transition for transgender people, and in maintaining a sense of self and individuality. Cathy and Deborah explore a similar experience, but very differently: 'Once Cathy decided to transition and live full-time as herself, she did it literally overnight; whereas, my transition from Sean to Deborah has been more like the tide coming in.'[389]

In this way, transition rests on a spectrum, and it cannot be said that there exists a particular stage when a person has changed gender from one to the other. In life, we all transition, there is no start and finish. It is a process to which one can affirm a true gender, and cannot be viewed as a change in identity. 'I was always Deborah. This operation did not make me a woman; all it did was make me physically female.'[390] Perhaps it is important to offer ways to rethink male/female, man/woman as something other than categories and more akin to sites of volatility. Deborah and Cathy's narratives search for strategies that resist modern forms of subjection, a means to layer masculinities and femininities, without neutralising identity.

One review of *The Big Deal* maintained that,

> McKevitt makes no attempt to juxtapose Cathy and Deborah's experiences to create a greater sense of conflict or urgency, nor to theatricalise their voices or raise questions about their perspectives or society's attitudes to the transgendered community… a mere act of bearing witness rather than an exploration of the greater significance of Cathy and Deborah's stories.[391]

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[387] Butler, Judith, 'Bodies and Power Revisited', in *Feminism and the Final Foucault,* p. 187.
[388] Butler, *Feminism and the Final Foucault,* p. 187.
[389] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 227.
[390] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 247.
[391] Keating, Sara, *The Irish Times,* 'The Big Deal', 16th August 2011. Accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/the-big-deal-1.598815.

This greater significance, in this reviewer's opinion, is the women's perspective of how the audience, or social eye, views them. In defence of *The Big Deal*, it is through the experience of Cathy and Deborah's story that the political act of bearing witness should be drawn into question. The text reiterates: 'I spent thirty-seven years apologising for my condition.' A problem largely seemed to surface through exterior rejection, not a rejection of self. 'I put other people's needs before my own.'[392] Deborah has experienced life primarily by how other people reacted to her. Her transition and place within the representational frame, enables a mental shift from object status to a self-defining position of subject.

Through the plays of Conroy, Harris and McKevitt, this chapter has illustrated the counter-narrative in Irish theatre that disrupts heteronormativity. These writers encapsulate a shift from male homosexual desire to a broader representation of the LGBTQ community. All three provide queer spaces that contest dominant patriarchal productions of meaning and give voice to the marginalised, in this case lesbian and transgender experience. Monolithic views of sexuality are dismantled to provide inclusive spaces, from varying perspectives, to normalise both lesbian and transgender identity. What these plays demonstrate are the high levels of fear experienced by those as identifying as lesbian and trans, the reality of this stigma in Irish society, and the silence and shame it induces. The need to end the silence and give voice to uncomfortable but necessary subjects is crucial to all the plays under discussion in this thesis. For example, violence and the threat of violence forms a prevalent backdrop to many women's lives and, as I develop this in the upcoming chapter, theatre can be an incredibly powerful medium through which to shed light on these unnerving silences.

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[392] McKevitt, *The Big Deal,* p. 233.

Chapter Three: Performing Violence: Representations of Sexual and Gendered Violence

In this chapter I discuss the prevalence and persistence of sexual and gendered violence in contemporary Irish society, and THEATREclub, Abbie Spallen and Stella Feehily's explicit and implicit motives in contesting misogyny in an array of forms. Rape, sexual and domestic violence are recurring themes in many women's dramatic writing, indicative perhaps of the presence of incidental violence within everyday experiences. As recently as July 2016, the Irish Times social affairs correspondent, Kitty Holland, headlined the 'rise in first-time callers to rape helpline.'[393] Reporting on Dublin Rape Crisis Centre statistics, she notes that the number of first-time callers to the national helpline for victims of rape and sexual assault was over fifty per cent higher in 2015 than two years earlier. Interestingly, Holland stresses the growing willingness of people to report such crimes committed by someone they knew, a truly positive advance on the culture of silence and shame pervasive in previous years. In terms of performance, Lisa Fitzpatrick is unequivocal; the considerable volume of work on these issues frames the fact that, 'sexual violence is a concern for women across cultural borders, though refracted differently through the specific cultural circumstances of different communities of women, other material conditions of their lives and the cultural conventions and practices available to them.'[394] From an Irish perspective, the three plays discussed here highlight the ubiquitous reality of sexual and domestic violence, its engrained presence in the very fabric of Ireland's social canvas. They deal directly with the social and cultural implications of abuse, and raise powerful questions concerning the forms and ethics of spectatorship. In this way, their theatrical representations shed light on the oppressive nature of sexual abuse and gender-based violence, and reassess cultural norms of shame, blame, and ultimately social silence.

Chiming with my overall argument, that theatre can be critical of larger social challenges, I have chosen to use THEATREclub's *The Game* (2015), Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* (2006) and Stella Feehily's *Duck* (2003). These plays explore how violence against women can be addressed, challenged and resisted through theatrical representations, and how these

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[393] Holland, Kitty, 'Dublin Rape Crisis Centre line sees surge in first-time callers' *Irish Times*, 27th July 2016. Accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/dublin-rape-crisis-centre-lie-sees-surge-in-first-time-callers-1.2735301.

[394] Fitzpatrick, Lisa, 'Women Writing Violence', in *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 185.

playwrights open a conversation to the realities of such abuse in culture at large. In this respect, I am concerned with interrogating the forms they deploy in order to deal with experiences of sexual and domestic violence, the ethics of spectatorship in their representations, and the showing of sexual violence without sensationalism. I explore the tensions of staging rape in particular, and the contrasting dramatic representations these playwrights adopt for such a disturbing subject matter. Fitzpatrick comments that,

> Women's writing of rape and sexual violence is often problematically received, reduced to anti-male polemic... and denied a complex aesthetic interpretation. Yet the issue remains central to women's dramatic writing, whether it is present in the workings of the plot or in small details of the characterization or setting, in Irish women's writing, rape, incest, sexual abuse and domestic violence are all recurring themes, represented in a wide variety of ways and different genres of writing and performance.[395]

In Ireland, there are strong traces of 'rape culture'– defined as a society whose prevailing social attitudes have the effect of twisting, normalising or trivialising sexual assault and abuse. As indicated by Mary McAuliffe, 'violence against women continues to be a major problem and institutional responses to a rape culture, which insists, still, on victim-blaming are slow to change.'[396] A persistent image is that a rape occurs when a woman is walking down the street and a 'stranger pulls you into an alleyway with a knife'. But this does not give an accurate picture of the problem. No longer should the person who commits sexual violence against a woman fall into the myth of an abstract monster on the street: it is the husband in bedroom; it is the young, successful, respected man that breaks into the house of a 72 year-old woman and rapes her.[397] It is misleading to pigeonhole a rapist as an outcast or a perversion of society. Rather, it is necessary to redefine the image of a sexual criminal. The 'monster' in the corner has become a monstrosity that needs to be socially addressed. In *The Game,* THEATREClub settles such received ideas about sexual assault by representing female experiences of the crime and by forcing an audience response through an uncomfortable narrative. Placing 'every-day' men from the general public in

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[395] Fitzpatrick, Lisa, in *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 199.
[396] McAuliffe, Mary, '*Afterword* Irish Feminisms: Past, Present and Future: 100 Years and Beyond' in *Irish Feminisms: Past, Present and Future,* p. 334.
[397] On the 24th September 2014, a 24 year-old man from Kerry, Anthony Hussey, broke into the house of an elderly woman, and raped her twice during the night. He was subsequently sentenced to 13 years imprisonment. See, www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/criminal-court/man-sentenced-to-13-years-for-raping-elderly-woman-1.2733743.

the position of those who have committed such violence makes for excruciating, uncomfortable viewing, as it further reiterates that rapists are very much part of everyday social fabric.

The destructive nature of violence in its physical, sexual and emotional sense, permeates contemporary media, politics, advertising, and popular culture. Portrayals of extreme violation against women in terms of harassment, sexual solicitation or cyber-bullying run the risk of normalising abuse. A clear indication can be seen in the online 'slut shaming' and victim blaming of the seventeen year-old 'Slane Girl' in 2013; who faced public humiliation after explicit pictures of her performing oral sex at an Eminem concert in Slane Castle went viral. New forms of misogynistic bullying have arisen due to the Internet, whereby the online language surrounding the case castigates the girl because 'she should have known better,' rather than penalising the men who filmed and uploaded the footage. This is particularly telling of the double standards of female sexuality, and the extent to which misogyny is still entrenched in society at large.[398]

In their book *Women, Violence and Male Power*, Jill Radford and Liz Kelly's interpretation of violence is that, 'far from being an aberrant experience in our lives or the experience of aberrant women, it is in fact the backdrop against which women's lives are lived. We have come to see male sexual violence as one of the defining characteristics of patriarchal societies.'[399] McAullife notes that one of the future challenges facing Irish feminists is 'the growing, vile and sexualized harassment of women and, in particular feminist activists online and for the sexualisation of young girls.'[400] The notion is that girls 'allow' themselves to be raped and, shockingly, certain sexual-assault prevention education programmes focus on women taking measures to prevent rape - instead of men being educated not to rape.[401] In an interview about her book, *Asking For It*, Louise

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[398] A further example of victim blaming and rape culture occurred in Castlegregory, Co. Kerry (Dec 2009) – Danny Foley was convicted of drugging and raping a 22 year-old woman outside a nightclub where he worked. After court he was met by the parish priest and a group of local people and who all shook his hand because they were there to support him. Later, his father commented on national radio, I don't want to make any judgment on her at all, but obviously the whole situation must have been embarrassing, for the police to happen upon them and what-not. She's the mother of a young child as well and, you know, that in itself doesn't look great. In Ireland a rape conviction is supposed to mean a seven-year sentence, he served three with a suspended sentence.

[399] Radford, Jill and Elizabeth A. Stanko, 'Violence against women and children: the contradictions of crime control and patriarchy', in *Women, Violence and Male Power: Feminist Research, Activism and Practice,* Marianne Hester, Liz Kelly and Jill Radford (eds.), (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p. 78.

[400] McAuliffe, Mary, '*Afterword* Irish Feminisms: Past, Present and Future: 100 Years and Beyond' in *Irish Feminisms: Past, Present and Future,* p. 335

[401] Everydayfeminim.com. http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/03/examples-of-rape-culture/

O'Neill notes that, 'too often society will only feel sympathy for victims of rape if they conform to a certain ideal - we don't tend to have too much sympathy for a woman who is sexually assaulted if she was a sex worker or if her clothes were too tight and too short.'[402] Such incidents examine society's penchant for victim-blaming whereby women are held to much more rigorous standards of sexual behaviour than men, and that shame and silence place blame on women when their bodies have been violated without consent. Margaret Martin, Director of Women's Aid, argues that 'listening, believing and supporting women affected by domestic violence must be a priority.'[403] Monica O'Connor goes further and believes that the hostility and resistance to feminism and discourses on gendered-based violence, 'is not only intentional and necessary for maintaining the structures of male power but it is also relentless and deliberate in rendering the purpose, intentionality and nature of men's violence against women invisible.'[404] Therefore, the reality for women to speak about their multiple experiences of violence and sexual abuse is essential.

Even today, of the forty-seven states of the Council of Europe, Ireland is still one of eighteen that has not signed the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.[405] It was actually as late as 1990 that marital rape was expressly recognised as a crime. Although only two men have ever been tried and convicted of the offence,[406] Noeline Blackwell, Chief Executive of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, makes the neccessary point that: 'certainly what we are seeing in terms of calls to the helpline and counselling sessions is not reflected in the numbers before the courts.'[407] Blackwell continues by saying that rape is notoriously difficult to prosecute, but marital rape appears to be more so. Horrifically, the latest case was in

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[402] O'Neill, Louise, 'Why I explore rape culture in my new book for teens', The Guardian, 2nd September 2015, accessed at: http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/sep/02/rape-culture-teen-book-louise-oneill.

[403] Women's Aid, Media Release: Domestic Violence Matters during #GE2016', 15th February 2015, accessed at: womensaid.ie/about/newsevents/news/2016/02/15/media-release-domestic-violence-matters-during-ge2/.

[404] O'Connor, Monica, 'Silencing Feminism: Making Sexual Exploitation Invisible and Legitimate' in *Where are we now?: New Perspectives on women in contemporary Ireland*, Ursula Barry (ed.), (Dublin: New Island, 2008), p. 134.

[405] United Nations General Assembly, 85th Plenary meeting 20th December 1983 48/104. Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women http://www.un.org. On the 28th May 2013 the National Women's Council of Ireland launched a new e-action campaign to show support for Ireland to sign the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence during Ireland's Presidency of the EU, at the end of June, 2013.
http://www.nwci.ie/index.php/learn/article/new_e_action_campaign_your_support_to_end_violence_against_women_in_ireland. Hfjskdf.

[406] Burke, John, 'Marital Rape… a crime with no punishment or sixteen years', *Sunday Tribune* (30th January 2011) Available online at hhtp://www.tribune.ie/.

[407] Blackwell, Noeline, cited in Kitty Holland's article, 'Marital rape conviction only second in Irish history', *Irish Times*, 26th July 2016, p. 5.

July 2016 when the court was told the husband threatened to cut his wife's face with a carving knife before raping her.[408]

Against this bleak picture, however, the turn of the last century does clearly mark a new found vocalism in Irish society, one that has engaged with the realities of sexual and domestic abuse for women. The Sexual Offences Bill published in November 2014 by Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald,[409] was a welcomed document which includes a wide range of reforms such as increased protection for children from grooming and rape, criminalising the purchase of prostitution without criminalising the person offering sexual services and permitting judges to impose court orders on convicted attackers, preventing them from contacting their victims. This bill looks to provide a more effective response to sexual offending and to new threats, such as online predatory actions. Ellen O'Malley Dunlop, former CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, commended the Minister and her officials on the 'sterling work that has gone into this publication,'[410] a positivity dampened only by the exclusion of a statutory definition of consent, which would help strengthen the legalisation of sexual offences. This is concerning given Ireland's appalling low rate of convictions I noted earlier.

In terms of theatrical representation, themes surrounding sexual violence tend to be embedded in the dramatic practice of many women playwrights and in their onstage experimentation with representing gender. In Irish drama particularly, Fitzpatrick suggests that, 'thematically, gender-based and sexual violence recur as naturalistic representations in the dramatic practice of many women playwrights. Unlike male-authored work, which tends to position sexual violence as a metaphor for the violence in Northern Ireland, women's writing generally tends to address issues of sexual violence as intimate and interpersonal.'[411] She believes that,

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[409] Minister Frances Fitzgerald also published the Heads of the new Bill on Domestic Violence in July 2015. The new measures contained within the bill will provide more protection for women in Domestic Violence situations, particularly the enhanced protection of and support for victims when they are going to court, the removal of the barrier of property ownership when applying for interim barring orders and the recognition of the new reality of online abuse. The Bill provides that a victim would be able to apply for an order to prevent the perpetrator from following or communicating with the victim, including by electronic means, other than for communications specifically specified by the court.

[410] Ellen O'Malley Dunlop, quoted in *The Irish Independent*, Dearbhail McDonald: 'New Sex Bill makes it a Crime to pay prostitutes for services', 24th September 2015

[411] Fitzpatrick, 'Women Writing Violence' in *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland*, p. 185.

> While such acts of violence are not absent from stage, they tend not to be the main focus of the dramatic action. In addition, they are often framed so that they communicate metaphorically: thus, the domestic violence in Daragh Carville's *Family Plot* refers to the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland: it functions primarily on that level, and the woman's subjective experience is not heard.[412]

The plays in this chapter, however, deal directly with the implications of violence against women, and require the audience to engage with this problem actively, both in the theatre and in society at large. THEATREClub, Spallen and Feehily openly place their concerns on the public stage and include female characters who speak and name experiences of abuse in contemporary culture. The physical, personal and violent nature of rape and male aggression is addressed, and does not serve as a dramatic metaphor for public or political struggles. Zoë Brigley Thompson and Sorcha Gunne, in their essay 'Feminism without Borders: The Potentials and Pitfalls of Re-theorizing Rape', reiterate that, 'The eponymous symbolism that equates the violation of women's bodies with the rape of land and culture has been challenged by feminists for perpetuating the view of women's bodies as a resource, property or guarded secret belonging to men.'[413] *The Game, Pumpgirl* and *Duck* renegotiate a place for female subjectivity away from the symbolic, and deal directly with the social and cultural implications of sexual and domestic violence. In doing so, they also invite close scrutiny of the relationship between violence and silence, provoking a conversation that engages with actual social realities. Much in line with my comments from before, silence, and an inability to talk about or even mention these issues, fosters a culture that denies the actuality of abuse, enables shame to fester within the victim and allows the perpetrator to go unpunished. These performances are driven by the narratives of previously denied or ignored voices and provide subjectivity to the violated female body. *The Game* addresses prostitution in Ireland and relies wholly on true-life testimonials of people in the sex trade, unearthing a sub-culture deeply rooted in generic, violent misogyny. *Pumpgirl* contains a horrific gang rape of a woman whose unconventional feminine representation complicates the association of sexual violence and male desire. In *Duck,* Feehily portrays the female body as a commodity for men, and violence as a means of control when subordination is strongly resisted. All three

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[412] Fitzpatrick, 'Introduction', *Performing Violence in Contemporary Ireland,* pp. 5-6.
[413] Brigley Thompson, Zoë and Sorcha Gunne, 'Feminism without Borders: The Potentials and Pitfalls of Re-theorizing Rape', in Zoë Brigley Thompson and Sorcha Gunne (eds.), *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation,* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 2.

plays deal with the actuality of gender violence but in none of them does this violence function simply as a dramatic metaphor for wider social situations. Extreme aggression surfaces when male 'power' is placed in jeopardy by the women protagonists: traditional notions of masculinity are presented at a point of crisis and, to reconstruct and retain their sense of identity, the men resort to sexual violence.

The Game: Endemic violence and prostitution: Can sex work ever be safe?

THEATREclub's *The Game* is a courageous exploration of acts surrounding the commerce of sex and subcultures of prostitution, its rules, its language and its power structures. The play is also a real-life game show, with levels and consequences, devised by Grace Dyas (director), Gemma Collins, Lauren Larkin with Rachel Moran and Mia De Faoite, alongside women who have left prostitution and those who are current sex workers. Moran and De Faoite, both former prostitutes, are now activists with SPACE International (Survivors of Prostitution–Abuse Calling for Enlightenment), an organisation formed to give voice to women who have survived the abusive reality of prostituion. Moran, author of *Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution*, was a key figure in SPACE International who gave evidence to the Irish Government in 2013. *The Game's* intention is to give audiences an insight into a reality that lies uncomfortably beneath the surface of day-to-day lives, the hidden world of prostitution in Ireland. The legislation of prostitution makes a statement about a society's values; the legal status of prostitution is a measure of that society. Laws around the world are changing and, in their mission statement, THEATREclub maintain, 'We think that theatre can change the world, by starting conversations that send ripples towards social change.'[414] Funded through an Arts Council Theatre Project Award, the play premiered on 7th October 2015 in The Project Arts Centre as part of Dublin Theatre Festival. Helen Meany's positive review was that 'THEATREclub's latest show is fearless, horrific and urgent, and presents a disturbing documentary collage of life in the prostitution industry.'[415]

THEATREclub worked closely over one year with women both in and now out of the sex trade, so that everything presented in the performance would be as faithful as possible to their experiences. Part of the script is derived from their own words, and part taken directly

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[414] THEATREclub, 'Uppercase Theatre, lower case club'.
[415] Meany, Helen, 'DTF Review, 'The Game': A complex exploration of the reality of prostitution'. *The Irish Times,* Thursday 8th October 2015. Accessed at http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/dtf-review-the-game-a-complex-exploration-of-the-reality-of-prostitution-1.2383805

from Moran's published work.[416] The title of the piece is a clear link to being 'on the game' and is guided by the two key performers, Gemma Collins and Lauren Larkin. Each performance adopts the same structure but is different in execution, as five different men partake in a range of scenarios each night. The men involved, with no prior acting experience, have previously responded to an online call-out from THEATREclub as volunteers to help engage in the issue of sex work in Ireland. The men have never played the 'game' before, and each night is different dependent on the choices they take through the course of the hour. With no script, and limited information of what is about to take place, they have chosen to be engaged as part of an event, a symbolic act that impacts on the audience – and themselves. In preparation for the show, these men had spent a few weeks working as a group with 'volunteer coordinator' Shaun Dunne, to consider, to think and to review misogyny in Ireland. They first meet Gemma and Lauren a few hours before the performance, and are introduced to the audience by reading out their personal reasons for their participation in the performance and why they want to address misogyny. In her review of the play, Meany points out that 'the men's enactment of a series of sexual transactions is a powerful method of exploring questions of abuse, violence and responsibility, here embodied and verbalised… What emerges, cumulatively, is the danger to which they are all exposed: the threat and the reality of brutal attacks, unspeakable abuse and rape.'[417]

A prior play in 2012, *Taking Back Our Voices,* was also a theatrical exploration of prostitution and trafficking in Ireland. Produced in collaboration with Ruhama[418] and survivors of prostitution and trafficking, it was staged after a six-month gestation period, where six women who worked as theatre-makers were partnered with six women who had been involved with prostitution, with the intention to create 'personal and honest' relationships and explore any dramatic material that might emerge. However, as Emma Creedon indicates, 'this intention is difficult to qualify as the Abbey Theatre's partnership with Ruhama (and hence its related political motives) could be interpreted as at odds with this alleged 'personal and honest' objective. In contrast, *The Game* uses the current debate about legislation, and offers nuanced perspectives on the criminalisation/de-criminalisation

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[416] Moran, Rachel, *Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution*, (New York, London: W.W.Norton & Company), 2013.
[417] Meany, *The Irish Times,* Thursday 8th October 2015.
[418] Ruhama is a voluntary organisation established in 1989 and based in Dublin that works with women affected by prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. Their mission statement is to offer assistance and opportunities to explore alternatives to prostitution and to work to change public attitudes, practices and policies that allow the exploitation of women through trafficking and prostitution.

of sex workers. The women's experiences are widely divergent and thus the performance resists a singular argument. Moreover, the production works to shift attention to men's roles and responsibilities. '*Taking Back Our Voices* strove to challenge what Ruhama considered to be contemporary misconceptions concerning the commercial sexual exploitation of women, notably that their involvement in prostitution is 'consensual and that prostitution should be legalized.'[419] However, Creedon goes on to suggest, that while 'this representation thus worked to de-glamourise, diffuse and re-appropriate the falsified eroticism of the commercial sex industry,'[420] by aligning themselves with Ruhama who, within the context of global debates on the issue, 'promote a radical feminist point viewpoint', the Abbey Theatre was taking a distinct political stance, and 'promoting the theatre as in favour of the criminalization of prostitution.'[421]

In *The Game's* performance the onus is cleverly placed on male involvement in prostitution, alleviating some of the responsibility traditionally placed on the sex worker herself. The audience is explicitly informed of the layout of the 'game' and the men's roles within it. First, they are to represent the actual men in each of the women's experiences. It is, however, heavily stressed that they do not have to pretend to be these men, rather they are to react to the circumstances simply as themselves. The audience is reminded this is 'a real life game, with rules, levels and consequences,'[422] and that everything disclosed is based on actual events. Lauren reasserts,

> Like everything we will look at tonight, we're here re-enacting this experience that two other people had, and I think that it's important that we stop here and talk about why we are doing this… this is not happening to us, this is not happening to me and you Robbie, when I was 15, I wasn't on this street. He doesn't drive a white van, you are not this man, you and I together, me and Robbie, are trying to show this for what it was really like.[423]

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[419] Creedon, Emma, 'Performative Reappropriation: A Case Study of *Taking Back Our Voices'*, in *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland,* Miriam Haughton and Mária Kurdi (eds.), p. 107.
[420] Ibid. p. 108.
[421] Ibid. p. 107.
[422] Due to the fact that each performance is different every night and relies only on an outline script, I am referencing from a recoded production that Grace Dyas provided for me. I have since transcribed the recording and from hereon will be using 'minutes' as page numbers. THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 00:06.
[423] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 00:17.

Second, 'the rules': consent is the golden rule, the men need not do anything they do not want to. They are given certain repeated lines in order to express their reactions to the game, and these can be vocalised at any time throughout the performance. These lines are 'I am not enjoying this, but I'll pretend to enjoy it' / 'this is not happening to me [name of the individual], this is happening to [name of the perpetrator]' / 'I am here to help'. If the men do not want to participate at any point, they can 'tag out' of the particular scenario and can be replaced with a different contestant/volunteer/male. At any point, the audience included, are free to leave the auditorium. It is permission for perceptual disembodiment, 'once the mind and the body are irretrievably fragmented, life becomes an out-of-body experience as s/he is constantly cut-off from his/her surroundings.'[424] It has particular resonance here in *The Game,* where each male volunteer is asked to 'step out' of his body and allow it to be used to help represent the experiences of the women's testimonials. It is a technique that stands in ironic contrast to the many women in prostitution, who are never granted this luxury.

Both Lauren and Gemma reiterate, 'My name is Gemma. This isn't happening to me, it happened to somebody else.'[425] These repeated refrains punctuate the piece and stress to the audience that this is a performance and is not actually happening – but that it did happen. These constant reminders to the audience of the veracity of each individual scenario highlight that this painful reality is ever-present and re-occurring. There is no attempt to cloak the experiences of these women and girls in the guise of acted performance, nor do Gemma or Lauren interpret or 'perform' these normally hidden voices. They are brutally honest testimonies from the underbelly of society that are so often consciously ignored. The intention is to work to understand what that situation might be like, to feel that depreciation, that violation, that abuse, and whether there really is any possibility of agency in a scenario in which a woman's body is bought and sold. In this way, the performance allows for the multi-layered voices of sex workers to be expressed through the bodies of two performers, giving vent to their conflicting perspectives, meanings and moralities. It is a demonstration of not one singular voice, but an indication of the wide variation of women and girls involved in prostitution, and the many different stances from which they speak, if they are even heard. The conflicting nature of their positions is indicated through Lauren and Gemma's opening address to the audience:

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[424] Creedon, in *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland,* p. 112.
[425] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 00:28.

> Lauren: I am here. I am standing. I am here. Streetlights, car lamps, we're on the street where we go to buy sex. You're here. Why are you watching this? *[Pace is building and building, frantic desperation]* You're in front of me; you're inside me, stop, the feelings, the sounds, the smells, the tastes. I am not what I am supposed to be. I have a right to do this. It's a game. It's a game. It's not a fucking game. You can't make me go away.[426]

> Gemma: My rights, my hands, my handbag, my eyes, my gender, my sexual abuse, my trauma, my fear, my humanity, my trafficking, my empowerment, my survival, I own it. It's mine. I shouldn't be here, I didn't choose to be here, I shouldn't be here talking about this.[427]

The Game dramatically sets out a series of powerful arguments, that prostitution is not just the oldest profession but also the oldest form of oppression, and that many sex workers are forced to invest mentally in a myth that they have power, have control, agency, are consenting. This forced myth serves purely to enable them to survive. As Moran acidly remarks, 'Academics who argue that prostitution should be considered ordinary work are very far removed from the reality of what prostitution is. You don't learn about prostitution in a university; you learn about it in a brothel.'[428] As such, the play hits at several targets at once. In the first instance, the criminalisation of prostitution is a highly contentious issue both globally and nationally. Second, it is a debate that divides feminist opinion. As Joyce Outshoorn suggests, 'although theoretically as many as four positions can be distinguished in feminist debates on prostitution… the major divide is between those feminists defending prostitution as sexual domination and the essence of women's oppression… and those who maintain prostitution is work that women can opt for, the sex work position.'[429]

The Game utilises the topic of prostitution as a synecdoche for the wider gender-based violence endemic in Irish society. Current debate surrounds the legal reforms to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act (1993) on prostitution that would criminalise the purchase of sexual services, though the person selling sexual services would not be subject

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[426] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 00:02.
[427] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 00:03.
[428] Moran, Rachel, quoted in 'The sex trade: safe or sordid?', *The Irish Times,* 4th May 2013, accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/the-sex-trade-safe-or-sordid-1.1382024.
[429] Outshoorn, Joyce, 'Introduction: Prostitution, Women's Movements and Democratic Politics', *The Politics of Prostitution: Women's Movements, Democratic States and the Globalisation of Sex Commerce,* Joyce Outshoorn (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), p.9.

to an offence. As matters stand, prostitution is not an offence under current Irish law, ss. 7 to 11 of the act prohibits soliciting, loitering, brothel-keeping, coercion into prostitution for gain or living on the earnings of the prostitution of another person, but not prostitution itself. The new Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2014, published in November, recommends legislative changes to the Act to place emphasis on the purchaser of sex and not to penalise the sex worker. Minister of Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald, commenting on her decision to introduce these legal reforms, stated: 'I am aware of the on-going debate surrounding prostitution and of the views of both sides of the debate. However, I strongly believe that this proposal is the best suited to address the trafficking and exploitation associated with prostitution. It sends a clear message that purchasing sexual services contributes to exploitation.'[430]

In June 2013, the Governments' Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality returned the recommendation that the 'Nordic Model' be passed into Irish Law, and in November 2014, the Irish Government announced their decision to implement the tenets of this Nordic Model. This approach represents some success for the *Turn Off the Red Light Campaign* (TORL), a coalition comprised of sixty-eight organisations including feminists, health care professionals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from civil and religious society and individuals, and spearheaded by the Immigrant Council of Ireland, and supported by the National Women's Council of Ireland. The campaign lobbied the Irish government to adopt the 'Swedish model' (and other Nordic countries),[431] to end prostitution and sex trafficking in Ireland by criminalising the purchase of sex. In 2001, Sweden had introduced the first law criminalising the buying of sexual services under a broad violence against women bill, acting to criminalise men who buy sex and decriminalise the women who sell it. In introducing the bill, the Deputy Prime Minister said that it was incompatible with a society committed to equality to have some women for sale for the purpose of sexual exploitation.'[432] Kate Homquist, in *The Irish Times,* makes the point that 'proponents say it encourages the women to report violence to the police and to identify themselves to people who want to help them leave prostitution. The Swedish

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[430] Press release, 27th November 2014, Accessed at: www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR14000349. Accessed on 10th April 2015.

[431] Holland, Kitty, 'Amnesty votes to decriminalize sex work and prostitution' in *The Irish Times,* Tuesday August 11th 2015. Accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/amnesty-votes-to-decriminalise-sex-work-and-prostitution-1.2313863.

[432] Winberg, M, Swedish Deputy Prime Minister, in *Seminar on the effects of Legalisation of Prostitution Activities; A Critical Analysis organized by the Swedish Government,* 5-6 November, Sweden, 2002.

model also promotes the strong social message that prostitution is exploitation and a form of violence against the body, and that it is always wrong.'[433]

Central to my thesis is the belief that no single narrative can describe Irish womanhood, rather, it requires a plurality of voices that contest stigmatising social labels and simple binaries. In terms of prostitution, 'good versus evil' is too simplistic: pitched against a clear spectrum of morality, TORL conflates many different and complex phenomena. For example, the reality of poverty, addiction, smuggling, trafficking all impact on aspects of sex work. Some critics believe that making prostitution illegal pushes this already vulnerable group further underground, and fails to protect the rights of women who choose to be in the sex industry.[434] Although, in the abstract, the change in the law might appear positive, by shifting the burden of criminality from women firmly to their clients, most sex workers believe the new law actually makes their work much more unsafe. In this respect, the Sex Workers Alliance Ireland (SWAI) advocate a 'harm reductionist approach' and argue that criminalisation of sex work will simply drive the industry out of sight, potentially creating further harm to women. Kate McGrew, co-ordinator of SWAI, claims that under the new legislation, a client does not face a prison sentence while a sex worker can be criminalised.[435] She asks 'Do the Government and TDs and Senators actually think they know more about the impact and effect of criminalisation on the rights of sex workers than sex workers themselves?... Let's be clear, this Bill does nothing to decriminalise workers. If these changes so blatantly target sex workers, then who is this legislation for?'[436] These on-going debates between TOTRL and the Sex Workers Alliance are teased out through *The Game.* In one scenario Lauren asks the audience,

> If all sex that involves money is called rape, what do I call it if you actually rape me? There's a difference. We need to decriminalize sex work. If I can easily work with other sex workers then, together, we can address the risks, we can have better security services, we can screen clients. The violence that you are talking about in these other stories is a direct result of the stigma directed at us. 'De-crim' lessens this

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[433] Homquist, Kate, 'The sex trade: Safe or sordid?' in *The Irish Times,* 4th May 2014, http://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-the/the-sex-trade-or-sordid-1.1382024

[434] Holland, 'Amnesty votes to decriminalize sex work and prostitution' in *The Irish Times,* Tuesday August 11th 2015.

[435] Quoted from Sorcha Pollak, 'Sex Workers face jail time under new legislation, warns alliance', *The Irish Times* 23rd January 2016. Accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/sex-workers-face-jail-time-under-new-legistlation-warns-allaince-1.2508387.

