Provoking Performance: Challenging the People, the State and the Patriarchy in 1980s Irish Theatre

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Summary of Contents: ***Provoking Performance: Challenging the People, the State and the Patriarchy in 1980s Irish Theatre***

This thesis offers new perspectives and knowledge to the discipline of Irish theatre studies and historiography and addresses an overlooked period of Irish theatre. It aims to investigate playwriting and theatre-making in the Republic of Ireland during the 1980s. Theatre's response to failures of the Irish state, to the civil war in Northern Ireland, and to feminist and working-class concerns are explored in this thesis; it is as much an exploration of the 1980s as it is of plays and playwrights during the decade. As identified by a literature review, scholarly and critical attention during the 1980s was drawn towards Northern Ireland where playwrights were engaging directly with the conflict in Northern Ireland. This means that proportionally the work of many playwrights in the Republic remains unexamined and unpublished. In addressing this knowledge gap my research provides a broad and unique study of theatre in Ireland in the specific period—the1980s— and a focused dramaturgical examination of particular plays with specific themes representative of the period. Feminist readings of work by Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy, Dolores Walshe, Patricia Burke-Brogan and Anne Le Marquand Hartigan reveal Irish women's dissatisfaction and anger with church and state and engage with the feminist movement throughout the 1980s from essentialist second-wave feminism to a feminist rejection of compromise or negotiation with the patriarchy. Plays by Thomas Kilroy, Hugh Leonard, Tom Murphy, and Aidan Carl Mathews among others demonstrate a vehement anti-state stance in the Republic at the time, along with postcolonial or revisionist themes so resonant of their time and of the impact of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The use of a Bakhtinian framework allows the plays of The Passion Machine Theatre Company to reveal challenging and provocative working-class themes. My work opens up fertile new ground for scholarship in this area, helping us to understand the artistic, cultural and social motivation of those writing in 1980s Ireland and revealing their influences and perspectives.

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Introduction

Legacies of the 1980s are very much in evidence in twenty-first century Ireland. In January of 2018 the Irish Gardaí issued an apology to Joanne Hayes, the woman at the centre of the Kerry Babies Tribunal, for their treatment of her and her family in 1985; the Gardaí are currently being investigated by the state for various malpractices which point to a prevailing culture of bullying and corruption within the force.[1] The 1983 referendum decision to put an amendment into the Irish constitution placing the rights of the unborn on an equal footing with those of the mother was successfully challenged by referendum in 2018. Much of contemporary debate surrounding these issues paints the 1980s as a dark and difficult time, particularly for women: Journalist Michael O'Regan, in his article "Repeat of Kerry babies case unlikely in modern Ireland" states that "Ireland of 2018 bears little resemblance to that of 1985"[2]; historian Diarmaid Ferriter refers to events of the period as constituting a "moral civil war".[3] Theatre's response to these failures of the Irish state, to the civil war in Northern Ireland and other issues, specifically feminist and working-class concerns, is explored in this thesis; it is as much an exploration of the 1980s as it is of plays, playwrights and theatre-making during the decade. By situating the plays analysed here within a rich historical contextualisation, the 1980s come to life as if on a stage, allowing for an insightful investigation into this period written into performative existence by those who were there.

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[1] 2018 saw the Charleton Tribunal continue to investigate the treatment of Garda whistleblower Maurice McCabe and an investigation begin into a disclosure by Garda whistleblowers that many murders have been misclassified and remain unresolved; in 2017 it came to light that the Gardaí had falsified hundreds of thousands of breath tests used to check for drunk-driving.

[2] O'Regan co-authored a book on the Kerry Babies Tribunal, *Dark Secrets* and his article in the *Irish Times* on 16 Jan 2018 was one of many responses to the belated Garda apology.

[3] Ferriter was speaking on RTE's Prime Time television show about the Kerry Babies on Tuesday 16 January 2018.

As someone whose formative years were marked by the confusing, challenging and in many ways dispiriting decade that was the 1980s in Ireland, north and south, my research is marked by a genuine passion to explore, debate and, through the medium of theatre, bring some insight and clarity to bear on the particular issues synonymous with the period. The country at the time was facing threat from terrorism, failed national and international economic policies, and social upheavals which exposed cracks and fissures as they shifted the foundational ground on which the state was formed. National debate during the period reflected themes which have become urgent matters for political discourse in the twenty-first century, in particular nationalism and feminism. Nationalism in the 1980s became imbued with connotations of violence, linked to paramilitary activity and the conflict in Northern Ireland. The conflict was in its second decade by this stage and ennui had gripped the Republic as a solution to the deadly impasse seemed ever more nebulous and unlikely; people in the Republic did not want to know and this generality is reflected in a dearth of artistic or performance genealogy from the Republic dealing with the conflict. Feminism and liberal social agendas were also facing a backlash from traditional or conservative activism, as evidenced by the results of the 1980s abortion and divorce referenda.

While the event of postcolonial discourse at least allowed for a lexicon to discuss the conflict in Northern Ireland, the appellation of ‘feminist’ in critiques of artistic work was often imbricated with negative terms such as boring or too worthy.[4] Second-wave feminism's gains, on issues such as legal autonomy, employment and reproductive rights, and violence against women, were becoming established from the 1980s onward in Ireland. However it could be argued that a subsequent perception of gender equality as a *fait accompli* and the emergence of a new neo-liberal world order resulted in a resistance to old-style feminism and a 'post-feminist' complacency.[5] Additionally the 1980s saw an urban youth culture emerge which embraced rather than 'Othered' the Irish working class, celebrating a vibrant if subversive and at times angry challenge to the established order. The approach utilised in this thesis allows the decade to reveal itself through theatrical works which were often immediately responsive to events and issues of concern and which gave voice to alternative and dissenting voices, therefore allowing for a nuanced and original examination of the period.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to investigate playwriting and theatre-making in the Republic of Ireland during the 1980s. The canon of Irish theatre in the 1980s includes seminal work from Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, Frank McGuinness and Thomas Kilroy but plays dealing with the conflict in Northern Ireland, emanating from Northern Ireland and from Field Day Theatre Company, dominate critical, published and international work of the period (see Literature Review). International influence and the Field Day debates also played a part in the largely monothematic approach to canonical theatre during this time due to the unfortunate scale of the Northern Irish conflict and its presence in Britain. In order to gain a comprehensive and more nuanced understanding of theatre during this period it is imperative to look beyond the ‘conflict plays’ of Northern Ireland, to turn the spotlight south of the border and ask what was engaging playwrights, and by implication society, during this time. My research (see Methodology) demonstrates that new plays produced in the Republic during this period were less likely to be published or academically critiqued and less likely to travel than was drama dealing with the conflict in Northern Ireland. However playwrights in the Republic of Ireland were prolific in output during this time, writing plays and making theatre which staged dissenting or overlooked voices often dismissed by traditional theatre and the academic community. This thesis therefore examines work that originated in the Republic of Ireland previously excluded from consideration because it did not fit the model of a ‘Troubles’ play.[6] A comprehensive study of the work of academics writing about theatre in Ireland in the 1980s, along with statistical analysis of actual performance and publication data from the PLAYOGRAPHYIreland website makes it very clear that focus on specific playwrights and plays engaging with the situation in Northern Ireland has overshadowed the work of other playwrights during the period.

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[4] See for example my discussion of theatre reviews in the chapter titled "The Women are Talking".

[5] For instance, Kim Solga in *Theatre and Feminism* writes that the rise of individualism under neo-liberal economic policies meant that the "illusion of gender fairness and equity erases our ability, as individuals, to see problems that still linger in the bigger picture" (8) and she further points out that "because protest and political unrest is considered bad for financial market stability, shutting down a public appetite for feminist protest is considered a 'win' for business and the governments that openly support it" (11).

The societal movements associated with the plays under examination here can no longer be dismissed as peripheral, inconsequential or undesirable as was the case in the 1980s. Feminism and re-emergent nationalism are now leading agendas driving debate and policy-making in the business and political world and this analytical work allows for greater understanding of the trajectory and cultural history of these movements in Ireland. Feminist readings of work by Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy, Dolores Walshe, Patricia Burke-Brogan and Anne Le Marquand Hartigan reveal Irish women's dissatisfaction and anger with church and state and track the feminist movement throughout the 1980s from essentialist second-wave feminism to a feminist rejection of compromise or negotiation with the patriarchy. Plays by Hugh Leonard, Tom Murphy, and Aidan Carl Mathews among others reveal a vehement anti-state stance in the Republic at the time, along with postcolonial or revisionist themes so resonant of their time and of the impact of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Using a Bakhtinian framework and applying entertainment theory allows the plays of The Passion Machine Theatre Company to identify and highlight challenging and provocative working-class themes which are particularly relevant as, according to Michael Pierse, work of this nature, i.e. work engaging specifically with the working classes, has "barely begun to get the recognition that its energy and complexity clearly demand" (258). Critical engagement with all of the above themes is important to the discipline of Irish theatre studies due to a specific focus on the underdeveloped studies of feminist and working-class theatre in Ireland; my work is also in dialogue with and compliments the existing academic discourses on Irish theatre and the state. In a continuation of Irish theatre tradition this work establishes intersectional historical and social genealogies with respect to theatre practice and illuminates the relationship between the social and aesthetic in ways crucial to understanding the contemporary history of Ireland.

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[6] The conflict in Northern Ireland, which is generally excepted to have begun with civil rights protests in 1968 and ended with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, is commonly and colloquially referred to as ‘The Troubles’.

The objective of this thesis therefore is the identification and study of neglected or overlooked dramatic work; it offers a radical re-examining of Irish theatrical history, particularly in the areas of feminist and working-class theatre and theatre staging political issues. Joe Cleary writes that “Three broad scholarly formations have commanded the field of Irish literary and cultural studies for some time now: revisionism, feminism, and what is now commonly called postcolonial studies” (*Outrageous Fortune* 2). However *theatre* studies in the 1980s were not registering feminist themes in the plays of the period and, in a continuum from the past and on into the future, female playwrights were not represented in the canon.[7] Additionally, as my research reveals, they were not being produced on the main stages of the larger theatres, rather they were producing or staging their work in independent theatres. As Cathy Leeney puts it in her introduction to *Seen and Heard,* “Canons are formed and we are the poorer for them” (vii). Not coincidently, the angry anti-patriarchal plays of Dolores Walshe remain unproduced in Ireland. Patricia Burke Brogan experienced resistance to having her play *Eclipsed* staged during the 1980s due to its subject matter concerning the Magdalen laundries and the control exerted by church, state and society over Irish women’s bodies. The application of feminist theory as a framework to interrogate the 1980s will situate my work in the debate which is currently seeking to address scholarship on female playwrights in Irish theatre, a topic on which Leeney, Melissa Sihra, Maria Kurdi, Miriam Haughton and Lisa Fitzpatrick, among others, have written extensively.

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[7] The Waking the Feminists (WTF) movement has recently generated much debate about this issue; see O’Beirne’s ‘A Gendered Absence: Feminist Theatre, Glasshouse Productions and the #WTF Movement’.

Postcolonialism was addressed, and debated, by Field Day, in their plays and their pamphlets but again the conservative nature of institutionalised theatre in the Republic did not encourage exploration of nationalism or the Northern Irish conflict from a Republic of Ireland perspective. Rather it eschewed overt or polemic work in favour of bipartisan treatment of the conflict in Northern Ireland, for instance Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. This is not to negate the impulse behind encouraging openness and non-sectarianism on the stage but other voices, which perhaps were painting an equally valid but unpopular viewpoint, were not as welcome, and 'theatre' in this respect applies to audience as well as institutions. When the Abbey, in 1982, staged Tom Murphy's attack on a corrupt 'Banana Republic' (*The Blue Macushla*), it was not well received and did not complete its planned run. This was partly because its adoption of American gangster tropes did not universally amuse but also because of its unpalatable message: that the Irish state government was not to be trusted. Indeed Lionel Pilkington identifies anti-terrorist legislation in the Republic as one of the reasons "literary and theatrical responses to Bloody Sunday, and to the conflict as a whole, were decidedly muted" in the Republic of Ireland (196). In studying these plays and playwrights we can gain greater understanding of how theatre as an institution functions; how it strives, and sometimes fails, to offer a platform for political alternatives when staging social issues. Many theatre practices developed by artists and writers during this period were collaborative, innovative and contested traditional and hegemonic structures; they also provide an historical basis for the devised and issue-based theatre of today.

Methodology

This thesis applies a textual and dramaturgical analytical approach to examine playscripts, published and unpublished. In addition it looks at theatre practices including critical and audience responses to performances. Lisa Fitzpatrick, in her essay "Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage", states that her work "progresses from the assumption that these theatrical representations reflect aspects of the social world"; her reading of dramatic texts and performances "assumes that both the staging of the work and its reception are influenced by material details of the surrounding local culture and society, including the ideological assumptions underlying social practices" (302). These assumptions are likewise made here in this exploration of Irish theatre during the 1980s, which uses a cultural materialist approach to identify hegemonic societal influences and theatrical responses to same. Bruce McConachie asserts the criticality of this approach by noting that "it does not take a materialist to point out that such social-historical roles, actions and perceptions constitute the fundamental stuff out of which theatrical events emerge" (465).[8] A literature review of academic writing on Irish theatre during the 1980s provides a qualitative approach to an investigation of the period. All of the primary academic volumes on theatre relating to the period are analysed, providing a thorough review of critical writing on theatre over the island of Ireland as a whole and identifying the most studied and prolific playwrights and plays produced and performed. The results of this study, combined with analysis from the Irish Playography database (see below), confirm a bias whereby the focus of academic attention during the period favours work from/about Northern Ireland and ultimately these findings direct my research to the Republic of Ireland to investigate the relative lack of material or knowledge available for a considerable body of plays during the period. The Republic is categorised here as the twenty-six counties comprising the Republic of Ireland, with the remaining six counties making up the British territory known as Northern Ireland.

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[8] McConachie quotes J. L. Styan to introduce his essay "Towards A Postpositivist Theatre History": "Drama is an expression of community, feeling the pulse of an age or of moment in time like no other art. A play is a social event or it is nothing."

An empirical study of original plays written and performed during the period 1980 to 1989 uses the English language digital database 'Irish Playography' on the PLAYOGRAPHYIreland website as a resource. Engaging with this digital platform and the use of digital analytical tools, such as spreadsheets and visualisation applications, provides a quantitative approach and underpins my research with evidence-based information. The Playography na Gaeilge database is not utilised here as Irish language plays are outside the remit of this thesis; the reason for this is solely because of a regrettable lack of proficiency in the Irish language on the part of the researcher. The output of the empirical study of new plays is analysed and the plays categorised by gender, publication status and provenance, using the information available on Playography. The relationships between these various factors and the playwrights under analysis are examined, using graphs and charts in order to visualise the data and to provide optimal presentation and comprehension of the data.[9] A caveat with respect to Playography is that there are inevitably some omissions in the data collated to date for the period; this is constantly being renewed and updated by PLAYOGRAPHYIreland, under the auspices of the Irish Theatre Institute, and the comprehensive database of information already existing provides an expansive and unbiased resource for research. Irish Playography's research parameters are defined on their website as:

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[9] Examples of this analysis are included in Appendix 1 of this thesis, and generally throughout the text.

> The Irish Playography provides detailed information on each new play produced in Ireland, North and South, by professional theatre companies, venues, festivals, and commercial producers from 1904 to the present day. It also contains plays produced by fringe companies and by semi-professional organisations, where the work is deemed to be of particular significance to the Irish repertoire. The Irish Playography also includes the work of key Irish playwrights whose work has been premiered abroad. The Irish Playography includes full-length plays, one-act plays, Theatre in-Education plays, plays for young audiences, musical theatres, adaptations, translations, improvised and devised works.[10]

This database provides a foundation for exploring theatre in the 1980s; the data can be analysed and compared with the literature review to provide a comprehensive picture of what, and who, was being staged and remembered and to identify work that remains unpublished and largely unexamined academically to date.

With respect to categorising the plays from Irish Playography, the following statements clarify the use of the database for this thesis. The full database as of December 2017 (a recheck was carried out at this time) was used for primary analysis, i.e. for gender, publication and north/south analysis, giving 353 plays. The criteria for a play under the Northern Ireland/ Republic of Ireland categories are the playwright's provenance and the play's premiere location. The next task was to break the plays into theme and this was accomplished where possible by reading the plays—and taking advantage of a contemporary revival if possible—and making an informed decision. If the play was not available, the categorisation was based on critical reviews of the premiere production or on information from Irish Playography. The graphical breakdown of gender is incorporated into the chapter on feminist theatre. The north/south analysis forms part of the literature review. The Northern Irish (NI) plays and the Beckett plays are then subsequently omitted from further analysis and the remainder of the plays classified as originating from the Republic of Ireland (ROI).[11] The identification of plays for this thesis was based on subsequent detection of gaps in knowledge which the plays might address: themes and issues which are clearly represented in certain plays but are not part of theatrical or academic discourse on the period (for instance feminist themes); themes or theatrical genres overlooked or dismissed as unworthy of critical attention (the urban working class plays of Passion Machine); themes which arise in surprising opposition to the state and its institutional bodies (almost all of the plays examined here).

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[10] http://www.irishplayography.com/attachments/2f063003-24d4-43f8-a5f9-a1ac39c5c496.PDF

In this analysis a critical reading of the chosen plays is theoretically underpinned by application of Irish and international feminist, postcolonial and class discourses. Applying theoretical frameworks in examination of the plays allows for detachment in forming critical analysis. McConachie writes that

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[11] Beckett's plays all premiered internationally, none in Ireland, but the decision to omit Beckett from this analysis was primarily due to the fact that the study of his work has been addressed comprehensively by specialised Beckett scholars.

> From a Postpositivist perspective, question-asking (even educated guessing) begins historical investigation; it does not follow the gathering of the facts. And, since this initial step is necessarily value-laden, better for the historian to examine his values through the lens of an appropriate theory, a process which can, in turn, help him or her to ask more pointed questions (471).

Question-asking began for this thesis with an investigation of dramatic work engaging with the conflict in Northern Ireland. The subsequent discovery of the almost blanket avoidance of the topic by dramatists from the Republic of Ireland prompted further questions as to what issues and themes *were* inspiring plays and playwrights writing from the Republic and directed the focus of the thesis to investigating this anomaly and therefore to a central timeline in the chronology of the conflict, as optimally representative of the period. Archival research is a primary methodology for this thesis as the work is situated in the 1980s and many of the plays under examination are not published. NUI Galway, the research facilitator for this thesis, is one of the foremost institutions in Europe for the study of Irish theatre history due to its extensive archival deposits, and the fact that it benefits from partnerships with theatre companies in Galway and beyond, including the Abbey, Gate, Lyric and Druid Theatre Companies. The archives facilitate access to the textual history of many plays produced on Irish stages (in the form of playscripts, prompt scripts, reviews etc.). The Abbey, Peacock and Gate archives have been digitised, which allows for an efficient means of accessing their very extensive papers; it should be acknowledged however that the digitised archives are in fact subject to the same limitations as any other. Ultimately access to the entirety of the archive is controlled by individuals and management of various institutions with sometimes conflicting aims. When Derrida states that “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory”, he highlights just how critical the control and dissemination of information can be (11). As Helen Freshwater writes, “This interaction of the state, writing, and the archive not only demonstrates the importance of textual traces for the construction of identity and collective national memory, it also indicates the state's methods of maintaining control of its subjects (733).”

Freshwater also notes how a playwright’s known personality or character can impinge on the reading of a play: specifically she is speaking of her work on the British Library’s Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files, where the censorship status of new plays written between 1900 and 1968 is recorded.[12] She writes:

> It often seems as if the psychology of the author is on trial as well as the content of the play. Factors taken into consideration often include the author's sincerity, motivation, intentions, and commercial interests, as if the censors wish to examine both the "conscience" of the play and of the individual who wrote it (Footnote 19).

The non-inclusion of biographical research with respect to the playwrights in this thesis helps to avoid this imbrication of any individual’s personality over textual material and also allows for the fact that people’s beliefs and affiliations can change dramatically over a period of time, while the thematic concern of this research is limited to the1980s. Having situated my work at the intersection of theatre and Irish society during the 1980s, authorial biography does not align with this chronology or impetus; also a focus on the plays rather than the playwrights limits the impact or influence of canonical writers over others. Equally the thematic, textual and dramaturgical focus of the thesis means that the work of directors and actors are not examined here; again the situating of the research in the immediate concerns of the period privileges new dramatic work and its reception, rather than interpretive work by directors or actors. Given the decision to allow the work to speak for itself and the availability of the NUI Galway archives, newspaper and journal reviews of the time generally supply the background material for an examination of the plays' reception, with acknowledgement of any specific academic input where applicable. Given the nature of Irish theatre and its renowned affinity with the written word, my work aligns with this tradition and allows for optimal use of the archives as they are presented. As previously discussed the context of the work is provided by a thorough historical/sociological background discussion while analysis is facilitated by use of applicable theoretical frameworks.

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[12] 1996 British Library Manuscript Collections Reference Guide 3, The Play Collections (unpublished leaflet, ref no.: GRS/JC1225) London: British Library.

Other deposits in the NUI Galway Library, such as playwright Thomas Kilroy's, are not in digital format but contain much unexpected and surprising information; in Kilroy's case this is partly a reflection of his friendship and communications with many literary figures, including Brian Friel and Seamus Deane. In addition the National Library of Ireland holds the papers of a number of independent theatre companies, such as Focus Theatre Company, while likewise the Dublin City Archives holds the papers for Storytellers Theatre Company, among others. Tracking of unpublished scripts occasionally presents a challenge. Irish Playography, however, does provide contact addresses for the majority of unpublished scripts and the authors in general are remarkably helpful and generous with their time and in sourcing, at some personal cost, scripts which they may not have considered for many years. Investigation and categorising the plays in terms of thematic content necessitates reading as many of the plays written in the period as possible and using a certain amount of subjective reasoning in order to group the plays under the themes discussed in this thesis: feminism, theatre and state, and working-class plays. It is critical that reading leads and categorisation follows wherever possible.

Thematic Content of Chapters

The analytical exploration undertaken in this thesis is led by the reading and categorisation of plays of the period under investigation. This addresses the question ‘what issues and themes were inspiring plays and playwrights writing from the Republic’? The first chapter discusses gender as a matter of concern with respect to the dearth of Irish women playwrights and gives an overview of the plays written by women in the period before focusing on the heretofore unexamined feminist themes in the primary texts analysed here. It foregrounds four female authors and one male author whose work resonated with feminist themes but had generally not been critiqued or considered as works engaging with feminist concerns when they were first produced in the 1980s. Sue Ellen Case, writing in 1988, notes the global and temporal extent of the absence of women playwrights and argues that, in addition to “traditional categories of production . . . consideration must be given to modes of performance located in the domestic and personal spheres which were assigned to women by the patriarchy" (*Feminism and Theatre* 29). A chapter in the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* dedicated to Irish Women's writing (Volume V) specifically addresses the same concerns: "We need to develop modes of evaluation and critique which take account of models of practice derived from a body of female authored theatre" (McMullan and Williams 1236). Plays by women identified and studied in this analysis have not been given any notable academic attention, and if they are published it is almost exclusively in volumes dedicated to addressing the specific issue of their omission from the canon. Critical discourse focused primarily (and deservedly in their own right) on the politically-motivated plays written by Northern Irish female playwrights such as Christina Reid, Marie Jones and Anne Devlin.

This chapter aims to bring some balance to this anomaly and provide an overview of feminist approaches in Irish theatre in the Republic, including a statistical breakdown of new plays and theatre-making by women in the 1980s, many of which have not been published, and a critique of specific plays which address and stage feminism. The six plays under analysis in this chapter engaged in different ways with feminist themes: some overtly and provocatively as in Le Marquand Hartigan's *Beds*; some using analogy and myth in their unambiguous demand for equality such as Walshe's *In the Talking Dark* and *The Stranded Hours Between*, Burke-Kennedy's *Women in Arms* and Kennelly's *Antigone*; and all of them, including Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed*, expose the patriarchal institutions of church and state as misogynist, hegemonic systems which must be challenged. Many other playwrights during the period also took up the challenges inherent in staging 'women's issues', making the personal political and putting women characters, historical or otherwise, centre-stage. This first chapter asks how Irish women playwrights were responding to the second wave of feminism which swept the western world in the 1970s and 1980s. It discusses the apparent invisibility of female playwrights and seeks to identify the reasons why ‘there are no women playwrights’.[13] Critically the aim of this text is to offer an intersectional theatrical intervention into the history of the ever-changing face of Irish feminism.

The second analytical chapter of this thesis discusses theatre and the state in 1980s Ireland. Reflecting the ‘state’ of Ireland in the 1980s, the phrase GUBU, coined by Conor Cruise O’Brien in an *Irish Times* article in August 1982 in reference to a bizarre series of incidents involving double murderer Malcolm MacArthur and the Attorney General, seemed to encapsulate the period and the many ‘grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre and unprecedented’ occurrences which defined it. The primary analytical focus of this chapter rests on the plays and playwrights who most acutely reflect theatre’s response to this apparent ‘GUBU’ state of Ireland and accordingly, after a review of all the plays on Playography’s database which potentially engage with critiquing the ethos and apparatus of the state, four plays are analysed in depth. Thomas Kilroy’s *Double Cross,* (1986), was written in response to a request from Field Day Theatre Company and often critiqued with respect to this context and the politics of Northern Ireland. Here it is read in relation to the Republic of Ireland, in its referential tropes and exploration of Irish society’s complicated and entrenched relationship with nationalism. Hugh Leonard, with *Kill* (1982), Tom Murphy’s *The Blue Macushla,* and Aidan Carl

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[13] This statement was Glasshouse Theatre Company’s title for their festival of dramatic work by female playwrights in 1992. It was of course named ironically.

Mathews's *The Antigone* (1984) all point a finger at the government of the Irish state in overt accusation: of corruption, of aligning itself with an underworld of paramilitary organisations or of infringing upon the human rights of the Irish people by attempting to employ tactics synonymous with those of a police state.

As with the previous chapter this chapter introduces neglected work and additionally offers new perspectives on major figures such as Kilroy, Leonard, and Murphy. Analytical frameworks utilised in order to situate the plays in context and in focus include postcolonial theory, identity politics and Irish historiography. The critical writings of Terence Brown, Seamus Deane, Eoin Flannery, David Lloyd and Joe Cleary, among others, is used to give varying historical perspectives on Ireland during the period; revisionist exponents are reviewed and contextualised with respect to their binary positioning in the 'Ireland as postcolonial' debate. To set the scene for the decade, a timeline is included in Appendix One which lists the political events of the decade along with a parallel listing of theatrical output. Plays from the border counties are addressed as a separate section in acknowledgement of the ambiguous nature of place and belonging in that region. In conclusion this chapter asserts that there is an unexplored and difficult relationship between the Irish state and its people which is brought to the fore in the plays examined here, with the playwrights expressing an unpalatable, at times exaggerated, but insightful view from an oppositional stance.

Urban working-class theatre in 1980s Dublin is the subject of the third and final analytical chapter. As with previous chapters this exploration of plays staging working-class characters and themes is distilled from a thorough overall review of plays from Playography. Urban plays, i.e. plays largely emanating from or set in

Dublin, account for a considerable number of the overall amount and many are unpublished. A primary setting and prevailing theme of these urban plays is working-class life and youth culture in Dublin and therefore this chapter focuses on the class-conscious plays of The Passion Machine Theatre Company as representative of this genre. The reasons for choosing Passion Machine include their prolific output and the fact that their plays are all original and very much set in the period of their origin. Additionally, despite their prolificacy and popularity their dramatic impact has been overlooked or dismissed by academics and critics due to their categorisation as 'just entertainment' and to their appeal to a largely young working-class demographic who would possibly not be attendees at theatre in general. These facts mean that their obvious influence on future Irish plays and playwrights has gone unacknowledged.

The Passion Machine stage positive, albeit gritty and at times angry, working-class characters who are resolutely present in their own lives and unlike Bernard Farrell's characters do not display any upwardly mobile aspirations. Nor do they represent victimhood or economic trauma as did their antecedents in O'Casey's plays; economic issues are present in the plays but the characters and the narrative are not defined by them. The Passion Machine playwrights, Paul Mercier, Brendan Gleeson, Aidan Parkinson and Roddy Doyle, intersperse humour and slapstick with more thought-provoking moments where music and dance provide escape from reality; this is particularly so with Mercier. The analysis of these plays engages with Richard Dyer and Jill Dolan's reading of entertainment as providing utopian tropes as a means of escape from societal realities and in providing a sense of community in a fragmented world. Michael Pierse and Joe Cleary among others provide insight into ‘popular’ or working-class theatre and writing, while Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival theory is used to interrogate the form, dialogue and working-class concepts inherent in these plays. The plays are examined in chronological order and a brief discussion of the theatre company’s trajectory through the decade helps contextualise their work and demonstrates that alternative theatre can successfully challenge the hegemonic institutions of the traditional. Consideration of Passion Machine’s audience and the dismissive attitude of many critics towards that audience also feature in discussion of the company. As with the previous chapters the intention here is to look anew at dramatic work which has not been given academic attention to date but which is resonant of society in the period in which it originates.

Literature Review of Academic Analyses of 1980s Irish Theatre

The premise of this thesis, in that it proposes there is a considerable body of overlooked but revealing dramatic work written in the Republic in the 1980s, runs contrary to arguments often made by academics writing about Irish theatre during this period. There is a tendency among writers, as will be discussed in this literature review, to assert that the Northern Irish canon has been largely ignored, and a number of books have been written in order to address this omission (among other aims). This review addresses this contention and refutes it while providing the evidence for this dissention. It is not a complete literature review as a literature review specific to each analytical chapter is also provided in the opening sections of the chapters themselves. Additionally it should be noted that some notable Irish academic scholars are not included here and other scholars’ work is not fully addressed; this is because my research focuses specifically on the 1980s and not on different periods of Irish theatre. In her recent volume, *Political Acts: Women in Northern Irish Theatre*, Fiona Coleman Coffey states that: ". . ., Northern drama has been neglected and often marginalized in both academic scholarship and on the professional stage" (10). However she does qualify this statement when she acknowledges that "Whenever scholarship addresses women's playwriting in the North, it almost exclusively points to the 1980s as the one period of great theatrical output for women" (49). This fact is evident when a review of the primary writings of the period is carried out, and indeed it could reasonably be argued also applies to male writers during the period, where the conflict-themed plays from Northern Ireland have been much written about in general. Books focusing on women writers specifically also cover Northern Ireland; Brenda Liddy (2010) and Maria Kurdi (2010) have both written about Anne Devlin, Marie Jones and Christina Reid.[14] Coleman Coffey names Tom Maguire's *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland* (2006) and Bill McDonald's *Theatre of the Troubles* (2009) as a start to a correction of the marginalization of Northern Irish drama. Maguire, in his volume, examines the writings of many of the academics charged with this neglect and finds that "there has been a tendency to regard Northern Irish dramatic output as a minor chapter in the canon of Irish dramatic literature" (7). He gives examples of Murray in *Twentieth Century Irish Drama* (1997) and Richards in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Irish Drama* (2004) as allotting just one and two chapters respectively in their books to Northern Irish Theatre. I would argue that these chapters represent the 1980s in its entirety with the exceptions of essays on Tom Murphy and Frank McGuinness and I would offer that, in fact, Northern Irish dramatic output during the 1980s makes up the majority of the canonical writings on theatre during this period.

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[14] Kurdi in *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women* and Liddy in *The Drama of War in the Theatre of Anne Devlin, Marie Jones, and Christina Reid, Three Irish Playwrights*.

Northern Irish Drama in the 1980s

It is useful to briefly examine the academic critiques of dramatic works written from a Northern Irish perspective during the 1980s, in order to support my argument that such work has indeed been addressed in writings on Irish theatre. It is clear that all of the writers reviewed here feel it necessary and advantageous to separate Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for their analysis; they acknowledge that they are doing so and that it is a necessary approach which allows them apply frameworks such as postcolonial and history theory to the plays under consideration. Maguire defends his decision to disaggregate plays concerned with the conflict in Northern Ireland from the mainstream of Irish theatre history because this allows closer analysis of "the ways in which plays in performance are situated as part of the contexts within which they are rendered meaningful" and he uses Gary Mitchell to illustrate his point as Mitchell refuses to be categorised as an Irish playwright, coming as he does from a working-class, loyalist and resolutely British background (8). Christopher Murray in *Twentieth Century Irish Drama,* in a chapter entitled "'A Modern Ecstasy': Playing the North", discusses how Northern Ireland has been represented in theatre during the period of violence which started in 1969 and came to an official conclusion with the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. He lists seventeen plays which he considers to be plays about Northern Ireland, and references D.E.S Maxwell's article "Northern Ireland's Political Drama" (1990) where Maxwell lists a further twenty-four plays, and also Philomena Muinzer's article "Evacuating the Museum: The Crisis of Playwriting in Ulster" (1987) in which she lists nine. It appears that categorisation of the 'conflict' play contradicts the generally ambiguous nature of theatrical works and their classification. Murray divides his analysis into three distinct areas consisting of drama staged in Northern Ireland, drama staged in the Republic of Ireland and drama staged by Field Day Theatre Company, acknowledging his acceptance of two states with the island of Ireland as implied by these distinctions (188). Anthony Roche in his dedicated chapter entitled "Northern Irish Drama: Imagining Alternatives" in *Contemporary Irish Drama* acknowledges the threat posed to playwriting and "all our notions of aesthetic form and dramatic coherence" by the situation which developed in Northern Ireland (216). Roche states that: "Any play dealing with the situation there has to acknowledge that instability in its own structure to some degree" and in addition, he continues, language in Northern Ireland "is also a double-edged weapon", given its divided inheritance (216).

In critiquing the Northern Irish plays most academics do so in terms of the thematic content and its relationship to the conflict in Northern Ireland, although Coleman Coffey applies a gender-specific lens throughout and does not focus on Anne Devlin, Christina Reid and Marie Jones, as they "have already received significant scholarly analysis" (13). Maguire acknowledges that the terminology used to define the conflict in Northern Ireland is weighted and while he primarily uses 'The Troubles' as a blanket term for the conflict in Northern Ireland, he notes that its use "carries a caveat": it should not be forgotten that it was "from the protests of a peaceful civil rights movement against the injustices of the unionist state in the 1960s . . . a sustained three-way war developed . . .” (4).[15] Maguire discusses Martin Lynch’s *Dockers* and Stuart Parker’s *Northern Star* to “demonstrate the mutability of the historical moment and the opportunities which, missed once, need not escape again” (61), noting that the importance of naming and words and the use of mythology and martyrdom are central to the thematic content of both plays (76). He examines myth and its function as a metaphor for a reality which may be “hidden or rendered impenetrable by familiarity” in his examination of three other plays: Tom Paulin’s *The Riot Act*; Stewart Parker’s *Pentecost*; and Big Telly’s *The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne*, sourced from Greek, Christian and Irish mythology respectively (79). Ultimately he finds that none of the plays achieved “the dual demands of proximity and distance” as the “deployment of specific performance strategies to produce a sense of vitality in the adaptation of myths has ensured that such adaptations have remained within the realm of symbolic representations, rather than arguments for social action” (96). Maguire looks at “the ways in which gender has been bodied forth in productions which have engaged with the Troubles”, focusing the discussion on Marie Jones’s *Somewhere Over the Balcony* and Rona Munroe’s *Bold Girls* for 7:84 (99). He finds that each play represents “an act of resistance to dominant representations of the Troubles in the depiction of female figures” but acknowledges a further dimension: specifically that each play was first performed outside Northern Ireland and not staged in the communities in which they are set (116).

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[15] Maguire cites Bob Purdie’s *Politics in the Streets: the Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland*, Belfast, Blackstaff Press, 1990 and *Who are "the People"?: Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland*, edited by P. Shirlow and M. McGovern, London, Pluto 1997 as evidence for this statement.

Murray uses Sean O'Casey's dramaturgy as a framework to examine the Northern Irish plays, writing that O'Casey's Dublin plays have shown "through a simple private/public interaction of ordinary citizens and state apparatus how ideology initiates urban warfare, which is indiscriminate, and how the cost condemns justification" (191). He looks at the different approaches used by playwrights writing about themes such as violence and political discord and in turn he provides a useful framework for examining other plays dealing with similar material. His chapter on Field Day describes the theatre company as a cross-border touring company with a base in Derry (208). Murray examines the plays staged by Field Day under a thematic framework broken into two sections: language and identity; and history, myth and vision. Kilroy's *Double Cross* is examined under the latter and Murray describes it as "essentially a play about Ireland's relations with England" (217). Murray believes that of the twelve plays staged by Field Day, "*Translations, Double Cross* and *Pentecost* stand out among the best Irish plays of the past twenty-five years" and he asserts that "Field Day made cultural nationalism a live issue once again in Ireland, North and South, and turned the 'narrow ground' of factionalism into an imaginative playground" (222).

Christopher Morash writes that Irish theatre had a long tradition of plays dealing with political violence and for that reason Sean O'Casey became the most frequently produced playwright in the professional theatre of the 1970s (245). Additionally, a unionist Ulster tradition of the 'Troubles play', going back as far as St John Ervine's *Mixed Marriage* in 1911, provided a "dramatic model for writing about the situation" that was unfolding in Northern Ireland (245). Morash sees this model being utilised in plays throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, giving examples of the work of three Belfast playwrights: John Wilson Haire's *Bloom of the Diamond Stone* (Abbey, 1973), Graham Reid's *Remembrance* (Lyric, 1984) and Christina's Reid's *Did You Hear the One About the Irishman...?* (1985). By taking the format of the Aristotelian tragedy, political violence is represented (or not represented) by "an offstage presence of some force too vast or amorphous to be seen" Morash believes, therefore appearing mindless and unmotivated (246). Morash discusses the opening night of Friel's *Translations* in the Guildhall in Derry, occurring at a time when relations in Northern Ireland were extremely tense and with the hunger strikes just about to begin (234). He believes that the theatre provides a fluid arena in which to develop identity, a stated desire of Friel's, and that the audience on that fateful night may have provided a glimpse of the culturally significant symbolic 'Fifth Province' which Field Day dreamed up as a safe place to explore such concepts (241).

Roche writes that: "Northern Irish plays are anti-hierarchical, for the most part, with no single character dominating"; their structure tending to emphasis "discontinuity, fragmentation and juxtaposition", with an acute awareness of "the fact that theatre is not an exclusively verbal medium" (217). Roche covers the Field Day story and in particular Friel's *Translations* and Tom Paulin's *Antigone*, the latter given context by Roche's discussion of George Steiner's *Antigones* and the fact that in the same year in which Steiner wrote his survey of the use of this myth in nineteenth and twentieth century discourse, Paulin and fellow poets Aidan Carl Mathews and Brendan Kennelly had all written versions of the Greek myth. Finally

Roche examines Frank McGuinness's *Observe,* a play "that got away from Field Day" (265) and a play that addresses an alternative to the Catholic nationalist bias of Field Day in its staging of the Protestant Ulster community (266). Roche notes that "Protestant writers like Derek Mahon, Tom Paulin and Stewart Parker were generally in reaction against that perceived character of Ulster unionism", that of a community which is "dour, humourless, generally without culture" (266). Roche notes McGuinness addressing "unsettling questions about the extent to which Catholic Nationalism has exclusively appropriated the concept of 'Irishness' in this century" (266).

Nicholas Grene in *The Politics of Irish Drama* uses a chronological table (as I have in this thesis) to link political events and theatrical output over the period covered in his book: 1860 to 1998. For the 1980s in particular he notes Friel, Murphy, Reid, Parker, McGuinness and Kilroy as playwrights writing in and of the era, and the hunger strikes in Northern Ireland and the Anglo-Irish Agreement as notable political events (xi-xv). Lionel Pilkington in *Theatre and the State in 20th Century Ireland* gives a comprehensive review of the Lyric's performance of John Boyd's *The Flats* as an example of the problems facing Northern Irish theatre in maintaining balance in such a volatile political situation, likening the play to O'Casey's Dublin plays in the manner in which it handles republicanism (as does Murray). As the 1980s approached, Pilkington writes, in the Republic of Ireland "there was a growing emphasis on the role of culture in underpinning the possibility of a new social contract between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland"

(Pilkington 209)[16] and this leads him to focus on Friel's much critiqued and debated *Translations* (1980).

One commonality between authors, writing of the Northern Irish or Republic of Ireland canon, is their awareness of the separation of interest north and south when it comes to discussion or engagement with the conflict in Northern Ireland. Seamus Deane, writing in the *Crane Bag* in 1984, asserts that: "Most people in the Republic are fed up with the Northern problem. Bad enough to begin with, it has been made worse by an almost incredible degree of incompetence and cowardice on the part of successive British and Irish governments" (82). Maguire addresses certain difficulties experienced by playwrights in the Republic when attempting to stage the issue of the conflict in Northern Ireland, giving an example of Peter Sheridan's *Diary of a Hunger Striker* being refused a staging at the 1982 Dublin Theatre Festival, with Michael Colgan, head of the festival, stating he didn't want a "H-Block image" in the festival (12). He concludes that "the potential for theatre to intervene in the politics of its society is not determined by the intention of the theatre makers; the dramaturgical strategies of the performance; the context of the production; or, even the constitution of the audience" (170-1). I would argue that this statement is unimaginative and does not allow for the subtle ways in which all of the above can influence public debate and bring a specific production into the public arena, often contrarily for reasons of resistance to the work and its professed sentiments. Maguire continues: "The conditions in which theatre can intervene politically only exist where the spectator is receptive to the possibility of applying aesthetically derived experiences to the ways in which he or she lives in and understands the world" (170-1). While this statement is generally true it seems reductive to limit the impact of what is a collaborative art to this one requirement. Murray adds to the consensus around the Republic's lack of engagement with Northern Ireland: he sees a formerly hubristic attitude in the Republic of Ireland die away when "people began to detach themselves from the Northern troubles in a mixture of apathy, guilt and frustration, meaning that few plays were written about the Northern situation" (200).

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[16] Pilkington references D. Bell, "Modernising History: The Real Politik of Heritage and Cultural Tradition in Northern Ireland", *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology and Colonialism*, edited by David Miller, Routledge, 1998, for this statement.

Meanwhile, South of the Border...

Books which specifically critique female playwrights based in the Republic in the 1980s include Maria Kurdi's *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women,* which is the most comprehensive in addressing the work of playwrights from the period; she writes on Burke Kennedy, Burke Brogan, Miriam Gallagher and Jennifer Johnson. Burke-Kennedy's *Women in Arms* is one of the featured plays by female playwrights in Anna McMullen's and Caroline Williams's edited collection in Field Day's belated anthology of Irish women's writing. Marina Carr's early work is addressed in many edited collections of writing on Irish theatre, including Melissa Sihra's collection, *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation.* Bernadette Sweeney also covers Carr in her volume *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre*, Carr's 1989 play *Low in the Dark* is given a dedicated chapter, while Tom McIntyre's 1983 play *The Great Hunger* is also examined in detail. Northern Irish women playwrights of the

1980s including Charabanc, Christina Reid, Marie Jones and Anne Devlin are covered extensively in collections on Irish theatre, as previously discussed.

In his section entitled ‘The South’ Christopher Murray writes about how Tom Murphy in *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) stages the Republic’s ambiguous nationalism and attitude towards Northern Ireland (199). *Conversations* contrasts an idealised nationalism from the insular sixties with a more current 1980s realism; a hubristic, Hollywood Hiberno-romanticism is also employed as a foil to the current state of Irish nationalism in Murphy’s *The Blue Macushla*, which is examined later in this thesis. Murray discusses Friel’s *The Freedom of the City* (1973), as the first major new Northern Irish play to be staged at the Abbey, noting how it addressed the tragedy of Bloody Sunday, although Friel later allowed that he wrote the play too soon after the event. Murray puts the mixed reception the play received down to the conservatism of the Dublin audience and its untimely production. It has not often been revived—a fact which “underlines the antipathy in the South to plays about Northern politics”—and indeed Friel’s next play, *Volunteers* (1975), was a “sardonic attack on Southern complacency”, according to Murray (202). It is interesting to see Murray focus so much of his section on the ‘South’ discussing the reception of Friel, a Northern Irish playwright, in the Republic. The play did not do well, and according to Murray Friel lost interest in introducing political themes to Abbey audiences and the subject matter was relegated to the Peacock which became the home for plays by Graham Reid and

Frank McGuinness (Murray 202).[17] Murray sees McGuinness, in contrast to Reid, as having an ability to accommodate his background in his plays. *Factory Girls* (1982) is set in Northern Ireland but does not directly address political issues, while McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) was staged "as the tide of opinion in the South turned more against old-style republicanism" (204). In fact McGuinness is asserting that "unionist 'loyalty' is primarily to 'Ulster'", a sentiment that was clearly deemed acceptable to theatre audiences in the Republic as the play went on to be staged on the main Abbey stage and won many awards (Murray 205-6). The desire of the Dublin theatre-going populace to rise above the mire that Irish nationalism had become perhaps facilitated their openness to McGuinness's engagement with unionist culture. Were they excited by the draw of the unknown, whereby unionism is the almost exotic unfamiliar other, placed on stage for perusal in a similar manner to the commodification of the working classes for theatre audiences?

Morash writes that when violence erupted in Northern Ireland in 1968, in contrast to the citizens of that state, "the demilitarisation of mindsets in the Republic, to which Ernest Blythe had contributed so powerfully in the 1940s and 1950s, had done its work", referring particularly to the "urban middle classes who dominated the professional theatre" (229-30). He also describes the Abbey's first attempt to process the situation in Northern Ireland, as do the other academics examined here, with the satirical revue entitled *A State of Chassis*, (1970), which was interrupted mid-performance by an “apoplectic Eamonn McCann, chairman of the Derry labour party”, protesting the depiction on stage of the Belfast MP Bernadette Devlin (230). He notes that the response to this disruption of the play by McCann “revealed the gulf between liberals in the South and working-class republicans in the North” (230). Morash discusses the emergence in Irish universities of graduates willing to make the move from students of amateur drama to professional actors (254). Educated to the knowledge of European and American theatre, new theatre groups, such as Druid, Rough Magic, Blue Raincoat, Field Day and many more, performed adaptations in the 1980s, including Friel’s, Kilroy’s and McGuinness’s versions of Chekhov and Ibsen (255). His analysis implies that the adaptations provided a means of covertly addressing the elephant in the room for Irish dramatists during this period: that the situation as it was in Ireland in the 1980s could truly be seen as society in melt-down. Morash also discusses Field Day and their adoption of the ‘Fifth Province’ trope.[18] Kilroy’s *Double Cross*, he notes, gave theatrical form to the theoretical debate about the re-interpretation of postcolonial and historical thought, as it “creates a stage world in which the old oppositions that had structured Irish cultural debate for so long collapse into a hall of mirrors” (Morash 256). The 1980s also brought the experimental theatre of Tom McIntyre in collaboration with Patrick Mason, Tom Hickey and Bronwen Casson in the Peacock, “a type of theatre not dominated by the spoken word” (Morash 257). Morash sees Murphy’s *Gigli Concert* (1983), which re-united Mason, Hickey and Casson, as

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[17] Friel's *Freedom* was given a relatively rare rehearsed reading in 2010, when Adrian Dunbar directed it in response to the publication of the Saville Report investigating the events of Bloody Sunday.

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[18] A concept created by Mark Patrick Hederman and Richard Kearney in their journal, *The Crane Bag* to provide a metaphorical space where diverse opinions and beliefs could be aired and listened to with mutual respect.

"part of a theatre of exorcism", where the past is conjured up to be duly accepted and healed (259). He describes Murphy's *Bailegangaire* (1985) as a thematically similar play which warns that reconciliation and dialogue have their cost (260). Morash is not specific about how these plays were received and whether the significance he applies to their message was widely understood or discussed at that time. He looks at how *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* performs McGuinness's discovery of the historical aspect to the Ulster Unionist background (260). His *Carthaginians* was to have been a Field Day play but actually opened in the Peacock and also addresses themes of the conflict but rejects, while acknowledging, the 'Troubles' Play (261). Morash goes on to discuss the 1980s in terms of Irish theatre becoming more diverse: The Passion Machine Company's vigorous depictions of urban life get a rare mention, in addition to the growth of community theatre such as Martin Lynch's Turf Lodge Fellowship Community Theatre in Belfast and the founding of Charabanc in Belfast in May 1983 by five female actors (262-3).

Nicholas Grene compares and contrasts the work of Friel and Murphy, noting that Murphy's work has received less international recognition than has Friel's. He continues to focus on Murphy and his coming to terms with the people he himself initially tried to forget, specifically those featured in *Bailegangaire* and *A Thief of a Christmas* (219). He sees two of the Abbey's famous country cottage plays in particular behind *Bailegangaire*: *Riders to the Sea* and *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* (227). Grene writes that the Irish obsession with history is apparent in the subject matter of many of the plays of 1980s Ireland, including Kilroy's *Double Cross*, Parker's *Pentecost* and *Northern Star*, McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of*

Ulster Marching Towards the Somme and Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*. All of these plays use a recreation of the past "in order to find a means of better understanding the troubled issues of the contemporary period" (236). Murphy, Grene finds, tends to sidestep the issues of national and sectarian identity with which the other playwrights are wrestling; his most straightforwardly political plays are *Famine* (1968) and the 1991 *Patriot's Game*. Grene does not consider *The Blue Macushla* in this study.

