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The Role of Gender in Selected Irish Plays

Význam genderu ve vybraných irských dramatech

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Abstrakt

Cílem této diplomové práce je zmapovat, jak se promítly rozsáhlé změny v irské společnosti do podoby moderního irského dramatu. Kdysi především rurální země svázaná náboženskými dogmaty a koloniální minulostí prošla ve druhé polovině dvacátého století výrazným vývojem, poznamenaným především slábnoucím vlivem katolické církve a rostoucí ekonomickou prosperitou. Ústřední problematikou irské kultury byla vždy snaha o definici všeobjímající národní identity. Tato snaha byla nejdříve na počátku dvacátého století podmíněna touhou odlišit se od Velké Británie a oprostit se od koloniální minulosti. Ve druhé polovině dvacátého století se však ideologický obraz národní identity (jehož validita byla beztak vždy přinejmenším sporná) začal stále více vzdalovat realitě. Úvod této práce bude věnován shrnutí změn, kterých doznala irská společnost v průběhu dvacátého století. Ze stručné charakterizace těchto změn by měla jasně vyplynout nutnost přeformulování hlavních znaků národní identity, kterou pociťovali irští umělci druhé poloviny dvacátého století. V centru zájmu této práce bude analýza tří divadelních her reprezentujících moderní irské drama – *Carthaginians* Franka McGuinnesse, *Dancing at Lughnasa* Briana Friela a *The Mai* z pera Mariny Carr.

Původní definice irské národní identity do značné míry stavěla na binární opozici dvou genderů: muže stavěla do aktivní role, zatímco ženy představovaly pasivní motivaci pro mužské hrdinství, případně metaforicky ztělesňovaly národ jako celek. Jedním z cílů této práce je osvětlit, jak se toto pojetí tradičních rolí změnilo. Pozornost bude věnována zobrazení žen a mužů v moderním dramatu v kontrastu s původním pojetím. Dalším cílem této práce je ukázat, jak si cestu na irská jeviště našly i postavy, jejichž předobrazy byly dlouho odsunuté na okraj společnosti – ženy a homosexuálové. Část této práce bude také věnována zmapování prostředí, v němž se dramata odehrávají, ve snaze ukázat, jak jsou osudy hlavních postav determinované vyhraněným vnímáním genderových rolí irskou společností a do jaké míry se z tohoto často značně omezeného pojetí postavy dokážou vymanit. Pozornost bude rovněž upřena k vzrůstajícímu významu těla samotného – irská identita byla vždy odvozována od duchovních pohnutek, tělo se všemi svými nedostatky vždy zůstávalo (i vzhledem ke značně puritánské církvi) v pozadí a často bylo předmětem tabuizování. V souvislosti s důrazem kladeným na tělesnost

bude také předmětem zájmu citlivá (zvláště pak v tradičně katolické zemi) problematika sexuality a narušení hegemonie heterosexuální sexuální orientace.

Klíčová slova: Brian Friel, Marina Carr, Frank McGuinness, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *The Mai, Carthaginians*, moderní irské drama, gender, identita.

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 McGuinnes, *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.

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1. Introduction: Setting up the Stage

1.1 Developments in Society

While examining the significance of social and historical context framing the turbulent developments on modern Irish stages, Brian Singleton argued that "the early 1990s is used as a rough historical marker as it was the period in which Ireland transformed its economic performance, overhauled some key components in its colonial legislation, and fuelled an unprecedented growth in theatrical activity."[1] Margaret Llewelyn-Jones joins in by claiming that "economic development has changed the literal and social landscape, including attitudes to history, class and gender, and especially to religion, as the power of the Catholic Church has declined."[2] The sudden economic prosperity of the former European underdog has been arguably far less reflected in literature and culture while the destabilization of the central Irish pillar – the Catholic Church and its previously unquestioned and seemingly unquestionable dogmas – was continuously brought to prominence.

In accordance with Church's gradual descent from the pedestal, Melissa Sihra interprets Pope John Paul II's 1979 visit to the Republic as the last major flourish of Catholicism in Ireland in the twentieth century.[3] Bradley and Valiulis argue that the inevitable religious loosening up was triggered in the aftermath of numerous scandals linked with the Catholic Church and subsequently resulted into related social adjustments:

> the reform of laws affecting divorce, the availability of contraception, the decriminalization of homosexuality, the sensational events around what has become known as the X case, the fall of an Irish government over the extradition of a paedophile priest, the revelation of a bishop's

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[1] Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 3.
[2] Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002) 3.
[3] Melissa Sihra, *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 152.

> and priests' actual rather than figurative paternities, and the various pathologies of misogyny that have come to light.[4]

The Church, for centuries firmly posited in the centre of Irish life and inextricably linked with numerous deeply internalized values and rules engraved into the Irish mind, started to collapse.

As it has been already suggested, the radical changes in the Irish attitude towards religion and the formerly virtually unchallenged quasi-omnipotent Catholic Church were directly linked to dramatic developments in social and family life; Melissa Sihra provides a further concise summary of the most significant aspects:

> Well-Woman Centres' were being set up to educate and provide services for women regarding their sexual health, and in 1985 contraception became available for the first time to over 18s after a referendum was passed by two votes to one. In 1986, the first divorce referendum took place, where a demographic split could easily be discerned between a minority pro-divorce urban population and a majority anti-divorce rural population.[5]

The extent to which women were subject to these changes is significant; figuratively speaking, with increased rights and choices they were finally leaving De Valera's utopian firesides and became far more visible on the public scene: the scope of change is indubitably best epitomized and personified by Mary Robinson, the first-ever female president of Ireland. Brian Singleton also remarks on the extent of change and identifies Robinson as its keen ambassador[6]:

> At the time of her election, divorce was illegal, homosexuality criminalized, contraception strictly controlled, and abortion outlawed

[4]Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gianella Valiulis, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) 1.
[5] Sihra 152.
[6] Singleton commemorates one of Robinson´s most iconic speeches: "the appeal to Mná na hÉireann (women of Ireland) by Mary Robinson as candidate for the presidency in 1990 was in part a call to an important constituency of voters in a historically male-dominated constitutional role and election but it was also a recognition of the role women played both metaphorically but more importantly actively in the birth and subsequent creation of the nation state." Singleton 44.

> except when the life of the mother was under threat. Instead, she used her iconic position to lead, by example, a march towards social inclusiveness and the disaggregation of a singular and hegemonic vision of the Irish state as white, Catholic, patriarchal, and compulsorily heterosexual. [...] She (and her successor Mary McAleese welcomed representatives of heretofore peripheral peoples in the imaginary of the nation state: lesbian and gay activists, women's groups, Orangemen from the North, Travellers, and refugees and asylum-seekers.[7]

The previously silent and silenced citizen enclaves, identified as the Other and heretofore only significant by their absence from official discourse, were finally becoming more visible, audible and eventually vocal: for example, as a result of the earlier second wave of feminism in the 1970s[8] the Irish Women's Liberation Movement was established, followed by The Irish Gay Rights Movement in 1974. And indeed, Bradley and Valiulis conclude that the groundbreaking changes within Irish society were partially the consequence of increasingly frequent challenges of the "status quo by women's, gay and lesbian groups and dissenters from the Catholic ethos of the state, as well as a self-awareness prompted in part by affiliation with other European countries, and a crisis of identity of what it means to be Irish at the end of the 20th century."[9]

The new progressive developments in society which were naturally subsequently reflected in culture and literature suggested the urgent necessity of finding a brand new identity discourse consistent with the changed national landscape, contesting numerous previously established stereotypes. The changes within the Irish society went simultaneously hand in hand with the increasing visibility of gender and sexuality and the inevitable need to accommodate these defining attributes into an updated version of national discourse; as Bradley and Valiulis argue, "the extent

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[7] Singleton 4.

[8] Mária Kurdi, *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Comtemporary Irish Drama by Women* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 11.

[9] Bradley and Valiulis quoted in Singleton 2.

to which social experience, past and present, is gendered"[10] was finally highlighted in the developments of Irish society.

Thus, in my thesis, I would like to illuminate how three modern Irish plays, Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa,* Frank McGuinness' *Carthaginians* and Marina Carr's *The Mai,* despite some of them being traditionally interpreted in different light, contribute to establishing the much needed updated version of Irishness in which gender and sexuality is no longer omitted but on the contrary brought to the fore. Providing the historical and social context of these plays is essential to fully appreciate what their authors struggle to achieve in presenting their own view of modern Ireland.

Therefore, within my work I intend to examine Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*[11]*,* Marina Carr's *The Mai*[12] and Frank McGuinness's *Carthaginians*[13] within their social and historical context which shall be provided in the introductory part. Subsequently, I am going to engage with the strategies employed by the said authors within their plays to respond to the call for a diversified and gendered identifying narrative; moreover, I wish to focus on how they demarcate new boundaries in treatment of gender and sex in cultural expression. In addition, I want to note how their innovative approach interacts with past traditions.

In addition, I would like to argue that apart from the undeniable historical and political engagement of the plays the role ascribed to sex and gender is equally important; I will attempt to advocate that gender and sex ultimately to a large extent determine the characters' fates and fortunes. Furthermore, I would like to contrast the plays' respective portrayals of female and male characters, their relationships and scrutinize how these notions subvert the previously established conventions. Moreover, I also intend to demonstrate how space and ultimately

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[10] Bradley and Valiulis 1.

[11] Brian Friel, *Dancing at Lughnasa* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990). All subsequent quotations come from this edition and will be entered directly in the text.

[12] Marina Carr, *Plays 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999). All subsequent quotations come from this edition and will be entered directly in the text.

[13] Frank McGuinness, *Plays 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996). All subsequent quotations come from this edition and will be entered directly in the text.

even death are gendered. Ultimately, performativity of bodies and increasingly visible sexuality will also be considered.

1.2 Diversifying Narratives

As the academic discourse attempted to accommodate the recent sudden changes and the emergence of the no longer ignorable Others, it became more and more apparent that the utopian (and never really justifiable) Revivalist and nationalist fiction of Catholic, Irish-speaking traditional rural Ireland inhabited by strictly heterosexual population was more owing to reality than ever before. In addition, the ideal of unity was finally equally dismissed as woefully inadequate; not only did the modern national discourse require updating, it also necessitated a mosaic of diverse narratives to echo the multitude of newly-emerged voices.

According to Fintal O´Toole, this burning need of finding a new heterogeneous identifying narrative is clearly reflected in modern Irish drama: "Ireland is not one story anymore, and we cannot expect single theatrical metaphors for it. Instead of one story and many theatrical images of it, we are moving towards a dramatisation of the fragments rather than the whole thing, the whole society."[14] Bernadette Sweeney expresses a similar opinion by claiming that as Irish societies "north and south become more faceted and diverse, an authenticity or homogeneity expected in representations of Ireland is still expected from some quarters. But this single vision of Ireland is becoming increasingly rare in Irish theatre." In addition, she also juxtaposes the diversification of narratives with increasing formal variety, asserting that "in the early- and mid-nineties, the landscape of Irish theatre was changed radically by the formation of a number of young companies that fore-grounded performance style, the roles of actor and director, before or alongside text."[15] The much called-for diversification in subject matter accompanied by formal heterogeneity is confirmed by Mária Kurdi who describes a "practice of an array of non-traditional approaches and experimental forms."[16]

[14] Fintan O´Toole, "Irish Theatre: The State of the Art", *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre,* ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009) 53.
[15] Bernadette Sweeney, *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre* (New York: Macmillan, 2008) 203.
[16] Kurdi 36

In addition, the Irish stage ceased to be a sacred domain of both male actors and playwrights; for instance, Melissa Sihra notes that in *Carthaginians*, “there is for the first time, numerically, something approaching gender parity.”[17] With the definitive departure from the vision of unity and eventual embracing of a more individual approach to history and identity, Kurdi also notices the long overdue increasing emphasis on the individual body “as a site of inscriptions of cultural experience.”[18] The importance ascribed to body as a site of meaning and its performativity shall be pursued in more detail at a later stage.

Furthermore, in her study of class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality depicted through Irish literature and culture, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford identifies the numerous Ireland’s internal Others as “women, gays, abused children, travellers, and the working class.”[19] However, the groundbreaking introduction of these outsiders’ strands of consciousness and points of view into limelight was initially accepted with reluctance to say the least: as Brian Singleton points out, “it is only in the past few years that Irish theatre historians and literary critics have begun to question their obsession with Ireland’s post-colonial status and its marginalization (if not annihilation) of discourses that challenge the assumptions of the historical metanarrative.”[20] Although the previously invisible representatives of marginalized groups were finally awarded with voice, they initially still remained comfortably underprivileged: for instance, gay men would have been invariably portrayed as victims of homophobic society punished by AIDS for their subversive digression from the norm; women on stage, empty ciphers when on their own, were identified only in relation to men as wives, lovers or mothers.

However, Irish drama still had to wait for an impartial or even favourable depiction of previously ignored individuals; it was not until the 1990s when Marina Carr emerged “with plays that proffered searing attacks on prejudice, featuring marginalized central characters, strong defiant women, and often either abject male partners or repugnant patriarchs tied hegemonically to land or

[17] Sihra 135.
[18] Kurdi 40.
[19] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004) 6-7.
[20] Singleton 2.

politics." Moreover, Singleton notices that gay characters presented an even more considerable challenge; he claims that:

> gay men emerged too from their pre-1990s depiction (...) reaching their apotheosis after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993. Frank McGuinness's work embraced some truly queer characters and contested the right to represent or defend the nation in compulsorily heterosexual terms.[21]

Interestingly enough, a large part the previously mute outcasts from the Irish stages and public life in the past was embodied by women, suggesting that the formerly popular supposedly unitary visions of Ireland in fact encompassed but a minority of the real population. Brian Friel purports the strange absence in one of his plays observing that "in the big canvas of national events, women have no importance, but at some future time and in a mode we can't imagine now I have no doubt that story will be told fully and sympathetically. It will be a domestic story."[22] Friel himself attempted to at least partially fill the void in *Dancing at Lughnasa*; his agenda in this play appears to be entirely different from his previous political and politicized ventures - as the dedication on the initial pages ("In memory of those five brave Glenties women" 1) suggests, rather than the public and political, we are entering the private, almost exclusively female domain here; nevertheless, via the play the originally domestic locale is transformed into a public one. Along with the lack of insight into female subjectivity, Mária Kurdi confirms the long-lasting female void also noting that the "emphasis on the female body in contemporary drama has been long overdue in Irish playwriting to fill in the representational gap created by marginalising or derealising women characters as inferior abjects or unreachable icons in the male

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[21] Singleton 7. The gradual de-tabooization of gay characters in dramatic representations is of course precendented by a similar tendency within the Irish society: the uneasy relationship of the majority society towards its gay minority is mirrored in the long-standing law criminalizing homosexuality. Repealed in Northern Ireland in 1982 after a long and bitter oppositional campaign entitled 'Save Ulster from Sodomy', spearheaded by the then firebrand loyalist politician, the Reverend Ian Paisley (Singleton, 96), the law was still valid in the Republic until 1993, despite not being universally adhered to. As Maire Nic Suibhne puts it in her 1992 article, "in practice, these acts are never used. The police do not go out and arrest known homosexuals." Maire Nic Suibhne, "Outcasts from another age: Homosexuality in Ireland is still criminal," *The Independent* (29th July 1992).

[22] Brian Friel, *Making History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) 69.

canon."[23] Once again, Helen Lojek attributes the changes on Irish stages to turbulent upheaval within Irish society – according to her, the sudden expansion of the debate focusing on historical portrayals of women was not unprecedented in the Irish society as "women were suddenly highly visible in Irish politics, especially when Mary Robinson was elected President in 1990."[24]

Furthermore, women were not only given a voice on stage but they also began to claim increasing prominence off-stage: a few years later, as an eventually inescapable consequence confirming the growing interest in the formerly silent group and her own qualities, Marina Carr finally fitted the role of a long-coveted major Irish female playwright, unheard of and sorely missed since the times of Lady Gregory[25], counterbalancing the masculine flood of new dramatists.[26] Indeed, Melissa Sihra describes her first plays as appearing "at a key juncture in Irish theatre and culture"[27]. How crucial her presence and position in Irish drama proved to be shall be examined later.

1.2.1 Gendering Culture and History

In *Bodies that Matter* Judith Butler acknowledges the essentiality of "sex" and "gender" to determine one's identity and indeed existence; she interprets "sex" as "not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the "one" becomes visible at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility."[28] In her influential work *Gender Trouble*, Butler goes on to define gender not as a pre-existing reality but rather identifies it as a performance itself: "gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a

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[23] Kurdi 214.

[24] Helen Lojek, "*Dancing at Lughnasa* and the Unfinished Revolution," in Anthony Roche (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 87.

[25] However, in retrospect, it is a question whether Lady Gregory should be primarily regarded more as a presence presiding over Irish drama rather than a really significant writer.

[26] This tendency to see Carr as a major persona is slightly reminiscent of the previous efforts on the critics´ part to manoeuvre Friel into the position of the Irish Shakespeare.

[27] Melissa Sihra, "The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr," *Women in Irish Drama A Century of Authorship and Representation* ed. Melissa Sihra (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 208.

[28] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993) 1.

stylized repetition of acts."[29] Furthermore, in *Bodies that Matter* she proposes that:

> if gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes then sex does not accrue social meanings as additive properties but, rather, is replaced by the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces "sex", the mark of its full substantiation into gender or what, from a materialist point of view, might constitute a full desubstantiation.[30]

Butler also questions the validity of gender as the social construction of sex, acknowledging the difficulties is establishing who is constructing the subject,[31] seeing that "there are structures that construct the subject, impersonal forces, such as Culture or Discourse or Power, where these terms occupy the grammatical site of the subject after the "human" has been dislodged from its place."[32] In my thesis I would like to examine the validity of these concepts in relation to the three selected plays.