[436] Quoted from The Workers Solidarity Movement web page of Kate McGrew speaking at the Fine Gaelard fheis on

> stigma. I believe in campaigning to eradicate poverty and addiction. The problem is not where you think the problem is. I don't need to be rescued.[437]

In Ireland, changes to the law also bring the government into direct confrontation with Amnesty International. Amnesty voted in 2015 to decriminalise all aspects of the commercial sex trade, with the aim of human rights for all, including those who choose to sex work. Amnesty argue that,

> When sex workers are no longer seen and treated as 'criminals' or 'accomplices' they are less at risk of aggressive police tactics and can demand and enjoy better relationships with and protection from police. Decriminalisation returns rights to the workers, making them free agents… The policy proposed by Amnesty International aims to provide greater human rights protection for sex workers - who are often among the most marginalised women in society - by arguing for greater protection and empowerment of women sex workers.[438]

They are also particularly critical of the proposed Irish legislation, based on the Nordic model because, even though sex workers are not directly criminalised, operational aspects such as purchasing sex and renting premises to sell sex, are still criminalised. This they believe, compromises sex workers safety and leaves them vulnerable to abuse and prosecution.[439]

The feminist debates are equally conflictual, not least around issues of agency: can women choose to use their bodies in this (or any) way, or are they the subjects of coercion and oppression? So, on the one side, Eilis Ward summarises her arguments by saying, 'we have to conceive the sex trade on a continuum of exploitation, and public policy should reflect that reality. This black-and-white definition of the sex trade that promotes criminalization does not reflect the reality. Philosophically, and as a feminist and as a social scientist, I don't have the right to tell any woman that she is misguided or suffering from false consciousness … [D]isempowering myths have emerged in Ireland that function to silence

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[437] THEATREclub, *The Game*, performance timing, 51:00.
[438] Amnesty International, 'Q&A: Amnesty Policy on Human Rights of Sex Workers', accessed at https://www.amnesty.ie/news/qa-amnesty-policy-humans-rights-sex-workers.
[439] Amnesty International, 'Q&A: Amnesty Policy on Human Rights of Sex Workers', accessed at https://www.amnesty.ie/news/qa-amnesty-policy-humans-rights-sex-workers.

and disqualify and shame.'[440] In their article 'Problematizing Prostitution in Law and Policy in the Republic of Ireland: A Case for Reframing', Sharron FitzGerald and Kathryn McGarry, suggest that 'whilst there are abuses associated with prostitution, commercial sex need not be inherently exploitative; and it is those attempts to abolish prostitution, and the attitudes underpinning such attempts, that feed into the creation of an abusive climate for sex workers that must be changed.'[441] Sex Workers Alliance Ireland add,

> Accordingly, sex workers are constructed as victims whose choices regarding their bodily autonomy do not signify genuine consent, and rather the financial incentive involved is said to exemplify a form of coercion in which sex workers are constructed as a passive objects of patriarchal violence. Whilst this view claims to be genuinely concerned with the welfare of women, it erases the voices and agency of sex workers whose choices are seen as misguided manifestations of "false consciousness".'[442]

It is this 'false consciousness' that lies at the heart of the debate, where a woman being prostituted is seen to deny and dissociate from the psycho-social reality of her situation, 'the nature of sex is mutuality, the moment money enters the frame 'mutuality' gets discarded, prostitution is not selling sex, it is selling sexual access.' As Catherine MacKinnon states, 'when fear and despair produce acquiescence and acquiescence is taken to mean consent, consent is not a meaningful concept.'[443] Speaking out in *The Irish Times* against the 'happy hooker narrative', Rachel Moran contends that, 'the reality is the vast majority of the women and girls in the brothels and the red light zones are there because they have been harmed through previous life experiences beyond their control, like poverty, educational disadvantage and childhood sexual abuse.'[444] What decriminalising or legislative regimes create in a society is a normalisation and a commodification of sex and the female body. Moran, in her interview with *The Huffington Post America*, claims that in places like Germany, where full legalisation of sex work is in place, 'you see brothels, 12 storeys high, built to service 1000 men a day, and they do, with sign up for lunch time

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[440] Dr Eilis Ward quoted in Kate Homquist, 'The sex trade: Safe or sordid?' in *The Irish Times,* 4th May 2014, http://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/the-sex-trade-safe-or-sordid-1.1382024

[441] FitzGerald, Sharron, McGarry, Kathryn, 'Problematizing Prostitution in Law and Policy in the Republic of Ireland: A Case for Reframing' in *Social and Legal Studies* 25(3), June 2016, p. 4.

[442] 'Sex Workers Say "No" To The Sexual Offences Bill', accessed at http://www.wsm.ie/c/sex-workers-no-sexual-offences-bill-ireland. 02-04-2016.

[443] MacKinnon, Catherine, *Women's Lives and Men's Laws,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), p. 260.

[444] Moran, Rachel, 'The Life of an anti-prostitution campaigner' in *The Irish Times,* 29th May, 2015. Accessed at, www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/the-life-of-an-anti-prostitution-campaigner-1.2230971

deals, special deals for the OAP and the unemployed, women have been turned into just a commodity like anything else in these countries, it is extremely dehumanizing, it's an insult actually to all women.'[445] In her accounts, Mia de Faoite, a street prostitute between 2005 - 2010, says 'Prostitution is a gross infringement of human dignity. I was standing beside 18 year-olds [who were] being abused by 60 year-olds, and that is a moral issue. I have seen so much suffering out there. We laughed a lot on the streets, but if you cried you would never stop – and if you got angry you would kill somebody,'[446] In her book chapter 'Silencing Feminism: Making Sexual Exploitation Invisible and Legitimate', Monica O'Connor, too, bemoans the fact that even one of the fundamental demands of the women's movement, that women have the right to choose what to do with their own bodies, 'is now used to promote the idea that women 'choose' to sell their own bodies for sexual exploitation, ignoring the constrained and limited context in which women and girls are forced into sexual exploitation.'[447] She adds, 'the sex industry has continued to successfully colonise the language of feminism and human rights in defending prostitution as a legitimate *career* for women and a *service* for men.'[448] This promotes a culture of silence and an underbelly of acceptability, while what feminists have always struggled for is a liberating sexuality for women and men based on equal, mutual, consensual sex for heterosexual, gay lesbian and bi-sexual people: 'What feminism challenged was our acceptance as a society of men's need or right to sex without consent and negotiation, whether it is in relationships, marriage, with strangers, in prostitution or in the so called fantasy world of pornography.'[449]

This challenge has never been so important. The evidence from countries like the Netherlands,[450] where legalisation has occurred, is damning. O'Connor proposes that legalisation, 'hasn't protected the rights, the safety or the health of women; in fact the dangerous coercive conditions, the levels of violence and sexual exploitation have only increased.'[451] From such examples it is clear, she argues, that 'when legal barriers

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[445] Ibid.
[446] Mia de Faoite – a street prostitute between 2005-2010. Cited in Kate Homquist, 'The sex trade: Safe or sordid?' in *The Irish Times,* 4th May 2014, accessed at: http://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-the/the-sex-trade-or-sordid-1.1382024
[447] O'Connor, Monica, 'Silencing Feminism: Making Sexual Exploitation Invisible and Legitimate' in *Where Are We Now? Now Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 155.
[448] Ibid.
[449] Ibid, p.162.
[450] See also Jeffreys, S and O'Sullivan, M, 'Legalising Prostitution is not the answer: the Example of Victoria Australia' in *Special Issue: The Case Against Legalising Prostitution, Violence Against Women: an International and Interdisciplinary Journal,* 10(10), *Sage*, October 2004.
[451] O'Connor, *Where Are We Now? Now Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 156.

disappear, so too do the social and ethical barriers to treating women as sexual merchandise, sending the message to men and boys that women are sexual commodities to be bought.'[452] Gunilla Ekberg agrees that, by making prostitution legal, men get to perpetrate on some women and girls what is unwanted and abusive and has been illegal and unacceptable on women in general.[453] Male abusers can then act with impunity safe in the knowledge that these women as prostitutes will be unable to report any exploitation as they will not be taken seriously by the judicial system. As Judith Herman observed: 'Women in prostitution (thus) exist as sexualized, commodified bodies to be appropriated, dissected, fragmented, used and abused in the interests of male biology and its need for variety, sexual fantasy and hegemony.'[454] Upon entering prostitution it is immediately clear that there is no such thing as respect for human rights or physical boundaries as soon as a client buys power over the woman. O'Connor maintains that it is the alliance of sexual liberals and the sex industry that has 'distorted the notion that of consent to legitimise the contract between the buyer and the bought, describing prostitution as a mutual contract in which both people have equal power.'[455]

The sex industry's credentials of being populated by 'liberated choice' appear fraudulent considering the reasons that many find themselves in prostitution. Abuse, homelessness, poverty, marginalization, family breakdown are just some of the lights illuminating the path to prostitution.

> Gemma: She is a sex worker, she is here to respond to a demand that will never go away. Her hands are her own. Her breasts are hers. She owns her vagina. And it can't be bought. She's providing a service.[456]
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> Lauren: She is a prostitute. She is here to be used by men to stop men from raping other women. That's the role of these hands, these breasts, this vagina. And she can't make herself like it.[457]

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[452] Ibid.
[453] Gunilla Ekberg, 'The International Debate about Prostitution and Trafficking in Women: Refuting the Arguments' in *Seminar on the effects of Legalisation of Prostitution Activities; A Critical Analysis organized by the Swedish Government,* 5/6 November, Sweden, 2002.
[454] Herman, Judith, *Trauma and Recovery; From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror,* (London: Pandora, 1992,) Cited in O'Connor, *Where Are We Now? Now Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 154.
[455] O'Connor, *Where Are We Now? Now Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 155.
[456] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 00:02.
[457] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 00:02.

The debates surrounding control and choice, exploitation and abuse, run strongly through this opening sequence. The two performers' voices crescendo in speed and volume, their speech overlaps word on word, the audience are reminded that there is no one stable voice or perspective. Instead, the multiple voices of the women in sex work are provided with a platform. Their dialogue speaks of the demands of ownership of their bodies, and yet the ever increasingly frantic nature of their tone suggests the impossibility of such autonomy. Lauren and Gemma frequently break from the performance and rely on audio inserts through which to control and orchestrate, to guide the action and while they privately address the male volunteers. This is a clever dramatic device that highlights how little control and agency women in the sex trade can ever really obtain. It creates nuanced views on sex work, the contrasting situations in which individual women find themselves - while the notions of consent and safety are recurring threads throughout the narratives.

Within the current legalities of sex work in Ireland, it is fully legal for a solitary person to discuss sex on the telephone. If a client, however, was to book a sex worker through a third party, or if Lauren and Gemma, say, were not acting alone but working together, or if Gemma was working from a brothel (all scenarios that would potentially lessen the risk to the sex worker), that would then be illegal. Hence the source of the argument that, by criminalising the situations in which sex workers might actually be safer, the law fosters the greater invisibility of the sex trade, and thereby places women's lives at further risk. Gemma turns to the audience, and informs them:

> In Sweden, and soon to be here in Ireland, it is being debated right now in the Senead, you would be a criminal for this [handing over money for sex], it's what's known as the Nordic model, the idea is that you're the criminal because you are exploiting me, I'm the victim. In Holland, all sex work is legal… This is never going away. It is the oldest profession, it's not about values, it's about keeping people safe.[458]

The issue of consent is paramount within the performance, for those partaking, but also on a wider scale, the (im)possibility of consent for sex workers. In one scenario, the audience witnesses two consenting adults, she is there for the money, he is there for the service.

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[458] THEATREclub, *The Game*, performance timing 00:22.

Then the scenario takes a swift turn and the 'man' involved attempts to assault and choke the woman. Gemma asks,

> What happens if you break the rules? In Holland this [the act of buying sex] is legal. Does that mean I can go to the police after you leave? In Sweden, since you are the criminal, this would push us underground. What's the difference? You could kill me right now, if you really wanted to. [459]

The polemical nature of the argument between criminalising and decriminalising sex workers is articulated in a forceful manner. *The Game's* dramatic representation of the debate is a powerful means of visualising the dilemmas involved, and humanises those who are normally marginalised and ignored, giving faces to the anonymous.

> Gemma: The Nordic model strives to end demand for all paid sex because it is impossible to ensure that the risk of violence and harm can ever be eliminated. It is impossible to protect the people that are forced into this. If there is a demand, there will always be a supply, and so we must end the demand.[460]

The Game provides a provocative vehicle through which to engage with misogyny and violence against women, calling for men, and society as whole, to stop the demand. It is not merely about legislation, but rather personal and collective responsibility. These women are faceless, merely objectified bodies because, if they are given individuality, they become somebody's sister, daughter, mother. Men availing of prostitution rely on dehumanising the woman in order to justify their own consciousness. They want it, they enjoy it, "I've paid, I can do what I like, their body is at my disposal". Moran argues that one of the cornerstones that supports the sex trade is 'the male insistence on offloading onto another class of women perversions they cannot reasonably expect to present to the women in their lives. Here, women are very distinctly divided into the respectable and the contemptible, the decent and the disreputable, the revered and reviled.'[461] In this respect, the individual testimonies and scenarios of abuse are extraordinarily vivid and distressing. In one account, a woman is paid to provide an enema, and the audience is told that she had to put her whole arm up this man's rectum. The audience experience this woman's pain

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[459] Ibid., 00:23.
[460] Ibid., 24:00
[461] Moran, Rachel, *Paid For My Journey Through Prostitution,* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, Inc., 2013), p. 85.

both through Lauren and the men participants on stage. The description is so harrowing, recounting the smells, the gagging, it creates a strong visual memory that generates a visceral reaction in the audience. It is not delivered as judgmental, just as appalling. This particular scenario is followed by an account of a sex worker's graphic experience of being raped and robbed. She is then picked up by a regular client, who repeats the process. She recalls, 'I didn't even argue with you. I just leaned back and let you at me.'[462] In a later sequence, Lauren informs a male volunteer,

> Lauren: You picked me up on the street. I told you, I said, I only do hand relief and oral, I don't do intercourse. And you agreed. Now that we are in your apartment you are having sex with me whether I like it or not and I'm not having any of it. I don't want to be raped.[463]

This does not represent choice nor does it represent consent. In Moran's terms, it represents what happens to people driven by poverty, illustrating the effects of desperation, manipulation that coerces, forces young girls and women into prostitution. She argues,

> First, it is not possible to consent to a lifestyle you do not comprehend. It is only possible to consent to a lifestyle you imagine it to be, and it is not possible to grasp an accurate comprehension of prostitution until you are already immersed in it. Secondly, many of the prostituted are not adults, and so are in no position to 'consent' to any form of sex with an adult.[464]

In *The Game*, these horrific experiences are interspersed with more positive ones in which the sex workers mentioned are not economically deprived, addicted to narcotics or 'unemployable'. These women do present some kind of agency,

> Lauren: I am a sex worker, I am a mother and I have a degree… Because I advertise online, all my boundaries, all my limits and everything I want in a client is on there… Women enjoy sex just as much as men, we enjoy and we can make money out of it.[465]

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[462] *The Game*, performance timing, 00:34
[463] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 48:00.
[464] Moran, *My Journey Through Prostitution,* p. 50.
[465] THEATREclub, *The Game,* 00:36-00:37.

Moran, however, counters this with the argument that, if freedom is universally accepted as one of the fundamental necessities for contentment in human life, the 'happy hooker' image can be no more than a myth that makes no logical sense, because 'the distinguishing feature of any free person is that their body is inviolable, while the distinguishing mark of the prostitute is that her body is not.'[466] If a prostitute does not experience life or her body as a free person might, how can such circumstances lead to happiness? In this vein, while some women may be content and want to engage in sex work, may enjoy their work, they might also refuse to speak of any 'bad experience'. Moran therefore believes, 'they are not women who to fail to *recognize* the true state of affairs, they are women who refuse to *acknowledge* it.'[467] She quotes Andrea Dworkin, that 'most maligned' of feminists: 'Prostitution is not an idea. It is the mouth, the vagina, the rectum, penetrated usually by a penis, sometimes hands, sometimes objects, by one man and then another and then another and then another and then another.'[468] Maureen O'Connor makes the point that, 'Women exploited in pornography and prostitution consistently document that men want them to pretend that they are enjoying it, to smile and to act as if they are having sexual pleasure no matter what is happening to them including violence and abuse.'[469] Similarly, John Stoltenberg strongly believes that pornography institutionalizes and eroticises male supremacy. 'It makes dominance and subordination feel like sex; it makes force and violence feel like sex; it makes hate and terrorism feel like sex; it makes inequality feel like sex. Pornography keeps sexism sexy. It keeps sexism necessary for some people to have sexual feelings...in fact the sexual freedom represented by pornography is the freedom of men to act sexually in ways that keep sex a basis for inequality.'[470]

In the performance, music plays over Lauren as she describes to the man volunteer how the next set of circumstances will unfold. The audience watch as he pulls out a gun, chases Lauren round the bed and she screams hysterically, she is shoved face down on the bed, sobbing uncontrollably. He then demands that Lauren perform oral sex, which she simulates while making gagging noises and almost vomiting on the bed. This is particularly difficult to watch and experience, for both the man volunteer and the audience.

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[466] Moran, Rachel, *Paid For My Journey Through Prostitution,* p. 151.
[467] Ibid, p. 159.
[468] Dworkin, Andrea, 'Prostitution and Male Supremacy Symposium: Prostitution: From Academia to Activism', in *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law,* Vol. 1, 1993, p. 2.
[469] O'Connor, in *Where Are We Now? Now Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 150.
[470] Stoltenburg, John, *Refusing to be a Man: Essays on Social Justice, Revised Edition,* (London: University College London, 2000), p. 114.

Throughout this scenario, the overtly uncomfortable volunteer repeats the lines given for when he feels distressed, reminding the audience and himself, that

> Man: I am not enjoying this, but I'll pretend to enjoy it / This is not happening to me [name of the individual], this is happening to [name of the perpetrator].[471]

The audience is once again reminded that this is not happening here, but that it did happen somewhere. Lauren's body is exposed, wearing just her bra and knickers, the man is fully clothed, the awareness that the girl in the story is 15, the noise of the screaming, crying and gagging, the sight of the gun, all have a powerful and profound effect. The vulnerability and fear of the girl is made all the more distressing with the realisation that, though the theatre is a safe place, this was all happening - and did happen - just outside its walls. The audience is confronted with the undiluted violence and risk faced by these women, the underside of life that occurs daily, and yet the realities of which society chooses to ignore.

> Gemma: I'm not thinking about what's going on here in this moment. I'm thinking about rotten smells that make me gag, I'm thinking about tasting something gone off, like drinking gone off milk or something, that feeling, I'm thinking about trying to put some random man's whole dick in my mouth, I'm thinking about what that feel like. I'm thinking about you, and what this is like for you watching this.[472]

Gemma draws upon the senses powerfully to guide her journey, to re-live the experience, even though the story does not belong to her. It relies upon the audience's own collective understanding of experience – such as drinking gone-off milk – to relate and bridge the gap between the individual, personal horror of these women's experiences. This is followed by a simulated 'snapshot' of Gemma fellating one of the volunteers whilst she obviously gags. He is asked to hold both hands on the back of her head and say 'you're so beautiful when you're doing that' as she gags. He is then asked to slap the woman's face, illustrating the dangerous slippage between sex, violence and power, particularly rife in prostitution. The performance speaks the unspeakable, shows the un-showable, and forces the audience to experience the unimaginable. Later, Gemma breaks from a 'rape scenario' to question the audience, 'are we doing the right thing here? Are we doing the right thing in showing you

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[471] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 00:48.
[472] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:01.

this?[473] She calls for light on stage and searches for a response from the audience. One member of the audience responds: 'I don't know. I find it very troubling watching you.'[474] As an audience member, this production had a profound effect on me and has remained with me since. It is excruciatingly uncomfortable viewing, but certainly demanded that I consider the realities of sex work in Ireland and also gender-based sexual violence in society at large.

The final experience is the most traumatic. Gemma describes a scenario where two girls, one named Jenny [re-enacted by Lauren], were offered a job for a Christmas business men's party, under the impression that it would be only a few men, one of whom Jenny already knew well. Jenny, described as, 'a friendly, bright, kind person and an extremely loyal friend'[475], had only come down to Dublin to buy her son some special gifts for Christmas, she is intentionally personalized for the audience. She describes that they had agreed terms, what was allowed and what wasn't, 'we were paid in full and we got on with it.'[476] Gemma proceeds to remove her bra and knickers as she describes what occurred, the volunteer men, now dressed in white clinical masks, place a plastic sheet over the bed while Lauren [as Jenny] also strips bare and they climb naked onto the bed and drape themselves over each other. The now faceless men form a circle around this tableau. The voice of Gemma that began the narration of the event is replaced with a recording of the woman to whom this had actually happened. The audience hears:

> Woman on audio: The next thing my hair was pulled. I was pushed over the sofa and then it began. I was dragged back into the bedroom where myself and Jenny were subjected to an unimaginable horror. We were raped both anally and orally as well. We were like rag dolls, not even, we were just objects to be passed around. My skin was crawling, my insides felt somewhere in my throat. I wanted to die.[477]

As this horrific ordeal is described from first hand experience, the audience bear witness to Lauren and Gemma's spotlighted naked bodies crouched over each other on the bed, whimpering and groaning. The exposure of their bare backs and wigs now removed visually reiterate the unimaginable yet real horror to which these women were subjected.

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[473] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:05.
[474] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:05.
[475] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:10.
[476] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:11.
[477] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:12.

Their vulnerable naked flesh presses the brutal reality onto the audience, as witness. The faceless men are seen squirting both a red and clear liquid over the two women's backs, serving as a horrific visual representation of the blood and semen that was pouring onto and from these women's bodies as the recording describes. This moment is made all the more harrowing by the screams and panic emitted by Gemma and Lauren lasting minutes, but seeming never to stop. The woman's audio continues,

> I looked at Jenny and I couldn't protect her, she was much younger than me, much thinner and weaker. I looked at the man who was on top of me, I looked straight into his eyes. I thought, can't you see me, can't you hear me scream? And I will never forget the eyes that looked back at me, for they were blank, he looked straight through me. There was one man who did nothing to us, and it is his face I remember, the others are faceless to me. They tried to insert objects inside us. Jenny was placed on a chair with her legs wide open, I'm sorry but I cannot speak about what happened next, but eventually it ended and they left…I left that building with a bruised face and body smelling of urine and bleeding from my rectum.[478]

Now spot lit and alone on the stage, the performers are sprawled naked on the bed covered with smeared red blood-like liquid. Gemma attempts to dress herself and the broken Lauren, crying hysterically, clearly in excruciating pain. The 'underground reality' of prostitution, and the embedded incidents of degradation and unimaginable horror are brutally exposed. The rape of sex workers is problematic as society tends to shun or hide such experiences, due to the very nature of their profession, however, here, the audience is implicated in this brutal rape and the very humanity of these women is brought to the fore. The audience is asked,

> Woman on audio: Do you now understand why I couldn't see the choices anymore? As for my friend Jenny, she died. Her drug use spiralled out of control and she died alone of an overdose about two months later. It may have been heroin in her arm the day she died, but I know what really killed her… Maybe you have to be present, maybe you have to witness the rape of another with your own eyes, be in the same room, be less than ten foot away from your friend as she is being violently abused and you can do nothing to help her because you are held down, because your own body is being mauled at and violated by others in a heinous way. You plead, you beg, you

[478] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:12.

> cry, you offer yourself to the few that are attacking her in the hope that her pain will ease, you watch as her eyes sink into the back of her head as the last shred of her dignity is removed.[479]

Lauren and Gemma visually represent this horror. Their screams and panic sit excruciatingly uncomfortably with the calm, resigned voice of the woman on audio telling the pain of her past, that remains impinged permanently on her present. Following this nearly unfathomable story, the five volunteer men are asked to re-read their reasons for participating in the performance and why they want to address misogyny. One volunteer man is visibly distressed through his reading, he speaks of his daughters and their safety, which to me highlights how powerful and important the production is at reminding that sexual assault and rape of women is not by some monster in an alleyway, it is very much a lived reality.

In the final moments, Lauren and Gemma face the audience, who are reminded that in this safe theatre space, the conditions were controlled, the rules were established and adhered to, but not everybody is afforded such a luxury. Gemma informs,

> Gemma: the rules are there for freedom, for justice, for the greater good, the rules kills us, the rules keep us safe. In any game, some people lose and some people gain.
>
> Lauren: And this is what we are up against. Everyone can't have what they want but we are here. We are standing here, and we do have a choice.
>
> Gemma: It's the oldest profession and it's the oldest form of oppression and we do not have to accept that it is never going away. It's about weighing up, it's about the greater good. The trouble is, you lose your ability to weigh up successfully the longer you play the game. We don't have to live in a world where everything is for sale, follow the money, examine the power. I can get through this, I can get through this, it was only an hour.[480]

A deathly, sinister, painful silence ensues, exposing an area of society steeped in violent misogyny and deep communal denial.

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[479] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:15.
[480] THEATREclub, *The Game,* performance timing 01:18-19.

The Game demands that society no longer sits in silence and allows such gruesome torture to take place. While prostitution is a well known reality, it is an altogether more difficult task to bear witness to the full horrors of the abuse in practice. *The Game* effectively makes the audience viewers of something that damages, degrades and debases women, far more so than the men simply paying for sex. By staying wilfully ignorant of such violence, is society not complicit in its existence? As Moran articulates, 'talk about trying to reduce the levels of violence in prostitution is pointless and inane. If physical violence was never encountered in prostitution, if nobody had ever raised a hand against a woman in the history of prostitution, violence would still be inescapable for prostituted women because prostitution *is* violence against women.'[481] How can there ever be sufficient legislation to protect these women, normally the most vulnerable and impoverished in society? Moran contends that, 'what you are actually doing when you prostitute yourself is sanctioning and accepting payment for the sexual abuse of your own body. You go through all negative feelings of sexual abuse, but in the sanctioning of it you have effectively gagged yourself.'[482] Such silence compounds sexual abuse, as more women are shamed into silence, and more misconceptions grow as to what constitutes sexual abuse, and culturally, who is allowed to speak of it, and responsible. While different sides of the debate both campaign for women's rights and safety, *The Game* attempts to explore the complexities of the issues from the perspectives of the people it affects most directly, the sex workers. Here the sex workers' voices are not excluded from the discussion (as they are from debates in the Oireachtas).

Pumpgirl: The silent scream of gang rape

In contrast to *The Game's* simulation, the horror of sexual violence in *Pumpgirl* is never physically visible. Abbie Spallen's play, directed by Mike Bradwell, was first produced in 2006 for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, premiered at The Bush Theatre London and subsequently toured to New York in 2007. It was awarded the Susan Smith Blackburn Award and Stuart Parker Trust Award, as well as being nominated for *The Irish Times* Theatre Award for Best New Play. *Pumpgirl* is constructed by monologues from three characters and builds a narrative around two incidents, one, a consenting act of infidelity, the second, a brutal gang rape. It is a disturbing portrayal of the violence embedded in 21st

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[481] Moran, *Paid For My Journey Through Prostitution,* p. 115.
[482] Ibid., p. 107.

century western culture. Spallen puts three characters on stage, the androgynous Pumpgirl (Orla Fitzgerald), her married lover Hammy (James Doran), and his wife Sinead (Maggie Hayes). It is Sinead's and Pumpgirl's monologues that frame the main narrative and they often undermine Hammy's sequence of events, exposing fraught discrepancies within his monologues. The unseen characters of formidable Shawshank and McManus are brought to life in quick verbal snapshots through Pumpgirl's narrative. The horrific gang rape that governs the narrative explores an anxiety towards the propensity for sexual violence and exploitation in an increasingly complex world of unstable and outmoded identity roles.

Moniza Alvi notes that 'rape, increasingly in the public eye as a global as well as a national concern, paradoxically still bears the stigma of the taboo, of that about which we dare not speak or write.'[483] Both *The Game* and *Pumpgirl* resist this taboo and not only dare to speak it, but confront loudly a culture that would rather hide than listen to reality. One difference between the plays is the means through which they stage rape. As Zoe Brigley Thompson and Sorcha Gunne postulate, 'for second-wave feminism the primary objective was to put rape on the agenda in an effort to prevent it from occurring. Now what is at stake is not just whether we speak about rape or not, but how we speak about rape and to what end.'[484] When staging violence, Fitzpatrick suggests that,

> The creation of a sense of threat can be more effective than the witnessing of the act of violence itself: the capacity of the violence to exist at the edges of human imagination before it is enacted on stage allows the full range of possible horror to exist momentarily for the individual spectator. The fear of what might happen, of the unknown, is greater than the witnessing of an act.[485]

With this in mind, rape is cautiously represented in *Pumpgirl* and, in conjunction with Fitzpatrick's belief of staging violence, the horror of the gang rape is gradually built and intensified through the use of ironic pathos within a sequence of monologues from Hammy and Pumpgirl. The audience are invited into the characters' inner emotions that intermittently unravel the men's sexual intent and Pumpgirl's painful naivety.

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[483] Alvi, Moniza, in Forward 'An Unsafe Subject', in *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives,* p. xi.
[484] Brigley-Thompson and Gunne, 'Feminism without Borders: The Potentials and Pitfalls of Re-theorizing Rape', in *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives,* p. 3.
[485] Fitzpatrick, 'Signifying Rape, Problems of Representing Sexual Violence on Stage', in *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives,* p. 191.

The use of sensory language in the present tense encourages a visceral reaction in the audience, in which visual attention is on the solitary girl on stage, while the horror of sexual violence forms in graphic mental images. This choice of tense places the audience in the uncomfortable helpless position of witness; complicit yet silent. Pumpgirl clinically narrates,

> Shawshank's mouth is pressed against mine. His tongue is licking round me and his breath tastes of tin. The fish has gone now and the car is back to being cold and damp and dark, and this weight is pressing on my chest as he makes another grab for my hands. The Indian buckle is pressing on my belly as he pulls open my combats. My face is pressed into the back of the seat now as he turns me over. The leather sticks and then unsticks to my face… I'm turned round again, and this time it's McManus. Hammy's standing behind him with this mad face on and I can't help feeling I've done something wrong. I want to tell him about my mad fishy dream, but I can't because there's a hand over my mouth. A hand that tastes of dirt and salt and cigarettes.[486]

Textual imagery provides strong mental pictures of the sights, smells and actions of the rape. The monologue form assumes a complicit passivity in the listeners/spectator, in which they are forced to be a silent witness to the gang rape. The performance negotiates the asymmetrical power relations between those watching and those suffering, while the relationship between content and form succinctly works to draw out the silenced horror of rape. The audience too is implicated in Pumpgirl's agony,

> Pumpgirl: My head is moving back and forward and I'm looking at the scratches on the roof above. Four people on a night out in Warrenpoint. Four people scratchin' on the roof of a car. Broken fingernails, silent screams, stiletto shoes and Saturday-night boots banging against black squeezing windows.[487]

This episode delves into the hideous nature of sexual violation. While personal emotion, pain or anguish remains removed from her dialogue, the 'scratches on the roof', 'broken fingernails', and 'silent screams' are all indicative of the trauma of sexual violation. In pathetic irony, Pumpgirl narrates the screams that she cannot shout, these silent screams

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[486] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 34.
[487] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 35.

conjure the history of rape's effacement within representation. In this way, *Pumpgirl's* deployment of rape refuses voyeurism and exploitation and, rather, tries to incorporate new spaces for the subjectivity of women who have been raped or have been threatened with rape. The play replicates what Conor Hanly describes as the typical rape scene in Ireland:[488] rather than be a sex worker as in *The Game*, she is in a low-skilled job, younger than her attackers, she goes voluntarily with them to a secluded place, all are intoxicated, and a low level of force is used. Hanly notes that these rapes are not usually reported for more than twenty-four hours, and that they are rarely prosecuted. The lack of definition of consent, and the legislative language that surrounds the crime, creates a difficulty in assessing, and ultimately prosecuting for sexual and domestic violence. Only physical evidence on the body can serve as prosecution evidence, and 'hard' evidence is often considered merely in terms of visible scars of cruelty. Kelly and Radford confirm that the focus of 'serious' violence is reflected in legal and police practice; it is the presence and extent of physical injuries that determine whether acts of violence are classified as common assault, actual bodily harm or grievous bodily harm. Harm is defined in relation to whether the surface of the body has been 'violated'.[489] Violation of the person, of their will, of their ability to act through the use of intimidation and threat are not criminal (apart from the threat to kill) and therefore not 'serious'. In this vein, although the discussion of domestic violence was becoming an increasingly vocal issue, the paucity of cases brought to court due to 'lack' of evidence, the difficulties of women receiving support, has meant that silence has reigned over those subjugated to domestic violence. Although there has been remarkable progress in valuing the testimony of female rape victims, courts continue to prefer obvious, ocular, proof wherever possible, and thus the evidence provided by physical rape examinations and chemical DNA testing continue to carry more weight than a woman's words. Silence, and being unable to speak, therefore becomes a fundamental problem in reporting rape. It is the impossibility of telling the untellable.

Sexual violation and insidious rape culture are teased out in *Pumpgirl.* The dangers of contemporary society in diminishing and yet eroticising sexual exploitation are implied throughout. For example, Hammy's monologues contain continual misogynistic references that are both clichéd and yet brutal. He describes his coffee cup as,

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[488] Hanly, Conor, *Rape and Justice in Ireland: A National Study of Survivor, Prosecutor and Court Responses to Rape.* Conor Hanly with contributors Dr. Deirdre Healy and Stacey Scriver, (Galway: Rape Crisis Network, 2009), p 360.

[489] Kelly, Liz and Jill Radford 'Nothing really happened: The invalidation of women's experiences of sexual violence', *Women, Violence and Male Power: feminism activism, research and practice,* p. 29.

> One of those strip-mugs where the woman's clothes are comin' off when you pour in hot water, but the whisky is cold so she doesn't get to do her thing... I take a long hard suck on the whisky and the slut on the cup looks more and more disappointed at keeping on her knickers.[490]

This forms a simple critique of mainstream consumerism that perpetuates a derogatory value system by exploiting the subject-object relation. While such trivial items obviously represent a dilution of the original, it is an indicator that female exploitation is inescapable, with a reach that extends to even the most mundane aspects of everyday life. It is not 'The strip-teasing-slut' mug alone that is the problem. Gillian Rodgerson and Elizabeth Wilson argue that it is not 'pornography itself that lies at the heart of women's oppression or indeed anyone's oppression... Pornography may mirror the sexism of society but did not create it.'[491] Such mugs are sold to the consumer as a comic, ironic enterprise, however the association between violence and a woman's 'positive' sexual response is perpetuated, potentially creating automatic associations between sex and violence for people who consume this media. Dolan asserts, 'mass market heterosexual pornography, for example, can be seen as a basic paradigm of male desire driving representations of women... There are performative connotations to the representations of the female body in heterosexual print pornography, which is constructed for satisfaction of male desire.'[492] The objectification of the female body has never been so easily accessed, deemed so acceptable or been so embedded in mainstream culture.

To further this sense of female sexual objectification, the soundtrack underneath Hammy's coffee-cup monologue is *Supertramp's* iconic hit, 'Take a look at my girlfriend,' which contains the repeated chorus line, 'Not much of a girlfriend, I never seem to get a lot.'[493] These moments tellingly occur just prior to the gang rape of Pumpgirl, indicative of the normalisation of women as objects for the sexual gratification of men, and the relationship between subtle sexist attitudes and manifestations of sexual violence. *Pumpgirl* draws upon the exploitation of advertising, film and music to consolidate in the audience the reality of this social subtext. In the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media,* James

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[490] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 33.
[491] Rodgerson, Gillian and Elizabeth Wilson, *Pornography and Feminism: The Case Against Censorship,* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1992), p. 67.
[492] Dolan, Jill, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic,* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 77.
[493] Supertramp, 'Supertramp Lyrics, Breakfast in America', accessed at: www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/supertramp/breakfastinamerica.html.