Pilkington writes of how Jack Lynch's government in the Republic was openly supportive of British government policy in Northern Ireland, declaring in 1970 "Ireland's preparedness to reintroduce internment", and facilitating censorship legislation in the Republic of Ireland, including the reactivation of Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act (192). Pilkington states that this, along with amendments to the Offences Against the State Act in 1972 and 1974, "soon led to an atmosphere in which support or sympathy for the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland was regarded with suspicion" (192). Pilkington sees the contradictory political messages sent out by the government—its "traditional nationalist rhetoric, its liberal ideology of modernization, and its immediate political hostility to nationalist protest in Northern Ireland"—reflected in policy at the Peacock theatre in the 1970s. Thomás MacAnna set the tone when he announced in the *Irish Times* in September of 1970 that political satire along with historical and documentary works would feature strongly for the season (193); a decision that resulted in the aforementioned revue and its controversial reception. Pilkington discusses the dilemma which faced nationalist writers and intellectuals in an Ireland which was digesting the events of Bloody Sunday and the internationally-disputed findings of the Widgery tribunal which investigated the event. Unsurprisingly, Pilkington writes, “literary and theatrical responses to Bloody Sunday, and to the conflict as a whole were decidedly muted” (196) and this atmosphere sets the scene for Brian Friel’s *The Freedom of the City* in 1973, which Pilkington analyses in detail. He believes that Friel’s play “offered a resolution to the conflicting demands of the state’s nationalist and modernizing ideologies” and “represented the conflict in a manner that gave vent to nationalist disquiet about political injustice in Northern Ireland” but in its wake there was “a conspicuous absence of plays relating to the political experience of the Catholic nationalist population in Northern Ireland” (202). Instead, he states, the national theatres, the Abbey and the Peacock, “tended to portray the conflict primarily in terms of a violent assault on the individual”, and he gives examples of plays by John Wilson Haire, Stewart Parker and Graham Reid (202). Summing up Pilkington allows that: “Recognising and giving expression to the differential relationship between Protestant/unionist culture and Catholic/nationalist culture in relation to the state becomes an increasingly important issue for Irish theatre in the 1980s and 1990s” (221). How should the state theatres react? For his final review Pilkington looks at Frank McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme,* pointing out its mirroring of the nationalist 1916 Rising with a similarly seminal moment for Northern Irish Protestants, i.e. the Battle of the Somme (222), and noting that it was elevated to the main Abbey Theatre stage just one month after the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed in November 1985 (223).

A reading of scholarship and critique of Irish theatre in the 1980s, as outlined in this section, clearly identifies a very obvious focus on plays and playwrights with a Northern Irish background, writing about the conflict in Northern Ireland from their perspective. The decade is usually and understandably construed and contextualised within the conflict that was at that stage entrenched in minds and bodies. It is also obvious that Field Day ignited controversy and stimulated intellectual discussion with their provocative and political intervention into cultural interpretations of the situation. They theorised and analysed the conflict, in dramatic and literary form, for an international audience and in doing so shone the spotlight on other Northern Irish playwrights equally engaging with similar issues. However analysis of Playography Ireland demonstrates there is a relatively vast, in an Irish theatrical context, tranche of plays written about and from the Republic during this period which are largely unexamined and unpublished and which deal with subject matters such as censorship of its citizens by the Irish state, nationalism in different contexts, working-class issues and feminist or women's concerns. This thesis situates itself in the 1980s and is focused firmly on these less examined works, in the belief that there are voices deeply engaged with issues pertaining to the period but these voices have not been given an adequate scholarly or analytical hearing.

Opening Conclusion

The impact of historical and political events and decisions from the 1980s still resonates in today's Ireland. Therefore an in-depth exploration and analysis of the societal and cultural influences of the decade is critical to our understanding of how and why these occurrences came about. Through the prism of theatre and dramatic texts, written in and of the period, we can theorise and hopefully attempt to understand more about where we were then and how we have changed as a society since then. Inevitably, as with almost any body of research, limits have to be set on the material investigated, many for reasons of fit and time and these and other issues are discussed in more detail in the conclusion to this thesis. The focus on the Republic of Ireland is not in any way meant to be exclusive; rather it acknowledges that there is an unexamined body of dramatic work which does not fit into the 'Troubles' genre, a genre which was sadly largely definitive of Northern Ireland during the period. Equally the noted indifference observable in the Republic in response to Northern Ireland during this period was unfortunate and at times acknowledged by the nationalist citizens of Northern Ireland as a betrayal.[19]

Theatre in the Republic reflected this apathy as it did other societal mores and concerns but the generality of the indifference to Northern Ireland is a notable aspect of the wider Irish society and culture. The highlighting of such facets of Ireland during the 1980s, through the medium of theatre, constitutes the aims and objectives of this thesis. The analysis of original plays from the 1980s proves a commendable means of providing context for and facilitating comprehension of the period. In-depth discussion of the plays allows for their dramatic form and techniques to be acknowledged and considered as foundational and conceptual with respect to the proliferation of social and issue-based theatre today. Research conducted here in order to explore and reveal neglected and overlooked plays will add considerably to the ongoing historiography and critique of Irish theatre, while the specific focus on working-class and female authors' omission from the canon of Irish dramatic work intersects with both national and international debate currently passionately engaged with such themes and exclusions.

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[19] For instance see Linda Connolly's discussion of how the Women's Movement was split over Northern Ireland and in many situations preferred not to discuss it at all: *The Irish Women's Movement*, pp. 134-7.

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Chapter One: The Women Are Talking; Is Anyone Listening? Feminist Theatre in 1980s Ireland

> We spent nights in Eden's fields
> Eating apples, gooseberries; roses
> Behind our ears, singing songs
> Around the gipsy bon-fires
> Drinking and romping with sailors and robbers;
> And so we're damned, my sisters
>
> —Nuala Ní Dhómhnaill: *We are Damned, My Sisters*

Background

Nuala Ní Dhómhnaill's poem, *We are Damned, My Sisters*, from 1988, warns the free-spirited, ecstatic women who romp within its lines that their behaviour will ensure no heavenly Eden awaits them, rather they will be damned for eternity for their wantonness (15-6). A similar fate was implied for the bold and brave feminists who challenged "those terrible twin forces of church and state" in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, a period which saw Irish women continue to respond to the international second wave of feminism (Smyth 274). The fears expressed by Smyth were very much based in reality, with the 1980s bearing witness to abuse of power and neglect of care with respect to women. Particularly egregious examples of this are the Kerry Babies Tribunal, Anne Lovett's death in childbirth and the Eileen Flynn controversy, all of which still resonate and are still topics of discussion today.[20] Agenda-led movements such as the women's movement, gay and lesbian rights advocacy, and environmentalism in a global and local context were established political issues in the 1980s. Environmentalism moved to being an increasingly emotive and urgent issue as the Cold War saw the proliferation of nuclear arms internationally, while the fight for gay and lesbian rights became the inspiration and the subject of considerable agitation and protest, and remained so until some major milestones were achieved (such as decriminalisation and marriage equality). However it is feminism and the resultant spread of the Irish women's movement which provides the framework for this chapter's investigation of Irish theatre in the 1980s. The aims of the chapter are as follows: to situate the decade with respect to past and contemporary feminist thinking and to examine relevant feminist and theatre theory; to highlight the statistics with respect to women in theatre in Ireland during the period; to identify what women playwrights were writing about in the 1980s; to focus on and analyse a selection of feminist plays of the period and finally to conclude with respect to those plays and their intersection with social, cultural and political issues. This aligns with my intention to foreground neglected or overlooked playwrights and theatre-makers whose work has not been previously critiqued or examined academically.[21]

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[20] See various reports in Irish newspapers, for example https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/garda%C3%AD-still-law-unto-themselves-34-years-after-kerry-babies-case-1.3357794

[21] See the literature review for a full discussion of reasons for the ROI focus.

Feminism in Ireland in the Twentieth Century

A comprehensive study of the work of academics writing about theatre in Ireland in the 1980s, along with statistical analysis of actual performance and publication data from the PLAYOGRAPHYIreland website and the Abbey Archive website, makes it clear that women playwrights are not proportionally represented on Irish stages during the period. Jill Dolan writes of how “Feminism begins with a keen awareness of exclusion from male cultural, social, sexual, political, and intellectual discourse. It is a critique of prevailing social conditions that formulate women’s position as outside of dominant male discourse” (3). Historian Margaret MacCurtain writes of the years between 1920 and 1960 as being a “valley period between two ‘waves’ of the women’s movement in Ireland, in North America and in Europe” (45). That first wave of feminism is now acknowledged as such and Irish women’s involvement in the fight for suffrage, in the literary revival and the various political and military associations and movements at the turn of the twentieth century has received belated recognition. In particular, a focused re-writing of women back into history has begun due to the national interrogation of archival material in response to the 1916 Easter Rising Centenary celebrations, adding to already existing works from academics such as MacCurtain, Cathy Leeney and others who have highlighted the marginalisation of influential women from the period. MacCurtain’s ‘valley’ can be observed in the increasingly unsatisfactory position of women in Irish society during the thirties, forties and fifties, one which was upheld in law thanks to legislation such as the 1935 Conditions of Employment Bill, placing restrictions on the rights of women in the work place, and Article 41.2.1 of the Constitution, 1937, designating women’s primary place in society as the home.

The second wave of the women's movement erupted in the 1960s, a global movement, MacCurtain notes, "concerned with issues of equality in the workplace, with child-care and with birth-control" (45). In Ireland in 1968, women's organisations such as the Irish Countrywomen's Association, the Soroptimists and the Irish Housewives' Association recommended to the government the establishment of a Commission on the Status of Women as a pre-condition for Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC), which Ireland was seeking at the time (MacCurtain 46). This resulted in the Beere Report which contained forty-nine recommendations for improving the status of women in Ireland and was followed by the setting up of the Council for the Status of Women in 1973. MacCurtain notes that while the "writing of women into Irish history became a subversive activity for women in the 1970s", globally there was an "emerging scholarship on the subject of women as a distinct group for historical research" and by the mid-1980s Women's Studies were part of Irish university curricula (47). In an *Irish Times* article on the 40th anniversary of the Students' Union in UCD, Joe Humphrey quotes Marguerite Ahearne, who took over in 1980 as the first woman president of the union: "the dominant themes were the liberal agenda; gay rights was just beginning" and that "there was not even a mention at that stage about abortion". The union was fighting the law introduced by Taoiseach Charles Haughey which necessitated a doctor's prescription for the sale of condoms.

The universities were central to activities and formation of thought on women's rights, and mandatory to an understanding of the globalised women's movement was the reading of seminal works by feminist writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Adrianne Rich, and more latterly Judith Butler, among many more. Moya

Lloyd writes that, in the initial stages of this movement, women-centred theory and politics were applied to all women, as the development of practices such as consciousness-raising and the politicising of "ideas such as the body, sexuality and house-work" represented a radical feminism which was the first expression of feminist ideas (*Judith Butler* 4-5). Rich's influential 1980s essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" argued for a challenge to the status quo, questioning the ubiquitous nature of heterosexuality and calling for a re-thinking "to undo the power men everywhere wield over women, power which has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control" (Rich 660). Such concepts introduced a radical political activism to the feminist movement during the 1970s and 1980s, polarising in the concept of political lesbianism and a call to women to abandon heterosexuality and embrace the possibilities within separatist lesbianism.

Shane Phelan sees the division between political feminists and those feminists "committed to a view of woman as 'inherently life-affirming, gentle and egalitarian'" growing wider throughout the 1980s (qtd. in Lloyd *Judith Butler* 9). In addition Lloyd notes that in the 1980s those movements based on identity "began to experience certain difficulties in speaking of and for their constituencies" (*Judith Butler* 2). Indeed bell hooks in her article "Understanding Patriarchy" sees significance in how feminists began to use the word 'patriarchy' to replace the more commonly used 'male chauvinism' and 'sexism' and writes of urging "advocates of feminist politics to challenge any rhetoric which placed the sole blame for perpetuating patriarchy and male domination onto men" (3). Questions arose as to how it was possible to speak for all female experience; women were not to be conceived as a homogenous group who could be represented under one umbrella, rather they were represented by Beauvoir's "Inessential Other".[22] Lloyd assigns initial exploration of the "ambiguity and indeterminacy of the category of women" to Denise Riley in the late 1980s and further to Butler's critique of identity politics in the early 1990s (*Judith Butler* 2).

These international discourses were hugely influential in the shaping of conscious-raising and agitation for women's rights in Ireland but Ireland had some issues which were, if not solely confined to Ireland, particular to Irish women's fight for equality. Not least of these was the political situation in Northern Ireland which fractured the movement into camps supportive of socialist nationalist feminism and those who opposed any affiliations with left-wing or republican groupings. Writing in 1988 Smyth notes that feminism in Ireland has been involved with "very basic, concrete survival issues. Everything we have gained over the past decade and a half has had to be literally torn from the grasp of those terrible twin forces of church and state" (274), while Ursula Barry saw "Pulpits, right across the country, serve as powerful political platforms, used to bolster a narrow and rigid ideology concerning women" (318). When Mohanty writes "Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis" (67), her argument underlines the need for a sisterhood in Ireland at the time. The Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) came together in 1970 and focused its aims on equal rights, the family and contraception. Famously they staged a theatre of protest when they went to Belfast from Dublin, aboard what became known as the ‘contraceptive train’ in 1971, and returned bringing illegal contraceptives into the Republic. June Levine, an activist, writes that even before they disembarked in Dublin—to a “cheering mass of people with banners”—the Bishop of Clonfert, Dr. Ryan, at the Knock Shrine in Mayo, said that: “never before and certainly not since penal times was the Catholic heritage of Ireland subjected to so many insidious onslaughts on the pretext of conscience, civil rights and women’s liberation” (144). This myth-making journey has since been memorialised; it was staged as a musical by the theatre company Rough Magic in 2015, as *The Train*.

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[22] As identified in Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*.

The preoccupation of this movement shifted quite quickly, according to Smyth, to “the development of self-help, aid and single-issue groups”, and the central focus of the movement had dissipated by 1972 (336). Radical feminism resurfaced in Ireland in the mid-seventies in the form of a group which called itself Irishwomen United; this group were noticeably more radical than the IWLM (Smyth 337). Smyth sees the “apotheosis of ‘State Feminism’” in Ireland as the appointment in 1982 of a Minister of State for Women’s Affairs and Family Law Reform: Nuala Fennell (340). Fintan O’Toole, quoted in the *Galway Advertiser,* lists 10 things a woman could not do in 1970 but could in the 1980s, as:

1. Keep her job in the public service or a bank when she got married
2. Sit on a jury
3. Buy contraceptives
4. Drink a pint in a pub
5. Collect her children's allowance
6. Get a barring order against a violent partner
7. Live securely in her family home

8. Refuse to have sex with her husband
9. Choose her official place of domicile
10. Get the same rate for a job as a man

By the end of the 1980s most of the discriminatory legislation above had been addressed in part if not entirely but Smyth notes that the “revolutionary ardour . . . was to be well-nigh quenched by the fundamentalist repression and the economic recession of the mid-1980s” (340). Barry identifies the rise of the ‘new Right’ as putting the Women’s movement “on the defensive in the 1980s”, demonstrated by the defeat of the 1983 Anti-Abortion and the 1986 Divorce Referendum (320). Events such as the Kerry Babies Tribunal and the focus on societal issues and referenda plunged the country into a vicious moral and ethical civil war.

While Irish women in the 1980s had benefited somewhat from the results of successful campaigns fought and won for equality in the seventies, they were now under pressure from economic depression and conservative reactionary movements. Nonetheless they were increasingly motivated and aware of issues and legislation pertaining to female subjugation and male dominance. It is within this politically and socially motivated cultural arena that my examination of Irish women staging feminism lies. There are few academic critiques of plays by women written in this period and those that do exist are almost solely focused on the politically-motivated plays written by Northern Irish female playwrights such as Christina Reid, Marie Jones and Anne Devlin. This chapter aims to give an overview of feminist approaches in theatre; a statistical breakdown of new plays by women in the 1980s, many of which have not been published, and a critique of specific plays which address and stage a feminist agenda as detailed in its complexity above. Critically this chapter will apply a feminist framework to plays by Irish women playwrights of the 1980s and in addition will question the obvious lack of visibility of plays by women playwrights and seek to identify the reasons why.

Feminist Theory and Theatre

Feminist theory was “systematically applied to theatre in the early 1980s, building on concepts developed during the women’s liberation movement of the previous decade” (Zarrilli 137). Irish theatre was no exception to this rule; as evidenced below, women playwrights and theatre-makers in Ireland were writing from and of feminist approaches throughout the 1980s. Case acknowledges the inter-disciplinary nature of feminist theatre critique, which included reading on “semiotics and film, early French feminist theory, current social issues, and literary history in order to respond as ‘feminist spectators’ to the history of performance” (*Feminist and Queer Performance* 104). She sees an eventual move away from disciplinarity and an embracing of a “fusion of activism and scholarship” as the site where “feminism most breaks free of patriarchal traditions” (*Feminist and Queer Performance* 109). My approach in this chapter is to look at feminism in a poststructuralist manner, acknowledging and applying the various theoretical forms of feminism but with an awareness that these are critical practices which do not necessarily add up to a totality. For definitions of these various forms, Gayle Austin offers the following summaries of three definitions of feminisms (138):

Liberal

1. Minimizes differences between men and women
2. Works for success within system; reform not revolt

3. Individual more important than group

Radical (or cultural)

1. Stresses superiority of female attributes and difference between male and female modes
2. Favours separate female systems
3. Individual more important than group

Materialist

1. Minimises biological differences between men and women
2. Stresses material conditions of production such as history, race, class, gender
3. Group more important than the individual

This text will offer facets of the ever-changing face of feminism, specifically those which were real and identifiable to the playwrights writing from Ireland in the 1980s. These writers generally adopt an essentialist position with respect to the subject of woman; this fact and the notably mono-racial make-up of Ireland's population in the 1980s means that for the most part the plays are written from the perspective of heterosexual white women. Incorporating a material feminist approach allows for social practices and issues to be revealed, as they underpin the plays and are specific to the time and place in which the playwrights were writing. Theatre in Ireland has a history of involvement with social, political and cultural movements, with the Irish Literary Revival and the Abbey Theatre being an obvious example, while the dominance of work dealing with the political situation in Northern Ireland during the 1980s is another. This dominance impacted on the theatre as a whole in the Republic but theatre-making by women, as can be demonstrated statistically, suffered doubly due to a dearth of female playwrights and a lack of encouragement or awareness of the specific problems relating to marginalised groups—to which women belonged despite being fifty-percent of the population—attempting to gain a foothold in a mainstream theatre which was inarguably controlled by male producers, artistic directors and decision-makers at the time (and since[23]).

Speaking of theatre produced by women at this time, Susan Bennett writes of “theatres which speak from more fragmented and marginalized positions” (9) and of a foregrounding of Brecht’s work as “important for any audience/play relations. His ideas for a theatre with the power to provoke social change” have had a profound effect on critical responses to plays and performances (21). Elin Diamond notes that Brechtian hindsight allows us to be aware that realism “mystifies the process of theatrical signification” and reinforces dependence on an “objective world that is the source and guarantor of knowledge” (*Unmaking Mimesis* 5); the same world of inherited and oppressive certainty which feminists have in their sights. Brecht’s theatrical techniques are clearly incorporated into many of the plays under examination in this chapter, most particularly in the work of Patricia Burke-Brogan, Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy and Anne Le Marquand Hartigan. As Diamond writes, “a feminist practice that seeks to expose or mock the strictures of gender, to *reveal* gender-as-appearance . . . usually uses some version of the Brechtian A-effect" (*Unmaking Mimesis* 46). According to O'Gorman and McIvor, feminist theatre groups also use devising as a means of producing theatre which will "offer more democratic alternatives to the hierarchical organizational structures of institutional theatres, which historically have been mostly dominated by male authors and directors" (20). The argument that theatre is a 'male entity' is made by Susan Bassnett-McGuire who argues that this fact has led to feminist theatre workers seeking out new ways of writing and performing, new theatre spaces, and, above all, new audiences (qtd. in Bennett 58). This is evident in Irish theatre in the 1980s where women were demonstrably unrepresented in mainstream theatre and faced either remaining on the outskirts of the established theatre hierarchy, or alternatively setting up their own theatre companies and becoming involved in community-based or socially orientated issue-based projects.

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[23] A fact statistically demonstrated by research carried out by WakingTheFeminists (#WTF), a social media-based movement launched by theatre designer Lian Bell in response to the Abbey Theatre’s announcement of its 1916 centenary ‘Waking the Nation’ programme, which featured an 18:2 ratio of men to women playwrights.

Bennett notes that while mainstream theatres have tended to target a middle-class audience "who are willing to pay those admission prices", many smaller ventures have to "target their product just as carefully" and exploit "the cultural formation of its audience" (98). Analysis of the Irish Playography[24] database provides evidence that many female theatre practitioners did indeed set up as independent companies in the 1980s, seeking autonomy and an opportunity to stage plays which may not have been considered acceptable or viable by the established theatres. Murray notes that in the 1980s an unwritten law was broken as directors and writers associated with specific theatres became freelance—through necessity—resulting in a "breakdown in the earlier distinctions between the subsidised and nonsubsidised theatres"; he asserts that the "market was taking over as arbiter of production" ("The Theatre System of Ireland" 353). The many independent companies include Charabanc Theatre Company, and Jill Holmes and Zoe Seaton's Big Telly Theatre Company in Northern Ireland. In the Republic of Ireland Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy founded Storytellers in 1986; Gary Hynes was instrumental in co-founding Druid Theatre in Galway in 1975; Deirdre O'Connell co-founded Focus Theatre in 1967; Lynne Parker, Rough Magic in 1984; Olwen Fouéré, Operating Theatre in 1980; Emilie Fitzgibbon, Graffiti for young audiences; and Glasshouse Productions was founded in 1990 by Clare Dowling, Katy Hayes Siân Quill and Caroline Williams with the expressed intention of providing a forum for women's voices. Phyllis Ryan continued to produce often original plays with her company Gemini Productions in the Eblana Theatre. It was unfortunately impossible to source information on many of these plays, for instance *The Last of the Hair Oil Lovers* or *Cop-Out*; Ryan's papers are deposited with the Abbey Theatre but were not available for research.

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[24] See details of Irish Playography in the introduction to the thesis.

Statistical Analysis

> "'THERE ARE No Irish Women Playwrights' was the name of a two-part festival staged at the Project Arts Centre in 1992 and 1993 by Glasshouse Productions. The festival's aim was two-fold: firstly, to stage the work of women writers such as Lady Gregory and Teresa Deevy whose plays had been excised from the Irish theatrical canon, and secondly to provide a context for staging the plays of emerging contemporary female playwrights. There are women playwrights in Ireland, the festival programme suggested;

> it is just that they get neither the critical attention nor their historical due”. (Qtd in Keating, “Female Voices”, *Irish Times*)

It is impossible to write about plays by women playwrights in any period of Irish theatre history, or indeed currently, without mentioning the fact that there are not a lot of them and the 1980s is no exception when it comes to female representation. Anthony Roche, addressing the gaping absence of women playwrights on the main theatre stages in the Republic of Ireland, finds that the evidence would suggest “that women in the Republic have been writing plays but that those plays have not been staged” and cites as an example an *Irish Times* women’s playwriting competition in 1982 which received 188 plays as submissions for the prize of £1,000 (229). Roche addresses one factor involved in the absence of women in theatre but does not address the fate of staged plays written by women and their propensity to disappear from view, either not published (see Figure 2) or unrepresented in academic discourse. As Leeney puts it, “Canons are formed and we are the poorer for them” (*Seen and Heard* vii). The situation was different north of the border, Roche notes, where “through its questioning of inherited norms of identity and relationships, the Northern situation has brought several women playwrights to the fore” (229). Patrick Lonergan in his blog *Scenes from the Bigger Picture* notes Christina Reid suggesting that she had benefited in the 1980s from the fact that her plays were topical. He writes “audiences in Britain and the US wanted to understand the Troubles better, and dramas like Reid’s managed to be both informative and (usually) uplifting”.[25]

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[25] Patrick Lonergan has addressed this issue on his blog *Scenes from the Bigger Picture* in a number of posts, particularly 12 and 16 June 2014, see Works Cited for details of the blog.

Melissa Sihra puts forward the theory that women's plays were being performed and subsequently ignored or dismissed by mostly male critics (10) and she addresses this absence of women from the canon of Irish playwrights, writing that "canon-formation enables an implicit set of cultural norms and standards to materialize, which perpetuate hegemonic structures, and which are based upon historically contingent values" (9). Lynda Hart points out that as a form "drama is more public and social than the other literary arts" and "is the sphere most removed from domesticity, thus the woman who ventures to be heard in this space takes a greater risk . . ." (qtd. in Kearney and Headrick 2-3). Kearney and Headrick offer as a further reason the economic factor: given men's greater access to wealth and the relatively high cost of staging a play compared to other art forms, lack of resources must be considered a disincentive for women artists (3). According to dramaturge Tanya Dean "the problem is the larger cultural factors that cripple access and support for female artists", adding that "Female playwrights are subject to the same five Cs that Michelle O'Donnell-Keating [a founder of Women for Election] talks about as the key factors that hold women back in politics: culture, confidence, candidate selection, cash and care" (qtd in Keating, "Beyond the Abbey"). She continues "If women aren't empowered beyond these conditions to write plays, then the plays simply won't be available for theatres to programme" (Keating, "Beyond the Abbey").

Both the Abbey Theatre website and the Playography database of Irish plays have lists of plays which can be analysed statistically, and these two databases are used here to give a general picture of how women were represented in the 1980s in terms of new plays written and/or produced. Neither of these databases provides a complete count of every playwright writing in the 1980s, the Abbey website obviously only covers the plays produced or performed by the Abbey Theatre, but the combination of both is adequately comprehensive for analytical and comparative purposes. Plays written by Northern Irish playwrights are not part of this analysis. Of the 272 playwrights representing the output of new plays in the Republic from 1980 to 1989, forty-four are female playwrights. This means that 16 percent of new plays on Playography, written or produced in the 1980s in Ireland, were written by women (Figure 1). Of this number, 34 percent were published to date (Figure 2). The plays break down thematically into some dominant categories: adaptations; biographical, mythical and historical themes; family and social dramas; and theatre for young audiences (Figure 3). Before focusing on specific plays and playwrights and applying feminist theoretical frameworks to relevant examples, it is useful to step back and take an overall look at what Irish women playwrights in the Republic were writing and producing in the 1980s.

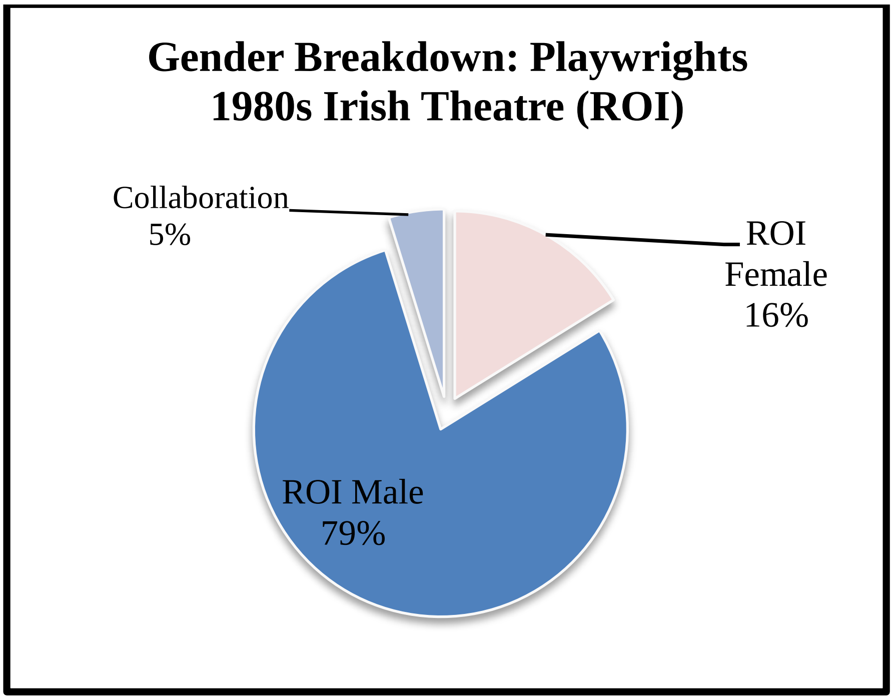

Figure 1: Gender breakdown for playwrights: Irish theatre, ROI 1980s

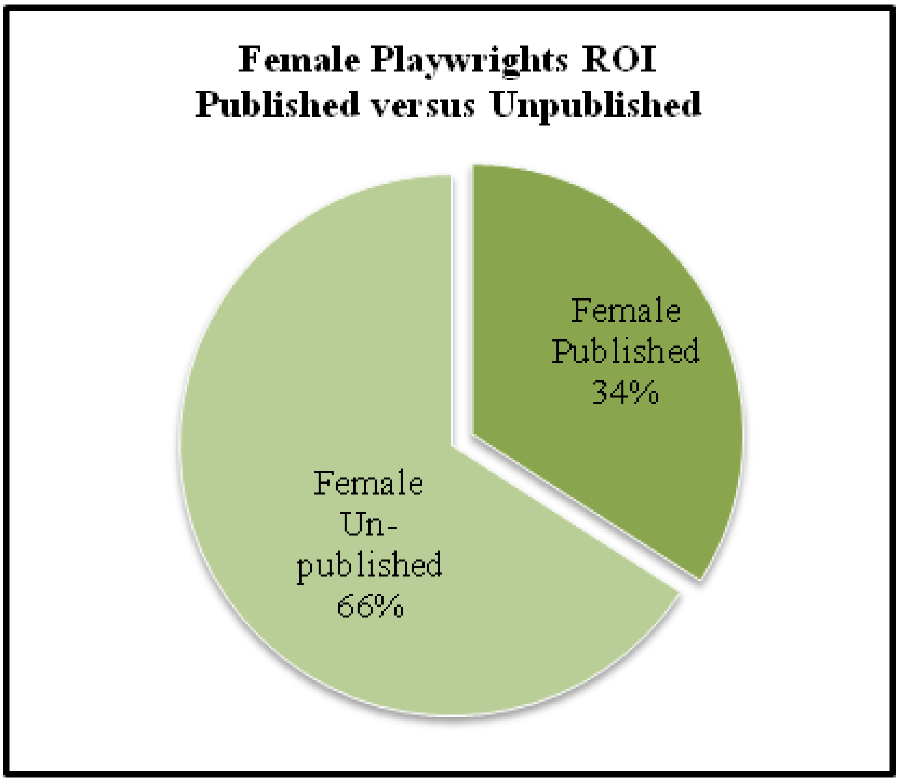

Figure 2: % Plays published versus unpublished for women playwrights

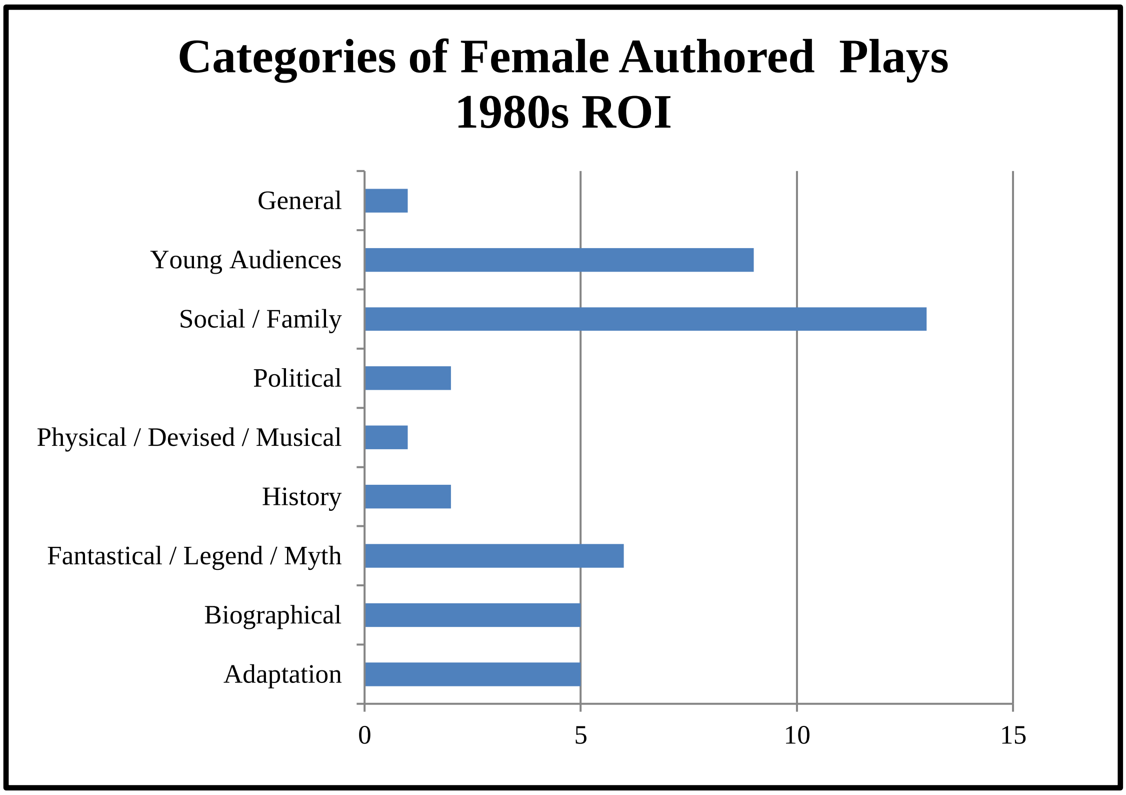

Figure 3: Graph categorising plays by female playwrights thematically

What the Playwrights Wrote

Categorisation of plays, as in Figure 3 above, is not an exact science, as dramatic texts resist easy compartmentalisation. Nonetheless, while bearing this caveat in mind, an examination of the topics playwrights were addressing can bring to the fore certain dominant themes which illuminate the concerns and preoccupations of those living through a specific period in time. Case acknowledges that as the second wave of feminism began at first “it seemed that feminist futures were to be found in feminist pasts” (‘The Screens of Time’ 105), a re-imagining of the “matriarchies, amazons, goddesses along with the secret lives, the so-called untold histories of those few women history had managed to recognise” (105). Case’s re-imagining of history and legend provides a thematic base for many of the plays written by women during the 1980s, as does biography; all allow for the foregrounding of the powerful or exemplary female figure as inspirational. This retelling and re-imagining of literary figures, history and legend is a common trope used by Irish women playwrights in the 1980s, with 36 percent of plays written by women on the Playography database fitting into this category (total of adaptations, biographies and fantasy/legend/myth in Figure 3 above). Similarly, family and social dramas are plentiful, exploring themes of domestic violence and social isolation. From a woman’s point of view creating drama from domestic situations gained a new perspective with the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’, even when the dramatist did not self-identify as a feminist nor wish to be categorised as such.

Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy was one of the most prolific writers of plays during the 1980s and founded Storytellers in 1986, “to create and tour ensemble theatre based on major stories from Irish and international sources” and “to tour creative and imaginative theatre throughout Ireland and abroad" (ITA 258). She wrote nine plays—at least—in the 1980s, primarily involving adaptations of international and Irish writers, including adaptations of Nikolai Gogol's *The Nose* (1983); *The Trial of Esther Waters* (1989), by George Moore; *Legends* (1980), featuring "Tadgh O'Cathan and the Corpse" by W.B. Yeats and "The Legend of Knockgrafton" by T. Crofton Croker; and *Uncle Silas* (1987) by Sheridan Le Fanu. She also wrote plays based on Irish Legend: in 1980 she wrote and produced *Curigh the Shape Shifter*, a story about an ancient inhabitant of a fort in the Slieve Mish mountains in Kerry who was massacred by Cuchulainn, and it was this story, Burke-Kennedy recalls, which led to her discovery of the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology and "a wealth of fascinating stories drenched in blood and bombast" (*Seen and Heard* 47). Her best known play, *Women in Arms* (1982), based on tales from the Ulster Legendary Cycles, resonates with Case's description of feminist playwrights writing strong heroic women back into being and is examined in more detail later in this chapter. She also wrote plays for young audiences. Two other history plays which foreground strong women are *Island Protected by a Bridge of Glass* (1980) by Garry Hynes of Druid Theatre Company and *Lady G* (1987) by Carolyn Swift, a play about Lady Gregory, staged in the Peacock, which placed her in a starring rather than supporting role. Hynes's play features music by De Danann and Jackie Daly, well known traditional musicians, and staged a fantastical meeting of minds between Elizabeth I of England and Grace O'Malley, or Gráinne as she is known in Irish legend. The play focuses on a crisis in the 16th Century instigated by Elizabeth's wish to expedite a policy of conquest and colonisation begun centuries earlier by the Normans. There is dancing and humour in the play but the staging of the many failed and pointless battles over land and sovereignty suggests that

Hynes's play is analogous for Northern Ireland. The play ends with Elizabeth and Gráinne embracing post-battle; Elizabeth asks the question "It's not over yet, is it?" and Gráinne replies "No, it's not over" (T2/6/58 - 62).

Continuing this theme of adaptation or historical referencing, Maureen Charlton wrote *Nora Barnacle* (1980), a musical based on Barnacle and her life with James Joyce; Edna O'Brien wrote *Virginia*, a biographical story of Virginia Woolf; Gabrielle Reidy wrote *Fragments of Isabella* (1985) which told the story of Isabella Leitner, an Auschwitz survivor; and Rosaleen Linehan wrote and acted in *Mary Makebelieve* (1982), which was based on the 1912 novel *The Charwoman's Daughter* by James Stephens. Sheila Flitton co-wrote a one-woman play called *Beezie* (1984) based on a real-life character living on an island in Lough Gill in Sligo. Jennifer Johnson, who wrote prolifically during the 1980s and had many of her short plays produced, wrote a historical play set in Ireland in the summer of 1920, *Indian Summer* (1983), which tells the story of the War of Independence from the perspective of an Anglo-Irish family. Anne Le Marquand Hartigan's lyrical *La Corbière* (1989) tells the tragic story of a boat which sank, carrying a number of French prostitutes, during the occupation of Jersey by the Germans during World War II. Miriam Gallagher was a prolific writer during the 1980s, and many of her musical works staged historic characters, such as Irish composers Turlough O'Carolan, John Field, Balfe and Wallace. Plays which were original in inspiration, and dealt with social and political issues more directly, include another play by Anne Le Marquand Hartigan, *Beds* (1982); this play will be critiqued later on in this chapter. *Same Old Moon* (1984) by Geraldine Aron and *She's Your Mother Too, You Know!* (1988) by Ena May are both family dramas. Aron's generational comedy was produced by Druid and features a clichéd portrayal of Irish family life. May's play stages a theme which is prevalent in work written by women during this period, particularly as evidenced by examination of the short plays on Playography: that of a woman with a still-young family struggling with a demanding older relative, usually a mother, to look after. Writing the personal, according to Dee Heddon, is "coterminous with the history of 'Second Wave' Western feminism", its base rooted in the slogan 'the personal is political' (130).[26] She quotes Robin Morgan who claims "Women's liberation is the first radical movement to base its politics—in fact, create its politics— out of concrete personal experiences" (131). Creating drama from domestic situations gained a new perspective when written from a woman's point of view, albeit not always intentionally a feminist one on the part of the writer. Plays such as May's did not stage an overt feminist theme but they were however written consciously about women's experiences. May's *Out of the Beehive* (1984) similarly is a family comedy, with the comedy mostly deriving from the inter-generational tensions in a house where three generations live together.

Anne Le Marquand Hartigan's *I Do like to Be beside the Seaside* and Jennifer Johnston's short plays also address themes of aging. Johnston's work is simple in structure and thought provoking, featuring older protagonists who deal with life and its hardships by creating worlds where they feel happy and secure; they have retreated from reality in order to cope with failed marriages and the advances of age. Mamie in *The Nightingale and Not the Lark* (1980) is a former actress whose living is confined to an attic above a theatre where she drinks and converses with her departed husband and fellow actor, Owen. Owen left her many years earlier for another actress and was killed by one of Hitler's bombing raids on London. Johnston's *The Invisible Man* (1987) also features an actor and deals with his unhappy childhood and difficult familial relationships, while in *Triptych* (1989), Rose, an actress, becomes embroiled in a love triangle of sorts. Maud in *The Porch* (1986) is about to be placed in a home by her son and his wife but finds refuge in her imaginary garden, a place she dreamed up to escape the unhappiness of her marriage. *O Ananias, Azarias and Misael* (1988), also by Johnston, is a monologue in which a recently widowed Northern Irish woman speaks of her murdered husband and her relationship with a Catholic neighbour. Dolores Walshe's *In the Talking Dark* (1987) and *The Stranded Hours Between* (1989) are set in South Africa during the Apartheid regime's reign and are both examined later in this chapter. Marina Carr's first play *Low in the Dark* (1989) has received significant academic critique[27] and is acknowledged as a feminist work, staging as it does the constantly pregnant female body. O'Gorman states that "One can detect in the early works Carr's search for a way of challenging patriarchal traditions and modes of expression. Carr, at this point in her career, was engaged in distinctly feminist theatre practices . . ." (487). Mary Halpin's *Semi-Private* (1982) was a winner of an *Irish Times* playwriting competition for women and is set in a gynaecological ward of a Dublin hospital. Miriam Gallagher wrote *Dusty Bluebells* (1987) which is set in a women's prison where a German film company are visiting, and *Labels* (1985), a comical farce set in a medical clinic somewhere in Dublin; both plays have social issues at heart. She also wrote a number of short plays, musical pieces, and magical fantasies, such as *Dreamkeeper* (1984) and *The Sealwoman and the Fisher* (1984) which played together in the Damer Hall at lunchtime. She was commissioned to write a play by Mountjoy Prisoners Theatre (EXIT) for the Dublin Theatre Festival and responded with *Footwork* (1983) which played at lunchtime in the Focus Theatre.

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[26] Heddon notes the continued use of the personal in performance although she qualifies any use of the slogan 'the personal is political' with the poststructuralist questioning 'Which personal?' and 'Whose politics?'(130).

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[27] In addition to essays and articles by academics and theatre writers, Carr has at least two books dedicated to critiques of her plays: Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan, *The Theatre of Marina Carr: "Before Rules Was Made"*, Carysfort Press, 2003; and Rhona Trench, *Bloody Living: The Loss of Selfhood in the Plays of Marina Car*r, Peter Lang, 2010.

Kearney and Headrick list Sheila Flitton and Margaret Neylon as writing about battered wives in their plays *For Better or for Worse* and *Home from Home* respectively (15-6). Flitton's play moves through various stages in the life of a woman named Jean.[28] Jean is a reasonably well-off married woman whose husband beats her; this occurs intermittently but with consequences including Jean having to escape and stay in a "refuge for battered wives" (3) and in her losing a child she is carrying (36). Flitton's play begins with a direct audience address by an actor playing a social worker and this documentary style approach ensures the audience are aware that the play is based in realism and is promoting awareness of the issues raised. Flitton stages many different scenarios where women are abused or subjugated, incorporating women from different socio-economic situations who are in abusive relationships for various reasons. Equally she does not flinch from portraying the lack of support or outright condemnation meted out to the women from other women: Betty, who Jean meets in the women's refuge, is deceived by Jean's husband's superficial friendliness: "He seems terrible nice. It's hard to believe he did what he did" (16). The lack of legal recrimination for men who abuse their spouses is highlighted and the small humiliations to which Jean is constantly exposed ensure the play never veers from believable. A discussion of the play, by Fr. Martin Tierney in the *Sunday Independent*, unintentionally demonstrates the norms of the period from which Flitton was writing: the article notes that "a pretty young Dublin actress [Zelda Golden] will have to portray a battered wife in the Damer Hall production of Sheila Flitton's tragicomedy 'For Better or for Worse'" (11). Golden, in the same article, also comments on the play, noting that "Sheila Flitton gives two sides of the story the violence of the husband as well as the occasional provocation by the wife" (Tierney 11). Golden's legitimising of the use of violence in a relationship (at no time is Jean ever violent towards her husband) is indicative of a careless or ambiguous attitude at the time to the issue Flitton was seeking to address with her play. Jean's abusive relationship is contrasted with a second relationship in the play which is held up as more desirable: Wendy tells Jean she agreed to marry Dave but "my life was still my own. You know what I mean, Jean. It's 1980 not 1890" (31). The play stages some graphic and violent scenes, particularly one where Don (Jean's husband) tries to humiliate her by stripping her, and there is no happy ever after trope for audiences to take away; realism plays out until the end. Flitton's depiction of the issue inspired Mary McEvoy, administrator of Family Aid, in the letters section of the *Irish Times*, to urge the public to attend the play (11).

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[28] The script for *For Better or for Worse* was mailed to this researcher by Sheila Flitton, January 2018.

It is notable that the majority of the above plays were not staged in the mainstream theatres, the Abbey, Peacock or Gate theatres, but instead in the alternative theatres which became very much part of the Dublin theatre scene in the

1980s, or in provincial theatres. Going by the Abbey Theatre's figures, national and subsidised theatre was not an easy arena for women to enter or to influence. Only twenty-two plays produced at the Abbey and Peacock combined in the 1980s were written or adapted by women and of these only three made it to the main stage, i.e. the Abbey stage, while the remainder played in the Peacock. Two adaptations by Siobhán McKenna, featuring extracts from the works of James Joyce and various other Irish writers, played on the main stage, and only one new play by a woman premiered on the Abbey stage: *Colours – Jane Barry Esq.*, by Jean Binnie, a full-length play about an Irish woman who lived her life as a man, qualifying as a doctor in 1812, and travelling the world with the British Army. The press cuttings in the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive (ATDA) in relation to Binnie's play are numerous and many remark on her debut on the main stage as a new playwright. For instance, in the *Guardian* (30 September 1988), Robin Thornber wonders, "So how do you get a play put on if you're a woman and you like writing big plays?" (ATDA 9). Christopher Murray, in the *Sunday Tribune* (9 October 1988), concludes that the play "is not a sermonising play and yet it is red-hot feminist theatre" (ATDA 20). Binnie's objective, quoted in the *Irish Times* on 19 September 1988, was to highlight Barry's medical achievements, remarkable for a woman in a man's world; but she is quick to assert that she does not see herself as a feminist, or at any rate "not a boring one" (ATDA 6).

A discussion on more overtly feminist Irish theatre featured in *New Theatre Quarterly* in 1991, written by Steve Wilmer and titled "Women's Theatre in Ireland". Wilmer highlights the historical role of female playwrights and theatre-makers in Ireland, particularly during the literary revival, and he notes the many theatre companies set up by Irish women over the preceding decades (353-4), and the many companies administered by women. He notes that "Consciousness-raising theatre of any kind has seldom been seen since Peter and Jim Sheridan left the Project a decade ago, and theatre trails behind short stories, novels, poetry, musical lyrics, and radio drama as a medium for feminist writing" (357). He too discusses the scarcity of female playwrights, quoting Jane Daly of Druid as estimating that only one in twenty unsolicited plays they receive are from women (357). Playwrights like Anne Devlin and Christina Reid, he believes, "have had an easier time in Northern Ireland, where they have greater access to the artistic and ideological orientation of London" (Wilmer 358). There was feminist work being produced however, Wilmer points out, and he singles out Raised Eyebrow Theatre Company as producing "innovative work . . . from 1985 to 1987 until it ran out of funds"; similarly to Sheridan's Dublin City Workshop, Raised Eyebrow depended for their funding on social welfare schemes which had a lifecycle of two years (358). The company staged plays by playwright and lesbian activist Joni Crone, including *It's Not a Tragedy* which deals with coming out as a lesbian, and Ruth Jacobs, with her play *That Fine Line*, about mental illness (358); neither are included on the Playography Ireland database.[29] Also highlighted by Wilmer is Annie Kilmartin's Moving Theatre Company with "their feminist piece *Legs Eleven*, about women hooked on tranquillisers" (358). Wilmer is critical of the Arts Council in Ireland for their lack of sustainable funding for any of the smaller, or feminist, companies, meaning “women’s theatre groups in the republic are forced to work on a shoe-string, often resorting to one-woman or two-woman shows like Nell McCafferty’s very popular *Worm in the Heart* (1985) . . .” (358-9). Burke Kennedy’s Storytellers Theatre “is perhaps the only professional company in Ireland producing original material with a feminist content for a cast of more than two” (Wilmer 359).

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[29] As of 21 June 2018 Joni Crone is not included; other 1980s plays by Crone are *Like Hedgehogs, Very Carefully* (1987) and *Anna and Her Sisters* (1988) about Anna Parnell and the women of 1916. I have emailed Playography to highlight this omission, as I have for other overlooked writers I have come across who are not on the database.