Less abstractly, in *Anthropology of Ireland,* Paul Medcalf also makes an attempt at identifying structures and powers that have shaped the gender narrative in the Irish locale, describing the fascinating interplay of various "forms of power: the moral power of the Catholic Church hierarchy; formal, state-sanctioned legal power; and illegal, illicit and subversive forms of power in the hands of those who resist, invert and transform official forms of power for their own ends."[33] Medcalf also notices an unbalance in critical attention claiming that "anthropologists have not always focused equally on all of these forms of power, and have not always given equal voice to each. Nor have they always noted how they can be mediated

[29] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990) 9.
[30] Butler, *Bodies* 4.
[31] Butler, *Bodies* 5-6.
[32] Butler, *Bodies* 8.
[33] Paul Medcalf, "Controlling Bodies" in *The Anthropology of Ireland,* ed. Tomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Oxford: Berg, 2006) 67.

by gender."[34] Furthermore, while equally acknowledging these internal influences Singleton also advocates reaching towards the outside and perhaps interdisciplinary domain in order to gain a better understanding, since "theorizing gender as a cultural construction also brings into question other identities, such as sexuality, as well as nationality."[35] Bradley and Valiulis concisely present another indispensable aspect of theorizing gender, stating that:

> we understand gender to be culturally constructed, and to be, like class, race and nation, susceptible of analysis from a variety of critical and theoretical vantage points: it is also, like those terms, interestingly fluid and problematic, often indeed intertwined with them in an active matrix, at the same time as it is, again like those other terms, defined historically, socially and culturally. The theorizing of gender has done much to unsettle ideas of sexual identities, and of what constitutes masculine and feminine, as being fixed and ordained by nature.[36]

In their observation, Bradley and Valiulis further examine and echo several points raised by Butler; they emphasize the fluidity of gender and the subsequent instability of identity as well as blurring of long unshaken and unshakeable boundaries. The validity of their claims in relation to the three selected dramas shall follow later.

Moreover, just as the society is to a certain extent necessarily shaped by gender narrative, Brian Singleton rightfully detects the same tendency mirrored within culture: "Irish theatre has always been gendered since it was first imagined at the end of the nineteenth century when the heroes of a mythical past were used as icons for both an emerging nation and a national culture."[37] However, the gendered narrative rarely represented the landscape of fact; incomplete and lacunaire, it was imagined and purely imaginary. As with accepting representatives of marginalized groups, the Other(s), in the official discourse, Bradley and Valiulis notice that Irish studies scholars had equally "for the most

[34] Paul Medcalf 67.
[35] Singleton 3.
[36] Bradley and Valiulis 2.
[37] Singleton 7.

part unconsciously, elided gender and sexuality from their concerns and spoken of it only in their silences on the subject."[38] However, the then existing limited gender narratives within the Irish theatrical canon were subject to a number of widespread conventions and encompassed a variety of constantly revisited stereotypes; a careful scrutiny of these will contribute to highlighting the major changes in the 1990s theatrical practice, namely in Carr's, Friel's and McGuinness' plays.

The Irish gender narratives as a concept can be characterized as deriving from strictly defined binary oppositions; the two genders have not been presented as co-existing and complementing each other - instead, they are clearly separated and divisions are further advocated within the widespread representations of both of them: Susan Cannon Harris notices that:

> in discourses about women the ideal and the material were pushed apart, creating an intra-gender split between two extreme poles. It was the other side or further consequence of the inter-gender split between masculine and feminine ambitiously yet also quite artificially constructed to protect the Irish masculine subject's position from the weakness and vulnerability that imperial discourse imposed on it.[39]

Through the traditional distinctive identification of Ireland as primarily feminine in face of masculine England, Irish men were sweepingly emasculated by mere adherence to their nation. Therefore, to provide a necessary inter-gender contrast and enhance men's reputation and hierarchic superiority, women needed to be further feminized and firmly put into place when transgressing their assigned role. In this respect, the two genders do not co-exist within the Irish narrative – rather, they compete and one of them, the female, is abused in order to assert the legitimacy of its counterpart.

Mária Kurdi traces how "casting the vigorous and hypermasculine male body as an alternative to the shameful effeminate image called forth its polar opposite in

[38] Bradley and Valiulis 2.
[39] Susan Cannon Harris quoted by Mária Kurdi 3.

the vision of the female body as passive, self-effacing and an unquestionable model of virtue."[40] Begoña Arextaga interprets the famous 1982 dirty protests in Armagh, perceived as "horrifying and incomprehensible"[41] by the public in a corresponding manner; in her view, what made the women's protest so despicable was "the appearance of menstruation in the political field."[42] In an interesting and telling contradiction, whereas the public would accept the male urine and faeces as a political statement, they gave up in "disgust" when confronted with a similar message communicated through menstrual blood. In addition to publicly demonstrating the body and its functions, it also manifests uncomfortable female initiative and agency. Arextaga nevertheless sees this provocative form as "gender-specific response to a gender-specific problem—the sexualized violence to which they had been subjected by the male guards who performed the unannounced search that triggered the protest."[43] Susan Cannon Harris also examines the causes of such fierce public reaction concluding that "these events, closely tied to woman's reproductive function, mark her body as irredeemably material and therefore resistant to idealization."[44] Subsequently, she further pursues the clash of pure ideal and realistic, stained physicality: "the female victim's body does not disappear behind her transfigured image; it remains present, solid, weighted down with the burden of corporeality and stained with sex and gender."[45] In other words, the physique of the female body is seen as a drawback rather than an asset within the traditional national perception.

It gradually becomes clear that the conventional Virgin Mary-like female drama characters, promoted from the early twentieth century and filtered through propagandistic nationalist cause, were firmly detached from their corporeality and

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[40] Kurdi 3.

[41] Begona Arextaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 126.

[42] Arextaga 127.

[43] Arextaga 128.

[44] Susan Cannon Harris, *Gender and Modern Irish Drama* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) 3.

[45] Susan Cannon Harris 3. Melissa Sihra documents the detachment of the Irish female symbolic female from her body by alluding to Gregory's and Yeats's Poor Old Woman "who vividly embodies the unresolved confrontation between symbolic 'Woman' (Mother Ireland) and debilitated physical woman. The Poor Old Woman is initially regarded with suspicion – an unquantifiable 'woman from beyond the world', whose ghostly transformation at the end of the play into 'a young girl [who] had the walk of a queen' has traditionally been regarded as a powerful image of feminine agency related to the nationalist cause. Yet this 'transformation' served to preserve the female wanderer within a frame of sublimated desire." Sihra 6.

their body as a site of meaning was a blank page; an ideal woman was a silent, passive motivation for male fights.[46] Kurdi describes the women in Irish drama as characters who are refused the chance to develop their own "subjectivity and autonomy independent of fulfilling certain feminine roles and embodying gendered stereotypes in the patriarchal economy, with which they serve a largely male, nationalist agenda."[47] Moreover, it is also crucial to remember that such images were mostly created by men for ideological purposes, making the expression of female subjectivity or body undesirable and perhaps even impossible as a result of limited male insight; any tampering with firmly posited conventions was dangerous, as Synge demonstrated with his controversial *Playboy of the Western World.* Eavan Boland eloquently expresses the absence of believable femininity in earlier Irish drama (and literature in general) by a series of bitter questions:

> What female figure was there left to identify with? None. The heroine, as such, was utterly passive. She was Ireland or Hibernia. She was stamped, as a rubbed-away mark, on silver or gold; a compromised regal figure on a throne. (...) Her flesh was wood or ink or marble. And she had no speaking part. Her identity was an image. Or was it a fiction?[48]

Replaced by an unrealistic iconic ideological construct (ironically endowed with symbolic centrality) serving a male-designed purpose, we can even conclude that women were virtually absent from Irish drama – history was indeed "his story", hers was sorely lacking; therefore, the expression of female subjective reality as well as finally acknowledging her body was long overdue on the Irish stage.

As Susan Cannon Harris previously rightfully observed, "there is a vast difference between the blood of the sacrificial martyr and the blood coming from the women's bodies. One cleanses; the other stains. One promises rebirth; the other

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[46] Susan Cannon also argues that a female presence, albeit a passive one, is essential: "Pearse's masculinist rhetoric has implications not only for the men it addresses but also for the women it ignores. Since without the implied rebirth the death loses its power, women are written into the sacrificial narrative in order to make the bloodshed not only sanctifying but also procreative." (11).

[47] Maria Kurdi, 10-11.

[48] Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1995) 45.

negates that possibility."[49] She also notices that this convention has gone on long enough without being seriously challenged despite considerable critical attention devoted to the concept of sacrifice within the Irish locale: "the fact that the martyr is marked as male and the great Other that receives the blood of the sacrifice (whether she is Hibernia, the bog, the Virgin, or the Shan Van Vocht) is marked as female has been taken for granted by many who write, or write on, Irish drama."[50]

Also, the idea(l) of male agency and ultimately sacrifice could be equally interpreted as an attempt to rewrite another deeply rooted national narrative which has already been hinted at: with Ireland being traditionally constructed as female and feminine, the male and masculine element had been omitted and the male agency was significantly missing. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford supports this view stating that:

> the cultural production of Irish Otherness, however, placed it on the feminine end of the representational spectrum, which spelled disadvantage as well as distinctiveness. Although resisted by many Irish dramatists concerned to assert their manliness, the connection between Irishness and femininity was reinforced by the native image of Ireland as a woman.[51]

Mária Kurdi also mentions the colonial Victorian discourse and rhetoric which labelled women as inferior;[52] in this light, we can by analogy claim that Irish males were not only insignificant within the constructed sweeping feminine national identity, but further degraded by their ultimate enemies, the English. Thus, constructing the female "lamenting the woeful state of her country and her own helplessness, seeking protection from external threat or even impending rape

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[49] Susan Cannon Harris 4.

[50] Susan Cannon Harris 4. Cannon Harris also suggests that "it was the intense investment in that image of the ideal and inviolable female body that made nationalist audiences so sensitive to representations of Irish women." Susan Cannon Harris 11.

[51] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "Gender, Sexuality, and Englishness in Modern Irish Drama and Film," in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, eds. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) 159.

[52] Kurdi 2.

at the same time"[53] was highly favourable and contributed towards the colonized Irish male who could finally establish and prove his long-invisible masculinity.

In his concise summary of the context of previously stifled Irish landscape dramatically changing its face, Adrian Frazier recognized the impending need "to cross the national narrative with counternarratives [...] of gender and sexualities."[54] The plural noun concluding his statement epitomizes the scope of societal developments. Similarly, Singleton argues that the

> essentialized iconic and mythical women of the early nation's male imagination have been replaced by women who reject male authority, seek new lives beyond the strictures of the family unit and refuse to be haunted by the sick, dying and dead patriarchs in their lives.[55]

In addition, the increased prominence of women on stage is mirrored also backstage: Melissa Sihra notices that in the 1990s a number of articles began to explore women's activity in theatre. Theatre Ireland devoted an entire issue to the subject in 1993, edited by Victoria White.[56] In 2002, this trend was sealed by the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* dedicated entirely to women writers.

1.2.2 Performativity of the Body

Mária Kurdi suggests that "dual patriarchy of colonialism and Catholicism (...) advocated binarisms hinging on interlocking oppositions"[57] – mirroring the previously discussed gender binarisms, another of these oppositions consists of the detachment of mind and body (the third crucial binary opposition lies in sexuality as a marker of identity). The body was unspoken of, and if noticed, it was often perceived as a convenient site of punishment.[58] Mária Kurdi also

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[53] Kurdi 2.
[54] Frazier quoted by Sihra 4.
[55] Singleton quoted by Sihra 14.
[56] Sihra 11.
[57] Kurdi 39.
[58] See Seamus Heaney´s poem "Punishment". Pursuing the idea of punishment even further, Paul Medcalf quotes Foucault in his book: "The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micro-penalty of time, of activity, of behaviour, of speech, of the body ('incorrect' attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency). At the same time, by

notices that "in recent decade a range of theoretical discourses have started to perceive and describe identity as performative, that is not a given but the effect of a process involving acts of repetition/reiteration and citation or references of socio-culturally based models and patterns."[59] Consequently, one of the most readily available devices and tools to accordingly perform identity is indubitably one's individual body.

Judith Butler indeed sees the body "as an intentionally organized materiality. The body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention."[60] The expressive and performative possibilities of Irish bodies were always significantly restricted or even annihilated by their environment, namely the influence of the Catholic Church that "was long the sole arbiter of right and wrong, defining what it meant to be a decent person and monopolizing moral authority in every walk of life from the most public to the most private and intimate."[61] Its values have been so deeply internalized it proved to be difficult to sufficiently challenge them. Since one of the central dogmas of the Church revolves around Immaculate Conception, it has never been particularly vocal in matters concerning sexuality[62]; the only intercourse deemed legitimate was a procreative one and issues regarding contraception and taboos surrounding abortion are still a painful topic. The engagement with sexuality freed from or confined within strictly defined boundaries and its expression in Irish drama will be one of the foci of the present thesis.

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way of punishment, a whole series of subtle procedures was used, from light physical punishment to minor deprivations and petty humiliations. Foucault quoted in Medcalf 44.

[59] Kurdi 67.

[60] Judith Butler,"Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminine Studies," *Theatre Studies (*Dec. 1988) 521.

[61] Medcalf 48. Medcalf also asserts that "only recently has the power of the church as a controlling body in Irish society been challenged – principally by the media."

[62] Medcalf quotes in his book observations of his predecessor John Messenger conveying the idea of carefully maintained sexual ignorance: "If Messenger were to be believed, the average Irish islander's knowledge of sex was so woeful and limited that it is difficult to understand how the country could have been populated at all. According to Messenger, the islanders he studied, and by implication much of the rest of Ireland's rural population, were the most sexually ignorant and most puritan in the whole of Europe. (...) When we recall that Messenger was writing in the midst of the sexual revolution of the 1960s – his monograph was published in the same year that sexual and other forms of liberation were being celebrated at Woodstock – he had indeed appeared to have uncovered a cultural curio. (...) Messenger outlines how the Inis Beag islanders were generally coy and embarrassed about their bodies and their sexuality. As far as possible, men and women carried out their activities separately. (...) Such views were not confined to the West, and Humphreys (1966: 139) describes how in 1940s Dublin sex was thought to be just as unpleasant, a view largely unchanged some fifty years later when the city's more working-class residents still found sex distasteful and experienced 'anxiety about the body and bodily control." Medcalf 45-6.

Moreover, Margaret Llewellyn-Jones suggests that despite "the role of verbal language as a marker of cultural identity, performance is created through a wide range of nonverbal signifying systems: lights, sound, costume, set and especially the actor's body in terms of kinesics and proxemics."[63] However, it could be argued that the gender and sexuality of the body on stage bears at least equal, if not greater importance than the aforementioned kinesics or proxemics. Just like the scarcity of credible female sexual and entire absence of gay characters on stage communicated a significant void, already their mere presence is subsequently endowed with meaning just like their acknowledged corporeality, its performance and performativity. As Lib Taylor maintains:

> performativity is fundamental to theatre in that its conventions are developed through a process of citation or reiteration – quotation and repetition – of historical, social and cultural practices. But in theatre, the notion of performativity goes further than describing a denotative/connotative process since the term implies a self-aware theatricality and indicates a theatrical event which foregrounds the representational functioning of the staged event. What most significantly marks this definition of performativity is its conscious use of the practices and conventions of theatre, its deliberate manipulation of citation and reiteration.[64]

In the course of this work it should become conspicuous how modern drama engages with this notion of performativity to assert the significance of body on stage and communicate the altered notion of national identity.

[63] Llewellyn-Jones 11.
[64] Lib Taylor quoted by Sihra 64-5.

2. Gendered Space

In the following chapter I intend to closely examine the vital concept of space in the three dramas. As it has been in detail discussed in the introductory part through delineating the restrictions of the Irish locale, the space we (and by proxy literary characters) inhabit inevitably inherently determines and shapes their lives. Therefore, I intend to examine the settings of the three dramas in question with the aim of determining their impact upon the outcome of the plays and more specifically, the influence on characters based on their gender. Most importantly, I would like to argue that these settings are equally to a large extent gendered and liminal in several respects; this liminality is primarily evocative of the previously marginalized status of several significant Others on Irish stages. The importance of the plays' settings, which never completely abandon reality privileging a fictive space, is emphasized over time, where past and memory are compressed into singular purgatorial present. Moreover, I would also like to assert the idea that the influence is mutual and that the characters also to a considerable degree shape their living space.

The concept of liminality shall be discussed in detail at a later stage; however, even a simple definition in the *Oxford Dictionary* identifies the crucial borderland quality of a limen as: "a threshold below which a stimulus is not perceived or distinguished from another"[65]. More specifically, Victor Turner adds that "liminality may involve subversive and ludic (or playful) events, factors or elements of culture which may be recombined in numerous, often grotesque ways"; he also maintains that liminality is traceable in a time "set apart from the ongoing business of quotidian life that takes place in the subjunctive mood, a world of as if, ranging from scientific hypothesis to festive fantasy."[66]

[65] "Limen", *Concise English Dictionary,* ed. Judy Pearsall (Oxford: Oxford Unversity Press, 1999).
[66] Victor Turner quoted in Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001) 95.

I would like to argue that multi-layered and multi-levelled liminality is a crucial aspect of the three plays in question and I intend to examine how it can be applied regarding problems of gender and sexuality outlined in the dramas.