Shanahan, Michael Morgan, and Mads Stenbjerre highlight this point by showing the ways in which exposure to popular media 'tends to reproduce the values and ideologies of the institutions and organizations that produce those messages and which thereby define the dominant culture mainstream.'[494] This insidious undercurrent is intrinsically attached to inequalities between women and men, which eroticises the dominance of masculinity over femininity, of men over women. Kat Benyard considers that free-market ideology, the proclaimed

> Sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s, and developments in technology all aligned to make the 1990s the decade during which sex became managed, manufactured, marketed, and consumed. Yet the gender-neutral term 'sex-industry' betrays the very specific nature of the transaction involved: in the sex industry, it is overwhelmingly men who are consumers, and women who are the product.[495]

The associations between sex, violence and power are teased out from the beginning of *Pumpgirl*. Hammy is introduced to the audience in his car during a race, in which he is screaming in pain,

> Ow! Ow! Ow! My fuckin' head! Ow! Jesus! My head. That hurts. Oh fuck me, that hurts. They don't call me No-Helmet for nothin'. Ow! Ah no. No-Helmet Hammy. That's me. Will I stick her into fourth? Why the fuck not? There's that sound I love. That wee crunch and groan of the gear beneath me... the sound of them oul' windscreen-wipers screek-screekin' back and forward... The lads'll all be watching... Nearly, hold her, hold her, squeeze her.[496]

The amalgamation of the violence as he smashes his head against the roof of the car, the continued use of the word 'fuck', and the sexualised language employed to describe his actions draw disturbing and normalizing connotations of pain, violence and sex. For Hammy, it is, 'the pain, the ecstasy and me.'[497] The car becomes the feminised object that he controls, and yet the discomfort of the adjectives to describe the car, 'crunch', 'groan', 'screek', to which Hammy will 'hold her, squeeze her', is highly indicative of sexual

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[494] Morgan, Michael James Shanahan, and Mads Stenbjerre, 'Green or brown? Television and the cultivation of environmental concern', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media,* Vol. 41, no.3, 1997, p 304-324.
[495] Banyard, Kat, *The Equality Illusion The Truth about Women and Men Today,* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), p. 139-40.
[496] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 13-4.
[497] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 13.

violation. R.W. Connell writes that 'mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life,'[498] and that 'true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body.'[499] In *Pumpgirl*, Spallen exaggerates this assumption, masculinity is highly charged, nearly all the men are trapped in stagnant representations of traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity, consumed with male camaraderie, competition, sex, alcohol, cars - traditional emblems of manic, aggressive masculinity. Through the performative nature of the men's behaviour, however, the assumption of a fixed masculinity can be dismantled, and rather 'the parodic repetition of "the original"', a performance which 'reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original.'[500]

This oppressive form of masculinity surrounds the women and leads to their reactionary violence and resistance. The violence explored in *Pumpgirl* is open, ambivalent and always unfinished. For those abused, the violation does not terminate in the act but resonates in the women's emotions and language, frequently leading to retaliation. In alignment with the act of arson to be discussed next in *Duck,* retaliation does not manifest through physical bodily harm, instead it is vented on inanimate signifiers of hyper masculinity. Throughout *Pumpgirl,* Sinead, Hammy's wife, diligently carves 'WANKER' into Hammy's prized possession, a car-race trophy. While masculine displays of violence are linked to humiliation and domination, female acts of resistive violence generally occur as a means of protection, or to express intolerable frustration. For Sinead, the traditional values of married life become so restrictive that they begin to warp functionality within her everyday social environment.

> Sinead: Your honour, it was the way his bottom lip puckered when he snored that made me want to put the hatchet through his head. How's that for a country and western song, Hammy? I could call it I'm Praying For Female Judge.'[501]

Oppressive domestic frustration leads Sinead to obsess over destroying the marital bed, 'If I could saw the bed in half I would,'[502] that bed with 'the invisible barbed-wire down the

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[498] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities, Second Edition,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 45.
[499] Ibid.
[500] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 31.
[501] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p.18.
[502] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p.18.

middle.'[503] A critical dissonance exists between the women's complicity in maintaining a sexist culture and yet finding solidarity together to resist violent misogynist behaviours. The women here are completely sexually disinterested, a stark contrast to Hammy's imaginary eager female strip-teasing mug.

Pumpgirl's unconventional gender complicates the sexual violation on stage. She is described as, 'A butch girl. A girl who loves her job and thinks she is one of the lads. A tomboy all growed up.'[504] She is seen crudely by the men as, 'The one who walks like John Wayne and looks like his horse.'[505] In this way, Pumpgirl is not presented as the desirable, sexualised woman, and firmly situates the sexual violation as a power game between the men, she becomes effectively an exchange object within a gendered display of power-masculinity. In effect, the gang rape becomes a physical argument between men, and can only be told through the silenced voice of the already invisible woman. The history of rape, Kim Solga suggests, remains 'tethered to its earlier roots as a property crime committed by one man against another's goods... rape was never *really* about the woman to whose body it happened.'[506] Susan Brownmiller's characterisation of the violation of a woman by a man indicates, 'rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of the would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear.'[507] It is perhaps the clearest representation of patriarchal force, and a crime governed by systems of power and control. The patriarchal misogyny inherent in rape, is brutally captured in Hammy's articulation, 'some people just get a raw fuckin' deal in life. And amn't I the fuckin' master dealer? Shufflin' away like a bastard and flickin' them raw-deal cards in the Pumpgirl's face?'[508] The gang rape implies that sexual violence is not only the repeated violation and subordination of the female body, but is also a perverse currency of power between men in which the woman becomes the disposable commodity of trade.

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[503]Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 40.
[504] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 7.
[505] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 25.
[506] Solga, Kim, '*Blasted's* Hysteria: Rape, Realism and the Thresholds of the Visible' in *Modern Drama*, Volume 50, Number 3, 2007, p. 353.
[507] Brownmiller, Susan, 'In the beginning was the law', in *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape,* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1975) p. 391.
[508]Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 40.

Duck: Resistance in the face of relentless misogynistic violence

Stella Feehily's *Duck,* premiered by Out of Joint Theatre Company and directed by Max Stafford-Clark, was first staged at the Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds, in 2003. It later toured to Ireland, performing in the studio space of the Abbey Theatre, the Peacock, and returning to London in January 2004 with an extensive run at the Royal Court. The plot focuses on two central protagonists, Sophie and Cat[509], both of whom are in their late teens. Sophie is attending college and Cat works in a bar for her thuggish boyfriend, Mark, and their acts of resistance against a milieu of patriarchal dystopia. In *Duck,* violence is brutal, both in the language used and the manner in which the characters treat one another. Fitzpatrick argues that *Duck* 'represents the female characters as aggressor rather than victims, women who will fight viciously when necessary to defend themselves and their interests.'[510] While this is true, the girls are undoubtedly surrounded by oppressive masculinity, represented in all ages – Cat's boyfriend Mark and her later encounter with 60-year-old writer, Jack, both of whom, in different ways, objectify and treat women as subordinate. Brian Singleton describes the two girls as 'a young Thelma and Louise, beating off potential rapists in their adventurous journey through their discovery of the aggressive sexuality, and the arrogant self-belief (and selfishness) of hegemonic masculinity.'[511] In the play, Feehily is quick to manipulate and highlight the myths and images embedded in such dominant, misogynistic narratives.

The problematic amalgamation of sex, aggression and gendered violence threads through the action in *Duck.* The opening scene introduces Anonymous Boy One and Two, who serve as parallels to Eddie and Mark, and emphasise that explicitly sexually exploitative violence is an all too common occurrence in Irish society. Feehily encapsulates this context when, for example, these anonymous boys describe the two girls in highly sexualized and aggressive language, 'They look like queers' / 'I think she's a hoor'/ 'Dirty bitch.'/ 'I like dirty bitches *(Grabbing his crotch.)* Do ya want a bit of that baby?'/ 'Get them'/ 'Fuck the shite oura them.'[512] Sexual violence is threatened in ways to subordinate the 'fuckin' lesbo-queers'[513] who, in this case, refuse to submit to traditional feminine behaviour. The

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[509] In original production Sophie was played by Elaine Symons, Cat by Ruth Negga.
[510] Fitzpatrick, in *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 195.
[511] Singleton, Brian, 'Sick, Dying, Dead, Dispersed: The Evanescence of Patriarchy in Contemporary Irish Women's Theatre' in Melissa Sihra (ed) *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 195.
[512] Feehily, *Duck,* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2003), p. 7.
[513] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 8.

phallo-centric language is intrinsically bound to systems of misogynistic domination. Kelly and Radford have argued that, 'violence and the threat of violence are used by men to control women – either to enforce their will or punish women for perceived transgressions... Actual and threatened violence is usually accompanied by forms of degrading and belittling talk.'[514] Writing in an era of increasingly porous sexual and gendered identities, Feehily amplifies the deeply engrained and insidious attitude in these teenage boys, in which women are viewed, defined and objectified as sexual objects for male gratification. Both genders are trapped by reductive cultural stereotypes.

Feehily refuses to allow these 'Anonymous Boys One and Two' to be dismissed as simply violent, nasty strangers, beyond the logical confines of ordinary life; instead she parallels their behaviour with the named characters, Mark and Eddie. This firmly situates their abhorrent behaviour as a common reality within hetero-normative patriarchy. Singleton notes that Mark 'has all the trappings of a hegemonic masculinity at such a young age… he appears in the play with just one other male, Eddie… the two men present a masculinity beyond redemption.'[515] That said, *Duck* is not simply a man-hating crusade, it intentionally inflates overzealous male aggression: sick of the silence, Feehily screams the message. She dramatises the suffocating identity roles for both sexes and the normative practice of gender-based violence amid everyday social landscapes. The men in *Duck* simply cannot relate to any woman on equal terms,

> Eddie: Howya love. *(He looks her up and down.)* Haven't seen you before.
> Mark: I've been housetraining her.
> Eddie: *(He laughs).* Ya lucky dog. *(He makes dog-panting noises.)* Well behaved is she wha?
> Cat: I've just learnt not to shit on the couch.[516]

While Cat's sarcastic reply defuses their derogatory behaviour, the persistent and incessant use of this sexist language diminishes the power of her small acts of transgression. She is 'a bang'[517] to Eddie, 'a hole' that 'likes it hard'[518] to Mark, and 'an angel'[519] to Jack.

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[514] Kelly, Liz and Radford, Jill, '"Nothing really happened": The invalidation of women's experiences of sexual violence' in *Women, Violence and Male Power,* p. 29.
[515] Singleton, *Women in Irish Drama,* p. 194.
[516] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 15.
[517] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 19.
[518] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 19.
[519] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 29.

Although Feehily's characterisation and use of language is extreme, it draws attention to the on-going abuse that place women as subordinate objects of male desire,

> Mark: You can have her.
> Eddie: Wha? You're on.
> Mark: What are friends for?[520]

Cat is spoken of purely in terms of her use-value and, in this last instance, functioning simply as a sex object of transaction between the men. While this sexual trade does not actually occur in the play, Cat nevertheless remains seen as a possession to be owned, part of an economy intrinsically linked to patriarchal commodity exchange. The need to 'tip ya'[521] or 'buy ya something'[522] in return for good 'feminine' behaviour runs throughout the dialogue; a proprietal view of women linked to what Michel Johnson calls 'a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control 'their' women.'[523] For the two men, Cat's body is a shared conquest of homo-social bonding, practices that are quite clearly laced with male domination and female subjugation.

The men in *Duck* show a strong propensity to sexual violence when their perceived positions of power are threatened. Liz Kelly argues, 'the linkage of power, violence and sexuality has been one of the foundations of feminist analyses of male domination; we have argued that, as in other political systems, men's gendered power is ultimately backed by force, that force is used when power is in jeopardy. Hence sexual violence is the outcome of men's power as men and women's resistance to it.'[524] The knife-edge balance of power and violence throughout the play enables Feehily to draw out the disturbing link between sexuality, dominance and gender-based violence. As Mark coerces Cat to tell him she loves him, the stage directions dictate that *'he rubs her throat and presses his hand against it',* concluding his persuasion for affection with, 'Cos if you don't, I'll fuckin kill ya.[525]

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[520] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 19.
[521] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 54.
[522] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 56.
[523] Johnson, Michael, 'Patriarchal terrorism and common people violence: Two Forms of Violence Against Women' in *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 57(2), May 1995, p. 283-294.
[524] Kelly, Liz, 'When does the speaking profit us?: reflections on the challenges of developing feminist perspectives on abuse and violence by women', in *Women, Violence and Male Power,* p. 37.
[525] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 32.

This tension between intimacy and violence is heightened in consecutive scenes, both set in the bathroom. Cat is visibly naked in the bath with her new sexual interest, the 60 year-old writer, Jack. The age difference between the two is visually alarming, worsened by Jack's desire to further infantilise Cat as he washes her back, singing 'You must have been a beautiful baby. You must have been a wonderful child.'[526] The comfortable manner in which Jack blends his paternal and sexual desire is indicative of the normalising approach in which patriarchal and sexual discourses have become socially intertwined. The subsequent scene poses Cat, still in the bath, yet Jack is now exchanged with Mark. In this sense Cat's body has been visually, and physically, traded from Jack to Mark, reiterating the female body as an object of exchange between men. The vulnerable body on stage fuels the transaction as sexual, as Jill Dolan comments, 'a naked female body is laden with connotation, the most prevalent of which is sex object.'[527] Furthermore, 'the male body does not signify the history of commodification that the female body represents.'[528] In the ideology of representation, Cat's body becomes framed in the bath, she is to the fore, her body sexually marked, constructed to be looked at and acted upon. This is heightened by Mark's command, 'Lie back. I just want look at you.'[529] However, the intimacy of the bathroom is instantly stripped away as Mark attempts to drown Cat as punishment for setting fire to his car. He repeatedly thrusts her head under the water, pulling her out at intervals to force her to shout 'I'm a fucking cunt'/ 'I'm a cunt.'[530] The privacy associated with the bathroom is twisted into a site of abuse and torture. Mark controls Cat's body, her oxygen and her voice. The fragility of the naked body, the act of violence, and the repeated refrain of 'I'm a cunt', vitally encapsulates the associations between sexuality, violence and male dominance.

Zoe Brigley Thompson and Sorcha Gunne suggest that, 'if the representation of rape in literature is controversial, the refiguring of sexual violence through the visual or physical is bound up with the scopophilic gaze and the danger of exploitation.'[531] In this sense, eroticised male aggression in visual representation can muddle the association of sex and violence for the viewer. Ranae Franiuk and Samantha Scheer propose that 'the repeated pairing of violence during erotic scenes may cultivate a reality where violence is viewed as

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[526] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 43.
[527] Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic,* p. 52.
[528] Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic,* p. 55.
[529] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 69.
[530] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 73.
[531] Brigley-Thompson and Gunne, in *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation*, p. 15.

sexy... further, these repeated pairings, through processes of classical conditioning, may lead to thoughts of violence being triggered in sexual situations.'[532] Although through the course of the play Cat contests and rejects traditional patriarchal structures, her subversive potential falls short in her inability to see herself completely independent of men. Groomed by mainstream culture to be sexualized, and perhaps subconsciously learning that sexuality is a performance, she must act out for others and not from a genuine desire of her own,

> Jack: Dance for me?
> Cat: I'm not a performing seal.
> Jack: I want to look at you.
> Cat: Look at me then.[533]

This exchange again probes the problematic relationship between viewer and the viewed. The art of watching is made visible and yet complicated more by the audience's eye - watching Jack, looking at Cat, who looks back, aware she is being watched. The mechanisms of desire become clearly obvious in the visual field. Rebecca Schneider calls dominant culture 'the prime terrain of visibility and we know how to view her as the passive, malleable emblem of desire... The scopic field is riddled with desire, seeping into the infinite deferral of the vanishing point, and the gaze is disembodied at the same time that it is rendered phallic.'[534] That snippet of dialogue suggests that Cat controls Jack's gaze and is aware of her status as the fetishised object. This provides a subtle critique of the power in the gaze, operating in a more complex and fluid relation than that of an obvious subordinate couple. The sequence draws out the dynamics of power and how it can oscillate between watched and watcher. However, the power balance further shifts when, a few lines later, Cat demands money for a taxi. Susan Brownmiller believes that women's acceptance of, and reliance on men in their protector role lead her to trade her body in exchange. [535] In this sense Cat is unable to escape the sexual 'market' and she still configures herself in terms of a commodity exchange.

If Cat's earlier search for autonomy has been tarred by her reliance upon men as a source of protection and finance, her disavowal of rank masculinity arrives towards the end of the

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[532] Franiuk, Ranae and Samantha Scherr, 'The Lion fell in love with the lamb, Gender, Violence and vampires', *Feminist Media Studies,* 13(1), 2013, p. 22.
[533] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 43.
[534] Schneider, Rebecca, *The Explicit Body in Performance,* (London/New York: Routledge: 1997), p. 66.
[535]Brownmiller, 'In the beginning was the law', in *Against Our Will,* p. 16-30.

play. Dressed in balaclavas, Mark and Eddie break into Jack's bedroom and hold Jack and Cat at gunpoint. The extreme, farce-like nature of the scene strips Mark of any previous intimidation, and his attempts at aggressive hyper-masculinity stumbles into farce. Mark's misogynist language crudely enquires: 'what does she do best? A suck. A Fuck,'[536] brandishing his gun, the ultimate phallic signifier, in Cat's face. However, she barely flinches and chooses instead to challenge viciously his assumed position of masculine dominance,

> Cat: You don't own me. You don't know me.
> I'm not Duck, or love or whatever the hell spews out of your mouth.
> I don't need you.
> I don't need any fucking one of you.[537]

The fusion of comedy with violence challenges the audience's breadth of comic acceptability, but also highlights the idiocy of male violence that considers women as sexual possessions. Mark's final flourish of insults at Cat, 'You are empty… worthless… Your methods are extreme,'[538] hold no weight due to the comic extremity of the hostage situation and Mark's collapse into emasculation. These heightened, near melodramatic, moments can underpin normative culture and highlight the oppressive nature of traditional masculine and feminine models of representation.

Cat and Sophie's centrality to the plot celebrates female sexual liberation and the subversive potential of woman-centred cultural space. Dolan reads performance as always ideologically positioned, and that 'representation offers or denies subjectivity by manipulating the terms of its discourse, images and myths through ideology.' With this in mind, Fitzpatrick proposes that most commonly, 'it denies subjectivity to female characters and positions the male characters at the centre of the action as protagonists and antagonists, with the female characters in a range of supporting roles and, often, functioning as objects of transaction between men.'[539] Throughout the play, song lyrics underscore the action and become an extra-diegetic soundtrack to Cat and Sophie's fast-paced drive towards

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[536] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 104.
[537] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 105.
[538] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 105.
[539] Fitzpatrick, Lisa, 'Representing Sexual Violence in the Early Plays of Conor McPherson' in Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordon (eds.), *The Theatre of Conor McPherson: Right beside the Beyond,* (Dublin: Craysfort Press, 2012) p. 67.

liberation. They demand that we 'turn back on the rot that's been planning the plot,'[540] and now we 'call all the shots'. The play opens to:

> *A huge explosion. Sounds of running. Car alarms. Sirens in the distance.*'[541] Cat enters announcing she just stuck her cardigan into her boyfriend's car petrol tank and set it on fire. 'Bob's your uncle, Fanny's your aunt, it lit in a shot. / Fucking Bastard… Do this, do that. No, you fuckers.[542]

Instantly, Feehily establishes her intent to explode past patriarchal discourses. The car, and all its connotations to hegemonic masculinity, has been set alight by a female garment. This act of arson defines the level of frustration and anxiety that consumes the girls, and the sexist patriarchy that surrounds them leads to exasperated acts of resistive violence. Feehily directly addresses the issue through Sophie's reflections in a college essay, concluding that 'Arson and scolding appeared to offer a dramatic form of protest to the poor and the rejected. Enabling them to vent an inarticulate rage against the hopelessness of their condition.'[543] This meta-discourse breaks the established tone of the play and directly isolates the desperate and limited situation in which these female protagonists find themselves. The girls' rejection of traditional, heterosexual gender roles is indicative in these extreme acts of violent reprisal. Immediately after this dramatic opening the girls are aggressively accosted by two boys, to which Sophie responds with a *'guttural roar'*, screaming 'FUCK OFF FUCK OFF FUCK,'[544] smashes her glass bottle and lacerates the boy's face. The girls retaliate with physical violence in an environment that otherwise offers limited and oppressive identity roles.

The two girls represent an ironic double bind, the right to sexual ownership of the body, against perpetuating ideology that views women as subjugated, static objects of sexual exchange. It is important to interrogate these apparently negative representations in order to tap into their ability to show up the workings of the ideologies that create them, and thereby expose ethically and socially problematic perceptions. Feehily highlights conflicting societal messages where, furthering my observations opening this chapter, girls and women are pushed to look sexual without actually being sexual, and the choice to

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[540] These lyrics are taken from the Hives pop song 'I hate to say I told you so', which Feehily specifically indicates in the script should be the soundtrack behind this opening scene.
[541] Stella Feehily, *Duck*, p. 3.
[542] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 5-6.
[543] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 58-59.
[544] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 8.

dress overtly sexually can be accompanied by the notion that they 'were asking for it'. Their demonstrative sisterhood is fraught, and *Duck* could be seen to dramatise the unresolved division in feminist scholarship; the search for female sexual autonomy, and the problematic position of being the object of desire. Jill Dolan notes that 'the role sexuality plays in performance and in visual representation of women as objects is an issue intently debated within the feminist critical community.'[545] Dolan continues, 'sexuality... is a tangible currency in the representational exchange... in western culture [it] is as rigidly constructed and prescribed as gender. While it is crucial not to conflate sexuality with gender, expressions of sexuality further illustrate the operation of gender codes and constructs in the representation of the female body.'[546] Though the play clearly expresses a strong disquiet about any dominant patriarchal ideology, the girls' pursuit of liberation seems trapped by male objectification - and the terms of their experiences are established along the lines of appearance and sexuality. Feehily's intentional use of branding on Sophie's clothes is symptomatic of a society at large in which women remain cultural symbols of desire, something that can be 'looked-at' and therefore openly seen as a possession. Stage direction is that '*Sophie pulls off her jumper revealing a top with FCUK ME across the chest.*'[547] As Dolan says, 'the female body is not reducible to signs free of connotation. Women always bear the mark and meaning of their sex, which inscribe them within a cultural hierarchy.'[548]

The end of *Duck* remains somewhat ambivalent. Mária Kurdi argues that the closing scene is 'cautionary about the future of young women in Irish postmodern city life burdened by inconsiderate materialism and the impoverishing loss of values like family and communal solidarity or respect for individuality.'[549] Feehily gives the impression of liberation without its actual achievement. This complicates the idea of seemingly straightforward 'liberating' female role models, and the girls are not permitted a fixed ending, marked by either an exit as happiness or death as stasis. This is a problematic vision of freedom, in which the pair remain caught by the strictures of a violent, patriarchal model. Cat and Sophie appear ready to depart on the cusp of an adult adventure, albeit surrounded by childhood objects, have no credit on their phones and wait on a taxi that never arrives. The audience is

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[545] Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic,* p. 59.
[546] Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic,* p. 63.
[547] Feehily, *Duck,* p. 58.
[548] Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic,* p. 63.
[549] Kurdi, Mária, *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Woman,* (The Edwin Mellen Press: New York, 2010), p. 212.

presented with the possibility of their flight, caught on the threshold, and yet denied. The haunting closing image is of the girls alone on stage as the lights fade to blackout.

Common to all three plays is their resistive reaction to misogynistic violence. Mia Doering, representative of the White Ribbon Campaign, asks the direct questions,

> But what if we put the perpetrator front and center of how we speak about 'Violence Against Women'? What if we call it what it is: 'Men's Violence Against Women'? Even if there is nothing we can do about it, let's name the agent. Let's name the problem. Let's give them the responsibility they certainly have earned. Women don't get raped by streets or by alcohol or by parties or by their homes. They get raped by men in these places. They don't get beaten by a mystical force, their partners beat them. At the very least let's acknowledge who is involved.[550]

The Game engages with men's silence, and by employing everyday male volunteers, shows how gender-based violence and rape culture can only be dismantled collectively. Doering believes 'It's time for those men to step up and say "I'm here to help, what can I do?"'[551] – exactly what *The Game* and those involved achieved. *Duck* and *Pumpgirl* reflect upon a set of cultural texts and anxieties about violence against women in the rapidly changing social and economic landscape of twenty-first century Ireland. Significantly, given my earlier remarks about Ireland's drastically low conviction rates for abuse, in none of the plays are the perpetrators accused, caught or punished. Pumpgirl, for instance, consistent with dark romance narratives that remove blame from the perpetrator, does not blame Hammy, rather she validates his violent behaviour: 'He looks so sad I whisper in his ear, "it's okay".'[552]

The ethics of spectatorship are drawn out in all three plays, generating a discussion of violence without desensitising the issues. When the playwrights choose to show nudity on stage, they must balance dramatic realism without eroticising the female form. Here, this ethical dilemma is negotiated in different ways: *The Game* addresses this challenge by simulating sexual violence on the stage, *Pumpgirl* is a series of monologues in which the

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[550] Doering, Mia, 'I've been groped, felt up, harassed. Rape culture exists and we need men to step up'. Online article in *thejournal.ie,* March 20th 2016. Accessed at: www.thejournal.ie/readme/ireland's-rape-culture-2624463-Mar2016/.
[551] Ibid.
[552] Spallen, *Pumpgirl,* p. 35.

acts of violence are spoken but never visually present, while *Duck's* linear form represents physical violence as it happens. In each case, the brutal reality of sexual abuse is represented harrowingly, and refuses audience complacency albeit in contrasting ways. Fitzpatrick contends that the issue is one of 'capturing the horror of sexual violence while avoiding a gratuitous display of the female body.'[553] Representing violence to women will inevitably emphasize the physicality of the body - erased or visible, the female body on stage remains troubling. Fitzpatrick continues by saying that 'depictions of rape remain problematic because they so often erase the human subjectivity of the victim, reducing her to a cypher or to a body suffering beautifully and displayed for the audience's pleasure in spectacle.'[554] In all three plays any possible visual eroticism is utterly diffused through the choice of staging, requiring the audience to bear witness – and to respond - thereby implicating them ethically in the performance of violence. The playwrights de-objectify women's bodies, so that rape and violence do not operate as a metaphor or staging technique, but a horrific social reality. According to Richard Schechner, 'the interactions played out in the theatre are those which are problematical in society, interactions of a sexual, violent, or taboo kind concerning hierarchy, territory, or mating. [...] Drama is not a model of all human action, but of the most problematical, difficult, taboo, liminal, and dangerous activities.'[555]

The issue of male violence against women is uncomfortable to watch but, as indicated in this chapter, undoubtedly necessary. A consistent thread throughout this thesis is to show how the plays catalyse a critical commentary on social inequalities in Ireland that place certain women outside power holding elites. As illustrated in this chapter, those who are marginalised are sex workers and women who are the subject of domestic abuse. Physical and sexual violence against women seldom has a face, but all the three performances locate violence as insidiously permeating many aspects of Ireland's social fabric. By refusing to provide an idealized, rounded conclusion, both Spallen, Dyas and Feehily avoid negating the severity of the issue, all the while seeking to exorcise the dark demons rooted in sexual and domestic violence. This is a shift in emphasis away from victims of the system to examine questions of responsibility, to interrogate the silencing of the violated body in performance. With this in mind though, violence cannot be exclusively blamed on men. While sexual violence towards women does seem to have its roots in power-relations

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[553] Fitzpatrick, in *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 189.
[554] Fitzpatrick, in *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland*, p. 199.
[555] Schechner, Richard, *Performance Theory,* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1988), p.213.

between men and women, women also have the potential for violence. Socially however, acts of violence committed by a woman do generate a doubly problematic reaction. While male violence seems to be a commonly 'accepted' reality, a violent woman, as I discuss next, is 'doubly deviant, doubly damned'.

Chapter Four: Staging Violence by Women: Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned

This chapter takes its impetus from Lisa Fitzpatrick's claim that, 'by wreaking chaotic violence within this private world, violent female characters make nowhere safe; they threaten to destroy the patriarchal family and therefore the society it stands for.'[556] Violence by women disrupts normative ideas of gender, in which a woman located in the domestic sphere is configured as a selfless and fundamentally nurturing being, with an inherent tendency to protect, care for and love. Anna Motz argues that the study of female violence requires first to challenge certain comfortable but unsustainable myths about violent women. She suggests these myths include: Women are victims, not perpetrators of violence; women are ruled by hormones; because women do not possess a penis, they are incapable of sexual perversion; women are governed by 'maternal instinct'; women are only violent under male coercion (especially with sexual crimes); women are fundamentally passive and gentle; only 'mad' women are violent.[557] The plays in this chapter disrupt these myths, so that Lisa McGee's *Girls and Dolls* (2006), Paula Meehan's *Cell* (2000), and Genevieve Hulme-Beaman's *Pondling* (2013) show acts of violence that escalate from relatively low levels to the extreme, often because of the failure of surrounding familial social structures.

Depicted as excluded, isolated and ignored, the women/girls in the plays engage in killing – whether of animals or persons. Each of the three playwrights uses devastating acts of brutality to highlight the effects that can result from resisting oppression. Meda Chesney-Lind and Lisa Pasko argue that feminist theories of crime and delinquency are needed to account for the myriad ways that gender matters. It is more, they say, than mere insertion of gender as a variable or brief commentary of 'girls' or women's issues': 'Feminist criminology requires a critical consideration of the impact of girls' structural positions in a gender and racially stratified society. It requires a deep understanding of the strategies girls use to negotiate and resist patriarchy and how these strategies can determine what crimes girls commit.'[558] While the playwrights discussed here do not develop theories of feminist criminology, distinct threads through these plays lie in the heightened levels of violence the characters use as they negotiate and resist patriarchy in society. By way of

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[556] Fitzpatrick, 'Women Writing Violence' in *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland*, p. 199.
[557] Motz, Anna, 'The ultimate taboo? An exploration of female violence and perversion', in *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy,* Vol. 28, No. 3, 2014, p. 268.
[558] Chesney-Lind, Meda and Lisa Pasko, *The Female Offender: Girls, Women and Crime* (Third Edition), (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Ltd, 2013), p. 74.

consolidating the overall arguments in the thesis, I illustrate how these playwrights are critical of the larger social challenges, in particular the inequalities that peripheralise and ostracise women who do not conform to approved, orthodox, gender stereotypes.

One of the through strands in my thesis resists the many common dichotomies that attach to women. In this chapter, I use these plays to counter locked oppositional pairs such as innocent/guilty, mad/bad, insider/outsider, when considering violent women. As in the previous chapter, I also raise the polemic nature of women's violence-as-resistance on stage, but here develop ways that such acts of violence are rendered deeply sinister and threatening, not least because they transgress socially gendered expectations of women. *Girls and Dolls, Cell* and *Pondling* create not only multiple and differing representations of violent women and girls, but also work to contextualise their acts of cruelty, brutality and malice. The playwrights' intentions are clear: not to condone such actions but, where possible, to question some of the roots and causes of the portrayal of their acts. The plays explore violent women, adult and teen-girl crime both in everyday life and in incarceration; why this is so socially problematic, and how better to understand such acts of violence within a form of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus, in this case these women's interactions with the largely patriarchal norms and conventions of Irish culture. Stevie Simkins considers that violent males can be understood against a backdrop of broad conformity to well-established patterns of behaviour, even if their crimes provoke feelings of anger, horror and revulsion. Talk of female violence, though, fractures the gender balance in the system - violent women become seen as 'doubly' transgressive: 'Agents of female violence are, by contrast, doubly deviant, doubly damned, having both broken the law and transgressed the 'rules' of what is understood to be acceptable female behaviour.'[559] Simkins comes to this perspective from Ann Lloyd's powerful commentary, *Doubly deviant, doubly dammned: society's treatment of violent women.*[560] As Lloyd points out, women commit fewer crimes than men, and a lot less violent ones. However, women who commit violent crimes are at high risk of being treated harshly and perceived as being worse than violent men.

Deviance forms an essential component through the discussion here. Socially, women are considered less likely to act violently, a supposition underscored principally by traditional

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[559] Simkin, Stevie *Cultural Constructions of the Femme Fatale From Pandora's Box to Amanda Knox,* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 40.
[560] Lloyd, Ann, *Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned: Society's Treatment Of Violent Women,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995).

feminine stereotypes of nature, nurture, and carer. Anna Motz suggests that 'despite conscious awareness that women are capable of extreme cruelty and perversion, potent unconscious forces prevail that perpetuate myths relating to the universal fact of 'maternal instinct'.'[561] In a similar vein, Ann Weatherby, Jamie Blanche and Rebecca Jones argue that, 'as soon as the crime is committed, the media immediately acts on public sense of anomie and classifies the female murderer as either mad or bad.'[562] With such ideas to the fore, McGee, Meehan and Hulme-Beaman invoke society's need to mark out such acts of transgressive violence, the urge to brand these women as 'bad' or 'mad'. Perhaps it is easier to cope with incidents of deviance as dark monsters in our midst, rather than accept that almost any woman could be reduced to violence. However, in contrast to this simplistic 'mad-bad' binary, the plays represent nuanced pictures of female violence and challenge social perceptions more generally. All three playwrights consider the extent to which violence against women can breed violence by women, and the sense here is that such violence can become cyclical - abuse *to* women can alternate with abuse *by* women. That said, the full picture is far more complex. For instance, such a causal description can become a wholesale denial of individual agency. As McNay states, Bourdieu's habitus is defined 'not as a determining principle but generative structure.'[563] To shade this, I draw upon the sense of habitus as engendering a 'potentially infinite number of patterns of behaviour, thought and expression that are both relatively unpredictable but also limited in their diversity.' To an extent, then, I contest Michel Foucault's notion of the 'docile body'. Foucualt intended the 'docile body' to be a malleable object upon which forces could act, it must be receptive and accept the powers that work on it. My sense is that the women represented in these plays are 'non-docile' and certainly not lacking in agency.