Following extensive primary research into plays and playwrights of the 1980s, five plays stand out as overtly engaging with feminist theory and practice. Dolores Walshe’s *In the Talking Dark* and *The Stranded Hours Between* and Patricia Burke-Brogan’s *Eclipsed can* be read as radical feminist texts in that they present situations where ultimately no compromise is possible. By documenting the reality of the Magdalen laundries, Burke-Brogan was instrumental in focusing international attention on the inhumane treatment of inmates in the Magdalen laundries, a predicament she experienced directly.[30] Her play writes the personal into the radically political and aptly embraces epic and physical theatre languages. Walshe aligns another inhumane system, Apartheid, with the subjugating/subordinate dynamic of an abusive marriage and in doing so situates the political within the family circle. In an afterword to her play *In the Talking Dark* in 2001, Walshe names her heroes as “women who braved ridicule and marched for my right to have my Child Allowance Book assigned to me” (326). In contrast, Burke-Kennedy’s *Women in Arms* (1982) and Anne Le Marquand Hartigan’s *Beds* (1982)[31] advocate a liberal feminism, one where negotiation and pragmatism are key to attaining equality. Burke-Kennedy suggests that the mythical women of Irish legend "engineered the destinies of their men, and of the country" (Leeney, *Seen and Heard* 47), despite the dominance of the fighting warrior trope in the traditional telling of the legends. In her re-imagining of these stories she writes into existence a more equal world but also warns of consequences. Le Marquand Hartigan's *Beds* is the most unconventional; it deconstructs the problems faced by women, at that time in Ireland, in an unapologetically direct and angry staging. She utilises the intimacy and familiarity of bodies and household furnishings to contextualise her angry feminist challenge to the patriarchy.

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[30] Burke-Brogan worked in one of these laundries as a novice in a religious order and left the order as a result of her experiences there.

[31] The scripts for *Women in Arms* and *Beds* were sent to this researcher by the playwrights.

Challenging the Patriarchy

A palpable anger directed at entrenched patriarchal norms and hierarchies can be discerned in a number of plays written by Irish women in the 1980s. With the establishment of women's rights as an agenda in academic, social and cultural fields, and an ever-growing awareness of the subordinate status of women in Ireland at the time, it is not surprising that, for women playwrights, anger and resistance come to the fore and are compellingly and emotionally conveyed. The 1980s are notably held up as an example of a dark period for women in Irish history, with references to the Kerry Babies Tribunal, Anne Lovett and Eileen Flynn commonly cited as examples of the cultural wars of the time.[32] Three plays which address the issues inherent in being a woman in a patriarchal society are examined here. Dolores Walshe's two plays *In the Talking Dark* (1987) and *The Stranded Hours Between* (1989) and Patricia Burke-Brogan's *Eclipsed* (1988) all stage and expose the status quo as it existed in the period they write from and provide passionate arguments for why subjugation must be identified and challenged. Patriarchy as defined by bell hooks is:

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[32] On the 16 January 2018 An Garda Síochána apologised to Joanne Hayes, the woman at the centre of the Kerry Babies Tribunal. This event instigated remembrances of the period throughout the media, with much focus on the manner in which women were treated by the institutions of the state in Ireland during the 1980s.

> a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.

Walshe's two plays are set in 1980s South Africa, where the ideologically indefensible political-social system, Apartheid, was still in place. Hélène Cixous names the places and means by which women are kept incarcerated, the "without", as "the heath where witches are kept alive" and the Apartheid routine, because, as woman "you are Africa, you are black" (877). Walshe wrote both plays in the late 1980s, as South African resistance to apartheid was escalating and gaining world attention. *In the Talking Dark* was performed in Manchester while *The Stranded Hours Between* has not been performed to date. Both plays feature unhappily married women, living under Apartheid, alongside husbands who have been compromised by the system themselves. Both have a son reaching young adulthood, and therefore being inducted into the system which Walshe depicts as analogous for patriarchal hegemony. Walshe's two female protagonists are challenged by their roles as traditional submissive wives and this provides the genesis of their anger and resentment.

In the Talking Dark is set in a suburban house in Pretoria, and a farmhouse outside of the same city, where Piet and Mia, a married couple, are living a white affluent suburban existence with their teenage son Jan. Challenges to this complacent lifestyle are provided by Claus, Piet's father and zealous exponent of the Apartheid system, and Piet's sister Babo, who seemingly defines herself in opposition to Claus and his political beliefs. The climactic events of the play are provoked by Babo's revealing to Mia that the man she has always believed to be her father is not in fact her genetic father, and that her real father is a black lawyer named Thulatu. Walshe's *The Stranded Hours Between* is set in an upmarket holiday village in South Africa's Kruger National Park. The exclusive village aims to give wealthy tourists a taste of living in the savannah in a pseudo African village secured with an electric fence and featuring 'genuine' indigenous huts fitted with all the mod-cons required for luxury living. Stoffel, an Afrikaner, and his wife Iseult, who is characterised as a white South African of Afrikaner/British descent, are the sole occupants of the village as the play opens. Stoffel is there as a reviewer of the new tourist facility and they are staying free of charge with all provisions supplied. Their teenage son Hennie is at a youth camp, learning to bear arms and 'be a man'. Iseult likens their situation to being animals in a zoo, situated as they are behind the fence, which, she also mentions, is broken in one spot. This information introduces a pervading sense of tension and fear, an atmosphere which permeates the play until the last. What happens if the wild animals breach the security of their village? And added to the threat of the African wild life is the presence of refugees from Mozambique who are fleeing a tribal war in their own country. They are represented as slippery figures glimpsed in the dark of the surrounds, being preyed on by lions and in turn embodying an ever-present danger to the two white residents of the hut.

This stifling, tension-filled setting is the background to Stoffel and Iseult re-evaluating their relationship, and its fragility is emphasised by the appearance of the other two characters in Walshe's play. Stoffel's jealousy of Andries, the manager of the resort, reveals his insecurities and vulnerability but also allows him to demonstrate his domineering attitude to his wife. As a patriarch and an Afrikaner he is filled with fear of imminent loss of status, defensive anger and a deep-seated need for control of those not fitting the category of white or male, in other words the 'Other', whether that Other be African natives or women. mKulie, the fourth character in the play, is both black and woman, and represents a challenge to Stoffel's learnt behavioural codes of sexual attraction and Iseult's loyalties.

In Walshe's *In the Talking Dark* the perceived intruder, the Other, becomes internalised as Mia's bloodline, the black genes she has inherited from her father. Mia has been indoctrinated to accept the superiority of the ruling class in a manner synonymous with the mores of the patriarchal system. Her lineage is being infiltrated insidiously, the castle walls breached from within, and Walshe allows the metonymic correlation between the couple's relationship and the greater political structure in which they exist to reveal the corrupt and violent nature of the patriarchal system; an institution held together by fear and loathing of the 'Other'. This dynamic is at the heart of what constitutes the patriarchy; hooks quotes Terrence Real writing of how "Both men and women participate in this tortured value system. Psychological patriarchy is a "dance of contempt", a perverse form of connection that replaces true intimacy with complex, covert layers of dominance and submission, collusion and manipulation" (6). The patriarchal mores as expressed through Apartheid are learnt "with the alphabet", Mia says, and for her there is no alternative, its absence leaves her as “Nothing! A cold empty space.” (*Talking Dark* 262). Cixous identifies the loss associated with being a woman in the conformist world, such as exists in this play, but sees an awareness of this loss as galvanizing: “those who are locked up know better than their jailers the taste of free air” (888). But for Mia her double-loss is too much to bear; having given up so much of herself to her conventional marriage and, additionally, to being a willing participant in the Apartheid system, she has nothing more to lose. Mia tells Piet

> Sometimes I’ve had a chilling dread that if Claus weren’t around to look at you with respect in his eyes, you wouldn’t exist. You feed on him. Then I wouldn’t exist either. I’d fade away, blend into the wallpaper like your mother, smiling apologetically, too timid to open her mouth” (*Talking Dark* 288).

Babo, Mia’s sister-in-law, stands up to Claus, her father, and condemns the apartheid regime and her father’s involvement with it. But Walshe does not allow any of her female characters escape the brutality of the system; Babo suffers physical violence at the hands of the violent South African police force when she is arrested on a protest and she too is left depleted and bereft of agency.

The very language the characters speak in Walshe’s plays is loaded with meaning; English appears less threatening than Afrikaans, speaking Afrikaans makes Iseult “feel ... undressed” (*The Stranded Hours* 111). Walshe has created relatively complex characters in her two primary female protagonists. Both are portrayed initially as submissive wives, and they play with this image themselves. Iseult makes clear her own non-threatening status: “Only my big toes are feminist;

the rest of me thinks they went too far" (*The Stranded Hours* 109). She states that she doesn't bother with the papers and can't read a map but as the play progresses it becomes obvious that this is pretence, a negotiation with the oppressor. She is taking pills to make it all palatable. Mia makes clear her use of her body and the sexual act is a bargaining chip with the patriarchy when she tells Piet she kept him satisfied in bed so that Claus couldn't get to him and she would be able to retain him as her own (*Talking Dark* 289). Both women are fully aware of their positions in society, as females in a male-dominant world, and both name and challenge that position, particularly when it threatens to take their respective sons away by inveigling them into the adult male arena. The device of the loss of a male child who goes 'over' to the patriarchy, or is lured over by the father figure, allows the women a pivot on which their relationships can turn, from apparent contentment to resentment and anger. In both plays the construct of masculinity is portrayed as performative, foregrounding Judith Butler's texts from the 1990s, with both young teenage boys literally having their masculinity imposed on them. Jan is fed stories of "Ten thousand Zulus against a few Boers! And they only got three of us" (*Talking Dark* 232); while Hennie is being taught gun skills, specifically against his mother's wishes, spending time in his room with his gun and "stroking it the same way he used to stroke the dog" (*Stranded Hours* 125).

The ultimate challenge to Iseult and Stoffel's relationship occurs when Iseult takes in an injured and traumatised pregnant African woman who is fleeing from violence in her own country and ends up in the village. Stoffel's conflicting response to mKulie veers from disgust to violent attraction and he forces Iseult's hand when he insists that they must hand mKulie over to the authorities. Rather than allow the young pregnant woman run into the bush alone Iseult goes too and the play climaxes when the two women leave together, unable to stay in the system or society as it is constructed. Iseult fears the wilderness but fears equally the sanctuary of the camp where "the brute's on the inside" (*Stranded Hours* 165). Both women face almost certain death rather than surrender, in Iseult's case to Stoffel's control, in mKulie's to the authorities who would return her to own country: "I will not take my child back to the birth of its death" (*Stranded Hours* 166). In *Talking Dark*, it is Mia herself who has been indoctrinated by the system; she cannot come to terms with her inherited black blood. She stigmatises her genetic father Thulatu, "You expect me to believe you have feelings?" (263). Themes of interracial and inter-gender tensions are analogised here by the irrational and unjust rule of apartheid in South Africa, a de-humanising institution which remained in power and generated much negative publicity throughout the 1980s.

Walshe's plays both climax with the female protagonists leaving; they cannot stay in the system or society as it is constructed. Their leaving takes the form of a walking away from the patriarchy to form a new life or more tragically finding a final escape route in death, as Mia ultimately does at the end of *Talking Dark*. Her suicide fractures the pretence at normality such a system requires. Both plays reach emotionally fraught climaxes and they can read as overwrought in terms of an escalation of the finality of choices facing the two women and the emotive language used in the texts. Having the Afrikaners as the embodiment of interracial injustice in South Africa may have resonance for the playwright with the conflict in Northern Ireland during the period she was writing from. The triangular shape of the political arena could be seen as similar, with Afrikaners, English and native Africans representing Protestant planter, mainland English and Catholic nationalist respectively. But critically Apartheid is also a truly egregious example of a patriarchal system at work as evidenced by its othering, subjugating and discriminating against one group in society, while the superordinate are given excessive power. By choosing to analogise Apartheid South Africa and compare it with the greater patriarchal world, Walshe leaves no ambiguity with respect to her intentions; these are angry feminist plays which rage against woman's subjugated position in society.

Patricia Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed* stages 'patriarchy by proxy' and is an effective and scathing indictment of the patriarchal institutions of church and state which enjoyed privileged status in Ireland for much of the twentieth century. Burke Brogan wrote the play in the 1980s: it reflects her own real-life experience as a novice nun in the late 1950s when she worked in the Galway Magdalene Laundry, run by the Sisters of Mercy. The play reveals the interior reality of the laundry through its depiction of two nuns, one young and idealistic, the other inured to and compliant with the rules of the religious institution. It contrasts their situation with the plight of the women who have ended up in this institution: mostly unmarried mothers, trapped by the debilitating loss of their babies and the social structures which essentially imprison them. The play received a rehearsed reading in 1988 and was first staged by Punchbag Theatre Company in the Town Hall Theatre in Galway in 1992. Minimal sets and music and movement feature alongside the reality of the laundry, the non-mimetic approach a common theme with other plays written by female playwrights in this thesis. However the play is also historical and based on fact. The narrative of the Magdalenes and the laundries is now well known; their story illustrates how state and church dealt with women who found themselves on the outside of Irish society, ostracised because of ‘unauthorised’ pregnancies, mental illness or by just being inconvenient for someone who had the power to exclude them. The orchestral music, chant and Elvis songs, and the dance/movement sequences serve to instil a Brechtian awareness of moment and message while also providing escape from the unremitting darkness of the subject matter. The play begins in the present day; a young woman called Rosa visits a convent to try to find evidence of her birth mother. She is helped by Nellie-Nora, an elderly woman who has spent most of her life in the confines of the convent as a former Magdalene and is now an institutionalised individual who chooses to stay there. As Rosa reads out the names written on a ledger, which dates from 1963, she summons up the ghosts of the women whose stories are encapsulated within its pages: the ‘penitent women’ of Saint Paul’s laundry who are individually identified, in most cases, by detail of the child born to them (175). Juliet is the exception among the Magdalenes; she was born into the state institutional system and, at seventeen, has never been outside in the real world nor wants to: “I’d hate to live out there. All those men!” (186).

Two nuns who run the laundry represent structures of power in the play. Mother Victoria is the foot soldier for the patriarchal hierarchy of the church and demands “Blind obedience!” from Sister Virginia, the younger nun who questions the ethics of the laundry and its systematic cruelty (193). In the Credo Scene Sister Virginia’s prayers are interrupted and paralleled with the voices of the Magdalenes crying out for help and Burke Brogan leaves no room for doubting the incongruity of the women’s situations compared to the moral aspirations of Catholicism (192-4). Sister Virginia questions her faith, asking will she become dehumanised if she stays there, ‘Locked in by Obedience’, “Was early Christian History rewritten too? Women’s witnessed submerged?” (193). The Christian God is implicated here in the treatment of the Magdalenes; his patriarchy, through the church and state in Ireland, stands accused of carrying out atrocities in the name of religion. In Walshe’s *The Stranded Hours Between* God is also implicated, Iseult states that between the ‘G’ and the ‘D’ there is “a cesspool” (137). But Burke Brogan makes clear the role women played in the perpetuation of this inverted Christian doctrine. Hooks writes that: “We need to highlight the role women play in perpetuating and sustaining patriarchal culture so that we will recognize patriarchy as a system women and men support equally, even if men receive more rewards from that system’ (3). Burke Brogan’s incarcerated women are nuanced, some angry, some broken by the forcible removal of their babies and their freedom, and some still harbouring dreams of loving Elvis and escaping the misery of the laundry. The two nuns are one Janus-faced entity, Mother Victoria is married to the church/patriarchy and will do its bidding regardless of how her actions affect the vulnerable, while Sister Virginia is idealistic and wishes to help her fellow man and woman through her calling to the religious life. When Bridget savagely attacks and torments Sister Virginia with taunts of “Scab! Spy” it may seem as if she has chosen the wrong target, but her actions highlight that those who uphold the system, albeit with the best of intentions, are implicated too (215).

Maria Kurdi points out how the women’s attempts to rebel against their incarceration leads to them becoming dehumanised: “The subordinate’s violent response to corporeal humiliation is often directed against the available though usually the least harmful person representing the power structure instead of its distant, intangible centre of oppression" (43). This argument applies to the nuns also, in that they too are subordinates and practice, or are subjected to, corporeal and mental humiliation as part of their religious vocations. Dehumanisation allows them to carry out their duties without truly engaging with the very real and present suffering of the Magdalenes. Sister Virginia's solution to the problem of how the women are being treated in the laundry is to attempt to get a letter to the Bishop asking him to visit the women, a letter which is intercepted by Mother Victoria. Sister Virginia is tied to the system by naivety and her own genuine good nature but her attempts to intercede for the women meet with Mother Victoria's fury and a demand that Virginia give the system the blind unquestioning obedience on which it thrives. The women find some solace in role-play; when Bridget dresses up as a bishop, according to Anne F. O'Reilly, "it allows the women to imagine freedom, in having money for cigarettes and access to a pantry full of rich food" (65), however in the scene where Mandy pretends to marry her idol Elvis, the expressed desire for marriage and entry into another patriarchal institution highlights the paucity of choices available to women in society at that time (the 1960s). As with Walshe's plays the patriarchal institution does not prove easy to escape from: Mandy's mental health breaks down and she is placed permanently into the "local mental institution" (226). Cathy dies from an asthma attack as she tries to flee in a laundry basket; Sister Virginia tries to atone for Cathy's death by giving Bridget the keys to make her own escape, which she does by running through the audience towards an unknown future, calling to Virginia as she goes: "Ye're the ones that are dead, Virginia! Dead inside yer Laundry Basket Hearts!" (223).

The protagonists in all three plays, therefore, are not superwomen; they do not truly confront the state/church, they are Antigones only in that they suffer from the effects of the power system/institution. Ultimately they have agency but they act out of desperation and an urgent need to escape, they have no desire to engage with the patriarchy. The complete rejection of the patriarchy demonstrated in these three plays, with escape through whatever means the only option on hand, aligns with a radical feminist rejection of formal politics. Lloyd writes that radical feminism identifies a need for an alternative version of reality, acknowledging that politics is not confined to the public sphere, rather the structure of patriarchy spreads "its tentacles through every aspect of life"; the private realm is "saturated with gendered power relations" (*Judith Butler* 3-4). There is no evidence of a desire for negotiation with the patriarchal structures in the plays; the subjects are ordinary every-women who have been both produced by and become victims of a power system, which they must reject and leave in order to have agency over their destinies.

Negotiating with the Patriarchy

Other plays of the 1980s authored by women stage a dialogue being initiated with the patriarchy; with a world which has not treated women as equal in the past. Here, as Lloyd writes, identities are performatively invoked in order to make political demands (*Beyond Identity Politics* 28). Applying Lloyd's definition, the dialectic questioning of power in these plays is a liberal feminist one, where women argue for a share of the already existing power structures inherited by men through centuries of patriarchal rule, "seeing this as the route out of sex discrimination" (*Beyond Identity Politics* 73). This contrasts with the approach taken in the previous three plays where male power is seen as domination and, in what can be termed a radical feminist approach, the protagonists do not engage with it but rather seek its overthrow or to escape its clutches (73). As previously noted, Case begins her essay “The Screens of Time: Feminist Memories and Hopes” with the acknowledgement that as the second wave of feminism began “At first, it seemed that feminist futures were to be found in feminist pasts”, in a re-imagining of the “matriarchies, amazons, goddesses along with the secret lives, the so-called untold histories of those few women history had managed to recognise” (105). She sees this rehabilitation as “imagined utopias, hopes for the future, embedded in the past”; “a collective dreaming through temporal tropes” (Screens of Time 105).

In *Women in Arms,* Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy’s re-telling of Irish legends through the prism of female experience, this longing can be discerned alongside an appeal for equality and recognition inherent in her political act of placing the women centre stage. The women make their case through storytelling. Anna McMullan in “Gender, Authorship and Performance” writes of how Burke-Kennedy’s technique “rejects a linear unfolding of narrative and reclaims an oral tradition of story-telling and performance” (39). The play draws from the epic poem Táin Bó Cuailgne and the Ulster Cycle of legends but critically in this telling the stories are narrated from the perspective of female characters who in other versions may have been portrayed as merely reactive or minor. It was first produced in 1984 by Cork Theatre Company and played in Cork’s Ivernia Theatre. Burke-Kennedy’s script is humourous and self-aware; she uses props, mimicry and movement to facilitate deft progression from one tale or scene to the next, and simple costuming changes to allow for cross-casting of actors. Burke-Kennedy portrays the four mythical women, Nessa, Macha, Deirdre and Maeve, as the ones “who engineered the destinies of their men, and of the country", despite the dominance of the fighting warrior trope in the traditional telling of the legends (*Seen and Heard* 47). The prologue to the play has the company speak:

> **Macha:** But the king could not command the Earth to stop breathing.
>
> **Maeve:** The king could not stop the fire from crackling.
>
> **Nessa:** The waves kept on crashing.
>
> **Deirdre:** And the air kept on sighing.
>
> **Nessa:** The women did not go to sleep.
>
> **Macha:** The women were not silenced (6).

Nessa is the wily one whose establishment of the new dynasty in Eamhain Macha, according to Burke-Kennedy, meant that the major turning points in the cycle from then onwards revolve around women. Nessa—initially known as Essa, meaning gentle or docile—is just "a prissy girl" when she is first exposed to life in the raw at the court of King Fergus: "by the time she was seventeen, she knew everything and nothing, for she had never made a mistake" (7). [33] There are no intellectuals at court, Fergus tells us, just men and women "who could fight and drink – and tell a bloody good story" (8). Nessa is highly educated; her refusal to perform her gendered role, and her adoption of the traditionally male one of intellectual, is perceived as a threat by the courtiers, she is considered an oddity, aloof with the women, full of herself (10) and in retaliation the 'lads' surround her and “Show her what her tutors left out” (11). The implied rape of Nessa does not destroy her; she is stoic about it, saying to her father “There’s nothing to be done. What has happened has happened” (12). Further outrage lies in wait for her at home, her twelve tutors have all been burnt to death “blackened, shrivelled up with open mouths in their necks” (13). As an induction into an adult world of misogyny and rule by mob, this is brutal and uncompromising. Nessa must now fight back, hunt down the killers and wreak revenge. She changes utterly; her men are scared of her and change her name to Nessa, the ‘Tough One’ (11). Nessa is impregnated by a druid, Cathbad, and using sexual favours for persuasion, tricks King Fergus into allowing this child, her son, take the throne for a year – a year which stretched into many, as Nessa refuses to return the throne to Fergus. Burke-Kennedy portrays Nessa as the ultimate female politician; she does whatever is necessary to gain power, whether it is by proxy, by guile or deceit, but she uses her opportunities to clean up the house of Fergus. She “encouraged visitations of poets and musicians” and “‘invited’ the women to take instruction from her” (21) but in championing Conchobar, the son she inveigled onto the throne, her legacy is ultimately a disastrous one.

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[33] The script used here for reference was one sent to this researcher by Burke-Kennedy. Burke-Kennedy expressed a preference for this script to be used in analysis of the play rather than the one published in *Seen and Heard* as there are errors in the published script.

Nessa is woman as pragmatist and intellectual, driven and ambitious; she is a match for any man in the kingdom and seeks to gain equality on those terms which already exist, rather than challenge the fundamental system. However in gaining status and power she has also had to give up so much of her early aspirations and dreams: “nor could she recall anything at all about the girl that had been their Essa” (21). In Part Two, Macha too must sacrifice something of herself, this time in order to embrace family and motherhood. In this story Macha, the goddess (for such she is), takes human form and moves in with a family of father and sons, to mother them and wash their clothes and cook for them. Macha finds herself, due to a betrayal by her lover Cruinniuc and at the instigation of Conchobar the king, forced to take part in a horse race, despite being pregnant; she does so with reluctance but succeeds in winning. However she collapses and gives birth at the finish of the race: “Two children came out of her. She screamed, as they came” (28). Macha then curses every man who heard her scream: in times “of crisis and threat to their homeland the men of Ulster were made to feel the agony she had suffered” (28). Macha is all powerful but she wants to embrace life as a both a mother and as her mate’s equal; she returns to be wife and mother to Cruinniuc and the children but she must surrender something integral to her in order to survive and compromise: “They never heard her word, good or bad. For she never spoke again” (29). By dedicating her life to her children, and her marriage, a woman is rendered voiceless in most contemporary societies but crucially that choice must be hers to make and as a goddess Macha embodies limitless choice. Burke-Kennedy is acknowledging the price of motherhood while at the same time allowing for the validity of making that choice, pointing, in this interpretation, to a liberal feminist reading of Macha’s motivations and a rejection of a more radical feminism.

In Part Three of the play, Deirdre causes consternation when she is born; it is predicted that “this girl’s beauty would be brighter than the sun and deathlier than the moon” and therefore her “power will have to be contained” (30). Deirdre’s story is a love story, but Deirdre does not love the one for whom she is being groomed, Conchobar the king, rather she falls for her peer, Naoise. Deirdre and Naoise run away together but the strain of keeping Naoise from reverting to his warrior identity and returning to Ulster proves too much for Deirdre. Naoise returns and is murdered and rather than give herself to Conchobar, who wishes to share her with Naoise's murderer Eoin—"[t]here you are now my darling, a ewe between two rams. Get used to the smell of both of us"—Deirdre flings herself from his chariot and "dashes her brains out on a rock" (47-8). Leeney notes the "neo-Platonic Christian ideal" of love that Deirdre represents, "love that overrides jealousy or possessiveness" (*Irish Women Playwrights* 91), while Kurdi sees her suicide as a "recuperation of agency over her body in public" (157). Choosing not to subject herself to Conchobar's control, not to compromise and negotiate as Nessa and Macha ultimately did, she must escape in death. By writing the story from Deirdre's perspective Burke-Kennedy is engaging with the versions of *Deirdre* which have gone before—namely those by Yeats, AE Russell, Synge, and more recently Vincent Woods—in which Deirdre could be interpreted more as an agent of crises to which the male protagonists react rather than the driver of the crisis.

Finally, in Maeve's story, the narrative turns to the Queen of Connaught, and her husband Ailill, who both share the same pleasure-seeking and free-spirited attitude to life. They are equals and this is very important to them; so important in fact that they have their respective estates measured and to Maeve's consternation she is found wanting. One of her bulls, a magnificent creature, "had gone over to Ailill's herd and had refused to leave it, because it wouldn't follow a woman" (52). Maeve is in despair, "she was no more than a kept woman" (53). Once again Burke-Kennedy's female protagonist is determined to prove she is the equal of her male counterpart, and again critically she is negotiating in the assumed patriarchal territory of strength and fighting prowess. Maeve must go to war with Ulster to acquire ‘an Dún Bó Cúailinge’, the brown bull which will banish her feelings of inadequacy, and in doing she proves herself as greedy, proud and aggressive as the fighting Ulstermen. The ensuing battles between the two are devastating. Maeve stops at nothing, even offering her daughter Finnabair’s hand in marriage as a bribe to have Cuchulainn killed (59). Maeve’s saga ends with her winning her campaign to steal the brown bull, but the losses of life and self-respect are enormous; this is the price of living, fighting and accepting the mores of the patriarchy. Kurdi sees this outcome suggest that Maeve’s story could be understood as a parable, warning of how the “committed endeavours of the women’s movement to prove the equality of their gender against the constraints of the patriarchal milieu are likely to entail further problems” (159).

Watching the play in 1980, there must have been strong correlations between Maeve and Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Great Britain during the period. Burke-Kennedy, in *Women in Arms*, stages women who appear to perceive their ‘femininity’ as weakness, something to be compensated for by becoming more ‘male’ and by performing masculinity, but it must be noted that Burke-Kennedy’s play can be read as a warning to those who engage in such practices. In fact Burke-Kennedy’s work parallels Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls* of the same year, in which the playwright makes a similar critique of Thatcher’s Britain and of feminist ambitions to take on the patriarchy at their own game, at whatever cost. The staging of the feminist message in the play is coloured by the final tale, the epilogue, which tells of the ultimate fight to death between the two bulls, a fight which corresponds to the political situation in Ireland at the time of Burke-Kennedy’s writing. The imagery of the two bulls that “ripped each other to pieces” conjures up images of war as testosterone-fuelled disaster (46). Critically Burke-Kennedy's female protagonists are not innocent bystanders in this war, they have agency and use it, they negotiate with the world as it exists, and they do not leave. Brechtian techniques, such as the telling of the stories directly to the audience, highlight the relevance of the message for the contemporary audience. *Women in Arms* is performed in a non-mimetic manner, with minimal stage sets and elements of play, music, humour and movement interwoven into stories which perhaps had largely existed previously as tales of battles and intervention by the gods in traditional style.

The foregrounding of female sexual issues in Anne Le Marquand Hartigan's *Beds* allows for these issues to become embodied and physically realised on stage. Diamond considers that this centre staging of the body highlights the suitability of the Brechtian 'gestus' for feminist performance, meaning that the actors perform in ways in which the body "stands visibly separate from the 'role' of the actor as well as the role of the character" ("Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory" 89). The generality of the move by women away from mimetic theatre towards a more Brechtian approach could be seen as rooted in the rejection of the classics, with their dramatic forms which "inevitably enforce upon us a sense of the unalterable solidity of this social world, all the way down to the colour of the maid's stockings"; in other words a resistance to a social world of oppressive patriarchy (Eagleton 162). Protest, Case writes, which heralded a rise in performance art, "offered gestural and scenographic portrayals of the socially disciplined body" which "could be interpreted as taking the Brechtian *Gestus* into the streets, only to have it return to the training for the stage" (*Feminist and Queer Performance* 103). Case discusses an approach by feminists to staging the political as "up-close and personal" and extending “the anti-patriarchal proximity of such theatre to a kind of global imaginary”, a concept which is exemplified here by the domestic detail in Le Marquand Hartigan’s play (*Feminist and Queer Performance* 126). This theme of domesticity however is undercut with the darker realities of women’s lives in Le Marquand Hartigan’s loosely structured and provocative staging in the Damer Hall as part of the 1982 Dublin Theatre Festival. The play was devised and work-shopped by Moveable Feast Theatre Company and audience participation was encouraged. *Beds’* cast list requires three women and three men and “one other”, no names are specified (1), and the titles for action in the play are, according to Le Marquand Hartigan, for description only ; the actions should flow “one onto another without a break”, while the play moves in “a Life-cycle from pre birth to deaths of various kinds”.[34] A pre-theatre piece consists of two rooms, one with double beds where the cast treat the audience to their sales pitch; the other, the “Bed of Dreams”, with dim lighting and a “pure white bed . . . with white net curtains”, the sound of gentle breathing, whispered dreams (2).

Scene one features voices discussing various aspects of sleep and segues into dance, with a ritual bed-making which is repeated throughout the play. The set for scene two is three beds on the stage with actors as three foetuses, and two blobs. The foetuses are happy, “in tune with her, my great mother earth”; “life is good” as they swing and float, speaking to the background sound of a slow heartbeat (21). The question that haunts them is what will happen when their time is up: “Is there life after birth?”; they seek proof of the great big earth mummy and daddy and agree that the first to be born will somehow get a message to the others to let them know the truth (29-30). In a deliberate nod to a pro-choice agenda, Le Marquand Hartigan stages the early foetuses as “lumps of jelly” who will remember “absolutely nothing” of their first “three years” in the womb (31-2). Foetus three is born and makes his birth cries but none can be heard by foetuses one and two. In scene three, a man and a woman meet in a symbolic setting, staged as a boxing match, with cross-gendered casting for the bride and groom. Unlike the foetuses, which had no specific gender assignment, here gender is performative, the scene hinges on the exaggerated characteristics of female and male impersonation as the wedding and honeymoon night is staged. Le Marquand Hartigan is writing women’s sexuality in an uninhibited if pedagogic manner; the exhortations of the brother of the groom and the mother of the bride to the wedding couple resemble instructions from a sex therapist’s handbook (47–50). The marriage is played out as dysfunctional and the message being staged is that women need to free themselves from the tyranny of marriage and unsatisfactory sexual encounters, but there is also an implied onus on women to take responsibility for their sex lives and communicate their needs.

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[34] Anne Le Marquand Hartigan mailed a copy of her script *Beds* to this researcher

As the action plays out, the traditional way of life concerning relationships and religion is held up for scrutiny and does not emerge unscathed. The control the church in Ireland exerts over the sexual and reproductive lives of its citizens is critiqued and exposed. Le Marquand Hartigan’s characters address contraception: “Our priest told me just have the first five of six, then think about Billings. I wouldn’t go on the pill.” (55). A back-street abortion is staged in parallel with a mass being performed, the altar doubling as a bed, while a priest evokes all the conservative religious dogma and myth surrounding the use of contraception including the man’s loss of respect for his ever available partner. The stage instructions state that as the priest raises the host for consecration, the girl “bears down and pushes out a child” (124). A statue of the ‘Sacred Heart’ Jesus comes to life to make love to a woman in her bed as they both recite the ‘Hail Holy Queen’ prayer (133–135). The final scene features an inversion of the marriage rites, dance and music with funereal overtones and macabre silent screams to the audience, culminating in a frantic waltz in which the audience are invited to join. *Beds* could well be understood as a “collective, political naming of the injustices, the inequalities” against women, as described by Aston and Harris (5); the key issues are all represented here alongside the various tropes of the patriarchal system. Le Marquand Hartigan does not pull her punches and the play is didactic in nature and earnestly and courageously on message.

Aston and Harris write that when feminists identified a collective ‘we’, “men were dramatized as the ‘enemy’, while women moved ‘centre stage’” (5); “History was restaged through a feminist lens and a mostly Brechtian-feminist aesthetic to demonstrate past oppression” and under the influence of theorist-practitioners such as Cixous, “the search began for a ‘new’ theatre language: a feminist poetics which would challenge the theatrical apparatus” (5). Such approaches are clearly utilised in Le Marquand Hartigan’s play, she stages the ‘personal as political’ and her use of imagery, music, dance and poetic language prevents the play from being one-dimensional or sententious, although in order to expose the hypocrisies surrounding the issues staged there is much more ‘tell’ than ‘show’ in the play. Caitriona Mary Reilly states that “within feminist performance, practitioners and performers have used the female body to politicize and critique hegemonic notions of womanhood, femininity and motherhood" (20). Le Marquand Hartigan's *Beds* stages the female body as a site of oppression and trauma but in her play men's bodies are also implicated in the damage and restrictions imposed by the hierarchies of power. Her courageous demand for dialogue with the institutions of power resides at the heart of her play and she writes with anger and a profound sense of injustice on behalf of Irish women.

This chapter's analysis of five plays, written by women in the 1980s, reveals how these playwrights, writing from what is recognisably a feminist perspective, wrote of negotiation, or a refusal to negotiate, with the patriarchy. These five plays (Walshe's *The Stranded Hours Between* and *In the Talking Dark*; Burke-Brogan's *Eclipsed*; Burke-Kennedy's *Women in Arms*; and Le Marquand Hartigan's *Beds*) dialectically engage with a consciousness raised by the second wave of feminism and are representative examples of feminist writing from that period. Apart from Walshe's plays, they do not conform to a hegemonic naturalistic and narrative model of the traditional Irish play. They all focus on female concerns; relationship dynamics are central to their texts. Kurdi makes the point that female-authored drama's "particular character constellations of two or three women taking the position of the protagonist could be linked to the collaborative practice of women's theatre groups that have facilitated or inspired the emergence of many playwrights and plays" (94-5); this dramatic form is evident in Burke-Kennedy's and Burke Brogan's plays. She also notes that Irish women playwrights usually include narrators who are both participant and witness "to events with community – or family members in the centre, which may be both recounted and enacted" (128); again this is applicable to both plays and to Le Marquand Hartigan's *Beds*. The plays also address the manner in which women's lives are impacted and in some cases destroyed by the patriarchal establishments of marriage, church and state; and they imagine alternative realities through storytelling and myth.[35] The challenging of hierarchical institutions from a subordinate but rebellious position aligns this chapter with the dominant theme central to this thesis: that of dissident voices promoting awareness or raised in protest with respect to a state overly influenced by the patriarchy of the Catholic Church and in constant reaction to the politics of nationalism and violent republicanism.

Writing Feminism from a Male Perspective

Feminist groups in 1980s Ireland failed to achieve the liberal/progressive agenda they sought, as various referenda fell to the conservation/religious vote. However feminism as a political stance maintained its profile throughout the decade as evidenced above and male voices inevitably engaged in the debate. Brendan Kennelly's 1980s adaptations of Greek myth, specifically Sophocles's *Antigone* and Euripides's *Medea,* intersect strongly with the feminist theatre themes of the previous plays. His *Medea,* which premiered in 1988, stages rage, women's rage at the situation they find themselves in, and the playwright states this clearly in the preface to the published version of the play. While this play is not examined here in detail it should be noted that it features a radical feminist response to patriarchy: Medea's "tide of bitter sorrow" does not negotiate with the established rules dictating how women must behave and ultimately she too leaves the patriarchal world in which she dwells, but not before she has destroyed any routes which might lead to a return (79). Medea is polemically feminist in tone; Kennelly uses the words of his protagonists to depict the reasons why a feminist agenda is necessary; Medea points out the double-standards meted out when a marriage breaks up while the Chorus allow that “Abortion can be a kind of mercy” (118). Kennelly’s feminist reading of Antigone takes the Irish state to task for its introduction of regressive laws, such as the Eighth Amendment, which diminish women’s rights and autonomy over their bodies. Read in dialogue with the other texts in this chapter, or indeed in the thesis as a whole, a clear and common theme emerges from the texts, a highlighting of an oppressive authoritarian state in which women rights are subjugated to the patriarchy.

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[35] This conclusion is central to my chapter 'A Gendered Absence: Feminist Theatre, Glasshouse Productions and the #WTF Movement' in *Perspectives on Contemporary Irish Theatre,* eds. A. Etienne and T. Dubost, from which the discussion above is taken.

Kennelly, in his introduction to his version of *Antigone*, notes that writing this play had personal and emotional meaning for him at a difficult time in his life (7). The play deals with justice and for Kennelly justice is what *should* prevail rather than the reality of what *does* prevail (10). The playwright describes his version as a “feminist declaration of independence” (Roche, “Ireland’s Antigones” 242), although Christopher Murray appears dismissive of Kennelly’s feminist theme: Antigone, he notes, is “given a few feminist lines to speed her on her way” (119). However by clearly setting up the dichotomy in the play between woman and man, Kennelly’s broad strokes paint a feminist struggle, and a timely one for the period. Douglas L. Cairns writes of the play: “Contemporary in its concerns and its import, it none the less fully confronts its Sophoclean original and situates itself in the tradition which that model has spawned” (141). The play is written in short line stanza form, with concise clean language and the lack of heightened emotional discourse adds depth and gravitas to the protagonists' speech. At the play's start Antigone mourns the different treatment meted out to her two brothers who have so much in common, including her love of them:

> Children can throw sticks and stones
>
> At our second brother's naked bones (14)

Already an image redolent of the 1980s comes to mind, of children on the troubled streets of Belfast or Derry throwing missiles at soldiers. Kennelly's Ismene is clearly not a feminist, convinced of her subordinate status in life as a woman, believing "We are ruled by those who are stronger" (15). Creon's talk, when he enters, is of the state and the state is all to him; loyalty and law must prevail. For him though, the gods are one with the city; for Kennelly the Catholic Church is the "chief advocate in Ireland of the closed mind" and by implying that Creon is an embodiment of that institution he reminds the audience that the church in Ireland equalled the state in resisting feminist demands (qtd. in Murray 119).

Inevitably a reading of the play which takes into consideration the context of the 1980s cannot eschew the effect the conflict in Northern Ireland had on politics on the island as a whole and on the feminist struggle. When the chorus bewail the generational nature of sorrow and trouble, "Generation cannot be freed by generation", they are referring to societal inheritances such as patriarchy and religion (33). Creon is entrenched in patriarchal mores; he sees the father as "the maker of the future", declaring that the family must be moulded by the father's will (34). When Haemon approaches, Creon warns him of treacherous women who do not obey, saying, "Disobedience is the worst of evils" and he further states that if he, Creon, must fall from power, he must do so at the hand of a man, never a woman (35). Kennelly's version seeks to subtly emphasise the sexist nature of Creon's pronouncements. Haemon attempts to make his father see reason, admonishing his blind autocratic vision and inability to allow the people to voice their opinions. Emerging as it does from Ireland in 1986, this plea for democratic rule again brings Northern Ireland to mind, and Haemon's words differentiate between the 'sand' which represents the whole of the plebiscite made up of many grains formed to shape over time, and the 'rats', a word with terrorist connotations (a fixation with informers):

> You'd make a good King of the desert
>
> The sand would never agree with you
>
> Neither would the rats (37)

Kennelly writes Antigone as a strong proponent of women's rights; in this version she accuses the Chorus of knowing all about men, money and power while knowing nothing of women. If a man, Antigone states, knew anything of women he could no longer remain a man as currently constituted, a clear indictment of patriarchy in the twentieth century (41). The relationship between Creon and Haemon is invocative of a dictator attempting to deal with a rebel whom he holds close to his heart on the one hand but who, on the other hand, represents emotive reasoning and subversion of the law of the land. "What must a King do, if his son is a rebel upstart?" the Chorus asks (49), notably assigning officialdom to Creon (King) and family to Haemon (son). Antigone and Haemon both die for love of another because Creon cannot bend or allow dissention from the rule of law, which is very much *his* rule, *his* law. Kennelly foregrounds the female response to the tragedy when he gives Eurydice words and space to speak of her grief on hearing of her son Haemon's death:

> Dead! How can my son be dead?
>
> You speak as if from another country,
>
> A land of more than-human-grief (51)

The words of the messenger seem incredible to her, between them lies "a sea of disbelief"; it is notable that he grants her a voice to express her emotions, something not accorded to her in most versions of the play (51). Kennelly certainly criticises the patriarchal society of modern Ireland through his treatment of *Antigone* the play. Antigone is impacted by the fact of being a woman in a society shaped by men for men, while Ismene voices the concerns of the conservative, traditional woman, in thrall to the status quo; the conflict between the two sisters reflects the division in Irish society with respect to feminism and how far it should go in challenging the establishment. Ultimately and in keeping with previous themes, Antigone must die in order to realise her truth. Her demands cannot be acceded to and there is only one way for her if she is to adhere to her ethical stance: she must go into a "black hole among the rocks" and remove herself from a society run on patriarchal terms or as Creon would have it, be "banished from the world of men" (43).

Kennelly's dramatic language is poetic and not inclined towards use of the vernacular but Douglas L. Cairns identifies a radical intervention by Kennelly in his use of specific words over and again in his version of the play (Cairns 143). The word 'word' is key to understanding the poet's emphasis on words and their performative usage. Cairns points out how ‘word’ is used to represent intention and action: Antigone says “Word and deed are one in me” (4) while Creon acknowledges he killed Eurydice with his words (53). In conjunction with other repeated words such as ‘silence’ and ‘secrecy’, the repeated words ‘difference’ and ‘different’ become even more powerful and indicative of a state or place which does not practice inclusivity, where words are dangerous and the word of the state is not to be trusted.

Contemporaneous Reviews and Publication Status

A number of the plays detailed in the section ‘What the Playwrights Wrote’ were premiered as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in the smaller Dublin theatres, and were therefore reviewed with perhaps a more open-minded approach than would have been the case if they were to be produced by the mainstream theatres. Some expectation and tolerance of experimentation or alternative techniques would have been demonstrated by the regular critics of the *Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent*, the *Examiner* and the *Irish Press* but from examination of the available reviews very few considered critiquing the plays from a feminist perspective. Mary Halpin’s *Semi Private*, in the 1982 Festival, is offered in the *Sunday Independent* as a prize winning play which “should be of great interest to women” (Gus Smith 16) and is then subsequently praised by *Examiner* reviewer Patricia O’Reilly in the following manner:

> One of the very pleasant surprises to emerge during the second week was Mary Halpin’s award winning play, *Semi-Private*. She is slim and bubbly with masses of curling hair and was genuinely delighted with her first night

> and parried questions skilfully from the international press about the amount of re-writing required before production (3).

Ena May's *She's Your Mother Too, You Know* prompts a "predictable – crouched in cliché and framed in stock caricature" from David Nowlan, who acknowledges that the thousands who have had to "face the problems caused by elderly relative" will find many points of interest (*Irish Times* 14). Desmond MacAvock's *Irish Times* review of Anne Le Marquand Hartigan's 1982 Festival premiere of *Beds* considers the "matter" of the play to be "birth, life, love and death and the inadequacy of bourgeois mores to encompass these elements" (8), this last reference to bourgeois mores perhaps reflecting his perception of an Irish feminist as demanding and middle-class. He goes on to write that what Le Marquand Hartigan has to say "does not really rise beyond the obvious, even banal" and focuses on "the form" of the play for the remainder of his review. Given Le Marquand Hartigan's strong attack on church and state in her play, 'banal' seems provocative or perhaps dismissive of her play? Steve Wilmer notes, from his interview with Le Marquand Hartigan, that another "outraged" critic of *Beds* warned the male cast members "lest they be 'influenced by the fantasies of a middle-aged housewife'" (359). Le Marquand Hartigan's *La Corbière* however was very well received, with Le Marquand Hartigan's website[36] quoting a number of reviews praising the poetic nature of the text and soundscape, along with Cathy Leeney's direction.

Burke Kennedy, interviewed by Francine Cunningham in 1988 for a Dublin Theatre Festival article, states that "*Women in Arms* is not meant as a political allegory, despite some possible contemporary meanings in the play", adding that she loves the stories for what they are and "doesn't want to boil them down into the 1980s" (17). However, the version of the play published in Leeney's *Seen and Heard* features instructions during Maeve's story to "take the positions and grouping of the characters of Picasso's *Guernica",* which implies that the playwright intends the play to reflect somewhat on destruction caused by acts of violence, such as the bombing of Guernica (43). This instruction does not feature in the most recent version of the play sent to this researcher. *Women in Arms* was well received, in 1988 at the Festival and previously in its first production in 1984 in Cork where Mary Leland of the *Irish Times* praises it for its validity as virile folklore, calling it "pungent, racy, utterly fascinating" (12). Derek West, for the *Irish Times* Festival review of 1988, sees the women asserting their power in the plays, particularly Maeve whom he refers to as the "Iron Woman of the Western World" (12). Of the plays critiqued in detail above, critics generally approach the themes of conflict in the plays as political. Dolores Walshe's premiere of *In the Talking Dark* at the Royal Exchange, Manchester, in 1989 gets a dismal review from Michael Billington of the *Guardian* who allows that it has impeccable liberal credentials but is a "wildly overheated piece of writing in which every line of dialogue seems to come with an invisible exclamation mark" (21). He situates his interpretation of the play in South Africa and is literal in his comprehension of the author's intent, seeing no references to feminist themes inherent in her work, although he acknowledges Frances Tomelty's performance as "a courageous, all out emotional piece of acting". Billington compares Walshe unfavourably to Fugard, writer of many plays of resistance regarding South Africa's patriarchal Apartheid system, but without acknowledging Fugard's use of female subjugation as analogous for racial injustice.

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[36] Anne Le Marquand Hartigan's website is at: http://www.annehartigan.ie

Patricia Burke Brogan’s *Eclipsed* became an inspiration for a movement in Ireland in the 1990s and beyond which sought to expose the stories of the women who had been (or still were, some laundries were still operative when Burke Brogan’s play was performed in 1992) incarcerated in Ireland’s notorious Magdalene Laundries. The scandal of how the women were treated, hidden away and used as unpaid drudges for the laundry systems run by the religious orders, became a part of a larger unveiling of the collusion of church and state in Ireland and the manner in which they dealt with vulnerable or noncompliant women and children. Michael Finlan in the *Irish Times* writes that it “would not be a bad idea to frog-march every one of our T.D.'s, particularly the male majority, into the theatre to see it" (12), while Judy Murphy in the *Galway Advertiser* of November 1992 notes that:

> The impact of 'Eclipsed' outside of purely theatrical consideration has been considerable. As a result of her sensitive handling of a controversial issue, Patricia Burke Brogan's fine play has led to reports and studies being done on the subject of the Magdalen Laundries and the situation then and now of unmarried mothers. These include a series of articles in the *Irish Times*, two documentaries on RTE Radio 1 and at the moment BBC2 is putting together a documentary for television on the Magdalen Homes in Ireland and Scotland (33).

Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed* and Burke-Kennedy's *Women in Arms* have received some critical attention.[37] Bennett points out that critique by interpretive communities can change and reshape how plays are received. She gives the example of how historically women playwrights of the nineteenth and twentieth century have been ignored by academics and theatre companies, despite recent research showing that such theatre was in fact very prolific (41). She notes that in "the 'alternative' press, theatre criticism has been overtly linked to the political bias of the publication represented" (42) and this implies that the choice of which productions actually get reviewed is also impacted by this bias. The reviews discussed here are from mainstream publications and in the case of Le Marquand Hartigan in particular this is reflected in the superficial engagement with the issues being staged. The secondary role of a text-based script, as in the case of interactive, physical and interpretative theatre such as Le Marquand Hartigan's, highlights the importance of reviews from as many sources as possible. When audience response plays such a large part in the process, the play relies on their presence to achieve its effects (Bennett 67). MacAvock was clearly irritated by having to move during the performance of *Beds*; this perceived inconvenience most likely influenced his reception of the play.