2.1 Domestic space

Both Brian Friel and Marina Carr anchor their dramas in a seemingly conventional domestic space of a secluded rural house; just like the role of women within society was carefully negotiated, a similar strategy can be easily identified in relation to a domestic setting. In a suitably theatrical metaphor, Mária Kurdi argues that a house is considered a female space, where women perform "joint roles of carers, wives and mothers, determined by social needs and patriarchal values."[67] More specifically with Carr's plays in mind, Kurdi claims that the dramas "are keen to question and to undermine the image of the house as a source of identity consolidation or well-being for the respective female protagonists in the postmodern present."[68] Furthermore, she observes in the Carr plays "an echo of the Syngean politics of space, with more emphasis on gender specifics. The discourse of home conveys a complexity of entrapment and restriction, contrasted by an alternative space, characteristically related to water and fluidity."[69] Suitably, water[70] and the fluid can be seen as a potent metaphor for exceeding boundaries and flooding and diluting dominant structures.

This is equally relevant to Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* with the sole difference of the alternative space being constituted by the sisters' garden, which Friel accordingly describes as "neat but not cultivated" in the play´s initial stage directions; however, even then the natural quality of this alternative space is directly opposed to culture and its delimitations. The garden's liminal, dual nature is demonstrated by its firm attachment to the house and yet maintaining its freedom from restrictive social conventions constantly voiced by Kate, outlawing

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[67] Kurdi 196.
[68] Sihra 13.
[69] Kurdi 197.
[70] Melissa Sihra mentions the significance and frequency of affiliation of women and water: "The evidence shows overwhelmingly that most place-names, particularly for wells and other bodies of water, refer to women. (…) Luce Irigaray writes of the potential of the fluid to 'disconcert any attempt at static identification [and how] fluid is, by nature, unstable.´ Thus fluid is always in a relation of excess or lack vis a vis unity. It eludes the "Thou art that." Sihra 13.

supposedly sinful behaviour from the house; as a result, it becomes the site of Gerry and Chris' disapproved wooing and dancing.

Examining the domestic space of Carr's drama, Melissa Sihra rightfully notices the crucial meanings attached to windows, asserting that "the limen of the window powerfully frames the emptiness that it outlines on stage. Upon closer scrutiny, the Mai is indeed continually seen passing by, drawn to, or framed within, the 'huge bay window'"[71]. By mentioning it in the very first sentence of the play ("a room with a huge bay window" 107) Carr establishes its vital centrality within her drama; figuratively speaking, her whole play opens and closes with a window. It is the site of The Mai's desperate waiting for Robert's return as well as the setting of her death. Its importance being continuously stressed, the word "window" appears four times within the first fourteen lines of Carr's drama. Significantly, it is invariably associated with women already in the initial stage directions – either with Millie or The Mai herself. Subsequently, however, it also frames other women: Connie stares in it (111), Millie opens it (111), Julie and Agnes peer in it, nosing around (134) and Beck is waved at from it (149). Whereas for The Mai the window enables a more direct connection with nature, Julie and Agnes immediately inquire into its cost, translating its original emotional value into a typical value of the traditional society. All in all, the liminal space of the window is representative of both The Mai's position on the threshold of the "respectable" society as well as being an echo of the previously marginalized position of women in general. Also, if the house was to metaphorically epitomize the nation, Julie and Agnes, representatives of the older generation of women eliminated from the official rhetoric, would accordingly be only allowed to peer into it from the perspective of outsiders; Millie, coming from a considerably more liberated era, significantly opens the window in an embracing gesture.

Friel's central location is adorned with two windows: "one kitchen window looks out front. A second window looks on to the garden" (stage directions). Melissa Sihra suggests that "the five Mundy sisters fleetingly glance at modernity, hope and possibility through the small kitchen window in 1930s rural Ireland."[72]

[71] Sihra 3.
[72] Sihra 3.

However, also Friel distinguishes between different attitudes towards this liminal space: for Agnes, the window represents an element of control; looking out of the house, she supervises Michael in the alternative space of the garden (4); it is also through the window that Maggie notices Gerry approaching the house. For Maggie, who is associated with it from the very first stage direction (and also connected to it by the very last), the window represents a refuge: upon hearing about her friend Bernie, effortlessly starring in all the roles traditionally attributed to a "proper woman", "Maggie goes to the window and looks out so that the others cannot see her face." (19)

As it has been already suggested, the windows are of course conceived of as a means of connecting the women with the external world from which they have been banished by acting against prejudiced patriarchal conventions; the window as a boundary is, despite being firmly in place, the more deceptive by its virtual invisibility and transparency. Moreover, it could be argued that these distancing conventions alongside with strangers in the respective female houses contribute to the outside world being constructed as the primarily male Other. This notion of male exterior is exaggerated to the extreme in an almost hyperbolic example in *The Mai*: biased by the widespread narrow-minded discourse, Carr's Julie in the context of an Irish village, at the mention of aborigines automatically imagines this ultimate Other as uncivilized and, more importantly, as male. (140)

All in all, both dramas are set within the domestic confines, and, as Helen Lojek notes in relation to *Dancing at Lughnasa* (and fully in concordance with *The Mai*): "visually the women are fully recognizable in the naturalistic kitchen setting. The men are visitors from some other, exotic world."[73] By Carr and Friel's constructing the domestic space as exclusively female, they adhere to Eamonn Jordan's thesis which purports the closeness of the environment by suggesting that the "outsiders, immediately obvious as outsiders, serve to emphasize the singleness."[74] The separation of both families is not only metaphorical, but also physical; The Mai's house stands on a much-coveted lonely

[73] Lojek 80.
[74] Jordan about *Dancing in Lughnasa*. Eamonn Jordan, "Metatheatricality in the Plays of Frank McGuinness," *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000) 55.

band of land surrounding the Owl Lake and the five Mundy sisters reside as outlaws two miles outside of Ballybeg town in "the most judgmental and repressive social milieu of his (Friel's) career, ostracized by the Ballybeg community"[75]. Pertaining to the initial argument, it shall be later examined in greater detail, how, in both cases, the reasons for their respective outlawing lies in the characters' failure to assume the predetermined stereotypical roles and obey conventions related to their gender. Lojek agrees with Jordan in describing the milieu as a:

> society whose revolution produced not greater opportunities for women but a codification of secular and religious paternalism. [...] Relationships to men and to patriarchy are subsumed to the primary theme – the relationship among the sisters – and even their disagreements reveal a powerful mutual bond. Each of Friel's previous women characters was isolated in a world of men. The Mundy women face Ballybeg's patriarchal world together.[76]

The female space thus stands in direct opposition to conventions primarily advocated by men and male politics; the female quality of the setting also further contributes to the construction of the male as the ultimate outside other.

Furthermore, Brian Friel devotes a substantial amount of energy to portraying the Mundys' lodgings, centred around the proverbial kitchen: "The room has the furnishings of the usual country kitchen of the thirties: a large iron range, large turf box beside it, table and chairs, dresser, oil lamp, buckets with water at the back door, etc., etc." Moreover, he adds: "but because this is the home of five women, the austerity of the furnishings is relieved by some gracious touches – flowers, pretty curtains, an attractive dresser arrangement, etc" (stage directions). Thus, in his vision, the kitchen is an exclusively female space associated with everyday chores as the priority of the iron range in the list suggests. This is confirmed by the distribution of activities in the first scene: "Maggie makes a mash for hens, Agnes knits gloves. Rose carries a basket of turf into the kitchen

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[75] Jordan 170.
[76] Lojek 78-80.

and empties it into the large box beside the range. Chris irons at the kitchen table." (2). Engaged in these domestic chores associated with female connotations, the four women communicate concern for warmth, food provision and, to a lesser degree, beauty; the absence of men and slightly masculine Kate endorses this notion of a female community.

Similarly, The Mai's house is also constructed as a female space: at first, Carr's initial stage direction ("Enter Robert. In one arm he has a travel bag, in the other a cello case. He looks around, examines the room in amazement" 111) identifies Robert as a male intruder, the proverbial stranger in the house; this conception is to a significant degree never altered despite his belated financial (and questionably emotional) contribution towards the home. Carr appropriates the house fully to The Mai communicating her ease within the premises: "She enters the room, wearing a summer dress and carrying an armful of books. She places the books on the bookshelf, a few here, a few there" (111); her natural behaviour and relaxed gestures are interrupted by the sound of cello notes, upon which she "startled – freezes." The male invader into her highly female space proves to be a destructive and ultimately fatal presence.

Melissa Sihra also interprets the crucial value the house represents in both material and metaphorical terms; she notes that:

> Carr's play shows the process of a woman 'rehousing' herself through the act of creation and storytelling. The Mai, a 40-year-old abandoned wife, attempts to provide a sanctuary and a space of artistic and imaginative possibility for her and her children, with music, books and 'a huge bay window' looking over the watery expanse of Owl Lake.[77]

However, representing merely a means of displacing a trauma, there are also darker echoes to her re-housing ambition as The Mai herself admits: "It's the kind of house you build to keep out neuroses, stave off nightmares. But they come in anyway with the frost and the draughts and the air bubbles in the radiators. It's the

[77] Sihra 208.

kind of house you build when you've nowhere left to go." (158) Nevertheless, the house is constructed by a woman and the notion of gendered, largely female domestic space is equally encouraged by the fact that The Mai's house is primarily inhabited by women – four female generations of Mai's unconventional family.

The notion of domestic space might seem to be a difficult concept to apply in relation to McGuinness' *Carthaginians;* since the author, according to Eamonn Jordan, "insists upon a vision of homelessness"[78] any domestic space is virtually absent. Upon a closer scrutiny however, we can claim that McGuinness deconstructs the supposedly idyllic domestic space to an even greater degree than Friel and Carr; McGuinness even outwardly perfects the disintegration that they merely suggested on a more intimate level. Whereas both Friel's and Carr's dramas feature at least a partially conventional harbour of a house and an alternative space, in McGuinness it is the alternative space that emerges to the fore. The absence of a more traditional home however proves to be highly informative; the characters' siege of the local graveyard communicates their feelings of loss and up-rootedness. Their absolute estrangement is declared by Paul:

> Paul: I was at a quiz tonight, but I said nothing. I used to run it. Questions and answers. [...] Who will guide me through this city of hell?
> Greta: Do you not guide yourself?
> Paul: Through Derry? It's grown foreign to me, Derry. (309)

The inability to recognize one's home(town) and provide answers for questions raised by recent traumas is echoed by Paul's failure in the quiz. In contrast to the domestic space being traditionally associated with stability, safety and warmth, the liminal lawless environment of the graveyard emphasizes dismantlement of order and confusing reversal of seemingly unshakeable values. On the other hand, it also represents an innovative and expressive theatrical space. Similarly to Carr

[78] Jordan evokes the curse of Carthage which was supposed to remain uninhabited and barren forever. Jordan 77.

and Friel, McGuinness in his own terms thus also joins in the critique of the traditional restrictive one-dimensional perception of strictly defined domestic space. Moreover, by attaching the characters' traumas related to gender and sexuality to historical events, he reconfirms the initial notion that history is indeed to a large extent gendered.

One truly domestic space fleetingly mentioned in the play is that of Maela's house – in concordance with what has been stated before, even this, albeit empty, house is a feminine territory, originally inhabited by Maela and her daughter with no mention of a male partner/father. Given Dido's gender flexibility, it could be argued that its female quality does not significantly diminish even after being subsequently settled by a drag queen. Also, the death of Maela's daughter in a way echoes the metaphorical death of home as a safe harmonic haven. In contrast eventually, it could also be argued that Sarah's longing for a child with Hark can be interpreted as a desire to resume living and (re)create a new domestic space, this time more liberal and emancipated; crucially, the initiative for a happy ending, just like in *The Mai*, lies within the female domain. However, Greta also recalls the house into which she was born: despite being identified rather as a female space, meticulously maintained by Greta's mother, it emanated coldness and sterility: "My mother was cracked, Sarah. Cracked. She never stopped cleaning. They called our house the doll's house on High Street. People used to stop and look into it through the window. The woman polished the footpath. She wallpapered the dustbin." (348) Interestingly, the recurring peering through windows might equally suggest the house's seclusion from the outside world, making it comparable to the setting of both *The Mai* and *Dancing at Lughnasa.*

Instead, in McGuinness' imaginative twist, the local graveyard is transformed into a temporary domestic space of the seven characters bereaved in different ways by the events of Bloody Sunday[79]; Nicholas Grene suggests that McGuinness might

[79] The unusualness of such a setting abounds in significance in its own right: Anne F. Kelly-O´Reilly notices the conspicuous parallel between the plot stretching over a few days and Christian waiting for Christ´s resurrection happening in a similar time frame and labels the play as a contemporary Passion narrative." Anne F. Kelly-O´Reilly, "*Carthaginians:* Narratives of Death and Resurrection in a Derry Graveyard," *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability,* ed. Helen Lojek (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 93. However, the play does not correspond with a Christian narrative only in its temporal dimensions; in the end, there is indeed a resurrection – it is

have picked up where Brendan Behan finished with his incomplete graveyard extravaganza, *Richard's Cork Leg*.[80] Furthermore, Kelly-O'Reilly quotes Greenberg and van der Kolk stating that the graveyard "a hiding place in time gone by for outcasts, lepers, fugitives, the insane, shunned by the living because of their fear of the dead, becomes for McGuinness another borderland. The watchers have moved into this borderland under the stress of loss or guilt."[81] This timeless liminal space is, similarly to The Mai's and Mundy sisters' houses, exempt from the restrictions of conventional society; it is an area where the dead and the marginalized living, the outcast homosexual and heterosexual, as well as the Protestant and the Catholic come together – it is in fact, ironically enough the Field Day's much desired fifth province where people of different creeds and characteristics are able to coexist together, an alternative space to the homogeneous norm.

Surprisingly, the graveyard is not imbued exclusively with negative connotations: Eamonn Jordan perceives it as both a private and public space which simultaneously constitutes a place of transition[82]. Also, although a sense of division can be distinguished (symbolically, Timothy D. Connors notes the stage being divide by a path from left to right in an American production[83]) the characters are, despite their gender and sexual heterogeneity, eventually joined in their effort to achieve a certain amount of catharsis. Melissa Sihra describes the graveyard vigil as having "the intensity of pilgrimage, but where the carnivalesque frame complements the ritual."[84] The relevance of the notion of the carnivalesque, the performativity of body and its gender implications will be examined at a later stage.

The seven characters, equally representing both genders inhabiting this marginal space are all confined by grief and united by their various losses suffered in

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not the proverbial rising of the dead expected by the characters, but it is their own dignity, self-esteem and hope that silently emerge from the ashes.

[80]Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 155.

[81] Kelly-O´Reilly 93.

[82] Jordan 73.

[83]Timothy D. Connor, "Derry Comes to Mid-Michigan: Staging *Carthaginians* at Central Michingan University", *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability* ed. Helen Lojek (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006) 82.

[84]Sihra 135.

connection to Bloody Sunday (although the events of that day are never directly depicted on stage, they are only present as shards of memories). Eamonn Jordan maintains that the six expectants feel the guilt of survivors and punish themselves by "self-negligence and self-damage"[85]; James Hurt sees them as people with "no access to the depth of their pain, whose individual life forces are stalled and they are functioning on a destructive automatic mode of being."[86] Moreover, as it shall become visible in later chapters, all of the characters' losses seem to be connected to identity, gender, gender roles and sexuality.

Furthermore, corresponding to the idea of gendered space, it is essential to recall that within the colonial rhetoric (which will be examined later in greater detail) of binary oppositions, England would be traditionally identified as masculine (epitomized by John Bull) whereas Ireland would be constructed as its feminine counterpart. Thus, in the politically loaded era, merely locating the drama in Ireland imbues the setting of *Carthaginians* with feminine quality; however, McGuinness takes the colonial simile even further when he associates Derry with feminine Carthage, ultimately victimized by masculine Rome. Therefore, despite defying the straightforward domestic label, McGuinness' Derry graveyard can be in a certain sense seen as a female and feminine space.

Nonetheless, the world of Carr's, McGuinness' and Friel's plays and their respective domestic environs is not exclusively female; in fact, as it already has been hinted at, it is the men who represent the sources of conflict and eventually stand at the beginning of the road to perdition. Tony Corbett goes as far as to speak of "forceful masculine penetrations into an almost exclusively female world, resulting in the disintegration of what appeared to be a unified system"[87]; Helen Lojek supports his argument claiming in relation to *Dancing at Lughnasa* that "there are no reliable men in this world. Unfaithful husbands, unsympathetic or renegade priests and men eager to marry younger women surround them."[88] In fact, the only reasonably "innocent" man in the two plays is Friel's Michael, who

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[85]Jordan 202.
[86] Jordan 202.
[87]Tony Corbett, *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2002) 135.
[88] Lojek 85. Lojek maintains this in relation to *Dancing at Lughnasa*, but this assertion can safely encompass also the world of Carr´s play.

has, cynically speaking, perhaps not yet grown up enough to hurt anybody; however, the sombre kites he paints certainly prefigure the potential repetition of the harmful male pattern.