Cell: A Play in Two Parts for Four Actors and a Voice: A Matriarchal Incarceration

Paula Meehan's *Cell: A Play in Two Parts for Four Actors and a Voice,* commissioned by Calypso Theatre Company and directed by Garrett Keogh, was first staged in the City Arts Centre, Dublin, on the 6th of September 1999.[564] Prior to writing *Cell,* Meehan had conducted writing workshops in prisons around Ireland: in Arbour Hill and Mountjoy prisons in Dublin, Portlaoise in Laois; and Shelton Abbey in Wicklow. Her portrait of

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[561] Motz, Anna, 'The ultimate taboo? An exploration of female violence and perversion', in *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy,* Vol. 28, No. 3, 2014, p. 267.
[562] Weatherby, Ann, Jamie Blanche and Rebecca Jones, 'The value of Life: Female killers and the feminine mystique', *Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice Research & Education,* Vol. 2, No. 1. 2008, p. 1.
[563] McNay, *Gender and Agency*, p.26.
[564] It was subsequently published the following year by New Island Books.

incarceration arrives relatively easily from her own personal experiences of working with women prisoners. During an RTE radio interview with Myles Dungan in 2003, Meehan discussed the imprint these experiences made on her: '[When] I began . . . to work in the prisons in the state, and I began to see that the culture I lived in, that the state I lived in, practiced what I wouldn't go so far really as to call genocide… but practiced practices that were totally disgusting on the weakest members in our state. And that kind of vision I think has informed everything I've ever written since.'[565]

Cell dramatises the incarceration of four women occupying a single overcrowded cell over a period of two months. Dolores Roche or 'Delo' is a 40 year-old Dublin woman in the fourth year of her seven-year sentence for dealing in heroin, a drug operation that she continues to service even while in prison. The monstrous and megalomaniac Delo dominates the cell, and as Derek West describes, is the 'Nurse Rachett on the block, and by intimidation, drugs, sex and violence, her will prevails.'[566] Nineteen year-old Lila Byrne, again from Dublin and convicted for the possession of heroin, is the youngest and most recent arrival to the cell. She has served a year-and-a-month of a three-year sentence and, sadly, prison has done nothing to reduce her addiction, of which Delo takes wholesale advantage. Martha Casey, again from Dublin, is twenty-six and serving a four-year sentence for shoplifting, also tormented by a heroin addiction that ironically began in jail. Alice Kane, a forty-nine year-old Leitrim woman, is starting a life sentence for murder and is the cell's newest arrival.[567] The prisoners are controlled by a bodiless intercom 'voice', the women only leave the cell to reach another part of the prison, or through death.

The play opens in the aftermath of a former inmate's (Anne) suicide. Not only was prison life too appalling, Delo had systematically and meticulously bullied her. That achieved, Delo then targets Lila, who tragically follows the same path to suicide. Following this, Delo finally fixes on Martha. This repetitive pattern of abuse becomes intolerable and, after a frenzied exchange between Delo, Alice and Martha, Delo herself is stabbed and murdered. In his review, West describes the piece as 'a visceral exposé of lives bound with disembodied voices, automatic doors, intimate bodily functions deprived of any privacy,

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[565] Dungan, Myles. "In conversation with Paula Meehan, Mary O'Malley and Eavan Boland." Rattlebag. RTÉ. RTÉ Radio 1, Dublin. 18 Aug. 2003.
[566] West, Derek, *The Irish Times,* 'Cell', Tuesday 9th September 1999, accessed at http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/cell-1.225417
[567] In the original production Delores Roche was played by Eithne McGuinness, Lila Byrne by Laura Brennan, Martha Casey by Barbara Bergin and Alice Kane by Joan Sheehy. The Voice was Lisa Tierny-Keogh.

virus and abuse... a claustrophobic cage.'[568] Through the play, Meehan insists that the audience bears witness to the marginalised presence of women in prison and foregrounds the intensity of spectating punishment, and 'wrongful' punishment, in confined spaces. Caoimhe McAvinchey suggests that, since the end of the eighteenth century, 'prisons have been designed to keep convicts in and the public, and its gaze, out.'[569] Meehan, directly responds to the invisibility of the body of the prisoner in performance.

The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) reports that on average, 'women make up around 3.5% of the prison population,'[570] with a large proportion of committals concerning non-violent offences. They maintain that, 'the numbers of women committed to prison have continued to accelerate - an increase of 8.9% in 2013 on 2012 figures,'[571] a figure that has continued to rise by 2014.[572] That said, while the overall prison population is some four thousand people, less than two hundred are women. They comprise, then, a small fraction of those imprisoned, especially for acts of violence. In addition, the Reform Trust notes that 'the majority of sentences are short-term (up to a year). However, the impact of even short-term imprisonment on these women and their families is profound. The economic and social costs to society at large arising from the imprisonment of women are also significant.'[573] The majority of these women prisoners are housed in the purpose-built Dóchas Centre on the Mountjoy campus in Dublin, the remainder held in a separate part of Limerick Prison. Major concerns remain in relation to overcrowding in the Dóchas Centre and to the inadequate conditions for women prisoners in Limerick. Currently, The Dóchas Centre is at the recommended maximum for its operational capacity - while this is exceeded in Limerick. This clear problem of overcrowding is directly encapsulated in the oppressive atmosphere in *Cell.* In 2013, IPRT's executive director Liam Herrick stressed that the number of women committals has risen by a third over three years, during a period when the number of men being sent to prison has levelled off.[574] He believes this is not simply an issue about increasing crime or diminishing prison capacity, but that 'there's an

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[568]West, *The Irish Times*, accessed at http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/cell-1.225417.
[569] McAvinchey, Caoimhe, *Theatre & Prison,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 36.
[570]Irish penal Reform Trust,
[571] Irish Prisoner Reform Trust statistics can be accessed at: http://www.iprt.ie/women-offenders/5.
[572] 2014 saw a 3.8 percentage increase in the average number of female offenders in custody http://www.iprt.ie/prison-facts-2.
[573] http://www.iprt.ie/women-offenders/5.
[574] See, 'Women's prisons over capacity as inmates committed fro minor offenses, warns Irish Penal Reform Trust', in *The Irish Independent,* 21st November 2013, accessed at: http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/womens-prisons-over-capacity-as-inmates-committed-for-minor-offences-warns-irish-penal-reform-trust-29773032.html

issue about why more and more women are being sent to prison.'[575] He maintains that the majority of women, 80 per cent, are imprisoned for non-violent offences, with a particular cohort of women being committed to prison for committing minor crimes linked to addiction, mental health and homelessness.[576] Aylwyn Walsh argues that if gender is considered alongside other factors of discrimination that lead to criminalization (such as poverty, poor education, lack of social mobility), women are actually jailed for respite and for problems in the community, ones that should be addressed outside of jail.[577] The point is well made - research on characteristics of women engaged in a broader continuum of violence, which may involve non-partner targets or other types of violent behaviours, is extraordinarily limited. Moreover, this very limited research examining the broader continuum 'often employs a dichotomous categorization of women with violent versus non-violent current offences, negating a more nuanced examination of similarities and differences among women.'[578]

Meehan's *Cell* captures both nuances and social neglect with female offenders and, similar to *The Game's* treatment of prostitution in the last chapter, demands that the audience firmly confronts the painful reality of underworlds in Irish culture. McAvinchey maintains,

> The worlds of theatre and prison appear immiscible. On a very basic level, prisons are places associated with punishment and pain, and theatres are places associated with entertainment and pleasure. However, both sites are culturally defined spaces which reflect, re-inscribe or, potentially, re-imagine ways of being in the world. They negotiate the relationship between the individual, the audience/community and, thence, the state.[579]

David Wilson and Sean O'Sullivan, in *Images of Incarceration: Representations of Prison in Film and Television Drama*, argue that 'drama provides people with the imaginative resources which help them visualize, or imagine the nature of the world,'[580] and that

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[575] IPRT Executive Director Liam Herrick talking on RTE's 'Morning Edition' on 21st October 2013, accessed at http://www.iprt.ie/contents/2560.
[576] Ibid.
[577] Walsh, Aylwyn, '(En)gendering Habitus: Women, Prison, Resistance' in *Contemporary Theatre Review,* 24(1), 2014, p. 42.
[578] Bybee, Deborah, Sheryl Pimlott Kubiak, Woo Jong Kim, and Gina Fedock, 'Differences Among Incarcerated Women With Assaultive Offenses: Isolated Versus Patterned Use of Violence' in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 28(12), 2013, p. 2463.
[579] McAvinchey, *Theatre & Prison*, p. 60.
[580] Wilson, David and Sean O'Sullivan, *Images of Incarceration: Representations of Prison in Film and Television Drama,* (Winchester, UK: Waterside, 2004), p. 14.

people are actually more receptive 'to arguments about things outside their own experience if they possess a cultural model or metaphor which helps them visualize it.'[581] However, McAvinchey goes on to warn that representations of prison can risk confirming rather than challenging familiar expectations and perceptions of penal institutions,[582] and that plays such as *Cell* could simply reiterate 'imaginatively limited narrative tropes and stereotypes.'[583] Meehan's images, though, are too harsh to allow complacency. She uses *Cell* to compel visualisation, to spotlight and condemn systemic abuse in prisons and reveal the shape of, and resistance to, hegemonic power relations. Her play campaigns for a stronger understanding of the issues that affect women within the criminal justice system. She demands that the public engages critically with the politics of imprisonment and needs to be certain that the treatment of prisoners, carried out by the State in its collective name, is truly just. Though dark and extreme, her work makes evident the realities of female prison experience, forcing exposure of levels of violence, corruption, solvent abuse, secular exploitation and the dismal failure of rehabilitation processes.

Violence as gendered is examined through the course of *Cell*; from a traditional socio-cultural perspective, crime is not meant to be girls' specialty. Wesely argues that 'from boyhood on, males are socialized into violence as an acceptable and encouraged part of masculinity.'[584] In contrast, violence is not conventionally seen as a natural or normal feminine trait. This perspective is reasserted by Anne Worrall who notes that, 'criminality is still assumed to be a masculine attribute and women criminals are therefore perceived to be either "not women" or "not criminals".'[585] Because female gender roles, socialization patterns and institutions forbid women's expressions of violence, Shamita Dasgupta believes it 'must be viewed as emerging from more intricate motivations than that of men.'[586] Wesley maintains that 'preservation of the binary opposition between masculinity and femininity does little to allow for more nuanced interpretations of women's violence that might provide greater insight.'[587] These complexities are important because they

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[581] Ibid.
[582] McAvinchey, *Theatre & Prison*, p. 37.
[583] Ibid., p. 38.
[584] Wesely, Jennifer K., 'Considering the Context of Women's Violence, Gender, Lived Experiences, and Cumulative Victimization' in *Feminist Criminology,* Vol.1 No. 4, October 2006, p. 305.
[585] Worrall, Anne, *Offending Women: Female Lawbreakers and the Criminal Justice System*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 31.
[586] Dasgupta, Shamita Das, 'Towards an understanding of women's use of non-lethal violence in intimate heterosexual relationships', Harrisburg, PA: National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women (VAWnet), February, 2001, p. 4. pp. 1-13.
[587] Wesely, 'Considering the Context of Women's Violence, Gender, Lived Experiences, and Cumulative Victimization' in *Feminist Criminology*, p. 306.

indicate the contrasting social reactions to male and female violence. The implication is that for women, 'any subsequent criminal activity may be regarded as at least partially consequent on [their sex] and excused by it.'[588] Andrea Leverentz views fiction more broadly and says, 'women remain a minority among incarcerated populations and are often dismissed in much of mainstream criminology.'[589] In particular, she makes the point that 'women are often seen as the wives of incarcerated men and the mothers of their children'[590] rather than the villains themselves. Leverentz's suggestion is that 'women in the drug economy most often remain in subordinate or peripheral positions and often acquire access to roles through their relationships with men.'[591]

By contrast, Meehan's characterisation of Delo is not subordinate, does not rely on male relationships, she continues to control the drug operations out on the street and, 'inside' an all female prison, she has full market monopoly. This only serves to heighten the incongruity so that, as Walsh contends, women emerge as 'more than doubly marginalized', particularly as they are more likely 'to receive custodial sentences than men, and to receive harsher sentences for similar crimes.'[592] Meehan's *Cell* illuminates how communities can fail some women, denying much needed help and support to those homeless or caught in cycles of addiction, mental illness (or both) – as in the case of Lila and Martha. Not only that, as McAvinchey argues, 'the punishment of being sent to prison is the deprivation of liberty, the reality... is that bad things happen in prison – acts of brutality, torture and indignity. These are additional punishments to that which someone has been sentenced to: acts with which the state may be complicit through choice or neglect.'[593] As drug addicts before (and during) prison, these women are trebly marginalized, first, castigated for being addicts, second penalised for this as a crime and third because they have transgressed societal norms of traditional feminine behaviour.

Meehan's play raises questions about reformative impact, if any, of imprisonment and of insidious programmatic 'cures' for deviance, with the aim of making unruly women 'right.'[594] The women in *Cell* are isolated, left to 'tick off the days,'[595] wait in limbo and,

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[588] Worrall, *Offending women: Female Lawbreakers and the Criminal Justice System*, p. 64.
[589] Leverentz, Andrea, *The Ex-Prisoner's Dilemma: How Women Negotiate Competing Narratives of Reentry and Desistance,* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2014), p 15.
[590] Leverentz, *The Ex-Prisoner's Dilemma: How Women Negotiate Competing Narratives of Reentry and Desistance,* p 15.
[591] Ibid, p 7.
[592] Walsh, '(En)gendering Habitus: Women, Prison, Resistance' in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, p. 42.
[593] McAvinchey, *Theatre & Prison,* p. 46.
[594] Walsh, '(En)gendering Habitus: Women, Prison, Resistance' in *Contemporary Theatre Review,* p. 41.

from the solitary window, watch the outside world pass by. They take visits but are confined to a secular sub-culture, just 'doing their time', with little encouragement for rehabilitation. Beth Richie's sense is that being, 'marginalized within the context of a disenfranchised community has a profound impact on the ability of the women to successfully reintegrate into it.'[596] 'Will nobody help us?'[597] Alice probes. It is 'the standing around and the sitting around and the waiting'[598] that becomes unbearable. There is no sense of 'transformation' for these women through incarceration. Rather, life inside seems stagnant, as Alice reiterates: 'how a body can stand it I don't know. We'll have to do something. You couldn't go on like this. Day in day out year after year.'[599] In part answer to Meehan's questions, McAvinchey makes the point that, 'although it had become clear that the penitentiary as a site for character transformation was a narrative idea that didn't work in practice, the development of the architectural and administrative infrastructure meant that it was, just as it is today, politically difficult to imagine or enact an alternative.'[600]

Foucault theorises that, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, prisons shifted their meanings from places of 'corrections', through the moralizing penitentiaries, to postmodern hyper-surveillance.[601] However, to engage with resistance as a performance as Meehan does, there must be space for a theory of behaviour that allows for transgressed or creative action that begins to erode the power of Jeremy Bentham's vision of the Panopticon. Walsh considers that 'resistance in everyday life is not only evident in large-scale refusal or denial of power structures, such as riots, revolts, and revolutions. Rather, an everyday resistance is an embodied reclamation of agency that causes a reframing of the original (oppressive) status quo.'[602] This is in line with Kershaw's comment, as I discussed earlier, that '[I]n any disciplinary system designed by some to control others [...] there will probably always be a 'space' for resistance, a 'fissure' in which the subject can forge at least a little radical freedom [...]. We should see them as crucially constituting the dramaturgies of freedom because they represent an absence that creativity seeks to

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[595] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 23.
[596] Richie, Beth, 'Challenges Incarcerated Women Face as They Return to Their Communities: Findings from Life History Interviews', *Crime and Delinquency,* 47(3), 2001, p. 383.
[597] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 87.
[598] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 36.
[599] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 75.
[600] McAvinchey, *Theatre & Prison*, p. 40.
[601] Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977).
[602] Walsh, '(En)gendering Habitus: Women, Prison, Resistance' in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, p. 43,

grasp.'[603] Through her acts of violence, intimidation and coercion, Delo successfully manipulates the penal system, the authorities, the inmates of the prison, the drug trade on the outside and represents a resistant body, a site of ferocious individual agency, immune to systems of surveillance. She determinedly 'reframes' the guards in relation to her thriving heroin business, and distributes her supply throughout the prison. Clearly pleased with this corruption, she asserts:

> Delo: I'm getting on very well these days with Prison Officer O'Reilly. I'm so to speak cultivating the relationship. A few tokens of the esteem in which I hold her are deeply appreciated. I'd say it won't be long till a polite request for a little reorganization will fall on fertile ground.[604]

In her own way, Delo dramatically represents resistance to Foucault's 'docile body' and a clear reclamation of personal agency. It is difficult to determine exactly what motivates Delo's propensity to extreme violence and her resistant strategies to prison, other than an unwavering desire for power. Meehan's construction of her character is that she is simply violent and manipulative, her acts of violence do not stem from a darker more perturbed past. However, as one reviewer acknowledges, 'there is a danger that we are tricked here into fascination with this creation.'[605] Her choice to be violent is simple; it is an individual's act of agency. Unlike Martha's sudden stabbing of Delo at the play's conclusion, Delo's constant violence throughout cannot be located within a set of contextual constraints, or a frenzied isolated act.

In the play, the women's pre-prison childhoods and lives are marked by various, multiple, and repeated experiences of loss and victimization, entirely abandoned by mainstream social, political and economic institutions. All of this exacerbates the dissonance between conventional societal norms and the women's perspectives. Institutional abuse has been a prevalent factor in their lives; they are already constructed as 'deviant' and 'delinquent', excluded from various aspects of normal society. Martha, for example, 'lost' her only daughter to social services, and was coping with the death of her daughter's father from AIDS. She was also clearly financially insecure - not least because she is serving a two-and-a-half-year sentence for robbery. There are clear indications that these women have

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[603] Kershaw, Baz, The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 155.
[604] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 63-64.
[605] West, *The Irish Times,* accessed at http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/cell-1.225417.

been repeatedly failed and marginalised by the social system, articulated by Delo as: 'Bastards. Doctors and cops and priests and fucking teachers. All fucking bastards. I hate them. I swear Alice I hate them.'[606] These are all instances of failed systems of surveillance and power, by institutions that are intended to protect and care. There seems to be limited choice for these women derived from their lack of financial security, drug abuse, loss and deprivation, poor education, limiting their choices in ways that contribute heavily to their current situation. For Jennifer Wesely, 'economic deprivation, social exclusion, desperation, and sexual vulnerability become part of the context of lived experiences that may generate further criminal activity.'[607] The matrix of disadvantage these women must navigate, 'shapes the use of violence as a viable coping strategy.'[608] Institutions are social and cultural constructions in which morality and ethics are tested in relation to their capacity to inform juridical-political discourses.

Cell represents a sour microcosm of the external world, where the depressing underside of life in drug abuse, sexual exploitation and manipulation run rife, made all the more insidious and oppressive due to the confined space within the very establishment that is meant to protect and care. Knowing the scarcity of emotional and physical supports and resources, the women find their own means of survival in a threatening and isolating world. The women remain dependent on drugs or, as in Martha's case, have started using, and they maintain a system of supplying and selling drugs, the very reason for Delo's sentence. Throughout the play there is continual interplay between the world inside and outside, and how the external world - an obsessive focus for those inside - cares so very little. Ironically, the principal contact with the outside world comes in the form of Dolores's heroin deliveries and, when it enters the prison, it only serves to compound the corruption. The women watch through the cell's single window as an entirely new prison is being built, the sight overshadowed by the sense of 'new buildings: same old problems.' The tiny window, through which they all peer, is a constant reminder of the outside, that life continues without them, and has such little impact. Delo says,

> They are voting today. And guess what's the biggest issue in this election? Crime! Our specialty, girruls. I hope you're proud. The papers are full of us. New prisons.

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[606] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 57.
[607] Wesely, 'Considering the Context of Women's Violence, Gender, Lived Experiences, and Cumulative Victimization' in *Feminist Criminology*, p. 305.
[608] Ibid, p. 308.

That's what the sheep are being promised. Ha. We're their worst nightmare. They want us kept well off the streets. Make them safe for peace and reconciliation.'[609]

Meehan tackles the treatment of women in prison, and suggest at least in this cell, that there is little authority support or concern. The disembodied 'voice' is wholly disinterested in the actions in the cell. It appears to have gone unnoticed by officialdom that Lila, incredibly sick, has not left the cell in weeks. When Alice requests a doctor, she is promptly told, 'the doctor is available between 8.00 and 8.45 in the morning'[610] and left at that. The voice has no face, merely a buzzer and a clinical, cold and systemic response, accepting or denying requests. This is a retreat from Bentham's Panoptican, in the cell there is no constant surveillance, there are no watching guards, in fact Meehan has removed all physical presence of authority, thus allowing the women to create their own social order. Delo mocks Alice's claims that they are entitled to a doctor, 'Oh yes, Alice. A constitutional right no doubt.'[611] The lack of trust the inmates experience in relation to those 'in charge' is insidious. Indeed, the voice, acting as an extension of the prison, is patently useless at protecting the people who are under its care. These women are provided very few rights, with the obvious exception of Delo who has negotiated her own corrupt system of survival. She manipulates the (off stage) guards, terrorizes the cell, and is never reprimanded. This minimal reprimand pushes the other girls into higher states of fear and turmoil. Wesely argues that 'minimal repercussions' to violence 'not only illustrates institutional lack of support and the impact of structural inequalities but also invalidate and minimize the abuse itself,'[612] effectively silencing the other women. All of which demands answers to Meehan's implicit question: If you cannot even trust authority, then whom can you turn to? Delo's expressions of resistance disrupt the institutional discourse, if this even exists. Any sense of the roles, rituals or rules of the institution, whose function is to be 'correctional', have disintegrated. Delo asserts agency in terms that she defines for herself, which has nothing to do with rehabilitation. As Martha acknowledges, 'there are rules. You'll be meeting Delo anon and she makes the rules.'[613] It is an internal matriarchal hierarchy of dominance devoid of any authoritative control.

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[609] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 18.
[610] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 43.
[611] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 42.
[612] Wesely, 'Considering the Context of Women's Violence, Gender, Lived Experiences, and Cumulative Victimization' in *Feminist Criminology,* p. 305
[613] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 27

Through the character of Alice, Meehan manages to create nuanced versions of violent women, breaking down and complicating common stereotypes. Alice is an unconventional inmate, 'an oul one.'[614] She is calm, soft and polite, in sharp contrast to the violent crime of which she is accused. Her arrival in the cell horrifies Delo: 'you queered our pitch rightly Alice Kane. Look at the state of her. It's like a fucking nunnery in here.'[615] 'We were supposed to be getting a murderer. Not a fucking bogwoman.'[616] She is serving a life sentence for the murder of a male neighbour, although she ardently believes it was 'self-defence' and 'is not sorry I did it. For I'd have no peace for the rest of my days.'[617] But, her recollections of her crime are confused, and she tells Lila and Martha two different accounts. Initially she claims to have repeatedly stabbed Shamy McGrane with a knife in her kitchen, in which 'there was blood everywhere. Up the walls even. I was covered in it.'[618] Later she recalls being in the chicken coop and piercing him in the eye with a sickle, before kicking him to the ground and beating him to death with a sock of an old plough. Both accounts of the crime are incredibly violent, and contain the same refrain - 'I don't know what came over me, or where I got the strength from.'[619] Furthermore, Alice's reaction to this bloodthirsty incident is composed and reflexive. She is more anxious about the smell of his buried corpse and about polluting the river than the possibility of prison. She admits, 'that was what I was really afraid of, for I loved that river… and I thought his putrefacting body would poison it.'[620] Seemingly, there is little remorse for her actions, nor is she scared of the immediate consequences for herself. 'I just waited. I washed myself, and put on fresh clothes and I made a cup of tea. I sat out in the garden. Do you know it was a beautiful day and I never felt such an intense happiness as I felt sitting there in the garden.'[621] In keeping with my arguments throughout this chapter, Meehan's creation of Alice complicates violent women as either mad/bad, while simultaneously challenging normative and limiting gender stereotypes. Her picture of Alice, as an elderly lady peacefully enjoying her garden is undercut by her violent, bloody crime. She explodes the sense of a woman located in the domestic sphere, configured as a selfless and fundamentally nurturing being and therefore seemingly immune to acts of violent resistance.

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[614] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 28.
[615] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 59.
[616] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 28.
[617] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 44.
[618] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 45.
[619] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 77.
[620] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 78.
[621] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 45.

Differing reconstructions of events like these form a pattern in the play. Martha claims her daughter has not visited her inside because she 'won't let her be brought into this place.'[622] Although she has not seen her daughter in over two years, Martha furiously maintains she knows what is going on in her daughter's life and that she has 'no fear. No fucking fear'[623] that she might forget her mother. However, as Martha later admits, she is not even allowed access to her daughter Jasmine. Throughout the play, the women lie and reconstruct, both to each other and themselves and create a reality in prison different to that which occurred in the external world. They generate imagined narratives to their lives in order to cope with the actuality of the situation. Their psychological adaptive efforts at self–preservation produce, what Judith A. Ryder describes as 'defences that, for those on the outside looking in, often appeared maladaptive and self-destructive.'[624] Martha has in fact been violent towards her child in the past - 'I'd never hurt my baby. Not on purpose. It was a total accident. She just wouldn't shut up.'[625] As just mentioned, the common image of women, particularly mothers, is that of nurturer, carer with the instinct to protect their young. However, as Motz argues, 'women who have themselves experienced serious deprivation, cruelty or neglect in their own early lives will often find the care of the young to be persecutory, intolerable and impossible, made worse by the social stigma attached to admitting to feelings of hatred towards their children.'[626] Martha, aware that she could be perceived as 'doubly-deviant' constructs alternative narratives, both internally and externally, to rationalize her actions.

Ecofeminists[627] claim that both women and nature belong to the otherness in patriarchal society; they are in symbolic relation and thus form part of the metaphorical thinking behind the idea of 'nature-woman'. This metaphorical thinking of 'nature-women' emphasises an alliance between sex and nature, which is shown from two aspects: the feminisation of nature and naturalisation of women. I agree with Janet Biehl's critique however, that this line of thinking focuses too much on the mystical connection between women and nature and not enough on the actualities of own lives.[628] As a poet, Meehan uses a large number of images in the play - of gardens, fields, moonlight, rivers - though in

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[622] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 27.
[623] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 28.
[624] Ryder, Judith, A., *Girls & Violence Tracing the Roots of Criminal Behavior* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2013*),* p. 113.
[625] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 80.
[626] Motz, 'The ultimate taboo? An exploration of female violence and perversion', in *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, p. 269.
[627] Goa, Xiuxue, 'Critical Analysis of 'Nature-Women' Metaphor From Ecofeminism, *Psychology Research*, 16, 2014, pp. 35-38.
[628] Biehl, Janet, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics,* (Boston MA: South End Press, 1991).

Cell the metaphorical relationship of women with nature is placed in contradiction. She combines nature with the *un*natural, the 'natural' place of women alongside abhorrent acts of violence. In this way, Meehan challenges the problematic symbolism of woman-nature by placing Alice's 'unnatural' gruesome violence within a natural pastoral setting. Similarly, the use of the 'full moon' allegory has both use and nuisance value. 'Lunatic! Lunacy! The moon. There's a connection. You just don't get it.'[629] The term 'lunatic', once commonly used in law, derives from the Latin *lunaticus* meaning 'of the moon' or 'moonstruck.'[630] It entails a madness caused by the moon, affecting susceptible individuals. There is 'something not right' about Delo, 'it's in her eyes. The look you'd get in a dog that goes prowling lambs at night.'[631] Delo and Alice could be seen as representations of such categorizations, Delo is so inhumane, that she becomes not-woman while Alice's soft demure and continual cries of self-defence allow her to take a peculiarly not-criminal position.

As previously mentioned, common to all three plays in this chapter is the repeated patterns within accounts of women's violence. In *The Cell*, Meehan parallels the cyclical passage of time with the women's menstrual cycles, and then with a cyclical pattern of crime and abuse. The implication throughout is that the women's ostracism from society, their isolation in the cell, their close physical proximity feed this reproduction of abusive phases. This is indicated throughout the play, not least through its time frame structure: part one is set on the October full moon, part two on the November full moon and, as Delo says, 'Leave a gang of women together long enough and they'll all end up on the same cycle.'[632] Lila and then Martha encapsulate this. Martha follows in Lila's footsteps, after whose death she begins the downhill spiral unable to cope, and continually thinking of what has passed. It is suggested that Lila was a copy of Annie, and Martha in turn a carbon copy of Lila. The suicide, first Annie, then Lila, are the ghosts that inhabit the cell. This pattern of abuse, the repetition of violence, the sickness induced by trying to come off drugs, attempts to resist the oppression and deal with Delo's manipulation and cruelty, is captured succinctly by Martha:

> I can't go on. I keep thinking of Lila. I swear, Alice, she does be around me. And I even think I do be seeing Annie and then I think there must have been someone

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[629] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 67.
[630] "Lunatic": Oxford English Dictionary, 11th edition, 2008, print.
[631] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 43.
[632] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 64.

> before Annie, don't you know, and I think I can see *her* sometimes. And then before her, whoever she was, there'd be someone else and on and on and on forever until the time they built this prison. And we're all trapped here – the living and the dead alike.[633]

The audience witnesses both Lila, and Martha unravel slowly and painfully, in an environment that is supposed to advocate reformation of character. There is wholesale lack of intervention from surrounding support networks to interrupt, break the cycle.

When women commit murder the fundamental social structures based on appropriate feminine gendered behaviour are contradicted and subsequently challenged. Contesting simplistic binaries is a central thread throughout the thesis, *The Cell* exposes problems in society and a criminal justice system that too readily label violent women/girls as either mad or bad. Hazel Kemshall argues that crude caricatures around 'mad or bad' are unhelpful because they 'divert attention away from the important processes, traumas and dilemmas that underpin these complex acts.'[634] As a result, productive conversations about women's violence and how to address it rarely surface. For example, labelling women who kill in the way Alice does, is the denial of their agency. That is to say that labelling these women dismisses the recognition of their ability to make a semi-autonomous decision to act in a particular way. Denying that agency in this way raises a number of issues, including, but not limited to, maintaining the current gendered status quo within the criminal law and criminal justice system, and justice both being done, and being seen to be done, for these women and their victims.

Girls and Dolls: 'Sure don't all girls love babies': fracturing gender tropes of passive girls

Lisa McGee's *Girls and Dolls*, produced by Tinderbox Theatre Company and directed by Michael Duke, was first performed in Belfast in 2006 at the Drama and Film Centre at Queens University Belfast, and went on to tour Northern Ireland the consecutive month.[635] *Girls and Dolls* is the story of two 10 year-old girls, Emma and Clare, and their struggle to accommodate to a destructive chain of events leading to the death of a toddler, Shannon.

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[633] Meehan, *Cell,* p. 81.
[634] Kemshall, Hazel, 'Risk, dangerousness and female offenders', in Gill McIvor (ed.), *Women Who Offend*, (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), p. 221.
[635] 2006 – Dundalk on 14th November; Londonderry on 16th and 17th November; Castleblayney on 21st November; Coleraine on 23rd November; Portadown on 25th November; Monaghan on 28th November; Lisburn on 1st December; Larne on 2nd December, Belfast 5th -9th December.

Through the course of the play the girls, now women, work to unfurl precisely what happened, what they eventually became and how they have been judged.

The action of *Girls and Dolls* takes place 26 years after the violent crime had been committed, when the perpetrators, Adult Clare, played in the original production by Mary Jordan, and Adult Emma (Veronica Leer), are reunited by an accident of fate – or what Clare describes as 'a blast from the past.'[636] Two sets of actors play the women: as thirty-plus adults in the present day and as 10 year-old children[637] in flashbacks that weave in and out of the adults' reminiscences. In this respect, memory and recollection are at the heart of the play, with attempts to reconstruct and, in doing so, control the events of the past. McGee poses tough questions through the dialogue: how responsible can children be held for their harmful, criminal, actions, particularly when they have been victims themselves? Rosalind Haslett notes that the violent crime central to the narrative, 'resembles the murder of two-year-old James Bulger by two ten year-olds, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, in 1993 – but for the fact the two perpetrators, as well as the young child they kill, are female.'[638] The strictures of a formal public trial place a far greater emphasis on the principle of justice being seen to be done than on the importance of understanding, helping - and ultimately rehabilitating - these young girls. In reference to the Bulger case, Gitta Sereny argues that, 'we are not talking about two murderers and a baby,' rather, 'we are talking about three children. Two of them are children who badly need our help.'[639] Through *Girls and Dolls,* Lisa McGee parallels Sereny's belief, creating more complex perspectives of the girls and their crime, and asks the audience to consider if crimes by women are more heinous than those committed by men or boys.

In a similar vein to *The Cell*, the nature of the penal system, notions of morality – and genderised morality, education and childhood are teased out through the script. Ryder argues that a violent female offender 'elicits a collective sense of surprise, even alarm, in most sectors of the population. The seemingly extraordinary event grabs our attention and

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[636] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 5.

[637] In the Original production Young Clare was played by Bernadette Brown, Adult Clare by Mary Jordan and Young Emma by Sarah Lyle and Adult Emma by Veronica Leer. Through the course of the play these four actors also adopt multiple roles of friends and family involved in the tragic incident, to help decipher a 'true' narrative of the moments before and after the crime.

[638] Haslett, Rosalind, 'Demarcating Violence in the Dramaturgy of Lisa McGee's *Girls and Dolls'*, in *Violence and the Limits of Representation,* Graham Matthews and Sam Goodman (eds.), (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 90.