Reviews for Kennelly's play were polarised, with Colm Toibin of the *Sunday Independent* seeing the adaptation as bringing nothing new dramatically or poetically to the text, while he bewails the playwright's failure to follow up the 'Irish guard' character who might have brought a political nuance to the production

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[37] Including in my chapter "A Gendered Absence: Feminist Theatre, Glasshouse Productions and the #WTF Movement" in *Perspectives on Contemporary Irish Theatre.*

(17). Toibin seems to expect that the play should address Northern Ireland, given its tropes of buried dead and martyrdom; he rather pointlessly mentions that the day of its premiere saw a “huge funeral for a dead IRA man in Monaghan” but makes no mention of its relatively overt feminist interpretation. In fact, with the exception of Derek Nowlan from the *Irish Times*, none of the reviewers pick up on Kennelly’s interrogation of Ireland’s cultural and gender wars. In sharp contrast to Toibin, the *Irish Press* enjoyed a “really good night’s drama” (Thompson, 5) while the *Irish Examiner* considered that the play “comes passionately to life” (Hingerty, 2).

Approximately 66% of all plays in this analysis, written in the 1980s by women, are unpublished (see Figure 2). All of the plays analysed here have been published, three of them twenty to thirty years after they were penned, in anthologies dedicated to giving voice and recognition to women dramatists, and to challenging the “‘master-narrative’ of Irish theatre” (Leeney, *Seen and Heard* vii). Burke Brogan’s play was published in 1994, a couple of years after its production, Walshe’s *The Stranded Hours Between* is unproduced. An attempt to address the publication status of female playwrights has been championed by Cathy Leeney in her anthology *Seen and Heard*, and in *Irish Women Dramatists* edited by Eileen Kearney and Charlotte Headrick. Irish women playwrights’ work now features in some recent gender-balanced anthologies of Irish plays, for example *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays* (Ed. Thomas Conway) and *Contemporary Irish Plays* (Ed. Patrick Lonergan).[38] However lack of representation of women in

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[38] Patrick Lonergan, editor, *Contemporary Irish Plays*, Bloomsbury, 2015; Thomas Conway, editor The *Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Theatre: This is just this. This isn't real. It’s money*, Oberon, 2012.

Irish theatre is still an issue. In November 2015, the Abbey Theatre hosted the inaugural meeting of #WakingTheFeminists (#WTF), a social media-based movement launched by theatre designer Lian Bell in response to Abbey director Fiach Mac Conghail’s announcement of its 1916 centenary ‘Waking the Nation’ programme, which featured an 18:2 ratio of men to women playwrights. Given the historic importance of commemorating the 1916 Easter Rising and the theoretically democratic and inclusive nature of the Arts—where there is an implicit onus in particular on those institutions largely funded by tax payers to be equitable—this omission was notable to say the least. A year later, on 14th November 2016, #WTF met on the same stage to present its research committee’s findings, provisional statistics compiled on the representation of female authors working in Irish theatres over the past ten years. Such a movement is clearly in dialogue with a feminist ideology, which many in an allegedly post-feminist world believed to have foundered at some point in the 1980s when the stated goal of gender equality had appeared to be an accepted and achievable fact. In fact, and rather depressingly, #WTF mirrors the grassroots movement, Glasshouse Productions, discussed earlier in this chapter. The conclusion of this chapter addresses the questions raised at the start: how Irish women playwrights responded to the second wave of feminism which swept the western world in the 1970s and 1980s; and what an examination of the neglect of their work contributes to the current discussion about why ‘There are no Irish Women Playwrights’.

Conclusion to The Women Are Talking

Often the first question which arises when analysing the contribution women make to theatre, and not just during the 1980s, is the aforementioned lack of women playwrights or theatre-makers, on stage or as part of academic discourse on theatre. While the factors bearing on feminist theatre, discussed below, are part of the overall picture, there are other likely reasons for this anomaly (see Figure 1). Given the impact of consciousness raising and identity politics which filtered down into everyday life in Ireland as a result of the second wave of feminism, from the 1980s onwards women were writing their individual lives into a general meaning and understanding of what it is to be female: the personal made political. The stage became a site where identities could be formed and the changing shape of women's lives articulated. Kurdi writes that "Women-authored plays tend to spatialise experiences which extend from a sense of paralysing incarceration to a determined search for freedom elsewhere" (190); or as Diamond puts it "the utopian strain in feminism depends on the performative 'as if'" (*Unmaking Mimesis* iii). The female-centeredness of women's plays, and this still applies in the twenty-first century, makes it all too easy for such writing to be dismissed as of limited interest, male-centric theatre having always assumed the male gaze as the catholic one, and all others as peripheral niche.

The very subject matter of a lot of female-authored plays, that of women trapped in situations where their imprisonment is backed by state, church and tradition, illustrates another practical reason why plays written by women are few on the ground, their lives did/do not allow for the solitary intellectual pursuit of writing; as previously discussed the five Cs, "culture, confidence, candidate selection, cash and care", intervene for women more than they might for men. Case, writing in 1988, notes the global and temporal extent of the absence of women playwrights and argues that, in addition to "traditional categories of production […] consideration must be given to modes of performance located in the domestic and personal spheres which were assigned to women by the patriarchy" (*Feminism and Theatre* 29). A chapter in the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* specifically addresses the same concerns: "We need to develop modes of evaluation and critique which take account of models of practice derived from a body of female authored theatre" (McMullan and Williams 1236). Given that it is more difficult as a woman to be produced on the main stages of the Gate and the Abbey, (see "What the Women Wrote", this chapter), it can be asserted that by working as part of a community-based initiative or engaging in theatre which raises issues regarding social injustices or marginalisation, opportunities to source funding to support the production of work may be increased. Additionally benefits accrue from working as part of a group or team where responsibility and rewards are shared. In terms of absence from the literary canon, it can be asserted that because women playwrights, as demonstrated here, often embraced an epic theatrical approach,—"destabilising mimetic forms which depend on binarisms" (Kurdi 192)—in doing so they were not critiqued in the same numbers as those writing text-based mimetic dramas but also, put simply, the dominance of men in decision-making positions throughout Irish institutions allows for a gender-bias which will continue to perpetuate itself until addressed in a deliberate and consensual way.

Much of the ideological and social change brought about by the women's movement in Ireland centred on issues which heavily impacted on women, family and women's sexuality. Therefore by writing plays about their lives women are staging their response to these critical discourses on feminism and their texts can be construed as feminist interrogations of state and religious oppression of women in

Ireland. Many of these writers may not consider themselves as writers of feminist texts and a hint as to why they may not have overtly aligned their themes with feminist issues may be found in a previously quoted line from Dolores Walshe where she names her heroes as: “women who braved ridicule and marched for my right to have my Child Allowance Book assigned to me” (326). Irish feminists, in addition to opposition from church and state, faced ridicule, and this not from institutions but from the ordinary man, and woman, of Ireland. June Levine, an Irish feminist activist, names this reluctance to associate with women’s liberation as fear of being seen as the “mad person” (96) and being subject to “the violence of that jeering, invalidating laughter” (209). Feminism itself, from the mid-1980s onward, was challenged by accusations of essentialism and elitism and of excluding women who came from marginalised positions; theoretical feminism became diffuse, poststructuralist, and intellectually rather than materially focused.[39] In the Republic of Ireland issues such as abortion, contraception and divorce proved divisive in terms of the creation of a unified women’s movement.

One of the most impactful challenges for the Irish feminist movement was how to deal with the crisis in Northern Ireland; the resultant binaries and partisanship which had to be considered when speaking for any group or cohort of women was a potential minefield. According to Levine, the issue of the Armagh women[40] “seemed to tear Irish feminists apart” (160), while Edna Longley considers the reluctance to open the "ever-problematic, ever-central issue of 'nationalism and feminism'" as partly symptomatic of a fear of "further division" (3). O'Toole and Connolly write that "paramilitary violence in any shape or as a means of achieving Irish unity was rejected by a significant majority within the women's movement" but they also note that "some activists in the South openly sympathised with the discriminations experienced by Northern Catholics throughout the period of the Troubles" and that "Republican feminism is undoubtedly a long-standing position in the history of the Irish women's movement" (146). This fragmentation of the women's movement from the 1980s onward, according to Ursula Barry, meant feminist groups were vulnerable to attack from the 'new right', emanating from the rise of American conservatism, and the effects of this counter-offensive was manifest in the conference of rights to the unborn child in the 1983 Anti-Abortion Referendum (8th Amendment to the 1937 Irish Constitution) and the defeat of the Divorce Referendum in 1986 (319). All of these factors make clear that being a feminist activist in 1980s Ireland was a fraught and at times unpopular path to follow. Writing and staging overt feminist performance work opened those involved to ridicule, as previously mentioned, intellectual opposition from some, and angry responses from those who objected to the movement's association with Irish nationalism, with extreme left-wing politics, anti-Catholic bias, support of gay and lesbian rights, and in some cases the basic tenet of equality for women.

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[39] See discussion of same in Kim Solga’s *Theatre and Feminism,* Palgrave Macmillan, 2016 and Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, “Feminist Futures and the Possibilities of ‘We’?”, *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory,* Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 1–16.

[40] In 1980-1 political prisoners in Armagh Women’s Prison staged a dirty protest, in response to withdrawal of Special Category Status, where they refused to wash, empty chamber pots or clean their cells.

Critically the record provided here of feminist responses to the state of Ireland at the time provides a contemporary and important material source of information regarding theatre history, feminist history and social and cultural history. An excavation of the 1980s has been very much to the fore in Ireland in recent times with respect to the cultural wars of that period, due to the revisiting of the 1983 Abortion Referendum in 2018 and also because the Gardaí have seen fit to apologise to Joanne Hayes, thirty-three years after the event, for their treatment of her during the Kerry Babies Tribunal (1985). The plays discussed in this chapter demonstrate that there was a valid feminist response and opposition to these events and others currently being re-remembered and debated in the media and academically today. The five plays analysed here in detail staged feminism: some overtly and provocatively as in Le Marquand Hartigan's *Beds*; some in an analogous but unambiguous plea for the dismantling of patriarchal hegemony, as in Walshe's *In the Talking Dark* and *The Stranded Hours Between*; some, like Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed*, by exposing the patriarchal institutions of church and state as misogynist, hegemonic systems which do untold damage to the vulnerable; and Burke-Kennedy's *Women in Arms,* which demands that women must be given the same opportunities as men within the system as it currently exists. Many other playwrights during the period also took up the challenges inherent in staging 'women's issues', making the personal political and putting female characters, historical or otherwise, centre-stage. Michelene Wandor, writing in 1984 of British Theatre, notes that: "The chief contribution being made by women writers at the moment is in foregrounding women as content; women performers, directors and designers are testing new relationships between female performers and audience" (91). Of the four playwrights critiqued in detail here, only one wrote familiar, mimetic drama; the other three staged music, movement and a Brechtian breaking of the fourth wall. All of them made theatre which embodied and reflected the message that women must be seen and heard[41], and indeed given a stage on which to romp.

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[41] *Seen and Heard* is the title of Cathy Leeney's anthology of plays by Irish women writers; Leeney notes in her introduction that "we have to move on from an idea of Ireland and Irish Theatre that is requiredly nationalist, masculine, and independent of connections with other countries, other cultures, other histories" (vii).

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Chapter Two: Staging the GUBU State; Farce, Satire and Protest Theatre in 1980s Ireland

> When I landed in the republic of conscience
> it was so noiseless when the engines stopped
> I could hear a curlew high above the runway (300).
>
> —Heaney, Seamus: “From the Republic of Conscience” (1987)

Introduction

Seamus Heaney, in his poem “From the Republic of Conscience”, describes the individualistic and lonely nature of being an ambassador of conscience: “You carried your own burden and very soon/your symptoms of creeping privilege disappeared” (*Opened Ground* 300). Much in Heaney’s poem resonates with the themes discussed in this chapter. His ‘dual citizenship’—as a ‘nationalist’ from Northern Ireland living in the Republic, and as a poet struggling with the responsibility of being assigned a political platform during difficult and divided times—aligns with a confliction and polarisation of identity during the period (*Opened Ground* 301).[42] He proposes alternatives or at the very least caution regarding the institutions of state: in his Republic “At their inauguration, public leaders/must swear to uphold unwritten law and weep/to atone for their presumption to hold office” (*Opened Ground* 301). In keeping with Heaney’s liminal Republic, this chapter foregrounds plays in which officialdom and protest intersect, a middle-ground or place of duality, where the state is held to account for its extreme and un-nuanced response to the conflict in Northern Ireland. My research, in its exploration and categorisation of the plays of the period, engages specifically in this chapter with playwrights who were struggling with the ‘state’ of Ireland at the time. It clearly identifies in their work an overarching concern regarding the erosion of civil liberties and human rights in the Republic of Ireland during the 1980s and highlights their stance against the prevailing national mood of the country as they staged work dealing with political issues of the period.

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[42] See Mark Carruthers’s discussion with Seamus Heaney regarding identity in the *Irish Times* 23 Jan. 2015.

A background section for this chapter sets the stage for the production and context of the plays analysed here, while a literature review engages with the various animated debates, theatrical, academic and political, which tried to make sense of the inherited and persistent hostilities defining the period. A table of political events lists the most critical of these, year by year throughout the decade, along with the corresponding published theatrical works, assessed with the use of information from the Irish Playography database (Appendix 1). The result of these investigations demonstrates that very few dramatists in the Republic were taking on the conflict in Northern Ireland or related tropes but in contrast this is not reflected north of the border where plays which overtly stage the conflict account for a majority of productions (see Appendix 1 for a list of the published plays from Northern Ireland and the Republic). Plays which challenge this generality of ignoring political issues are examined, including Peter Sheridan’s *Diary of a Hunger Strike*, Joe O’Byrne’s *The Ghost of Saint Joan* and William Trevor’s *Scenes from an Album.* Plays from the border counties, such as Frank McGuinness’s *Borderlands* and Eugene McCabe’s *Victims* are addressed separately here, as they speak from a liminal place and experience specific to that region. The primary analysis of this chapter however is focused on four plays: Thomas Kilroy's *Double Cross,* (1986), an exploration of Irish society's complicated and entrenched relationship with nationalism; Hugh Leonard's *Kill* (1982); Tom Murphy's *The Blue Macushla;* and Aidan Carl Mathews's *The Antigone* (1984). All challenge the Irish state—at times by aligning it with forces outside the law, usually paramilitaries—and accuse it of infringing upon the human rights of the Irish people by employing tactics synonymous with those of a police state. Postcolonial theory provides a theoretical framework within which to examine these plays and their contemporary reception in Ireland. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the plays' important converging themes, which point strongly to a real and insidious threat to democracy within the Irish state, a situation which has not had the retrospective historical consideration it deserves to date.

Analytical Focus and Background

The phrase GUBU, coined by Conor Cruise O'Brien in an *Irish Times* article in August 1982 in reference to a series of incidents involving double murderer Malcolm MacArthur and the Attorney General, seemed to equally fit other 'grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre and unprecedented' events of the 1980s, including the Kerry Babies Tribunal and Anne Lovett's tragic death in childbirth, alone at a Marian shrine. The primary analytical focus of this chapter rests on the plays and playwrights who most acutely reflect theatre's response to this apparent 'GUBU' state of Ireland; the four plays examined in detail in this chapter all undoubtedly do so. Thomas Kilroy, with *Double Cross* (1986), engages with the political and academic debates of the day, primarily the postcolonialist versus revisionist debate which very much defined the period, and with Irish society's complicated and entrenched relationship with nationalism. Hugh Leonard, with *Kill* (1982), Tom Murphy's *The Blue Macushla,* and Aidan Carl Mathews's *The Antigone* (1984) all challenge the status quo; essentially they accuse the Irish state of abusing its position of power and of infringing upon the human rights of the Irish people. They also point to corruption and a general reign of chaos during the period which undermined state security as much as any terrorist threat, real or existential. Controversially they do so by aligning the government with the anti-state forces to which it was opposed. All address their subject matter obliquely, by using distancing techniques such as Epic theatre, historical analogy or mythology, or by setting the plays in distracting fictional genres. The plays reflect the confusion and mistrust of authority which pervaded the decade; entering the political arena as playwrights in such a polarised time was always going to be controversial and ultimately coloured the reception and success of these theatrical works. The grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre and unprecedented 'state' of Ireland they staged was not a palatable or popular one.

While Ireland in the 1980s was facing into a very real terrorist threat, internally and from Northern Ireland, theatre from the Republic of Ireland was notably silent regarding the conflict in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless the shadow of the conflict can be discerned in certain plays' concerns with a growing authoritarianism. Colm Toibin, in a 2011 lecture, asks of Irish theatre in the 1980s:

> I wonder if I am right in believing that there was a feeling then that a new play could make a genuine difference to the country, that there was, then, a

> sort of openness and innocence in the society combined with a fierce suspicion of, and cynicism about, everything public (8).[43]

The Republic was responding to paramilitary violence and pro-IRA activity, while government support for the nationalist population in Northern Ireland had weakened considerably since the start of the conflict in 1968. The political situation in Northern Ireland remained deadlocked throughout the 1980s, which began with the IRA hunger strikes and ended with a new IRA campaign in Britain in 1989. Throughout the 1980s binaries existed in extremis: the political and sectarian division between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland however was not replicated south of the border, instead a historic nationalism was being severely challenged by the perceived current version. While Field Day Theatre Company, Charabanc Theatre Company and many Northern Irish writers engaged directly with sectarianism and the conflict, in the Republic of Ireland very few playwrights took up the challenge. A general feeling of apathy reigned in the Republic with respect to Northern Ireland, while at the same time Irish society's complicated and entrenched relationship with nationalism continued. The government responded to the threat of paramilitary violence with various policies which sought to increase the state's control over its citizens: the ongoing 1971 Broadcasting Ban and the contested 1984 Criminal Justice Act being examples. As the decade progressed the pervading public consensus privileged an anti-nationalist stance in response to the continuing atrocities committed by one side or the other in the sectarian war in Northern

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[43] Colm Toibin emailed a copy of this lecture to the researcher on 31 Jan 2018.

Ireland. This attitude closed down debate and facilitated acceptance of heavy-handed authoritarian responses to any anti-establishment activity.

Literature Review

This review of the academic and political writings on Ireland during the 1980s provides a background to my exploration of theatre during the period. The focus on postcolonial theory in the literature review allows for an examination of the only contemporaneous attempt to engage intellectually with Irish nationalism or Republicanism without a reactive blanket condemnation or a shutting down in response to Northern Ireland and the conflict. The themes of confusion and conflicted loyalties characterising reaction to the conflict and the predominant conflation of nationalism with paramilitary violence can be appropriately applied to Irish society as it was during the decade. The fallout from reactive policing policies and legislation, censorship and the implications of events such as the Kerry Babies Tribunal could only have a volatile and unsettling effect in general. The existence of armed and active paramilitary forces carrying out atrocities in Ireland and Britain meant people were living in a time of continuous crisis, a constant state of stress. The 1980s are situated in the middle of the period in Irish history referred to as the 'Troubles' (considered to start with the civil rights marches in Northern Ireland in 1968/9 and to conclude with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998) and understandably the period was dominated politically by attempts to find a peaceful solution to the situation.

Economic policies and social legislation were necessarily impacted by the impasse, with Terence Brown, in his social and cultural history of Ireland, asserting that the conflict in Northern Ireland become a central preoccupation for the political classes and the cultural sphere in the 1980s; he references *The Crane Bag*, *The Irish Review*, and Field Day Theatre Company as influencing thought both north and south of the border. It could be argued that this preoccupation was limited to those whose positions meant they had to directly deal with the conflict, and some members of the academic community; citizens in the Republic did not necessarily concur. Brown writes that the onset of protest and violence in Northern Ireland, in 1968 with the civil rights marches, was rooted in the six counties (267), clearly placing the birth of the conflict squarely in that region. He notes that once the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland gave notice that they were no longer content to remain in the Northern Irish semi-state, the Republic could not maintain its aim of attracting and facilitating reunification of the whole of the island of Ireland with a positive and outward-looking economic policy (268). The Irish government "maintained its commitment to economic and social progress, apparently ignoring when it could the commotion at its doorstep" (268). He adds that it was not the lure of material wellbeing which caused the Republic's disaffection from the Northern Irish situation but rather inertia when faced with the consequences of having to restructure their state to accommodate a new political order (269). I would argue that IRA atrocities must be considered when discussing the disengagement of the Republic in general.

The New Ireland Forum Report (1984), with its acknowledgement of the awfulness and extent of the human dimension to the conflict in Northern Ireland, challenged the prevalent attitude whereby the Republic hoped "the Northern-Irish problem could be isolated by a mental quarantine" (Brown 331). This 'quarantine' mindset is widely identified as such by academics and historians; while there was anger and a nationalistic reaction in the Republic of Ireland to the initial incidents which sparked the crisis in the late sixties and the early seventies, by time the conflict reached its third decade in the 1980s, empathy and support for the Catholic community in Northern Ireland was in short supply. The 1980s saw academics debate the root causes of the conflict in Northern Ireland, looking to postcolonial theory and identity politics to try to understand the violence and cultural divisions in Ireland at that time but critical thought, post the rise of revisionism in the late 1980s and 1990s, tended to dismiss these frameworks. Brown identifies the emergence of what became known as a revisionist approach to translating Irish identity, which challenged ideological dogma and fantasies of a peaceful Unionist acceptance of a united Ireland while critiquing republican nationalist historiography and the "literary version of Irish history that generated the 1916 Rising" (276). Conor Cruise O'Brien was among those who espoused such revisionist thinking and was criticised for his "iconoclastic handling of national sentiment", particularly his belief that Ireland would have achieved the same result had the Easter Rising and the literary revival not taken place, according to Brown, who takes issue with the unhistorical quality of Cruise O'Brien's writing (Brown 277).

The early 1990s saw a response to these debates with the publication of Field Day's counter attack on revisionist theory (in particular the work of Roy Foster) in their collection of essays *Revising the Rising* and, according to Brown, this:

> set the tone for what became in the 1990s a settled critique in which cultural theorists in the universities took as a given that historical writing was one

> discourse among many, which could not escape its imbrication with ideology (406).

Seamus Deane writes that revisionism "shows little or no capacity for self-analysis. Its own demolition of nationalism rebounds on itself" (7) and he notes that Field Day saw their art as "one in which the whole history of a culture is deeply inscribed" (*Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* 7). He accepts that this aim meant that it was necessary to engage with nationalism but not just with Irish nationalism; he sees British nationalism as the blueprint for Irish nationalism, "a copy of that by which it felt itself to be oppressed" (*Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* 8). This "contemporary colonialism" uses the "available idiom of religious division" to develop "an ideology of dominance and subservience" (*Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* 8). Deane sees the Republic as repudiating the nationalist revolution and embracing instead the "corporate 'international' opportunities offered by the European Economic Union and the tax-free visitations of international cartels" (*Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* 13-4). I would argue that this point highlights another difficulty with any manifestation of nationalism in the Republic during the 1980s: it became perceived as anti-progressive, a ball and chain preventing Ireland from moving away from recession and into a globalised market.

In his book, *Because We Are Poor* (2011), Victor Merriman returns to postcolonial theory as a framework to critique Irish theatre in the 1990s. He links the revisionist school of thought to a reluctance within academic institutions to debate anything that smacks of identity politics and also quotes Edward Said on Irish inclusion in the field of postcolonial studies: "One of the main strengths of postcolonial analysis is that it widens, instead of narrowing, the interpretive perspective, which is another way of saying that it liberates instead of further constricting and colonising the mind" (7). Possibly postcolonial studies are particularly adept at including the political and the cultural together, on an equal footing, when debating both local and global historical discourses. Eoin Flannery notes that for some the "very interdisciplinary architecture of postcolonial studies is grounds for its curt dismissal" and he acknowledges, in some contexts, its "nefarious re-affiliation of a retrograde nationalist heritage to an ostensibly respectable discourse" (*Versions of Ireland* 12). The counterpoint to Flannery's statement is that postcolonial studies provided a place where this 'national heritage' could at least be acknowledged and discussed during difficult times.

The absence of a response to the conflict in Northern Ireland from the artistic communities in the Republic and the apparent impossibility of staging realistic drama that reflected aspects of nationalism is indicative of the need for the Crane Bag's 'fifth province'.[44] Joe Cleary dates the emergence of postcolonial studies in Irish academia to the start of the 1980s—specifically he points to the staging of Friel's *Translations* as a seminal moment—and he notes the Field Day pamphlet series among other publications as important events contributing to the growing body of work on postcolonial studies (*Outrageous Fortune* 14-6). These studies asserted, he believes, that colonialism was not a remote historical phenomenon but was in fact a critical influence on Irish society up to the twentieth century and beyond. Discussing the period of the Northern Irish conflict, he sees their influence felt throughout the island of Ireland and the social climate in Ireland during the 1980s as blighted by “long economic recession . . . political deadlock, hunger strikes and military conflict in the North” (*Outrageous Fortune* 17). Certainly the colonial-or-not status of Ireland generated much writing, debate and argument, both north and south of the border and the debate continued overseas in American and British academic institutions throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Post-colonial intellectual David Lloyd, discussing cultural nationalism, asserts that “Ireland’s principal writers have almost all been remarkably recalcitrant to the nationalist project” and he sees the anti-representational tendency “constantly exceed the monologic desire of cultural nationalism, a desire which centres on the lack of an Irish epic” (*Anomalous States* 89). His points address some of the reasons so few playwrights in the Republic appear to have engaged fully with the conflict in Northern Ireland. Using a postcolonial approach to define Ireland as a cultural entity, he notes that because Ireland is an underdeveloped culture, it must turn to literature to express an “underlying unity” present in the “conflicting social forces” (91); here Lloyd is articulating some of the conflicts and contradictions present in the plays discussed in this chapter. Lloyd further notes that “[w]ith the possible exception of greenness, no quality has more frequently and repetitiously been attributed to Ireland than violence” (*Anomalous States* 125) and he discusses “two distinct understandings” of Irish violence (125). Within nationalist historiography, violence is “symptomatic of the unrelenting struggle of an Irish people forming itself in sporadic but unconnected risings against British domination” (125). For revisionist and imperialist histories, “[v]iolence is understood as an atavistic and disruptive principle counter to the rationality of legal constitution as barbarity is to an emerging civility, anarchy to culture (125). These and similar nuances and arguments were central to discussions surrounding the centenary commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising.

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[44] A concept created by Mark Patrick Hederman and Richard Kearney in their journal, *The Crane Bag* to provide a metaphorical space where diverse opinions and beliefs could be aired and listened to with mutual respect.

Lloyd engages here with the complex nature of Irish identity; by applying postcolonial discourse to a questioning of nationalism he allows for a subaltern mindset impacting on responses to the conflict in Northern Ireland. He states, controversially, that “from the perspective of dominant history, the subaltern must be represented as violence” and discusses the definition of subaltern, his own definition being one that could describe the Catholics of Northern Ireland, in that they were not represented and resisted the state (*Anomalous States* 127). Lloyd states that there are political stakes involved in assigning colonial status to Ireland as to do so is to deny the legitimacy of the British Government in Northern Ireland; in saying so he does not “confer automatic legitimacy on any armed insurrectionary movement” but he recognises in turn that the ‘violence’ of the state “belongs in its capacity to control representation, both political and cultural” (“After History; Historicism and Irish Postcolonial Studies” 48). Lloyd’s qualification of his assertion here is a case in point for the apparent requirement of anyone questioning the conflict from a nationalist perspective to distance their stance from those who use violence as a means to an end, and it also demonstrates why engagement with the conflict was so difficult for writers and artists in the Republic of Ireland. Must a total rejection of the use of violence in an (alleged or accepted) war situation then necessitate denial of the foundations of the Irish State? Kevin Whelan discusses the politics of postcolonial memory in his essay and writes that the question ‘who am I?’ links memory to identity; he makes the point that if violence, specifically in postcolonial situations, “is the originating moment in the mobilization of collective identity, cultural memory then becomes a storage system of violence, wounds, scars, anger." ("Between Filiation and Affiliation" 92).

The constant requirement to question the historical foundations and the language supporting any discussion on the conflict in Northern Ireland or the north/south divide accounts in great part for the highly politically charged atmosphere around these historiographical debates of the 1980s. Edna Longley challenges any clinging to "the notion that a 'good' or 'real' nationalism exists in some zone uncontaminated by the Provos"[45] (11). Richard Kearney furthers debates this point in his book *Postnationalist Ireland,* but applies more nuance to the term nationalist, writing that with the onset of the IRA's campaign in the 1970s the term 'republican' fell into disrepute: "Nationalism become the covering term for some eighty per cent of the electorate on the island of Ireland; while republicanism came to designate a non-democratic violent movement, often dubbed as terrorism by the media" (26). This became confusing the further one travelled from Ireland; the term republicanism held positive connotations for continental Europeans and indeed the cause of the Irish Republican Army was identified with "democratic liberation and self-determination" (Kearney 26). Kearney believes that the sins of nationalism (or being nationalist) have been exclusively associated with the Irish side, with English nationalism pretending it does not exist and "that the irrational and unreasonable claimants to sovereignty, territory, power, and nationhood are always others – Palestinians, Indians, Africans, Irish" (9). He quotes Hannah Arendt in *Crises of the Republic* stating that "as long as national independence and the sovereignty of the state are equated . . . not even a theoretical solution of the problem of war is conceivable" (17). Kearney warns that to go beyond a negative nationalism one must be wary not to succumb to the opposite extreme of anti-nationalism; to roundly condemn Irish nationalism and refuse to distinguish between its constitutional and non-constitutional parts, with no reference to the historical injustices of British colonialism and Unionism, "amounts to a tacit apologia of the latter" (58). These last points are central to Kilroy's themes in his play *Double Cross*, a work which dramatises these concepts by aligning opposing ideological extremes.

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[45] Provisional IRA

My discussion of the postcolonial versus revisionism debate here attempts to give academic voice to the conflicted outlook or opinion that defined Irish identity politics during the period. Flannery, discussing revisionism, details the critical interrogations of those who oppose the practices and agendas of postcolonial studies and the manifold shortcomings they perceive both within and around postcolonial studies including:

> Its apparent celebration of anachronistic nationalism; its vacant language games; culturalist bias; ostensible neo-colonial pretensions as a dominant academic orthodoxy; the careerism of postcolonial theorists; its apparent betrayal or relegation of classical Marxist praxis; its homogenising tropes and theoretical universalism; its veneration of abstraction over empiricism and its fetishisation of oppression (27).

Flannery associates the "proximity of violence, culture, history and politics on the island" (of Ireland) with the heightened charge of postcolonial studies in the period of the 1980s, 1990s and early twenty-first century. This, he believes, gave rise to the ideological clash between postcolonial critics and revisionist literary criticism. He quotes Roy Foster, historian, in an interview in 2001, as urging a rejection of “the victimhood package that has been responsible for a great deal of fuzzy thinking about Irish history and Irish identity” (29). Flannery also contests Stephen Howe’s (along with Liam Kennedy, Edna Longley, J. J. Lee and others) conviction, using empirical argument as evidence, that Ireland “fits the league tables or quantitative standards of Western Society” and was saved from “narrow-gauge Irish nationalism” by the economic, social and cultural modernisation of the recent past (31). This revisionist approach does appear to give a disingenuous impression of an easy transition to modernism and indeed is refuted by Flannery and by Joe Cleary, who see Ireland’s co-option into the mechanics of modernity accomplished via a traumatic colonial history; in addition Flannery takes issue with Howe’s absolving colonialism of ‘intentionality’ (32). Anne McClintock criticises the term post-colonial for its sense of premature self-congratulation, given the fact that there is “nothing ‘post’ about colonialism at all” for the inhabitants of Northern Ireland (87). The work of the playwrights discussed in this chapter does not in general have a revisionist bias or seek to forward a revisionist agenda, the legacy of the Irish literary theatre’s involvement in the formation of a national identity may still be felt too strongly. One exception is Leonard’s play *Kill* which reflects no such legacy and argues against the representation of Ireland as a postcolonial state; the idea that there should be public loyalty to any such ideology is presented as risible.

The ramifications of government policy in the Republic of Ireland during the period of the conflict in Northern Ireland are addressed by Mark O’Brien, where he writes of a “silencing project” in the Republic during the two decades in which the

Irish Broadcasting ban (Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act) was activated (48). The impact of this silencing of specific dissident or criminal voices on contemporary artistic communities must be included as a factor in any discussion on same; it is reasonable to expect that such censorship would colour, or indeed inspire, creative output, just as the plays discussed in this chapter advise of the existence of a special police force using extra-legal tactics in the Republic. O'Brien defines this project as a situation "whereby legislation or government policy makes citizens or media professionals wary of expressing a contrary opinion for fear of attracting a negative sanction or public odium" (48); I would argue it could very well have the same effect on playwrights and theatre-makers and is a very real manifestation of a kind of silencing by "perceived consensus" (48). O'Brien states that one of the consequences of the ban was that the disintegration of the Northern Irish state and the subsequent conflict became over-simplified in the public discourse, so that "even the mildest support for self-determination was viewed as tacit support for the IRA" (50). Ed Maloney points out that censorship made it more difficult to explain why people joined the IRA and killed in its name; people, he states, who were motivated "by personal experience, such as violence at the hands of the security forces, or by wrongs visited on their community by the security forces or the British Government" (108). The broadcasting ban, he believes, strengthened the view of people in Northern Ireland that only violence could change things, the refusal of the press to cover stories such as the Birmingham Six could be seen as proof that going through the system was a "waste of time" (109).[46]

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[46] The Birmingham Six were wrongly convicted of the Birmingham bombings of 1974. Their convictions were overturned and they were freed in March 1991.

According to O’Brien, there was little or no governmental debate in the Republic of Ireland as to the origins or underlying causes of the conflict or what would constitute an appropriate response and he notes a “siege mentality in the Southern body politic that became manifest in four areas”: “a belief that the conflict would engulf the South”; the Garda Síochána being given a free hand to discourage dissent; silencing of the media; and a “demonization of alternative viewpoints” regarding the conflict (50-1). He also discusses the re-introduction of the jury-less Special Criminal Court (1972) by Minister for Justice Des O’Malley on the basis that jury intimidation was a real threat (51). The Emergency Powers Bill (1976) followed, among other reactive legislation, allowing for the detention of individuals without charge for seven days. O’Brien also details how Section 30 of the Offences Against the State Act, which allowed the Garda to arrest someone on the suspicion of a crime, was used to discourage dissent (53). He notes that “in 1973, 271 people were arrested and 181 people were subsequently charged. In 1975, 607 people were arrested and 116 charged. The respective figures for 1977 are 1144 and 150, and for 1979 are 1431 and 169” (53). This disparity illustrates how the Section was abused by the Gardaí and used against “those who attended meetings and protests that the state viewed as undesirable” (O’Brien 53). This pattern was still evident as the 1980s progressed, for instance in the attitude of the Gardaí to protestors and activists during the H-Block hunger strikes, and was the subject of much criticism.[47]

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[47] Anti H-Block action groups were set up in Northern Ireland and the Republic to protest and to demand a resolution to the 1980/81 hunger strikes of Republican prisoners. The Gardaí Special Branch responded with harassment of activists, including constant surveillance, threats to inform employers that activists were members of illegal organisations, stopping and searching in public places, and arresting and holding activists overnight in police stations for putting posters on walls (all experienced personally by this researcher). It should be noted that the Gardaí had due cause for concern at times: for instance during a protest

Allegations of “systematic ill-treatment of individuals in Garda custody emerged” throughout the seventies and 1980s (O’Brien 53), with the Kerry Babies Tribunal set up to investigate a particularly egregious example.[48] O’Brien notes that: “By the late 1970s approximately 80 per cent of serious crimes were being ‘solved’ by confessions alone – many of which were later retracted in court” (53). The “cumulative effect” of all of the above was to “create and perpetuate a climate of silence and fear of expressing opinions or analyses that went against the pseudo-consensus that the only permissible and safe thing to say on the conflict was to condemn the IRA” (O’Brien 57), and additionally the Republic’s government “could only offer the most insipid responses to injustices such as the imprisonment of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, and the Dublin and Monaghan bombings” (O’Brien 58).

Irish Theatre and the State in the 1980s

Brown writes that Irish theatre had begun to break new ground in the 1970s, specifically in the four areas of sexual themes, religion, working class politics and republicanism and the Northern Irish conflict; he mentions Brian Friel, Thomas Kilroy and Tom Murphy as playwrights taking up these issues along with employing new theatrical techniques and approaches (305). By the 1980s Friel, and later Kilroy, were directors of the influential theatre company Field Day, which introduced a ‘Troubles’ agenda to Irish and British stages throughout the 1980s. Field Day’s analysis of the crisis in Northern Ireland derived from a “conviction that

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march to the British Embassy in July 1981rioters injured 150 Gardaí, provoking a baton charge in response.

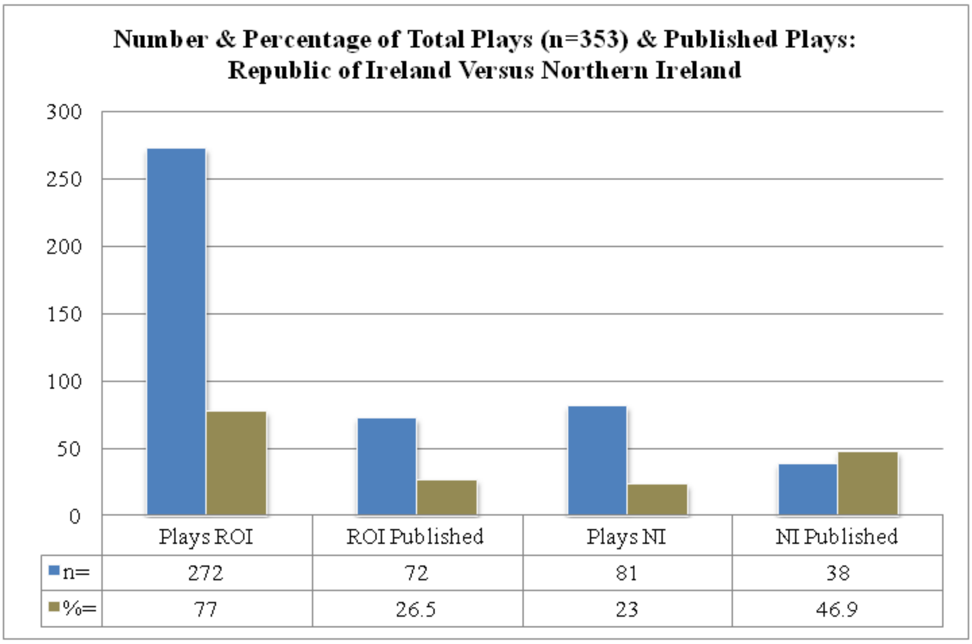
[48] See introduction for further discussion on the Kerry Babies Tribunal.

it is, above all, a colonial crisis", according to Seamus Deane, another director of the theatre company (6). Deane sees this position as an unpopular one, mostly associated with those committed to armed struggle. Martine Pelletier in *Irish Drama: Local and Global Perspectives* notes that five of the seven men who were directors of the company were global figures, namely Seamus Heaney, Friel, Stephen Rea and Deane, with Kilroy regularly having his plays performed outside of Ireland (25). She notes Rea saying "It was essentially, I guess, a political statement: we were northern but we belonged to the whole country" (24). Most of Field Day's productions in the 1980s also travelled to England, in particular to the Royal National Theatre and Hampstead Theatre (25). The publication of six pamphlets together in one volume, *Ireland's Field Day,* was taken on by the London publishing house Hutchinson, which had outlets in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa (28). Aidan O'Malley notes that "[i]n focusing on the issue of cultural identity and seeing it constitutive of politics, Field Day co-opted the outlook of nationalism", while still rejecting Ireland's conservative political form of nationalism (8). He sees Field Day's stance on postcolonialism as being applied to the crisis in Northern Ireland, with the plays "more successful at articulating, or performing" an enabling postcolonial politics than the pamphlets (9). He also notes that Field Day's performative construction of Irish identities ultimately undermines the "notion that an essential 'Irishness' exists"; and he posits the existence of a 'fifth province' which can only function as a political model when it is "understood as a translation without an original" (21). He writes of Edna Longley's revisionist criticism of Field Day as being a defence of the Northern Irish state and notes that this implies she views culture as a "Trojan horse" (23). In acknowledging that Field Day was extremely influential in terms of theatrical output and politically during the 1980s, it must also be recognised that its dominance drew international as well as national attention away from theatre in the Republic of Ireland and foregrounded a consciousness which was focused in Northern Ireland.

In this chapter however my intention is to redirect the spotlight away from Field Day, and others of the Northern Irish canon and shine it on plays and playwrights working south of the border; the following sections examine the plays that represent the Republic of Ireland's theatrical engagement with the state in 1980s Ireland, including responses to the conflict in Northern Ireland and governance in the Republic. Many of the plays addressed here are neglected in terms of publication, new productions or academic attention, and in part this can be attributed to their themes; the Republic was not, in general, hospitable towards plays about current political issues. Pilkington, in *Theatre and State*, discusses the Abbey's dilemma during the 1970s, when conflicting political agendas within the management of the theatre meant that "Policy makers were torn between the need to show that minority protest could be represented in the theatre . . . and concern lest, in the course of any such representation, the theatre itself might be used as a means of protest or as a forum for an alternative politics" (194-5). This sensitivity was still present throughout the 1980s. Christopher Murray, in *Twentieth- Century Irish Drama*, compartmentalises his analysis of plays with respect to plays about the conflict in his chapter "Playing The North", where he acknowledges that few plays written in the Republic of Ireland addressed the Northern Irish situation (200); he briefly examines Leonard's *Kill* and Murphy's *The Blue Macushla* under 'Political Allegory' (184-6). I would contend that while both plays are allegorical, and farcical in the case of *Kill*, they derive their focus from anger at the Republic's response to

Northern Ireland and the fallout on policing and governance in the Republic. Merriman, in his recent book *Because We Are Poor,* states his intention to offer critical readings of plays alongside the cultural and societal continuities and upheavals of the period (2). He states that his "engagement with 1990s theatre began as an effort to comprehend what Irish theatre might reveal about Irish society" and he then considers the role of theatre in "enabling a 'second republic'" (2-3). This statement feels close to the questions I will ask of theatre in the 1980s; my focus will be the Republic and will, I believe, address an overlooked and overshadowed period of Irish theatre.

Theatre in the Republic of Ireland, while it did not generally engage directly with the conflict in Northern Ireland, reflected the sense of alarm, confusion and unease which characterised the period. The timeline in Appendix One details a chronological account of the political events of the decade and a parallel listing of published theatrical output for the period. It demonstrates that, despite the unremitting campaign of violence throughout the decade, very few published plays in the Republic engaged with the inevitable fallout from those events of the period, while many published plays from Northern Ireland do. Also notable is the proportionally greater number of plays published in Northern Ireland, given the general population, see Figure 4.



	Plays ROI	ROI Published	Plays NI	NI Published
■n=	272	72	81	38
■%=	77	26.5	23	46.9

Figure 4: Breakdown of published and unpublished plays in numbers and percentages

Detailing published plays allows for a picture of what was considered popular and worthy of critique to emerge; in other words it highlights canonical engagement with certain plays. Not all of the plays were published during the 1980s but publication seems to certainly coincide with recognition, while unpublished plays understandably tend to be relatively unknown and unexamined.

Taking on the 'Troubles'

In 1983 Brian Friel and Thomas Kilroy facilitated a theatre workshop, in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre at Annaghmakerrig, for a number of emerging playwrights. Among them was Aidan Matthews, who kept a diary of sorts during his stay at Annaghmakerrig, and his notes are in Kilroy's archived correspondence. Mathews recounts how Friel, at an evening workshop where "much wine warms the atmosphere", took the participants to task: "There's a war going on two miles from here. A war. And what do you write about? Pool-halls, punk bands, suicide pacts. You shut your eyes to the most pressing and pertinent fact. Why?" Mathews ponders on the reasons why, as playwrights from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland is such an alienating and repelling subject matter: "The dramatist is an agent provocateur. He stirs up the crowd against the guilty party . . . And you can't do that in the North." (Thomas Kilroy, Papers of, 4). The plays that did challenge the prevailing mood in the Republic and engage with the conflict in Northern Ireland are detailed below.

Harrowed Land (1982) by Emelie Fitzgibbon, of Graffiti Theatre Company, is described by the author as being adapted from John Montague's poem and cross cut with one of his short stories. FitzGibbon also mentions another play she directed the year before, *Tom Paine,* also not extant, originally staged by La Mama, "where I trailed an image of a paramilitary as the final moment. It wasn't supportive or anything like that—heaven forbid— just posing a question about the idea of revolutionary violence".[49] *The Wind that Shook the Barley* (1981) by Declan Burke-Kennedy is also an adaptation; the original source of the play is one called *The Trespasser*, which he wrote in 1973 and which was awarded best new play in the Dublin Theatre Festival, directed by Deirdre O'Connell.[50] It is described on Playography as "a study of the effects of the threat of violence on those who would wish to remain neutral" and tells the story of a couple living in isolation in the West of Ireland who receive a unwelcome visit from a young man and older woman; this intrusion brings tensions in their own relationship to a head. Burke-Kennedy maintains it was not so well received because of the political atmosphere of the time.[51] There were a number of versions of *Antigone* written during the 1980s, including two by Brendan Kennelly and Aidan Carl Mathews. Mathews’s version is analysed in detail later in this chapter, Kennelly’s in Chapter One. William Trevor’s *Scenes from an Album* (1981), which dealt directly with Northern Ireland and the long-standing inheritance of conquest and colonisation, premiered in the Abbey Theatre. The play begins in 1610 when a planter named Eustace Malcolmson wins and retains a plot of Ulster land, declaring “You love the land you win in battle. The blood of your comrades soaks the warm grass” (7). The play’s setting then moves to the twentieth century, where his ministerial family are still in situ despite terrible misfortune and a plague of sectarian killings. The incumbent heir, also named Eustace, drinks to forget the awfulness of the past while his sisters hold everything together; they appear to be exempt from the wrath of the local populace because, as Honoria says, “women are silly” and not worth killing (55). The play ends on a note of hope, which Trevor may have felt was necessary to make some sense of the doomed nature of his characters’ lives: “And hereabouts the birds, you know, have not yet ceased to sing” (69). The play met with a very mixed reception. Fintan O’Toole in *In Dublin* considered it a very important play (*Critical Moments* 9). Michael Sheridan in the *Irish Press* described it as an “excruciating bore”, finding the Northern Irish problem was dealt with in an obscure manner; in the *Evening Press* Con Houlihan spoke of it staging a “world beyond the present obscene cycle of death” (11). Tim Harding in the *Sunday Press* brought things back reductively to the current time: “Trevor seems to be saying a fairly crude: ‘Brits Out’” (18).

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[49] Email to this researcher from Emelie Fitzgibbon, 2nd June 2016.

[50] *Trespassers* was a one-act play (an hour) which Kennedy later developed into *The Wind that Shook the Barley,* for the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1981 (Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy, on behalf of Declan, emailed this information, 7 July 2016).

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[51] Email to this researcher from Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy, 7 July 2016.

Jennifer Johnston addressed Northern Ireland, and the way in which its populace is viewed from the Republic of Ireland, in her play *O Ananias, Azarias and Misael* which premiered in the Peacock in 1988. The play is a monologue featuring a widowed Northern Irish woman whose husband Billy joined up and died as a paramilitary. Christine reflects on the unwillingness of her relatives in the Republic to come north or even to welcome her down to the relative safety of their homes, particularly now that she is contaminated by association with Billy. Peter Sheridan wrote *Diary of a Hunger Strike* (1982) in direct response to the 1981 IRA H-Block hunger strikes where ten men died of self-imposed starvation. Produced by Hull Truck Theatre Company, England, Sheridan wrote the play at the behest of Yorkshire director Pam Brighton, who went on to direct it when it played in Hull. According to Sheridan, Brighton wanted something to unsettle the British public (*Break a Leg* 257). He also describes how he had been contacted, in a cloak and dagger style by a communication written on cigarette paper delivered to his house, and asked to raise his voice for the protesting prisoners because they had been deprived of theirs (*Break a Leg* 259). Sheridan conducted research in Belfast organised by the Association for Legal Justice and visited the H-Block prison. His subsequent first draft however turned into a play about the Conlons, who were falsely arrested for the Guildford bombing.[52] Brighton rejected it: “Bobby Sands is the new Che Guevara. The British public need to know why he did it and how he did it.” (263) The impression given by Sheridan in his autobiography is that the target audience for his play was clearly going to be the British public, and that his impetus for writing it was to create “something human, an emotional story about people caught up in a tragedy that could, and should, have been avoided”, however he notes that Brighton was excited at the prospect of controversy and media attention (*Break a Leg* 264-5). When the play finished in Hull, Sheridan looked to Dublin for a venue but met with a lack of interest from the theatres there; it was turned down by Michael Colgan for the Dublin Theatre Festival, much to Sheridan’s disgust. His complaints to the *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* about such alleged censorship were carried by the newspapers but not in a manner favourable to Sheridan (*Break a Leg* 304). The play continued on to Edinburgh and London but Brighton had made changes for the London production, foregrounding a Marxist analysis, according to Sheridan, which showed the source of the hunger strikers’ anger to be the social conditions they had endured rather than one of political or cultural identity (*Break a Leg* 306).