Indeed, the female spaces in both *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *The Mai* are eventually subject to a fatal male invasion[89]; in an almost binary opposition, Carr, Friel and even McGuinness identically endow their female heroines with creativity contrasting with male destructiveness. Women build houses as ultimate proofs of love, create gloves and knitwear and embellish their living quarters; the scarce examples of male creativity in the respective plays display traces of perverted distortion: to please his wife, Robert is only capable of creating "a bleak piece of music" (121) and Michael garishly paints primitively drawn kites with "crude, cruel, grinning faces." (70)[90] McGuinness offers his vision of male creativity in Paul's determined building of a pyramid: "I won't give up. I'll build on. Everything has to be exact. Every measurement. Through here the dead will find their way back to this world. When I'll finish, they'll rise, the dead. So I'll keep going." (320) Firstly, Paul's manic activity is in all probability a manifestation of a self-preservation instinct and an attempt to prevent madness from seizing him. Secondly, rather than with the living, Paul's construction signals his affiliation with the dead. The only male creative effort with a positive outcome is therefore Dido's playlet; however, to pen it, its author has to assume his female alter ego of Fionnuala McGonigle. In the end, all men in the dramas rather pertain to the crucial concept in Irish drama – that of a stranger in the (female) house.

A stranger in the house, Welshman Gerry (who, on the surface also fits the colonial narrative of a villainous Briton harming innocent feminine Hibernia) is the primary cause for the Mundys' banishment: his initial romantic mission did not remain without consequences and Chris' illegitimate offspring is the reason for outlawing the Mundys beyond the limits of dogmatic Ballybeg in order to

[89] Kurdi argues that The Mai´s weakness opens the door to male-induced destruction: "The Mai´s failure to reconcile opposites and achieve tradition-bound aims through unconventional means is highlighted by blurring the juxtaposed spatialities of house and nature. (...) While she has energy and ability to create, she is also vulnerable due to her imposed and also self-perpetuated dependence on male behaviour." Kurdi 197.

[90] McGrath attributes them to Michael´s "own Dionysian moment." McGrath 240.

hypocritically maintain its purity. Gerry's subsequent infrequent visits certainly do not enhance the sisters' good reputation. Despite Gerry's involvement with petty repairs in the house and sweet talk of marriage, he retains his outsider status, since Chris is permanently conscious of his tinker character that prevents him from staying: "you wouldn't intend to (leave) but that's what would happen because that's your nature and you can't help yourself", 33).

Furthermore, long anticipated and coveted as the saviour of his disgraced sisters, another stranger to the Mundys' house eventually proves to be the elderly Uncle Jack. However, even Michael notices the gaping discrepancy between the dream and dismal reality:

> When I saw Uncle Jack for the first time the reason I was so shocked was that I expected – well, I suppose, the hero from a schoolboy's book. Once I had seen a photograph of him radiant and splendid in his officer's uniform. (...) All the same the wonderful Father Jack of that photo was the image of him that lodged in my mind. (8)

Indeed, the unfortunate estranged uncle also involuntarily pertains to the notion of a destructive male stranger. Returned after more than two decades from his Christian mission for mysterious reasons (among others, there is a suspicion of his homosexual inclination), Jack finds himself literally speechless in midst of a world he no longer recognizes. His misfit quality is indeed initially demonstrated on a linguistic level: "and on top of that Swahili has been his language for twenty-five years; so that it's not that his mind is confused. It is just that he has difficulty finding the English words for what he wants to say" (11). Especially Kate never ceases to make excuses for her brother's ineptness, despite the necessity to repeatedly postpone his saying Mass. However, the scope of Uncle Jack's derangement gradually proves to be insurmountable when he not only fails to understand and recall words but also vital concepts, proving to be inadmissible into the narrow-minded space of an Irish village in the 1930s: "I thank you. I am grateful. It is so strange: I don't remember the – the architecture? – the planning? – what's the word? – the lay-out! – I don't recollect the lay-out of this home...scarcely. This is strange, isn't it?" (26) The repetitive reference to the lay-

out of the house in this case might refer to the characteristics of the actual house or it might metaphorically pertain to the social and religious lay-out of Ireland. The eventual admission of Jack's lunacy is immediately intertwined with its detrimental consequences:

> And the doctor says he doesn't think Father Jack's mind is confused but that his superiors probably had no choice but send him home. Whatever he means by that, Maggie. And the parish priest did talk to me today. He said the numbers in the school are falling and that there may not be a job for me after the summer. But the numbers aren't falling, Maggie. Why is he telling me lies? (35).

It is deeply relevant that the final sentence (in both meanings of the word) is delivered by a priest, the ultimate representative of illiberal patriarchal society. In an intriguing reversal, the slightly masculine Kate also becomes a stranger in the house on a double level: shunned anew from Ballybeg society, she is no longer welcome in the local school.

The villagers' gradual discovery of Jack's new unconventional faith and his enthusiasm for the harmony within the pagan tribes in Africa, marks their ultimate turn from the Mundys, whose female house is finally dilapidated after a long struggle. Ironically enough, Jack, a formal representative of dogmatic patriarchal codes praises the Ryangans by ascribing them certain characteristics that in his view honour the Irish in Ballybeg: "The Ryangans are a remarkable people; there is no distinction between the ritual and the secular in their culture. And of course their capacity for fun, for laughing, for practical jokes – they've such open hearts in some respects they're not unlike us." (48); nevertheless, Jack's countrymen ceased to be open-hearted long ago – the bitter proof of their narrow-mindedness already hangs in the air. The environment that had once shaped Uncle Jack had spun out of his control to condemn him.

Like the unfortunate Jack, Robert, more voluntarily, triggers the fall of the house in *The Mai*: Eamonn Jordan's remark about "a single house, single family, both so single indeed that the entry of a new thing can lead only to the collapse of the

entire world of the play"[91] describing Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* can thus unaltered be equally relevant to *The Mai*. Robert's travel bag and cello case (107) immediately establish him as an outsider. Already in the initial scene, he seems to be forgiven by The Mai and introduced to the most feminine space of her castle: her bedroom. However, as it is conspicuous in the scenes from the following year, the outsider stigma still lingers: despite having contributed financially (156), he is still regarded as a stranger in the house. Given his wandering nature (epitomized among else by him repeatedly dangling his car keys), the money he contributes could be almost interpreted as a traveler settling his hotel bill; this notion confirms Robert's outsider status within the female house. Moreover, his unconcealed parallel liaison eventually wheels The Mai into committing suicide.

Even though McGuinness' drama does not feature any house which could be intruded by a proverbial male stranger, the said metaphor is surprisingly easily traceable within the play. Revisiting the traditional metaphor of nation as a house, there are two significant strangers in *Carthaginians*. The first to carry out this concept are inevitably the British soldiers causing havoc on Bloody Sunday, more or less directly inspiring the characters' flight to the graveyard; being identified as soldiers, their status is itself highly performative of masculine agency. More importantly however, the second stranger in the house/nation presents himself in form of Dido. Biologically a man, Dido is one of the traditional Irish Others, challenging the national identity both by his fluctuating gender and ambiguous sexuality. Nevertheless, Dido is the only one of above-mentioned strangers who is not associated with damage and destruction; arguably however, his almost messianic abilities voiced through the playlet might be attributed to his feminine side. Nevertheless, there are also strangers and ghosts within Dido's world, threatening his own existence: when Maela recalls his fasting to death, Dido admits it was "in protest. I'd been abandoned by this beautiful stranger. It was a form of suicide." (304). Given Dido's interest in man, we can quite safely assume that even this hurtful stranger was male. To compensate for this failure, Dido recalls another stranger: "He was foreign and he was pissed but he was beautiful. I met him when I was wandering the docks [...] He came up to me carrying red roses and he gave them to me. He said his name was John. He said he was from

[91] Jordan 55.

the Lebanon." (326) In a peculiar version of a creation myth, it is the sailor who establishes Dido's new identity. Interestingly, their encounter, indubitably unacceptable within the boundaries of conventional society, takes place in a port – a further example of liminal spaces scattered through the dramas.

2.2. Gendered Myths of Place

Nonetheless, the notion of the stranger in the house is not the only myth traceable within the dramas. When discussing Carr's plays in general, Mária Kurdi asserts that: "realism is complicated and challenged by a language imbued with lyricism and the inclusion of Gothic, supernatural, magic and surreal elements in these works, encouraging a distrust of surface meanings and a search for metaphorical levels and symbolic."[92] Moreover, she also maintains that:

> there is a variety of ways to figure or interrogate the opposition between spaces that represent social relations on the one hand and nature invested with myths and stories on the other, reflecting the female protagonists' need for an alternative to the paralysing of stifling atmosphere of the house.[93]

Locating her play within the confines of Midlands, Carr further suggests the notion of liminality and in-betweennes; however, she also firmly intertwines her drama with a local legend that signalizes the drama's outcome: the rural myth of Coillte, amorous of Bláth, Lord of all the flowers, the creator of Owl Lake that tragically eventually proves to be her nemesis. Millie admits:

> I knew that story as a child. So did the Mai and Robert. But we were unaffected by it and in our blindness moved along with it like sleepwalkers along a precipice and all around gods and mortals called out for us to change our course and, not listening, we walked on and on. (148)

[92] Kurdi 55.
[93] Kurdi 197.

Corresponding crucially in terms of gender role distribution, numerous parallels in the two narratives of women searching for fulfilled love (e.g. Robert's lover echoed in the dark witch of the bog, Robert's ignorance foreshadowed by Bláth's disregard for Coillte[94]) stress The Mai's symbiosis with the landscape and nature she inhabits; this is taken even further by Miriam Haughton who advocates the view that the death of Carr's heroines, stripped of its tragic connotation, ultimately signifies their return to nature.[95] Nevertheless, The Mai's complicity with the myth of the land is undeniable.

Myth is also embodied already in the title of Friel's play: Michael explains the origin of Lughnasa, named "after the old Celtic God of the Harvest. Because in the old days August the First was *Lá Lughnasa,* the feast day of the pagan god, Lugh; and the days and weeks of harvesting that followed were called the Festival of Lughnasa" (1). It could be argued that the temporal setting of Friel's play into a pagan festival introduces certain subversive unchristian elements; the sisters' house is thus a liminal space on the boundary separating Christian and pre-Christian elements. Moreover, the sisters' affection towards Lugh is also communicated through their intention to baptize their beloved radio set after the pagan god. Lugh proves to be equally important in terms of connecting the five sisters to their territory and its native beliefs just like his intended modern reflection thrusts the Mundys into modernity and connects them to the surrounding world. Interestingly, in an intriguing gender reversal, the male pagan deity of Lugh significantly contrasts with (or indeed potentially complements) the notion of a sovereignty goddess, traditionally conceived of as female.

As it has been already mentioned, McGuinness firmly attaches the history of Derry to the narrative of Carthage, imbuing also the Northern Irish location with a gendered myth; as an illustration of this, he endows Paul's memory with mythical

[94] Bláth´s ignorance and its outcome (He would not speak to her, look at her, touch her, and heartbroken Coillte lay down outside the dark witch´s lair and cried a lake of tears that stretched for miles around, 147) is relevant to both Robert´s first leave-taking (and therefore ignorance) and The Mai´s subsequent creation of the house and secondly also to Robert´s overlooking his wife after his homecoming. Arguably, mirroring Coillte´s lake, the house also proves to be The Mai´s nemesis, since it provides her with a window to "drift from" (186). On the other hand, the ensuing "sounds of geese and swans taking flight, sounds of water" (186) suggest that The Mai might have finally ended her life in precisely the same way as Coillte.

[95] Miriam Haughton lecture, National University of Ireland, Galway, 11.3.2013.

dimensions. However, McGuinness's rewriting of the Carthage myth is not solely a reminiscence of destruction and repression – it is also a meditation on the rebirth of hope and possibility of escaping the cycle of helplessness. Thus, when James Hurt argues that *Carthaginians* not only explain but also embody history[96], it must be added that they equally, as opposed to other uses of the Carthage/Ireland link, foreshadow the future. Symbolically, the hope for the future comes from Carthage itself; Dido as the new representative figure of modern Ireland is encouraged by a Lebanese sailor (supposedly coming from the location of ancient Carthage and using the predominant means of transport of his ancestors) to "cease the violent hand" (350).

Friel's choice of late summer as the time of the play is deeply symbolic – summer is generally connoted as a climactic period of the year bringing harvest[97], but its lateness in *Dancing at Lughnasa* also suggests the slow precipitation of autumn and winter, connected with decline and ultimately death; "Lughnasa's over, girls" (61) and so are, despite all Kate's efforts to hold their household together and maintain their integrity, their dreams and hopes as well as their girlhood; even the radio's tune stops for good. The notion of summer is also associated with fertility; however, the Mundys' house remains hopelessly sterile and the arrival of autumn confirms the loss of last hopes, voiced in Kate's desperate exhortation: "What has happened to this house? Mother of God, will we ever be able to lift our heads ever again?" (59). What lies ahead of the five women is an unhappy silent eventless existence of five underprivileged spinsters in the 1930s or, according to Lojek's reminiscence, an even worse fate of homeless women in the streets of London.[98] In the absence of an alternative in the rigid social system, by having failed to fulfil the prescribed female roles of wives and mothers, the sisters did not succeed at ensuring continuity of their family and, by proxy, caretakers for old age. Carr chooses the same temporal setting with similar intentions – her play is embedded within two consecutive summers; however, she is even more radical in her

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[96] James Hurt, "Frank McGuiness and the Ruins of Irish History," *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage,* eds. Stephen Watts, Eileen Morgan and Shakir Mustafa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) 281.

[97]The central image present on the stage was a huge crop of wheat. In Tony Corbett´s view "this fertile abundance was so vibrant a stage image it almost mocked the sisters' barren futures". Corbett 120.

[98]Lojek 88.

symbolism than Friel - the end of summer does not bring only bitter truth and shattered dreams, but also death to her female heroine.

McGuinness' temporal setting is vaguer; the immediacy of the Bloody Sunday ghost implies, apart from a political watershed period, the margin between late winter and early spring; correspondingly, the four-day time span is suggestive of Easter and indeed, the final scenes promise rebirth, traditionally associated with the spring. A further example of temporal liminality on a smaller scale and corresponding promise of regeneration is present also in the last scene, set at the break of dawn: "light breaks through the graveyard. Birdsong begins. Light illuminates them all. They listen, looking at each other, in the light. They lie down and sleep. It is now morning. Dido alone is awake in the graveyard." (379). Although sleep has been traditionally greeted as a borderline between life and death, the suggestion of rejuvenation and rebirth is predominant; in contrast to both Friel's and Carr's heroines inevitably shifting towards death, McGuinness' characters are headed towards hope and renewed fertility. Unlike its mythological counterpart, the Irish Carthage is not to remain uninhabited and barren forever; the reversal is suggested by the grim opening with "When I am Dead and Laid in Earth" from Purcell's Dido and Aeneas being substituted by the concluding birdsong.

2.3. Subversive Space

In the following part of my thesis I would like to argue that the theatrical space of all the plays in question not only constitutes a highly gendered domain, but also displays numerous subversive traits. The subversiveness is again largely performed in gender terms, aiming at a repressive, "no" culture society with a tendency to forbid and prohibit. Susan Cannon Harris detects one of these inhibiting factors shaping Irish society, stating that:

> Catholic dogma and iconography have made Christ and the Virgin Mary the only culturally acceptable role models available to Irish men and women. The all-pervasive power of the Catholic Church inexorably forces Irish men and women into these positions and

> therefore requires them to continually recreate not only the crucifixion but also the pietà.[99]

Paul Medcalf supports these arguments, claiming that the rural clergy "maintained a firm control over the bodies as well as the souls of their notoriously obedient parishioners' (in some cases literally, as the exposure of sexual abuse by priests subsequently revealed)."[100] However, Friel, Carr and McGuinness provide their specific counter-reactions to this unitary rhetoric through a space that is not only gendered but also highly subversive through contesting central notions of family and religion.

Carol Coulter outlines the merciless omnipresent typical societal expectations for women claiming that:

> in the Ireland of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, marriage was still the only lifestyle choice, apart from the convent, open to women. In rural Ireland marriages were contracted more for the preservation of property and the assurance of inheritance than for love and companionship.[101]

Melissa Sihra conforms to this while further exploring the restrictions, stating that:

> from the 1930s on, women's perceived primary social function as wife and mother, and the implementation of the draconian 1932 public service 'marriage bar', which prevented married women from being employed as civil servants and as national schoolteachers, was used to limit their role and potential in public life.[102]

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[99] Susan Cannon Harris 4.

[100] Medcalf 48.

[101] Carol Coulter "Hello Divorce, Goodbye Daddy" Women, Gender and the Divorce Debate", *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland* Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) 277.

[102] Sihra 2. Sihra begins her sociological summary in 1937, claiming that "at this time, severely confining roles for women were drawn up in consultation with ultra-conservative Archbishop John Charles McQuaid and became enshrined within the constitution, many of which remain in place today." Subsequently, she concludes that "the lack of positive outcomes for many of the female

Supporting the concept of history as a gendered narrative, most of the characters (especially female) in the three dramas would be exempt from its official rhetoric. Their failures to conform to lifestyles outlined for their respective genders often prove to be fatal; thus, the unofficial history which they represent is also largely gender-driven.