[639] Sereny, Gitta, cited in Fiammetta Rocco's article, 'Why did Jamie Bulger die?', *The Independent* (UK), 11th February 1994. Accessed at www.independent.co.uk/life-style/why-did-jamie-bulger-die-1393366.html.

rattles our assumptions about how girls are "supposed" to act.'[640] In *Girls and Dolls*, McGee focuses exclusively upon the aftermath of violence and the processes of justice to avoid a simple one-dimensional portrayal of these women offenders. We first encounter young Emma and Clare playing a child's clapping game to lyrics that encapsulate typical gender categorization of female innocence, of girls caring for dolls. During the course of the play the girls are depicted not as evil but merely two children caught in a hideously tragic moment. The act itself is not premeditated but comprised of a series of escalating episodes. They 'borrow' the child, Shannon, take her on an adventure to their tree-house and events spiral out of control from there. The baby begins, and refuses to stop screaming, rain starts hurtling down, the two girls are panicked and shouting, Clare lifts up the child, shaking her to stop the crying. The child is dropped/pushed/fell over the side and plummets to her death. Adult Clare reflects that, 'sometimes you concentrate so hard on not doing something that it almost forces you to do it.'[641] Because, 'the mind's a mad thing, so it is, girls, and when it's under pressure, when it has to work quickly, sometimes it make mistakes.'[642]

Clare is regarded as the more dominant of the two, the bully and the instigator of the fatality. She became the face of evil, 'sick in the head, that's what people said.'[643] To the public she was depicted as the 'clever girl' that came from a nice house, well cared for, and horrifically spoilt. As Clare bitterly notes, 'they had a field day'[644] with these superficial perceptions; we can only presume 'they' are the media, court and public. She reasserts that 'they' did not want the truth, 'they wanted a monster.'[645] It transpires that both girls were perceived as 'monsters', dehumanized, criminalized – Clare imprisoned and Emma forced to move. By moving and 'forgetting', Emma is required to bury and hide from the trauma, and is never allowed to deal fully with the psychological implications of her actions and her part in the crime. Emma's aunt captures this, saying: 'this is our new life… people won't understand, we'll keep it to ourselves, never mention it, not a word.'[646] It is to Clare that the 'monster' label sticks, she is demonized, potentially at the hands of the press, certainly in public opinion, but a label that is cemented by her court sentence. Mirroring much true-to-life propaganda, the public creates caricatures of the girls based on external appearances and instant pre-judgments. However, these are far from accurate assumptions

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[640] Ryder, *Girls & Violence Tracing the Roots of Criminal Behavior*, p. 1.
[641] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* (London: Nick Hern Books Limited, 2006), p. 5.
[642] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 53.
[643] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 8.
[644] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 24.
[645] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 71.
[646] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 18.

and, over the course of the play, are replaced with revealing psychological traumas in both girls' lives. After the incident, Emma's family acts swiftly to re-make her personality and character, and is particularly vocal in re-shaping the narrative of the two girls' friendship. They encourage stories of Emma as a victim who 'dresses in rags and doesn't get fed' and that 'her mother's sick – her father drinks.'[647] Her family 'would've said anything,'[648] and Adult Emma clings to this impression in order to cope with the past. Public narratives of Emma follow suit, she is 'the pathetic follower,'[649] the 'poor stupid, stupid girl. Shy, timid, frightened girl.'[650] As Adult Clare bitterly reflects, 'if I'd really been that bright, I'd have done what you did. I'd have played your hand. You were the one that got away.'[651] Though Clare was the only one penalized by the justice system for the crime, Emma does not escape unscathed. She may have avoided physical incarceration but remains, 'stuck in that day. Stuck in that moment. Like that's all there is.'[652]

Clare, like others, has faced, 'what it meant to have this history of offending and incarceration, and how to re-establish their lives and their relationships on the other side of that history.'[653] Women coming out of prison negotiate competing narratives of who they are, who they should be and how they should lead their lives.[654] This is why Leverentz suggests that, 'once one has gone to prison, one can be an ex-prisoner or an ex-offender and one can stop offending, but one cannot return to a pre-prisoner identity. In both tangible and intangible ways, those convicted of criminal offences continue to experience the invisible punishments or collateral consequences of their convictions.'[655] Ultimately, Emma too becomes locked in her own internal prison. Emma, naively, believes that after her court acquittal she could resume her old life. Small-town minds, though, do not easily forgive: 'people didn't want me, not in that street, not in that school. People wanted me to disappear, so I did.'[656] While the option to disappear was both a plausible and actual occurrence for incarcerated Clare, Emma was still openly shunned by society and haunted by her past. Public treatment and scrutiny of the girls was rife and their families targeted. A newspaper at the time, printed an article that included a picture of Emma's family house,

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[647] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 19.
[648] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p.19.
[649] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 13.
[650] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 13.
[651] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 13.
[652] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 72.
[653] Leverentz, *The Ex-Prisoners Dilemma: How Women Negotiate Competing Narratives of Reentry and Desistance,* p. 5.
[654] Ibid., p. 6.
[655] Ibid., p.14.
[656] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 16.

after which the public posted shit through the letterbox, and they were constantly harassed and abused. As Haslett argues, 'in the present of the play, both Adult Clare and Adult Emma are depicted as outsiders in their community; they have failed to negotiate the terrain of their childhood world and have therefore had to find a new place for themselves beyond its parameters.'[657] Forbidden to acknowledge the incident or expressively deal with the reality of trauma, Emma is forced to reimagine her involvement and thus transfer all blame to Clare. To make progress to adulthood she must differentiate herself from Clare, her refrain becomes 'people like you…,' a clear demarcation of Clare as the 'other'. Clare, compelled to take responsibility and show public remorse, is at least afforded the opportunity to come to terms psychologically with the reality of the incident and her actions. Emma on the other hand, governed by the narratives of her family, has built and re-built her own truth. Adult Clare questions her: 'has it become easier to believe it? Because people wanted you to?'[658]

It would appear impossible for Emma to provide Clare with truth, even as the only other person witness to the event, she has woven the threads of her own trajectory. In this way, Adult Emma's recollection of the event is littered by the opinion of other people: in her version she believes that her 10 year-old self had the words to tell Clare her behaviour was 'inappropriate,'[659] a contrast in fact to the language young Clare and Emma use in the play, and are quite clearly 'somebody else's words!'[660] So, Adult Clare and Adult Emma are unable to recognize themselves in the Clare and Emma of the past: they are, quite literally, different people. Graham Dawson suggests that, 'those who have suffered a traumatic episode remain attached to an internal landscape formed in the past, and the difficulties experienced in integrating it physically involve the construction of a defensive border that divides one part of the psyche from another.'[661] Emma suffers from twenty years of continued denial of her involvement – 'it wasn't me'[662] or it was 'your idea'[663] and later reiterates, 'it's not my story – it's your story. It has nothing to do with me.'[664] She remains unable to accommodate the past and has constructed the kind of defensive border Dawson mentions. Dan McAdams argues that, 'narrative identities are stories we live by. We make

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[657] Haslett, *Violence and the Limits of Representation,* p. 101.
[658] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 47.
[659] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 48.
[660] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 48.
[661] Dawson, Graham, *Making Peace With the Past?: Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 66.
[662] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 28.
[663] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 28.
[664] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 9.

them and remake them, we tell them and revise them not so much to arrive at an accurate record of the past as to create a coherent self that moves us forward in life with energy and purpose.'[665] Our stories, he says, are partly determined by the real circumstances of our lives – by family, class, gender, culture, and the historical moment into which we are thrown, 'but we also make choices, narrative choices.'[666] In a similar vein, Ryder argues that 'in disclosing a story of trauma, the teller relies on a 'listening space" where not only is she able to speak and be heard, but she is believed... this is a feature of recalling traumatic experience, made even more difficult perhaps by the speakers gender, youth and devalued status as wards of the state.'[667] The experience of trauma affects memories and consciousness and thus 'shapes its telling.'[668] In the play, Adult Emma needs to hold on to much of the 'blame Clare' attitude enshrined by the court's sentencing and her own family's narrative of 'mad, bad, Clare':

> Adult Emma: I won't feel guilty about something that wasn't my fault. Do you understand me? I won't let you do that again. So whatever game you are playing, it stops now. It's over, you did what you did, you can't change it, you can't rewrite it. All you can do is leave it alone, all you can do is forget.
> Adult Clare: How do I forget before I've even remembered?[669]

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping defines 'coping' as the effort to 'manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.'[670] They argue that 'coping is a process of adapting to stressful events, a process of 'constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts that evolve over time.'[671] In the play, Emma and Clare adopt contrasting mechanisms to deal with their past, Emma deliberately forgets, while Clare reaches a point in her memory where she must simply 'stop':

> Adult Clare: This is where I stop. Usually it will all wrap up somewhere around here. I get the desire, you see, to just push both my hands against my face. To dig into the flesh with my nails. Rip it open and pull all the contents out. So I just...

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[665] McAdams, Dan, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 98-99.
[666] Ibid.
[667] Ryder, *Girls & Violence Tracing the Roots of Criminal Behavior, p. 8,*
[668] Ryder, *Girls & Violence Tracing the Roots of Criminal Behavior, p. 8.*
[669] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 35.
[670] Lazarus, Richard and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal and Coping,* (New York: Springer, 1984), p. 141.
[671] Lazarus and Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal and Coping,* p.141.

Adult Emma: Forget.

Adult Clare: I stop.[672]

The use of 'avoidance strategies', Ryder argues has 'the highest risk for psychological dysfunction', while the existence and use of social supports 'migrate negative effects of stressful and traumatic experiences.'[673] It is clear that Adult Emma is a manifestation of such, she becomes deeply fearful that this encounter will demand she confronts a past she has so meticulously repressed over the years. For her, the meeting and the memories are 'when my past blew up in my face… a blast from the past. I never understood that phrase. People use it with affection … people nearly always use it when something that's been missing makes a welcome return. But a blast is an explosion, it's abrupt, violent. It leaves scars and it burns.'[674] Clare asks, 'what are you so frightened of?... It's just a conversation.'[675] Indicative of Emma's fear, 'I have a life and you can't stand that. You want to destroy it. Because that's what you do. You destroy things.'[676]

McGee teases out cycles of violence, in this case the relationship between violence to children and the violence by children. Adult Clare admits her father 'soiled' her and 'ruined' her; she felt unsafe in her house and desperately wanted to run away. Clare, as a victim of sexual abuse, opens up possible cause-and-effect sequences through childhood ordeals. She describes an upbringing in the shadow of a violent father and subsequent life of deprivation. A new toddler, Shannon, and her mother move into her street and fascinate this deeply traumatized girl. Clare becomes obsessed by the mother and daughter relationship, engrossed by the closeness of their bond. Baby Shannon's father arrives banging on the mother's door night and day for weeks, and something is triggered in Clare, she desperately seeks to 'protect' the child from the fate she suffered herself, 'I couldn't stop thinking about it – him – him turning up out of nowhere and now he's in her house.'[677] Clare's horrific experiences of sexual abuse by her father at such a young age leave her scarred; she is too young and vulnerable to separate herself from their situation. On one occasion, staring through their front window, she witnesses Shannon's mother and father in a sexual embrace. Clare sees only, 'him lying on her, pushing down on her, one hand in her top and the other up her skirt, grabbing and pushing and pawing and all the

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[672] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 62.
[673] Ryder, *Girls & Violence Tracing the Roots of Criminal Behavior, p.* 114.
[674] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 5.
[675] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 9.
[676] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 14.
[677] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 63.

time slobbering, slobbering all over her.'[678] When she realizes it is being reciprocated, she is horrified: 'She was. Herself. And my head was melting, you know, my head was spinning, I mean, I was thinking why would she, why would she want to do that, to get it over with, to have it finished, maybe, to end it quickly.'[679] Too deeply disturbed by her own horrific childhood, Clare is unable to grasp the world in any regular way. Her own traumatic abuse renders her incapable of vocalizing her fears or confusion to herself or someone else, tragically a recipe for upcoming disaster.

Valerie Johnson and Robert Pandina cite evidence from literature on family violence to suggest that children growing up in families with disrupted relationships, that is, lacking in warmth and closeness and fostering hostility and fighting, tend to demonstrate 'increased levels...of dysfunctional coping strategies.'[680] As Ryder argues, the violence within the family unit corrodes norms, trust, and the predictability of relationships, and so 'contributes to the production of emotional alienation.'[681] She continues, 'it is only when we locate a young woman's violence within the context of her early relationships that we can begin to see how her actions also reflect the traumagenic effects of harm done to her.'[682] It is not difficult to perceive of women's violence as 'gender resistance' or 'acts of opposition to conventional gender expectations or beliefs'[683] because, unlike cultural prescriptions for men, women's gender roles generally discourage women and girls from engaging in aggressive action as a means for asserting or re-asserting control. When teenage girls use violence in treacherous situations it can provide some sense of 'controllability over present and future events' at least in the short term. In this way, Felicity de Zulueta considers that violence can be the 'reciprocal manifestation of a damaged attachment system.'[684] It may satisfy the 'tremendous, primal human need for attachment, albeit in a distorted manner.'[685]

Pondling: 'Shinny shoes and pink bicycles': dismantling gendered scripts through violent acts

Pondling, written and performed by Genevieve Hulme-Beaman and directed by Paul

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[678] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 63.
[679] McGee, *Girls and Dolls,* p. 63.
[680] Johnson, Valerie and Robert Pandina, "Effects of Family Environment on Adolescent Substance Use, Delinquency and Coping Styles", *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse,* 17, no. 1 1991, p.72.
[681] Ryder, *Girls & Violence Tracing the Roots of Criminal Behavior, p.* 114.
[682] Ryder, *Girls & Violence Tracing the Roots of Criminal Behavior, p.* 133.
[683] Hollander, Joceyln, 'Resisting vulnerability: The social reconstruction of gender in interaction', *Social Problems*, 49, 2002, p.475
[684] De Zulueta, Felicity, *From Pain to Violence: Traumatic Roots of Destructiveness,* (London: Whurr, 1993), p. 78.
[685] Ryder, *Girls & Violence Tracing the Roots of Criminal Behavior, p.* 129.

Meade, was staged first in 2013 at Smock Alley Theatre[686] as part of Dublin Fringe Festival.[687] It charts the upheavals in one girl's mind over a few weeks in summer before she returns to school. Madeleine lives with her grandfather and brother on an isolated cattle farm in rural Ireland, she is largely ignored and solitary, and her main outlet for communication is with her beloved chickens: 'I would tell them everything and they would listen, they would keep my secrets and stories locked away in their little chicken hearts until the day when they became soup.'[688] She sees herself as their 'friend and leader' all the more disturbing when later she has no problem in slicing off their heads.

Madeleine dreams of a life of glamour and elegance in France, encapsulated in her fantasy alter-ego, 'Madeleine Humble Buttercup', which means 'beautiful swan that lives in the white woods, you can remember me by that.'[689] These visions of romantic glamour are fuelled by her love interest and obsessive fixation on Johnno Boyle O'Connor, she dreams of speeding across the cliffs of France in a red convertible, sunglasses on, wind blowing through her hair, sharing cigarettes, overpowering Johnno with her irresistible beauty. Madeleine's romantic illusions implode the day she meets 'Johnno Boyle O'Connor's stupid long armed girlfriend'[690] who appears like 'a bolt of brunette lightning shattering my heart and my hope.'[691] Intent on winning her love she seeks council in a 'beautiful glamorous' lady she spies in the park, Anne Marie Coleman, unaware that that she is actually the mother to her arch enemy – Johnno Boyle O'Connor's stupid long-armed girlfriend. From this point, events spiral rapidly out of control as Madeleine's visions of beauty and glamour frequently descend into volatile outbreaks when faced with brutal realities of life. The episodic quality of the play is suggestive of diary entries, and the young girl invites the audience into her world of love, invention, resentment and outrageous outbursts through intricate, poetic and melodramatic language. The anecdotal form allows Hulme-Beaman to jump energetically between story and fantasy, to create an oscillating atmosphere between light and dark, one that could erupt at any moment. It is the marrying of these contrasts, the sinister and harsh language, which sometimes verges on

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[686] Ran at Smock Alley Theatre from 31st March to 5 the April 2014 and moved to the Mick Lally Theater, Galway and The Axis, Ballymun Dublin; Edinburgh Fringe Festival August 2014 and winner of Edinburgh Fringe First, toured to South Bank Centre Foyer Spaces, London in October 2014 and to New York at the 59E59 Theaters as part of the annual Origin's 1st Irish Festival on 8th September – 4th October 2015. It has also been aired by RTE as a radio play

[687] The performance saw Genevieve Hulme-Beaman win Best Actress Dublin Fringe Festival 2013, and the play went on to win the Stweart Parker Award. *Pondling* is produced by Guna Nua and Ramblin Man.

[688] Hulme-Beaman, Genevieve, *Pondling,* (Unpublished Script) p. 3, I obtained a copy from the producer Matthew Smyth.

[689] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 12

[690] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 6.

[691] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 6.

the psychotic, and the visual appearance of a young, sweet child on her 'my little pony bicycle' [692] and new 'black shiny shoes,' [693] that creates nuanced and challenging representations of female violence. As one critic notes, 'the booming voice that spits out of Genevieve Hulme-Beaman's dark and rich monologue jars so strongly with her cute young girl appearance that it is at first shocking then deeply unsettling.'[694] Hulme-Beaman toys with highly charged images of femininity, as enshrined in Madeleine's demure appearance and traditional fantasies of romantic love, only to rupture these through her deliciously deviant propensity for violence, stealing and rage. This dismantles traditional notions of femininity and introduces a conception of multiple subjectivities.

It is only on occasions that that the outside world and the judgements of others filter through into Madeline's narrative. When this happens, she is acutely aware of external perceptions of herself, and feels the isolation of the outsider who is ignored, and written off as mentally insecure. Visually, she segregates herself from her peers, she wears 'farmyard chic,'[695] the 'other girls wore jeans or leggings or T-shirts even. I wore a dress. Beautiful dresses I had.'[696] These are reveries she generates as she peddles along the streets of her Irish village, complementing herself on her choice of cream tights. Her intention to 'other' herself, is the product of continually being labelled as such by her surrounding community –'stupid, stupid little girl'[697] / 'round head' / 'chubby cheeks'[698]. This clearly has stigmatizing consequences, especially when the label is attributed to elements located largely outside the locus of her control. Her strategy for resistance is to construct alter-identities to counter the slights to her sense of self, and her aggressive responses demand she is provided with some social legitimacy. Madeleine's decision to be generative of her own identity is powerfully challenging, and is potentially uniquely empowering in relation to the external circumstances in which she finds herself,

> Madeleine: I know what they are thinking, they're thinking, what does she know? Look at her, look at the round head on her. Not too much going on up there I'd say, but what they don't know is that inside. INSIDE this little round head is something else, something very beautiful. A beautiful French swan girl by the name of

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[692] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 2.
[693] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 2.
[694] Review by Rowena Hawkins 19th August 2014, from the Edinburgh performance, accessed at http://www.ayoungertheatre.com/edinburgh-review-pondling-underbelly-cowgate/ on 15th October 2015.
[695] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p.7,
[696] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 7.
[697] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 7.
[698] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 19.

> MADELIN HUMBLE BUTTERCUP... *I* AM THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SWAN ON THE POND and they will know, they will now and they will NEVER FORGET.[699]

There is powerful agency in her refusal to accede to the external images imposed on her, and her repeated mantra from the beginning to end of the play: FREE... BRAVE... BEAUTIFUL.

More than this, she considers herself superior, the protector of the farm, a potential high-flying daughter, Johnno Boyle O'Connor's romantic lover, artistic singer, swan woman – all of which, in effect, render her essentially unknowable and unpredictable. Her identity is constantly in flux, she does not simply step outside her reality, she inhabits both simultaneously. In her refusal to perform normative girlhood submission, Madeleine - violent, outcast, labelled as mad - finds a freedom in resistance and protection of herself, at least temporarily, in her constructed 'other' and vivid fantasies. She is a French aristocrat, 'a beautiful swan lady, cycling through the streets of Paris with a warm breeze whispering sweet French lullabies into my ears. I was FREE. I was BRAVE. I was BEAUTIFUL.'[700] 'Proud and Beautiful and alone, we understood each other.'[701]

Within this, Madeleine blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy, reconstructing herself in numerous and differing ways so that she occupies a cluster of personalities at any given moment. In the *Use of Pleasure* Foucault defines such desire as the 'arts of existence'[702]. This represents the complicated relation between the self to itself, the individual subject as both 'crafted and crafting'. Butler, in reference to Foucault's 'arts of existence', suggests that the 'line between how [the subject] is formed, and how it becomes a kind of forming, is not easily, if ever drawn, the 'indistinguishability' of this line is precisely the juncture where social norms intersect with ethical demands, and where both are produced in the context of a self-making which is never really self-inaugurated.'[703] The self becomes a filter for itself, selecting its own substance for creation and yet all the while never entirely separate from either the body or environment. In relation to *Pondling,* Madeleine's fantasies become the substance for her identity creation, and yet her corporeality and the desolate isolation of the farmyard are a constant presence. There are

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[699] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 12.
[700] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 2.
[701] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 9.
[702] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume Two*, p.10-11.
[703] Butler, Judith, 'What is Critique? An essay on Foucault's Virtue' in David Ingram (ed.), *The Political Blackwell reading in Contemporary Philosophy,* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), p. 225.

moments in the narrative where Madeleine's world of fantasy and her experienced reality become as one, so that the perceptions of her alter ego also manifest as truth, aiding this sense of multiplicity.

Madeleine's propensity for violence is established early in the play, and the act of killing a cat swiftly progresses to larger targets, and more violent action. As Munzo, Romero and Martinez suggest, 'A violent act is often followed by others... frequently by the person who was initially the victim of violent behaviour.'[704] In the play, Madeline's everyday moments of resistance are embodied reclamations of agency that reframe her isolation and provide her with purpose. She relates long conversations between her grandfather and brother about poetry and killing animals, conversations from which she is excluded, her only early morning job is to hold the torch while her grandfather and brother milk the cows. As she recalls: 'they thought this made me feel important and busy, when actually I know it was just to distract me from my uselessness.'[705] However, Madeleine does not feel useless, claiming instead they just liked to 'talk the talk' and she 'always knew they couldn't kill anything.'[706] This is not the case for young Madeleine, who happily 'captured and killed the stray cat,'[707] for she could do the 'odd jobs, the tough jobs, the jobs that no one else was brave enough or clever enough to do.'[708] Anna Motz argues that violence is 'primarily a communication and that it can be a response to a perception of being powerless and a solution to psychic pain.'[709] With this in mind, Madeleine can be seen to use violence as an instrument of control and subjugation that allows her to reassert her perceived superior status. She systemically resorts to violence in her everyday interactions because she has also come to perceive its usefulness. Killing saves the chickens from the cat, or her black shiny shoes from the cow. They are retaliations when she wants to re-establish a sense of control. There are a myriad of social factors that fractured Madeleine's concept of a unified self to such a degree that violence emerges as a legitimate response. She has an obsession with crushing cans but, in a disturbing admission, she declares her love of those cans that 'just at the very last moment, they became –strong, they put up a

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[704] Celallos Munzo, Alfonso, Ramon Espejo Romero and Bernardo Munzo Martinez (eds.), 'Preface' in *Violence in American Drama Essays on Its Staging, Meanings and Effects,* (North Carolina & London: McFarland & Company Inc., 2011), p. 1.
[705] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* unpublished script, p. 2.
[706] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 3.
[707] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p.3.
[708] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 3.
[709] Motz, 'The ultimate taboo? An exploration of female violence and perversion' in *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy,* p. 271.

fight, resisting the inevitable until the bitter end.'[710]

It is on the farm that Madeleine stumbles across 'Tansy Ragwort' a beautiful yellow flower that Madeleine wishes had 'powers to kill or destroy anything I wanted it to,'[711] and incidentally it transpires to be one of the most poisonous flowers on the farm, that could kill any of her grandfather's livestock. Repeatedly, she proclaims her desire to use this flower to 'kill' her brother, Johnny Boyle O'Connor's stupid long-armed girlfriend, and 'THE STUPID COW'. Eventually she does:

> Madeleine: We gave her some hay. We watched her munch away. And as effortlessly as that cow dropped the shit, I tossed tansy to the pile of hay. It didn't take long after that.[712]

The use of 'we' synonymously places Madeleine as Tansy Ragwort, 'a beautiful yellow killer.'[713] Her proud intention is to live up to this self-ascription and is intensely irritated when 'beady eyes' Katie Coleman refuses to believe Madeleine's claim that – 'if you pull the head off a chicken, its body still runs around afterwards.'[714]Uncomfortable and bewildered by Katie's wish to visit the farm and, unsure how to behave with her guest, she takes her to the chicken shed. Madeleine demonstrates. The swift propensity to violence in which she performs this action is best caught by the stage direction:

> *It's not coming off, she keeps pulling but fails to decapitate the chicken, then she spots the can crusher, places the chicken's head inside and closes it hard down on the chicken's neck. It worked, she pops the headless chicken onto the floor, she claps and laughs with delight as it runs around.*[715]

Her dislocation from reality is clearly represented through her reaction to killing the chicken, she is delighted, clapping and giggling hysterically, and wholly uninterested that 'beady eyed' Katie had fainted and was most likely unconscious from the ensuing blow to the head. She maintains a dizzying sense of alienation. Unfazed by Katie's reaction, she simply puts her in the trailer of her 'my little pony bicycle', and returns her to the Coleman household, where she breaks in and leaves her in the downstairs toilet. Madeleine clearly

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[710] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 3.
[711] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 6.
[712] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 8.
[713] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 7.
[714] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p 15.
[715] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 15.

has 'profound difficulties in understanding the mental states of others and/or being able to empathise with these.'[716] Motz suggests that 'the choice of violent action over other forms of self-expression stems from developmental difficulties in attachment and the capacity for mentalisation.'[717] The violent malice of these acts is viewed by Madeleine from a slightly thwarted angle. To her, Katie is not unconscious, she is 'sleeping', and she is not breaking into the Coleman house, the door simply 'opened.'[718] This is true to how she navigates her sense of self, and her ability to process external judgments from others. Once in the house, the shower in Anne Marie Coleman's en suite 'beckoned' her to come inside, the 'lonely lilac razor' was 'calling' her, asking her 'to have a go.'[719] She proceeds to shave her arms, legs, cheeks and toes, and delights in the blood that streams from her knees, turning the water 'cherry blossom pink.'[720]

Her treatment by her peers and family, and the memories of the names they have called her are occasionally allowed to enter her narrative. When they do, however, Madeleine responds with visceral bodily sensations of pain – migraines, screaming and fanatical noises. The memories of such taunts threaten to destabilize her and she dissociates within the moment itself. At the point where she realizes that Anne Marie's eldest daughter is the stupid long-armed girlfriend, Madeleine reacts with anguish - 'ahhhh ahhhh… the burning in my head, burning in my head, and screaming.'[721] It turns her mind obsessively angry and upset – 'it should have been ME *(mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.... this goes on for sometime before she can gather herself enough to speak again.)* '[722] In these moments, her distinct identities are fractured by circumstances in the real world, Madeleine experiences physical pain, as with the migraines, when she is forced to bear witnesses to things that counter her internal narrative. Painful fissures are created in her internal script, and are indicative of the complexities of her troubled mind.

The farm and its inhabitants are associated with all she does not have and fracture the beautiful façade she has so meticulously constructed. She has an instinctive hatred of dirt,

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[716] Motz, 'The ultimate taboo? An exploration of female violence and perversion', in *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy,* p. 270.
[717] Ibid.
[718] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 15.
[719] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 16.
[720] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 16.
[721] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 17.
[722] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 17.

and the cows, 'munching and lolloping pink and slimy:'[723] sights that clearly disgust and disturb her.

> Madeleine: The tail lifting. And I staring, and I can't look away, and the hole and the tail and the shit, the shit, and the shit coming out. And I watching and the shit growing and stinking, and the shit and the cow and the smell, and it falls out, and down and lollop and UP.
> And it's on my face.
> And it's in my mouth
> *(almost gagging)* And, and…and…and.
> It's on … MY… Shoes.
> *(she gasps desperately for breath and she can't breathe with the upset)*[724]

The dirt of the farm, the stench of her grandfather's cigars, the cows and their repeated association with 'shit' is a marked contrast to Anne Marie Coleman. Madeline is determined to find the 'magic' and, later, breaks into her house, oblivious to her deviant behaviour. Everything there is 'clean and sleek and fresh,'[725] smelling of lemons and 'looked like cream.'[726] Madeleine is clearly in awe of this estranged beautiful environment, in which she desperately seeks to 'touch and smell and taste all of it.'[727] It represents for her 'a pillar of elegance and femininity in this dark world.'[728] The Coleman household, and its 'flood of frills and flowers and femininity' hits her like a wave and she takes pure delight in the grooming products and make-up in Anne Marie Coleman's bathroom, or what she refers to as 'the tools of beauty… an endless supply of magic.'[729]

> Madeleine: MAKE UP, make up, my MY lovely make up. All skin colour and glittery brown. Golden cases and shiny jars and tiny tubs of paint. I coated my face, brushed my arms with glittering pink and brown. Black brushed my lashes and brown lined my eyebrows and blue and greened my lids. Lip-sticked and lip-glossed and tried on all her clothes.[730]

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[723] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 7.
[724] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 8.
[725] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 13.
[726] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 13.
[727] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 13.
[728] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 14.
[729] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 14.
[730] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling*, p. 16.

Madeleine is deludingly 'proud' of her perfected silky shiny skin and brown glossy arms, however the description of her made-up face is a clown-like carnavalesque mask, a comic depiction of psychotic behaviour. While her actions look to endorse her appearance and romantic sense of self, they actually result in superficial portrayals of femininity, and through that friendship, gain entry into the home of the most glamorous woman of all. 'My very own personal mentor in glamour and beauty AND my best friend.'[731]

Hulme-Beaman does not explicitly indicate the deep source for Madeleine's violence although, in addition to other reasons, it can perhaps be located in the absence of parental security, by which she considers her mother's body as the betraying and abandoning object. Motz argues that women's violent tendencies and the roots of their aggression can be located 'in their own experiences of impoverished or perverse care, by their most significant attachment figure, their mothers.'[732] Being motherless, female role models are so removed from Madeleine's life that she becomes easily fixated on traditional images of beauty and glamour. On one of her 'collecting' (stealing) missions she shoplifts a fitness video, she describes the beautiful woman on the front, with wild curly hair and a 'wide white happy smile, she wore yellow swimming togs that matched her hair band and showed all of her hips. I collected it immediately.'[733]

She is desperate to source and store heightened images of the female body which are always based on external appearances. 'I would be thin like the lady in the video, elegant and slim'[734] and she envisions herself walking into school next week, in the 'yellow swimming togs and matching hair-band'[735] and Johnno Boyle O'Connor would be 'overwhelmed'[736] by her elegance and confess his love to her. She takes these stereotypes from the larger culture, only to turn them – often tragi-comically - upside down. She exudes a superficial veneer of rationality and charm, a form of 'false self' personality, but she does believe ardently in her creation. Madeleine's sense of self is clearly located in the physical portrayal of her aesthetics, and this is how she judges others. All things nasty or frightening, violent or destructive are covered up and washed over with innocent simplicity. Her fascination with the woman in the exercise video, is later transferred to

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[731] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 10.
[732] Motz, in *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, p. 270.
[733] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 4.
[734] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 5.
[735] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 5.
[736] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 5.

Anne Marie Coleman, the 'tall and elegant and slim'[737] lady she sees in the park. Immediately she fantasises:

> If she was mine I would rush to her arms bright faced and wide eyed and we would head off on our day of glamour and beauty together. We would only speak French to each other and we would sing duets at parties.[738]

Madeleine is utterly alone and craves a maternal figure and, pathetically, deludes herself into thinking that this lady is her mother, she recounts: 'then I realised, she knew, she was waiting for me. I was the only child and she was the only mother. It was. It must be… she was here to COLLECT me.'[739] However, there is no one to collect Madeleine and instead she has to return home, where her only comfort is to sleep the night in the dirty, damp, chicken shed. The cold realisation that her hopes and aspirations are unobtainable leaves her physically distraught, her body 'pulsing and roaring with rage.'[740] Watching other children with their mothers in the park, leaves her emotionally distressed and she is haunted by suppressed images of what others have – Johnny Boyle's stupid girlfriend, beady eyes glamorous mother, the fitness woman's white happy smile, all of which drive her violent tendencies. Such moments indicate that her misconceptions of the adult world and deviance are the results of utter deprivation and neglect. Madeleine openly seeks out other women to fill this void, however, in the end she views them all as inadequate, deceitful and ultimately cruel. She reiterates: 'That Glamorous lady, my glamorous, new, lovely, lemony lady had betrayed me, lied to me, kept Johnno Boyle O'Connor a secret from me.'[741] In a similar vein, Bateman and Fonagy[742] argue that both men and women who use violence against others have similar developmental histories in terms of early deficits in their primary caregivers' capacity to contain and reflect their intense and difficult mental states, leaving them feeling overwhelmed and without the capacity to name or tolerate them. This can lead to the development of what they refer to as the 'alien self' in that unacceptable and intense feelings are felt to come from without, and cannot be integrated within the personality.

Lisa Fitzpatrick suggests that 'violence by female characters is often written and received

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[737] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 9.
[738] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 9.
[739] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 9-10.
[740] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 10.
[741] Hulme Beaman, *Pondling,* p. 17.
[742] Bateman, Anthony, Peter Fonagy, *Mentalization-based Treatment for Personality Disorders A Practical Guide,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 20-23.

as evidence of madness or badness.'[743] Hulme-Beaman's unconventional portrayal of girlhood violence, however, hugely complicates the simplicity of this, and Madeleine's violence can be seen, not least, to confront patriarchal dominance and offer the possibility of transgressive potentiality. Madeleine's wide-eyed childish naïveté and imagination have flashes of psychosis that flare dangerously, but also demand a deeper exploration of her acts of transgression. To transgress is to go beyond the boundaries set by law, discipline or convention. It implies wayward behaviours and acts that challenge the establishment that is not reactionary for the sake of reaction, but acts to resist aspects of established practice that typically is denied.

McGee, Meehan and Hulme Beaman have sought to challenge present and on-going images of violent women that impact mythologies of 'womanhood' in Ireland. The actions of violent women rest uneasily against societal proscriptions of how women should by 'nature' engage with their surroundings. These playwrights consciously implode stereotypical patriarchal images of women as fundamental carers and nurtures and, thus, the plays act as sites of vehement resistance. Along the way, McGee, Meehan and Hulme Beaman trade simple binary dualities – 'mad' and 'bad' women - to create nuanced dramatic depictions of female violence, and locate these within cycles of reactionary abuse. A constant challenge throughout the thesis is to disrupt myths surrounding the actualities of women's lives. This will be developed further in my following discussion of the aging Irish woman. She, I argue, has been displaced and misjudged in much social discourse, but is reconfigured through the plays of *Six Acts of Love, Treehouses,* and *Halcyon Days*.

[743] Fitzpatrick, in *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland,* p. 199.