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[52] The Guilford bombings took place in October 1974 and the Conlons were among those wrongly arrested and convicted of the bombings.

One of Sheridan’s prisoner characters discusses what made him join the IRA (something he did on the same day that he left the Catholic Church): he was interrogated by the police (the RUC) and needed to find “an alternative to stop that ever happening again. The RA was the only alternative I could see.” (*Dialann Ocrais* ATDA 25). This declaration asserts Sheridan’s intention for the prisoners’ motives to be other than economic. Sheridan’s depiction of the prisoners is visceral, both in terms of showing the horror of the physical situation in which they were living and in terms of staging the brutality that was part of prison life in the H-Blocks: the first act, for instance, ends with a violent body search (*Dialann Ocrais* ATDA 60). The only venue at this time (1982) which would stage the play was the Belltable Arts Centre in Limerick. Five years later it was staged again, on the

Peacock stage in 1987, where it played as a bilingual version titled *Dialann Ocrais - Diary of a Hunger Striker*. Sheridan notes that the initial reviews for the play in Hull in 1982 centred on the male nudity and the fact that "one of the male characters, Sean Crawford, took a piss on stage" (*Break a Leg* 302). Reviews for the Peacock's production in 1987, for instance in *The Phoenix* and the *Sunday World,* heralded the appearance of "Glenroe Hunk David Herlihy" (Abbey Theatre 17-8).[53] However in general the play elicited a generous and thoughtful response in 1987, with David Nowlan in the *Irish Times*—"'Diary of a Hunger Strike' in the Peacock" 6 Feb. 1987—writing that the play "impresses by its even handed treatment of the forces and protagonists involved" (Abbey Theatre Archive 12), while Colm Toibin in the *Sunday Independent*—"Powerful H-Block Drama", 8 Feb. 1987—finds that the play "doesn't over-sentimentalise, distort or exploit what happened in the H-Block" (Abbey Theatre Archive 13).

Joe O'Byrne uses an historical female warrior and defender of faith as a key figure for his engagement with the Northern Irish conflict. He and Declan Gorman founded Co-Motion Theatre Company in 1985 and their play, *The Ghost of Saint Joan*, deals directly with the politics of Northern Ireland, from both a current and a historical perspective.[54] Joan is a constant reminder in the play of how the ghosts of the past haunt the present re-occurrence of sectarian bitterness. She also represents a pre-reformation figure, from a time before the split between the two strands of Christianity. The play was first performed in the Black Church in Dublin for the

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[53] *Glenroe* was a popular soap opera on RTE, set in rural Ireland.

[54] A copy of *The Ghost of St. Joan* was sent to this researcher by Joe O'Byrne by email on 20 July 2016.

1989 Dublin Theatre Festival and uses a site-responsive approach to its surroundings, with audience participation encouraged. Chanting and singing, clowns and physical theatre, a teleological timeframe and techniques such as loudspeakers presenting information, fracture any coherent storyline and force the political themes to the forefront of the performance. Children are part of the production; their childish sectarian rhymes highlight the source of the hatred as atavistic and generational, while their physical presence reminds the audience of the vulnerability of victims of the conflict. In order to understand the background of the historical characters it would be necessary to have some knowledge of Ulster Unionist hagiography but the play moves quickly forward to recent events when actors carrying civil rights banners beg to be housed in fitting accommodation, a situating of the genesis of the contemporary conflict in the civil rights issues of the late 1960s and to discrimination which was primarily felt by the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. Joan reminds the audience at the end of act one that she is both religious icon and fighter as she declares “There is but one and all sufficient remedy, the edge of the sword. No, I am not alone” (15).

Scene two enacts various moments from the history of the conflict in Northern Ireland: the initial welcome of the British soldiers deployed on the streets; the house raids; a tarred and feathered victim speaks; and Bloody Sunday is re-enacted, with each victim named and the place where they died identified. O’Byrne introduces Padraic Pearse followed by James Connolly, whose Labour affiliation is referenced by the striking Ulster Workers Council. O’Byrne weaves the past through the recent present: Connolly is shot as the play comes to its conclusion, while Pearse repeats his funeral oration speech and, as Joan burns once again, a cacophony of voices rises up crying “no surrender” and other well-worn militaristic and martyrdom tropes. As the play finishes, the sound of a helicopter is heard and a searchlight picks out the audience, implicating them and returning them to present day Ireland. Reviews for O’Byrne’s play were generally very positive and obviously appreciative of the non-partisan focus of his work; both sides in this conflict are portrayed as equally entrenched and resolute in this dialectical drama following Shaw and Brecht. The reviews also reflect the interactive nature of the piece, where the audience were not seated and at times “are spectators but at others victims and participants in the action” (O’Byrne 1). O’Byrne’s staging techniques were also a focus of reviews, including the situating of the play in the Black Church venue, a place which is rumoured to have demonic associations in local lore, the use of multiple media techniques such as the loudspeakers, recorded sounds of street fighting, music and his breaking the fourth wall by ‘arresting’ the audience and illuminating them with searchlights. Seamus Hosey in the *Sunday Tribune* calls the production “a vivid theatrical kaleidoscope reflecting the past twenty years of the violent history of Northern Ireland”.[55] Victoria White in the *Irish Times* considers that Co-Motion’s immersive techniques, in terms of overwhelming the audiences’ senses with sound, and images, convey “the agony and confusion of the Troubles far more effectively than any kitchen sink/rubber bullet ‘realistic’ drama ever has” (14). Only one reviewer, Patricia Sharkey in the *Irish Press*, doesn’t allow for O’Byrne’s nuanced presentation of the conflict, calling her review “Irish Republican politics explored” (16). The playwright, when asked by this researcher about the response to the play given its subject matter, noted that their theme may have unsettled their sponsors—“many believing those who chose plays about the north must be Provo supporters”—and they “had some difficulties with actors during the rehearsal, who believed they could be doing Provo propaganda”[56]. However the didactic Brechtian approach taken by O’Byrne, along with the foregrounding of a historical—and therefore less emotionally charged—perspective, seems to have rendered the play less controversial and more palatable for an audience in the Republic than some other plays examined here.

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[55] The reviews were sent to this researcher along with a copy of the play on 20 July 2016 by the author, Joe O’Byrne; there is no page number or archival record of this particular review.

The Border Counties

‘The Border’ in the Irish context refers to the regions adjacent to the dividing line between Northern Ireland (i.e. the six counties) and the Republic; an area which has seen some of the worst of the events of the conflict. The border weaves its way through 360 kilometres of verdant Irish countryside and small border towns, crossing streams and rivers, running through villages, dividing the Republic of Ireland from Northern Ireland. The partition is not a physical presence anymore, although it still exists politically and legally and in many ways its impact is not diminished by its lack of walls, barricades and barbed wire. In a post-Brexit world its physical manifestation may indeed return. In the 1980s, however, the border was manifest in border controls, manned by both the Republic and Britain, and during that period the illegal smuggling of goods synonymous with borders everywhere included a trade in weapons of war and people. Geographic proximity or distance from this border, I will assert, impacted on what constituted the tone and theme of the Irish political play in the 1980s.[57] The geographical 'green' border, as Eberhard Bort writes, had a complementary picture in the 1980s: the "official border posts, approved crossings, harassment, the presence of the Army, fortifications reminiscent of the Iron Curtain" (260). Edna Longley, writing in 1989, sees recent fiction and drama from the southern border counties as exceptional given that it "contains two-way perspectives from a neglected limbo and source of light" (12). She compares this to what she believes to be Field Day's "re-imported Nationalist propaganda" (speaking about their *Saint Oscar* production specifically), stating that Friel's drama and Deane's critical writings contain "a powerful sense of Palestinian dispossession. The alienation of Friel's Ballybeg is utterly different from the post-Nationalist alienation of Tom Murphy's *Bailegangaire*." (12). Two playwrights, Frank McGuinness and Eugene McCabe, writing in the 1980s, are examined here as representing the dichotomy of border living, where at times it must have seemed like the worst of both worlds.

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[56] Email to this researcher from Joe O’Byrne, 10 October 2016.

Frank McGuinness was born in the border county of Donegal and wrote extremely prolifically during the 1980s; his work includes adaptations of Lorca and Ibsen, while a number of his plays engage with the politics of Northern Ireland, moving around it rather than staging the reality of the time; his protagonists are characters from all sides and ideologies. *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* was much lauded when it premiered in the Peacock in 1985, with O'Toole in the *Sunday Tribune* calling it an important play, writing that "McGuinness has found a way of looking at the Protestant presence in Ireland through wider and more universal events – those of the First World War" (*Critical Moments* 34). Lisa Fitzpatrick however problematises this reception of *Observe* when she points out that McGuinness's map of Irish identity, while it includes both nationalism and loyalism, does not interrogate the customary identification of these political stances with Catholicism and Protestantism respectively ("Nation and Myth" 173). *Observe* was revived by the Abbey in 1994 to respond to "changes in the political divisions of north and south, and to mark the paramilitary ceasefires" according to Emily Pine (147), and for the centenary commemorations of 2016 the play was performed in the very place where McGuinness set the drama, the Somme at the Ulster tower, where the 36th Ulster Division met their fate one hundred years ago with the loss of 2,000 lives. The 2016 production toured Britain and Ireland, with Fiach MacConghail of the Abbey explaining in an *Irish Times* article that "In the South, people think the problem is solved. It isn't. Integration between the communities hasn't happened, or is happening very slowly." (Lara Marlowe online). McGuinness's other overtly political play of the 1980s, *Carthaginians* (1988), features a fey and humorous script in a graveyard setting, using non-realism and metatheatricality (a play within a play) to stage a broken community dealing with the repercussions of Bloody Sunday. The dominant theme in *Carthaginians* is one of redemption and catharsis, brought about by Dido, whose outsider status as a young gay man allows him facilitate the others in dealing with their trauma and grief. McGuinness makes very clear the effects of Bloody Sunday on his protagonists and on the city of Derry/Londonderry. Bort notes of Frank McGuinness that the "Borderlands which formed him" featured in *Factory Girls* (1982), a play set in a Donegal shirt factory where the economic pressures on industry in an isolated border region are addressed (270). Bort considers Vincent Woods's *At the*

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[57] In this chapter a 'political' play refers to plays engaging with the state, the conflict in Northern Ireland and related issues.

Black Pig's Dyke (1992) and Michael Harding's *Hubert Murray* (1993) as examples of "1990s treatment of Border violence" but for the purposes of confining my research to the 1980s neither play is critiqued here (271).

McGuinness's *Borderlands* (1984) was written for young adults under the TEAM initiative and played in schools all around Ireland and is unsparingly scathing of official Irish attitudes in the Republic towards Northern Ireland and its citizens. In the play four youths, two Protestant and two Catholic, set off on a charity walk: "marching to Dublin for the Third World" (158). Problems accompany them from the start of their walk; the sectarian divisions in their group mean they are reluctant to embark on such a journey with boys from 'the other side' but McGuinness inserts plenty of symbolic hope throughout the play: the shared tent, the shared games and wicked humour. The arguments between them develop however as they proceed on their journey, with the clash between Scott and Rocky becoming particularly bitter and cumulating in Rocky telling Scott his father deserved to be murdered by a car bomb (179). When the boys reach the Republic they encounter southern indifference and prejudice in the person of Vonnie, a landowner on whose land they attempt to camp, and the "State-authoritive form" of the Republic in the "brutish and ignorant" guard that Vonnie calls to help evict them (Bort 269). McGuinness doesn't pull punches when depicting the guard as acting with excessive brutality and given the young age of the target audience this is surprising. The guard tells the boys "This country's civilised. No packs of savages blowing the brains out of each other" (181) and ultimately Vonnie regrets calling him. Eventually she turns on the guard, telling him "We still have ones over you in this country", a strong anti-establishment message to spread among school children and indicative of the awareness of the rogue elements existing in the Garda Síochána. The director of TEAM, Martin Drury, notes that the guard is "frighteningly real . . . in the way he gives expression to the institutional violence and the perversion of language embodied in the Criminal Justice Bill"[58]; the bill was being debated in the Dáil during the play's tour (151). According to Brian Cliff, the boys unite around the shared external threat represented by the guard, "by their collective difference from the Republic", which exposes the relationality of their divisions (11). This scene also proposes a "turning away from the North" by the Republic (Vonnie) but Cliff sees it emphasising "the disillusionment and consequent withdrawal of the Northern boys" (12). The play does not end neatly, the tension between the boys remains and is split down sectarian lines: Fluke's rendition of *God Save the Queen* is heard in competition with Laser's *We're on the One Road* as the boys make their way back behind the border. One of the claims made for the play by TEAM is that they wished to stage and tour a play which would alert young people in the Republic of Ireland to the need to do their own thinking and not accept the belief of the previous generation. The play certainly stages a theme that other plays here also embrace: that of insidious corruption and brutality within the forces of the state in the Republic.

Eugene McCabe is a playwright from Monaghan, another border county; he wrote a 1981 play based on an earlier book and television play of the same name, *Victims*, both of which stage the conflict in Northern Ireland. McCabe writes about an IRA squad who are on a mission to hold hostage a Protestant family in order to secure the release from prison of some of their comrades. McCabe’s dramatic form is more in dialogue with the plays of the Northern Irish canon dealing with similar issues and also with Sean O’Casey’s male/female binaries.[59] His male characters are hardened bigots from both sides of the sectarian divide while his female characters, particularly Bella Lynam, the IRA activist, and Harriet Armstrong, one of the Protestant victims of the hostage-taking, provide the emotional and moral focus of the play. Bella wears her fears and sensitivities on her sleeve while in contrast the IRA men do not show fear; indeed Gallagher, a sexist misogynist brute, seems to revel in the situation. As the drama progresses we learn that Lynam has been placed on active service as a punishment for aborting the baby of Burke, an IRA commander. The playwright’s rationalising of Lynam’s involvement with the kidnapping therefore is juxtaposed alongside her decision to carry out an act which at this particular time in Ireland was mired in controversy; one feasible implication being that Lynam is traumatised by the abortion and subsequent bullying and these events excuse her involvement with the crime. Harriet is a lone empathetic depiction among the Protestant hostages: Alex and Colonel Plumm are unashamedly bigoted and speak of their Catholic neighbours in a derogatory manner. This clichéd depiction of Protestant ascendency characters is not in line with a more politically sensitive theatre in the Republic; *Victims* premiered in the Lyric. McCabe appears to mix thriller tropes with more than a touch of Hollywood Irish nostalgic characterisation, but the text does not deploy self-reflective awareness or apply distancing dramatic techniques to alleviate these mawkish elements; it remains melodramatic in tone. Eileen Battersby in an *Irish Times* review of McCabe's collection of stories including *Victims* and *Heaven Lies About Us,* writes "The only humanity gracing these stories is that which McCabe confers on Harriet, the despairing hostage truth-teller in 'Victims'" (13).

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[58] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie Criminal Justice Act, 1984.

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[59] Discussed by Christopher Murray, for example, in *Twentieth Century Irish Drama,* in a chapter entitled ‘“A Modern Ecstasy”: Playing the North’.

Staging Debate; Postcolonialism in Kilroy and Leonard

Analysis of Thomas Kilroy's *Double Cross* and Hugh Leonard's *Kill* allows for a greater understanding of political and public responses to the turbulent events of the 1980s in Ireland. Kilroy in *Double Cross* overtly addresses the ambiguous nature of Irish nationalism and additionally invokes the legacy of British imperialism and colonialism in the damaged personas of his two protagonists, Brendan Bracken and William Joyce. This places his play firmly in dialogue with academic debate in the 1980s centred largely on the theoretical appropriateness of applying either a postcolonial or a revisionist framework in order to understand both the here and now and the history of the country. Field Day largely appropriated the postcolonial viewpoint and used it to underpin thematic approaches in their plays and in the many pamphlets and articles they wrote and published. Thomas Kilroy joined the board of Field Day in 1988, the only southerner to do so, but his play *Double Cross* was staged for the company in 1986; it engages with the themes Field Day were interested in exploring, on stage and before an audience. In an introduction to *Double Cross*, Kilroy states that he "wanted to write a play about nationalism" and indeed the play does engage with convoluted and contradictory versions of nationalism, staging as it does identity politics of an extreme nature (12-3).

Double Cross was first performed by Field Day in the Guildhall in Derry and addresses themes of treason, oppression and racism, as well as those of nationalism and a postcolonial legacy manifesting in destructive self-hatred. Bracken and Joyce are Irish men by descent who submerge their Irish identities/ancestries in murky pools of untruths and half-truths so that they can re-invent themselves and gain freedom through “distance and space” (*Double Cross* 34). Bracken left Ireland as a young man and ingratiated himself into English high society with the pretence that he was a born and bred Englishman. Kilroy implies, through a long monologue by a character called Lord Castlerosse discussing Bracken, that in reality most of Bracken’s English peers knew that he was Irish and tolerated him despite of this because of his larger-than-life persona: “the flamboyant Celt, . . . a red-haired golliwog” (37). Bracken’s internalised racism is exposed in his use of anti-Irish invective to describe Joyce, he calls him a “Vulgar little shit from Connemara . . . You know the kind of Paddy” and implies that Joyce’s lower-class Irishness is as contemptible as his anti-Semitism, fascist intolerance and treason (22). The snobbish and racist aspect of Bracken’s adoption of Britishness is highlighted when he quotes Edmund Burke lauding a British inheritance as desirable and then turns incandescent with rage at the mention of Gandhi and his desire to “dismantle the Empire”; the parallel with subaltern Ireland and “Peasants in the field” is one he cannot bear and one that Kilroy was aware equally incensed academics leaning towards a revisionist historiography of Ireland (44). Lord Castlerosse also makes the association with nationalism and the working classes, declaring “Everyone thought at the time that the only problem with Hitler was that he was frightfully common” (39). Joyce also detests the country in which he grew up, refusing refuge on the west coast of Ireland when attempting to escape Germany after the war: “I refuse to go there . . . I will not be condemned to a living death" (80). With the intent of punishing England for its failure to recognise his supremacy, he and his English-born wife Margaret become supporters of the fascist regime in Germany. As the infamous Lord Haw Haw, Joyce nightly invents an England on its knees in order to disconcert his British radio listeners, and they in turn daily disseminate his propaganda, in effect re-inventing William Joyce. This, the Actress tells us is what is known as "the Double Cross Effect" (62).

Double Cross is one of the most extensively critiqued of Kilroy's plays, with academics and theatre-writers analysing the play in terms of its theatrical themes and techniques—the Brechtian distancing and Kilroy's intricate mirroring devices—as much as for its political and thematic content. Christopher Murray, Thierry Dubost, Martine Pelletier, Nicholas Grene, Hiroko Mikami and Anna McMullan all contributed to the *Irish University Review (IUR)* Special Issue on Thomas Kilroy where they address *Double Cross* in their analyses. Grene makes a coherent argument for the presence and exposition, in Kilroy's plays, of the inner life of the mind as well as the outer political person. In common with all of the writers in the *IUR*, he notes that the play's thematic content addresses the Field Day mission by being "informed by the ideas of postcolonial theory" (75). Mikami states that Kilroy's interest in "the deformities of nationalism" explains his choice of protagonists in the play; Kilroy is pointing out the dangers of having a narrow concern with nationalism but because *Double Cross* is a history play we benefit from the "distance" provided (105). McMullan discusses the play using a framework of gender and performance theory, finding that even in Kilroy's theatre of non-realism women are firmly located in the realm of realism and this draws attention to "their lack of autonomous agency and removes or excludes them from the possibilities of imaginative or aesthetic invention or innovation" (136). To further develop this point it can be noted that most of the plays in this chapter invest their female leads with a realism and sensibility lacking in the males: Leonard's Madge, Murphy's Roscommon and Mathews's Antigone all represent a pragmatic and grounded morality in contrast to the damaged psyches surrounding them. McMullan posits that Joyce's and Bracken's experience of being colonial subjects is at the root of their racism and anti-Semitism and this "leads them to abject all those who, like their fellow Irish, are on the outside of power" (131). Dubost in the IUR, examines *Double Cross* in the context of how "battlegrounds of the self come to have a meaning in the plays" (10), pointing out that both protagonists primarily wish to eradicate their Irish origins and he asserts that Kilroy is declaring this role-playing "probably results from the moral and social features of the country, which have been coloured by the colonial past of Ireland" (17).

Dubost, in his monograph on Kilroy, *The Plays of Thomas Kilroy: A Critical Study*, raises the lack of a Manichaean viewpoint in dealing with the Second World War theme, a point also addressed by Pelletier in the IUR who notes the seemingly ambiguous morality in pitting two different political systems against each other, as *Double Cross* does, without any apparent censure (114). Dubost clearly finds the play's "flagrant, undifferentiated reprobation brought to bear upon Churchill and Goebbels or George V and Hitler" as problematic from the perspective of historical accuracy and he speaks at some length about the message conveyed by the play and his questioning of Kilroy on this point in the course of an interview he conducted with the playwright (62-3). He allows that the playwright is not validating or justifying the conflict insofar as both characters share values of hatred with the face of English fascism in Mosley “which marks their commitment with the seal of infamy” (63). Kilroy, in an interview with Dubost and Paul Brennan, replies to Dubost’s questioning him about his seeming conflation of the two opponents in the Second World War that “the kind of black and white, stereotypical morality is totally inadequate to account for human behaviour” (Brennan 10). Kilroy is speaking from an Ireland at the time where just such a black and white mentality appeared to be the prevailing attitude. In addition, by clearly portraying his characters’ motivations as stemming from their experiences of colonialism, he is morally paralleling British imperialism with the fascist regime in Germany. The same point is again picked up by Michael Billington in the *Guardian* who comments that the play stands out for its biting and provocative intelligence but, while there are obvious parallels between the two men, he finds Kilroy’s attempt “to equate them morally questionable” and he goes on to assert that Kilroy’s play “in its quest for intellectual and spiritual links between its twin protagonists, obscures the blindingly obvious point that one of them was committed to defeating the Nazis, the other to endorsing them.” (11). Critically it is this lack of a Manichean viewpoint which provides the central theme of Kilroy’s play, a theme which appears to have been misunderstood by many, including the academics and journalists quoted above. Kilroy was writing of and from the Republic during the 1980s and his intent in paralleling (though not equating) two opposite sides in the Second World War is to highlight the ambiguous, contradictory nature of nationalism, something which defined the 1980s in the Republic of Ireland. Due to the actions of paramilitaries during the conflict in Northern Ireland it became anathema in Ireland, but particularly south of the border, to approach nationalism with anything less than outright condemnation. Kilroy's blurring of the lines between the two characters and their allegiances in *Double Cross* aligns with Field Day's exploration rather than outright condemnation of nationalism as a concept; his inclusion of colonialism in the play as another layer in humanity's geography is also clearly in dialogue with Field Day's philosophy.

In my analysis of the four plays under discussion here it is clear that an ambiguous and porous paralleling of state and anti-state fascism/nationalism/colonialism are common themes and evidently the playwrights struggle with both condemnation of extremes of nationalism and attempts to understand the source and its relativity. Or as Bracken would have it: "It's odd, isn't it, that patriotism and treason may be fuelled by the same hunger for space" (34). The mirroring of Bracken and Joyce highlights the relationship between extremes of adherence to an ideology (nationalism/fascism) and a complete denial of one's roots. As Kilroy notes in his introduction "To base one's identity, exclusively, upon a mystical sense of place, upon the accident of one's birth, seems to me a dangerous absurdity. To dedicate one's life to the systematic betrayal of the same notion seems to me just as absurd." (12-3). *Double Cross* also foregrounds other political issues, for instance the censoring of the IRA and other paramilitaries with Section 31, i.e. the Broadcasting ban. Joyce, the ultimate propagandist, describes Bracken as "the man who censors and determines the flow of information to the British people during this quite unnecessary war" (23), while Bracken announces to the British public "This is England, not Germany where people are put behind bars for listening to the BBC. That's not our way of doing things" (63). Bracken's early scene, where he juggles numerous phone handsets, demonstrates his mastery of the art of insincere flattery and persuasion and feeds into the general trope of political double-speak employed by Kilroy throughout the play (30). The total ban in the Republic on the broadcasting of certain dissident or criminal voices meant that the lack of a stage on which to perform their roles limited opportunity to propagandise. On the other hand, as O'Brien points out, this ultimately meant that "the IRA never had to account for its actions or place its activities in a political rather than a military context" (57). Once again Kilroy exposes the contradictions inherent in the Republic of Ireland's response to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Both men talk incessantly and at times incoherently, because their lives depend and exist on their ability to create their false personas with words. To quote Bracken, "Words refined the hanging jaw". His lover Popsie displays her disregard for his ramblings: "Every time I try to reach you, yet another Brendan is talked into existence. Like a distracting mushroom. Very disconcerting." (35). When Joyce's wife Margaret betrays him with her pupil Erich they argue and Margaret's relief is heartfelt when, after twenty-four hours of non-stop talk, "Finally it stopped. That sickening spill of words. I thought I should never hear that voice stop" (75). Both women, speaking from their realistic viewpoints, refuse to take seriously the propaganda and untruths which the men constantly spout. McMullan points out that the women confront the men's duplicity and therefore have the moral advantage but not however the "transformative potential of the mask" (132).

Kilroy's two talking heads emote about their obsessions while the war carries on and deaths mount up. Kilroy's final scene in *Double Cross* has Bracken and Joyce realise that in their core parts they are one: Bracken seeks his brother in the prison where Joyce awaits his execution, searching for a man with the "face of a condemned people" (89). The 'Lady Journalist' then relates her memories of the trial of William Joyce to the audience. In a parallel reality Rebecca West, a journalist who attended Joyce's trial and appeals in London in 1945, writes of the convoluted and opaque background history that the legal teams defending and prosecuting at this trial needed to investigate in order to establish if Joyce was actually treasonous or not (in *The Meaning of Treason*). Born an American citizen, an Irish man by descent but an Irish loyalist, British by citizenship and similarly so German, Joyce's web of deception had finally ensnared him and he was ultimately hung for treason. He represents however the epitome of Kilroy's definition of absurdity, in his lifelong denial of the facts of his birth and his negotiation with elitism and fascism in order to feed his desire to be part of some 'master race'. Kilroy has clearly allowed West's description of the fascists who attended Joyce's trial to influence his writing, as his Lady Journalist evokes an image of a "group of young fascists, the acolytes, the loyal ones, the young men in the gallery" with tears pouring down their "long, emaciated, Celtic faces" (90). West describes the fascists in attendance at Joyce's trial as having "an Irish cast of feature" and "men of violent and unhappy appearance"; or "unhappy young men in Hitler raincoats with a look of Irishry about them" (Kindle). She also notes that as they left the court on Joyce's sentencing they banded together "tears shining on their astonished faces" (Kindle). Inevitably such descriptions bring to mind violent but committed men prepared to die for their country and the enduring and damaging resilience of the martyrdom trope throughout Irish history, embodied in the 1980s by the 1981 IRA hunger strikers. In a twist of history that feeds into Kilroy's convoluted tale of identity, West herself was Anglo-Irish and very conscious of the differing status and heritage that defined her in comparison to the native Irish: her description of Joyce as a "small, nippy, jigdancing type of Irish peasant” resonates with Bracken’s detestation of the people and land of his birth (Kindle).

The general consensus at the time in the Republic of Ireland which, publicly at any rate, aligned nationalism (or republicanism) solely with violent activism and which tolerated strenuous revisionist responses to the situation, clearly influenced Kilroy’s thematic choices for the play. Looked at with the particular time (1980s), and place (the Republic) in mind it is clear that Kilroy is staging the complexities, contradictions and confusion of a postcolonial Ireland, one which must acknowledge its birth in a violent nationalist movement and which was still dealing with violence in the name of nationalism. Analysis of Hugh Leonard’s play *Kill* allows for a staging of a different point of view to Kilroy’s; one more in keeping with a revisionist approach to Irish history. According to biographer Patrick Maume, Leonard was “critical of interpretations of Irish literature that privileged the question of national identity”; he was unambiguous in his condemnation of paramilitary activity and he accused “successive governments, and Irish society generally, of combining hypocritical condemnation of violence with unwillingness to take effective action against terrorists because they were secretly regarded as ‘our own’” (online on RIA.ie). In addition to many other individuals and institutions, Leonard fell out with Field Day regarding his exclusion (not entirely of Field Day’s doing) from their *Anthology of Irish Literature* (Maume online).[60] He was renowned as being a particularly prickly character and was apparently happy to live up to his reputation; his column for the *Sunday Independent* was self-titled “The

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[60] Maume notes that Leonard “refused permission to include an extract from *Da”* (online).

Curmudgeon”. Leonard’s output was prolific and continued until 1994, with many of his plays premiering at the Abbey Theatre. During the 1980s he penned four original plays and one adaptation (from Edith Wharton’s short story *Roman Fever*). The playwright writes in his introduction to *Kill* that with this play he had finally written a political play, “and was promptly roasted for it”, specifically by Irish critics (4). He considers the symbolism used throughout the play to be “rudimentary”: the six-roomed alms-house by the north gate much desired by Wade, the “monomaniacal” owner of a de-consecrated church (the Republic of Ireland), unsubtly providing “the theatrical equivalent of a comic strip” in terms of imagery (4). However Leonard is also clear that his intentions were serious. The play is set in 1980s and allows Leonard vent his anger over the hypocrisy he believed characterised Irish political life at a time when he saw a widespread and systemic blindness in the public and governmental response to paramilitarism south of the border (5).

The setting for act one of the play is the drawing room of Wade’s converted church, on a stormy October evening. Nessa and her husband Sleehaun are the first of his invited guests to arrive for dinner and they are greeted by the “superbly groomed” Therese, Wade’s lover (9). As Wade is thinly disguised as a caricature of Charles Haughey, Irish Taoiseach at the time of Leonard writing the play, Therese can be reasonably assumed to be a sketch of Terry Keane, Haughey’s acknowledged real life lover. Sleehaun discusses his mother’s Saturday dinner, the sheep’s head which the family would be at “like savages”, thereby situating his character as uncouth and someone Leonard could file under ‘peasant’. Nessa’s excessive sensibility which renders her faint at the thought of a sheep’s head or mutton in general portrays her as affected and socially obsequious (13). Terrorist Mort Mongan’s appearance is executed pantomime style: the IRA man complete with balaclava and blackened face is seen edging across the stage by the terrified Nessa but unobserved by her husband. Confusion ensues to farcical effect, resulting in Sleehaun’s relief when he realises Mongan is not making sexual advances towards Nessa but merely carrying a stick of dynamite in his hand (16). Leonard has fun with his clichés: all of his characters represent some aspect of Irish society. Bishop, the priest who pretends to be a bishop but isn’t even a priest any longer, and Iseult, who personifies the genteel and cultured female artist—and “hourly communicant”—with a mercenary steel core, are next to arrive. Iseult plays an instrument referred to as a ‘saw’ which is in fact just a saw; Leonard is spelling out the truth as he sees it in his satire. Next to appear is Mrs Wade, a relic of the old Protestant ascendency class, and she is followed by Wade himself who greets everyone with warmest insincerity and a degree of lordliness (24). He holds forth about the alms house which was left to the ‘footman’ by his wife’s family when they departed: “They gave that flunky what wasn’t theirs to give – my property”; “its continued existence . . . is an abomination, a boil for the lancing”; “my sworn destiny: to be the one who at last achieves the return of the alms house to Kill” (26-7); “I want it, I want it, I want it” (35). The next two visitors, the Judge incapable of making a decision and Madge his ultra-capable wife, complete the cast of characters who represent, for Leonard, embodiments of all that is systemically corrupt in Ireland circa 1980.

Act two opens with Iseult’s rendition of a patriotic Irish rebel song, with lyrics by Leonard incorporating Irish mother and martyr tropes and references to the enemy, the “cowardly Saxon” (83). Similarly to Murphy’s *Macushla*, this romantic nationalism of Ireland past provides an atavistic base for the current version. His instruction that “Iseult is the kind of singer who rhymes ‘boy’ with ‘high’” places her beautifully in the genteel drawing rooms of a middle-class Ireland which was fast becoming a thing of the past. “Another explosion at the alms house” where a man is badly injured follows Iseult’s performance and there ensues much innuendo and pointed barbs from Leonard. The ‘Bishop’ prays for the “poor fellow” and adds another prayer for the injured man, the joke being that his first thoughts are with the instigator (Mort Mongan) and not with the victim (53). The play ends with farce involving a disappearing, reappearing ticking bomb/clock. The signs and signifiers Leonard employs here are paradigmatic and less than subtle. The symbols used to designate ‘Irishness’ are all hollow and represent revisionist digs at Irish historiography: the harp is but a saw; Wade’s “genuine St. Patrick’s crosier” is stamped “Made in Taiwan” (38). An awareness of Leonard’s journalistic persona and his particular bête noirs means the play can be read as an obvious rant against Haughey’s government, double-standards in the church’s attitude to paramilitary violence and, as Leonard perceives it, hypocritical middle-class Ireland’s underlying support for atavistic nationalism. Mongan the terrorist is depicted as dumb, animalistic and ultimately successful in his desire to destroy the alms house, which he sets on fire before ultimately coming home, in the play’s denouement, to daddy who unsurprisingly turns out to be Wade. Leonard’s revisionist critique of Irishness is hammered home in *Kill* and his anger is palpable, albeit submerged in slapstick and farce. There is a lack of sympathetic characters in the play, with the exception of the Junoesque Madge, a reality acknowledged by the playwright. This fact along with the play’s positioning of itself on high moral ground, and Leonard’s antagonistic and arrogant public persona known to those attending the Olympia

Theatre, may have been instrumental in its poor reception by its audience in 1982. Christopher Murray, discussing *Kill* and Murphy's *Blue Macushla,* considers that the plays' farcical allegories of Irish society fail as "an extended joke is not enough to carry a play for Irish audiences conditioned to experience theatre as a thoughtful as well as amusing experience" (*Twentieth Century Irish Drama* 186). Additionally, as could be argued for Murphy's *The Blue Macushla,* it is very likely that audiences were uneasy at the equating of armed paramilitaries with institutions of the Irish state in both plays.

The tone of *Kill* is mocking and malicious: sly insinuations such as Therese's question to Wade, "Will you be requiring me to sleep with you tonight?" to which Wade replies "I'm not sure. I have my eye on Miss Mullarkey", could be construed as a purely personal attack rather than political in intent (28). Kilroy's play appears less personal and more intellectual, using historical distancing to remove emotional context from a highly emotive subject but it is important to consider his choice of Stephen Rea as actor. Mary Trotter writes that Rea "becomes caught in identifications as Field Day actor, as Bracken, and as Bracken's antithesis, Joyce", leading the audience to "compare and contrast this self-identified Irish actor performing in this very Irish event with the characters he plays". Additionally Rea was married to the convicted IRA bomber and activist Dolours Price and Kilroy's stated intention of writing the parts for Rea must bear signification to some degree. In comparing these two overtly political plays it seems appropriate to assign them opposing roles in the postcolonial/revisionist debate that so engaged academics during the 1980s but, while both playwrights would have been aware of the intersection of their work with academic discourse, the plays are not academic exercises. Both clearly come from heartfelt positions and a desire to engage as theatre-makers and playwrights with the ongoing drama that was playing out around them. Equally both envisage a depressing and dystopian view of the Irish state: Kilroy’s Irishmen are so damaged by the legacy of colonialism that they embrace violent ideologies and go to extremes, in paroxysms of self-hatred, to wipe out their own histories; Leonard satirises the state as corrupt, hypocritical and sinister while he stages caricatures of equally despicable people representing parodies of his fellow countrymen and women. In their anger and disgust at the events of the 1970s and 1980s, these playwrights voiced controversial, if opposing, views and revisiting their work here allows for a greater understanding of political and public responses to events of the time.

Tom Murphy’s Blue Republic

Tom Murphy wrote prolifically in the 1980s, premiering eight plays, the majority of which played on the main Abbey stage. His most political play, *The Blue Macushla,* was not one of his most successful but is clearly in dialogue with McGuinness’s *Borderlands*, Kilroy’s *Double Cross* and Leonard’s *Kill* in its depiction of a place where authority figures act with the same disregard for rules and human decency as do the criminal elements of society. Other 1980s plays by Murphy include *Too Late for Logic* (1989), which O’Toole describes as “a farce about a philosopher preparing a lecture on Schopenhauer” (132), noting the “discarding of conflict as the basic principle of drama” in the play (291). The semiotics of the play have similarities to *The Blue Macushla*: a dark shadow-filled opening scene features the protagonist, Christopher, outlined with a cigarette in one hand and a gun in the other in a nod to gangster movie iconography. *Bailegangaire* (1985) and *A Thief of a Christmas*

(1985) are both haunted by “the image of buried children” according to Murphy, which “echoes the events of the years between 1983 and 1985” when Ireland was rent by the abortion referendum debates and the Kerry Babies case (*Plays: Two* x). *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) and two adaptations: Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* (1982) and Liam O’Flaherty’s novel *The Informer* (1981), complete his 1980s oeuvre. In his introduction to *Plays: One* the playwright situates the gangster tropes of *The Blue Macushla* in the era directly preceding the 1980s. Murphy relates a number of incidents which occurred after his return to Ireland in 1970, frightening incidents which involved his becoming aware of the exceptional powers of the Garda Special Branch Division, set up to deal covertly with terrorist activity.[61] He also tells of how he reacted when he was approached and asked “to write a script for the provos”: he found he couldn’t blankly refuse but instead “went into a rigmarole” about how writing a documentary required skills he did not have, his fear of offending the representative of a terrorist body overwhelming him to a degree (xix). Murphy makes it clear that *Macushla* comes from his awareness of the lack of transparency which was evident in the country at the time—“a celebration of deviousness”—and a sensational series of events in the Republic of Ireland which included shootings, bombings, kidnappings (of humans and racehorses), robberies and jail-escapes. In other words *The Blue Macushla* is Murphy’s response to the GUBU politics of Ireland during the period; he writes of a gangster world in which nobody is who they seem to be and where it is impossible to tell the good guys from the bad guys.

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[61] Murphy writes of noticing two men “throwing their weight around for no good reason” in a hotel in Dublin and of his surprise when he was informed that they were ‘Special Branch’ Gardai; he was stopped in error on another occasion when driving, by two plain clothes Special Branch Garda who were extremely aggressive towards him; and thirdly was approached by a representative for the IRA and asked to write a “TV documentary they were planning”. He allows that he “went into a rigmarole” in saying no (xix).

Murray argues that in *Macushla* Murphy is suggesting “the unreality of the contemporary moral consciousness when confronted by the IRA” (“The History Play Today” 281) but there is clearly a wider network of corruption or unreality implied in the play. Told primarily in the form of a flashback, the story is of a common thief who is blackmailed into allowing his premises to be used by ‘Erin Go Bráth’, a paramilitary organisation obviously suggesting the IRA. A ‘film-noir’ tale of double-crossing agents in a sinister nightclub which fronts all kinds of illegal activity, and corrupt ‘cops’ who act as unofficial executioners, *The Blue Macushla* stages a nightmarish world where lawlessness prevails and corruption reaches right up to the highest echelons of government and law. The play depicts the IRA, the Special Branch Gardaí and government ministers as all ultimately implicated in the play’s final big reveal. Murphy writes that he believes “nationalism is an elemental and dangerous emotion, intrinsic to us all: but I believe that it is more dangerous not to acknowledge it or to pretend otherwise” (*Plays: One* xviii), highlighting why he chose to write a play about issues that so many in the Republic wanted to ignore. While it is clear that Murphy is writing a political play and is highlighting societal problems particularly in relation to the fallout from the situation in Northern Ireland, in common with most of the playwrights reviewed in this section he does not stage realist drama. Language unsettles from the start, characters from Dublin’s drug-beset inner city speak in American gangster slang with words such as ‘Mom’ and ‘Aw Gee’ replacing an Irish equivalent. Stage lighting is gloomy and atmospheric while action often takes place off-stage where the public spaces of the Blue Macushla bar and nightclub are situated. The mood is satirical, the onstage world a parody of a western democratic state gone rogue. Eddie, the nightclub owner, is forced to join the terrorist Erin-go-Bráth organisation as he unwisely attempted to pin a bank robbery on the group. His inauguration takes place in the club and his declaration of the oath of allegiance is juxtaposed with the old Irish ballad *Macushla*, sung off-stage by the nightclub's resident singer known as Roscommon (159).

Roscommon represents the formally rejuvenated Cathleen Ní Houlihan grown battle-weary and disillusioned with the reality of her partial freedom, even her name, synonymous with one of Ireland's poorer counties, suggests neglect and misfortune. Murphy uses ballads throughout the play which evoke a more idealistic and romantic period of Irish history; they also have a sentimental Hollywood quality which resonates with his American gangster theme. He includes the Countess Markievicz's *A Battle Hymn* and the suggestion is that these seemingly distant sentimental ballads are implicated in the genesis of the current conflict in Northern Ireland (196). The arrival in the nightclub of Danny, an old friend of Eddie's just out of jail, introduces a love triangle to the play, with Danny immediately attracted to Roscommon and Eddie determined to assert his 'ownership' of her. Roscommon is written as a typical gangster's moll, clearly seen through a male gaze. She is sad and sweet, acquiescent but jaded. On meeting Danny she tells him "There's always been a guy with slow-movin' eyes for me to end the night with, learnin' a new trick on the tambourine" (173). With her songs of lost love and battles, at the centre of a tug-of-war between two hot-headed violent men, Roscommon is a cipher for every maudlin romantic image of Ireland incarnate. The violence in the play extends to the female characters as they become targets for male frustration. When Roscommon is slapped by Eddie to prevent her leaving she cries “What’s happenin’? To everyone? To life, to love, to friendship?” (183-4). Danny goes to hit her later in the play but stops himself, shocked, while Roscommon replies “(*quietly*). Go ahead, Mr Mountjoy, it don’t hurt no more.” (205). Murphy is evoking an image of Ireland battered and fatally compliant, while at the same time asking, in bewilderment, how this state of affairs came about. The members of the Erin Go Bráth gang are all suitably cloak and dagger; No. 1, the leader, conceals her gender in addition to her identity while the Countess’s ‘Hungarian’ accent is a front for her Northern Irish identity. This doubling and deception cumulate in the passing of the ‘holy grail’ (the black book which contains the names of those implicated in various crimes and misdemeanours) from the gang of criminals into the hands of the equally corrupt cops. The ‘book’ does not stop there however and it is implied that it contains names from the highest offices in the land. There is hope though, as Danny and Roscommon walk away from the carnage together to “no place . . .”, because it can only be better than the present place (227).

Murphy deftly suggests a broad involvement in this criminal underworld but for an audience keen to assert that Northern Ireland and its impact was far removed from their world the message was not a popular one. In its depiction of a contemporary Ireland the play appears to have fallen between two dramatic forms, comedy and satire, and failed to convince the audience that the play’s theme was relevant or resonant for them; it could even have been perceived as berating them. *Macushla* was withdrawn from the stage in the Abbey Theatre before its projected run was complete. Many reviewers criticised the paralleling of terrorists and state, with Gus Smith in the *Sunday Independent* for instance alleging that the play “fails because audiences are unable to relate to his characters or recognise in them living people" ("Blue Macushla Closes" 30). However some reviews are positive and Niall Kiely makes the point that the play's unenthusiastic reception "says something uncomplimentary about Dublin's theatre-goers", adding that he enjoyed it thoroughly (*Irish Times* 11). The casting of Stephen Rea in the role of Danny may have lent a dark realism to the production as Rea was a highly politicised actor with deep nationalist connections.[62] The play was revived in 1983 by Red Rex Theatre Company, with Derek Nowlan of the *Irish Times* finding that "events in Ireland itself since the play's first production, what with heroin peddling and related rackets, have added further topicality to Murphy's depressing vision of the place", adding that "not everyone will take kindly to his likening of the country to the world of corrupt and inept gangsterdom" (10). It was revived by Druid in 1995 as part of the Galway Arts Festival, again with mixed reviews, implying that in its imaginative and artful use of the stage it holds an attraction for theatre-makers and actors.

Inevitably Antigone

Seamus Heaney, discussing his translation of Sophocles's *Antigone,* commissioned by the Abbey Theatre in 2004, lists the 'familiar topics' associated with the play:

> individual conscience versus civil power, men versus women, the domestic versus the public sphere, the relevance of the action at different times of crisis in France, in Russia, in Poland, in Northern Ireland . . . ("Search for the soul of Antigone" 2005).

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[62] Further discussed with respect to Kilroy's *Double Cross* earlier in this chapter.

Heaney writes that one consideration made his new version, which he called *The Burial at Thebes*, very timely: the rise of the Bush administration in America and their foreign policy on Iraq. *Antigone*, it would seem, is to be found on stage where conflict and violence are present concerns, when people have ceased to trust or believe in the state. Bertolt Brecht’s 1948 version is a denouncement of the Nazi regime and demonstrates how epic theatre techniques can foreground a political interpretation of the play. Jean Anouilh’s obviously political but ambiguous 1944 version situates *Antigone* in Paris during the Nazi occupation of the city. In the 1980s Tom Paulin’s *Riot Act*, (1984), which is set in an analogous Northern Ireland, stages the figure of a lone woman standing against an unyielding patriarchal power—obviously the prevailing Unionist hierarchy—prepared to die for her belief that her brother deserves a decent burial. The connotations of emotionalism, socialism and tribalism that the relationship of ‘brother’ infers characterises his Antigone as anti-state and therefore nationalist/Catholic. Paulin’s choice of *Antigone* as an analogous source is concomitant with the dramatist’s struggle to incorporate some distancing or context when staging an ongoing situation. George Steiner’s book *Antigones* was published in 1984, contemplating the use of this myth in Western society as a means to invoke reflection on conflict between opposing forces, and in the same year Paulin and fellow poets Aidan Carl Mathews (*The Antigone*) and Brendan Kennelly (*Antigone*) wrote versions of the Greek legend. Brian Arkins, speaking of the proliferation of dramatic work engaging with the myth in the 1980s, writes that “Irish Antigones show how both the Northern and Southern States are deluded in their attempts to suppress the individual person; for neither the Unionist Creon of Paulin’s *The Riot Act*, nor the Republic of Ireland in Matthew’s *Antigone* possess self-knowledge” (26-7).

Kennelly's version of *Antigone* is examined in Chapter One of this thesis. Mathews's play, very loosely based on Sophocles *Antigone*, premiered in the Project Arts Centre in January 1984. Murray notes that copies of the Criminal Justice Bill currently passing through the Dáil, which gave increased powers to the Gardaí for stop, search and arrest, were handed to the audience as they arrived ("Three Irish Antigones" 128). This bill has been highlighted throughout this chapter as being a consideration or even incentive for playwrights to voice protest at the time and was clearly playing on the minds of the public. O'Toole notes Martin Lynch's play *The Interrogation of Ambrose Fogarty,* which made the journey south to the Peacock in 1984 as having "appalling relevance . . . to the current debate on the Criminal Justice" (28). The bill was part of an increasing effort by the Irish government to deal with terrorist activity in the state but its reach was considered excessive by many who believed it impinged on citizens' human rights. Murray quotes Mathews, in his information statement issued by the Project Arts Centre, as describing the mise-en-scène as "a devastated world, its immediate location any one of a dozen shattered cultures" ("Three Irish Antigones" 125). The play itself reflects this devastation, this 'GUBU' state "set in Ireland in the 1980s B.C.", in its postmodern format and the deconstruction of its origin. [63] As the play opens the Chorus, played singularly by a well-known Dublin actor and political activist Mannix Flynn, is putting posters featuring Orwellian messages onto the wall of the stage and tellingly whitewashing other parts of the wall "in thick regular strokes" (3). Heman (Haemon) enters; he is now Chief of the Secret Police. A conversation on the weather ensues, with Chorus obsequious and full of platitudes, finding it a “Lovely evening”, while Heman ominously mentions an “odd little breeze from the north” (5). Verbal sparring follows, with Chorus subservient and Heman taking the dominant role, quizzing Chorus on what he may have seen, heard or said (5). Both characters hail Creon’s hegemony, while Chorus declares: “I’m legally blind. Or nearly”; “The old ears aren’t what they used to be”; “Laryngitis” (9-10), a reference to the possible impact on freedom of speech by the proposed Criminal Justice Bill and the granting of increased powers to the Gardaí.

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[63] The script for *The Antigone* was emailed to this researcher by Aidan Mathews on 19 Aug. 2016.