Generally speaking, none of the women in the plays succeeds at living up to the coveted ideal; even Kate, "a national schoolteacher and a very proper woman" (1) representing the voice of convention (a fact established by Michael in the initial lines "she said it would be sinful to christen an inanimate object with any kind of name, not to talk of a pagan god" 1) fails in numerous respects. The repressed 1930s which suffocated the five Glenties women are also echoed in their contemporaries, The Mai's aunts Agnes and Julie, guardians of Christian morality; born into a highly unconventional marriage and guilty of spinsterhood without the desirable alibi of entering a convent, they, despite their efforts fail to reverse the unfavourable subversive trend recycled in the subsequent generations of their family. In addition, Millie's exaggerated description of her aunts' efforts connects them with Kate; arguably perpetuating their loss of femininity, their supposedly female voices communicate patriarchal thoughts:

> Two of The Mai's aunts, bastions of the Connemara click, decided not to take the prospect of a divorcee in the family lying down. So they arrived one lovely autumn day armed with novenas, scapulars and leaflets on the horrors of premarital sex which they distributed amongst us children along with crisp twenty-pound notes. Births, marriages and deaths were their forte and by Christ, if they had anything to do with it, Beck would stay married even if it was to a tree. (135)

Futhermore, in their characters, both Friel and Carr continue exploring what McGrath calls the "preoccupation with the official myth of rural Ireland, a myth

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protagonists in plays by women, from all periods of the twentieth century, can be read as a potent response to the false legacy of the new State, and reveal an unresolved disaffection." Sihra 1-3.

that extolled conservative Catholic family values and the frugal routine of an uncomplicated, simple existence"[103]. The Mai's family existence is by no means an exemplar of Catholic virtues: one of the many significant illustrations of this fact would be the comic figure of Grandma Fraochlan, coming from the once highly lauded idealized and allegedly uncorrupted west of Ireland. As several critics have noted[104] the name of the island filling the gap of the absent surname imbues the result of a one-night sailor pleasure with the impression of legitimacy. Equally importantly and ironically, Anthony Roche also notices that "the grandmother bears in her first name an archetypal female status."[105]

Melissa Sihra notices that "the monotheistic patriarchal meta-narrative valorized the heterosexual family unit and glorified the role of motherhood while intervening in issues pertaining to sexuality and morality."[106] Operating within this strictly delineated environment, McGuinness arguably takes an even more audacious stance. Not only do his characters fail to conform to any of the desirable above-mentioned stereotypes violated by Carr's and Friel's dramas, but the author even suggests a complete disintegration of the society as a normative concept. The shell-shocked environment the characters inhabit is far too perplexed to embrace the wide-spread subversive extravaganza of characters and their stories inhabiting the graveyard; on the other hand, given the historical and political context, there is simply nothing stable left to be subverted. Subsequently, the negative reactions towards Dido's homosexuality and transgressive fluidity of gender are not based on religion or society but exclusively upon personal insecurities and feelings of threat. Another example of omnipresent degradation and travesty of values pertaining to sexuality and gender is epitomized in an exchange between Dido and Maela:

> Dido: Sado-masochism. That's where the future lies, sado-masochism.
>
> Maela: What's that?

[103] McGrath 246.
[104] See e.g. Clare Wallace, *Suspect Cultures: Narrative, Identity and Citation in 1990s New Drama* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 61.
[105] Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama* (London: Macmillan, 2009) 37.
[106] Sihra 2.

Dido: You fancy somebody, you take them to bed, you beat the shite out of them.

Maela: I see. Marriage.

Dido: Not exactly. There's pleasure in sado-masochism. (325)

Moreover, a vast majority of children (in fact all the significant ones) in the plays are conceived out of wedlock, further destabilizing the traditional worshipped institution of a family and motherhood. Alarmingly however, despite being outlawed to the outskirts of society, none of the family members seen to express doubts or regrets towards their transgressions of the established norms. Kate blames the radio for killing "all Christian conversation in this country" (66) but she never once reproaches Chris for delivering a far more major blow to Christian morals. In addition, Uncle Jack, as a man and most importantly, as a priest theoretically embodies the voice of patriarchal authority: the existence of a child for him initially automatically implies the presence of a husband; however, upon discovering an undesirable family incompleteness, he starts perceiving Michael in surprisingly positive terms as a "love child" (40). Thus, Friel completely twists the audience's expectations by disguising the most subversive element into the least expected form.

Any potential moralistic rebukes would immediately lose momentum within The Mai's family – the transgressions have simply appeared far too often for far too long. In fact, with one exception, it proves to be demanding to find an example of a conventional interpretation of family and gender roles in the clan. Even more daringly however, Carr demonstrates through her central heroine that even starting off with a conventional marriage does not necessarily imply happy endings; The Mai does not reverse the pattern of dysfunctional relationships (this concept shall be discussed later in a greater length). Within the chaos invoked in *Carthaginians*, it is not only the family bonds that are dysfunctional and shattered; it is the bonds of humanity that are challenged and redefined.

Margaret Llewellyn Jones argues in relation to *Dancing at Lughnasa* that: "transgression of Christianity is also manifested through female desire: Chris has an illegitimate child, simple Rose takes a lover – both against the stereotypical

notions of virginity and holy motherhood."[107] It is, however, not limited to Friel's play; Carr's heroine is presented as an attractive woman and her desire is demonstrated immediately in the first scene, when she allows Robert not only in her house but also in her bedroom. Her new-found intimacy with her long-lost husband is hinted at in the beginning of Act 2, when she communicates and externalizes her frustration through a deeply personal item of clothing. The knickers symbolically landing on Robert's head might also represent the end of infatuated desire and return to reality and rationality. Beck suggests an even more daring general conception of female sexuality and desire when she claims: "Mai, you're too innocent. Half the country's having affairs with married men" (151); Carr does not hesitate to confirm this notion through Mai's sister Connie who "has always been with men" (158) and dreams of acquiring a Woolfian room of her own for casual sex.

Also, Grandma Fraochlán's sexual desire is, as Carr suggests, not a spent force even despite her advanced age. Surely Sarah's past slipping to prostitution cannot be interpreted as a demonstration of her desire but in a way represents functional, transactional female response to male desire which is not necessarily lauded but at least publically acknowledged. Sarah is not shunned by the other characters on account of her past; in fact she herself is most aware of the extent of her transgression. Despite that, in a slightly extreme and polar dichotomy, she is towards the end of the play ultimately perceived as the character who is most likely to convene to the societal expectations connected to her age and gender.

As a further component of highly subversive environment, Catholicism as such plays a very ambiguous role – in Carr's drama, it is connected with the older generations and does not seem to play any significant role in the lives of Millie or her mother; in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel depicts a submissive community deeply bound by the Christian codex. The sisters are shunned for Chris's trespass and their presence is tolerated only outside the limits of the village. Ironically enough, their seeming salvation in the form of their much-anticipated brother proves to be but a coup de grâce – uncle Jack, likened by Ashley Taggart to a

[107] LLewellyn-Jones 37.

Shakespearean fool[108] returns from his Christian mission in Africa muttering stories of pagan rites and calling his native pagan servant Okawa his “mentor”. Also, he represents the afore-mentioned male stranger in the house; his alienation is even self-proclaimed as he identifies himself with the Ryangans: “That’s what we do in Ryanga when we want to please the spirits – or to appease them: we kill a rooster or a young goat” (39). In this quote the returned prodigal son also abandons Christianity in favour of a pagan ritual. This is later confirmed by Jack’s undisguised admiration of the natives, namely Okawa: “my friend – my mentor – my counsellor – and yes, my house boy as well; anyhow Okawa summons our people by striking a huge iron gong” (47). Just like the women fail in their desirable female roles of mothers and wives, Uncle Jack betrays his male priestly prerogative. In addition, Friel drops several hints suggesting that Jack’s sexuality, a silent taboo in connection to priests, is not only pronounced but inclines towards the undesirable homosexual extreme. As a result, it is ironically only Kate who insists that their domestic space on the outskirts of Ballybeg is a Christian and Catholic home.

Moreover, the position of the Church is further compromised when Gerry mentions his conscription taking place in this supposedly sacred space. The inviolability is degraded to a purely secular military campaign carried out by an unmanly midget. However, even after such mocking humiliation, Friel still constructs the church as an exclusively male entity. This is however challenged by McGuinness and his sorrow-possessed Maela who claims: “The dead will rise here. A miracle. But we can’t talk about it, for fear if we talk about it, it won’t happen” (298). In a quasi-antithetical perception of the importance of biblical word, Maela transforms several central dogmas of the Catholic Church: in lieu of a male Christ it is her daughter Maela expects to rise from the dead at the end of the symbolic four-day ritual. However, what remains most conspicuous throughout McGuinness’ drama is the undisguised virtual absence of religion and God in general; religion is present merely through a sarcastic mockery of the Sacred Heart in Dido’s playlet.

[108] Ashley Taggart, “Theatre of War? Contemporary Drama in Northern Ireland,” *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre* ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000) 73.

In addition, there are tangible elements of paganism and un-Christian beliefs in all of the plays – the legend surrounding the Owl Lake and predestining The Mai's fate is certainly not a Christian one, and, even more importantly, the celebration of Lughnasa is an openly pagan tradition. This tradition is elaborated by F.C. McGrath as the elements of "the Dionysian (as opposed to the rational – Apollonian) irrupting into the life of Christian Ballybeg"[109]; he argues further that this habit was simply so strong that it had to continue coexisting side by side with Christianity[110]. On the contrary, the highly sacred concept of marriage is debased into a ceremony of "dance wedding" (41), a ritual taking place in the alternative space of the garden. Also, Kate hopes to compensate for Chris' transgression and female failure through reinventing the family as inextricably linked with religion through Uncle Jack ("Ballybeg was proud of him, the whole of Donegal was proud of him. And it must have helped my aunts to bear the shame Mother brought on the household by having me – as it was called then – out of wedlock."); however, all she is eventually left with in place of "our own leper priest" is a pagan worshipper and alleged cock-slayer.

We have proved throughout the chapter that the three dramas are rooted within a largely conservative suffocative milieu whose conventions and long-lived relics of gender expectations to a large extent determine the characters´ fates. The notion of liminality is vital; it is evocative both of the firmly set boundaries and the simultaneous desire to shape and shake them. After a careful setting of the scene, we shall turn our attention to the characters that inhabit these spaces.

[109] McGrath 237.
[110] McGrath 238.

3. Proud Mad Women

In the following chapter I intend to examine Carr´s, Friel´s and McGuinness´ depictions of women; initially, I wish to delve into the dramatists´ respective portrayals of women, the discrepancy between their assigned and real place in society as well as their self-reliance directly defying the previous (mis)representations. Also, I would like to focus on how their characters clash with the deeply-rooted gender stereotypes. Moreover, in the course of my discussion I want to juxtapose the dramatists´ modern take with the traditional ideology-burdened canon.

In their "urge to counteract the de-realising representation of a woman as a passive icon embodying moral values and/or symbol of desire inherited from the traditional masculine narrative of nation building"[111], Carr, Friel and to a less obvious, yet undisputable extent McGuinness joined other dramatists in their shared effort to present their own updated version of female characters; McGuinness even enriched the rigid canon with groundbreaking trans/homosexuals. Overall, their women characters were free from male-centred ideologies and ultimately even critiqued the outlived one-dimensional stereotypical gender narratives.

As it shall subsequently become visible, the three writers succeeded in contributing towards the de-idealizing of Irish womanhood, shattering the stereotypical illusions and removing women from their lifeless pedestal. Apart from that, Carr, Friel and McGuinness in their plays finally offered a portrayal of individual strong women in a more realistic manner without omitting their own subjectivities any longer. Their female characters also attempted to liberate themselves from their limiting maternal role essentially defined by the dated 1937 Constitution[112] and from the confines imposed upon them by the hegemonic patriarchal society. Indeed, the gaping discrepancy mapping the extent of changes is best illustrated by juxtaposing De Valera´s vision of femininity and Mary

[111] Kurdi 41.
[112] Singleton 13.

Robinson´s encouraging statement in her first presidential address where she claimed: "I want women who have felt themselves outside history to be written back into history."[113]

Interestingly, the old-fashioned order is immediately playfully hinted at and significantly mocked in the initial moments of Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* in Maggie's singing: "Will you vote for de Valera, will you vote? If you don't, we'll be like Gandhi with his goat." (4) Indeed, Maggie in her aged spinsterhood is an almost perfect antithesis of De Valera´s laughing happy maidens; ironically, in comparison with De Valera´s flawless quasi-Technicolor imagery, Friel endows his sisters with much more credibility and life. Similarly, both Carr´s and McGuiness´ dramas, despite their considerably more recent temporal setting, also offer a retrospective glance at the first half of 20th century through equally subversive characters in order to defy the imagined stereotypes: in *Carthaginians* it is Greta´s rigid loveless mother who ridicules the concept of happy maidens; Carr jeopardizes the Taoiseach´s idealist image with narrow-minded spinster sisters Julie and Agnes.

When speaking about Carr's works, Mária Kurdi asserts that "her heroines are conceived as the Other to the male-dominated world, offering a deliberately heightened reflection of the traditional gender dichotomy and politics of the gaze still in operation"[114]; this could be equally applied to both *Dancing at Lughnasa* and even to an extent to *Carthaginians*. All the three plays represent an environment where the male and the female universe are separated and, with rare exceptions, cannot symbiotically co-exist; indeed, the two genders are often connected or, even more frequently, separated through their mutual gaze. However, it can be argued that the crucial difference between these three plays and its predecessors is that the females in these have a voice (and also a gaze); indeed, their voice is powerful enough to ultimately overrule the male and transform it into the Other. In these three plays, women are finally liberated from

[113] Robinson quoted by Sihra 153.
[114] Kurdi 55.

being a merely passive surface[115] into active agents, as if in an artistic response to Mary Robinson's political appeal.

3.1. Claiming a Voice

In all the three plays the female voice is very prominent, most conspicuously in Marina Carr's *The Mai*; it is only appropriate that a female-authored play should be filtered through a central female consciousness, The Mai's daughter Millie. As Eilis Ni Dhuibne has it:

> *The Mai* exploits narrative techniques in two ways. In the first place, it is actually told by a narrator, Millie, who sits on the side of the stage throughout most of the play, introducing, commentating, interpreting, and summing up. She is not an objective commentator [...] In addition to introducing and linking various episodes in the play, Millie narrates in a second way: she tells several short anecdotes or stories, as do some of the other characters, especially Grandma Fraochlán.[116]

Thus, directly involved in the almost exclusively female environment, Millie appropriates all the narratives circulating in her family and even mediates the objectifying gaze; through her mediation she is even able to control the voice of Robert as well as the purely textual narrative of the nine-fingered fisherman. Nic Suibhne asserts she is not a subjective narrator; moreover, she is also a highly selective one. In addition to two narrative techniques, we can essentially also interpret Millie as a double narrator, directly participating in the events presented on stage and retrospectively retrieving the same events from her memory endowed with a spatial as well as temporal distance.

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[115] Judith Butler suggests this idea in her book *Bodies that Matter:* "The relation between culture and nature presupposed by some model of gender "construction" implies a culture or an agency of the social which acts upon a nature, which is itself presupposed as a passive surface, outside the social and yet its necessary counterpart. One question that feminists have raised, the, is whether the discourse which figures the action of construction as a kind of imprinting or imposition is not tacitly masculinist, whereas the figure of the passive surface, awaiting that penetrating act whereby meaning is endowed, is not tacitly or – perhaps – quite obviously feminine." Butler 4. Another proof of ultimate abandonment of passivity can be embodied both on and off-stage by the genesis of a female theatre group Charabanc, active 1983-1995 willing to resolve the absence of women-authored plays and the lack of opportunities for actresses due to the scarcity (or virtual nonexistence) of central female roles.

[116] Sihra 140.

Sihra maintains that “Carr’s drama enters into communication with Friel’s as well, notably on two points - incorporating as well as activating a double of the protagonist, which the other characters cannot see.”[117] Equally, proportionally mirroring the strategy of Carr’s play, it is quite significant that a male-authored play is framed by a male narrator while a female-created drama has a female guide through the events. However, Michael’s position is more ambiguous than Millie´s. Indeed, bearing in mind that *Dancing at Lughnasa* is set in Ballybeg in 1936, we can be misled by a simple and simplistic conclusion that little Michael is an alter-ego of the author himself, identified by his age and female surrounding; such a claim could be very easily supported by the fact that the act of writing finally enabled Friel a reconciliation with the past and an act of absolution for his unfortunate relatives, providing Friel “with an acceptable fiction for them”[118]. Apart from the private conciliation, from a wider non-personal perspective, Mary Trotter notes that “*Dancing at Lughnasa* concludes this series of dramatic history plays, and this terminal position itself suggests that in it Friel resolves to his satisfaction both his ideological and methodological problems with the past.”[119] Yet many critics choose to interpret Michael in a very different light than the benevolent Lojek, who sees in a certain sense Michael´s male gaze as inevitable and maintains that:

> Arguably Michael’s retrospective gaze perpetuates the typical male gaze that has historically defined images of women, but the issue goes beyond narrative voice. As a man Friel cannot escape the reality that his plays will have a male gaze. Here he foregrounds the fact of a male gaze rather than obscuring it. Michael’s biographical similarity to Friel diminishes suspicion that the playwright has unfairly appropriated either women’s subject matter or the subject matter of Ireland in the 1930s.[120]

[117] Sihra 179.
[118] Lojek 87.
[119] Marry Trotter, “Translating Women into Irish Theatre History” in *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage,* eds. Stephen Watt et al. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000) 175.
[120] Helen Lojek, “Dancing at Lughnasa and the unfinished revolution,“ in Anthony Roche (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 80.

On the contrary, Melissa Sihra inherently suggests that Michael is an element of male control in the otherwise exclusively female world; she asserts that by "placing a male narrator on-stage, Friel acknowledges that, for all its emphasis on women, the play is authored by a man."[121] The idea of "patriarchal control mechanism"[122] (as far-fetched as it might seem embodied by a seven-year-old boy) that Sihra only suggests, is, in Declan Kiberd's view, directly expressed in "feminist readings of *Dancing at Lughnasa* that have identified Michael the narrator as a 'Frielian device of control"[123].