Chapter 5: Memory and the Aging Process

Traditionally, there have been problematic representations of aging women in the history of Irish theatre and folklore, not least the symbolic place of the old woman as Shan Van Vocht, a metaphorical embodiment of Ireland. This is famously evident in Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats's tired old woman in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan.* Aging mother Ireland must give way to the revitalised Dark Rosaleen, forging the association of aged with 'hag', and youth with beauty. In this chapter, however, I drag the tired old woman from the shadows into the glare of contemporary daylight, not just to wrestle with myth and tradition but also to call attention to the complexities and multiformity of lived realities for older women. I argue throughout the thesis that all the plays under discussion work confront and counteract gender inequalities that peripheralise the lives of real women. Anna Harpin maintains that 'aging has frequently functioned… as a metaphor, or trope, as opposed to being itself a legitimate and coherent object of study and exploration.'[744] In reference to modern British drama, Harpin perceives 'a turn towards age that begins, not only to figure (female) aged characters centre stage but, moreover, to place the previously more static and seemingly self-evident notions of old age in flux.'[745]

With this in mind, the chapter explores dramatic representations of aging and memory through the realities of Irish women's experiences. It advocates narrative story-telling as a means of thinking about the present despite the pervasive gravitational pull of the past. The three plays discussed are Ioanna Anderson's *Six Acts of Love* (2008), Elizabeth Kuti's *Treehouses* (2000), and Deirdre Kinahan's *Halcyon Days* (2012). These three playwrights combine narratives of both progress and decline,[746] where progress depicts an enriched old age and decline entails decrepitude. They achieve this combination through intricate portrayals of their aged characters and, in doing so, generate an ambivalent narrative of aging that represents an individual, personal, realistic - rather than mythical - depiction in the lived experience of older women. Aagje Swinnen and Cynthia Port suggest that by focusing on materiality 'emphasizes the conceptualization of age as embodied experience.'[747] These are the material physical changes that come undeniably with age and

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[744] Harpin, Anna, 'The lives of our mad mothers: Aging and contemporary performance,' in *Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory,* 22(1), March 2012, p.67.
[745] Ibid, p. 68.
[746] Gullette, Margaret Morganroth, *Fighting the New Ageism in America,* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p.154.
[747]Swinnen, Aagje, and Cynthia Port, 'Aging, Narrative and Performance: Essays from the Humanities', in *International Journal of Aging and Later Life,* 7(2), 2012, p. 12.

the ways women manage such changes in their daily lives. Deleuze actually believes that the body is never solely in the present, rather, 'it contains the before and the after, tiredness and waiting.'[748] The plays underscore these ordinary details, that the later-life stories should not be forgotten or invisible - not only because they have value in their own right but also because their past services explanations of the present and enables contemplation of pathways into the future. While critics[749] might question the radicalism of reminiscing on stage, it can actually become a cathartic exercise on how to deal with trauma and loss. In *Irish Feminism: Past, Present, and Future,* Clara Fischer argues that many of these lessons on 'memory, rememory, trauma and loss, can be applied to the feminist context, a way to remember… what an entire culture has been trying to repress.'[750] She continues, 'it can be said that women hold a rememory of the primal trauma that is patriarchy… as feminists we are aware of the cruelties and exclusions – those instances of sexism that surface as hauntings of an ever-present yet repressed and denied patriarchal trauma.'[751] Her sentiments reflect Caroline Williams's comment on 'chronic amnesia' in my introduction; that feminist struggles must continue to maintain progress toward equality, lest we forget the elisions of the past.

A constant strand through my thesis lies in both naming and resisting the many binary 'dualities' that society commonly attaches to women; in this case, dramatic representation can confirm or counteract social perceptions and cultural interpretations of aging. The plays I discuss here operate at a number of complex levels and this is true, too, of their women protagonists. Through contrasting theatrical representations, the characters move out of locked oppositional pairs – 'healthy-sick'/ 'young-old'/ 'progress-decline' – blurring such polarisations as the intricacy within each figure is spoken and heard. Negative stereotypes of aging women are a very prevalent feature within social reality. Nuria Casado-Gual argues that such images are 'so engrained in the youth-orientated societies of the Western world that they often become invisible to older people themselves.'[752] To contextualise this, Jacky Jones rails against 'ageism' as 'a prejudice so ingrained in Irish society that few people recognise it… it is an insidious and pervasive negative belief

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[748] Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (trans.), (London: Athlone, 1989), p.189.
[749] Fisher, Mark, 'Six Acts of Love Review', *The Guardian,* 7th October 2008, accessed at www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/oct/07/theatre.
[750] Fischer, Clara, ''You Memory That?' Theorising Feminism in Ireland Through Feminist Storytelling and Rememory', in *Irish Feminism: Past, Present, and Future,* p. 265.
[751] Ibid.
[752] Casado-Gual, Nuria, 'Ambivalent Pathways of Progress and Decline: The Representation of Aging and Old Age in Joanna McClelland Glass's Drama', in *Theatre Research in Canada,* 36(1), 2015, p. 110.

system [that] stereotypes everyone over 60 as dependant, sick, frail, decrepit, and a drain on the economy.'[753] Older people become framed as a 'social time bomb'[754] and are viewed as recipients rather than contributors within the health and social services as well as in society more broadly. Halpin argues that the 'presentation of age as a dire financial burden on the public services establishes old people as *necessarily* in poor health and reasserts the narrative of decline. Age is thus universally equated with disease, deterioration and incapacity, and has led to a pathologisation of aging.'[755] The emergence of old age pensions, mass retirement and geriatric medicine, coupled with an increased interest in cultural history and an anthropological study of social groups, has 'fixed the associations between age, illness, poverty and debt.'[756] In this 'fixing', aging has become a narrative of disease, inevitable decline and dependence.

This pathologisation of old age, however, has provoked a counter-movement, evidenced in the coining of the term 'ageism' in 1969 by Robert Butler.[757] An increased focus on the social reality of an older populace has created the need to forge success narratives that resist the dominant narratives of decline. Gullette's analyses of cultural constructions of old age, for example, forge a distinction between these seemingly opposing narratives. The progressive makes older people the subject of the same positivity that is frequently associated with children and young people, while 'decline narratives', persistent in the master narrative of aging, maintaining negative stereotypes that are detrimental to the current reality of an aging society. This simplistic binary continues to underline contemporary interpretations and representations of aging, and both accounts can be problematic. In a Foucauldian light, it is possible to argue that perspectives on older people can be constituted through multiple, complex social discourses. The significance of memory, as well as the crucial role of life narratives in the personal and cultural construction of identity, can be used to interrogate the ways in which perceptions of aging can be enriched by theatrical representation. While such binaries of aging play out in socio-political discourse, the three plays here illustrate the importance of both progress and decline narratives at work at one and the same time. This is why Gullette warns that, although progress narratives project a 'moving image of the self through its past and

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[753] Jones, Jacky, 'Second Opinion: Ageism is so engrained that we don't spot it', in *The Irish Times,* 22nd September 2015. : www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/second-opinion-ageism-is-so-ingrained-that-we-don-t-spot-it-1.2353716.

[754] Harpin, 'The lives of our mad mothers: Aging and contemporary performance,' in *Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, p. 70.

[755] Ibid.

[756] Ibid.

[757] Butler, Robert, 'Ageism: Another form of bigotry', *The Gerontologist,* 19 (2), 1999, p.234-464.

onward to its better future'[758] they must not lose their grip, so that progress can also 'contain accidents, bleeding, pain, scars and rage – impediments that might otherwise lead to decline narrative.'[759] Theatre can create a multi-layered presentation of the aged, self-replete with reflections on the life course. Anderson, Kinahan and Kuti give theatrical space to the realities of older voices, attending to the plurality of experience of aging in Ireland. Their representations of older women relocate the concept of female aging from a cultural space of fixity to one of politicized indeterminacy.[760] This can best be understood as excavating an indeterminate, muddy space between stereotype and counter-stereotype in which the politics of gendered aging can be reassessed.

To focus on Ireland's aging population is to comment on the problems presented by this new demographic reality. One element is the so-called 'longevity revolution,' which Casado-Gual uses to describe the remarkable increase in life expectancy that has, 'characterized Western societies since 1900 and especially following the second half of the twentieth century, and which still presents some of the most important medical and social challenges of our modern world.'[761] This revolution has led to new conceptualisations and interpretations of the 'aging-into-old-age,'[762] a cultural process about which little is known. An *Irish Times* article entitled 'Trinity researchers confirm you are only as old as you feel' describes research at Trinity College Dublin, where a longitudinal study on ageing (The Irish Longitudinal Data on Ageing – TILDA, 2016), has found that negative attitudes to aging affect both physical and cognitive health in later years.[763] The report[764] published in January 2016, detailed a large-scale, nationally representative study of people aged 50 and over in Ireland, and has completed three waves of data collection from a nationally representative cohort of more than 8,000 people living in Ireland.[765] In an *Irish Times* article, Aoife Carr argues that the findings from this report have important

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[758] Gullette, *Fighting the New Ageism in America*, p. 149.
[759] Ibid.
[760] Harpin, 'The lives of our mad mothers: Aging and contemporary performance,' in *Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, p. 70.
[761] Casado-Gual, 'Ambivalent Pathways of Progress and Decline: The Representation of Aging and Old Age n Joanna McClelland Glass's Drama', in *Theatre Research in Canada*, p. 109.
[762] Ibid., p. 109.
[763] www.irishtimes.com/news/offbeat/trinity-researchers-confirm-you-are-only-as-old-as-you-feel-1.2512194 Wednesday, January 27th, 2016.
[764] Donoghue, Orna, Rose Anne Kenny, and Matthew O'Connell, 'Walking to Wellbeing: Physical Activity, Social Participation and Psychological Health in Irish adults aged 50 years and Older', *The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing* (TILDA, 2016). More than 8,000 people aged 50 and over (48% men, 52% women) accepted the invitation to participate in the first wave of TILDA, and the majority of these also agreed then to undertake a comprehensive health assessment.
[765] www.irishtimes.com/news/offbeat/trinity-researchers-confirm-you-are-only-as-old-as-you-feel-1.2512194 Wednesday, January 27th, 2016.

implications for media, policymakers, practitioners and society more generally, as 'societal attitudes towards ageing are predominantly negative.'[766] It is only by addressing and focusing on internalised attitudes to the aging population that change can arise in the treatment of the elderly and the treatment of themselves. The experience of aging as enshrined in the symbolism of the old Irish woman need not be cloaked in a misconception of long-suffering finality. Such perspectives of aging are commonly understood as 'truths' and secure age-related stereotypes that suggest older adults are 'physically weak, forgetful, stubborn and selfish.'[767] Unsurprisingly, according to the World Health Organisation,[768] there is little medical or psychological evidence to suggest that this applies exclusively to older adults, or that all older adults can be tarred with the same brush. Allowing such stereotypes to remain unchallenged maintains demeaning subliminal messages surrounding aging in society. Rose Anne Kenny reiterates, 'researchers and policy makers can work together to develop and implement societal-wide interventions to target attitudes and perhaps, ultimately, find novel ways of maintaining health in later life.'[769] This indicates that the way aging is thought, talked and written about could have direct effects on health and determine successful aging. Deirdre Robertson, lead researcher for the Trinity TILDA project, continues this idea by saying, 'everyone will grow older and if negative attitudes towards ageing are carried throughout life they can have a detrimental, measurable effect on mental, physical and cognitive health.'[770] Age scholars stress the importance of adapting the cultural conditions of how the ageing body is perceived, which can be aided through performance.

TILDA's[771] longitudinal study on aging is considered the most ambitious ever carried out in Ireland, and represents a current step-change in terms of data, knowledge and understanding of ageing with which to inform policy and research. The population structure in Ireland is changing, people are living longer, and a key challenge facing public health in the country is this burgeoning aging population and the increasing demands on

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[766] Carr, Aoife, www.irishtimes.com/news/offbeat/trinity-researchers-confirm-you-are-only-as-old-as-you-feel-1.2512194 Wednesday, January 27th, 2016.
[767] www.irishtimes.com/news/offbeat/trinity-researchers-confirm-you-are-only-as-old-as-you-feel-1.2512194 Wednesday, January 27th, 2016.
[768] World Health Organisation, (WHO): The United Nations public health arm, which monitors disease out breaks and assesses the performance of health systems around the globe. www.who.int.
[769] Professor Rose Anne Kenny quoted in www.irishtimes.com/news/offbeat/trinity-researchers-confirm-you-are-only-as-old-as-you-feel-1.2512194 Wednesday, January 27th, 2016.
[770] Dr Deirdre Robertson quoted in www.irishtimes.com/news/offbeat/trinity-researchers-confirm-you-are-only-as-old-as-you-feel-1.2512194 Wednesday, January 27th, 2016.
[771] McGarrigle, Christine, Hilary Cronin, Rose Anne Kenny, *The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing,* (TILDA), Trinity College Dublin, Lincoln Gate, Dublin 2, Ireland, 2014.

the middle generation for both financial and informal care. From TILDA, the proportion of women aged 85 years or over increased by 55 % between 1991 and 2011.[772] One outcome of interest has been called the 'sandwich generation'[773], those middle aged women who support and care for both living parents and younger dependent children. One-third of women aged 50–69 in Ireland fall into this sandwich generation and the majority provide care in both directions, Janus-like, to both the elderly and young. The impact of providing this intergenerational support on women's health varies by the type of support given. In brief, to give support, particularly financial support, to children was seen as beneficial and life enhancing, while non-financial giving in the form of caring for elderly parents is associated negatively with poor physical and mental health.[774]

As Anderson, Kuti and Kinahan's plays illustrate, these identities are told better as stories of aging, authentically defined. Indeed, Gullette believes that by telling 'our life-course stories even in a naïve way, we are carrying on an activity with latent subversive potential.'[775] Swinnen and Port suggest that, 'a narrative approach to age starts from the metaphor of life as a story and refers to the way age identities are constituted in and through narratives.'[776] This conceptualisation heavily features in both *Six Acts of Love* and *Treehouses*. Swinnen and Port continue that, 'narrative',

> [A]s a travelling concept, helps to define aging as a development through time, negotiating between personal circumstances and aspirations, and the expectations of the master narratives in which we are inscribed. Narratives of age range from the autobiographical to the fictional and include oral accounts as well as representations in literature and other art forms.'[777]

Hannah Zeilig reasserts, 'the interrogation of stories of age and ageing via narrative approaches and as found in literatures are increasingly recognised as an important source

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[772] Central Statistics Office, *Profile 2 Older and Younger*, (Stationary Office: Dublin, 2012).
[773]McGarrigle, Christine, Hilary Cronin, Rose Anne Kenny, 'The impact of being the intermediate caring generation and intergenerational transfers on self-reported health of women in Ireland', Int J Public Health (2014) 59:301–308.
[774] See, Christine McGarrigle and Rose Anne Kenny, *Profile of the Sandwich Generation and Intergenerational Transfers in Ireland,* (TILDA) October 2013, accessed at: tilde.tcd.ie/assets/pdf/intergenerational_transfers.pdf, pp. 1-36.
[775] Morganroth, Gullette, *Aged By Culture,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 124.
[776] Swinnen, and Port, 'Aging, Narrative and Performance: Essays from the Humanities', in *International Journal of Aging and Later Life*, p. 12.
[777] Ibid., p. 12.

of knowledge for mining the intricacies of later life.'[778] Gullette suggests that, 'we follow narrative because we understand the fundamental truth: aging *is* narrative. We research the context of storytelling because we know that storytelling never happens in a vacuum of a solitary mind, however self-affirming that mind might be.'[779]

In applying Foucault's ideas to decline and resistance, I argue that in the intersection of these contradictory discourses, resistance to ageism is possible. Markers of culture, gender and social-class pervade the conditions of aging in both positive and negative ways. For example, a 'progress' narrative can act to counteract negative social stereotypes of old age. Diana Tietjens Meyers argues that,

> Born into and formed by misogynist, heterosexist, racist, ethnocentric, ableist and classist societies as we are, we need to understand the true self as an ever evolving self if we are to overcome internalized markers of domination and subordination and if we are to resist unjust social structures and practices without sacrificing authenticity.[780]

It is potentially dehumanising to ignore the diverse ways aging is experienced and 'it is illogical and damaging to keep "aging" in artificial conceptual isolation from our multiple identities.' [781] In relation to theatre, Casado-Gual, suggests it is likely to see these diametrically opposed views on aging dramatically represented, and that 'plays and their authors consciously or unconsciously propagate, reinforce, contradict perceptions of age and aging through their theatrical creations.'[782] As I will demonstrate, this is certainly the case with the three plays here.

To further my primary attentions to age and aging as the focus of this chapter, I look also at the importance of the passage of time in varied forms of gendered, late-life resistance. These playwrights create a theatricalisation of 'time' in a myriad of ways, to take account of the subtle and multifaceted depictions of late-life aging, where older women's life narratives and self-conceptions unfold in parallel with their own process of aging in the

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[778] Zeilig, Hannah, 'The critical use of narrative and literature in gerontology', in *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life,* 2011 6(2), p. 7.
[779] Gullette, *Fighting the New Ageism in America*, p. 159.
[780] Tietjens Meyers, Diana, *Gender in the Mirror Cultural Imagery and Women's Agency,* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 157.
[781] Gullette, *Aged by Culture*, p. 124.
[782] Casado-Gual, 'Ambivalent Pathways of Progress and Decline: The Representation of Aging and Old Age in Joanna McClelland Glass's Drama', in *Theatre Research in Canada*, p. 110.

present. As Butler points out, 'One's (pre)history has never stopped happening and, as such, is not a prehistory in any chronological sense. It is not done with, over, relegated to a past, which then becomes part of a causal or narrative reconstruction of the self.'[783] David Wiles suggests that such temporal complexity is one of the themes of Raymond Williams' Marxist writings on art and culture that offers up a temporal mapping of the present, attending to the way in which any contemporary moment is always already made up of different 'times'. Writing about theatre and time, Wiles considers the way in which 'plays are neither *in* time nor *about* time, but are *of time.*'[784] In this vein, the playwrights use contrasting techniques to unite past and present, and allow for meditative monologues and dialogues to emerge, balancing a fine equilibrium between 'actional' and 'contemplative tempos', or in Casado-Gual's words, to 'a delicate balance between theatrical rhythms that either stress change or, alternatively, underline an apparent sense of stasis.'[785] Within these patterns, chronological time is often dismantled and confused, representing dramatically the way their female protagonists' past continues to impinge on the present. Casado-Gual suggests that when this happens, 'characters' old age becomes a polyphonic standpoint through which all different ages, age-roles, and significant life transitions that constitute the character's identity can be expressed.'[786]

The instability of memory is common thread through the plays. Harpin argues that, 'memory, like time, is another central aspect in the dramaturgy of older lives.'[787] Memory is traditionally understood solely as a method for recollecting things or as a container of information to be retrieved through association. More recently, however, neuroscientists regard memory as a unified mental pattern of the mind and the body, bringing together the object and the self.[788] Alan Richardson suggests that despite the apparent disconnect between memory and imagination,

> Recent work in cognitive neuroscience suggests that remembering the past and imagining the future may in fact be closely related functions of a single cognitive system or, at the very least, kindred functions that overlap significantly and share

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[783] Butler, Judith, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 78
[784] David Wiles, *Theatre & Times,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 3.
[785] Casado-Gual, 'Ambivalent Pathways of Progress and Decline: The Representation of Aging and Old Age in Joanna McClelland Glass's Drama', in *Theatre Research in Canada*, p. 116.
[786] Ibid.
[787] Harpin, 'The lives of our mad mothers: Aging and contemporary performance,' in *Women aand Performance: a journal of feminist theory,* p. 76.
[788] Damasio, Antonio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Conciousness,* (London: W. Heinemann, 2000).

> many of the same neural mechanisms. What has been called the 'Janus hypothesis' – that retrospection into the past and prospection into the future.[789]

This conceptualisation challenges us to investigate further the functions of memory and understand how these can be 'utilized in a piece in other than a performance of recollected personal events or as a tool for the building up of character.'[790] The stories and recollections of the women central to the plays shape the plots, and their evocative histories continually mark the present. They are certainly plagued, either by on-stage ghosts or the remembered and reconstructed ghosts from their youth. The plays resurrect victims of the past, probe beyond the boundaries of death and speak with the dead, to encompass both regrets about late-life and past mistakes, hopes for the future while, at the same time, extracting full value from the present. The playwrights' experiment with varying techniques for staging memory, such as overlaps of time between characters, places and situations; changes in grammatical tense between past and present; repetition of lines, and mirror imagery. In addition, the staging of dementia serves as a metaphoric device as well as an increasingly prevalent social reality. Here, the 'modern old woman' is both young and old, recognising her age while resisting the processes of aging, living both in the moment and in the past, telling her interweaving stories of present day and yesterday.

Six Acts of Love: Analysing the 'sandwich generation' and the necessity of staging dementia

Ioanna Anderson's[791] *Six Acts of Love,* initially developed under a writer's scheme at the Abbey, premiered in Glasgow by The Tron Theatre Company on September 30th 2008,[792] and was directed by the company's Artistic Director, Andy Arnold. Commenting on the importance of production, Anderson remarks that, 'without which, as all playwrights know and fear, a play is not really a play, it's a collection of papers in the back of your sock

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[789] Richardson, Alan, 'Memory and Imagination in Romantic Fiction', in *The Memory Process Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives,* Suzanne Nalbantian, Paul M. Matthews, and James L. McClelland (eds.), (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 277.

[790] Richardson, in *The Memory Process Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives,* p.277.

[791] Ioanna Anderson was born in Edinburgh but has lived in Dublin for many years. She co-founded Greenlight Productions, which produced her first play, *Describe Joe,* which won the OZ Whitehead Award in 2000 and was performed at the Dublin Fringe Festival. Her second play, *Why I Hate the Circus* produced by Greenlight in association with the Civic Theatre, Tallaght, in 2001. Her third, *Words Advice for Young People,* was produced as part of Rough Magic new writing SEEDS programme at Project Theatre, Dublin, in 2004. *Nightshift,* a short play commissioned for the Gaiety School of Acting, was performed as part of their graduation show in June 2004. Her latest play, *You Are Here,* was commissioned by Living Space Theatre (then Readco) and was performed at Dublin Theatre Festival in 2008.

[792] The play ran between 26th September to 11th October 2008

drawer.'[793] Anderson recalls suggesting the play be called 'Love, Death, Home' since, she says 'these are the things all my plays seem to be about. Luckily no one agreed with me.'[794] While it deals with love, death and home, it also engages with a delicate treatment of dementia, the effects of menopause and the aging process on the female protagonists, their resistance to narratives of decline, and the importance of the stories of the past for moving forward in the future. In one review of *Six Acts of Love*, Mark Fisher argues that, 'as with many plays where characters are fixated on the past, every move forward requires several steps back, depriving the production of energy.'[795] However, dramatic impetus emerges through the overlay of context and images rather than the linear unfolding of a plot. The use of multiple generations on stage and techniques for staging memory, explore the transitional nature of the women's personal and social history. The fluidity between past and present is drawn out, whereby the violence of history continues to repeat upon the present.

The plot focuses on Katherine (Barbara Wilshere), in her fifties and a mother of four, and her mother Dorothy (Una McLean), in her seventies and grappling with vascular dementia. Dorothy has been married twice, her first husband Desmond, Katherine's father, died tragically in the war, before Katherine was born. Her second marriage is to his brother Fergus (Des Braiden) and, though he is gay, their love is evident - if only platonic - as Dorothy's fractured memory attests: 'I was only ever in love once. Have you met Fergus?'[796] Care-worker Delilah (Clara Onyemere) has recently moved into the family home to help with Dorothy's illness. Katherine has lately separated from her husband Tom (Benny Young), who has 'run off' with a younger woman. In a bizarre turn of events, in the process of filing for divorce, it transpires that they were never actually legally married and this true-to-life scenario is the interesting plot device upon which the play rests. The priest who married them failed to sign the correct documentation so that, in the eyes of the Irish state, although they had performed the religious ceremony, there had been no accompanying formal civil procedure. This becomes a fiercely convenient situation for Tom, who reminds Katherine: 'legally, legally speaking, I am not obliged – for example, our accounts, our finances, for the most part, are in my name, and so on. We are in a new

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[793] Anderson, Ioanna, 'Author's Note' in *Six Acts of Love,* (London: Nick Hern Books Limited, 2008).
[794] Ibid.
[795] Fisher, Mark, 'Six Acts of Love Review', *The Guardian,* 7th October 2008, accessed at www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/oct/07/theatre.
[796] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 11.

situation now.'[797] He can, as Katherine articulates, 'wipe out thirty years on a technicality. Why not? Clean slate. New broom.'[798] A fair settlement through divorce can only be obtained by getting re-married, because, 'you can't get a divorce if you're not married.'[799] However, the problem persists, not only would they need to remarry, they must also do so under precisely the same conditions of their first marriage – the same priest, same church and same witnesses. Fisher comments, it is 'like a cruel exhumation of the past,'[800] whereby the past is quite literally being re-created in the present. This ridiculous, if not grotesque situation whereby Catholic priests 'forgot' to formalise marriage ceremonies with the civil authorities was a genuine reality for some 'married' couples in Irish society. Their re-marriage/re-ceremony is the only means to formalise the past, as Katherine attests: 'this is the Catholic Church, after all, they like things as medieval as possible.'[801] This plot device enables Anderson to collapse historical time into a tripartite structure where past, present and future are remembered and re-enacted simultaneously, history is still playing itself out.

In *Six Acts of Love,* aging is presented as a heavily gendered process through Anderson's characterisations of Dorothy and Katherine. This gendered process is, in Aston's words, an example of the 'escalating millennial trend of the neo-liberal governance of femininity as the key to women's success, exemplified in mass media culture'.[802] As other feminist scholars have pointed out, patriarchal cultures not only identify Woman with Nature and Man with Culture, but also they prize culture over nature,

> The cunning of a thriving patriarchal gender symbolism is that it contrives to load the entire natural life cycle into feminine imagery. So powerful is the association of womanhood with youthful beauty and motherhood that when a woman's looks cease to inspire ardour and her ovaries cease to produce eggs, womanhood is identified with death.'[803]

Aston suggests that this powerful, ubiquitous, cultural trend amounts to a social 'make-over programme', and has a signature that is one of rejuvenation, the regulation and

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[797] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 29.
[798] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 29.
[799] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 29.
[800] Fisher, *The Guardian,* 7th October 2008.
[801] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 32.
[802] Aston, *A Good Night Out for the Girls,* p. 72.
[803] Tietjens Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror Cultural Imagery and Women's Agency,* p. 163.

transformation of older bodies to force them to look 'young'. Anderson emphasises this potent trend in the play in a myriad ways: her staging of Dorothy's illness, the waning of youthful appearance, Katherine as carer and her onset of menopause. All these accentuate the heightened cultural pressure of aging on women, not least the symbolic nexus that links femininity to beauty, youth and motherhood. Aston emphasises the point that 'the negative connotations of being called old that both men and women experience is particularly acute, painful and unpleasant for women.'[804] As Dorothy points out,

> A fifty-five-year-old man looks at his wife. She is almost the same age and he sees it every time he looks at her: her waist has thickened and her face has slackened. She has the same smile, perhaps, but when she smiles now it's like seeing someone he used to know waving from a distance. He is a healthy, successful and confident man. He's old as he feels. But when he looks at his wife he feels *(Pause.)*[805]

This is an instance of the pervasive nature of the 'male gaze,'[806] which is taken as the universal perspective, and through which the man can be as 'old as he feels' while the woman is reduced to external appearances of age.

Dorothy is shown to be aware of the gendered social script of aging, at times accommodating to it, at times refusing to be managed expertly by others. Through her acute awareness of the inequalities of the aging process, she is able sometimes to accept and yet also resist the 'pervasive narrative'. She is aware that 'most women have a public and a private face,'[807] and that cosmetics can be used to 'apply an even mask, taking care to blend at the edges.'[808] In the course of one exchange, Katherine is applying Dorothy's lipstick, powdering her face, removing the headband and combing her hair. As Dorothy attests with the application of make-up: 'all the colour that used to be there, painted back in. All of the things that never used to be there, lines, shadows, thread veins, painted out.' That said, Dorothy shows no desire to 'reverse' the advances of age, and rails against the ageism that expects as much. She says: 'I'm over seventy. No one at my age recognises their face in the mirror,'[809] but this should not be problematic,

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[804] Aston, 'Grumpy Old Women' and Virginia Ironside's monologues', in *A Good Night Out for the Girls: popular feminism s in contemporary theatre and performance*, p.75.
[805] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 7.
[806] Mulvey, Laura, 'Viusal pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, 16(3), 1975, pp.8-16.
[807] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love*, p. 5.
[808] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love*, p. 6.
[809] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 17.

> Dorothy: None of this can reverse anything, of course. You will not look twenty-five again, you will not look thirty-five again.[810]

Meyers argues that women's aging features have been typically commandeered as figurative vehicles for decline and demise. Dorothy, though, shuns this stereotypical view, she celebrates the older face as full of character and interest,

> Dorothy: It's hard to tell much about a young face, but an aging face gives everything away, how much you have eaten, drunk, smoked, how often you sat in the sun or laughed.[811]

She defends her use of make up commenting that, 'I expect you think I'm too old for any of this to matter. The young never really understand the old. It's not all about dying, you know.'[812] This represents Dorothy's affirmation of an internal self and external appearance that refuses to be disavowed, but also her sense that being old derives from 'outside' social pressures. Dorothy's determination to retain her own self-esteem and dignity persist in these daily rituals – for her, applying make-up is a progressive act of later-life resistance. The process of old age is replete with continued developmental possibilities and, as Aston points out, such transformations can refigure old age as a 'liberation from the dominant cultural economy of highly regulated, youthful femininity. Letting go of the agony of having to look good in favour of 'look[ing] old in a good way.'[813]

The characterisation of Katherine, on the other hand, is trapped within the 'dominant cultural economy of highly regulated, youthful femininity',

> Katherine: I never used make-up till I was about forty. I was never beautiful, but I was young. I suppose it's only with hindsight that begins to look like the same thing.[814]

She feeds on the narratives that view older women as undesirable, unattractive and redundant. When Tom left her, her first thoughts are of loneliness and isolation, believing

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[810] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love*, p. 7.
[811] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 6.
[812] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 12.
[813] Aston, *A Good Night Out for the Girls,* p. 88.
[814] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 7.

that at her age, 'men are looking for someone younger and prettier, or they're not looking,'[815] and is certain she will spend the rest of her days as an old crone in a 'cold and half-empty bed.'[816] She embodies the negative social inequalities surrounding middle-age women, societal messages that are so ingrained, they can be hard to detect, debate or contradict; external insults to her body that manifest themselves internally. However, as I return to later in the concluding scenes of the play, Anderson does provide Katherine with some release.

These somewhat depressing notions of women's experiences of physical aging are heightened in the play by Katherine's early menopause. Aston asserts that, 'before the economic realities and stresses of old age come to pass… women also have to contend with 'multiple aging processes' much earlier than men and most significantly in the years of menopause.'[817] Katherine's experience of the menopause provides insight into the pervasiveness of dominant cultural attitudes around women, and the desirable feminine. She recalls:

> Katherine: So, early menopause. My doctor's very brisk about it… I'd completed my family, as he put it, so I could have no further practical use of my womb, surely.

The finality of the medical male gaze firmly places Katherine as reproductively redundant, and marks her as 'old'. This is why Miquel-Baldellou argues that 'women were thus deemed to grow older earlier given the fact that the threshold propelling them towards old age was based on their capacity for reproduction.'[818] Historically, according to Karen Chase, 'when menopause began, a woman was considered to have entered both the portals of old age and mental instability.'[819] Aston suggests that 'there is then an experiential stickiness to the menopausal label: women may feel it, inwardly, physically, and are made to feel it outwardly through the social scripting of the menopausal body as abject.'[820] Katherine's sense of identity is stripped bare though the changes in her body, she experiences both the physical effects which are amplified by the external pressures of youth, femininity, all which becomes internalised, she attests, 'I'm upset because, y'know,

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[815] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 54.
[816] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 54.
[817] Aston, *A Good Night Out for the Girls,* p. 76.
[818] Miquel-Baldellou, Marta, 'Tracing Miss Havisham in the Mirror, or Aging through the Other', in *Perverse Identities: Identites in Conflict,* Flocel Sabate (ed.), (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), p. 179.
[819] Chase, Karen, *The Victorians and Old Age,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 42.
[820] Aston, *A Good Night Out for the Girls,* p. 76.

a part of me is dying, and everything will be different from now on whether I like it or not.'[821]

Katherine believes that feeling young and being desirable are governed by her ability to have children. The only books given to her by the doctor were 'all about making an effort to remain useful and attractive,'[822] which simply added to her internal angst,

> Katherine: So I tell Tom I'm feeling… sad. Tom books us a mini-break to some spa hotel where he spends all the time on the phone and I spend all the time having expensive beauty treatments administered by young girls who find me – I was sure – withered and pathetic. A crone.[823]

From her feminist perspective, Aston notes that the 'mapping of the embodied (inside) ways of knowing and disembodied, discursive (outside) formations of menopausal subjectivity is important.'[824] She makes a further point, though, that the menopause actually needs to be recognised as 'symptomatic of the 'double aging process' in which socially, culturally *and* biologically women come to feel that their "best before" date is stamped not in later years, but somewhere in their post-reproductive, middle years.'[825] She suggests that 'given the likelihood of encounter with ageism in their middle years, women may, therefore experience this as a doubling of age alienation'[826]

Tom, however, does not have to face such feelings of dejection and replacement. Rather, Katherine recalls, he simply returned home one day in the previous year to inform her 'they' (he and Katherine) were not happy and to reveal he had fallen in love with a woman younger than their oldest son, and that he now wanted a divorce. Tom has since left the family home, has a baby with his new partner, but his presence and sense of righteousness is keenly felt. His insensitive, selfish and somewhat ridiculous behaviour nearly lends itself to the comic. In an ironic parallel, because of her dementia, Dorothy is desperately trying to cling to her fading past, while Tom is dramatically trying to erase his. But Katherine reminds him, 'we have a whole history together, you can't just wipe it out. Even if you wanted to. Even if I wanted to.'[827] Later, Katherine says,

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[821] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 46.
[822] Ibid.
[823] Ibid.
[824] Aston, *A Good Night Out for the Girls,* p. 80.
[825] Aston, *A Good Night Out for the Girls,* p. 76.
[826] Aston, *A Good Night Out for the Girls,* p. 83.
[827] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 72.