All the characters rant about how inappropriate the script is, while Heman promises to shoot whoever wrote it (11). Antigone disparages the script and rails against her inevitable and violent death in the part she has been playing for three thousand years, while Ismene protests having to play her role: “I want a real role. I want to be a person, not a meaning.” (14-5). This meta-theatricality signals Mathews’s deconstruction of Sophocles’s original script and at times the overtly ‘clever’ focus on words and wordplay in his version may have made meanings difficult to grasp for the audience, for instance when a ‘programme note’ becomes a ‘pogrom note’ (30) or when Heman directs Antigone not to “go Antigonizing” Creon (46) it is very possible the sleights of tongue may have been lost. The trappings of an autocratic state apparatus are obvious from the start of the play; Creon and Heman are the apparatchiks and everybody suffers at their hands. One step down the power strata, Chorus is sycophantic towards Creon and Heman but displays violent and sexist behaviour towards the women, indicative of the corruptive nature of power but also refuting Sophocles’s diegetic depiction of violence. His description of love-making with Ismene is coarse and derogatory, he "put her head through the beauty board" (3) and he constantly hits the female characters. The world of the play is a war zone, strewn with bodies, with much of life's necessities rationed or unavailable. Chorus is the guardian of the script, despite his own misgivings, and through direct interaction with the audience keeps the original in mind. Polynieces's disappearance is raised: as Chorus puts it "Poly has been fuckin' vamoosed" (18), and by disappearing Polynieces rather than acknowledging the existence of his body Mathews reminds the audience of the IRA's tactic of disappearing victims rather than allowing families to bury their dead. Everyone denies they knew him, his name now an anathema, while, according to Chorus: "Every Charlie's heard of Peteocles" (Eteocles) (26). The end of act one is signalled by a slowly increasing audible reading of the Criminal Justice Bill, giving, as per the stage directions, "the impression of arid legalese, of an unimpassioned gobbledygook" (36).

The second act begins with the Critic character emerging from the audience; he reads a critique of the play which becomes negative in tone as it proceeds; the house lights are then suddenly switched off and sounds on stage imply a struggle. When the lights come on again the Chorus is mopping up a stain on the stage, the audience/citizens of Ireland witnessing a cover-up. Mathews uses sardonic humour throughout to create an atmosphere of jaded contempt among the protagonists, Creon refers to Antigone as having all "the charm and euphoria of a washed-out caravan holiday" while acknowledging that she is "multiplying inside me like a white blood-cell" (44). He wishes Antigone had political training (47) while Antigone sees herself representing "tens of thousands of faceless women. Women who stand in queues, and wait. And their waiting is more busy, more concentrated, than all the bustle of men" (48). Creon resents Antigone's "whiter-than-white" type: "I know your sort. You've been sniping at me since the Book of Genesis. Pro-abortion and anti-bloodsport. A whole sorority of the high and mighty" (51). The play is often referential: Creon interrogates the Critic about publishing in *The Crane Bag*, something the Critic denies,

> CREON: Have you ever published in *The Crane Bag*?
>
> CRITIC: Never, sir. Not once. In fact, I've had material rejected. Three times.
>
> CREON: But you're admitting you've read *The Crane Bag*?
>
> CRITIC: (TERRIFIED) Once. Perhaps. But I didn't understand any of it. And what I did understand, I've… forgotten.
>
> CREON: And what is your opinion of such literature?
>
> CRITIC: The very same as yours, sir.
>
> (PAUSE)
>
> CREON: Welcome aboard.
>
> CRITIC: Glad to be here, sir. (54)

Antigone's protest at the disappearance of her brother (or brothers) manifests in her painting the letter P on a wall; a nod to the political slogans which became ubiquitous on walls north and south in the period. Heman attempts to scratch out the P "To protect you from yourself", he tells Antigone, and she retorts "And who gave you that right?" Heman, in Mathews's version, is resistant to Antigone; he describes his love for her as a delicate emotion: “You’ve no right to disturb it. My peace of mind is at stake” (64). When he sees proof of Antigone’s crime in red paint splatters on her hand he reacts with inappropriate and excessive violence: punching her repeatedly in the breast (65). Creon comments, as the assault takes place, “All of this will be forgotten. Because if you make the effort, you can forget anything” (66). Antigone pleads with the audience “Do any of you know Polyneices?” and warns them:

> Tell them. They’ll come for the woman down the street. Will you tell them then? They’ll come for your next door neighbour. Will you tell them then? They’ll come for you. They’ll come for you. And after that, when there’s nobody left, they’ll come for themselves. (75)

She is attacked by Chorus and during the ensuing struggle Mathews stages Antigone choking as if for real, a Brechtian intervention to remind the audience of the blurred lines between acting and reality. The house lights are turned on; Chorus acts truly shaken by this turn of events, the stage directions make clear that it should be hard to tell if it was staged or actually occurred spontaneously: “Member of staff joins actors on stage, frees neckbrace round Antigone’s neck. There should by now be a sense of real uncertainty in the house, a dissolution of the landmarks” (77). When towards the play’s end Chorus reads Antigone’s words to the floor: “Where there are sheep, there will be scapegoats”, a silence falls. Chorus is upset; he bewails his position: “It’s the guy in the middle of the road who gets mowed down. Don’t let them see me like this” (86). ‘Them’ appears to refer to the audience and one by one the cast turn on the audience, telling them to disperse quietly, calling them voyeurs and peeping toms, and finally Creon ends the dialogue: “Go home. Go home. You can do nothing” (86).

Mathews’s motivation here is explicitly political; the play is a powerful plea by the playwright against apathy and passivity and represents a call for action as human rights issues were being eroded in the Republic. He stages the realities of life in a totalitarian police state as a real possibility given recent government interventions in policing legislation. But critically he is staging Northern Ireland and the human rights violations inherent in that situation also, poking at southern complacency and pointing out that the nightmare scenario of executions, imprisonment without trial and unrelenting violence has already been unleashed. Antigone describes her arrest and detention in the ’Zoo’: “The air stank of… something. Like dead sealions. At night it went away. But it came back in the morning. I sat in the cage where they put us, and I waited” (67). Her depiction is evocative of conditions in the H-Blocks, and its topicality would have been noted by the audience. Mathews uses humour to continually subvert every character in the play, with the exception of Antigone but the play is nonetheless relentlessly polemical. He dedicates the play to French philosopher René Girard who was his professor at Stanford University and this may imply Mathews is applying Girard’s Mimetic Theory to the situation in Northern Ireland, for its analysis of the causes of conflict, violence, and scapegoating or victimisation by individuals and communities.[64] As the scapegoat, Antigone’s death, according to Girard, should provoke a violent action which will prove cathartic for the two sides of the conflict and bring an end to war. Antigone is signposted as the victim: her reading material consists in part of *St. Joan* by Bernard Shaw and *The Autobiography of St. Therèse of Lisieux*. Creon, in Mathews's inversion of the original, wants to be the scapegoat, "I wanted to be a Jew. To be blamed for everything, and guilty of nothing" (51), then later to Antigone: "You want to be a martyr. You want me to have you killed! But I won't do it. Because there's no martyr without a monster. And I won't play that part." (69). In Mathews's play, however, Antigone's death is not a given fact and at the play's end, when Chorus mutters about her disappearance, Heman replies "That's not true. She was seen in Kharkov. Only last year" (85). There is to be no suitably cathartic ending to conflict in Mathews's play and understandably so, as at the time of his writing it the conflict in Northern Ireland was showing no signs of reaching an end.

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[64] “Mimetic theory questions the way in which the problem of religion and violence is constructed.” Scott M. Thomas discusses Girard’s theory in “Culture, Religion and Violence: René Girard’s Mimetic Theory”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 2014, Vol. 43(1) 308–327, DOI: 10.1177/0305829814540856.

Mathews, similarly to Kilroy, invokes the seeming inevitability of war throughout the ages, and by foregrounding Antigone's weariness and ubiquity he too acknowledges the long history in Ireland of colonial oppression and its impact on the Irish psyche. In an interview with Theatre Ireland he states: "The *Antigone* which I've written rehearses the theme of instability, of a deep-seated privation which makes persons hate themselves while resenting the very individuals they most desire."; a description of the postcolonial mindset very much in keeping with Kilroy's damaged and self-despising antagonists (18). In his brutal and confrontational attack on Ireland's response to the conflict in Northern Ireland, and its ever increasing policing powers and surveillance of its citizens, he is clearly in dialogue with Leonard and Murphy. The constant beating and violence directed towards the female characters in the play challenges the recent encroachments on women's rights in the Republic. The crisis of self-identity implicit in *The Antigone* becomes a crisis of identity for the Irish writer from the Republic; his loyalties on an emotional plane may belong instinctively to a nationalist agenda which retains an innate resistance to colonial rule but this conviction or principle, since the conflict in Northern Ireland imploded, has been hijacked by extremists. Creon therefore exists also in extremis, policing any attempt to sympathise with those who break the law, those who feel that it is imperative upon them to take the law into their own hands and those who cite human and civil rights as reason for doing so. In the language of the Republic during the 1980s Creon's laws demanded an official suppression of debate (the broadcasting ban) and any engagement with activities which are antithetical to the publicly expressed views of the Irish state during this period. Mathews, in the same interview, describes his approach to writing the play: "I came at it from a bookish angle, as a trainee anthropologist with an interest in comparative religion" (18) and indeed his many references to philosophic and religious figures and theory may have meant his version was a challenge even for an audience familiar with the original myth of *Antigone*. Newspapers featured a number of interviews with Mathews, giving the poet opportunity to discuss his influences and inspirations.[65] Predictably the reviews were mixed and in some cases confused. Gus Smith in the *Sunday Independent* writes "If the poet Aidan C. Mathews set out to paint a black picture with terrible images then he succeeded admirably" ("Don't Mess About with the Classics" 14) while Peter Thompson of the *Irish Press* considers it “basically a piece of gimmickry”, “an allegory of some kind of liberation theology”, while the design itself “owes a debt to Beckett which threatens to be larcenous” (4). Michael Scott, the director, in interview with Aikaterini Gotsi, acknowledges the *Godot/Rockaby* references: on the bomb site of a stage is a bare, disfigured tree underneath which “everyone waits for Godot” and a rocking chair where “sitting, going backward and forward, nothing changes” (Gotsi 305).

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[65] *Irish Press*, 27 July 1984, p. 7; *Sunday Independent*, 29 July 1984, p. 13; *Theatre Ireland*, No. 7 (Autumn, 1984), p. 18.

Conclusion of Staging the GUBU State

By categorising and then examining the response of playwrights writing about the state and political issues in the Republic during the 1980s, it becomes apparent that those doing so were few but were united in their staging of a GUBU scenario, where a siege mentality compounded with historical trauma gave cause for grave concerns. The methodology employed here allows for an amplification of the relevance of each individual playwright’s work; the themes of protest coalesce, and dramatic forms have in common their distancing, and satirical approaches. All four plays discussed in detail in this chapter stage an Ireland built on shifting ground. The plays depict this conflicted state in dramatic forms which avoid staging reality. Kilroy’s *Double Cross* is part historical drama, part allegory and part farcical representation of internal thought processes brought about by extreme ideology. *Kill, The Blue Macushla* and *The Antigone* accuse and satirise politicians and governments of the day; by using humour and farce, or the manipulation of familiar tropes, they deflect the force of their political themes but the anti-establishment message is clear. It is impossible not to be aware of real fear and concern in the plays analysed here, and the playwrights clearly feel genuine anger about certain political decisions being made on behalf of the Irish people. Garry Hynes, in conversation with Ramona Ostrowski, summarises theatre's role in such socio-political situations:

> I think every act of theatre is political, and should be. It's a civic action; it's a group of people in a live situation, in a room together, doing something. Is theatre a way of response to what is happening around us? Absolutely yes, and if it isn't, why are we doing it, why are we bothering? Do we have an obligation to reflect what's happening? Yes. Can we affect what's happening? Yes.

The relevance of the plays for a current understanding of Ireland is critical; the genesis of many of the issues of concern today can be found during this period. The focus on policing and the granting of excessive powers to the Gardaí allows for an interpretive background to the current situation with respect to numerous ongoing investigations into Garda Siochána corruption scandals including misuse of procedure, bullying of whistle-blowers and a systemic failure to be truthful and transparent. The attempt by the playwrights to understand contemporary nationalism and its response to the conflict in Northern Ireland gives critical insight and context to today's version of Irish nationalism. For established writers like Kilroy, Murphy and Leonard, inserting themselves into the heated atmosphere of Irish politics during this period was not an easy choice. As acknowledged by many writers previously discussed in this chapter, staging a political stance or an intervention dealing with nationalism or Irish identity exposed any work to the risk of being assigned to the binary of a competing ideology. The middle-ground in 1980s Ireland must at times have seemed as deserted as Heaney's noiseless runway in the Republic of Conscience.

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Chapter Three: In Dublin's 'Fair' City? Working-class Plays in 1980s Ireland

> We always sing, even when we're losing
> 'Cos Dublin's drone is hard enough especially when you're down and you're boozing
> We sing the Oul' Triangle and then the Tommy Ryan
> 'Cos all the world's a jail and we can't remember why
> Why we agreed to live and lie in embers of a cold old fire, nobody remembers
> They hand the ashes back to me down the button factory, we're cattle at the stall
>
> —Cian Lawless and Lankum, 2014.

Lankum's song "Cold Old Fire" above is about life in Dublin on the dole (the button factory), written after the economic collapse in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, a situation echoing the economic depression which equally defined the 1980s in Ireland when high unemployment rates impacted strongly on urban working-classes, particularly the young. The plays examined in this chapter have a dominant theme in common with the two previous chapters on feminism and nationalism/revisionism, as the playwrights stage anti-establishment and subversive approaches to their environment and the state. What is remarkable also about this category of plays in the 1980s is the proliferation of work engaging with working-class characters and set in working-class areas of Dublin, or indeed of plays dealing specifically with class as a concept and a factor in Irish people's lives.[66] These plays comprise a body of work which has been to some extent ignored, arguably based on the premise that as 'popular work' it is not necessarily worthy of critique or of a place in the Irish canon of drama and theatre. The majority of the 'Dublin' plays also remain unpublished[67] but nonetheless represent an opportunity for research as their obvious influence on future Irish plays and playwrights has largely gone unacknowledged. A reading of these Dublin plays identifies and highlights the challenging and unambiguous working-class themes they address. This is particularly relevant as Michael Pierse points out, because work of this nature, i.e. work engaging specifically with the working classes, has "barely begun to get the recognition that its energy and complexity clearly demand" (258).

In this chapter I review and discuss working-class plays, set in Dublin and written during the 1980s, with a particular emphasis on analysis of The Passion Machine's work. In examination and analysis of the plays, I turn to various theorists and academic writers, both Irish and international: Michael Pierse and Joe Cleary have both written about Ireland's urban working-class communities and their literary output; Jill Dolan and Richard Dyer help to rebut the negative connotations of calling certain theatrical works 'popular' or 'just entertainment'; Michael Peillon provides a sociological picture of Ireland in the 1980s; while Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on Rabelais and the carnivalesque provide a theoretical framework with which to contextualise and understand the hedonism and the challenge to the established order at large in the plays under discussion here.

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[66] Analysis and categorisation based on Irish Playography's database as for previous chapters.

[67] Again, using Irish Playography, approximately 70% of plays fitting this genre are unpublished.

Popular Entertainment, Utopian Worlds and Working-Class Literature

Passion Machine’s ten original plays, which premiered during the 1980s, are the primary focus of analysis in this chapter. Their body of work is generally categorised as ‘popular entertainment’ by contemporary theatre critics, who at times appear to question the company’s credentials as theatre-makers.[68] However, as Richard Dyer notes, works of entertainment are not immune from ideological criticism, as “any entertainment carries assumptions about and attitudes towards the world” (2). Both Dyer and Jill Dolan have written about the tradition of the utopian sensibility in theatre and other ‘entertainments’: as a means of escape from societal realities and in providing a sense of community in a fragmented world. Dolan believes that “theatre and performance can articulate a common future, one that’s more just and equitable, one in which we can all participate more equally, with more chances to live fully and contribute to the making of culture” (455). She argues that people seek to be part of a shared experience such as live theatre as it offers “if not expressly political then usefully emotional, expressions of what utopia might feel like” (456). She considers “the material conditions of theatre production and reception” critical to the possibility of imagining this utopia: a “boundless ‘no-place’ where the social scourges that currently plague us . . . might be ameliorated, cured, redressed, solved, never to haunt us again” (456-7).

For Dyer, this utopia presents itself in entertainment specifically in contrast to working-class conditions, and it manifests, for example, as energy and intensity in opposition to exhaustion and dreariness, community as opposed to fragmentation and job mobility (26). A suggestion or implication of such a utopia is present in much of Passion Machine's work, posited as an alternative to the social and material conditions of the young working-class audiences they attracted, primarily in staging those solutions of community, energy and intensity. Mercier, regarding The Passion Machine's ethos, states: "To us theatre was as much about audience as it was about the plays. We felt that theatre wasn't working if it didn't reach or reach out to the greater community".[69] Where their work differs from Dolan's more activist performance-based theatre-making is in the absence of a strong political message urging or inspiring action; Passion Machine's characters may kick against an existence poor in material goods or protest their subordination to others but essentially their reality is accepted and remains unchallenged. Dyer acknowledges that work with an entertainment value "presents, head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organised" (20). While music and movement is an integral part of the plays discussed here, they do not represent "(capitalist) palliatives to the problems of the narrative" (Dyer 28), rather Passion Machine's work represents escapism that remains in the realm of the attainable and firmly rooted in the protagonists' own (working-class) worlds and communities. However in terms of reception of the plays it could be surmised that for Passion Machine's audiences the very fact of attending a 'theatre event' represented an act of taking something for themselves which might be assumed to belong exclusively to the middle classes, middle-aged or older individuals, or the intelligentsia. Dolan makes a salient point also about the vulnerability of the actor on stage and how that

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[68] Examples of this are discussed later in this chapter in the section on The Passion Machine.

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[69] Email to author, 26th November 2017.

"vulnerability perhaps enables our own and prompts us toward compassion and greater understanding. Such sentiments can spur emotion, and being moved emotionally is a necessary precursor to political movement" (459). For a young working-class audience accustomed to 'performing' tough in urban 1980s Dublin the vulnerability of the actors, and in some cases the characters, may have prompted strong emotional responses to the plays. Passion Machine's use of movement and the male body as dancer—as opposed to the predominance of the female dancing body—frees the male characters from posturing and macho stereotyping, allowing the male audience members to imagine alternative expressions of masculinity.

For those young urban Dubliners there was also a strong affinity, helped by the multi-channel availability of English working-class dramas—such as Alan Bleasdale's 1980s *Boys from the Black Stuff* and the TV series *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* (first episode 1983)—that staged an aggrieved working class suffering under Thatcher's neoliberal world view. In terms of characterisation, Passion Machine's plays certainly staged a similar 'bolshie' and at times aggressive demographic, one which would have been familiar to television viewers of the 1980s. Additionally playwrights such as John Godber were staging realist plays depicting life and youth culture in Britain during the period, plays which notably featured stylised movement and music to break with textual drama. *Bouncers*, 1977 but revived in the 1980s, could perhaps be a possible influence on Mercier's early work; it played in the Dublin Theatre Festival of 1985, in the same year that *Blood Brothers*, Willy Russell's critique of Britain's class divide, also featured. The tradition of "socially realist yet non-naturalistic drama" began with Joan Littlewood's Theatre Royal. Millie Taylor notes Robert Leach arguing that Joan Littlewood's theatre workshop productions “were carnivalesque in their attempt to breakdown the hierarchies and subvert authority through parody, in asserting the values of community and affirming the primacy of action and the body” (94). Littlewood’s vision undoubtedly influenced John McGrath and Elizabeth MacLennan’s 7.84 theatre companies; 7.84 were exponents of social theatre which gives a voice to the minority, the excluded and the oppositional (“Theatre and Democracy” 137). McGrath’s socialist dramas have in common with The Passion Machine’s plays the use of music, song and dance to avoid reliance on character-analysis while emphasising a collective class consciousness. Indeed, similarly to The Passion Machine, his 7.84 company performed in venues not associated with traditional theatre output. However it should be noted that the political and historical scope of his plays is not reflected in Passion Machine’s work. In his “Angry Young Men” chapter, Michael Pierse focuses on the post-1950s era, on works that shift “the terms of class contention towards *cultural* and *social* deprivation, towards the ‘hidden injuries of class’” (74). He notes that this period saw work that sought to represent the working-class characters as they are “rather than in the manner a bourgeois writer might wish his/her ‘representative’ heroes to be. This attitude is a marked departure from the discourse of pitying condescension that pervades writing on the working class” (76). In examining Lee Dunne’s play *Goodbye to the Hill*—which was previously a novel banned in 1960s Ireland—Pierse writes that, while it premiered in the Eblana Theatre in 1978, it had a remarkably long run in the Regency Airport Hotel from September 1989 to December 1992, produced and directed by Dunne himself as it had been turned down by the Abbey Theatre and others. Both the venue and the play, according to Pierse, attracted people who would not normally attend theatrical productions, and the play was subject to dismissive criticism from theatre reviewers.

The categorisation of work as 'popular' and the situating of the performances outside of the traditional theatre venues are points discussed, robustly, by Mercier and Sean Moffat in the letters page of *Theatre Ireland*, regarding The Passion Machine's output.[70]

Joe Cleary makes the point that the O'Casey genre of working-class tragicomedy influenced theatrical work in Northern Ireland during the conflict, as "the cutting edge of the political conflict in the region tended to be associated with working-class Catholics and Protestants rather than with their middle-class counterparts" (234). Many working-class dramas in the Republic, during the 1980s at any rate, did not follow suit, in particular The Passion Machine's output as it presented working-class people as resisting a representational stereotype of misery-laden victims of poverty. Cleary sees that particular genre as "closely wedded in its origins and ideals to the emergent middle classes"[71] while the freer, more ambiguous dramatic form of the plays examined here is more resonant with carnival and the subaltern (235). Pierse, discussing O'Casey's aesthetic, states that "O'Casey's plays express the ironic sense of what I will call in this book an 'alienation of the centre', by depicting the impoverished, anti-heroic Dublin poor at the epicentre of political tumult but simultaneously alienated by political power" (53). Pierse writes about working-class life as portrayed by cultural productions on television, in sport and in music, noting how focused "across the water" much of Dublin's cultural references were during the 1980s, due to emigration to Britain and the manner in which working-class life was a part of British popular culture while in Ireland this was not the case (25). He asserts that working-class 'behaviour' was often at odds with the Irish state, giving the example of how, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Concerned Parents Against Drugs (CPAD) took to the streets to attempt to highlight the heroin issue in the inner city but were treated "by many in power as a threat to the very stability of the state" (26). While some of the plays discussed in this chapter are very issue driven, Passion Machine's work is notably reflective of the lives of a majority of Dublin working-class people, struggling with unemployment and other issues but essentially getting on with their lives. It is the ordinariness of their working-class Dublin youngsters that is Passion Machine's most defining feature.

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[70] In 1989: these letters are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

[71] Clery notes a Marxist reservation about domestic tragedy speaking for a "humanist world view in which specifically middle-class interests are mystified as universal human values" and invariably privileging the private over the public sphere (235).

Bakhtin and the Carnival World

In order to appreciate and understand the subversive and provocative works staged by The Passion Machine, Mikhail Bakhtin's approach to literature is utilised as a theoretical framework in this chapter. Ken Hirschkop considers the meaning of terms associated with Bakhtin: 'Carnivalesque' works "use motifs, themes and generic forms drawn from a tradition of subversive medieval popular culture . . . and to the significance of the body in medieval and Renaissance culture" (3).[72] Hirschkop considers Bakhtin's works in terms of both linguistics and culture, and states that "Bakhtin chose to describe culture not in neutral terms of social science, but as an activity with political and moral ends and objectives" (5). He defines dialogism in formal literary analysis as designating a number of different practices:

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[72] In his introduction to *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (2001).

"parody, the use of socially marked languages in literary texts . . . and what Bakhtin calls stylisation, the pointed emphasis of socially distinct speech" (6). He discusses Bakhtin's belief in the novel's ability to present arguments in a form which can "reveal the import and significance of ideologies more adequately than could pure verbal disputation" and further notes Raymond Williams's justification of fictional experimentation in dramatic works:

> As Bakhtin shows with Dostoevsky and Williams with Brecht, it is as likely that the 'subjunctive' or 'novelistic' work will result in a critique of history as it is that it will reveal social forces at work behind the backs of unsuspecting characters (28).

Hirschkop states that the principle of ambivalence, expressed in the images and language of carnival culture, is clearly a descendant of the principle of dialogism: "Its historical basis is not the materiality of language but the inextricable intertwining of birth and death; production, consumption and excretion; labour and the fruits thereof" (34). He perceives the carnival as a democratic sphere where abstract identities are replaced by "one who eats, drinks, procreates and labours" and notes that it represents a "condition where history is directly experienced in the texture of social life" (35).

The concept of a pre-modernity lingering in the working-class consciousness resonates with a Bakhtinian use of Rabelais and his folkloric subversion of the hegemonic. Pierse quotes James Connolly explaining this affinity with a folkloric past as a resistance to "capitalist English conventionalism" and associating, in the romantically inclined view of his time, a pre-colonial communal land ownership with a race memory which would predispose the Irish working class to revolutionary change (45).[73] Pierse however identifies the flaws in Connolly's Celtic communism and his idealised view of a united Irish proletariat; specifically he notes Eoin Flannery's discussion of the Irish experience of modernism via colonialism rather than industrialisation, and asserts that the dispossessed Irish played an integral role in Anglo-American capitalism as emigrants (48).[74] McGrath's work with 7.84, foregrounding Scottish working-class activism through theatre, relies on the use of heteroglossia, i.e. socially-marked language and accents, to initiate a political dialogism. He however questions the assigning of medieval values to contemporary theatre:

> Of course we would certainly be courting disaster to assume a medieval sensibility lurking within a modern audience. I would prefer to read Bakhtin's visions of carnival, laughter, and 'wholeness' as inspirational rather than either historical accounts or as a model to imitate (*The Bone Won't Break* 154).

While Bakhtin focused his writings and theorisation on the novel, with respect to the plays under analysis here there appears to be a good fit in utilising his theories to examine The Passion Machine's Irish urban working-class plays. Graham Pechey states that radical readers of Bakhtin must "push his concepts still further on in their journey, putting them to still more demanding tests" and adds that: "One such test is the theorisation of drama" (57). He notes Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and his World*, remarking on Brecht as a representative of the "realist grotesque" which "reflects at times the direct influence of carnival forms" (58). Pechey writes that "Epic theatre seeks to strip the speech of characters of what Bakhtin would call 'objectivisation' and free it for entry into dialogical relations with the discourses of interruption" (59). Therefore he argues that: "The typical roles of Brechtian theatre are those that Bakhtin claims that drama cannot put to consistent use: the rogue, the clown, and the fool" (59). Pechey argues that novelisation in Brecht (in Bakhtinian terms 'dialogisation') "so jogs the generic memory of drama as to bring about a return to the carnivalesque" (60). He adds that drama perhaps is monologised by being read as literature rather than as theatre, but this too is influenced by distance as, for instance, Bakhtin claims that the 'Sophistic novel' appears monological because the heteroglossia "with which it dialogically interacts – cannot be reconstructed at this historical remove" (61).[75] Pechey's first assertion highlights the need for an audience (and an author) in order for dialogic communication to take place, while his last assertion somewhat returns the academic reading of drama to relevance, in that it may point to the usefulness of research carried out to contextualise and re-remember the heteroglossia of dramatic work.

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[73] Quoted in Pierse: Connolly's *Collected Works*, p.21-2.
[74] Quoted in Pierse: Flannery, "External Association", *Third Text*, 19:5, p.450.

On the terms monoglossia and heteroglossia, which are key to an understanding of Bakhtin's theoretical work, Tony Crowley points to Ireland as an example of where the imposition of a monoglossic language was used as a tool for a colonising force (86). Joyce, he writes, utilised the "language of absolute heteroglossia" and "likewise the language of absolute dialogism . . . in which no form has only one meaning and all questions have at least two answers" (87). Nancy Glazener writes that Bakhtin derives the heteroglossia of literary discourses "ultimately from the stratification of social life, in which different social groups create distinctive discourses from their common language" (109). Carnival subversion, she notes, "is directed against an official language that would deny the body, the cyclical nature of human life"; its laughter "is ambivalent in that it affirms and denies at once, diminishing the individual but re-ennobling him or her through the medium of collectivity" (113). Terry Eagleton observes that "much of the critical discourse by which Bakhtin has been appropriated" seems to him "strikingly shitless"; carnival, he writes:

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[75] Quoted in Pechey from "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.373.

> at once cavalierly suppresses hierarchies and distinctions, recalling us to a common creatureliness . . . and at the same time does so as part of a politically specific, sharply differentiated, combatively one-sided practice – that of the lower classes, who incarnate some utopian 'common humanity' at the very moment they unmask their rulers' liberal-minded ideology of 'common social interests' for the shitless, self-interested rhetoric it is (188).

In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin's use of heteroglossia, according to Michael Holquist in his introduction, "is a master trope at the heart of all his other projects" (xix) which Holquist describes as an "extraordinary sensitivity to the immense plurality of experience" (xx), with emphasis on experience given the multiplicity of factors which characterise dialogue. Bakhtin's "basic scenario for modelling variety is two actual people talking to each other in a specific dialogue at a particular time in a particular place" (xx). Bakhtin, in his essay "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", writes that "in Rabelais the destruction of the old picture of the world and the positive construction of a new picture are indissolubly interwoven with each other” (169). Rabelais, according to Bakhtin, relies upon folklore and antiquity to escape “imposed conventionality” while his “Rabelaisian laughter not only destroys traditional connections and abolishes idealized strata; it also brings out the crude, unmediated connections between things that people otherwise seek to keep separate” (170). These connections, for example in Donal O’Kelly’s *Bat the Father, Rabbit the Son*, are memorably and graphically depicted as the common effluent of all Dubliners flowing as one co-mingled movement out to sea in Dublin Bay. Rabelaisian laughter is, Bakhtin notes, “directly linked to the medieval genres of the clown, rogue and fool, whose roots go deep back into pre-class folklore” (170). It is in the “heteroglossia of the clown” who ridicules all languages and dialects where Bakhtin identifies “heteroglossia that had been dialogised”; that was “parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time” (273). The foregrounding of the body in Mercier’s plays, as represented by stylised physical movement and grotesque parody of sexual behaviour, has a parallel in Rabelais: “In the process of accommodating this concrete human corporeality, the entire remaining world also takes on a new meaning and concrete reality, a new materiality” (Bakhtin 170). Similarly the reliance on drink as an enabler for action, which is a common trope in these working-class plays, resonates with Rabelais’s novels where Bakhtin notes that almost all his themes come about through the “eating and drink-drunkenness” series (178) and he equally acknowledges Rabelais’s use of

> ‘formulas’ for obscene profanity, whose ancient cultic importance has not yet been extinguished; this obscene profanity was widespread in ‘unofficial’

> everyday speech and gives rise to the stylistic and ideological idiosyncrasies of 'unofficial' everyday speech (most especially in the lower classes) (184).

Again on the 'defection series' in Rabelais, Bakhtin writes that it "creates the most unexpected matrices of objects, phenomena and ideas, which are destructive of hierarchy and materialize the picture of the world and life" (187). Notably in Bakhtin's discussion of Rabelais he notes that "there is not a single instance in the entire expanse of Rabelais' huge novel where we are shown what a character is thinking, what he is experiencing, his internal dialogue" (239); "All that a man is finds expression in actions and dialogue" (240). It is indeed tempting to see this novelistic technique as eminently suited to dramatic work.

Cleary notes Irish folk/punk band the Pogues, as engaging with stereotypes of "drunken brawling paddies" but suggests that "such issues be usefully considered in terms of capitalism, the carnivalesque and consumer excess" (264). The Pogues, he continues, "are certainly not unique in exploiting this carnivalesque seam in Irish popular culture" and he names Joyce, Flann O'Brien, and others as having done the same (264). He notes the themes and musical aesthetic of the Pogues's songs—and ballads—as tracking "a peculiar mini-history of modern subaltern carnival and consumerist excess that stretches from pre-modern to postmodern times" (266). Critically he notes that while this "articulation of excess was radical in the broader socio-historical context of the depressed 1980s, it inevitably lost much of its transgressive edge in the affluent 1990s" (266). The songs of the Pogues, Cleary argues, while appearing apolitical in their depiction of "a more antic world of subaltern carnival and mayhem", nonetheless "express a commitment to a bibulous national popular *communitas* that is fundamentally both republican and anarchic in its value-system" (280). Similarly Passion Machine's work appears apolitical and while, unlike the Pogues, they eschew references to republicanism and nationalism, their presentation of a working-class culture which is essentially self-reflective, capricious and intent on taboo-breaking is inherently anarchic and political.

Cleary's description of the Pogues's aesthetic as a "rowdy subaltern collective exuberance that was simultaneously anti-authoritarian and festive" resonates with Mercier's and Doyle's writing of chaotic, often drunken but usually non-threatening mayhem in plays like *War, Wasters* and *Home* (286). He sees the role of carnival in the modern world as having been cannibalized by capitalism as it channels its "celebration of abundance and uninhibited indulgence into the very different routines of the consumer society" and in order to examine this he situates carnival in the "immediate historical context of the 1980s" (289). While internationally the period was defined by a New Right coming to power, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, Cleary notes that in Ireland "all social debate was . . . cast in terms of a rigid Kulturkampf between Catholic traditionalists and social liberals", with choice limited to "an inherited economic-and-cultural nationalism" or "an emergent economic neo-liberalism" (289). The ultimate decision in Ireland to embrace open market capitalism is reflected to some degree in the plays of the late 1980s and certainly of the 1990s.[76]. The Pogues and their celebration of excess represent internationally therefore "those very subaltern strata that were targeted by the New Right" and thus constituted "a refusal of the New Right's sanctimonious moral authoritarianism" (Cleary 289). In Ireland, suffering as it was from a severe economic depression and a war, "their plebeian-carnivalesque aesthetic discombobulated traditionalists and modernizers alike" (289); "the Pogues represented an antinomian radicalism that was, for a time at least, shocking" (290). This point seems particularly applicable to Doyle's plays, and indeed his early novels, where middle-class morality is undermined by a humourous refusal to apply bourgeois principals requiring accountability or punishment for disregarding the law and societal mores. In detailing the changes that 1990s affluence brought to society, Cleary writes of the 1980s that "in non-affluent and socially conservative societies of scarcity and want, carnival serves functions quite different from those that it fulfils in societies of permissive consumerist affluence" (291). The Pogues music, he writes, by representing the defiant spirit of the Irish lower-classes, draws attention to "a dimension of Irish subaltern cultural history neglected in conventional scholarship" (294).

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[76] See the discussion of O'Kelly's *Bat the Father, Rabbit the Son* and *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* by Dermot Bolger later in this chapter.

A Marxist Response

Defining an Irish working class has proved an onerous task for academics of many disciplines, yet it is an accepted social construct used by self-defined working-class people as well as others; it can also of course be intended as a derogatory categorisation. Piese in *Writing Ireland's Working Class,* (2011), states that his book "is broadly concerned with writing about the working class, regardless of its provenance, rather than what is often a more narrowly defined and divisive concept of an organic 'proletariat literature'" (30). This point is important and it parallels my research intentions, as to write about work solely from within the working-class or from the political left would be too narrow a position to take. Pierse does address the need, in writing of the working-classes, to engage with Marxist theory, stating that "it is necessary, in dealing with the matter of cultural form and proletarian formation, to recover some of the ideological and political inflections underlying how culture is interpreted by left-minded thinkers" (31). He warns against taking working-class politics and labour activity as "an encapsulation of the totality of working-class life" while further noting that the colonial/postcolonial nature of Irish history "problematises any simplistic application of Marxist teleology to Irish working-class life" (Pierse 11). Pierse, as I do here, also engages with David Lloyd and his application of subaltern studies "onto the topography of Irish social development" (Pierse 44); for Gramsci, Lloyd writes "the subaltern is the state in emergence. . ." (Lloyd 127). Lloyd addresses the 'bourgeois nationalism' which Ireland has adopted as it conforms to Franz Fannon's definition: "The adoption, virtually wholesale, of the state institutions of the colonizing power, and conformity to its models of representative democracy" (Lloyd 7). As a counter-culture force in opposition to the bourgeois state, the working classes are not assimilated with Lloyd's "statist nationalism" (Lloyd 8). Antonio Gramsci's work, Lloyd writes, "provides a basis for any theorization of cultural hegemony" (Lloyd 9) and he states that "any radical cultural studies, and particularly one which seeks to articulate the potential of residual *and* emergent formations, will have to engage explicitly with the critique of the state for which those formations are its unrecognizable" (Lloyd 10). Lloyd's 'statist' nationalism, as it existed in the Republic in the 1980s, can be represented by official revisionism, his bourgeois state by an emerging neo-liberal agenda, also represented by Peillon's "state project". This state did not recognise working class culture, with its resistant and residual elements, as desirable. The shadow of authority falls across all of the plays examined here, an exclusive 'normality' which 'others' and essentialises the characters; resistance to this hegemony is implied if at times unstated in all of the works. Gramsci's concept of a dominant class which leads, more so than rules, by its exercise of "intellectual and moral leadership", in addition to being "based on the decisive nucleus of economic activity", informs this reading of Passion Machine's plays as resistant and challenging to both of these 'norms' (85-6).

1980s Irish Society

Michael Peillon, in *Contemporary Irish Society: An Introduction*, provides a sociological picture of the place and time from which the playwrights examined in this thesis were writing. Industrialisation had radically changed the social structure of the country by the late 1970s, according to Peillon, while "[t]he rapid urbanisation which has engulfed Dublin is almost of crisis proportions" (1). He states that "Ireland is a country of stark class contrasts, which reveal themselves not only in differences of status but in differences of behaviour" (2). Writing of the Irish working class, Peillon notes a number of reasons why they are considered conservative or lacking in 'class consciousness'; he names a rural bias, "the pre-dominance of the national question on the political scene to the exclusion of the social one, the influence of religion in exalting universal solidarity and an abstract consensus, the safety valve of emigration or the weakness of capitalism" (4). However he notes that the Irish working class "displays a remarkable capacity for collective action without ever embracing a radical orientation" (4). When categorising in detail what constitutes this working class in Ireland Peillon considers occupations which have clear class connotations; for instance office workers, who may be on relatively low wages, are not considered as 'class allies' by trade unions with working class membership, as evidenced by the fact that these groups "do not scruple to pass a picket mounted by a union or association of office staff" (33).

Peillon traces the genesis of the Irish working class back to the evictions which occurred after the famine of 1845-9 when many farm labourers "joined the ranks of the labour force or the urban destitute" (34). At the end of the nineteenth century manufacturing industries were established and the city's "employed unskilled labourers" subsequently became the tenants of the notorious Dublin tenement slums (34). The working classes become the largest social category in the national census, increasing at a greater rate than before between 1961 and 1971 (35). Education was another marker of difference between the working classes and other social categories, with working-class children at the beginning of the sixties less involved in post-primary education than others. This fact however changed considerably after the event of free secondary school education in 1966 and the establishment of community colleges a few years later, but, as Peillon notes, there still remained a notable section of the working class whose children left school after primary education; these children "invariably come from the least skilled sections of the working class" (36). He writes that the sons of workers tend to follow their father's footsteps and he describes the extent of social mobility between groups as: "Mobility, then, but only over very short distances" (37). With higher fertility rates than the middle classes or farmers and a tendency to marry young in life, job insecurity among semi-skilled and unskilled labourers "has a profound effect on working-class attitudes and sentiments" (38). Pierse, discussing the concept of upwardly mobile social classes in Ireland, gives the following statistics: "By the mid-1980s 75 per cent of working males were employed in businesses not owned by their respective families” while “in the late 1980s, 70 per cent of working class men in the state were themselves the children of working-class men” (20). This number, he notes, is comparatively high with respect to other Western European countries. James Wickham writes that in July 1986 the unemployment figure of 231,026 meant more people in the Republic of Ireland were registered unemployed than were actually employed in all of the manufacturing industry (84). Clearly Ireland was a country in crisis.

Joe Cleary, in *Outrageous Fortune*, discusses the pervading dissident intellectual formations of revisionism, feminism and postcolonialism in 1980s Ireland, noting that none of them could be called defenders of tradition. Cleary notes a disbanding of the strong sense of a distinct and well-defined class from the 1970s onwards, with the “expansion of higher education and the ubiquity of mass culture made possible by new media” restructuring the cultural landscape (83). The insouciance and confidence of The Passion Machine plays and their protagonists reflects solidarity among working-class Dubliners but also allows for a normative approach to an urban class that was not delineated with any permanence. Peillon makes the observation that sexual roles are more stereotyped in working-class families than in middle-class families “and the habit of the working class husband of going alone to the pub persists” (38). With the exception of Roddy Doyle’s *War* this tradition does not feature in the plays here; the young women drink with their male partners and friends, something that is indicative of changing social norms in the 1980s. Peillon warns that social differentiation in Ireland is nuanced, with “the real pole of social differentiation to be found at the bottom of the working class scale” (38). He notes that Irish writers and academics tend to show little interest in the "stable section of the working class, and preoccupy themselves with a sort of sub-proletariat", appearing to "delight in the pathos of working class destitution", in fact in the "world brought to life by Sean O'Casey more than fifty years ago" (39). With respect to the Irish rural working class, Peillon's research shows that the industrial workers in small towns and villages "retained their close links not only with the countryside but also with farming activity" (40) and differ from the urban working class with respect to "their tendency to marry late or not at all" (41). The entry of Ireland into the EEC brought increased agricultural prices, bringing "a certain prosperity to the rural areas" which may mean a level of job security for rural workers (182). Peillon writes that the principle of opposition which dictates how a 'social force' defines itself is split with respect to the Irish working class as the "moderate trade unionism" acknowledges its need for employers to provide management of the economy while at the same time it focuses on the incomes and conditions of employees (75-6). Peillon is clear that overall the 'State project' for Ireland has the interests of the bourgeois as a central element but notes that some working-class needs and interests are generally addressed. This however is to the detriment of the working-class project as it undermines support for it (188). He summarises that working-class projects in Ireland consist of two "rival and conflicting projects": the project for a reformed capitalism and the project of an embryonic socialism. The two are not necessarily incompatible (197).

The Playwrights

The primary focus of this chapter is the 1980s plays of The Passion Machine Theatre Company but first a summary of the work of other playwrights who wrote of or from an urban working-class environment provides a broader view of the genre. The

Passion Machine plays analysed here in this chapter have in common a representation of an Irish working class which makes no apologies or compromises for that fact. In this they are unique and revealing of a new Ireland where working-class citizens are no longer content to 'know their place'; instead they challenge authority and established norms by means of a carnivalesque subversion and a refusal to be culturally appropriated. Their use of the working-class Dublin vernacular and characterisation allows for a heteroglossia, in Bakhtinian terms, which contains the critical dialogism necessary for the plays to be challenging and significant. The nature of a working-class literature means it is vulnerable to many of the arguments discussed in the literature review for this chapter: a rebuttal of a Marxist determinism, which might limit the scope of cultural output; an expectation of realist 'gritty' dramas; critique for foregrounding entertainment values without that critique allowing for the utopian collectivism and empathy which they engender. Equally, as discussed, this analysis will utilise a Bakhtinian theoretical perspective, specifically in the analysis of the collective social body and emphasis on all that is carnal and somatic, as it represents the political destabilisation of the established, or bourgeois, cultural and economic hegemony.

Bernard Farrell wrote many plays throughout the 1980s; he became a stalwart of the Abbey Theatre and a reliable and popular comic writer and social observer. He writes from the perspective of the middle classes, a fact that probably influenced his reception in the Abbey, and there is a class consciousness in his plays that foregrounds the contrast or tension between the aspiring or newly-arrived bourgeoisie and their wealthier protagonists. His first play, *I Do Not Like Thee, Dr Fell* (1979), is a black comedy about group therapy and its shortcomings. Farrell's use of a bomb in a bag as a trigger for character reveal may have had specific resonance for an audience in 1979/80 and this insensitivity is in a way a feature of his 1980s plays. In the pursuit of farcical humour, sexuality, race and the gender divide are often treated crudely; however usually the perpetrator of a sexist or racist comment or act is identified as a 'bad guy', or a loser. Peter, at the start of *I Do Not Like Thee,* reveals his penchant for the 'sly flash' of female flesh in summertime—or "Randy weather"—but the plot later reveals his insecurities about his marriage (17). Dave takes on the role of pervert or pest in *All in Favour Said No* (1981), threatening his fellow female worker with putting a rat "Suas do guna, Una"[77] (85) and commenting on the same Una being 'well-stacked' (89). Similarly to Peter, Dave's attitude signals his general insensitivity and boorishness, and he is not among the winners by the end of the play. The progression of this stock rogue character continues in Farrell's work with *Say Cheese* (1987): Rory is brasher and more lecherous than previous incarnations and is racist in addition. Arabs and Aborigines are figures of fun but, as before, Rory's fate does reflect his crimes as Farrell punishes his attempt at seducing the wife of his friend with a fall from a high-rise hotel building. Farrell's plays, with the exception of the more nuanced and darker tale of *I Do Not Like Thee,* also allow for the author's commentary on Ireland's upwardly-mobile classes. In an example of reverse snobbery, Joan, a factory worker in *All in Favour,* sneers at office workers, deriding them as stuck-up (113): "Hear the way your woman talks? Jaysus!" (112).

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[77] Up your dress, Una.

Canaries (1980), Farrell's play about various Irish people who meet up on holidays in the Canary Islands, is probably his most class-conscious—and least sexist—play. Marie and Tommy announce their working-class status by their prescribed appearance; Marie is "enthusiastically (if cheaply) dressed" while Tommy, her husband, wears a "small cross around his neck" (9-10). The holiday scenario allows Farrell's characters to re-invent themselves to some degree, usually in an upwardly-mobile direction. Essentially the play lacks a strong plot and any likeable protagonists but the characters are certainly relatable to the emerging materialist mindset of the 1980s. Ciarán McCullagh, writing about crime in Ireland in the 1980s, notes the "change in the symbolic importance of many forms of property. Possession of for example a car became valuable not just for its utility but also for what it said about the social status of its owner" (15). This materialist attitude prevails throughout the play, with Marie and Tommy denying their working-class roots and claiming residency in Killiney on Dublin's exclusive south coast, along with ownership of a yacht, while Richard, one half of a swinging couple on seemingly permanent holiday, describes himself and his family in terms of car ownership (34): Kenneth their son will "become a Citroen man" (*Canaries* 36). The Dublin bias against their rural counterparts is another trope, with Madalene, a single female holiday-maker supposed to be embarrassed by being from Navan (43). Hans, a Danish psychologist, maintains some distance and perspective as he disparages the conversations "about marvellous washing machines and marvellous deep-freezers and marvellous motor-cars. . ." (50). According to David Nowlan of the *Irish Times* the play's "comic and serious moments did not seem ideally balanced within the script" (10). Certainly the unmasking and satirical caricaturing seem to jar with the comic elements of Farrell's script but he keeps his targets in sight throughout: the class pretentions and materialism of 1980s Ireland, with aspirational working-class characters portrayed as particularly unattractive.

Peter Sheridan has previously been noted in this thesis as a politically and socially aware writer, with his play about the 1981 hunger strikers, and as a native of Dublin his playwriting focus has been very much urban and working class. He was involved with the Project Theatre with his brother Jim when it was formed as an alternative performance resource for the city. In the 1980s, no longer involved managerially with the Project, Sheridan was living in Ballybough, "a deprived, working-class area of Dublin" as he describes it (268), and found himself wanting to contribute to his community through drama, drama that would celebrate "the native wit and capacity of Dublin citizens to overcome adversity" and not engage with "depressing social realism" (269). This desire to celebrate working-class lives rather than sentimentalise poverty and deprivation is particularly characteristic of 1980s Dublin theatre, as can be observed in the plays explored in this chapter. His community arts project, developed with Mick Egan, was funded by the Department of Education and the group's first devised and researched project was *Who's On In Number Four* (1982), a play about the courts, a judge and arbitrary sentencing (274). The City Workshop, as the group called themselves, next improvised a "welfare sketch" about supplementary social welfare payments (something of which all of the members of the group had experience) and this was followed by a play based on the history of a local area known as the Monto. Archival research and personal interviews provided the background for *The Kips, The Digs, The Village* (1982) as the Monto play was called, bringing to mind the working methodology and focus of

ANU Productions' Monto plays (2010-14),[78] and it played to full houses (286-7). A character from this play called 'the jelly woman' went on to have her own one woman show in 1986 called *Shades of the Jelly Woman*, written by Sheridan and played by Jean Doyle. *The Rock and Roll Show* (1982), about 1950s and sixties Dublin, was written by Sheridan and was followed by another researched and collaborative project resulting in two plays: one called *Pledges and Promises* (1983) which looked at the effect of the demise of the Dublin docklands and a second, *A Hape of Junk (1983)*, which looked at the resulting unemployment and drug taking which hit the area. Sheridan also adapted two books for the stage, *Down All the Days* (1982) by Christy Brown and *Mother of All the Behans* (1987) by Brian Behan, while his play for young people, *Bust*, was commissioned by the Dublin Youth Theatre. Sheridan's work, along with others of the period, brought community arts to the stage and he represents an indigenous work ethic which sought to bring working-class Dublin, its history and people, to national attention. His work doubtless exerted an influence on companies such as The Passion Machine's writers and other playwrights discussed below.