However, it can be argued that rather than an element of control (especially with the separation of the young and adult Michael being executed continuously on the stage) the detached adult Michael brings into the narrative of his five aunts the distance and a kind of objectivity provided by the decades lived after leaving Ballybeg[124] as well as a permanent reminder that via the story, we are entering the past and in a way revisiting a narrative that has long been denied its place on Irish stages. It could be said that while providing a resembling perspective, Carr's Millie, a "Brechtian deconstructive commentary, partly giving details of future and past,"[125] cannot by any means be accused of a controlling intervention into the female space; constituting the fourth generation of fallen women in the house and repeating the same mistakes as her sires (in spite of embellishing them in a story), Millie is, despite her longing to flee the Owl Lake, directly complicit in the action on the stage without imposing limits or judgements enabled by the necessary distance, that would lend her, in Mary Trotter's words the "authority over the past events"[126]. On the other hand, despite being its mediator, the character of Michael is somewhat discriminated and excluded from the play: in his case, the interaction with other characters is visibly limited, since, as Friel suggests "no dialogue with the BOY MICHAEL must ever be addressed directly to adult MICHAEL, the

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[121] Sihra 208.
[122] Bernadette Sweeney, *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 112.
[123] Declan Kiberd quoted in Sweeney, 114.
[124] See also F.C. McGrath´s view on Michael: "Events are framed throughout by the adult narrator Michael, whose stage persona as a child is unseen. Actors do not acknowledge the narrator's presence but speak to the child's invisible body. This 'split self' narrative opens gaps, not only between the imagined and the real, past and present, but also – in Nietzsche's sense – that between the Apolline, controlling force of verbal language and the mysterious and creative potential of the Dionysiac body". McGrath 235.
[125] Lojek 87.
[126] Marry Trotter 174.

narrator"(7); F.C.McGrath even deems that "Michael never really appears as the seven-year-old"[127] – McGrath thus clearly distances Michel from the women and straightaway introduces an idea of males as intruders into the past and exotic outsiders within the female universe that shall be discussed later at greater length. If we took McGrath's suspicion even further, we could conclude that if Michael is never present as his younger self, he is also absent from the past events on stage. In a way, it can thus be suggested that whereas Millie creates, censors and filters the narratives within which she is firmly anchored, Michael is a mere transmitter fully at service to the ultimately female narrative in which he does not have any active part; thus, ironically, he constructs himself as the narrative's Other.

Both Michael and Millie betray the suspense of their respective narratives by inserting dramatic irony – we learn about the impending unhappy endings halfway through the stories – as Trotter claims in relation to *Dancing at Lughnasa*, "since most of this information is announced early in the play, the events are imbued with a melancholic fatalism as the audience witnesses the sisters struggle to preserve their dignity amid mounting economic gloom and personal disappointment;"[128] the identical strategy is employed by Carr.

McGuinness' play lacks a similar central consciousness through which the narrative would be mediated; however, the liberal inter-gender distribution of the narrative voice also proves the extent of emancipation on Irish stages. Moreover, *Carthaginians*' main narrative is anchored in the present with flashbacks illuminating the characters' past and clarifying their motivations; both Friel's and Carr's respective dramas are connected to the present solely by the persona of the narrator; the core stories happen in the past and are transmitted through series of flashbacks. McGuinness avoids the framing scheme and allows his characters unmediated expression. In tune with what has been suggested before it is very significant that the play opens both visually and aurally by women: it depicts three females of various ages; the voices within the first scene are exclusively female. This is also mirrored by the closing scene; the last word of *Carthaginians,* the

[127] McGrath 245. Also Tony Corbett repeatedly acknowledges Michael´s separation from the story. Corbett 137.
[128] Trotter 170.

much dicussed “play” is pronounced by Dido, who had previously transformed into his female self.

Unlike Carr´s and Friel´s plays, McGuinness’ drama has in addition of course an undeniable historical dimension: the events of Bloody Sunday in January 1972 have been perceived as one of the most profound wounds in the history of Northern Ireland and tabooed to such an extent that addressing this traumatic experience has for decades meant careful tiptoeing around the scar; even then, the incident has always been subject to prudency and required delicate handling (this significant silence echoes the similar lack of eloquence concerning female subjectivity). Thus, all those desiring to provide any artistic reaction to the conflict took their time in acquiring at least some necessary perspective and distance in order communicate this sensitive experience which, in many cases, directly altered their own lives. However, it can be argued that McGuinness attempted to transform even this event into a gendered narrative purporting a female voice and communicating a female point of view. McGuinness primarily tells the story of Derry; similarly to Brian Friel[129] before him, (and Marina Carr years later) he builds on the central metaphorical gender dichotomy of female and feminine Carthage as the embodiment of Ireland while equating Britain/England to Rome, continuing the tradition of the masculine England epitomized by John Bull opposed to the feminine Ireland of Cathleen Ni Houlihan. He feminizes story of Derry through linking it to and identifying it with feminine Carthage, a simile directly expressed by Paul in the play; thus, he firmly asserts he is telling a feminine story with even the male voices being swallowed within the female voice of the city.

In addition, the notion of a female voice overruling and appropriating a male narrative (and therefore subverting the tendency of male mediators long present within men-dominated Irish drama) is supported by examining Sarah’s claim:

[129] It is interesting to compare the two playwrights´ notions: whereas McGuinness in the end of his play acknowledges hope for Derry/Ireland, Friel´s Hugh in his final speech – his attempt to recall the beginning of Virgil’s Aeneid – whether or not Carthage/Ireland can be restored to its former plenitude is a problem that is suspended, quite literally, in mid sentence.

> I only know one story. Will I tell it? Once upon a time there were three young fellas, who were pals, best of pals. One of the young fellas, the ringleader it's fair to say, the hard man, he met a girl. Jesus, did they fall for each other. Did they believe in each other. They were the King and Queen of Derry. They were all good mates. They went out walking through the streets of Derry. Hark and Paul and Seph and Sarah. Alone, together, and then in hundreds, and in thousands, and they would overcome someday. They had a dream. Civil rights for all. We would change Derry. And we did. We all changed. There was another dream. A secret one. Go to Europe, see the Alps. One of the gang, the girl, she went away, but not to the Alps. Amsterdam. No that's another story (298).

In this excerpt, Sarah's story encompasses and appropriates elements of Hark's, Paul's, and Seph's respective narratives. In addition to this, it could be accordingly argued that McGuinness' female characters are more vividly and humanely depicted than their male counterparts; Melissa Sihra argues that even though Maela "has lost her daughter to cancer, Greta has had a hysterectomy, Sarah has turned to drugs and prostitution in Amsterdam; their interactions with the world have a strong interpersonal dimension. For the male characters, activities seem more political first and personal second."[130]

Hélène Cixous has once remarked that "all women are exiles"[131]. Also thanks to Brian Friel, Marina Carr and Frank McGuinness, women and their voice ceased to be exiles from the Irish stages; they ceased to be merely figures surrounded by and accompanying men – their voice is increasingly strong and loud and their spirit is independent.

Carr, similarly to Friel and McGuinness, commented on the link between (her) writing and its potential ability of reconciliation with the past (although not as

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[130] Sihra 212.

[131] Quoted in "Ireland's 'exiled' women playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr" in The *Theatre of Marina Carr: Before Rules Was Made* eds. Cathy Leeney et al. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2003) 150.

personal as is the case with Friel and McGuinness[132]), saying that it provides: the necessary "wisdom and the circumspection needed when dealing with the dead or the past, with memory, knowledge. I think to write like that shows incredible bravery on the part of the writer. It's about having the courage to sit down and face the ghosts and have a conversation with them."[133] Language and story-telling constitute also an essential element of relief from various traumas in McGuinness' plays[134]. As if simultaneously reconciling both the authors and their audiences with the past female void in Irish drama, language and narrative are powerful devices for constructing female identities.

The ability to construct one's identity ascribed to the female voice is best epitomized in Grandma Fraochlán; Roche notices that in her, "the figure of the Tramp has changed gender and now offers a matrilineal line of support and continuity rather than a substitute patriarchy"[135]; McGuinness' Sarah has also been compared to a tinker[136]. Their construction as wandering figures is counteracted by the necessity of a narrative that would ground and identify them: Grandma's stories supply the family with personal history – their lives are compressed into short anecdotes. However, Mária Kurdi sees her in a less favourable light: "the opium-consuming Grandma's matriarchal presence represents also the long standing but self-deceptive legacy of mythologizing personal life to override facts, which carries the danger that women cherish unattainable expectations of the future."[137] Millie continues the ultimately detrimental romantic storytelling tradition by inventing a fantastic myth for her son surrounding his father: "El Salvadorian drummer who swept me off my feet. I do not tell him that he is married with two sons to a jaded uptown society girl or

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[132] McGuinness remarked that Bloody Sunday was the day that ended his adolescence. 6 Timothy D. Connors, "Derry Comes to Mid-Michigan: Staging Carthaginians at Central Michigan University," *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability,* ed. Helen Lojek (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006) 85.

[133] Sihra 215.

[134] See Eamonn Jordan who discusses this recurring concept at a greater length in his essay. Eamonn Jordan, "The Feast of Famine", *The Plays of Frank McGuinness* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997). 71- 73. The importance of language and narrative is also omnipresent in *Carthaginians:* in the beginning of the play, the three women are holding a vigil for a dying bird. They distance themselves from its impending death by reciting childish rhymes, singing and telling dirty jokes. This foreshadows the strategy of displacement which they employ subsequently to communicate their own personal traumas.

[135] Roche 36.

[136] Jordan 71.

[137] Kurdi 109.

that I tricked him into conceiving you because I thought it possible to have something that for myself that didn't stink of Owl Lake" (165). Despite the lie, it is important to notice that it is not a male gaze and narrative that provides the women with substance.

Their own narrative, diametrically different from the official rhetoric, is crucial for Friel's five brave women of Glenties; four unmarried spinsters, a fallen woman and an illegitimate child are shunned from the official story; therefore, they need to reinvent themselves in their own voice. McGuinness' women at first refuse to tell their story in fear of being obliged to acknowledge its validity. They avoid the truth through a myriad of songs and jokes; once they are finally capable of saying it aloud, the author allows them to move towards acceptance and eventually rebirth, in Sarah's case possibly even literal as she expresses her desire to have a child with Hark (366). It could be suggested that the eventual reconciliation with Hark and providing hope for a future through her fertile body can be arguably perceived as a sort of sacrifice of her part; this notion would enter into a dialogue with the notion of the impossibility and sterility of female sacrifice as described by Arextaga.

Nevertheless, the identifying narrative can present itself in numerous forms, as it is apparent in Beck's reproach aimed at The Mai:

> you don't know what it's like out there when you're nothing and you have nothing, because you've always shone, always, you've always been somebody's favourite or somebody's star pupil or somebody's wife, or somebody's mother or somebody's teacher. Imagine a place where you are none of those things. (132)

It could be argued here that Mai's own agency and narrative were insufficient to entirely establish her identity: in the latter part of this particular excerpt, she is constantly defined and identified in relation to somebody else. Not least importantly, as a remnant of patriarchal rhetoric, she is objectified as someone's wife. In contrast to this, the definite article associated with her name suggests a notion of uniqueness and identifies her per se. However, the character of The Mai

also illustrates the dangers of being trapped within a narrative shaped by fantasy and four-penny romance:

> the Mai and the princess were two of a kind, moving towards one another across deserts and fairytales and years till they finally meet in a salon under Marble Arch and waltz around enthralled with one another and their childish impossible world. Two little princesses on the cusp of a dream, one five, the other forty. (152)

The detrimental effect of her imaginative intensity and immature succumbing to fairytale narratives is omnipresent throughout Carr's drama, as Millie further suggests:

> The Mai set about looking for that magic thread that would stitch us together again and she found it at Owl Lake, the most coveted site in the country. And the new house was built and, once she had it the way she wanted, The Mai sat in front of this big window here, her chin moonward, a frown on her forehead, as if she were pulsing messages to some remote star which would ricochet and lance Robert wherever he was, her eyes closed tightly, her lips forming two words noiselessly. Come home – come home. (111)

In this case, the female narrative is disturbed and rendered impossible by the male refusal to succumb to it and fulfill his assigned role. Furthermore, another example of a misleading narrative can be detected in Maela's denial to acknowledge the death of her daughter: by keeping her daughter alive through language she continues to identify herself as a mother, a role out of which she involuntarily slipped; in this respect, she subscribes to the traditional interpretation of a female role. Maintaining the fantasy of the dead rising in her case equals to rightfully resuming her maternal narrative and role.

Also, Millie demonstrates and rightfully acknowledges the failure of narrative in her own life by claiming:

> she filled us with hope – too much hope maybe – in things to come. And her stories made us long for something extraordinary to happen in our lives. I wanted my life to be huge and heroic and pure as in the days of yore. I wanted to march through the world up and up, my prince at my side, and together we'd leave our mark on it. (163)

On the other hand, it is also obvious that most of the women in all three plays reject the readily available narratives of the hegemonic patriarchal society to which they were forced to subscribe in the past; narrating their lives as shunned spinsters, single mothers, abandoned wives and even prostitutes, they shape and enrich the heretofore limited canon.

3.2. Masculine Females?

The landscape of the three plays is remarkably void of strong male characters (this notion will be later examined in greater detail); this is best epitomized in McGuinness' work, where the central character Dido needs to alter his gender in order to provide hope and stability. This significant absence of dominant men results into a challenge to offer a suitable redefinition of the traditional female gender role in situations when the women are forced to compensate for the male void.

Margaret Llewellyn-Jones describes The Mai as a "passionate woman whose strong feelings do not fit her socio-economic context"[138]; it is also possible to argue that it is not just her feelings that make her exceptional but also her economic agency and emancipation, transforming her into a self-sufficient Celtic Tigress in her own right. Such an interpretation stands in a stark contrast to what Kurdi had previously described on the example of J. M. Synge as the formerly current practice:

> The ever so limited vista of emancipation that Synge offers in his plays for women, is available only in exile or on the periphery of society, or in death, let us add. In dramatic terms, the woman character

[138] Llewlellyn-Jones 87.

> is allowed no space to develop her subjectivity, her iconic function being to represent the lack of harmony between private and public forces, a tragic as well as debilitating experience of Irish people during the decolonisation process.[139]

Ironically however, in their resourcefulness and self-sufficiency the women of the more recent dramatic ventures acquire certain male characteristics, creating a disruptive dichotomy, traces of the Other, within their own gender narrative. On yet another level of interpretation, through their self-sufficient unconventionality they also again re-enter the role of the marginalized Other, this time defined in relation to the conventional image the traditional society constructs; in the end, neither flesh nor fish, they find themselves in-between two poles once again, failing to entirely belong to neither of the two narratives.

Let us further introduce this notion by examining Greta in *Carthaginians;* to support the notion of her blurred sexual and gender identity and further destabilize the previously strict general gender dichotomy, McGuinness does not hesitate to ascribe Greta some traditionally masculine characteristics: she reads *Sporting Life* in order to pursue her horse betting passion and she smokes sixty Silk Cut cigarettes when simultaneously claiming she is cutting down (significantly, she shares the passion for tobacco with both Connie and Grandma Fraochlán). Her masculinisation might originate from the absence of a man in Greta´s life for whom she would perform her femininity.

Furthermore, immersed in and intrigued by her RUC officer role in Dido's farcical playlet, Greta is excited to kill a person, enthusiastically inquiring into the total number of casualties – the confirmed prospect of an impending massacre seems to satisfy and even excite her. Whereas Tom Maguire asserts that Dido's play resists the limited characterisations of women on stage, sentimentalized

[139] Kurdi 9. Kurdi observes that: "in virtually all of his plays, Synge negotiates the possibility of woman´s liberation from her fetishised position but the outcome is ambiguous. – Nora does not manage to separate, let alone emancipate, herself from the disabling bonds of the patriarchal discourse as there is no alternative to it in the real and not even the utopian world represented by the Tramp, with whom she leaves the house." (Kurdi 7) It is true that even when Nora seems to have liberated herself from the confines of patriarchal society, we can notice that the Tramp speaks and makes decisions on her behalf; in other words, Nora managed to remove herself from one from of patriarchal control only to fall into another, albeit less conventional one.

motherhood and "satirises the range of mother roles which mutates from the classic mother role to woman as villain"[140], the innovative image of "real" women that McGuinness proposes might be multi-faceted but simultaneously sad, discouraging and somehow de-feminized.

Likewise, Carr's The Mai also appropriates male characteristics to a considerable degree: echoing the initial scene of Robert's return (which enabled her to perform a romanticized version of her femininity), in later stages her masculinity is brought to the fore. The Mai metaphorically resumes and echoes previous Robert's performance, rendering herself almost androgynous when she "taps the bow along her toes, stops, pulls a string from it, looks at Robert, looks away, resumes playing herself: knees, thighs, stomach. Then she stops to snap a string as it suits her. She plays her breasts and makes notes on her throat with her other hand. Eyes closed, playing herself" (156). The notion is also supported by linking herself to music, which, as it shall be demonstrated, is associated with males throughout the three dramas.

We can turn our attention to a damsel in distress, Sarah in *Carthaginians* in search of another example pertaining to the notion of masculinised females. Sarah is also forced to embrace certain agency and literally step into the role of her own painfully absenting male saviour: "I walked by the canals of Amsterdam. I was sinking under the weight of powder. I sank and sank until I felt hands lift me. I thought they were yours, Hark, but they were my own. I saved myself, Johnny. I saw myself dead in Amsterdam. I've come back from the dead. I'm clean." (328)

Furthermore, while touching upon the issue of stability, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford observed that:

> the well-being of society depended on women's embracing a passive, home-bound role and on men supporting them financially and emotionally. The presence of women in the workforce and an emphasis on women's economic independence, transformed women

[140]Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland: Thorugh and Beyond the Troubles* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006) 107.

