

Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the turbulent changes within the Irish society affected the face of modern Irish drama. Ireland, originally a rural country bound by religious dogmas and its own colonial past, underwent a considerable amount of development in the latter half of the 20th century; it was predominantly manifested through an increased Celtic Tiger economic prosperity and decreasing influence of the Catholic Church. The central interest of Irish culture has always been the effort to define a unifying national metanarrative and identity. In the beginning of the 20th century this desire was motivated by a struggle to establish a vital opposition between Ireland and Great Britain and definitely renounce its depreciating status of a former colony. However, in the second half of the 20th century the discrepancy between the nationalist ideology driven idea of Irish identity (whose value has always been questionable to say the least) and its modern reality became unbridgeable.

The introduction of this thesis is dedicated to summarizing the changes within the Irish society in the course of the 20th century. A brief characterization of this turbulent development should justify the urge of more recent artists to re-formulate the Irish national metanarrative to suit the 20th century status quo. To illustrate the extent of changes, the present work will predominantly focus on three plays representing modern Irish drama – *Carthaginians* by Frank McGuinness, *Dancing at Lughnasa* by Brian Friel and Marina Carr's *The Mai*.

The original conception of Irish national identity relied to a considerable extent upon the binary opposition of the two genders: men were perceived as active, whereas passive women either represented the motivation for male heroic deeds or metaphorically epitomized nation frequently imagined in feminine terms. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to examine the subsequent development of these traditional stereotyped roles; the obsolete construction of

national identity will be contrasted with a more modern take of McGuinness, Friel and Carr. Furthermore, we intend to trace the gradual tendency to represent also previously marginalized characters – women and homosexuals. In addition, a part of this work will be dedicated to exploring the setting of the respective dramas in an effort to prove that their space is largely gendered and that the characters' fates are to a great extent determined by gender roles pre-conceived by the society. A considerable amount of attention will be equally focused on the increasing significance of the body per se. Previously, the Irish national identity was always dependent on rather spiritual values; the physical body lurked in the shadows and was consistently subject to tabooization. Moreover, with the emphasis on the performativity of the body we will also examine the issue of sexuality and homosexual orientation threatening to disrupt the omnipresent compulsory heterosexuality.

Key words: Brian Friel, Frank McGuinness, Marina Carr, *Carthaginians*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *The Mai*, gender, modern Irish drama, identity.