> You missed all that stuff when they were small and funny and needed you. And now you get this second chance to wipe the slate clean and try it all again with a new family? And while you're discovering the magic of babies at sixty, what happens to your old wife and your four children who had to grow up without you? What happens to us?[828]

Many Western women believe that with age they become less attractive and less sexual, more so than their male counterparts, and that the family is their main responsibility and obligation. These messages, Collette Brown maintains, are 'so engrained that few consider debating or contradicting them.'[829] In terms of family care, as Sally Marie Bamford posits, 'the nature of women's role as largely hidden and forgotten caregivers, and older women's vulnerability to the care they receive in certain parts of the world, demonstrate the persistent inequalities many women face across the life course.'[830] As TILDA has well documented, a larger percentage of women than men are disadvantaged in terms of age - specific disabilities and co-morbidities as a result of living longer. This gendered process of aging is reflected as similar to the gendered order of care. Katherine is an example of the TILDA 'sandwich generation', as sole carer during the onset of her mother's dementia. Stephen Post argues that,

> Very quickly, the much vaunted 'filial duties' become the imposed burden of the daughter or daughters-in-law. The affective strain of actually caring is placed on women while men are mostly only indirectly involved – they might assist with financial management, funeral arrangements, and the like. Thus, the 'modern technological extension of the life span has put pressures more directly on women rather than on men.[831]

Ironically, the very scientific progress that was to liberate modern human beings from bondage now imposes a 'moral care-giving burden that is far heavier than that faced by

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[828] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 47.
[829] Browne, Colette, *Women, Feminism and Aging,* (New York: Springer Publishing Company Inc, 1998) p. 34.
[830] Bamford, Sally-Marie, *Women and Dementia – Not Forgotten*, The International Longevity Centre, London, UK, (ILC-UK), 2011, p. 44.
[831] Post, Stephen G, 'Women and Elderly Parents: Moral Controversy in and Aging Society', *Hypatia,* 5(1), Spring 1990, pp.83-89, p. 85.

those living in earlier centuries when death came sooner for most people.'[832] This demographic transition, for feminists is especially significant because, as Post notes:

> Women, on average, outlive men; women do most of the home care for their elderly husbands; they constitute over ninety per cent of the nursing home population; their likelihood of suffering serious dementia is much higher than for men simply because of their life span; and the modern extension of the life span has left many women poor at the end of their lives after years of imposed self-abnegation.[833]

The old adage 'men die and women become disabled' is still widely considered to ring true. At the time of writing, White Riley asserts 'one-half of all women over seventy-five live alone – and while most elderly men are still married, most elderly women are widows.'[834] There are some brutally grim portrayals of care homes articulated through *Six Acts of Love,* particularly through the character of Delilah. They are descriptions of solitude, constant TV, lack of personal interaction, of indignity and all contribute to harrowing images,

> Delilah: I've worked in nursing homes, hospitals, private, public. If you can pay, you get nice flowers and better carpets, but the smell's always the same, piss and boiled meat. And the old folks are all the same, clinging on to life, all of them, no matter how miserable, how reduced, they want it. They hold on even as it's leaving them all alone in a half room with the TV always on, someone they don't know coming in to give them a quick wipe down with a damp cloth before visiting hours.[835]

The character of Delilah refuses to engage fully in her line of work as a carer, it is essential to remain detached, she says, because, 'if I got personally involved with every single – I'd go mad, wouldn't I? Because, they all die. In the end. And the job's finished. And I move on.'[836] Depictions of care-homes as places of limbo, colloquially known as God's waiting room, also occur in Kuti's *Treehouses* and Kinahan's *Halcyon Days,* and clearly illustrate

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[832] Post, 'Women and Elderly Parents: Moral Controversy in and Aging Society', *Hypatia,* p.84
[833] Ibid. p. 83.
[834] White-Riley, Matilda, and John W. Riley Jr, 'Longevity and Social Structure: The potential of the added years', in *Our Aging Society: Paradox and Promise,* Alan Pifer and Lydia Bronte (eds.), (New York: WW Norton, 1986), p.66.
[835] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love*, p. 63.
[836] Anderson, Six Acts Of Love, p. 64.

the pressing need for these playwrights to discuss the realities of care homes for a growing aged populace.

The harsh realities of dementia and the effect on the surrounding family are brought delicately to life through Anderson's dramatic representation. Dorothy's loss of memory intensifies as the play progresses and her mind, indicated through the visual projections, re-create her past while her narrative does not necessarily represent her present. In the opening scene, everyday objects are laboriously labelled, from a brush to the chair and the table. Dorothy carries around a notebook with her in which she writes a list of the day's activities, in chronological order, to be erased as she goes along. It is her mechanism for coping with memory loss. Dorothy asks 'Did you mention I am losing my mind?'[837] Katherine retorts, 'you are losing your memory' but, for Dorothy, 'well, I'm not at all sure it doesn't come to mean the same thing.'[838] Through loss of memory, Dorothy's history, bound to her identity, slowly begins to unravel as she arrives at a place in the present in which she can no longer attach to the journey in her past. This meditation on dementia is a form of violence against the body, and the characters' own resistance to its onset,

> Fergus: Dorothy has always been very good at looking like everything was all right.
> Dorothy: All women, darling.
> Katherine: She was like someone doing a very skilful imitation of herself.
> Dorothy: The doctor did a lot of tests. He said I was absolutely fine. Except for this one thing.
> Katherine: Vascular dementia.[839]

Dorothy's attempt to appear 'all right', is an exemplification of the body's active resistance to debility, whether physical or mental. The doctor describes this illness as a 'gentle decline,'[840] that the lights go out one by one, what he referred to as a 'slow fade'[841]

> Delilah: Did he say, "the progress of the disease varies with the individual"?
> Katherine: Yes!
> Delilah: Doctors.
> Fergus: You say that in the same manner women will exclaim, "Oh! Men!"

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[837] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 13.
[838] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 13.
[839] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p.15-16.
[840] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p.16.
[841] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p.16.

> Delilah: Well. A lot of doctors are men. They're not good with dementia. Y'know, they like there to be a solution to everything. (*To Fergus*) Nothing personal.[842]

However, the social distaste for the word dementia itself is apparent in the medical male gaze - as the doctor in question could not look at Katherine when he diagnosed her mother. Katherine has read books on dementia and is well versed in the restorative value of positive remembrance. She has to keep talking to Dorothy and to keep reminding her of her past, to show her photographs, create a book and make a diary, to the point which they were all, 'telling her story back to her. As far as we know it.'[843] Given my earlier remarks on narrative, stories once again remain central to the performance of memory. However, as the plot progresses, Dorothy loses the ability to retain her 'stories' so integral to self. The harsh realities of Dorothy's future and illness linger in the corner of every room, and as Katherine reminds, towards the end, 'you don't recognize your own home, your child – your own face in the mirror.'[844] One of the most tragic consequences of dementia is that it complicates the orthodox binary of healthy/ sick because, while Dorothy's mind is failing (sick), her body still retains all of its functions (healthy), and makes it a difficult illness to detect. Katherine recalls that,

> Katherine: One day we got on a bus to go shopping, it's the same bus we've been getting for twenty years. And she stopped suddenly, just at the door, for thirty, forty seconds, no more than a minute, but I got the feeling that she couldn't think, just for that short time, what she was doing there or what to do next. There were other times… if you weren't looking for it, you wouldn't notice anything different. But there was something… careful. A hesitation.'[845]

The horrific social reality of dementia is depicted delicately in one pitiful scene as Dorothy's memory loss increases. Waking in the night, she no longer knows her surroundings and, although she screams for Fergus and Katherine, she fails to recognise them in the older people before her. She is trapped in the memory of Fergus as a young man and Katherine as a child. The excruciating panic this must induce is caught harrowingly as she repeats their names, her voice rising in alarm until she finally loses control of her bladder. The scene touches upon the terrifying ordeal of a person desperately

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[842] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p.16.
[843] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 17.
[844] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 17.
[845] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 15.

searching for someone they will never be able to recognise. She is hostile to, and frightened of, the environment that seeks to protect and care,

> Katherine: She doesn't recognise her own life anymore.
> Fergus: Neither do I.
> Katherine: Neither do I.

The complexities of society's new aging demographic are addressed through the staging of Dorothy's dementia, followed by Fergus's own gradual decline.

Throughout the play, past and present are continually overlaid, and Anderson stresses the importance of narrative to progress the story. It is impossible to ignore the past, it will quite literally, as symbolised in their need for Katherine and Tom's re-marriage, repeat on the present. Like the twin Greek goddesses Mnemosyne and Lesmosyne – one driven by the injunction to remember and the other by the injunction to forget – the elements of this binary infuse and are indispensible to each other. Ironically their re-marriage is a signal of its end. Through the plot device of their re-wedding, Tom and Katherine find themselves trapped in an old memory. Remembering is to re-live, to be in the same moment all over again. One comic scene in the play features a car journey with all the characters, as they attempt to travel from Dublin to Galway, to perform the 're-wedding'. A map is projected and re-projected onto a large screen behind the action, however the family continues to become increasingly lost, finally their car breaks down. Screen projections display other cars moving past *(Lights sweep across the stage, another car. Fergus and Tom hold out their thumbs. It too goes past.)*,[846] while they are caught, stationary, in a broken vehicle. The scene symbolises their state of limbo, all the more heightened by the movement of their surroundings. They are effectively driving back in time, to relive a memory, in the same space, with the same people, but in a different age, to achieve a similar, yet different aim. David Wiles suggests that time 'flows past us, it reaches out in front of us, we go through it, it runs by too quickly, it is behind us now.'[847] Anderson brings this to conceptualisation into a moment of pathos.

There are several devices such as these that serve to dismantle linear notions of time, techniques useful to stage splinters of memory. Anderson's representation of dementia, for example, cannot be entirely separated from the dramatic function of looking back as a

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[846] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 53.
[847] Wiles, *Theatre & Times*, p. 2.

means for constructing the present. Both Catherine's remarriage and Dorothy's dementia rely on this process. At times, the physical construction of Dorothy's illness becomes fused with the dramatic intention to stage memory. In this way, stories produce the self[848] and *Six Acts of Love* focuses on what happens when that narrative is lost. Dorothy's memory 'list' is a continual prop and serves as a 're-memoriser' throughout. Questions scatter in the dialogue, 'Who are you?', 'Do you remember?', 'Not this again', 'Did it happen like that?' The projection screen is a constant feature at the back of the stage and provides a visual slide-show of Dorothy's life through photographs of herself and her family, beginning in 1949, and is symbolic of the inner workings of Dorothy's mind. She is initially introduced to the audience through projected images of '*one enormous eye, then a mouth, then a section of her face.*'[849] It is only through these partial images that the audience can first see Dorothy. This subtly draws on concepts of broken reflections and distortions that aid the representation of failing memory. By introducing Dorothy through these magnified elements of her face, Anderson captures the fragmentation of her unified image, and even of her mind. Throughout the play, photographs appear on the screen, illustrating moments of Dorothy's life: the funeral of Desmond; the birth of Katherine; her marriage to Fergus. Each new picture instigates the narration of the memory it captures and, slowly, more and more of Dorothy and Fergus's history is brought to life. The projections are consciously recognised by the characters, but are also indications to the audience of time passing, of family history that lives told and re-told. However, these photos gradually begin to jam and fade, the stage directions indicate that:

> *Images on the screen flicker, go static and then there is a rapid jumbled sequence of images of the garden at different times, in different years and seasons, with different children; sometimes* Katherine, *sometimes,* Katherine's *children. The images flicker again, the screen shows static and then it goes blank.*'[850]

As these images begin to arrive more quickly and more erratically through the course of the play, the screen projection serves as a reproduction of Dorothy's failing mind. The swift transition between pictures calls into question the fissures between past and present by forcing images of each to exist in close proximity. These stories overlap but also

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[848] Gullette, *Fighting the New Ageism in America,* p. 151
[849] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 5.
[850] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love*, p. 76.

contain gaps. However, as Katherine attests, 'I always think the sign of a good storyteller is what they choose to leave out.'[851]

By the end of the play when Dorothy and Fergus have passed away, it seems that Katherine's life dies with them. She believes that there will be no more stories, and that all she has left are *their* stories, *their* photographs, and *their* memories. Katherine does not appear in many of the projected photographs, an absence that Delilah addresses. She is the photographer, 'not a centre-stage person'.[852] She is the 'technical support,'[853] a ghost figure in her own life-narrative. When questioned about her childhood, Fergus recollects,

> After a while we began to notice that all the stories were about other children. When we asked Katherine about it, she'd just say, quite cheerfully, 'Oh, I'm not in that story.' Dorothy was appalled. She was hopping mad! She kept saying, 'But *where* did you learn such a thing! To leave yourself out of everything?'[854]

It appears that Katherine is surrounded by stories, but in none of which she seems to centre. The story of her broken marriage to Tom, his younger woman, the stories of her four sons who now have their own families, those of Dorothy and Fergus. Katherine appears as a woman who might never have existed. She is becoming unrecognizable to her mother, her children have moved on in their lives, her shattered marriage means she is denied legality by the state, she appears in none of the family photographs, and her stories are 'all about what everyone else is doing.'[855]

Katherine feels an 'age decline' and performs it accordingly. Essentially she has written herself out of her life story. Nothing has happened to her health, she suffered loss, but nevertheless proceeds to perform 'old age' – shuffling round the house in her slippers, a recluse from the outside world, indicative of the 'decline narrative'. Anderson, however, refuses to end the play on this negative finality, and Katherine eventually carves out a new beginning by finding intimacy with Delilah. Katherine moves away from the dying heterosexual relationship with Tom to initiate a story based on an intimate lesbian union with Delilah. She is told,

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[851] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 18.
[852] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 58.
[853] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 58.
[854] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 58.
[855] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 94.

Delilah: There will be more stories. There's your stories. You are still making your story… you're a bit old, you're a bit heterosexual and you have crap taste in indoor footwear. I haven't stopped thinking of you since I left here.

Katherine: What do we do now?

Delilah: Whatever you want.[856]

Katherine finally becomes the centre of her own narrative. This moment is loaded with past experience but at the same time is open to new possibilities and change.

Treehouses: Memory, remembrance and finding cathartic solace

Elizabeth Kuti's *Treehouses*, under the direction of Jason Byrne, was first performed at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin on 5th April 2000.[857] Kuti describes her intention for the play as to give it a 'simple, fable-like quality: to create a mood of lyricism… the simple universal feeling of a nursery rhyme or of the Bible.'[858] Through this lyrical, storytelling technique she comes to terms with the present through a prism of the past. This combines private and communal stories of past and present, home and exile, youth and age. She continues, 'drama ignites where the subtext exerts an intolerable pressure on the surface of things; where the spoken clashes with the unspoken; where words and deeds diverge.'[859] This evokes the power of staging memory and the state of liminality that the play provides. When asked about the possible influence of Irish drama on this work in an interview with Mária Kurdi, Kuti replied that Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* (1964) was more of a predecessor for her, because '[l]ament and sadness (and guilt) about the past seem to be a big part of memory plays, and perhaps that's common to Irish and to Jewish culture and literature.'[860]

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[856] Anderson, *Six Acts Of Love,* p. 99.

[857] Not long after its successful run, the author and her work were selected for inclusion as representatives of contemporary women's drama in Ireland, in Volume V of the renowned *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing,* subtitled as *Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (2002).

[858] Kuti, Elizabeth, "'Strangeness Made Sense': Reflections on Being a Non-Irish Playwright'", *Irish Drama: Local and Global Perspectives,* Nicholas Grene and Patrick Lonergan (eds), (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2012), p. 145-46.

[859] Ibid., p. 143.

[860] Kurdi, Mária, 'In interview with Elizabeth Kuti', *Irish Literary Supplement,* 23.1 (2004), p. 11.

Treehouses interweaves two main narratives, the recollections of Eva, played in the original production by Morna Regan, and that of Old Magda played by Stella McCusker. The women and their memories are tied together through their relationship with the character of Joseph, a Hungarian Jew who is present only as an ethereal figure on stage. He occupies the margins of the stage and his story unfolds through the women's recollections and tales, his presence felt most keenly through their memories and flashbacks. To Old Magda, he is recalled as a 15 year-old boy on the run and with no family, whom her younger self initially helped hide from Nazi occupation in World War II. Her past is brought dramatically into being through a role-play between herself as a girl, 'Young Magda' (Gertrude Montgomery), and Joseph, referred to only as 'The Boy' (Robert Price). Filtered through Old Magda's memories, they enact her story in a third area on the stage, appearing and disappearing as quickly as Old Magda moves between past and present. This staging technique layers invisible and visible recollected spaces. To Eva, Joseph is her recently deceased father. He becomes a ghostly being throughout the play, the memory of whom haunts both Old Magda and Eva. Jon Erickson has noted, 'human beings experience time through three modes: memory as constructing past; attention, as constructing the present; and anticipation, as constructing the future'[861] and, in *Treehouses*, this is given dramatic form through Young Magda (past), Old Magda (present) and Eva (future).

Old Magda resides in Ireland, although different parts of the action occur in several unspecified places. Her carer, Ger, with a peculiarly Dublin accent, comments that it is a, 'beautiful country... this island... but the words of this language – harder, harder to remember'.[862] As Mária Kurdi notes, though, 'both the onstage and offstage action of *Treehouses* is set in different countries reflecting Kuti's experience of having a mixed identity and multicultural heritage.'[863] Thus the action of the play unfolds in several locations: Old Magda's story is placed in the present, and is told from a (presumably Dublin) residential home for the elderly. She is haunted by the ghost of Joseph as a boy, and the nagging belief that he failed to survive because of her eventual decision to abandon him.

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[861] Fischer, Clara, ''You Memory That?' Theorising Feminism in Ireland Through Feminist Storytelling and Rememory', in *Irish Feminism: Past, Present, and Future,* p. 265.
[862] Kuti, *Treehouses,* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), p. 6.
[863] Kurdi, Mária, 'Traumatic Memories on the Stage – A Hungarian Holocaust Survivor in Elizabeth Kuti's *Treehouses',* in *Hungarian Review,* Volume VI, No. 1, 2015, p. 88.

> Old Magda: He was so young. He looked to me for protection. And I – I was so innocent and so stupid – I promised it to him. I should not have promised what I could not keep.[864]

Eva's story also takes place in the present, in the garden of her childhood home. She has just attended her father's (Joseph) funeral and recollects instances from her past, after her mother had left them. Eva remembers him as a grown man, as the father she has just buried, and this makes it clear he managed the highly dangerous journey across borders to the west to reach safety by himself regardless of Old Magda's fears. Both characters use narratives of their past to enable redemption in the present. As Marianne Hirsch explains, 're-memory is neither memory nor forgetting, but memory combined with the threat of repetition.'[865] Old Magda and Eva's reminiscences are connected to their former sufferings; they construct a sense of guilt and remorse in order to transcend prior hardships. The director of the American premiere of the play, Charlotte Headrick, argues that '*Treehouses* functions on several levels. On one level it is a Holocaust drama… On another level, the play is an emigration/immigration play… Additionally, *Treehouses* is a memory play. '[866] In a similar vein, John L. Murphy's view is that the allusions in *Treehouses* follow a complicated pattern but it seems that 'Old Magda carries on the heroic role of biblical matriarchs.'[867]

In a similar vein to Anderson's *Six Acts of Love,* Kuti's *Treehouses* relies on multiple elements to perform memory, in particular Kuti's use of lighting is influential in stories of remembrance and recollection. '*Dawn light*'[868] slowly opens the play to reveal two separate spaces, one incorporating Eva and the charred remains of a treehouse in the branches of an apple tree, and another casting light on Old Magda, asleep in a chair at the nursing home. The hazy lights between these areas visually establish a mood of nostalgia, memory and feeling of other-ness that are so pertinent to the narrative. Eva confirms this in the story of her father's passing away, in which she describes the 'little things' of her memories that surface, the 'unguarded moments which survive for some mysterious reason

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[864] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 48.
[865] Hirsch, Marianne, 'Maternity and Rememory: Toni Morrison's Beloved', in *Motherhood and Representation,* Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey and Meryle Kaplan (eds), (Yale: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 96.
[866] Headrick, Charlotte J., 'Elizabeth Kuti's *Treehouses:* Towards a new definition of Irish Theatre', in *ABEI Journal* 11, November 2009, p. 39-45.
[867] Murphy, John L. "Nem arrol hajnallik: Searching for Dawn in *Shyllag* and *Treehouses",* in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies,* 10.1-2 (2004), p.83.
[868] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 1

just snapshots of a boring day, a trivial act.'[869] These stage spaces become instantly intertwined as the lights come up on a third space on the stage, which is occupied by a Young Magda and a young Joseph, the Boy. They kiss, and Eva continues her recollections until Old Magda '*wakes up with a start,*'[870] when Young Magda and the Boy disappear into the darkness. Through the use of lighting, the third space appears and disappears, and represents a physical embodiment of Old Magda's recollections and remorse, and acts as a theatrical device to aid the performance of memory. The Boy is cloaked in mystery throughout the play, a spectral figure filtered through Old Magda's reminiscences. He appears only in specific lights, '*moonlight on the Boy, waiting*'[871], he appears *in a pool of light,*[872] a constant ephemeral presence always on the point of departure in Old Magda's narrative. Old Magda talks to, and receives a responses form, this ghost form,

> Boy: You are kind, Magda
> Old Magda: Are you mocking me? Why do you… ? I have waited so many years for a sign. Of clemency. Of forgiveness. Give me a sign. But don't mock me.
> Boy: You are very kind.[873]

Emilie Pine suggests that a key example of the anxieties both surrounding and within Irish remembrance culture is the presence of ghosts on the Irish stage and screen. Ghosts, she argues, 'are unwanted haunting presences, yet they also testify to a fascination – even obsession – with the past. Ghosts thus embody the tension between forgetting and remembering that runs through Irish remembrance culture.'[874] In this sense, ghosting is a strong theatrical technique explicit within Irish drama and, in *Treehouses*, this non-naturalistic mode of reflection acts as a cathartic exercise. Old Magda is ravaged by guilt and painful recollections. She is mentally and literally, haunted by the spirits from her past, haunted by the ghost /memory of the Boy: 'It will not leave me alone. Forgive me. Forgive me. I am too old to be dreaming of such things'[875] – 'But never to know what became of him. To this day. It is like a curse. And still it feels like he is there, in the hayloft, waiting for me to come.[876] Cathy Caruth argues that,

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[869] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 1
[870] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 2
[871] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 64.
[872] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 10.
[873] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 24.
[874] Pine, Emilie, *The Politics of Irish Memory Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture,* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 154
[875] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 2.
[876] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 66.

> [T]rauma... requires integration both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure. But on the other hand, the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own, and others', knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall... the capacity to remember is also the capacity to elide or distort and... may mean the capacity to simply forget.[877]

In reconstructions of the past and in particular stories of pain and trauma, mystery and subterfuge are allowed to run rampant. There is always the possibility of secrets being 'protected', either by conscious disavowal or being shrouded from the truth and remaining forgotten. Maria Kurdi suggests that 'The dynamic juxtaposition and vivid evocation of a plurality of cultural spaces in *Treehouses* shatters the audience's expectations of being presented with a single and coherent narrative, which identifies the work as a postmodern memory play.'[878]As Old Magda says, 'that's the lie of a lazy memory' ... 'perhaps I was innocent. But still things they are never simple. Never, never.'[879]

Moments of dialogue over-lap between Young and Old Magda. Her past and present meander back and forth between each other, and at times the two speak together: 'Old Magda/Young Magda *(together):* 'no, no I can't bear it, stop it, stop it.'[880] This is an instance of what Casado-Gual has called the 'polyphonic standpoint', whereby the past impinges on the present through a symbolic cycle of repetitions, when the 'most important turning points of the characters' past lives are evoked simultaneously.'[881] By clouding the space between Old and Young Magda, Kuti collapses chronological time and place. Similarly, Eva's and Old Magda's speech becomes intertwined, although their monologues remain separate:

> Old Magda: What is it you want? What more is there to be said? What words do you want me to say?

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[877] Caruth, Cathy, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction', *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* Cathy Caruth (ed.), (Maryland: John Hopkins UP, 1995), p. 153-4.
[878] Kurdi, Mária, 'Traumatic Memories on the Stage – A Hungarian Holocaust Survivor in Elizabeth Kuti's *Treehouses',* in *Hungarian Review,* Volume VI, No. 1, 2015, p. 93.
[879] Elizabeth, Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 3.
[880] Elizabeth, Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 4
[881] Ibid.

Eva: I want – just for today – to find the right words – if today I could say the right words

Old Magda: What words would make everything all right?

Eva: To lay him to rest.

Old Magda: I have looked all my life for such words[882]

Both women, caught in the past, repeat parallels of pain, isolation and loneliness, lament the same problems and are haunted by the same figure in their memories. Talking together and yet not in conversation:

Eva: In the beginning –

Old Magda: It was a long time ago.

Eva: it was a simple time

Old Magda: the time is never simple[883]

One technique for staging memory is to push away and blur the boundaries of realism – using overlapping lines, lyrical dialogue and multiple stories that intertwine. José Esteban Muñoz suggests that, 'while memory is not static for anyone, it is always "in the making".'[884] The continual use of repetition interspersing the folklore songs and the onstage action, draw upon the ritual process of remembering - and looking back in order to move forward. At one moment, Old Magda is holding a plate of cake from a birthday celebration in the care home, while Young Magda is standing with a plate of food from a celebration in the past [the dance for the harvest festival]. At this point the stage directions indicate: '*crossfades to Eva'* in the present, '*standing in the garden with the remains of food on a paper plate*'[885] from the aftermath of her father's funeral. This parallel staging brings forth the connection between the spheres, but simultaneously draws out a sense of ritual in ceremonial festivals – a birthday, a harvest festival, and a funeral. These are all ritualistic traditions that have their roots in a cyclical form, the ceremony, the timeframe and the locations. These may all be different but the sentiments are similar - as is the process of aging and recollecting the past. Old Magda's thoughts are interspersed with her memories of herself as a younger woman, she is literally 'watching herself' in the character of Young Magda. This montage of time, memory and history bring the past quite

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[882] Elizabeth, Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 2.

[883] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 3.

[884] Muñoz, José Esteban, 'Queer Theater, Queer Theory Luis Alfaro's Cuerpo Politizado, in *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater,* Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla (eds.), (New York; London: New York University Press, 2002), p.231.

[885] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 64.

physically into the present. As the play progresses, these overlays intensify and her haunting memories of the Boy spill into her dialogue in the present. This causes Ger some alarm, he cannot understand why Old Magda tells him: 'I was only bringing him his breakfast. That was all.'[886] Her present coalesces with her past, half a dream world and half in the moment. Ger notices this disconnect, 'thought we'd lost you to another planet for a minute there, you looked so far away!'[887] Old Magda is occupying a different space, far away from her care home and tea offerings, she is re-living one night many years ago.

Halperin believes that old age consists of related yet contradictory and conflictual forces[888] and the complexity of these opposing forces is teased out through the course of *Treehouses*. On the one hand, Old Magda feels 'like an old bird that cannot migrate again,'[889] and is pictured immobile in her chair in the care home. This creates an impression of solitary old age whereby the world keeps on passing while Old Magda remains stationary. She has few visitors, and her only positive relationship in the home is with care-worker Ger. He brings her left-over cake from Mrs Gorman's birthday celebration down the corridor, he speaks of other's people's families, of Mrs Nolan, the lady who had her room before her, and her enormous family – 'fourteen grandchildren she had I think,'[890] and of a kind nephew who paid for the room to be completely redecorated when she passed. In contrast, Old Magda could seem to be left only with her memories and ghosts from the past. As Ger comments, 'you're a very far-flung family aren't you?'... 'all over the world. Not like me. I'm the apple that doesn't fall far from the tree... terrible really, no escape.' To Old Magda, though, 'to belong', she comments, 'is wonderful.'[891] Alone, watching the sea, she has only her memories and the many journeys taken across the ocean that define and re-shape her present. She reiterates, 'sometimes I can hardly remember how we arrived – how we arrived at this place, with all my keepsakes washed up around me.'[892]

However, as Casada-Gual maintains, a feminist interpretation redefines the action of remembering and forgetting, 'as sources of empowerment and self-renewal for the older

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[886] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 39.
[887] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 60.
[888] Halperin, David, *How To Do The History of Homosexuality,* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). Cited in A Genealogy of Ageing and Sexuality', accessed at www.iasscs.org/sites/default/files/Lecture%205%%20A%20of%20ageing.pdf.
[889] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 59.
[890] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 25.
[891] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 26.
[892] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 79.

woman'[893]. Remembrance need not all be negative. Freddie Rokem points out, too, that performing versions of history enables us to 'overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past.' In this positive way, Old Magda, can be seen to re-live her past to reconstruct her desertion of the Boy and find new ways to remember, and to do so *differently*. Gullette reminds us that 'every thread of selfhood requires the Before and After'[894], and suggests that aging can be turned into a story of identity, the telling of which *need not necessarily* be in the form of a progress narrative, it is much more complex than that. She probes, 'Who does not have at least one [story] to bore the public with? Who does not gnaw a somewhat different version of the same one privately? Any self we can identify has a potential story line, potentially rich in detail and value, deeply imbricated in time, and made possible by aging.'[895] Kuti expands on this idea to explore Old Magda's use of remembering as a cathartic exercise in order to find peace. Casado-Gual argues that the interconnection of memory and old age enables an alternative discourse of aging where old age is deprived of its alleged meaninglessness and becomes, instead, 'part of a new quest for meaning.'[896] Despite the undeniably distressing circumstances exposed in the play, it demonstrates Casado-Gual's belief that 'small moments of (mutual and self-) discovery are still possible in desolate scenarios.'[897] Reflecting on the Young Magda that she sees in her memory, and whom the audience see on the stage, she notes, 'what a long journey it has been to arrive here at last.'[898] Through the process of memory, she has found new meaning from her past and arrived content in her present. The patterns of life are fore-fronted through allegories of nature, and are used to indicate how Old Magda's journey is drawing to its close. She listens to movements of life through the sounds of nature and relishing in her love of sea that sits just outside her window, 'I love it holding so many journeys and so many – transportations.' [899] She speaks,

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[893] Cassado-Gual, Nuria, 'Unexpected Turns in Lifelong sentimental journeys: Re-defining love, memory, and old age through Alice Munro's 'The Bear Came Over the Mountian' and its film adaptation, *Away From Her,* in Ageing & Society, 35, 2015, pp. 389-404, p. 399.
[894] Gullette, *Aged by Culture,* p. 126.
[895] Gullette, *Aged by Culture,* p. 126.
[896] Cassado-Gual, Nuria, 'Unexpected Turns in Lifelong sentimental journeys: Re-defining love, memory, and old age through Alice Munro's 'The Bear Came Over the Mountian' and its film adaptation, *Away From Her,* in Ageing & Society, 35, 2015, pp. 389-404, p. 401.
[897] Cassado-Gual, Nuria, 'Unexpected Turns in Lifelong sentimental journeys: Re-defining love, memory, and old age through Alice Munro's 'The Bear Came Over the Mountian' and its film adaptation, *Away From Her,* in Ageing & Society, 35, 2015, pp. 389-404, p. 401.
[898] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 59.
[899] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 59.

> They are very soft, these afternoons of late summer, they bring little sounds in the window. Many people strolling along the sea front. Wind brings their voices in my window sometimes. I like to hear their voices.[900]

Here lies a possibility for healing and renewal through hard-earned release from the wounding truths and effects of history. There is restorative value in positive remembrance, 'distangling the heavy knots of a silenced past.'[901] *Treehouses* presses for the importance of historical understandings to aging that are plural, varied and contradictory. The idea of a changing life-course rather than a predictable life cycle, one that posits a more progressive process will be developed further in *Halcyon Days*. To conclude this play with Kuti's character Eva,

> If today marks an end then it must also mark a beginning - the beginning of how it will be – like travelling to a new country – being washed up on a new shore – you have to learn the language.[902]

Halcyon Days: Complicating the myth of youthful reinvention and the narrative of degeneration.

When discussing playwriting in Ireland, Deirdre Kinahan believes that 'we are going through an adolescence. There is a fervent desire to find something new, a new form, a new way of telling it. I think that's missing the point. What is theatre if it's not a reflection of what's around you? How you decide to write or create or respond to it comes from you.'[903] Her play *Halcyon Days,* is a celebration of a quest for meaning through aging, even in seemingly the most hopeless of circumstances. She says, 'I wanted to write a play about how no matter how dire it seems, there is always humour and room for joy and future… that was the message I came out of those nursing homes with. That no matter where you are in life, no matter how disabled or debilitated you may seem, there is a human being in there, a whole gamut of emotions and potential.'[904]

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[900] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 59.
[901] Cassado-Gual, Nuria, 'Unexpected Turns in Lifelong sentimental journeys: Re-defining love, memory, and old age through Alice Munro's 'The Bear Came Over the Mountian' and its film adaptation, *Away From Her, p398*
[902] Kuti, *Treehouses,* p. 6.
[903] http://entertainment.ie/theatre/feature/Interview-with-Deirdre-Kinahan-These-Halcyon-Days/210/4403.htm. Accessed on 7/09/2015
[904] Ibid.

Halcyon Days[905] was first performed in preview at Solstice Arts Centre, Co. Meath, on 4th October 2012, and later premiered at Smock Alley Theatre as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival on 10th October 2012,[906] directed by David Horan. The play focuses on the relationship between Patricia (Anita Reeves) and Sean (Stephen Brennan) that blossoms in a beautiful and unconventional way when they meet in a nursing home in Dublin. Patricia, in her late sixties, is two years into retirement from her profession as a primary school teacher, suffers from Sclerosis, a condition that causes her to have fits and blackouts. However, as she pointedly contends: 'It's not from drink if that's what you're thinking?! Why does everyone think it's from drink...?'[907] The strain of her illness became too much for her sister Nora and, as a consequence, she has been forced bitterly out of her own home and into the nursing home. She is depicted as a woman fighting her diagnosis, her predicament and her fears at every step of the way. In contrast, Sean presents a stoic acceptance that his life is now over. In his early seventies and suffering from dementia, he has long since been deserted by his younger partner, Tom, who could not cope with the realities of his illness. Unlike Patricia, the nursing home has become his refuge and he finds solace in this waiting room, where he slowly fades.

Identities and meanings of old age change as people move through different socially constructed spaces, and this means it is 'possible to identify with, resist, or otherwise react to those identities through the use of space.'[908] Three areas are suggested on stage; that of the Care Home, the Conservatory and the Garden and each is a troubling space of ambiguity in relation to the aging process. Patricia resents 'the home' as a place of incarceration in which they are doing-time, confirmed in Kinahan's description of the home as, 'somewhere in-between, a kind of holding area, where everything is essentialised.'[909] Patricia actively resists this state of limbo, and thwarts the limited, reductive categories of identity that this space generates. While Kinahan draws out isolation in care homes, her emphasis is also on the potential to develop and celebrate

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[905] Deirdre Kinahan's prior plays include: *Broken* (Fishamble, 2012); *66 Books* (Bush Theatre, 2011); *Where's My Seat* (Bush Theatre, 2011), *BOGBOY* (Tall Tales & Solstice Arts Centre at Irish Centre/New York/Project Arts Centre); *MOMENT* (Tall Tales & Solstice Arts Centre/Project Arts Centre/Bush Theatre/national Irish tour); *Salad Day* (Abbey Theatre); *Hue & Cry* (Bewley's Café Theatre & Tall Tales/Glasgow/Romania/Bulgaria/Paris/New York); *Melody* (Tall Tales/Glasgow/national tour); *Attaboy Mr Synge* (Civic Theatre/national tour).