> into predators of married men and undermined the stability of marriage.[141]

Butler Cullingford ventures even further in her depiction of the intended Irish society by claiming that "in a properly ordered society, (…) women who opted for the role of full-time homemaker – the desired role for women – would be rewarded with security and an assurance of permanent support from their partners."[142] The discrepancy between the idealistic stratagem and the reality presented in the three dramas could not be more conspicuous; for most of the women in the plays, working and economically securing themselves and their families is the only choice available to them. However, as it has been suggested above in case of The Mai, despite their best efforts, the women rarely achieve the coveted stability, as Friel's Kate resignedly admits:

> You work hard at your job. You try to keep the home together. You perform your duties as best you can – because you believe in responsibilities and obligations and good order. And then suddenly, suddenly you realize that hair cracks are appearing everywhere; that control is slipping away; that the whole thing is so fragile it can't be held together much longer. It's about to collapse, Maggie. (35).

Indeed, the futility of the struggle at times proves to be overwhelming and, as the following excerpt suggests, despite all the female solidarity inevitably negatively influences the increasingly bitter close-knit environment:

> Kate: You´ll buy it out of your glove money, will you? I thought what you and Rose earned knitting gloves was barely sufficient to clothe the pair of you.

[141] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "Gender, Sexuality, and Englishness in Modern Irish Drama and Film", *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis eds (Amherts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) 283.

[142] Butler Cullingford 286. Butler Cullingford also mention "Two female models in the divorce debate: the faithful wife and mother, devoted only to her home and family, whose satisfaction lies in providing for their well-being, and the sexually active predatory working woman, whose priorities are self-gratification through career, money, and sex – ran like a red thread through the debate." (286) Applying this clear-cut criteria for example to Friel´s *Dancing at Lughnasa* and identifying hard-working Kate as a sexual predator is ridiculous to say the least.

Agnes: This isn´t your classroom, Kate. (23)

Representing an element of control and being most aware of social conventions, Kate is arguably seen as the least feminine of the sisters; however, while still managing to provide stability to a certain degree, all the women have to abandon certain feminine qualities in exchange. At this price, The Mai succeeds at building her dream house, the Mundy sisters manage to long maintain their residual dignity and modest existence in hostile Ballybeg and McGuinness´ heroines simply survive. However, in contrast, not all the traditionally feminine qualities are lost as *Carthaginians* prove: on a motherly and more emotional note, McGuinness' Maela expresses her motherly concern about Sarah getting sunstroke (297) and Greta lovingly cares for a dying bird. Also, Butler Cullingford emphasizes McGuinness´ interpretation of women as peacemakers: "Greta's care for the dying bird at the beginning of the play is explained by the Irish name for Derry, Doire Colmcille 'Columba's oak grove,' which is related through the saint's name to the Latin for dove, columba 'bird of peace"[143]

As we have already proved, the women in the plays are shaped and masculinised by the present/absent men in their lives; Friel's and Carr's plays are connected by a pattern of withdrawals and arrivals imposed upon the heroines by men. Chris, amorous but no longer under any illusions after years of deception, knows that her wandering lover, Gerry, will leave her again ("You wouldn't intend to but that's what would happen because that's your nature and you can't help yourself" 33). As a parallel, the Mai believes that Robert's idyllic return in the initial moments of the play, accompanied by armfuls of gifts, marks the ultimate homecoming and the beginning of their fairy tale life in her fairy tale castle. Interestingly enough, Mary Trotter reminds us of the old tradition according to which a groom prepares a house for his beloved[144]; the Mai's case is distinctive by its gender reversal - it is her who spends years labouring and building the love nest of stability. Also, this notion is similar to the traditional narrative of the three goals indispensable to achieve for every male in order to prove his worth: build a house, plant a tree and father a son. It can be safely said that with regard to these goals The Mai is far

[143] Elizabeth Butler Cullingford 234.
[144] Trotter 169.

more a man than her husband; overall, in her self-reliance The Mai assumes the male role. Similarly, while further imposing the idea of crucial voids and consequential gender reversals, it is conspicuous that there is no mention of a man in the life of the masculine Greta; similarly Maela's daughter can be interpreted as the sole trace of a male presence within her life – a presence that has eventually become a significant absence in the play. All of the plays also suggest that the traditional concept of a nuclear family of the first decades of the 20th century is either outlived or has changed beyond recognition.

Having confirmed the notion that the women within the three dramas assume certain male characteristics we can further observe that the females attempt to exercise certain control over their male counterparts. Paul Medcalf sets out to justify its necessity through the following argument:

> women must keep a check on men´s behaviour, since men are like children who seem to be primarily regarded as potential tearaways who are in need of control. Consequently, women regulate men´s drinking, fighting, gambling and other excessive, "roug" and "unruly" behaviour.[145]

In accordance with Medcalf´s observation and in an attempt to maintain her integrity, Kate indeed firmly demarcates her territory by outlawing Gerry into the garden by ordering Chris to "meet him outside" (25). Furthermore, she equally imposes her control over both Jack´s mind and body by strictly delineating his daily itinerary and establishing her central role in it:

> I´m going to walk you down to the main road and up again three times and then you´ll get your tea and then you´ll read the paper from front to back and then you´ll go to bed. And we´ll do the same thing tomorrow and the day after and the day after and the day after until we have you back to what you were. (41)

[145] Medcalf 53.

Indeed, Uncle Jack becomes a mere puppet in the protective hands of his sisters, who nevertheless display the best intentions regarding his welfare. Similarly, in *The Mai,* the overprotective Grandma Fraochlán by proxy succeeds at keeping an eye on her beloved Ellen´s husband through infecting her mind with contempt for him (146). Last but not least example of female grasp of power over males can be also effortlessly identified in McGuinness´ *Carthaginians*; while being visibly more vulnerable and prone to insults in his original nature-appointed gender, after slipping into his feminine alter ego persona Fionnuala McGonigle, Dido easily manipulates all of the graveyard vigilants (including the rebellious and abusive Hark) through his playlet. Moreover, while sustaining the scarred graveyard sextet merely on the physical level as a man, Dido forces them to conquer their respective traumas only after donning his female garb and gender.

3.2. (Dys)functional Females

Although it would be deceptively simple to draw an inevitably one-dimensional conclusion after the close-reading of the three texts that the female characters, inspired by the transition from the stereortypical iconclastic image of a nuclear family and from a rural economic model to a more urban one, display solely masculine features, such an observation would nevertheless be completely amiss. The female characters, despite their emancipation, have retained numerous feminine characteristics and, above all, they demonstrate considerable female solidarity; the alternate female community overturns the primacy accorded to the nuclear family.

Bernadette Sweeney remarks concerning Friel´s play that "it is clear that the evocation of lost days is central to the play; it achieves this by describing an earlier time of shared family solidarity against poverty and against social censure, and is based on the notion of a homogenous society"[146]; she is but one of the numerous critics who notice the complicity of the women in face of their merciless fate. In fact, the crop of wheat dominating the stage in some productions, apart from being informative about the (harvest) time, probably also represents the strong bonds between the five women. Once the bonds are loosened

[146] Sweeney 117.

(when Agnes and Rose leave), the carefully bargained existence equally falls into pieces. The eventual ruin is announced by Michael in the very beginning of the play:

> And even though I was only a child of seven at the time I know I had a sense of unease, some awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before my eyes, of becoming what they ought not be. That may have been because Uncle Jack hadn't turned out at all like the resplendent figure in my head. (1)

The female solidarity of the five sisters surviving in the hostile environment of the patriarchal and parochial 1930s is what inextricably connects them with their modern counterparts from Carr's pen who face a markedly less so, but still distinctly non-amiable milieu. The female togetherness is so powerful that the women refuse minor compromises that would nevertheless significantly ameliorate their status in the eyes of their surrounding: as Lojek rightly notices concerning the Mundys that they embody values that rupture the homogeneous environs of the rural context:

> Though their lives are shaped by things they cannot do, they are most notable for things they do not do. They do not abandon Rose to an institution. They do not relinquish Michael to an orphanage. They do not condemn Chris's unwed motherhood, though Kate is alert to prevent repetition. Chris chooses not to marry Gerry, despite her love for him and despite cultural expectations that unwed mothers will seek to marry.[147]

Similarly to the Mundy sisters who are not willing to dismantle their integrity, "an ensemble support system of female energy"[148], The Mai also refuses to meet the demands of the village by abandoning Robert in exchange for a more acceptable, conventional existence. Even minor characters manifest similar solidarity: The

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[147] Lojek 86.
[148] Roche 36.

Mai´s aunt Julie outwardly presents herself as a typical product of patriarchal consciousness (she has difficulties articulating words such as "abortion" and "sex"; however, she eventually proves to be quite understanding, sneaking money into her unfortunate nieces´ pockets in times of need.

Despite not focusing to such extent on familial bonds like its two counterparts, it is also possible to detect resembling solidarity within McGuinness' drama. In fact, the togetherness inspired by other than family bonds is in a certain sense even impressive and noteworthy. This affinity can be illustrated already by the initial scene featuring Maela, Greta and Sarah; unlike their highly individual and individualized lonely male companions, the female characters are presented in mutual interaction, unified by nursing the dying bird. Moreover, another highly intimate and physical proof of their solidarity towards each other is traceable within the moment following Greta's avowal of her trauma: "Sarah goes and puts her hands gently on Greta's breasts. Greta screams. Sarah comforts her. Greta calms." (374); here, Sarah literally touches the site of Greta's trauma – her body and its female aspects.

However, Melissa Sihra proposes that "while ideals of family were promoted in the cultural life, 'home' in Irish drama has remained a precarious space, denoting a lack of security and prone to invasion and penetration."[149] As if in support of this assertion, Margaret Llewellyn-Jones rightfully argues that Carr's play stresses "circular effects of dysfunctional motherhood"[150]; The Mai, paralyzed by her love for Robert and focused on her goal of building the house of her dreams that would eventually lure her fairytale prince, does not simply have enough capacity left for emotional engagement with her children. In a bitter irony, she instead displaces her love onto a little Arab girl; her love-giving can thus be in a sense seen as a financial transaction and emotional prostitution. Moreover, the little Arab girl also represents a far more desirable accessory to The Mai's fantastic story than her own plebeian children. Millie bitterly describes her motherless childhood in embittered reminiscing: "What was certain was nothing was going to stop that house being built for Robert. We sat down to dinner in shifts and slept eight to a

[149] Sihra 2-3.
[150] Llewellyn-Jones 37.

room while The Mai swept up the curls of Arab royalty" (152). Curiously enough, unaware of her own pain-inflicting it is The Mai who passionately exclaims: "If there was less talk about love in this house and more demonstration of it we might begin to learn the meaning of the word." (152)

In Carr´s drama, love does not seem to represent a base for a stable happy family; on the contrary, it stands in direct opposition to it. The Mai's failure to succeed in the ultimate female maternal role and provide a loving environment for her children is not unprecedented in her family history; she merely seems to mirror Grandma Fraochlán, who clashes with and destabilizes the static image of a mother even within the older generation. Julie reveals the extent of the latter's maternal inadequacy concerning her daughter Ellen: "I remember a few nights before she got married, she appeared on my doorstep, three months pregnant with The Mai there, and she begged me to take her in until the child was born and wanted me to go and talk to you and make you see that she didn't have to marry him." (139). Grandma Fraochlán initially speaks very warmly of her favourite Ellen - she is very proud of her beauty and her academic success (117); however once Ellen announces she is pregnant following a romance with a bricklayer, all the fondness disappears as Grandma Fraochlan forces her into a marriage with a man she despises. It is not until the end of the play that she admits her regrets about ruining Ellen's life.

Moreover, Julie equally accuses Grandma of uneven distribution of love in their household: "She had little or no time for her children except to tear strips off us when we got in her way. All her energy went into my father and he thought she was an angel. And then when she was left with all of us and pregnant with Ellen, she was a madwoman." (145) Grandma herself eventually admits her parental insufficiency in reaction to Julie's outburst ("You didn't bring me up at all. I brought myself up and all the others. You were at the window pinin' for the nine-fingered fisherman!" 141) by claiming: "Julie, I called you after the sunshine though you were a child of winter, me only winter birth, me first born, greatest love abounding in your making. Maybe parents as is lovers is not parents at all, not enough love left over" (143-4). Later on, she confirms her affinity towards a romantic rather than parental involvement: "there's two types of people in this

world from what I can gather, them as puts their children first and them as puts their lover first and for what it's worth, the nine-fingered fisherman and meself belongs ta the latter of these." (182). However, Grandma Fraochlán, just like The Mai seems to be unable to change her detrimental feelings; even decades later, she still constantly drags along an oar (112), the only artefact of her late husband; in a merciless crescendo of motherly failure, rather than to her children, Grandma Fraochlán devotes her affection to an inanimate wooden object.

In addition, a similarly inadequate version of motherhood can be traced in McGuinness' play – the relationship of Greta with her mother is strained to say the least; as a result, Greta fails to understand herself and her body and, through the lack of knowledge and parental interaction, interprets her first period as the beginning of her transformation into a man. The relationship between gender, sexuality and identity is inevitably highlighted. As a result, Eamonn Jordan even considers the role of the mother to be "deconstructed."[151] Although he pronounces this in relation to The Mai, displaying four generations of women, none of whom can be considered a conventional satisfying representative of a kind motherly figure (Grandma is Fraochlan more than willing to exchange her children for her husband, the Mai "adopting" a little Arab girl instead of Millie, barren Agnes and Julie, or Millie, unable to secure a complete family for her son), the quote can be equally relevant to both *Carthaginians* and *Dancing at Lughnasa.*

The Mundy sisters' house cannot be reproached for being a loveless household: despite their incessant struggle for survival and respect of their hostile community they still succeed at reserving enough emotional space for each other. However, Michael's position within the family is peculiar; rather than exclusively Chris´, Michael seems to be the son of all the five women, with no obvious preferences towards his birthmother (it is also suggested that he is a special favourite of Kate's, who despite their strained budget never fails to sneak some sweets for him into the house). Maggie attempts to approach him via witless riddles; on the contrary, Michael's rightful mother Chris is the only one, who is seen castigating her son for his trespasses. Also, with no mention of the sisters' parents or relatives, Maggie has a very motherly relationship with Rose.

[151] Jordan 170.

Apart from acknowledging the concept of dysfunctional motherhood, it is also necessary to highlight another notion striking the proverbial coup de grace to the traditional nuclear family in modern Irish drama: in addition to the emotional ambiguity and insufficiency and despite the strict Catholic code, all the significant children in the three dramas are conceived out of wedlock or brought up in incomplete families. For instance, the unexplained absence of Maela´s partner would have invited a myriad of questions in the Mundys´ era; however, the fact that the void remains unchallenged and, what is more, unreferenced, imbues it with the air of normalcy and ordinariness, further undermining the once dogmatic institution of motherhood and untouchable worshipped ideal of a nuclear family.

Despite all the emancipation and pretence of independence, the role of largely absent males is still crucial for all the women in the three plays; Mária Kurdi illustrates the veracity of this claim on The Mai: "her sense of dependence on the man to define herself in the restrictive terms of love and romantic marriage prevents her from considering a solution other than committing suicide once the hope for marital improvement looks irretrievably shattered."[152] The Mai ceaselessly links her happiness with Robert's return; Millie reminisces over his six-year-long absence with

> no explanations, no goodbyes, he just got into his car with his cello and drove away. So The Mai and I went into town and sat in the Bluebell Hotel where The Mai downed six Paddys and red and I had six lemon-and-limes." [...] When I came back with the drinks The Mai said, "Don't you worry about a thing, Millie, your Dad'll come back and we will have the best of lives. (111)

In The Mai's eyes, Robert is indeed the proverbial thread to stitch them all together (110). When the runaway husband eventually returns, immediately forgiven, The Mai takes him directly to her bedroom; his reappearance is nevertheless not so easily absolved by Grandma Fraochlán, who fearlessly voices her reproaches: "You didn't see her strugglin' with them youngsters, all yours – in case you've forgotten – scrimpin' and scrapin' to get this house built and even

[152] Kurdi 109-110.

when everything's laid on, you appear on the doorstep with a bunch of flowers." (122)

The indispensability of a man for a happy ending is also painfully conspicuous in the Mundy cottage: Gerry's absence as a father and husband (deemed unsuccessful at "everyday stuff" 19) can be largely interpreted as the cause of the Mundys' marginalisation within their rural community. Another coup de grace to the sisters´ vulnerable status comes through Maggie's confrontation with Bernie O'Donnell, her childhood friend and peer: Bernie left Ireland, got married to a London man and boasts with two beautiful children. Upon hearing the news, Maggie, conscious of her own failure, "goes to the window and looks out so that the others cannot see her face. She holds her hands, covered with flour, out from her body" (19). . In a sad attempt, Maggie struggles to compensate the gender unbalance of their cottage by christening the radio set after Lugh, a pagan male god. From a certain point of view, Bernie's example seems to suggest that for attaining a similar sort if happiness it is vital to free oneself from the restrictive forces imposed by the Irish patriarchal society; a similar notion could be identified in The Mai, who manifests her affection for a London child. In a parallel, the disappointed Sarah might have reached the breaking point in Amsterdam, but it is also outside of Ireland where her recuperation eventually begins. In addition, all of the vigilants begin to grasp the full extent of their scars in an outsider space, beyond the rule-bound society.