Joe O'Byrne's play *Gerrup!* (1988), for Co-Motion Theatre Company, literally assigns class status to all his characters by listing them as either middle class or working class in his character list. Sandra is the only middle-class person named and she is a "former junkie" (Character List). She is the first person on stage and is followed by a "group of lads" who, in a choreographed manner, kick her, thump her and finally as the music changes to waltz music, 'rape' her with a syringe (1). This dream sequence morphs—with the help of lighting and sound—into a more realistic scenario of Sandra wakening up and describing what appears to be a drug experience to the audience (1-2). Notable here is a trope which is evident throughout the plays in this chapter and which resonates with Bakhtin's concept of the 'collective' or 'folk body' in *Rabelais and his World*: the working-class characters move and act as a group, in this case a frenzied violent body with one common purpose. O'Byrne's play uses music and dance to allow this corpus act as one; characters in the play complain individually about their lack of girlfriends/boyfriends, unemployment and emigration, but collaboratively they become a carnivalesque body. The music aesthetic is punk, channelling working-class rebellion with the Stranglers and the Sex Pistols. Cleary, speaking specifically of the Pogues, notes that their strategy of "grafting punk onto folk" connected their music to "an historic sensibility that had been shaped . . . in the rough and tumble subaltern subcultures of the Irish and British-Irish lumpenproletariat" (269). Language in O'Byrne's play denotes the characters' working-class backgrounds, there is much swearing, the dialogue is generally antagonistic in tone and talk is of sex, alcohol (and curiously circuses in the girls' scene). Scene four opens with another dialogue from Sandra, her character given individuality, agency and gravitas in contrast to the others (11-2). She also appears to be the only one attending college (26).

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[78] Brian Singleton has written about ANU's Monto Cycle in his book *ANU Productions: The Monto Cycle* (2016).

Dance and song continue as the groups of girls and boys move about the stage, celebrating an earthy sexuality. Sex comes at a price though and Mags, one of the female protagonists, becomes pregnant and leaves to have an abortion, accompanied by Sandra. Writing abortion themes into the play, as does Brendan Gleeson in his Passion Machine script *Breaking Up* and Aodhan Madden in his play *Sensations*, is a clear challenge to church, state, and establishment, the 1983 referendum having made abortion illegal in Ireland earlier in the decade. Bleak social realism is present but it tends to be articulated or monologised rather than emerge organically through plot development. This aspect of the play’s dramatic form is deliberately Brechtian, according to Declan Gorman, co-founder and director of Co-Motion, noting that the influence of Germany’s Weimar period “is still a more important factor than anything in the Irish tradition” (Hunter, “In from the Cold” 10). O’Byrne’s characters express an ‘us’ against the world attitude, a sense that they feel they belong on the bottom rungs of society’s ladder: Sandra is told “Ye belong where yer from. Ye’re not one of us . . .” (27); while Mags speaking about teachers says “They take from us all the time. They’ve got the laws. Why shouldn’t we take back. Nobody gives us anythin’” (41). The lyrics of the original songs incorporated into the play reflect this anger and frustration while they list the tribulations of being working class in Dublin during the period; they resonate with Lankum’s bitter mood as they portray a grim, un-nuanced urban working-class existence.

A play with an equally gritty dark tone, *Pisces the Cod* by James Douglas, played in the Peacock in 1983 and brought together a group of similarly disaffected young men, struggling to grasp meaning in lives lived without jobs, money or a focus of any sort. The play is a conversation among the youths as they hang about at a local harbour; the topics they discuss are wide-ranging and erudite. There is a sense that the play’s message lies in the fact that just being together and talking is a help, they do not have to face their problems alone. The forlorn sound of gulls and the Dun Laoghaire mailboat's foghorn accentuates their isolation from the world of the working and reminds the audience of the ubiquitous solution that emigration has become.[79] Liam Lynch's two 1982 plays were also in keeping with themes of gritty reality: *Kreig* taking on mental illness and *Voids* the familial and repetitive nature of domestic violence and poverty, as seen through the life of a Dublin tenement family. *Voids*, which was produced by Platform Theatre Group, was first staged at the Lourdes Hall, Sean MacDermott Street, in Dublin's inner-city, a traditionally working-class venue. The Focus Theatre on Pembroke Street in Dublin, run by Deirdre O'Connell, was a busy venue during the 1980s and gave voice to a number of productions with an alternative anti-establishment message or ethos. "Plays from the USSR" by Kalendâr Productions (an Irish company) featured in June 1983 and various playwrights wrote urban realism for the stage. Tom O'Neill's plays premiered in the Focus: *Have a Nice Day* (1986) features two characters discussing their challenging lives, "lives which clearly resemble his own biographical note about being drunk and stoned from the age of 17 to 30" according to Maev Kennedy in the *Sunday Independent*; *Another Day* (1987), is a short play about two young men who live in a council estate and have made a suicide pact. Tony Cafferky wrote a number of plays that also premiered in the Focus, usually during their lunchtime slot. *Potatoes* is about city people going off to pick potatoes. *Cement* and *Corporation Flat* are both set in the inner-city and both feature a relatively familiar trope of a bourgeois or middle-class character visiting a working-class community and reflecting that community from their viewpoint. In *Cement* a young student goes to work 'on the buildings' for the summer while *Corporation Flat* features a tale of two security guards watching over a flat in Dublin's Summerhill to prevent squatters moving in. One of the guards, Manus, is a middle-class writer and we know he is middle class because he tells Aggie, one of the neighbours in the flats that he's from Drumcondra: "The middle classes. I'm working my way down. My father was a doctor" (44). All of the above plays are closer to the Sean O'Casey traditional play in that they foreground the poverty, unemployment and social issues associated with Dublin's inner-city working classes.

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[79] Abbey Theatre. *Pisces the Cod*, 31 May 1983, [Prompt Script]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 2834_PS.pdf | Ref. 10826.

Two plays, written in the last years of the 1980s, portray a cynical, heartless Dublin, as they predict the rise of the individualistic 1990s and the official adoption in Ireland of the neo-liberal policies espoused by Thatcher and Reagan. *Bat the Father, Rabbit the Son* (1988) by Donal O'Kelly was first staged as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, and was produced by Rough Magic Theatre Company. O'Kelly performs the monologue himself, playing Rabbit, "a middle-aged, self-made haulage magnate" (194). The play is redolent of Dublin in its naming of places and streets, and in the cadences of O'Kelly's speech. A minimal stage allows for imaginative use of the aluminium table and chair which are the sole props; Rabbit wears a pinstripe suit and is portrayed as a Haughey-esque character, down to his sneering voice and grandiose pronouncements to Keogh, his invisible subordinate. Rabbit has clawed his way from a position of poverty to where he is now, the owner of two-hundred trucks, but today he is in a mood for reminiscences. An imaginary slide show allows for exposition of Rabbit's childhood, the defining moment of which seems to have been a fishing trip with his father where he witnesses his father's humiliation by his boss. Bat, Rabbit's father, makes various appearances; he bubbles up inside Rabbit, "taking over Rabbit's tight, squat body with his roly-poly loose-limbed wide-eyed persona" (201). Bat is a family man with an affectionate outlook on life, the antithesis of Rabbit, who broke his mother's heart in his quest to move away from the family's roots (226). Rabbit embarks on a voyage, a boat trip with Keogh in search of "his green, glassy buoy", planning to find it and "fucking weld it to my leg of Butlin's rock and never let it go. God help me, I rue the day I lost the green, glassy buoy of my past" (215). Rabbit sees the detritus of life passing by as he moves through the waterways, the "everyday legacy of the populace of the Pale"; the dirty gulls; the "filthy fish the mackerel" (217-8). Where Bat "bubbles up at the mention of Liberty Hall", his dyspeptic son disparages it: "Seventeen storeys of trade-union bloody trouble-makers" (220); Rabbit inhabits a world where the Marxist ideal of workers united against their capitalist overlords has become one of individualist materialism. O'Kelly's politics clearly point to the past as a lost utopia where men at least had integrity, if little else: Bat fought for Ireland during the 1916 rebellion, an Ireland now inhabited by voracious moneymen who aspire to be rich rather than free, according to this portrayal. Bat emerges again as the play comes to an end and embarks on a Joycean soliloquy to Mamie, his wife, which follows the path of Dublin's effluent and emissions as they go "underneath the city in the dark" to a "resting place at sea". Finally to Rabbit's despair he finds that he too has ended up back out to sea again, along with the rest of the city's unspeakable (229).

Dermot Bolger's first play, *The Lament for Arthur Cleary*, also represents a dramatic form more associated with the 1990s, individualistic and focused on a immigrant's return to Dublin, rather than a departure from the benighted city. Its magic realism is evocative of Conor McPherson or Marina Carr; it premiered in the Project Arts Centre in September 1989, just as the decade was waning. Based on the Gaelic language poem "Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire", in Bolger's play Arthur comes back to a Dublin where hope has died. Emilie Pine discusses *Arthur Cleary* in *The Politics of Irish Memory*; she sees Dublin portrayed as "a living death" in the play, as Bolger conveys Arthur's sense of alienation and fragmentation not just in the searingly critical images of Dublin at the end of the 1980s, but also with the form of the play" (85). Arthur meets the Girl though, which gives meaning to his life for a while, although her wish is to escape to anywhere else: "If I had the chance I would be gone tomorrow" (30). Girl's father sees Arthur as a no-hoper: "Where's he going, where can he bring you? Some corporation flat?" (33). Girl herself knows that Arthur is on a self-destructive path, he is being watched by dangerous men, drug dealers and pushers; the authoritarian characters of the Porter and the Frontier Guard bully him, threaten him and try to warn him. It is all to no avail, Arthur is a "posthumous man" (64) and 'his world' along with him. Warning of a dark, dystopian future place about to materialise into the present, Bolger allows Arthur to "let go" and leave it all behind (67). The Dublin of tomorrow is no place for community values or non-materialistic ambitions; rather it is an atomised space in which community had ceased to care for its own. Community as it is staged in The Passion Machine's plays still cohered; their work depicted a modern, confident, brash but self-aware Dublin working-class, in a manner which was new and challenging to the theatrical establishment of the time. They broke with the tradition of using realist dramatic form and pathos, with working-class tropes filtered through a middle-class lens and presented on stage for middle-class audiences, and instead cultivated their own audience from the same young, urban demographic as that of their protagonists. The Dublin plays of the 1980s are bookended in some ways by the early Passion Machine plays, staging tight-knit communities and utopian togetherness, and the dark pessimistic outlook of O'Kelly and Bolger, heralding the changes to come.

The Passion Machine

The Passion Machine Theatre Company was founded by Paul Mercier, John Sutton and John Dunne. PLAYOGRAPHYIreland states that:

> Passion Machine was based in Dublin and was founded in 1984. The company was a project-based operation, staging only original Irish work, and was committed to a wholly indigenous populist theatre that depicted, challenged and celebrated the contemporary Irish experience.[80]

My analysis of The Passion Machine reflects the company's ethos in that it views the plays as a collective and in doing so mirrors the plays' depiction of Dublin working class communities as a communal body. The company initially staged all their plays in the SFX Centre, in Dublin's inner city and premiered ten plays between 1984 and 1989: *Drowning* (1984), *Wasters* (1985), *Studs* and *Spacers* (1986), *The Birdtable, Brownbread* and *Going Places* (1987), *Breaking Up* and *Home* (1988) and *War* (1989). The SFX venue is perhaps significant in that its situation in Dublin's north inner-city, and its use as a venue for rock concerts and other events, signalled its remove from the more traditional theatre venues in the city and unfortunately also meant that as a theatre it was uncomfortable and chilly.

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[80] http://www.irishplayography.com/company.aspx?companyid=30045

Despite their prolific output throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s and beyond, with playwrights such as Joe O'Byrne writing for them post-1980s, The Passion Machine's plays have not received much academic attention and one of the reasons for this may lie in the fact that their ethos, themes and characters were strongly associated with Dublin's working classes. The Passion Machine were charged with catering to a subsection of Irish society, their work categorised—for instance, by Christopher Murray writing about their being emulated by other theatre companies—as plays "by, for and about deprived people in Dublin's new suburbs" ("Not Blinded By the Light" 16) and by critic Sean Moffat as "catering for a non-theatrical audience" (9). To be dismissed on the basis of audience demographics reflects on those making the judgement to a significant degree; to attract an audience such as they did seemingly transgressed the theatrical norms of the time. John McGrath for instance, writing in 1981, notes "The audience has changed very little in the theatre, the social requirements remain constant, the values remain firmly those of acceptability to a metropolitan middle-class audience" (*A Good Night Out* 15).

The Passion Machine did not attract mainstream theatre audiences, and their ability to survive as an unsubsidised venue, Fintan O'Toole points out, was down to two factors: "Mercier's ability to stage his own shows as director, and the courage of John Sutton at the SFX who has been prepared to look beyond immediate profit" (269). Without Mercier's directorial ability, O'Toole writes, "there is a strong chance the work would not have been presented for the audience which he wants to reach" (269). Equally these facts imply that Passion Machine may not have been as restricted by the "demands of patriarchal capitalism", as described by Dyer, that applied to the larger theatres (20). In *Theatre Ireland*, Murray goes as far as dismissing the plays' literary worth:

> Issues of unemployment, emigration, and self-fulfilment were on the agenda, although always in a non-intellectual, unanalysed form. One got the sense of a new generation finding fresh, irreverent articulation ("Not Blinded" 16).

Paul Mercier, The Passion Machine's artistic director, replied in the letters page of *Theatre Ireland* to both Murray and Moffat in defence of The Passion Machine. In addition to pointing out some notable inaccuracies in Moffat's article, he writes "as a critic, Sean Moffat must understand that if a play strives for some truth then it has universal appeal or relevance. If the play is truthful and works then it should be seen by as many people as it can reach" (No. 19, Jul. - Sept. 1989 52). In response to Murray he states that his article is uninformed and dismissive of "the work of a company devoted tirelessly to theatre" (No. 30, Winter, 1993 5). In an interview in the *Irish Times*, with Francine Cunningham, Mercier again defends the company against "the old criticism that Passion Machine is limited and provincial in what it does", stating that "We don't go in for high drama, high art, political theatre, obscure drama, foreign work. Our main aim is to develop a theatre about what we think is important in everyday life" (8). Mercier is clearly—and defensively—asserting Passion Machine's status as a counter-hegemonic entity in the theatre world, as its plays stage working-class lives *not* commoditised for traditional theatre audiences' consumption. Lauren Onkey, in one of few academic analyses of The Passion Machine, focuses on Mercier's "rhetoric" as he responds to critics of the plays; rhetoric partly motivated, she alleges, by "his desire to establish street credibility" (225). She fails to allow for the fact that Mercier is being forced to defend the plays' entertainment values against an elitist theatre establishment. Pierse and others have noted the opposition of the working class to the state project and of how "working-class culture in Ireland often punctures through the edifice of conventional wisdom, evading the clutches of epistemic orthodoxy" (50). Murray differentiates between The Passion Machine's "distinctly different kind of drama, relating to unemployment, rock music, crime, emigration and drugs", seeing it exist "side by side with the culturally approved repertoires of Dublin's mainstream theatres" ("The Theatre System of Ireland" 362). What is also clear is that by staging resolutely working-class plays The Passion Machine rattled a certain section of Irish opinion, for which Murray perhaps speaks when he writes about *Wasters*: "It is a new articulation of a class ominously at odds with middle-class culture" ("Some Themes in Recent Irish Drama" Par. 10). One point of difference between The Passion Machine in the SFX and traditional theatres was their policy of heavily subsidising their shows, as a means of facilitating those non-traditional theatre-goers: Mercier notes "we always wanted to keep tickets low or affordable".[81] In 1988 Passion Machine received some funding from the American-Ireland fund, to develop "new audiences and specifically to attract people who do not frequent any theatre" (Murray "The Theatre System of Ireland" 368), or as Mercier puts it: "The American-Ireland fund awarded 3,000 pounds to the company in 1988 to develop its audience programme" (email to researcher Nov. 2017). John Sutton and Jeff Byrne, Mercier explains "built a substantial network of groups, schools, clubs and factories. Anne Gately . . . also contributed to building audiences by encouraging the sponsors, their employees and associates to come to the shows" (email to researcher Nov. 2017).

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[81] Mercier made this statement in an email to this researcher, 26 Nov. 2017, and also writes "essentially the concessions were for people who i) did not go to the theatre ii) who were on low or no income iii) students & Oaps and iv) the sponsors, sponsors-in-kind and those who contributed to the hidden subsidy".

In conversation with Cunningham, Mercier also challenges the fact that his Blackrock (i.e. middle-class) background has been used to dismiss as patronising his representation of a less privileged world, asserting that "There is no note of artistic exploitation in what we do" (8). This opposition to or questioning of so-called middle-class playwrights writing about the working classes is not new, as the on-going debate over whether Sean O'Casey qualifies as middle or working-class demonstrates, with the same argument often put to Roddy Doyle due to his working-class themes. Dermot McCarthy writes of Doyle dealing with his own class assignation by describing himself as occupying a grey area between working class and middle class, a product of free education (114), and rather than represent a class background he sees Doyle represent "his changing situation in a changing society" (116). As the 1980s progressed, Murray notes, Arts Council funding to independent theatres increased dramatically from 1986 onward ("The Theatre System of Ireland" 376) and Passion Machine were granted Arts Council funding in 1987 for the first time. The end of the 1980s however brought with it a sharp decrease in Passion Machine's Arts Council support, something that was decried by various journalists and arts people, including Fintan O'Toole[82] and Joe Dowling[83]. Mercier believes the reason for this was "that the Arts Council felt they shouldn't be supporting a company promoting admission policies that were unorthodox and getting an advantage in the market by undercutting other theatres and companies - no doubt other clients of the Arts Council".[84]

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[82] "Passion Machine Deserves Better: Second Opinion", O'Toole, Fintan, *Irish Times,* 16 Jun 1990, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times,* p. A5.

[83] "Funding Passion Machine", Dowling, Joe, *The Irish Times,* 19 Jun 1990, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times,* pg. 9.

The Passion Machine Plays

Drowning, written by Paul Mercier, was the first play produced by Passion Machine, premiering in the SFX Centre in July 1984. The set is a rock concert stage and Luke, a young man from Dublin, is the narrator. Luke is an unusual character in Mercier's work in that he is allowed more individualism than are characters in the later plays. Luke uses the collective energies of an imaginary rock band, of which he is the iconic lead singer Ossie Stench, to escape from the mundanity and restriction of his life. The play starts with Luke fantasising about Ossie (Luke) taking a trip in his limo with the girl from the local unisex hairdressers. While the band may be figments of Luke's imagination, the rock music is very real and punctuates the drama to express Luke's thoughts and feelings, with original lyrics written by Mercier. The company released the sound track at the same time as the play was first staged. Luke's family present him with challenges, his love for his mother is not in doubt but we learn of her eccentricities as Luke describes her dubious pink decoration of the exterior of their council house. He also asserts the family's working-class status by noting "15 St. Brigid's Crescent was heaven on earth. It was home. Everythin' you could wish for. There was also the satisfaction of knowing ye didn't own it" (8). One definition of working class in 1980s Ireland was living in a council house. We learn that "no-one worked" in the family, except sis who works part-time in the local supermarket, so the characters' working-class credentials are definitively established, and confirmed by the clearly articulated Dublinese. Of all Mercier's work, this play is the most formulaic in terms of adhering to stereotypical depictions of working-class Dubliners. Music plays as Luke describes the series of blows that the family dealt one another, culminating in Ma locking herself in the toilet (11). As Ossie, Luke imagines public appearances where his escape from this "poor deprived upbringing" is applauded by audiences; in the song lyrics which interrupt the action, he expresses his frustration and need to get away. The effect of poverty and abuse on Ma is a major theme here: she says "My hands, Christ look at my hands and why am I so thin and that couldn't be the milk bill" (23). Luke describes another Ma though, "The loud tipsy bitch who would drag your heart through the dirt; the weeping wreck in a dressing gown who regretted ever havin' us . . ." (17). Da is portrayed as the primary source of the family's misery; he drinks to excess and is violent, meaning Luke and his brother are thrust into the role of protector of their mother. The violence is exaggerated and stylised and the comedy, music and movement and the non-realistic stage setting prevent this depiction of working-class life from moving into pathos.

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[84] Email to author, 26th November 2017.

Ma notably has middle-class pretensions and calls Da "a common layabout" as he attempts to extract her from the toilet where she retreats to escape the stresses of family life: she calls through the door, to the horror of the children: "My father was a proper gentleman who told me to stay away from corner boys. But Billy Burns got me pregnant" (31). Mayhem ensues, water pipes burst, the neighbours gather and, as Da starts to smash down the bathroom door, the "stage erupts into a rock concert again” and Luke sings the title song “Drowning” (32). The lyrics make clear his association with his family despite their dysfunction: “All that I love, Drowning” (33). When Ma ends up in the hospital the family unite as the “where-the-fuck-are-we-tribe” and take on the task of helping Ma with her escape from the “loonies” (37). They act as one now, carnivalesque play dictates their collective desire to rescue the lady from the ‘tower’ and as one they flee with Ma from the established order. They rob a car and the slapstick escape scene that ensues is comedic and visceral, as they are pursued by “the posse” (50) and finally take refuge in an upper-class house. Pretending the house is theirs, the family “act out (mime) the alternative lifestyle during the song”, “Living in Paradise”, which Luke sings (57). The contrast presents a materialistic utopia but one which the family, with the exception of Ma, do not desire. In the folkloric tales where Bakhtin traces Rabelais’s carnival roots, the peasant traditionally will show little respect for the privileged orders; he or she will treat them with contempt and trickery but critically not seek to gain entry into their sphere. Despite the troubles and violence defining the family’s existence they are a collective, capable of acting as one when needs be; they belong together. When Ma disappears again, the family must look for her in the sea and Da and Luke are moved to air their grievances. Da is given an opportunity to speak from his perspective, blaming his problematic relationships on the fact that Ma’s pretensions were responsible for his anger: “I don’t speak like a gentleman cos I wasn’t born a gentleman. I don’t wanna be a fuckin’ gentleman” (68). The music takes over as awareness of Ma’s absence becomes existential and eventually the scene reverts to the one from the beginning of the play where Luke is in bed being called to get up. It was all a dream, or was it? Luke’s final words end the play on a note of hopelessness and ambiguity when he describes finding Ma “lying on a bed of plastic bleach bottles, cans and broken glass . . . Her skin soaked white and blue” (73). However the music and non-realistic dramatic form infuse the traditional tragicomic themes of poverty, domestic violence and despair with a utopianism of collective belonging, directly appealing to a young audience.

After *Drowning,* themes of domestic abuse and overt pretentiousness do not feature strongly in Mercier’s Passion Machine plays. Subsequent characters are portrayed without the clichés of working-class depiction hobbling their representation; they are generally part of a collective entity within a contained existence, in a world which exists without constant comparison with the ‘hegemonic norm’. This is enabled by the refusal of realistic dramatic form, a refusal to have their experiences reified by the solidity of bourgeois expression. The non-commodification of the working classes in The Passion Machine plays is evident in the reception of the plays, where critics resisted their portrayal of working-class characters; their protagonists were not token agents for middle-class or international perusal, rather they reflected real life for those actually experiencing it. *Wasters* was first produced in November 1985 in the SFX Centre, and revived in 1990 when it opened in Andrews Lane theatre before transferring to the Olympia Theatre. It tells the story of three young men and three young women who meet up one night on waste-ground near a Dublin Corporation estate. Pierse notes John Fordham’s contention that working-class writing, no matter how abstract or expressionist, always foregrounds the “social image” or “moral Concern” (43), undoubtedly applicable to Mercier’s depiction here of the abandoned green fields of suburban Dublin or the overcrowded modern tenements of *Home*. Three young men, Joycer, Bonzo and Ducky, drink beer and wait for the girls to arrive so that the night can truly begin. The chat is macho and competitive, with 'slagging' the means of communication, particularly with respect to Joycer's upcoming wedding to one of the girls, Liz.[85] The lads mess around and are physically interactive. They are caught simulating sexual intercourse with each other just as the women arrive, a carnivalesque act which sets the tone for the night of drinking and debauchery ahead. There is no reticence on the part of any of the characters with respect to managing bodily functions and the appetite for drink and cigarettes is strong; Bonzo, needing to urinate, tells the rest "I've a bag full of piss" (33). A game begins which involves communal story-telling where the trick is to out manoeuvre your opponent with challenges preventing him or her from completing an imaginary plan of action. It is comical and engaging and assigns to the characters an innocence and childishness at odds with their tough images. Scene one ends with the girls performing a song and dance routine to Bob Marley's 'Three Little Birds', with the boys teasing them by clapping and chanting (47).

In scene two we find out that Joycer is about to be sentenced for a robbery, with assault. The serious conversations do not last long however and a communal assault takes place on Joycer, in fun but with Joycer getting agitated as the others strip him and threaten to get nettles and "Shove them up his hole" (63). Another game ensues, the story this time centred on breaking Joycer out of an imaginary prison and creating scenarios for his escape. The stakes are raised by the rule that anyone who curses must remove an article of clothing, Joycer being told to "Hold it like a fart" rather than lose his clothes (74). The scene ends with the same singing and dancing routine as before. Both the collaborative, performative elements and the utopian dreams of the games resonate with Dyer's assertion that commonly used descriptions of entertainment as 'escape' and 'wish-fulfilment' "point to its central thrust, namely utopianism" (20). Scene three sees various squabbles break out as the endless night goes on. Martina accuses Ducky of two-timing her with Linda Houlden "Right slapper, isn't she?" (96). Angela at this stage has been sick from drink while the resentment felt by Joycer and Ducky at the fact that Bonzo left to emigrate and did not come home for years emerges in aggressive form. Bonzo expresses the dichotomy of the emigrant: "I'm still sick of home. It never went away. Ye know somethin', it's a bastard over there" (108). Similarly to *Drowning* though, the collective body emerges as the high-energy games start again: the gang against the world, as imaginary cops chase them through the housing estates and vigilante turf, laughing, fighting, swearing, eating, drinking and running from the "special cunts" (the special branch Gardaí) and staging a faux wedding (119). Language and carnival behaviour accentuate their resistance and oppositional position as working-class youngsters. They finally end up 'here', where they are, where they started, united and tired.

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[85] Slagging is a colloquial term for teasing and is commonly used in Ireland.

Mercier's *Studs* (1986) also features a collective: a group of amateur footballers of varying ages and abilities. The set again is minimal and conducive to abstract staging of the actual football games as well as the dressing-room scenes. According to the stage management instructions: "The play relies heavily on stylisation, particularly in the football sequences . . . There is no ball. It is mimed or suggested" (5). In a manner pre-empting Mark O'Rowe's poetic vernacular, some of the speech in *Studs* is in verse. Trampas the goalkeeper challenges the others: "Go ahead and try me you fucks. Gimme hell till I'm swallowin' muck. Studs in me face, teeth in the net. I'll resurrect to teach you respect" (6). The talk among the men is gritty and often scatological: Josie loves his Sunday morning games, "Funny game but then this mud is mighty. Makes me a gladiator. Yeah, it's all up me hole. Sticky" (10). Speedy reiterates the 'sticky' nature of the game: "Can't shake off the Number four – he fucks up me ballplay . . . No time for a tricky. The only thing is for a sticky finale" (14). The language is rough and, in the canon of Irish dramatic work, relentlessly working-class. Bakhtin notes the use of what he calls the "unofficial (male) side of speech" in which Rabelais "divined specific points of view of the world, a specific selection of realities, a specific system of language that differed sharply from the official side" (238). The humour is sharp and irreverent; 'slaggings' often result in fights but team loyalty means they must stay together; they are a family.

Walter Keegan is the new manager and he asserts his standing initially with persuasion but ultimately with violence. This is accepted by the men and he wins their loyalty. Walter convinces the team to lose strategically against the Belview Estate team, normally a guaranteed win for them, and the match is staged with stylised movement and music. The non-realism clashes with the representation of the men as rough and brutish, allowing for alternative representation of working-class masculinity, and it foregrounds the carnival and collective elements of the play. The team win their next match against the renowned Malachi's, having managed expectations with their loss against Belview. This is a big deal for the players: Trampas's da takes him out to the pub for the first time and gets him "so legless I fell off his stool" (89). Walter doesn't drink though, and this disturbs the team: “Not right tha’” (99). The ‘pretend’ games that featured in *Wasters* also feature here, the team act out winning the cup together while scene three stages ‘silent movie’ montage to music where the players act out different sport scenarios. In a way that speaks of a communal experience of class subordination, this representation of a collective imagination is both a dramatic flight of fantasy and a reference to the carnival games where the downtrodden become kings, and the losers become the winners for a day. When the team finally persuade Walter to have a drink with them, cans in the dressing-room in a male-bonding exercise, he too joins in the collective imagining as he describes centre stage his own favourite career goal. As everyone gets progressively more inebriated, Mick, the centre-half, gets angry and brings his work into play, letting fly about his boss: “I hate that babyfaced cunt and his poxy sportscar. His wife is a delightful bitch who told me my missus was well-fuckin’-spoken . . . The whole place stinks of white collared shite” (120). The anger and resentment directed at bourgeois privilege is an omnipresent undercurrent. The team making it to the cup final is a community event and provides an opportunity for the men to demonstrate their physical prowess but, as Fintan O’Toole notes, in *Studs* “the hero is not an individual but a football team” (*Critical Moments* 53). The final match plays out again in stylised movement with primarily monosyllabic input from the players but ultimately the team lose and Walter is exposed as an imposter. It seems almost inevitable that they should lose, as normality comes back to roost, but the collective dreams they shared allowed for a temporary usurping of the established order in a carnivalesque flight from the reality of working-class life.

Mercier's script for *Spacers*, again performed in the SFX, lists the characters alongside their employment status. Of the three young women and four men, three are unemployed and the others work in occupations which would be considered working-class: security guard, hairdresser, shop assistant, forklift driver (2). The play centres on this group of mostly reluctant theatre-makers taking part in Chas's play in order to enter for a community variety competition. The primary emotions they display as the play begins are frustration and antagonism. The cast are not united and do not share Chas's vision for their performance: stage fights merge into real fights, with swearing and bickering the preferred mode of communication. *Spacers*, more than any of the other plays, is played primarily for comedic affect, with the 'play within the play' a slapstick farce, while the romantic subplots are equally played for laughs. Ritchie is the oldest character at fortyish and he provides a challenge to Chas's authority while, in a nod to mutual understanding between audience and actors, his 'teddy-boy' persona is a natural enemy of Belinda, a modette, and of Thomas, a skinhead, and puts him at a remove generationally from the others. A Dublin audience in the 1980s would generally have no problem reading the signs; affinity with British fashions in musical and cultural scenes saw cliques form in Dublin based on the revival of Motown and the British northern soul scene (Belinda) and a skinhead culture synonymous with gang violence (Thomas). There was a notably exclusive and violent nature to street credibility during this period in Dublin, which saw fights and stabbings break out at events and gigs regularly[86]. Ritchie provides the musical element of the play, breaking into a rock and roll number on the piano (23). This becomes a song and dance routine, with Mercier's original lyrics more parody than serious as the music unites the divergent group temporarily (24).

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[86] https://comeheretome.com/2014/04/14/violence-and-the-dublin-live-music-scene-1977-1988/

As in *Wasters* the female characters are equally as verbally aggressive and vulgar as the males; indeed when it comes to romance the women are the instigators. This may perform as a comic gender-reversal trope typical of comedy routines but it is also reflective of changing roles in Irish society and female audience expectations. Belinda grabs Thomas and "kisses him long and hard" (30), likewise Stella "grabs Ritchie and gives him a longer, fuller kiss" (50). The performance of Chas's play accounts for half of *Spacers* stage time; the group's shambolic attempts at serious drama—addressing issues such as drug abuse and gang violence—are farcical and everything that can go wrong on stage in front of a live audience does go wrong. Mercier unashamedly uses every cliché possible but to comical effect; there is no pretence at making any pedagogic or portentous points. In fact Chas's good intentions, with his play as social document, are very much parodied in *Spacers*, which may reflect somewhat The Passion Machine's resistance to pressure to provide social comment rather than 'just entertainment' values in their plays. Jimmy, the karate kid character in Chas's play, constantly asserts his position as "a serious bloke" and vigilante while Hughie, who acts Jimmy's character, is the least convincing and effective actor of the group (73). The female characters in Chas's play are helpless victims in contrast to their alter-egos off stage. The dream of a successful production is not realised but the play ends with attainable realisations of the various romantic relationships.

Roddy Doyle's *Brownbread* premiered in the SFX in September 1987. Doyle was a teacher in Greendale Community School in Dublin's Kilbarrack, a relatively new suburban area, as was Mercier. The Passion Machine asked Doyle to write for them and Doyle, who states his admiration for the company and the plays (1-2), was very happy to be involved. *Brownbread* unsurprisingly has the same setting and anarchic humour that characterises Doyle's Barrytown trilogy of novels, all of which went on to be successfully filmed for the big screen in the 1990s. With a totally unbelievable plot concerning the kidnapping of a Bishop—still the ultimate authority figure in 1980s Ireland—by three bored teenagers from Barrytown, a council estate anywhere in Dublin's outskirts, *Brownbread* is written primarily for laughs, and indeed according to O'Toole, succeeded in delivering them (*Critical Moments* 58-9). However Doyle's play also demonstrates a carnivalesque inversion of the established order and a mocking of figures of authority; it is a dramatic kick in the teeth for lawfulness and the rule of both church and state. This Bakhtinian "profanation" and subversion of the sacred and solemn, Pierse writes, "is a performative portrayal of counter cultural revolt, in which the iconoclastic and taboo, the scatological and the bodily, come out to play" (111-2). He notes Lloyd's subaltern discourse also as referencing a time when 'the people' were separate from the official institutions of state and culture and therefore a means of subverting the dominant class was required. Holed up in Donkey's parents' bedroom, the three lads, Donkey, Ao and John, are keeping the Bishop hostage. First to arrive on the scene is the 'culchie' cops, "from places far from Dublin" as Doyle puts it (10). This othering of the 'culchies' in the ethnically-homogenous Ireland of the 1980s is indicative of a need to establish an 'other' in order for the collective to define their borders and is also evident in Mercier's *Home* as it problematises urban working-class culture to a degree.

Doyle uses a heteroglossia of different accents to establish authenticity for his characters and allow his audience to understand the pre-existing divergences between the characters based solely on urban/rural or class status. Ao's da, Farrell, is as belligerent and anarchic as the three lads but represents the most likable character in the play, prepared to defend the boys for reasons of kinship and mutual mistrust of the guards. Farrell tries to find out why the lads have resorted to kidnapping but the lads are unable to articulate a specific reason for their act: "We just had enough, Da, yeh know. We just had it up to here" (21). The humour is relentlessly black and defiant. Donkey asks Farrell to feed his horse if the worst happens:

> Farrell: No I won't feed your fuckin' horse.
>
> Donkey: (*hurt*) Okay. —Okay. If yeh don't feed me horse then I'll shoot the Bishop.
>
> Farrell: Ah, shoot the jaysis Bishop an' we can all go home.

Class plays a part in denoting where our sympathies should lie: John's mother is described in the stage directions as "an appalling, overpowering person. Everything about her should scream 'I am middle class and it is the right way to be!'" (24). The truth about John's class status comes out, as his mother mentions that fact that he is going to college despite getting involved with the wrong crowd: "You've even picked up that—accent" (27). Donkey points out to John that "Gerry Delaney said you were one o' the biggest thicks in your class" and John replies "I fuckin' know. But she won't believe me" (27). The pointlessness of the kidnapping, and the inability of the lads to come up with a purpose for it, is probably the most controversial element of Doyle's play: they have not even considered asking for a ransom until the Bishop enquires as to why not. Even they are shaken though when it emerges that the Bishop is "a yank" and "They want him back" (44).

The invasion of Bull Island by a force of US Marines ups the dramatic stakes and act two opens with The Doors song "The End" playing—and referencing Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*—as "whirring helicopter blades and motors become the predominant sounds" (47). Doyle uses actual RTE broadcasters' voices describing events as they unfold on the radio, while the voices of the US military personnel are either officious or generic Hollywood American. The plans of the military go badly awry when they attack: Farrell informs the lads that the "helicopter's after crashing into the Community Centre" (65), with the loss of seventeen Marine lives but "no indigenous casualties" (67). The following day, Barrytown is described by Charlie Bird, (real life) RTE commentator, as having "an almost carnival atmosphere", with two female hawkers (street sellers) catering for the large crowds of sightseers (73). President Reagan, his image streamed live from the US, tries talking to the 'Barrytown Three' but the lads resolutely hold to their rebellious stance and refuse his appeal for reason and a way to make the seventeen lives lost meaningful. It is up to the Bishop at this point to rescue the day and as a means of expressing his scorn for the Americans he announces that he was never kidnapped, so allowing the lads to escape recrimination for their actions. The lack of any repercussions, despite the violent, anarchic nature of the crime and the resulting death count, is of course meant to be viewed as irreverent comedy but the lack of respect bordering on cruelty shown by the lads for anyone outside the collective is controversial and limits audience sympathy for their situation. Doyle’s work contains similarities to Martin McDonagh’s 1990s plays, where comedy is derived from obscure and uncharacteristic scenarios. It is also possible that Doyle was commenting on the various kidnappings carried out by the IRA and INLA during the 1980s, which could be viewed as equally pointless and disrespectful of human life. There is evidence in the play, beneath the comic elements, of a grotesque Rabelaisian representation of Dublin working-class people. Carnival allows for “youth run riot—a time when young people tested social boundaries by limited outbursts of deviance, before being reassimilated in the world of order, submission, and Lentine seriousness”, according to folklorist Robert Darnton (83).

Aidan Parkinson’s *Going Places* premiered in the SFX centre in December 1987 and stages a group of bus workers in a realistic comedy-drama set in contemporary Dublin. The drivers are mostly hard-talking union men, children of James Connolly. The still remarkable ‘equality of the sexes’ is a primary theme; the arrival of two new female bus conductors, and subsequent nights out where Lena drinks pints and plays darts, challenges the primacy of the male protagonists (22). Alcohol’s negative impact on lives and family is another theme in the play; similarly Irish people’s relationship with alcohol also plays a part in The Passion Machine’s following play, Brendan Gleeson’s *Breaking Up,* again produced in the SFX Centre, in September 1988. Dealing with emigration, unemployment issues and abortion, the play is very much a realistic portrayal of Dublin in the 1980s, lacking the physical performance elements of Mercier and the cartoon comedy world inhabited by Doyle’s protagonists. The opening scene features a group of drunken young men, some still at school but all still in their teens, celebrating finishing school for the summer by drinking in Andy's garage. There is much laughter and rowdiness. The following morning the hangovers are commensurate to the extent of the celebrations and the talk, after reruns of the antics of the night before, turns to jobs; Frank, the central character of Gleeson's drama, decides to apply for a job on a building site. Frank's relationship with his girlfriend Deirdre is about to be put to the test. Deirdre is pregnant and intent on going to England for an abortion, despite Frank putting pressure on her not to: "I don't agree with abortion" he tells her (10). Frank finds her cold about the situation; Deirdre tells him "one of us has to stay rational" (16). Frank retorts "There's a difference between being rational and being fucking inhuman" (16). The impact on the country of the divisive 1983 Abortion Referendum is clearly reflected here in Gleeson's theme. Frank begins work on the building site and endures the humiliations associated with being the new boy on the job. The Dublin accents contrast with the rural men's voices as many workers are from outside the city. After being sacked from his job on the buildings and being told by Deirdre that she isn't actually pregnant after all, Frank decides to go to Germany with his friend Andy, to do a bit of busking and look out for work. The two make it to Germany and meet up with a German woman called Hanni who finds them work but home does not go away and Deirdre rings with news of the death of a schoolfriend and later arrives over to Germany for a visit. Most of the scenes are set in bars and drinking is generally done to the point of drunkenness; Deirdre lets lose when she comes, allowing herself to join whole-heartedly in the nightly sessions in the pub. As she leaves to go back to Ireland however she informs Frank that the relationship is over and that she has actually had an abortion, and resents having had to deal with the situation alone. Gleeson stages issues particularly relevant to young people and the language of the play is often prurient in tone; this manifests for instance in the many scatological references to 'pissing' and a discussion on the merits of different countries' toilets. The depiction of the boys abroad is in keeping with the stereotype of, as Joe Cleary puts it in his discussion about the Pogues, the "drunken brawling paddies" (264). The hedonism that replaced security and a sense of belonging for a generation of 1980s Irish urban youth defines the lives of the characters in *Breaking Up*. Brendan Gleeson's first play for The Passion Machine was *The Birdtable*, an awkward office drama featuring unpleasant characters and a spectacular breakdown.

Home tells the story of Michael, from Westmeath, who arrives in Dublin to look for work and finds accommodation in a typical Dublin 1980s 'tenement' of bedsits and flats. The urban/rural divide is emphasised from the start: the character list gives each character's age and county of origin—not country—and the Dublin flat dwellers notably share characteristics that differentiate them from the others. Michael moves in on Halloween night and the constant calling of children dressed up as witches and monsters and other apparitions at the door of the house introduces an atmosphere of revelry and carnival from the start. His first meeting with a fellow tenant contrasts Michael's politeness with the brusque expletive-rich rapport of Martin (late twenties; from Dublin), when Martin enquires as to Michael's work:

> Martin: What sort of work?
>
> Michael: Management.
>
> Martin: Wha'?
>
> Michael: Hotel management.
>
> Pause. Martin takes a good look at Michael.

> Martin: Fuck off!
>
> Michael: (Shaken) In that line anyhow. (10).

Elizabeth and Christine (both twenties, both Dublin) have an ongoing feud which allows for much name-calling and aggressive behaviour. Eugene, (single, twenties, Dublin) enjoys his nights out; as it is Halloween he got "dressed up and got locked" and brought a girl dressed as a ballerina back to his flat for the night (19). Passion Machine's production uses music and a "collage of quick, split-timed images" to denote the passing of time at the beginning of scene three, adding to the sense of an over-populated and frenzied community lifestyle in the flats. Michael makes friends with Valentine, a fellow 'culchie' (mid-thirties, Cavan), receives rejection letters from his applications for work and equally has doors "closed rudely" in his face by other tenants, unappreciative of his usefulness with household appliance repair jobs and helpful manner (35). The shared bathroom is a focus of frustration for everyone, and along with the other shared areas of the house provides a communal arena where the collective entity of the house can be observed at its bodily and amorous activities. The carnival atmosphere is heightened at times of festivities, with much drinking, swearing and aggression allowing for robust relief of everyday stress.

Christmas time brings celebration and hedonism: there is a Santa collapsed in the bathroom; adulterous sex takes place in the yard; Michael reluctantly has a drinks party of his own when Valentine brings his 'hardened labourer' friends over for whiskey. The sense of antagonism shown towards Michael by other tenants does not diminish however and when he makes the critical error of getting involved in the war between Elizabeth and Christine over ownership of the house 'Hoover', the repercussions result in Tony, Elizabeth's boyfriend, shoving a breadknife under Michael's chin and warning him: "I'll fuckin' use it. Do ye hear me?" (60). Act two ends with an unpleasant exchange between Michael and two friends of Tony's who arrive back at the house after a football match. Identifying as Dubs (singing "We are Dubs. We are Dubs)", they 'other' Michael as "that culchie's been muckin' with our Tony" and bully their way into his flat to wreak revenge (67). Tony ultimately comes to Michael's rescue but the scene proposes a brutality at the heart of working-class culture that goes beyond the general chaotic but normalised banter and rough humour that characterises the play. *Home* seems to be in dialogue with *Brownbread* as it problematises the working-class culture it depicts. Afterward Michael is left alone and crying in his flat. In his previous plays Mercier also featured tough-talking, aggressive characters but with everyone included in the community and able to give as good as they receive. This play exposes the bullying characteristics of the collective entity; Michael is not from Dublin and this makes him prone to misunderstanding the nuances of the language and culture but equally he is perceived as being a legitimate target for teasing. Fintan O'Toole dismisses Michael as "essentially a sap" and perhaps his emotional sensitivities did not project during the performance to the extent they do in the written script. As carnival reigns, the permission to humiliate those "who personified the infringement of traditional norms" holds sway" (Darton 83). The relationship between Michael and Valentine is portrayed as warm and genuine however and when Valentine leaves to go back to London for work Michael is more alone than ever. As Halloween approaches again, old tenants are replaced with new versions of themselves and life in the flats goes on in the same chaotic, meaningless and pitiless way, a sharp contrast with Michael's rural small-town background. The play's final scene stages the landlord knocking on

Michael's door but this time Michael sits "still and expressionless" without answering (106).

War, Roddy Doyle's second Passion Machine play, was first staged at the SFX centre in September 1989. The stage management instructions in the published play dictate that the set is in two parts, the pub lounge stage-right and the kitchen of a corporation house stage-left. The lounge belongs to a 'local' in Barrytown which hosts regular pub quizzes, while the only inhabitant of the kitchen throughout the first scene is Briget, the wife of one of the quiz contestants, George. The quiz is a popular event which is taken very seriously by its contestants, all of whom are detested, "every one of them", by Denis, the quiz master and compiler (103). The action cuts regularly to the kitchen where time is not running parallel to pub time but moves from just before the quiz starts to a week before the event; a contrasting of a Rabelaisian collective time[87] with a modern individualistic life. The kitchen scenes allow the audience to see two of the contestants, George and Yvonne, father and daughter, outside of the pub scenario. George's wife Brigid is presented in contrast to the drinking, urinating, vomiting, shouting and fighting collective body in the pub. She reads, does the crossword, writes and is clearly the more mature intellectual one in the relationship with her husband George. The contrast with the younger generation, to which her daughter Yvonne belongs, is obvious here. Yvonne and her friends are all in the pub, drinking as much as the men and getting as uproariously and aggressively drunk; not for them the tradition of staying at home, with maybe a gin for company, while the men go to the pub. The women fight, verbally and physically; Angela, a contestant, responds to Yvonne's taunts by planning to "get her in the jacks after" (174).[88] Doyle's female characters are also as sexually voracious as their male counterparts, with the exception of Briget who seems notably written in the same mould as O'Casey's Juno. Doyle, in his novels, sets up a similar opposition between 'good' woman and violent man, begging the audience to question why would 'she' put up with 'him'. In Brigit's case, as with Paula Spencer for instance in Doyle's *Family* and *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, the implication seems to be because there is enough residual love, mixed with fear, to keep them from leaving.

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[87] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 206-7.

Pierse discusses the particular elements of class which discriminate against working-class women: the economic, where women were relying on a low-waged husband; marriage, because of Ireland's patriarchal legal rulings on the status of women pre-1980s; and the Church's stance on contraception and the "Stricter adherence to Catholic dogma by poorer families, or their inability to purchase contraceptives either way", which meant that large families were the norm, albeit with changes emerging in the 1980s (116). Briget tells Yvonne: "I'll say this much for your daddy when we were goin' out with each other. He was never boring. He was sometimes drunk. An' usually disgustin', but he was never boring" (133). Both George and Yvonne see Briget as belonging to the home, not the area of carnival which is the pub, and both reject her when opportunities arise for her to accompany them out. Doyle presents Briget's story as an alternative aspect of working-class culture. She alone seems to care about the bills and the family's status in the community, while George is much more concerned with winning and with asserting his ownership of Briget, by violent means when he deems it necessary. The scene where George threatens to hit Brigit is dark and ensures that George is depicted not as a one-dimensional comic cartoon character but rather as a sometimes violent bully (190). O’Toole feels this scene did not work on stage as the tone up to this point had been one of comedic mania but “what happens when the laughing has to stop, when what you want to show is the negative, violent, even brutal side of working-class life as well as the funny, warm, zany side?” (88).

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[88] 'Jacks' is toilet in Dublin slang.

Pub time is carnival time: drink is taken in vast quantities, with the barmaid Sandra flying back and forth in an effort to keep filling the open mouths. Sexual competition is a constant: Niamh and Yvonne fight over Dermot’s affections and Angela fancies Leo the barman for various reasons including “. . . if he ever tried to hit me I’d be able to beat the livin’ shite ow’ of him” (148). The pub toilet is in constant use and openly and regularly discussed: Tommy announces to his table “the smell in the jacks is Paraic”[89], while Angela comments that “Men’s piss is always smellier” and all loudly announce their intention when a visit to the “tylet” is imminent (130). Leo the barman is from Dundalk and in contrast to the working-class Dubliners he is a rock of sense and professionalism. As the night continues the drunkenness increases and tone and tempers are heightened. Ultimately George’s team win, for the first time in three years of coming second; Leo and Angela leave together; Yvonne breaks up Niamh and Dermot’s relationship and then rejects Dermot herself; and all the while Brigit is in the kitchen. Doyle’s use of humour is one of the play’s strongest components. The dialogue is sharp, gritty and believably working-class Dublinese; the larger than life characters—obsessed as they are with drinking, sex, fighting and bodily functions—represent a working-class body at play. Winning the pub quiz could be seen as an opportunity to challenge assumptions about working-class intellectual status and clearly represents the utopia that the team collectively desire. Doyle’s scene breaker of Groucho Marx singing “Lydia The Tattooed Lady” from the Marx Brothers’ film *At the Circus* accentuates the sense of carnival; the final scene in the published version of the script has Brigit anxiously waiting (dreading) for George to come home but at the same time unable to resist doing Groucho impressions as “Lydia” comes on the radio.[90]

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[89] Rhyming slang: Paraic = Paraic Pearse = fierce.