[906] *Halcyon Days* was originally devised as a short play for the Abbey Theatre's reading series 'The Fairer Sex' in 2009 and was subsequently developed by Tall Tales Theatre Company with the support of The Stewart Parker Trust.

[907] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* (London: Nick Hern Books Limited, 2012), p. 32.

[908] Pain, et al., 'Difference and the Negotiation of Old Age', in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, p. 378.

[909] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days*, p. 2.

beautiful moments that can arise in the strangest of places. Sarah Keating suggests that what gives Kinahan's play its 'pulse' is its finely-drawn characters,

> Sean has the sharp intelligence of a man who knows he has been beaten, but Patricia shows him that there are new roles he can play, even from his wheelchair. Patricia, meanwhile, brings giddy effervescence to her self-denial. Calisthenics, fish-oil, walnuts: she will fight her fate until she is forced to embrace it.[910]

From this angle, Patricia and Sean can be seen as dramatisations of the binary narrative that runs through this chapter – a preoccupation with Gullettes's[911] notions of progress and decline as discussed earlier. Gullette believes that, life storytelling 'is becoming more edgily poised within the binary of progress versus decline… the dichotomy has demoralizing political and psychological effects. It suggests that decline is a loser's story - our own fault.'[912] However, narratives of success have also been denounced for their socio-cultural elitism and for ignoring physical realities of aging, as Baars observes, 'the negative aspects of aging [could be] denied the dignity and careful attention they deserve.'[913] She maintains that the polarised themes of progress and decline are nothing but 'the culmination of fears caused by the insecurities of future life in which an uncertain future of aging is not looked in the eye, but subjected to positive and negative stylization.'[914] Which is why Casado-Gual stresses that, 'cultural gerontologists and age critics have warned about the traps and dangers of the age ideologies they favour, especially when each narrative is regarded as an absolute model.'[915] Through her characterisation of Sean and Patricia, Kinahan has initially placed this binary in opposition – Sean (decline), Patricia (progress) – only then to dismantle such and represent the benefits of both to enrich the process of aging.

While the depiction of the care home emphasises their sense of isolation, Sean being resigned and Patricia feeling trapped, a beautiful relationship ensues whereby the pair help

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[910] Keating, Sara, 'REVIEW: Halycon Days', accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/blogs/festival-hub/2012/10/11/review-halcyon-days/.
[911] Gullette, *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America,* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
[912] Gullette, *Fighting the New Ageism in America,* p. 154.
[913] Baars, Jan, 'Philosophy of Aging, Time and Finitude', in *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does It Mean to Grow Old?* Thomas R. Colem, Ruth E. Ray, and Robert Kastenbaum, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Up, 2010), p. 108.
[914] Baars, in *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does It Mean to Grow Old?* p. 108.
[915] Casado-Gual,'Ambivalent Pathways of Progress and Decline: The Representation of Aging and Old Age n Joanna McClelland Glass's Drama', in *Theatre Research in Canada,* p. 110.

alleviate each other's fears. Through the course of the play, Patricia revitalises Sean by reminding him of his worth and the importance of friendship. Sean eases Patricia's fears of death and the unknown. She attests, 'that's the curious thing because I was afraid before. I was anxious, so terribly anxious of the darkness... and the heat... and being alone.'[916] She entered the care home full of fear and restless anger, Sean however seems to have brought her some level of peace. Kinahan draws upon the theatrical power of an aging voice and unfurls ambivalent pathways of progress and decline to represent this essential human experience in a dignified way. She sheds light onto the (in)visibility of the aging voice. Talking about her play, Kinahan says: 'It's about trying to get a glance at that last dance and that beauty and that fading flower before it fades out completely on us. It's a double-edged sword.'[917] It's not until Patricia embraces her circumstances that she can make progress. Kinahan goes on by saying, 'I wanted to get inside the head of someone for whom life has spun out of control and you are valiantly trying to build it up as it crumbles around you.' With Sean, she takes a different stance, 'His home is alien to him, his family let him down. So the nursing home is a refuge. His fading is a solace to him. None of us fit any one bill. There are layers and layers of experience in there.'[918]

Sean and Patricia recollect their pasts together, and this once again illustrates the importance of narrative to the process of aging. Sean recounts his acting career, his life as a gay man, the many parties and his beautiful young lover who finally left him. He recalls: 'Our house was full... so full, Patricia... of every life and every wish... and parties, there were lots of parties... but then... I got old.'[919] Sean's vision is directed singularly to the past, Patricia is focused on the present and living in the moment. She talks of her beautiful home and garden, the sun on her face, her books, music and love of theatre, and the cat that she misses. She reminisces of her home, being under her lilac tree, planted the day she moved in, her spot in the garden: 'I could sit there for hours... with a good book'[920] However, by the end of the play, Patricia has lifted Sean from his drudgery and Sean has helped Patricia find peace and acceptance. Kinahan attests that 'whilst [the characters] are static through illness and age, their dynamic is constantly shifting, unearthing.'[921] In this way, she breaks down the obvious binary division, interweaving the importance of

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[916] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 64.
[917] http://entertainment.ie/theatre/feature/Interview-with-Deirdre-Kinahan-These-Halcyon-Days/210/4403.htm. Accessed on 7/09/2015.
[918] http://entertainment.ie/theatre/feature/Interview-with-Deirdre-Kinahan-These-Halcyon-Days/210/4403.htm. Accessed on 7/09/2015.
[919] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 56.
[920] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 52.
[921] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 2.

progress and decline with the reality of aging and signifies the last phases of life as a period of on-going development. There is currently greater currency in the idea of a 'changing life course, rather than a fixed life cycle associated with predictable changes in behaviour and perception.'[922] Sean and Patricia's sensitive friendship draws out the best in both and is a celebration of the quest for meaning, in even the most hopeless of circumstances.

Throughout the play, due to his dementia, Sean loses words and sentences trail off as he tries to find the language that is gradually failing him. Previously a well-established actor, a profession reliant on memory, his is a particularly harrowing personal decline. He complains of 'some trouble with the words... sometimes they stop... disappear... fade out.'[923] Moments of their friendship become interspersed with Sean's broken memories, so that a conversation about playing cards evokes old scenarios that then bleed into his current reality. Patricia handles such incidents with sympathy, enjoying their sporadic and random nature. Similar to the representation of Dorothy in *Six Acts of Love,* questions linger dialogue, 'I can't seem to find my feet?'/ 'In my slippers?' / 'Why?' / 'Tom?' / 'Were we? / 'Where am I?' / 'Where's Tom?'[924] This is counterpointed by Patricia's keen awareness of 'fighting' old age, she can see value and importance in keeping the brain active – to play cards, do crosswords - 'An active retirement and an active mind.' That is my mantra – was my mantra. That and peppermint tea, you see – *she knocks her head with her knuckle.* No dementia![925]

While their friendship is dealt with tender intimacy in Kinahan's writing, the degradation of care homes cannot be denied in her representation. Patricia feels excruciatingly that she has 'washed up in this place'... or some hole like it.'[926] Before coming to the care home, Patricia suffered a stroke and faced death, however recollecting the incident, she questions: 'Would that have been such a bad thing?... Would it Sean?... When I see to what we're reduced?'[927] In essence, is dying preferable to a life in a care home? These institutions manifest an omnipresent ideology of decline that maintains a negative vision of aging. Although reference is made to the outside world, visitors or carers are never physically

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[922] Pain, et al., 'Difference and the Negotiation of Old Age', in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, p. 377.
[923] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 15.
[924] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 17-18.
[925] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 16.
[926] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 9.
[927] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 55.

present on stage. The feeling of isolation and waiting is distressing, particularly when the characters recall a life so full that is now reduced to so little. The presence of any care staff is regularly denied to the audience, they feature simply as a permanent off-stage presence, spoken of often but never seen. This heightens the sense of remoteness of the characters.

> Sean: The nurse comes.
> Patricia: Really? I'm not so sure in this place.[928]

Desperate not to 'give' herself to 'this place', Patricia refuses to believe that her life is 'up', and that she is there for 'a rest'[929] or 'for a period,'[930] because she still has her own 'home.'[931] Yet, as Sean's questioning illuminates, she clearly feels displaced and alone,

> Sean: 'and family…?'
> Patricia: *(increasingly irritated).* Yes. Well, Nora. My sister. She's my family. We live together.[932]

Her career and her house were fundamental to her personhood, and she reminisces bitterly, 'I suppose we don't get it all. Do we, Sean? We all don't get that perfect life.'[933] She says later, 'But like everything Sean, I am not at home, I'm here; where even the simplest pleasure can cause a riot.'[934] Indicating the strict regulation of the care home that infantilises it occupants. The Matron, Patricia believes, 'ought to be sued', and comically implies that 'she has half the inmates drugged and the other half in wheelchairs.'[935] Their days are marked by mundane routine – the tea trolley, Sunday roast chicken at two, continual repetition and monotony – 'we're up at six, there's always plenty of time.'[936] The focus is held on the 'visit', who visits and when. Sean's daughter, Dee, does call in but this seems due principally to the close relationship she has established with the care-home Matron, and she is not shown conversing with her father. Patricia mentions her sister, and

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[928] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 19.
[929] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 31.
[930] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 31.
[931] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 31.
[932] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 31.
[933] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 47.
[934] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 52.
[935] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 35.
[936] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 36.

awaits her visitors, but they never arrive. 'Are we waiting for someone?'[937] – 'they' in the outside world always seem to be waiting but never quite manage to arrive.

> Patricia: You can see the dread, can't you, on every visiting face.[938]

Catherine Woodward argues that 'the denial of the scandalous isolation of old people in our societies is a public secret, one the public chooses to keep from itself.'[939] There are secrets that are kept from the public and then there are public secrets, issues in full view but consciously disavowed. This 'denial' chimes with a recurring issue throughout my thesis, a focus on those whose plights are present and yet generally ignored. Through Kinahan's careful depiction, this invidious isolation is brought to light.

> Sean: No one goes home.
> Patricia: What?
> Sean: No one goes home from here.
> Patricia: Nonsense.
> Sean: No…
> Patricia: Well, I'll tell you – I intend to.
> Sean: Why?
> Patricia: Because… because I have a life, of course!... Because I can't just sit here and go gaga. I mean, is that it, Sean?... Is that the grand plan?[940]

Patricia struggles against the desolate atmosphere in care homes that perpetuate narratives of decline. She longs for music – 'all they blare out there is television!'[941] Kinahan engages with the disjoint between chronological age and experience, challenging recognizable signs of old age. Her characters are not engaged in a sham of acting old, and they contest representations of care homes as full of images of the elderly as doddery, frail, shaking limbs and faltering steps. Patricia, in particular, resists visual stereotyping and agitates the meta-narrative of old age as decline and disease.

> Patricia: I asked that matron for a device, I keep all my music on iPod, I told her,

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[937] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 38.
[938] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 51.
[939] Woodward, Kathleen, 'A public secret: assisted living, caregivers, globalization', in *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life,* 2012, 7 (2), p. 19.
[940] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 31.
[941] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 20.

what I need is the dock… don't you have one?... A dock?... A speaker thing?!' I might as well have been speaking Swahili'[942]

In this sense Patricia is evidently well informed in modern technology, and is aghast by the matron's regressive attitudes. The Matron's peculiarly distasteful and patronising attitude to aging is displaced through Patricia, mockery instead is shifted from the cared-for and onto the carers. This offers a contortion to the performance of age.

A touching scene unfolds whereby, through sheer determination, Patricia finally locates a CD player and encourages Sean out of his wheelchair, albeit briefly, to dance. 'I knew it. All you need is a stick!'[943] In response to which, in a later scene, Sean emerges in the doorway on a walker, pronouncing 'Ta-dah!'[944]showing intermittent signs of vitality and creative energy. As Gullette reiterates, 'during an individual's life course, people can opt for new bodily attitudes, habits, and self-descriptions.'[945] Where age is concerned, 'we both *have* a body and … *perform* our body… a body, like an identity, is better thought of as a series of try-ons and reaffirmed performances: new consolidations. Age on the body can involve both passive accretions and will.'[946] Patricia, has helped Sean to 'try-on' a new body identity and this spurs a positive narrative around aging; together they overcome his physical deterioration and embrace through song and dance. This poignant scene mirrors moments throughout the play in which Patricia and Sean are brought together and ignited through their love of the arts. Despite his dementia, Sean is witnessed remembering and performing a monologue again from his past role in Shakespeare's 'Henry V', they sing together, discuss their love of theatre, Patricia encourages him to go outside and feel the sun on their faces, to 'feel the day'.[947] They display their engagement with life and resist the obstacles posed by their oppressive environment.

These incidents, delicately crafted by Kinahan, dramatize the vitality, curiosity, humour and creative energy that are so pertinent in the life process. Their positivity, challenges what Casada-Gual refers to as the 'essentialist narrative of decline,'[948] what their aged corporealities would otherwise have suggested. Initially, Sean feels old and performs

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[942] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 27.
[943] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 24.
[944] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 35.
[945] Gullette, *Aged by Culture,* p. 160.
[946] Ibid, p. 161.
[947] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 50.
[948] Casado-Gual, 'Ambivalent Pathways of Progress and Decline: The Representation of Aging and Old Age in Joanna McClelland Glass's Drama', in *Theatre Research in Canada*, p. 112.

himself as such, but Patricia warns, 'You can't give up, Sean. Don't you know that? We must never give up!'[949] Casado-Gual suggests that, as observed in studies of older people's everyday lifestyles, 'the resolute wish to persist in one's customs or duties is essential in advanced stages of the life course.'[950] From a performance perspective these moments illustrate a more assertive and positive perception of aging, and late life resilience. This demonstrates the problematic internal attitudes and language attached to the aging process. Gullette indicates that the phrase '"I am the same person I used to be" is a verbal formula deployed by people who have internalized that they are aging past youth, who feel an internal exile... it is intended as their way to still feel at home in the embodied self.' However, she continues, 'it feels weak and inconsistent because the same person then has to say, "of course I've changed too."'[951]

In this way, as Problematizing Prostitution in Law Gullette positively reminds - 'I am the rich continuing heir of my past as well as the owner of the current last word.'[952] Age narratives of progress and decline are closely intertwined in the physical characterisation and psychological bases of the characters in *Halycon Days.* By the end of play, and under Sean's guidance, Patricia takes his daughter's car keys and intends to return home. Yet, just as Patricia is about to flee this 'waiting area', to escape the drudgery, the door already open, keys to the car in her hand, ready to go home, she collapses. It is a poignant and telling scene in which both 'progress' and 'decline' narratives overlap, and complicates the binary of healthy/sick that runs through earlier discussion in the chapter. In a reversal of Dorothy's plight in *Six Acts of Love,* Patricia's mind is fully active (healthy) but it is her body that fails (sick). The complexity of the moment is mirrored in a final stage direction that concludes with,

> Sean: *stands motionless on his walker. He closes his eyes. He starts to finger the* [music] *notes in the air... as he remembers the music in his mind. He puts his hand to the window, to the outside world and he whispers 'Goodbye'.*[953]

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[949] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 23.
[950] Casado-Gual, 'Ambivalent Pathways of Progress and Decline: The Representation of Aging and Old Age in Joanna McClelland Glass's Drama', in *Theatre Research in Canada,* p. 113. She also make reference to Evvy Gunnarson: 'Older People's Meaning of Everyday Life and the Lived Body' in *Acculturating Age: Approaches to Cultural Gerontology,* Brian Worsfold (ed.), (Llida: U de Lleida, 2011), p. 89-104.
[951] Gullette, *Aged by Culture,* p. 123.
[952] Ibid, p. 125.
[953] Kinahan, *Halcyon Days,* p. 70.

This chapter has shown how complex and differing characterisations, plot devices, and temporal frameworks through which old age are represented in *Six Acts of Love, Treehouses* and *Halcyon Days.* This brings forth the aging woman from symbolic metaphor to social reality. The playwrights signify the last phase of life as a period of on-going development and complicate a simple binary of narratives of progress and decline through attitudes of resistance. Casado-Gual maintains that 'literature and the arts in general can offer truthful, imaginative - and, often, more positive – reflections on the heterogeneous experience of ageing in our contemporary societies beyond the constraints of the empirical sciences.'[954] The combination of both progress/decline, and their interconnection through performance, means that aging, particularly from a woman's experience, overcomes superficial representation. The playwrights enable an experience of aging to be represented dramatically with honesty, depth and even hope.

[954] Casado-Gual, 'Unexpected Turns in Lifelong sentimental journeys: Re-defining love, memory, and old age through Alice Munro's 'The Bear Came Over the Mountian' and its film adaptation, *Away From Her,* in Ageing & Society, 35, 2015, pp. 389-404, p. 390.

Conclusion

My thesis looks at the intersections between women, theatre and Irish society, the many connections that cross from the realm of the social into the world of theatre and art. And then back again. It illustrates my fascination with socio-political engagement, the explicit intersect between art and politics in Ireland, and how I see theatre as a vital and influential cultural medium. Taken from a Gramscian cultural studies framework, John Storey states that, 'we need to see ourselves - all people, not just vanguard intellectuals - as active participants in culture: selecting, rejecting, making meanings, attributing value, resisting and, yes, being duped and manipulated'[955]. In part, my impetus for the work has been to resist the overlooked and unrewarded presence of Irish women's playwrights from the turn of the millenium. Cultural resistance is the act of resisting and changing dominant political and social structures[956] and the Waking The Feminists movement in Ireland has been monumental in demonstrating my argument, fully refuting the idea that there are no Irish women working for and in the theatre. In terms of programming, however, it remains that women are still willfully under-represented and a major gender bias runs rife, not just in the theatre but in society at large. Fiach Mac Conghail, the Abbey Theatre's Artistic Director, speaking at the public meeting on the Abbey stage on the 12th November 2015, acknowledged that 'the absence of women from the Waking The Nation programme is not something [he] can defend.'[957] It was this invisibility that ignited old conversations about gender inequality in Irish theatre. Mac Conghail admits,

> I failed to check my privilege and I regret that, privilege is not just about structural, social advances of birth like being man, and white and middle-aged, its about who gets to talk… and who has to listen. I should have stopped to consider how my privilege affects the things that I say and do. Society is overwhelmingly biased towards the male narrative, towards me. I see it in the government, I hear it the voices, or more importantly the absence of voices on the radio, I should have

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[955] Storey, John, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction Seven Edition,* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 171.
[956] Duncombe, Stephen, *Dream: re-imagining progressive politics in a an age of fantasy,* (New York: New Press, 2007).
[957] Mac Conghail, Fiach, speaking at the Waking the Feminist meeting on 12th November 2015, can be accessed at: 00:28 minute of the 2nd installment. Can be accessed at: www.wakingthefeminists.org/2015/11/03/public-meeting-video/.

> implicated my self in that issue by checking myself and applying the same analytical eye to my world, the arts world.[958]

However, when rhetorically questioning himself if he had adequately explored the canon with 'modern eyes' when choosing the material for the 'Waking the Nation 2016 programme', his justification appears peculiarly defensive:

> I was thinking in microscopic detail, I was thinking about the legacy of 1916, I was thinking about war stories, about poverty, about housing, about disenfranchisement [apparently women do not write about such things], I was thinking about the middle east, I was thinking about Northern Ireland, I was thinking about international touring, I was thinking about the Abbey Theatre's canon [which, incidentally, is exclusively male], I was thinking about new commissioned plays on my desk that were at final draft stage, and I wasn't thinking about gender balance; I did not look up.[959]

Gender did not feature in the many things on his mind, and I can only wonder at the Herculean denial required to ignore what is plainly before him. His approach lends credulity to the notion that, once again, it was the 'gaze' that was the problem. Socio-political views of war, poverty, immigration, and history are certainly successfully dealt with by many women playwrights over the last 100 years. But rather than justifying the exclusion of women due to the *so many* other things being thought about, why not consider a conversation that has been ongoing for decades. I would agree, Mac Conghail did 'fail to check [his] privilege.'[960]

It is neither possible or desirable to 'do justice' to the expansive volume of work achieved by Irish women in theatre from the year 2000, from directing, acting, designing, choreographing, writing to producing. Using fifteen plays to illustrate the five important themes running through the thesis has been a balancing act, a tension between representing different acts of opposition to dominant cultural structures and yet accepting the constraints required of a PhD study. Therefore, my thesis relies on several strong reasons that draw these plays together as a unique contribution to some broad debates. I have used

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[958] Mac Conghail, speaking at the Waking the Feminist meeting, 00:30-00:31 minute of the 2nd installment.
[959] Mac Conghail, speaking at the Waking the Feminist meeting, 00:30 minute of the 2nd installment.
[960] Mac Conghail, speaking at the Waking the Feminist meeting, 00:29 minute of the 2nd installment.

them to broach a small number of important matters abroad in Ireland today, that include the position of motherhood in contemporary society, queer and gender identities, sex and sexuality, violence against - and by - women, and issues surrounding the aging process. I have developed my thesis arguments along three key strands. First, that the playwrights I discuss craft techniques of violence and resistance to contest patriarchal production of meaning, to de-objectify women, and oppose oppression in all its forms. Their work acts to agitate against gender power relations and universalise the multi-form complexities of women's lives. Irish womanhood is described by no single narrative, but rather by a plurality of new voices spawned during the turn of the millennium. It has been important to note the individuality, the agency, of women who experience life across class, race, and circumstance formations. There is a danger that this might return to what Aston and Harris call the 'reoccurring question of how to talk about 'women' as a category without risking an advocacy of the old, essentialist and exclusive traps that feminisms variously have worked to overcome.'[961] While I fully recognize these dangers, I embrace Carmel Winters's exhortation for us all to become 'women lovers'[962]. For my part, the term women is no fixed or essential category, and I have suggested throughout my thesis ways that women's perceptions of the world change and develop when they become a 'knower' and 'explorer' rather than an object to be known and explored. There is relevance and importance in women's micro stories, particularly in relation to macro social policies in Ireland, and how collectively we can strive for change. Under this broad umbrella, I have explored myriad expressions of individuality but have also sought what collectively can unite.

Second, I argue that these women playwrights engage in an overarching desire to address pressing social inequalities in Ireland, not least those that place women in groupings outside of certain power-holding elites (LGBTQ communities, sex-workers, people with disability, teenage mothers, elderly women, female prisoners). Resistance consists of acts of opposition to those dominant cultures that reproduce inequalities and, throughout the thesis, I have looked for playwrights and their plays that celebrate the power of human agency, that stress the ways in which individuals are not simply passive victims of social structures. Finally, I have shown that these 15 plays trade duality for multiplicity and challenge essentialist binary categories of identity (good mother–bad mother, hetero-homo,

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[961] Aston and Harris, 'Are We There Yet?' – Final Reflections and Marisa Carnesky's Ghost Train', *A Good Night out for the Girls,* p. 191.

[962] Winters, Carmel, speaking at the Waking the Feminist meeting on 12th November, at the 00:17 minute of the 2nd installment.

victim-perpetrator, mad-bad, progress-decline) that determine, and are determined by, proscriptions of social existence.

I agree with Susan McKay's view of Ireland, that we are in a period of 'enhanced feminist engagement'[963] with social issues. She does warn against 'the extreme characterisation of feminism in terms of peaks and lows' that, within this undulation, risks the erasure of certain feminist experiences, and rather it might be best to consider feminist 'waves', as 'a continuous ever-present movement that sometimes eddies and intensifies, and sometimes constitutes stiller waters'[964]. In my view, 'Irish feminist waters' are not still, they are ferocious, assertive and loud; they demand attention, acknowledgement and equality, and they refuse to recede. At the turn of the millennium, the future and power is in the hands of the Republic, it is with the Irish populace that the change resides: the youth, individuals, groups, community spirit, which are formed with positivity and good intentions, and view the main aim as securing an, inclusive and equal Irish society. That said, it is important to remember and be wary of any resurgence of Ireland's legacy of deep-rooted patriarchal conservatism that commonly acts as a drag anchor on social change.

There are more issues in Ireland to be debated on the road to equality. I could have chosen playwrights who explore the rights of travellers denied their ethnicity, the glaring gaps in the health services, of children living in poverty, the rising number of those with inadequate housing or simply left homeless, the treatment of the disabled or, most contemporary, fraught issues of abortion. The present moment, as Deleuze and Guattari say, is always in process. A recent documentary on RTE entitled *We Are Irish*, reflects on the seismic societal changes that have occurred in the last 20 years, and consequently what culturally it means to be Irish in this generation. Actor Emmet Kirwan, discussing his own Irish cultural identity during this programme, warns that 'though religion has been good for many people, for helping them through bad times,' the nature of the connection between the Irish Catholic Church and the Irish State has been criminal, re-asserting that 'it caused hurt, turmoil, suffering and agony and still does for many of its citizens.'[965] In agreement, author Louise O'Neill is hostile to the 'hangover' experienced in Ireland from the control exercised by the Catholic Church. She argues that 'there has been very strange ideas about what a real woman should be within Irish culture, that definitely is a result of the

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[963] McKay, Susan, 'Respect and Respectability', *Irish Feminisms,* p. 253.
[964] Ibid.
[965] Kirwan, Emmet, speaking on 'I am Irish' an RTE documentary on the 7th April 2016, at the 15th minute. Can be accessed at: www.rte.ie/player/ie/show/i-am-30003939/10557164/.

stranglehold that the Church has had on this country. The idea that we were encouraged to venerate Mary as this ideal woman, a woman who had fulfilled her intrinsic duty by giving birth, because, as we all know those in the possession of a womb need to fill it as quickly as possible, but hadn't defiled herself by actually having sex and it was such a confusing message. I mean the talk about the Madonna/Whore complex is made manifest, this idea that you should be made mother without having sex.'[966] For sure there are prevailing, uneasy and insidious double standards that pervade Irish society. The sense that people tell their daughters, sisters and friends, you can have the world, young woman, but for God's sake, just remember not to walk home alone, not to put your drink down, and not to dress suggestively.

The current momentum for women in Ireland, then, is that of progression, to recognise the inequalities of the past, debunk internalized misogyny and to ensure 'chronic amnesia' does not reoccur. This is evidenced in increased social activism centered on women's needs and equalities, and the increased visibility of women across important sectors of society. There are multiple forms and movements that frame this. The award winning Woman's Podcast[967] hosted by Kathy Sheridan in collaboration with *The Irish Times,* was established in September 2015. She introduces the first episode by saying, 'it's clear that there are a lot of people who are enthusiastic about a podcast like this one, but some people are wondering why we thought we needed one at all, and there is a fine line between representation and ghettoization, and we plan to stay on the right side of it, the fact is that women's issues are everyone's issues.'[968] The Podcast has subsequently joined forces with 'Herstory.ie' a website established to eliminate the prominent and ongoing statement: 'I've never heard of her'[969]. The project focuses directly on bringing integral, reactionary, and yet lost women in Irish history into the limelight, alongside the need to keep referencing the invaluable work and political involvement of Irish women on the contemporary landscape. Another further example, geared towards a younger audience demographic, is 'The Hunreal Issues'; a website recently established to politically mobilize younger women in Ireland. Such incidents are combined with the enormous pressure of 'Repeal the

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[966] O'Niell, Louise, speaking on 'I am Irish' an RTE documentary on the 7th April 2016, at the 7- 8th minute. Can be accessed at: www.rte.ie/player/ie/show/i-am-30003939/10557164/.

[967] Sheridan, Kathy, episode 51 (but the mantra beginning most episodes), 'The Gender Episode, Kay Cairns, Chris Ricketts, Justin Vivian Bond & Lilian Bland's Herstory', accessed at: https://soundcloud.com/irishtimes-women/ep-51-the-gender-episode-kay-cairns-chris-ricketts-justin-vivian-bond-lilian-blands-herstory?in=irishtimes-women/sets/the-womens-podcast.

[968] The Women's Podcast, Episode One, 'Women in Politics', Can be access at: www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/the-women-s-podcast.

[969] Herstory, 'Mission Statement', accessed as: www.herstory.ie/mission/.

8th' campaign. This seeks to provide full body autonomy and equality to all Irish women, and thus remove the 8th amendment from the constitution that equates life of the unborn as equal to the life of the woman. That the politics of these have directly intersected with the arts, attests to the powerful ability of this medium to move towards progressive change. The movement to 'Repeal the 8th' has been impelled forward by multiple 'pop-up' acts of resistance from a younger generation that refuses to be silenced. The Repeal Project, established by Anna Cosgrave, is a sweatshirt-based campaign using clothing to voice a hidden problem: the need and desire for free, safe and legal access to abortion in Ireland. The project relies on a simple black sweater, with a clear, bold and plain-white message emblazoned across the chest: 'REPEAL'. They have been widely distributed, worn by celebrity and public alike, and force this fundamental issue into the limelight. Such was the appetite for the sweatshirts that people queued in pouring rain at the pop-up shop, they sold out in one day, securing €10,000 for the Abortion Rights Campaign Ireland. A further instance of youthful political energy is 'Choice Box', a 'spoken word and music event' in support of the Repeal campaign, organised as a 'celebration of choice as the basis of bodily autonomy.'[970]

The tensions, though, are ever present and deep social schisms are undeniable. A 'Repeal the 8th' mural, painted on the front of the Project Arts Centre building in July 2016 by renowned Irish street artist Maser, and funded by Hunreal, was subsequently removed because Dublin City Council Planning Department deemed it a 'planning violation.' However the Council had no objection to murals emblazoned on the front of the theatre in the past, which lends to the belief that the heart of the problem was the political message behind the picture. According to *The Irish Times,* the Project received 50 complaints but over 200 letters of support for the piece, and an online petition was signed by more the 3,000 people in three days,'[971] all in agreement with the mural and its political sentiments. A 'Repeal 8th' poster subsequently appeared in the window of the building opposite, highlighting not only a powerful web of theatre, art and politics but also the refusal to be silenced, and a reminder that art, and equality, matter. Cian O'Brien, Artistic Director of the Project, makes the point that, 'as an organization, we believe that is important to support, perhaps controversially, undermined or undervalued artistic messages and

[970] See www.facebook.com/ChoiceBoxIre/about/?entry_point+page_nav_about_item&tab=page_info.
[971] McDermott, Megan, 'Repeal the 8th' mural in Project Arts Centre in Temple Bar Removed', *The Irish Times,* July 25th 2016, accessed at: www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/repeal-the-8th-mural-in-projects-arts-centre-in-temple-bar-removed-1.2733842.

moments that risk being unheard, unimagined and unseen; we want to challenge the public to think beyond the status quo.'[972]

There is a history of internalized misogyny within the theatre industry but the energy in the current conversation is immense. These moments place my arguments centre stage; women are no longer in the shadows looking in but have returned to where they should be, at the very heart of the action. To continually check and recheck privilege is to analyse who is commandeering the meaning-making, the decision-making and who do those decisions benefit. So, as the WTF public meeting on the Abbey stage encapsulated, the prevailing feeling is one of excitement, hope and anticipation. These Irish women are no longer waiting for change to happen, they are demanding it. Speaking at the event Deirdre Kinahan, attests: 'I welcome this conversation with all of my heart, I have always been made to feel a little like a screamer from the corner because [gender inequality] wasn't a popular viewpoint.'[973] Now the screaming from the corner is taking its rightful voice centre stage. While I have shown the beneficial presence of women in Irish theatre, it is tedious to constantly labor under a gender imbalance. With Susan Liddy, I reject the misleading argument that a woman playwright's failure to be produced lies in the poor quality of her work. Rather, it is pertinent to question who is deciding what is quality and who reaps the benefits. Liddy argues that, within a gender order, 'there will be stories deemed to be universal, there will be characters that are deemed to speak to everyman, women are often sidelined as niched… I believe that has to be rigorously debated and I believe it has to be monitored. I am not saying you have to throw out the concept of quality altogether, but I think it can be used as a very convenient stick to explain away the invisibility of women and closing off our voices.'[974] It is a call for an expansive heterogeneous gaze, to address taboos, deconstruct reductive stereotypes, to show the expanse, variation and prominence of contemporary Irish women writers. Women do not write lesser plays, women are not lesser artists, and women are not lesser citizens. The challenge now is to ensure that these conversations are not repeated, and that change is finally implemented. As Evlan Conlan reiterates, 'if we don't remember the history, today

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[972] O'Brien, Cian, 'Repeal the 8th: Maser and The HunReal Issues at Project Arts Centre', July 11th 2016, accessed at: www.projectscentre.ie/repeal-8th-maser-hunreal-issues-project-arts-centre/.
[973] Kinahan, Deirdre, speaking at the Waking the Feminists Public Meeting on 12th November 2015, can be accessed at: www.wakingthefeminists.org/2015/11/03/public-meeting-video/. 00:03 minute of the 2nd installment.
[974] Liddy, Susan, speaking at the Waking the Feminists Public Meeting on 12th November 2015, can be accessed at: 00:16 minute of the 2nd installment.

will again become a flash in the pan and disappear… let us remember our history and that might help us not to let this happen again.'[975]

To end this thesis is impossibly hard, it has been my passion, belief and desire for change for so many years. But then I turn to my courageous 8 year-old niece Sophie-Rose (who lingers as I write) and I feel overwhelmed with hope. I believe she will grow up in a society that will be horrified by sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and any form of racism. This young girl rejects such judgments and I am proud to see this daily in her character. I am also drawn to her resilient mum, my cousin, Clare, who becoming pregnant at 16 rejected so many of the messages we, as a society, place on young women. Things are not always planned, orchestrated or implemented as society means. Rather, it is important to find a space for choice, even personal 'resistance' and to feel this across all sectors; it is choice and equality I believe this thesis has fought for. Theatre can be an inclusive space, opening up possibility and multiplicity all the while creating a reparative site for the displaced and dispossessed. I know Clare, Sophie and I will attend The Abbey, and many theatres across Ireland, to relish in a plethora of women's talent and celebrate womanhood collectively, in our own individual ways.

[975] Conlan, Evlan, speaking at the Waking the Feminists Public Meeting on 12th November 2015, can be accessed at: 00:19 minute of the 2nd installment.

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