Doyle faced the challenge inherent in his work’s controversial depiction of working-class life when in 1994 *Family* was screened as a television series and he received “widespread and passionate outbursts of opprobrium” according to Dermot McCarthy in his book on Doyle’s work (8). Doyle stated his intention to remove his authorial voice from the work but the depiction of his working-class characters does not allow for that (27). The voice of his own lived experience is inevitably present in his Rabelais-esque portrayals of his collective working-class bodies, and perhaps as a secondary-school teacher Doyle brings the mayhem of that situation to the stage or page. However it is difficult not to read an underlying criticism of Dublin working-class culture beneath the laughter and slapstick, a criticism also notably present in *Brownbread* and in Mercier’s *Home*. McCarthy acknowledges both the “new urban realism” of Doyle’s work and the traditional nature of his expression of the carnivalesque: "the expression of a popular culture that sites itself in difference and opposition to the norms, conventions, and conformism of the 'official' culture" (28). Comedy seems manifest in Doyle's plays as a kind of Rabelaisian laughter, expressing: "a strain of popular culture in which the riotously funny could turn to a riot, a carnival culture of sexuality and sedition in which the revolutionary element might be contained within symbols and metaphors or might explode in a general uprising" (Darton 99).

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[90] See Fintan O’Toole in the Reception section of this chapter for a discussion on the ending of *War*.

The Passion Machine's Critical Reception

Lorcan Roche in the *Irish Independent* voices a ubiquitous critique of The Passion Machine during their early years when he says of Doyle's *War*: "although it is not (and was not meant to be) a great night's theatre, 'War' is a great night's entertainment (7)".[91] The Passion Machine's critical reception in the 1980s is remarkable in that it demonstrates clearly how our expectation of theatre has changed over time. 'Performance' is now an adjunct to the words drama and theatre; devised, non-narrative and documentary-style theatre and performance are all mainstream dramatic expressions in Ireland in the twenty-first century, and increasingly receive academic attention despite not necessarily being text-based. Humour is obviously a central trope of The Passion Machine's plays, evident in the writing, as well as the physical and visual elements of their work, with O'Toole noting that the "close to resident" company's strengths lie in "comic timing and physical fooling around" (*Critical Moments* 73). Brian Brennan in the *Sunday Independent* writes that *Breaking Up* works "as a piece of entertainment . . . partly because it is liberally laced with visual and verbal gags, but mainly because it is delivered with that generous energy and natural sense of fun which is the hallmark of this young company" (15). He also notes the company's affinity with TV dramas such as *Auf Wiedersehn Pet* in the same article. Gerry Moriarity, writing in the *Irish Press* about Doyle's *War*, states: "Again the Dublin northside group succeed in delivering vigorous (and vernacular) unashamed popular theatre that is funny and entertaining, and packs an unpretentious, credible social-commentary punch" (15). Charles Hunter, writing in the *Irish Times*, notes that The Passion Machine catered for people who were not "theatre heads"; he states that their policy on concessionary tickets meant even successful shows in the SFX tended to lose money, while "actors and crew receive pretty minimal fees rather than wages" ("The Passion Machine: A Lust for Theatre" A11).

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[91] See the discussion earlier in this chapter on Murray and Moffat in *Theatre Ireland*.

Fintan O'Toole compiled many of his reviews and articles on theatre in his volume *Critical Moments* and generally his reviews of The Passion Machine's work are very positive; writing in 1988, he sees Passion Machine as "constituting the most important movement in the Irish Theatre of the 1980s" (72). He too acknowledges the primacy of the entertainment value in Mercier's writing. On Mercier's *Wasters*, O'Toole writes that it owes a debt to "socially realistic television drama" but "the language is new"; he describes this language as "a rapid, sneering, ironic speech" (45).[92] He notes that the play "takes its setting and the working-class characters for granted—there is no sense of a writer using people as colour, no frantic pointing to the fact that these are not usual characters of Irish Theatre" (46); this statement puts him at a remove from Murray and Moffat and their exclusionary viewpoint. Pierse notes Declan Kiberd's[93] identification of a "bleakness of tone" in plays of this period; he compares Mercier's *Wasters* with Bolger's *Journey,* as both depict a grim desolate Dublin mired in criminality and poverty (207), with the acceleration of the heroin epidemic in Dublin's inner city adding to the problems endured by inner-city areas in Dublin. I would argue that *Wasters* exudes a very different tone to *Journey,* its comedic sensibility and energy suggesting utopian possibilities in contrast to Bolger's dystopian Dublin cityscape. Speaking specifically of *Studs,* O'Toole sees the play "probe the success ethic of the Eighties with perspicacity and toughness"; additionally he sees the influence of TV on the work in a positive light: "It uses the pace and excitement of television, the medium best known to the audience it is aimed at, without sacrificing the essentials of theatre" (54).[94] Again in *Studs* O'Toole notes the collective being at the heart of the play, the concern "with the collective hopes, dreams and fantasies of a whole class" (53), as it "creates a collective portrait of the urban dispossessed" and, with Mercier's direction, welds the cast together "into a single fluid entity" (54). The play allows for the new Dublin and its new generation to be "finally, enfranchised in the Irish Theatre" (O'Toole 55).

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[92] In *Critical Moments*, his review from the *Sunday Tribune*, 1 Dec. 1984.

On *Home*, O'Toole, writes that while it does focus more on one character than any other of Mercier's work, it is still essentially about a group (73); the action is not confined to the private domestic sphere but rather takes place in "hallways, passageways, stairways, the shared back yard" with a frenetic pace which showcases

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[93] In *Inventing Ireland,* p.609.
[94] In *Critical Moments,* his review from the *Sunday Tribune,* 13 Apr. 1986.

Mercier's skill "in keeping this whirl of characters spinning, balancing farce and realism, pathos and parody" (73).[95] The best of the humour is physical, he notes, and he finds that the "dramatic dice are still loaded in favour of the young, single, male and urban" with Michael, the culchie, "essentially a sap" (74). O'Toole notes Passion Machine's difficulty in attempting "to contain groups of characters who are not essentially homogenous" (72) and certainly Mercier appears to write the character of Michael with more sympathy than he was perhaps staged. A reading of the play gives a nuanced account of Michael, and a much more critical one of his antagonists. Perhaps this disconnect reflects a desire on Passion Machine's part to cater to their audience as discussed further below with respect to *War*. On the other hand, Dublin is a relatively small city and obviously audiences at such highly successful shows as *Home* were not homogenously young urban northsiders.[96] O'Toole argues that The Passion Machine, having "achieved an incredible amount in the four years of their existence . . . they, of all companies, cannot afford to stand still or repeat themselves"; ". . . they know their scope must be always widening. Home is part of that process" (74). Certainly reality is present in the later plays, manifesting in tropes which the earlier plays reject: with Michael breaking the urban character bias in *Home*; with Gleeson's abortion theme in *Breaking Up*; Aidan Parkinson taking on alcoholism; and with Doyle's portrayal of domestic violence in *War*. Notably the dramatic form changes too, there are no music and dance or dream sequences in the later plays, as utopian intensity gives way to still funny but darker portrayals of working-class lives. These changes feel like a maturing of the company and of course a desire to take on new challenges in writing and performing. As the first plays reflect a unique, on the Irish stage at least, optimistic, anarchic youthfulness, and a non-engagement with social issues, the later plays carry the weight of an onus, as working-class plays, to address social issues.

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[95] In *Critical Moments*, his review from the *Irish Times*, 19 Nov. 1988.

[96] O'Toole notes the success of *Home* in *Critical Moments*, from his review in the *Irish Times*, 19 Nov. 1988.

On Doyle's *Brownbread,* O'Toole writes that the absurdity of the piece works dramatically "because it is built on a base of authenticity, a robust and supple recapturing of the speech and mannerisms of the working-class suburbs of Dublin" (58).[97] He notes that the play is "set against a world of authority . . . which is stupid, incompetent and completely crazy" (59). Doyle's *War* is, O'Toole believes, indicative of the balance that The Passion Machine were trying to maintain, in terms of keeping the audience they have cultivated through their comedies while at the same time desiring to show "what happens when the laughing has to stop" (88).[98] O'Toole discusses this point with respect to George's violent relationship with his wife Briget and the production choices which differ from the text of the play published by The Passion Machine. The set is not constructed as set out in the published version; it should be split in two with a constant view of George and Briget's kitchen alongside the pub set where most of the action happens, but instead the kitchen set "swings in" and is "literally subsumed into the pub"; this means that the "arena of laughter (the pub) subsumes and dominates the arena of irony, of boredom, of pain (the kitchen)" (O'Toole 89). Critically in addition, O'Toole notes, the stage ending is not the complex ending of the published version, where Briget speaks the last line of the play: “Please God, he didn’t lose again. Please” (90). This is omitted completely from the actual staged version, providing a “nice, warm conclusion”, according to O’Toole, which “makes the play in a significant sense untrue” (90). He sees the reason for this in a conflict between the company’s two main aims: “to present contemporary Irish life and to attract a large audience”, in particular noting the fact that the move to the Olympia, a much larger venue than the SFX Theatre, means that “the company has got to a point where the consequences of failure are much greater than they should ever be if good theatre is to survive” (90). This point should be balanced against the fact that The Passion Machine ran the company with little or no funding for years and Paul Mercier only became a fulltime director, having left his teaching job, in 1988. It also begs a number of questions. Should it be required of working-class plays to stage certain social issues? Does it not risk essentialising the working classes if there are certain tropes that must be addressed? Were the self-contained, carnivalesque worlds of Mercier’s earlier plays too overtly anti-establishment for an Ireland—and its working classes—about to enter the 1990s and an accelerating economic upturn?

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[97] In *Critical Moments,* his review from the *Sunday Tribune,* 20 Sept. 1987.
[98] In *Critical Moments,* his review from the *Irish Times,* 21 Oct. 1989.

Conclusion for In Dublin’s ‘Fair’ City

Ireland, in the 1980s, was experiencing an economic depression which dwarfed the more recent Celtic-tiger bust lamented by Lankum in their song “Cold Old Fire”, and this naturally coloured the themes and the tone of work from the period. The 1980s also saw right-wing economic and foreign policies in Britain begin to gain primacy over socialist governance and ultimately by the beginning of the 1990s Ireland was well on the way to embracing free-market neoliberal capitalism and preparing for the birth of the Celtic Tiger economy. The impact and trajectory of these changes, subtle though they may have initially been, are reflected in the plays of the period with the Dublin playwrights examined here notably writing dramas foregrounding issues particular to a young urban working-class demographic. The early 1980s saw Peter Sheridan devise plays which staged local experiences with a community arts project group in Dublin's inner city. Joe O'Byrne wrote *Gerrup!* focusing on social inequality and drug-taking by engaging with Brechtian techniques; other playwrights focused on issues such as domestic violence, and mental health. These plays represent a riposte to the upwardly-mobile pretentiousness of Brendan Farrell's characters in his 1980s comedies; comedies which were notably acceptable to the national theatre in ways that The Passion Machine's work apparently was not. Pre-empting the dystopian and monologic plays of the 1990s, for instance the work of Mark O'Rowe and Conor McPherson, the plays *Bat the Father, Rabbit the Son* by Donal O'Kelly and *The Lament for Arthur Cleary* by Dermot Bolger definitively brought a conclusion to the 1980s by signalling a new individualism and isolationism at play. O'Kelly's contrasting of Bat the father, an idealist revolutionary who wore his poverty with dignity, with his son Rabbit, haulage magnate, realist, "pragmatist, common-sense economist, pacifist" (232), vividly brings home the socio-political changes that took place during the period. In doing so he exposes a growing lack of security and integrity at large in society, as Rabbit's final journey takes him back out to sea without his 'green, glassy buoy' from the past for anchorage. Arthur Cleary, in Bolger's play, returns home from working abroad to an unrecognisable Dublin, which in turn refuses to recognise him. All is cruel and bleak there now and Cleary is in danger from organised crime while continuous surveillance blights his life, and death; again the securities and constants of the past are contrasted with the harshness of an advancing materialism and individualism. It is as if the realisation that something has been lost in the advance towards a more anatomised future has hit home and both Arthur and Rabbit seek ballast or harbour from the past.

The Passion Machine did not generally foreground a message in their work. Instead they identified an audience—one that was not a traditional theatre-going one—and they wrote and staged plays that very specifically reflected that audience's experiences of life and working-class identification. The company elicited strong responses to their work and its uniqueness within Irish theatre at the time. They seemed to touch a nerve with Irish theatre critics, some of whom seemingly possessed a particularly narrow definition of what theatre is and is not. Most reviewers acknowledge that Passion Machine were innovative, original, energetic and talented, but they struggle to place the company's non-realistic dramatic form, youthful aesthetic, entertainment values and gritty colloquial speech in the canon of Irish theatrical work. From a twenty-first century perspective Passion Machine are not remarkable in mixing physical theatre and music with story and text; somatic theatrical expression is no longer considered in isolation but rather in conjunction with a broader concept of theatre and performance analysis. Passion Machine's output however has notably not been examined in any detail to date. Experimental and physical theatre was a feature of, for instance, Tom MacIntrye's 1980s ensemble work in the Peacock and Abbey Theatres but in contrast Passion Machine's work was staged in the SFX Centre, which was not actually a dedicated theatre but rather was a venue known for rock concerts. The cultural changes of the 1980s which impacted on Irish working-class society—brought about, as discussed, by access to free education and therefore the expectation of upward mobility, and by the influence of positive and defiant depictions of working-class communities and youth culture on British television or in the music of bands like the Pogues—were captured by Passion Machine in their plays. Robert Gordon notes how British playwright Willy Russell captured the zeitgeist in his musical *Blood Brothers* with his "deployment of a popular vocabulary of British rhythm and blues, 'retro' rock and roll and Northern soul", ensuring it "communicates with audiences on an immediate and visceral level" (33) and Passion Machine equally engaged with a similar moment in Irish popular culture. The political aspect of the plays dwells in the collective bravado, defiance and sense of community at the heart of the characters and their lives. The collective bodies used to portray working-class urban Dubliners, as seen in Mercier's choreographed movement and dance, in *Home*'s frenetic multi-faceted living quarters, in Doyle's grotesque portrayal of pub life, all allow for a Bakhtinian challenge to the status quo, with the status quo represented by the middle-classes and bourgeois identified by Peillon as the owners of the 'State Project' (188). It also facilitates an ideological depiction of an identifiable Irish working-class united by language and an awareness of social inequality. Rabelaisian laughter, particularly in Doyle's work, addresses this inequality by mocking the powers of church and state but it does not seek to change the situation on a permanent basis; to do so would be disloyal to the collective.

Societal changes in women's lives are also reflected in the plays' rather ambiguous or uneven portrayals of its female protagonists. Young female characters are aware of the 'equality wars' and more often than not embrace life as fully as their male counterparts: women are represented equally as socialising, drinking, being sexually demanding and colourfully outspoken in *Wasters, Spacers, Going*

Places, *Breaking Up* and *War;* the notable exception in these works is Brigid in *War,* the stay at home wife and mother, and victim of domestic violence. However *Studs, Brownbread* and *Home* are male-centric scripts, with the primary concern of the female characters in *Home* focused on domestic appliances; although it is notable that *all* of the characters are confined to the domestic space. Obviously the playwrights brought their life experiences to bear on their work and the portrayal of women in the plays could be considered representative of an Ireland where female empowerment was topical but still nascent. In *Drowning* Ma personifies the suffering but feisty working-class matriarch. Pierce, discussing writing about the working classes, notes that there are expectations that the work should be political, left-leaning or indeed an organic 'proletarian literature' but equally, he argues, "classifying working-class culture too narrowly is a disabling exercise for those who seek to promote it" (30-1). While it might be argued that the depiction of working-class characters in the plays, particularly in Doyle's work, is not universally positive, nonetheless The Passion Machine's characters almost always have subjectivity and agency, and critically are unapologetically present on an Irish stage. The plays do not present or engage with the commoditised image of Ireland gaining tenure in an increasing globalised cultural market and this may have had some bearing on the fact that the 1990s saw The Passion Machine's funding decrease. Their work seems to reside in an in-between space, a transitory period, in Ireland's recent cultural history; post a traditional realist tragic-comedic portrayal of working-class life and preceding the knowingly globalised parodic dramas of Martin McDonagh and Enda Walsh. The Dublin plays examined in this chapter are all situated in urban and suburban working-class Dublin and engage with a demographic which would experience seismic shifts in economic and social status over the next two decades in a new, globalised, neoliberal Ireland. The plays themselves represent shifts in dramatic form which pre-empt the inclusive theatre of the twenty-first century and its critical reception. The work of the playwrights examined here, and largely unpublished, is important to recognise and celebrate as they stage a difficult decade in Dublin/Ireland’s history but do so with panache, verve and energy. To paraphrase Lankum’s lyrics, they always sing, even when they’re losing.

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Conclusion to Provoking Performances

This thesis offers important new perspectives and knowledge to the discipline of Irish theatre studies and historiography and addresses an overlooked period of theatre history in the Republic of Ireland. My work opens up fertile new ground for scholarship in this area, helping us to understand the artistic, cultural and social motivation of playwrights and theatre-makers writing in 1980s Ireland, and revealing the influences and perspectives from which they wrote. As identified by many academics and writers, scholarly and critical attention during the 1980s was drawn towards Northern Ireland where playwrights were engaging directly with the conflict there.[99] This means that proportionally the work of many playwrights in the Republic remains unexamined and unpublished. In addressing this knowledge gap my research provides a broad and unique study of theatre in Ireland in the specific period—the1980s— and a focused dramaturgical examination of particular plays with specific themes representative of the period. Therefore I present with a general and wide-scoping initial methodology, in the introduction to each of my three chapters, before my approach moves to excavate certain plays in more depth. The analysis of these plays offers context and theoretical evaluation of works that aptly represent theatrical, social and cultural mores specific to the time in which they were first performed or written. In order to identify these plays, from a pool of largely forgotten works, I had first to explore the theatrical arena of the 1980s, collate and review over 250 plays, and allow the informed reading of those plays which were extant and available dictate the subsequent focus of my later analytic exploration of specific texts. It should be noted however that thematic categorisation resists tidy compartmentalisation and it is not my intention to 'shoehorn' plays into categories or restrict texts to singular contexts; instead, unifying themes should arise organically and any temptation to 'tidy' plays into one group or another resisted. This methodology also informs my use of multiple theoretical frameworks to examine the plays and the period, rather than utilising a more narrow or fixed approach. The plays themselves, individually and collectively, play a critical role in dictating which discourses or theories might best apply in order to understand and contextualise the works. Additionally in the reviewing and writing of these frameworks within the stricture of a certain timeframe in history, it becomes apparent that they all inevitably overlap and intersect: feminism's addressing of power structures and hegemonic, patriarchal oppression of women finds affinity with postcolonialism's exploration of the relationship between coloniser and colonised, while both intersect with a Marxist materialist interrogation of the tension between the working classes, the bourgeoisie and the institutions of state in Ireland in the 1980s.

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[99] See Literature Review, the discussion of Field Day in Chapter Two and the table in Appendix One.

Collating and analysing the plays as a whole (from an entire decade) allows for themes which may have seemed inconsequential on a singular level to come through. My analysis identifies unifying themes of subversion and anti-establishment protest present in all of the plays examined here and clearly running through many of the dramatic works of the period. Reasons for this are discussed in depth in the individual chapters but research clearly demonstrates that the pervading atmosphere of the 1980s in Ireland—with cultural 'wars', exposure to the conflict in Northern Ireland and a dire economic recession all contributing to societal concerns—was obviously a motivating factor in the themes addressed by many playwrights during the decade. By providing a foundation or reference base for researchers wishing to work within Irish theatre in the 1980s, this thesis challenges the existing academic discourses on Irish theatre and the state and equally opens new areas for research. Chapter One has particular resonance with current and past research engaging with non-canonical women playwrights. My methodology also will hopefully provide signposting for other plays and playwrights which regrettably are not within the remit of my research here. These works include for instance Phyllis Ryan’s theatre company Gemini Productions; their work is largely unexamined to date and deserving of scholarly attention. The post-structuralist works characterising performance art in Ireland in the 1980s are not part of this thesis; nor are their relatives, the post-dramatic plays of Operating Theatre or Tom McIntyre in the Peacock. This is mainly because my selection of plays is based on thematic concerns and is textually focused but I acknowledge the significant gap this makes in my work on the period. Friel, Devlin, Jones, Parker, Reid (Christina and Graham) and the numerous other influential Northern Irish playwrights of the 1980s are not included as I limited my exploration to the Republic of Ireland, based on the fact that many detailed studies of these playwrights already exist. In this conclusion to my thesis I offer an appraisal of the challenges and positive outcomes of my research in documenting Irish theatre in the 1980s, discussing each chapter in turn, and in conclusion highlighting the relevance of my study for today’s theatre researchers and students of literature, particularly those with an interest in work engaging social, cultural and historical concerns.

Feminist Theatre: The Women Have Spoken

When writing of a different period to the one currently being experienced, it is required to bear in mind that social and cultural constructs may have undergone significant changes over time. This shift in the subjective gaze applies to the interpellation of women and Irish working-class characters on stage and our engagement with nationalism from a current perspective. When I presented a paper on feminist theatre in Ireland in the 1980s, at a conference in 2016, an academic in the audience protested that his students did not engage with Burke-Kennedy's *Women in Arms* as a feminist play.[100] His point, I believe, was to question the play's credentials as a relevant feminist piece for today. I have two responses to his comment: one is that having seen the play revived in a recent production as part of the Cúirt International Festival of Literature in Nuns Island Theatre in Galway in 2015, the play was a mischievous, provocative and very well-choreographed piece that succeeded in presenting the ubiquitously macho Táin legends in a fresh way, i.e. from the female perspective. Therefore, and bearing in mind that the play also had a successful run in 2002 (with a four star review from the *Guardian*), the play stands on its merit as successful and still significant.[101] Additionally however, the commenter's point about the play's feminist credentials being relevant raises issues regarding the historical significance of the play and the period in which it was written. It is understandable—and also in many ways wonderful— that there may be a 'so what' response to the message of liberal feminism among students in colleges today. However, a discussion of Burke-Kennedy's re-writing of the Irish legends should appropriately allow for an appreciation of how feminist writers used myth and legend to re-think women's place in history in the period, when, to re-quote Case, "it seemed that feminist futures were to be found in feminist pasts" ('The Screens of Time' 105). The semiotics of placing legendary women on stage in central rather than supporting roles, bearing arms, alongside Brechtian interventions in the manner of direct audience address, Gestic acting, cross-gender role-playing and non-realism, all serve to highlight the tools of feminist theatre still in use today. They should be part of a dramaturgical discussion of the play, as should applying a cultural materialist approach to examining the piece. Indeed, with respect to feminist theatre in 1980s Ireland, this thesis has addressed the leading concerns of the period and provides archival and analytical context for a cultural, social, dramaturgical and historiographical understanding of plays such as Burke-Kennedy's *Women in Arms*.

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[100] The conference was '1916: Home: 2016', 16-31 October 2016, facilitated by UCD Humanities Institute.

[101] *Women in Arms* review by Karen Fricker, *Guardian*, 12 Apr. 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2002/apr/12/theatre.artsfeatures.

As discussed in my introduction to this thesis, many issues which haunt memories of the 1980s have come back to revisit this land, not least of which is the contentious issue of abortion rights. Ailbhe Smyth and other feminist activists have stated that losing the abortion referendum, along with the subsequent divorce referendum in 1986, was a huge blow to Irish feminism. In a 2002 interview with Mary McAuliffe, Smyth speaks about both referenda, and recalls her response to the result:

> . . . losing the divorce referendum after the abortion referendum was the only time in my life I've ever thought about emigrating. I thought, 'I can't stand this country any more.' And then I thought, 'No, we've had two terrible losses; it is a terrible decade, the '80s, there's dreadful economic recession,

> there's huge repression . . . I know, for myself, I really had to keep on going although it was terribly difficult . . . We were just exhausted. (McAuliffe Online).

On 25 May 2018 Ireland voted by a 66.4 percent majority to overthrow the Eighth Amendment to the constitution and allow for legislation for abortion. Ailbhe Smyth led the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment to a successful result. Given the strength of the original referendum result, when the country voted by 67 percent to place the Eighth Amendment into the constitution, and the aforementioned weariness of the pro-choice lobby, it could be reasonably assumed that abortion might be avoided as a subject matter for theatre-makers during the 1980s. The result of my exploration of theatre and playwriting in the 1980s surprisingly demonstrates that abortion *was* a topic for a number of playwrights, and in general the subject was covered in a non-judgemental, rather pragmatic manner. Kennelly proposes that "Abortion can be a kind of mercy" in his *Medea*; Aodhan Madden in *Sensations* problematises society's response to those who have abortions; Brendan Gleeson and Joe O'Byrne in their scripts, feature women travelling to procure abortions as an economic and social necessity; while Anne Le Marquand Hartigan engages with the topic as a feminist issue in *Beds*. The knowledge that abortion was being scripted into dramatic works, in spite of the atmosphere of repression described by Smyth, adds nuance to our understanding of the period.

My research on Irish women playwrights aligns with a vigorous renewed focus on highlighting and investigating the dearth of female theatre-makers, on or working behind Irish stages, as demonstrated in my discussion of Waking The Feminists in Chapter One. Dedicating a chapter to female playwrights seems appropriate particularly due to current questions being asked about the many who have been overlooked or dismissed because of their gender. Nonetheless there is an argument to be made against corralling playwrights into gender specific or ‘female’ categories. Ultimately my chapter focused on the response among theatre-makers to second-wave feminism in 1980s Ireland and I believe theatre has proven to be a capable conduit for expressing such issues with immediacy, passion and nuance. Burke-Kennedy and Le Marquand Hartigan embody, in their plays *Women in Arms* and *Beds*, a plea for equality with men on their terms—an approach which characterised liberal feminism at the time—along with an acceptance of woman as essentially feminine. More disturbingly, Walshe, Burke Brogan and Kennelly stage radical feminism’s assertion of the impossibility of existing in a patriarchal society as a free, fully liberated woman. Dramatically the plays listed above almost all eschew realistic mimetic drama and rely instead on the use of myth and legend, music and movement, applying Brechtian techniques to alert audiences to the issues at large. In this they are prescient of feminist theatre today in Ireland which rarely presents as a traditional play. In *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland*, Miriam Haughton and Maria Kurdi note how, “by choosing a path away from the patriarchal heritage of realism”, women are attracted in their theatre practice to “alternative forms of making work and a diversity of themes relating to female experience” (2). They further discuss how the relationship of women playwrights and theatre-makers to feminism has shifted since the 1980s, so that ‘radical’ is not associated with second-wave radical feminist scholarship regarding theatre-practice (2).[102] This point addresses the ongoing need to apply appropriate frameworks clearly and contextually to work under consideration; two recent volumes by theatre academics, Lisa Fitzpatrick and Miriam Haughton, engage with feminist theory to analyse trauma (Haughton) and rape (Fitzpatrick) on contemporary stages. While discussion of essentialism or elitism is no longer centre stage, some things remain the same: Fitzpatrick discusses the need for female characters to possess agency on the stage (250-3); while Haughton calls for "a global, interconnected fourth-wave of feminism . . . to destabilise this patriarchal planet" (219).

Theatre and the State in Ireland in the 1980s: The GUBU State Staged

When Brian Friel challenged his fellow playwrights at Annaghmakerrig in 1983 to explain their lack of engagement with Northern Ireland and the conflict—"You shut your eyes to the most pressing and pertinent fact. Why?"—he highlighted the anomaly that was the Republic's apparent refusal to stage a response to the civil war in Northern Ireland. When he accuses them (dismissively) of writing about "Pool-halls, punk bands, suicide pacts" it becomes imperative on the researcher to query that statement (Thomas Kilroy, Papers of, 4). Friel, according to Mathews's diary notes, was referring to the various playwrights' work in progress in Annaghmakerrig when he mentions pool halls and so forth but his intervention does leave a question mark as to what playwrights south of the border *were* writing about. Similarly to Friel, Lionel Pilkington and Christopher Murray among others also point out that, despite the conflict in Northern Ireland being an emotive and distressing agenda throughout the entire decade of the 1980s, playwrights in the Republic were not taking on Northern Ireland. The staging of work which directly engaged with the conflict was almost solely left up to playwrights living or writing from Northern Ireland, and many of those stepped up to take on the task. The distaste/anger/ennui with which the general community in the Republic apparently viewed the situation ‘up north’ undoubtedly impacted on the response to plays which did attempt to be overtly political, as in the case of Murphy with *The Blue Macushla*, Leonard with *Kill* and Mathews with *The Antigone*, all of which had very mixed critical reviews based not just on artistic merit but also on subject matter. Their plays’ themes highlight how ramifications and fallout from the conflict affected the Irish state, as it turned on itself in an inability to deal with threats from within and from across the border. Nationalism, and even more so Republicanism, became ambiguous concepts during the period. The populace that spent nights in Irish pubs singing along to anti-British pro-IRA rebel ballads returned in the cold light of the day to an unexamined condemnation of any kind of nuanced response to the situation in Northern Ireland.

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[102] This discussion of Haughton and Kurdi is also included in my chapter "A Gendered Absence", as before.

In other words many Irish men and women were simultaneously historical nationalists and avid anti-nationalists when it came to Northern Ireland and the representatives of both sides in the struggle. From my research, as it examines theatre’s response to all of the above, it could be concluded that the state took advantage of the confused and conflicted relationship between the people, their government and the legislators during this time and stands accused of trying to deceive the Irish public with respect to its own agenda (Murphy and Leonard) and of trying by stealth to impose the restrictions and impositions of a police state on the country (Mathews). Most use farce and satire rather than mimetic drama to condemn the Irish state and the state enforcement body, the Garda Síochána, accusing them of corruption and of instigating policies which encroached dangerously on Irish citizens' freedom. McGuinness's Team play for young people, *Borderlands,* points to policing policies in place in the Republic that heavily discouraged any interaction between those on either side of the border, while it also hints at police brutality. It is left to Kilroy to warn of the dangers of the extremes of nationalism (he points to fascism, racism, and intolerance) and its bedfellow, the extreme inversion of nationalism, which manifests as a postcolonial hatred of the 'other' or the subaltern in oneself. Similarly to my chapter on feminism, my research methodology here applies contemporary analytical frameworks to explore the relationship between state and people as it is performed on Irish stages during the period. Postcolonial theory, in its Irish manifestation, is not currently a vibrant school of debate but nonetheless postcolonial scholars writing in the 1980s are an essential resource for my work, as they seek to understand the historical influences which led to the savagery of the war in Northern Ireland. Also included in this chapter is a summary discussion of various acts of legislation, in particular the Criminal Justice Act of 1984, which inspired many of the plays examined here, such as *Borderlands*, *The Antigone* and Joe O'Byrne's *Saint Joan*. Again I situate the plays in the context of the time in which they were written, in the spirit of historical accuracy and integrity. Dramatic texts and representations provide, from this remove, encapsulations of ephemeral phenomena such as national mood and emotional responses to current events. Lisa Fitzpatrick writes, in her recent volume *Rape on the Contemporary Stage,* of how in her own research she works on the understanding that "theatre is dialogic and that it speaks to its own social moment, that its process of reception and meaning-making is culturally and historically specific, and artistic choices made will tend to reflect or respond to tensions within a society . . .” (2). This description of theatre’s relationship with the social and cultural geography from which plays emerge and are received is very much in dialogue with my intentions and approach in this thesis.

Fitzpatrick additionally questions how the theatrical and dramatic representations of her subject matter, in this case sexual violence, “reflect the dominant metanarratives of our own cultural context, and how can they be remade to challenge those narratives?” (3) While this study does not offer proposals for restaging or reshaping the body of works examined here for a present day perspective, my research does seek to explore the ways in which the past evoked in the plays speaks to events of the here and now, offering historical reference and opportunity for understanding and contextualisation of the social and cultural background to events of the 1980s. It offers new perspectives on theatrical works which may have been previously dismissed as of no interest to an Irish dramaturgical canon and a fresh intervention in the field of Irish theatrical historiography. This chapter is clearly in dialogue with recent happenings on a world stage which has seen the rise of an ugly nationalism motivated by personality politics, economics, and anti-migrant sentiment, aligning thematically with the cynicism and opportunism of Kilroy’s protagonists in *Double Cross*. The national mood in the Republic with respect to Northern Ireland has changed too and this can be felt, for instance, in Taoiseach Leo Varadkar’s statement, made with respect to ongoing Brexit negotiations, where he tacitly acknowledges historical issues:

> To the nationalist people in Northern Ireland, I want to assure you that we have protected your interests throughout these negotiations. Your birth right as Irish citizens, and therefore as EU citizens, will be protected. There will be no hard border on our island. You will never again be left behind by an Irish Government.[103]

Additionally a sense of community and support was demonstrated post the successful ‘Repeal the Eighth’ campaign when activists immediately highlighted the need to address Northern Ireland’s restrictive abortion laws, with the *Irish Times* on 29 May 2018 writing that “Hundreds of pro-choice activists vowed to hit Northern Ireland like a ‘seismic wave’ as they stepped up their bid for change with a rally in Belfast on Monday” (online), while in the same article Varadkar is quoted as saying “he could not imagine why women from Northern Ireland would not be able to receive treatment for crisis pregnancies in the Republic” (Press Association). Compared with the divisive politics, angry accusations of corruption and enforcement of a police state, and a dismissal of the citizens of Northern Ireland, all strongly evident by the reading and analysis of the plays in this thesis, perhaps Varadkar’s comments are a hopeful and positive note on which to finish this examination of Irish theatre and the state.

In Dublin ‘Fair’ City: Working Class Bodies on Stage

The Passion Machine Theatre Company do not progress their working-class characters into radicalism or even politicisation in their plays; they do not address gender politics, except casually in their depiction of females present on stage in contemporary representations reflecting a changing Irish society where women are no longer restricted to traditional roles. These omissions were often construed as a criticism of the theatre company by contemporary critics and are addressed by Mercier when he claims a social value in what he and his fellow playwrights do: “Theatre should be doing something for people, liberating them and helping them come to terms with aspects of their lives” (Cunningham 8). While it is true that The Passion Machine’s work lacks a robust engagement with issue-led theatre (which historically appears to define working-class drama in Ireland), as a result they do not tend to reproduce stereotypes of working-class representation on stage. James Hickson discusses such clichés in his discussion of working-class plays in the Dublin Theatre Festival, giving as example the “negative, expletive-ridden accounts of crime, aggression and hopelessness” of Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle with their adaptation of *The Playboy of the Western World* in 2007 (137).[104] Equally The Passion Machine do not subscribe to an alternative representation of the working class exemplified, Hickson believes, by a production of O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* at the Abbey in 2011, with its “dirt poor but rich-spirited working-class heroes”; both representations, he asserts, “precludes new perspectives appearing and old perspectives changing” (137). The lack of those characteristics, it could be argued, contributes to The Passion Machine’s uniqueness, as they refuse to portray their characters as criminals (with one exception), drug-addicts, or as hopeless, and certainly not as heroes. Rather they are staged as ordinary people within identifiable settings, eminently relatable even if not particularly eminent as individuals. This refusal to stereotype or commodify their protagonists and focus their plays around working-class tropes resists further marginalising “a perceived ‘underclass’ of drug-addicts and ‘no-hopers’, single mothers and welfare dependants” as occurs in the scenarios described by Hickson (140).

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[103] Varadkar made this statement on 8 Dec. 2017 in conclusion of Phase 1of Brexit negotiations.

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[104] Working-class theatre and drama is discussed by James Hickson in his essay “Representation of Working-Class Dublin at the Dublin Theatre Festival”.

One facet of their dramaturgy that Passion Machine do share with Synge and O’Casey (although perhaps not with either of the particular productions mentioned above) is their use of humour; in O’Casey and Synge tales of tough lives and deceitful fabulists are made more than palatable with skilful comedic characterisation. The carnivalesque subverts authority and the rule of law but contains its own sweetener in the ribald, the cheeky and the bold. However the treatment of the not-so-funny side of life becomes problematic at times in the Passion Machine’s body of work and is discussed in this thesis specifically with respect to *Home*, *Brownbread* and *War*. Doyle’s depiction of some of his male characters, most notably George, the threatening husband in *War*, is based on the trope of the violent drunken working-class individual and his portrayal creates a tension within the play. The shouting, verbal sparring and swaggering characters of the pub scenes are primarily there for physical and comedic value, in their cartoon-like humorous rendition. However when George looms over Briget and threatens to hit, her the light-hearted atmosphere wobbles and the audience must confront a social ill that is synonymous with the working-class play and one that Doyle does address more adeptly in his later books: that of domestic violence. O’Toole makes it clear that the sudden confrontation of the audience with dark realism does not work on the night he reviewed the play; the laughter faltered but did not stop and so the audience ended up laughing at what was clearly not a funny episode (88). Where laughter made O'Casey's barbed social commentary acceptable to an audience who considered themselves above the antics of Joxer and the Captain, the identification of the audience with Doyle's characters represents a factor in making this scene problematic. Other possible factors include the audience's expectation of social issues being off the menu, while the production choices also failed to embrace or commit to this element of the text, according to O'Toole (88-9).

Indeed this finding points to opportunity for further studies examining where The Passion Machine's dramaturgy resides with respect to O'Casey and other playwrights or theatre-makers currently (or previously) writing working-class plays or staging performances. This statement equally applies to many of the lesser-critiqued plays in this thesis, as their dramaturgical stances often reveal departure from the status quo of Irish theatre norms and strong influence on current and recent playwrights and theatre-makers. Another consideration made by Hickson in his previously referenced essay also has resonance with The Passion Machine's plays: the staging of Dubliners "trapped in performative routines, as much as they are in corporation flats. The world of Northside Dublin (and their classed identities) holds them firmly and fixedly in place" (146). As the lyrics of many songs about Dublin demonstrate—including Lawless and Lankum's depiction of the city's heart as a "cold old fire"—the city has a personality, a character, which seems most authentic when performed as working class, and is present in Passion Machine's plays as such. Hence the characters are defined by place and place is manifest in their accents and attitudes, and in this respect the plays align with O'Casey and the traditional working-class Irish play. Where they resist this spatial typecasting is in their contentment to be where they are. There is no great longing for change or escape in Doyle's Barrytown or with Mercier's groups of youngsters who disrupt stereotypes by being working class on stage without enduring traumatic storylines. However to investigate and contextualise these protagonists it is necessary to introduce a distancing framework that may provide a broader interpretation of their existence on the stage at this time and in this place. Applying Bakhtin's carnival theory allows for just such a distancing and attributes a rebellious, subversive element to The Passion Machine's work. Engaging with Richard Dyer's and Jill Dolan's reading of entertainment proposes utopian tropes in the dramas, offering a means of escape from societal realities and providing a sense of community in a fragmented world. It facilitates recognition of the politics of placing dancing, singing, fighting, laughing, joking, unapologetically working-class Dublin bodies on stage; it enables a more positive interpretive reading of the ubiquitous Dublin accent and the expletive-ridden speech; and it situates the plays in international discourse and analysis of working-class texts.

The broader influences on Passion Machine's work become obvious when their work is aligned with various elements, including working-class theatre from Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, for instance John Godber's plays; with TV dramas, particularly British series like the very popular *Boys from the Blackstuff* and *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*; and with musical influences such as the Pogues. Their affinity with 'entertainment' genres, in addition to theatrical ones, was one of a number of reasons for dismissal aimed at the company, by some surprisingly sour-sounding theatre academics and critics; others include their encouragement of a non-theatre going audience, with subsidised tickets available for all shows and the fact that they did not commodify their characters for middle-class audience expectations. As Pierse writes, “often broadcasters pick on the mad or bad in working-class life, instead of shining a light on what is good” (204). The criticisms levelled at The Passion Machine beg the question as to how they would be received today; it is relevant, in the light of their reviews, to ask whether theatre is still as middle-class or elitist as it clearly was in the 1980s. According to Cathleen O'Neill, a working-class activist who attended the inaugural WTF meeting in the Abbey Theatre in November 2015, the answer is yes. Speaking to Maggie Armstrong, in the *Irish Independent*, the day after the meeting, she told how she raised her voice to congratulate everyone on stage but felt she also “needed to raise another matter - class. Theatre for the working-class is ‘relegated to community arts,’ she said. ‘Don't forget us, sisters,’ she implored the well-heeled theatre-makers on the stage” (Armstrong online).

Conclusion

This thesis provides a detailed study of Irish theatre in the 1980s. It is comprehensive in terms of the initial scope of the project as it reviews and collates many overlooked or lost plays from the period. Subsequently the research becomes specific, led by the thematic concerns of the plays themselves, and identifies three main areas of focus: play texts which stage second-wave feminism; plays which struggle with the conflicted relationship between the people and the Irish state; while The Passion Machine Theatre Company represent the many plays of the period which engage with working-class Dublin, their physical and comedic dramaturgy fitting into a popular entertainment genre. The plays all have in common provocative or subversive underlying themes which question and challenge authority or hegemony, be it the patriarchy, the state or middle-class appropriation of the arts in 1980s Ireland. The work here affords a valuable intersectional base for any future exploration of Irish theatre as it is both an archival recovery project engaging with unpublished scripts and playwrights, and a timely intervention in providing evidence of the history and context of these neglected works. Many of the plays examined here can be considered with respect to their influence on today's playwrights and theatre-makers, with my analysis highlighting original comparisons and connections and therefore contributing to Irish theatre historiography and scholarship. I look forward to future development stemming from my work: the archival research reveals a period rich in exciting and insightful works of drama and theatre too numerous for one project to encompass. Ideally my research could be used as a stepping stone to further analysis of the period while equally addressing the ongoing concerns of today's artists and scholars. Most urgently, in my work, the plays of the 1980s allow for a textual and theatrical palimpsest to be revealed which provides a historical framework for theatre's interaction and engagement with critical and pertinent issues relating to feminism, nationalism and class today.

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Appendix 1:

Year:	**Events:**	**Published Plays in Republic**	**Published Plays Northern Ireland**
1980	Charles Haughey elected leader of Fianna Fáil and Taoiseach in Dec. '79 Haughey & Thatcher meet in May IRA prisoners begin hunger strike in Oct. Hunger strike called off in Dec.	CANARIES Bernard Farrell ENGLISH THAT FOR ME! Eamon Kelly THE BLUE MACUSHLA Tom Murphy THE CHASTITUTE John B. Keane UPSTARTS Neil Donnelly	ACT OF UNION, Seamus Finnegan NIGHTSHADE, Stewart Parker THE CLOSED DOOR, Graham Reid TRANSLATIONS, Brian Friel
1981	2nd hunger strike begins in March Bobby Sands wins by-election Sands dies on hunger strike in May General election sees coalition led by Garret Fitzgerald elected & 2 hunger strikers elected to the Dáil in June Anglo-Irish Council set up in Nov.	ALL IN FAVOUR SAID NO!, Bernard Farrell THE INFORMER, Tom Murphy (1) THE SEAGULL, Thomas Kilroy VIRGINIA, Edna O'Brien	DOCKERS, Martin Lynch SOLDIERS, Seamus Finnegan THREE SISTERS, Brian Friel
1982	Haughey returned in General Election in Feb. Hyde Park and Regent's Park bombings in July General election again returns coalition and Garret Fitzgerald in Nov. Droppin Well bombing	KILL, Hugh Leonard THE FACTORY GIRLS, Frank McGuinness WOMEN IN ARMS, Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy	JAMES JOYCE AND THE ISRAELITES, Seamus Finnegan THE COMMUNICATION CORD, Brian Friel THE INTERROGATION OF AMBROSE FOGARTY, Martin Lynch
1983	Falklands war in April New Ireland forum meets in May Thatcher wins second term as PM in June Constitutional referendum on abortion Maze prison escape in Sept. Harrods bombing in Dec.	A VIEW FROM THE OBELISK, Hugh Leonard FANCY FOOTWORK, Miriam Gallagher PIZZAZZ, Hugh Leonard ROMAN FEVER, Hugh Leonard THE GIGLI CONCERT, Tom Murphy (1)	HORSEMAN PASS BY, Daniel Magee PRATT'S FALL, Stewart Parker TEA IN A CHINA CUP, Christina Reid

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Year:	**Events:**	**Published Plays in Republic**	**Published Plays Northern Ireland**
		THE GREAT HUNGER, Tom MacIntyre THEN MOSES MET MARCONI, Bernard Farrell	
1984	Anne Lovett, aged 15, dies in childbirth alone at a grotto. Kerry Babies tribunal begins. 1984 Criminal Justice Act AIDs virus identified in April Forum report published in May Thatcher rejects forum report (out, out, out) – Nov. VAT removed from theatre tickets.	BORDERLANDS, Frank McGuinness DREAMKEEPER, Miriam Gallagher LILY, Shane Connaughton SAME OLD MOON, Geraldine Aron THE SEALWOMAN AND THE FISHER, Miriam Gallagher	HIGH TIME, Derek Mahon MARY'S MEN, Seamus Finnegan NORTH, Seamus Finnegan NORTHERN STAR, Stewart Parker RAT IN THE SKULL, Ron Hutchinson REMEMBRANCE, Graham Reid THE RIOT ACT, Tom Paulin
1985	Anglo-Irish agreement signed Nov. Unionist MPs resign en masse in Dec.	A THIEF OF A CHRISTMAS, Tom Murphy (1) ALL THE WAY BACK, Bernard Farrell BAGLADY, Frank McGuinness BAILEGANGAIRE, Tom Murphy (1) CONVERSATIONS ON A HOMECOMING, Tom Murphy HOW TO ROAST A STRASBOURG GOOSE, Sydney Bernard Smith LABELS, Miriam Gallagher OBSERVE THE SONS OF ULSTER MARCHING TOWARDS THE SOMME, Frank McGuinness SPIDER, Geraldine Aron THE MASK OF MORIARTY, Hugh Leonard	NOW YOU'RE TALKIN', Marie Jones (1) OURSELVES ALONE, Anne Devlin
1986	Chernobyl nuclear disaster in April	ANTIGONE, Brendan Kennelly DOUBLE CROSS, Thomas Kilroy	GOLD IN THE STREETS, Marie Jones (1)

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Year:	Events:	Published Plays in Republic	Published Plays Northern Ireland
	Sinn Féin vote to take up seats in Dáil if elected McCarthy & Keenan kidnapped in Lebanon Divorce Referendum rejected in June	DUSTY BLUEBELLS, Miriam Gallagher INNOCENCE, Frank McGuinness	HEAVENLY BODIES, Stewart Parker JOYRIDERS, Christina Reid MUMBO JUMBO, Robin Glendinning THE GERMAN CONNECTION, Seamus Finnegan THE GIRLS IN THE BIG PICTURE, Marie Jones (1) THE SPANISH PLAY, Seamus Finnegan
1987	Haughey & Fianna Fáil re-elected in March Thatcher wins 3rd time in June Black Monday on US Stock Exchange in Oct. Enniskillen bomb in Nov.	BROWNBREAD, Roddy Doyle NOCTURNE, Miriam Gallagher SAY CHEESE!, Bernard Farrell THE INVISIBLE MAN, Jennifer Johnston	DID YOU HEAR THE ONE ABOUT THE IRISHMAN...?, Christina Reid FATHERS AND SONS, Brian Friel PENTECOST, Stewart Parker SOMEWHERE OVER THE BALCONY, Marie Jones (1)
1988	Hume & Adams meet in Jan. Gibraltar killings result in funeral attack in March British broadcasting ban on paramilitaries in Oct.	A HANDFUL OF STARS, Billy Roche BAT THE FATHER RABBIT THE SON, Donal O'Kelly BOSS GRADY'S BOYS, Sebastian Barry BREAKING UP, Brendan Gleeson CARTHAGINIANS, Frank McGuinness EXIT ENTRANCE, Aidan Mathews GOING PLACES, Aidan Parkinson HOME, Paul Mercier MEDEA, Brendan Kennelly PEER GYNT, Frank McGuinness	MAKING HISTORY, Brian Friel

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Year:	**Events:**	**Published Plays in Republic**	**Published Plays Northern Ireland**
1989	New IRA campaign begins in Feb. Fianna Fáil/PD coalition elected in July Deal barracks bombing In October 1989 the Court of Appeal quashed the sentences of the Guildford Four	BLOOD GUILTY, Antoine Ó Flatharta BOHEMIANS, Miriam Gallagher GHOSTS, Thomas Kilroy IN THE TALKING DARK, Dolores Walshe LA CORBIÈRE, Anne Le Marquand artigan LOW IN THE DARK, Marina Carr MARY AND LIZZIE, Frank McGuinness POOR BEAST IN THE RAIN, Billy Roche THE LAMENT FOR ARTHUR CLEARY, Dermot Bolger THE SECOND GRAND CONFABULATION OF DRUM CEAT, Sydney Bernard Smith TOO LATE FOR LOGIC, Tom Murphy (1) WAR, Roddy Doyle	MY NAME, SHALL I TELL YOU MY NAME, Christina Reid SAINT OSCAR, Terry Eagleton THE BELLE OF THE BELFAST CITY, Christina Reid THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES, Derek Mahon