Although the failure of traditional family is undeniable, the characters throughout the plays seem to suffer major difficulties acknowledging this fact: Robert reacts very violently at Grandma Fraochlán's mention of his own wandering father: "He never left her! He went to America for a few years. It was after the war, he had to get work, but he came back, didn't he!" (123) Moreover, Robert is unwilling to enter a destructive repetitive cycle (an example of which he observes within The Mai's family) but Grandma Fraochlán predicts its inevitability: "But not you, no, and not your father, and sure as I'm sittin' here, you'll not be stopping long, because we can't help repeatin', Robert, we repeat and we repeat, the orchestration may be different but the tune is always the same." (123). However, Grandma Fraochlán is guilty of resembling negation, making her more susceptible

to detecting the identical failure in others: she herself has a direct experience with male absence in form of her drowned husband:

> He didn´t leave me. He was taken from me. He was given to me and was taken from me, somethin´ you would never understand, you who was seduced be ledgers and balance sheets, installed in a house with a slate roof and an automobile be a walkin´ cheque book who counted his thingamagigs as he came- (143)

In a perverted family harmony, The Mai echoes her husband´s denial till her last breath: "Robert goes to hotel rooms with this one and that one, like you said you'd like to do, Connie, but he always comes back to me. He always does and has done and always will." (160); it is difficult to decipher with certainty whether she really believes this or whether she only constructs another favourable narrative, essential for her survival. However, at times even she is aware of the sense of impending fatality: "He's going to leave me again. I can't bear it a second time. Oh God, please, I can't bear it a second time." (151). Robert is unanimously held responsible for the tragic outcome: as a result, Millie, depicting very unfavourably her current relationship with her father (on chance meetings "we shout and roar till we're exhausted or in tears or both" 163) ultimately confirms the disintegration of the family; calling him Robert, Millie denies her father his biologically determined paternal role.

McGuinness' drama portrays a similar inability to acknowledge a failure of the desirable traditional family bonds. As an illustration of this claim, Maela visibly struggles with the death of her daughter; upon Greta's questioning her "what age would she have been?" Greta eagerly hastens to adjust the hypothetical conditional into the painfully coveted realistic present ("You mean what age she is?" 298). In addition, representing a typical product of the generational stereotypes, Maela, deprived from her daughter's father's support, is also immersed into a typically feminine activity of knitting, invested with both figurative emotional and physical warmth which stands in a tragic metaphorical contrast with the coldness of the corpse the knitwear is intended for. Eventually, in the end of the play Maela is finally capable of admitting to herself her

daughter's death and her emptied role as a mother: however, the loss is inevitably accompanied by pain that despite its final acknowledging proves too great to bear; while presenting her narrative, Maela still feels the necessity to detach herself from it and indirectly mediate her experience through a cruel joke (317-8).

Furthermore, the concept of a family is thwarted even before its rightful genesis by the caricatured representation of unproductive romance. Elements of romance and love stories are present within all the three plays. However, in none of them is its depiction straightforward and ultimately concluded by a happy ending. The five Mundy sisters, spinsters in their thirties are well aware of their virtual umarriageability; Kate, secretly in love with Austin Morgan (who eventually marries a girl half her age whom she brought up as a governess) translates her romantic feelings into a pampering relationship with Michael. On the other hand, the masculine Agnes, indulging in smoking, reveals her soft spot by her choice of literature: her reading *The Marriage of Nurse Harding* might suggest that even she still cherishes a tiny flame of hope of becoming a wife or that she at least succumbs to this iconoclastic concept. In addition, the stereotypical image of a nurse, an elderly unmarried woman, mirrors her own status. Moreover, the retarded Rose is confounded by the attention of the local Don Juan who, in all probability, perceives their relationship more or less as a temporary joke. In addition, as we have already noted, Gerry and Chris' courting is restricted to the garden, reinforcing the notion of it illegitimacy; the lack of the traditional outcome of their courting also supports this connotation. The garden is also the site for their dancing, perceived as a form of marriage by their son Michael; however, even this personalized ritual is subsequently degraded by Gerry who devotes the same attention to Agnes.

A cycle of caricatured romance seems to be an inescapable experience for Grandma Fraochlán's clan; Grandma herself is mercilessly described as a "result of a brief tryst between an ageing island spinster and a Spanish or Moroccan sailor" (115). The Mai's Robert performs the role of an infatuated suitor almost perfectly: his highly clichéd (and therefore necessarily impersonal) and feminine

gifts include a perfume, flowers (108) and tickets to Paris.[153] Despite his sweet talk ("All those years I was away, not a day went by I didn't think of you, not a day someone or something didn't remind me of you. When I'd sit down to play, I'd play for you, imagining you were there in the room with me." 127) Robert's arrival is marred by his avowal it was his repetitive vision of The Mai dying that brought him back home. Robert's second set of caricatured presents (a ten-pound note, a birthday card and the last issue of *Cosmopolitan*) painfully denigrates the degradation of their relationship. A further echoing example of failed romance can be illustrated by Beck, who in her endless stream of relationships at thirty-seven devaluates the notion of "true love" while incessantly swearing that "this time she said it's for real" (119).

Any impending prospect of better times ("because Robert is back and he's here for good and that's all I care about. Grandma Fraochlán, you don't realize how awful it's been these last few years, and now I have the chance of being happy again and I can't bear anyone to say anything that'll take that away." 116) is destined to be inevitably shattered; the concept of a wedding supposedly assuring love and happiness proved to be tragically flawed in case of Millie's parents. Beck, secretly married in an unromantic registry office and even more secretly filing for divorce, is viewed by her husband as mere prevention against loneliness in old age; once her true identity is revealed, she is dismissed; nevertheless, she still shares her marriage with her family in her eagerness to confirm her status and female role (129). In an instance further supporting the mockery of romance, the promise purported by Gerry's arrival in the beginning of Friel´s *Dancing at Lughnasa* remains unfulfilled: Michael, Gerry and Chris are never simultaneously present on stage, negating the possibility of forming a legitimate family and their interaction is limited to two-way dialogues, creating a significant default in communication. Eventually, even the short-lived happy moments of Gerry, Chris and Michael performing the role of a quasi-normal family are overshadowed by the final revelation of Gerry's parallel, disturbingly similar family in Wales.

[153] Another gift, sweets for his grown up children (whom he fails to recognize) demonstrates Robert´s ignorance as a father. (109).

McGuinness' Sarah has also a haunting past to drag along as a burden; unable to feed her Amsterdam drug addiction by any other means, she had agreed to forfeit her own body, femininity and ultimately her identity as a prostitute. Desperate to save herself and keen to come back to life by entering the traditional role of mother and wife, she hopes to secure a future and a child with Hark, who, however, remains deaf to her longing. Apart from Hark´s cowardice to resume his life, he is also to an extent emasculated by Sarah taking the decisive step in their relationship. Moreover, the shattering of dreams indeed goes hand in hand with the aforementioned inability to ensure a future; the barrenness of Irish drama used as a signifying concept has been widely commented on. Anne F. Kelly-O'Reilly, examining McGuinness' characters claims that "their respective wounds make it impossible for them to be life givers."[154]

As we have already mentioned, Maela, the oldest female keener, lost her daughter to cancer on Bloody Sunday. Nevertheless, locked in a pattern of denial and unable to come to terms with reality, she continues to perform her maternal role – she saves money for her daughter's birthday, dresses her grave and her ceaseless knitting reminds us of the motherly effort to bring warmth into the home (although knitting as a traditional attribute of motherly figures gains an entirely new dimensions in Dido's grotesque play-within-the-play). Maela has undoubtedly lost her defining female role of a mother; unsure of her identity in the current void, she is at a dead point, unable to move on in her life. Significantly, the Irish stages seem to be remarkably childless and barren with women deprived of their natural role and often of their progeny. This is emphasized by Dido's pushing a baby-less pram full of provisions[155]; the possibility and hope of a better future, associated with prams and new life are painfully replaced by mere alimentary sustenance reassuring merely physical survival; the essentialist myth

[154] Kelly–O´Reilly 94.

[155] This might be an allusion to the following event: Moreover, just eight months prior to the play's Lyric Theatre production, a controversial 34-hour curfew had been imposed on the predominantly nationalist Falls Road. This caused widespread alienation among Belfast's nationalist population. The moderate Central Citizens' Defence Committee (CCDC) condemned the British Army's violation of English common law (Lee 1989: 434) and, in a fifty-page booklet, Law (?) and Orders, it argued that the Falls curfew had destroyed nationalist confidence in its 'peace-keeping' role in Northern Ireland (Irish Times, 18 September 1970: 1). The curfew ended on 5 July shortly after a group of 3,000 women from neighbouring nationalist areas in Belfast defied the army by walking through the military cordon with prams full of bread, milk and other provisions. Singleton 123.

of Mother Ireland is replaced by barren borderland where the present (let alone the future) remains uncertain as life is substituted by survival.

In addition, Greta reveals she underwent a hysterectomy which deprived her of the uniquely female prerogative to bear children; also, given her severely challenged gender identity, the surgery (which she apparently regrets) thus approached her towards the male end of the spectre. Similarly to Maela, she is also unable to tackle her narrative directly; the dirty joke she repeats is the mediated sad story of her life ("she saw herself. She saw nothing, for she is nothing. She is not a woman anymore. She's a joke. A dirty joke." 373). Deprived of this important attribute (especially in family-oriented Ireland) defining her gender, Greta also further loses a clear idea of her identity, resulting in her blatantly expressing her vague wish to "want herself back" (351). Furthermore, by abandoning her original job of a teacher, her life remains ultimately children-free. As a result, Greta, repeating a children's rhyme in a ceaseless cycle, becomes overtly attached to a dying bird, allowing her repressed maternal instincts to come to the fore. In fact, Greta is a representative of how jokes concerning sexuality (fallen off penises, smashed bananas) scattered throughout the play, aim at the characters' softest spot. Like the similarly haunting topic of death, sexuality is the object of ridicule in order to silence the danger of a serious discussion that would prove too painful to bear.

Carr to a certain extent also represents Ireland as a barren wasteland; she translates this concept into Ellen's last child (the ultimate nemesis of its mother) who was "a beautiful stillborn baby boy." (135) Moreover, Beck expresses her longing for a child, but, aware of her age she admits to herself: "No, I won't have any now. I suppose there has to be one spinster in every generation." (129). She takes the spinster torch from the previous generation, her aunts Julie and Agnes, who remain childless. Ironically, it is precisely these two bigoted conventions-obedient women who fear the possibility of her unwed pregnancy ("we'll find out if she's pregnant first and, if she is, with the luck of God she'll miscarry" 135). Also the five Mundy women did not succeed in securing the continuity of their family; their age prevents any hope for rectifying this in the future. Their only

legacy takes the form of an illegitimate offspring, eager to leave his Ballybeg past far behind.

Furthermore, pertaining to the notion of caricatured romance, Mária Kurdi asserts that:

> Costume, which is a frequently ambiguous framing for the body and make-up as an extension to it also participates in the process of gender conditioning and normalisation. {...] The deployment of diverse languages of the body and dress in female-authored plays is intertwined with the verbal level and operates as a source of signification, prone to render gendered social constraints visibly inscribed on the female body. Also, they reveal obstacles, institutional as well as discursive, in the way of women gaining real or at least a greater amount of personal autonomy.[156]

Accordingly, the costumes and make up determine how women are perceived; unfortunately, the appearance is also inextricably linked to their success with men. Many of the female characters within the examined plays indeed feel the urge to enhance their likeability, either physically or by performing a certain role. Beck in *The Mai* does both: not feeling socially adequate as a thirty-seven-year-old waitress, she reinvents herself as a thirty-year-old teacher. (130) Even Friel's Rose puts on her Sunday best for her date on the lake to distance herself from her mundane routine. On the contrary, the lack of interest in their appearance communicates the extent of McGuinness´ characters´ resignation.

Devoting quite a considerable amount of attention, Friel in his stage directions suggests that "the clothes of all the sisters reflect their lean circumstances, Rose, Maggie and Agnes all wear the drab, wrap-around overalls" (stage directions); Rose is described wearing wellingtons and Maggie puts on "large boots with long, untied laces" (stage directions). Pure functionality of these clothes suppresses femininity of their owners; however, even the Mundy sisters prove to be occasionally interested in their appearance: the first scene, showing their everyday

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[156] Sihra 41.

routines features Chris complaining about the broken mirror ("You can see nothing in it" 1). Nevertheless, her Agnes´ reaction ("Except more and more wrinkles" 1)[157] realistically shows the futility of any effort: their fate is determined by their age and outcast position from the social hierarchy. Despite that, Chris' first worry after seeing Gerry approaching the house concerns her appearance; she still has not yet given up that feminine side of herself.

Carr's Agnes and Julie are also characterized through their appearance: wearing fur coats and resembling handbags, they attempt to assert their status as distinguished mature ladies: however, their nosing around and peering in the windows degrades them into nosy elderly spinsters. Also The Mai could be said to use clothes as a means of communication: in one of the last scenes she dolls herself up at the occasion of going to a local dance with her unfaithful husband. She asks the others not to compliment her on her stunning look, hoping to receive the coveted words of praise from her ignorant husband; her intense imagination demonstrates itself once more through her childish dressing up: building a dream castle and putting on a princess' dress is designed to lure the prince into eternal love – but ultimately fails as the prince dangles his car keys, impatient to meet his mistress. When approaching Robert about his unmasked unfaithfulness, Mai throws her knickers on his head communicating her hopeless anger (158); the gesture is endowed with immediate feminine intimacy and vulgarly manifested vulnerability. Last but not least, in the beginning of the play, Millie recollects the day when she went shopping for The Mai's blue waking clothes; even after her life has finished, the Mai remains remarkably vocal concerning her wardrobe.

It is significant that the women in McGuinness' play do not devote much attention to their appearance; this seems to emphasize their resignation and passivity. The sole exception is Sarah who is seen fixing her hair; in the end it is her who first finds the courage to tell her story and express her desire to come back to life. In a curious gender reversal, the ultimate ambassador of femininity is thus curiously enough a man; floating easily between the two genders, Dido asserts his altered

[157] A similar resigned exchange also appears a little while later: "Ch: Far too late. And the aul mousey hair. Need a bit of colour. A: What for?" (7).

self by putting on a black miniskirt, black tights and high heels (330), by far the most feminine attributes to be found throughout the whole play.

4. Masculinity in Crisis: Emasculated Males?

4.1 Controlling the Voice?

It has been already suggested in detail throughout the introductory part of the present thesis that Irish public life was in all respects largely dominated by men respecting and supportive of various more or less ostensibly patriarchal organizations and dogmas; the Irish stage, reflecting the situation in the society, was no exception to this male predominance. Melissa Sihra considers the Field Day Theatre Company to illustrate the intensity of male domination:

> With its exclusively male directorate, the company lasted for over ten years producing one (male-authored) play per year and touring the island. Under the general editorship of Seamus Deane, the company published the three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1991, as well as pamphlets and plays. The elision of the traditions of women's writing in the anthology became immediately apparent.[158]

Ironically, despite ceaselessly voicing the desire to create an indiscriminate liberal fifth province, even this company still failed to willingly embrace and fully encompass several muted Others. Brian Singleton confirms the reprehensible gaps in representation on Irish stages in a more general observation:

> That there was not one single woman either writing for or directing on the stage to achieve any kind of status within the theatre in the post-1958 period (until effectively the 1970s and the emergence of the Druid Theatre Company) is testament to the patriarchal practices of a whole cultural establishment.[159]

Apart from deliberately erasing female authors from their *Anthology*, for reasons that have never been fully explained, Field Day refused to stage McGuinness'

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[158] Sihra 151.
[159] Singleton 52.

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme, discouraging McGuinness to pursue any further cooperation. This suggested a further elimination of another marginalized group and potentially explosive matter – the issue of (homo)sexuality; moreover, despite the once omnipotent patriarchy, Irish postcolonial masculinity was simply not established firmly enough to successfully meet a heterogeneous sexuality challenge. As Anthony Roche puts it, McGuinness, a Northern Catholic, suggested that the company "associates itself very strongly with the colour green" and asked, "Don't you think art is more colours than green?" In *Carthaginians*, which he withdrew from production by Field Day, McGuinness uses the Dido story to "reflect the rainbow," to engage with Irish problematic of gender and sexual orientation that, in his view, Field Day has elided."[160]

Nevertheless, the present chapter intends to prove that the pronounced dominant maleness of Irish drama was not universally homogeneous and uncomplicated; Brian Singleton suggests that: "the Irish male, let alone his masculinity, is very difficult to determine in a post-colonial context given his feminization in the colonial period, subordinated to the hegemonic forces of British law, custom, and practice."[161] In the preface to his 2011 book *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* Singleton announces his aim to explore these following questions: "What kind of men and their representations precisely have been canonized? And what have been the challenges to those hegemonic representations at the latter end of the twentieth century, and in the twenty-first?"[162] In my thesis I will attempt to relate Singleton's latter concern to the three plays in question. In addition, the following text also wishes to support Singleton's intention to:

> tear apart the notion that masculinity is a pre-ordained fixed identity and to pluralize the construction of that identity, exposing the numerous masculinities at play in contemporary Irish society, and not

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[160] Roche quoted in Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anticolonial Metaphor in Heaney, Friel, and McGuinness," *PMLA*, 2 (Mar., 1996) 228.
[161] Singleton 8.
[162] Singleton 1.

> all of them dominant, hegemonic, or upholders of the national and nationalist metanarrative.[163]

Similarly, I would like to expose various masculinities performed in the three examined dramas and assess how they correspond to the aforementioned nationalist metanarrative; furthermore, I intend to examine the extent to which they pertain to and foreshadow the widely discussed notion of crisis of masculinity omnipresent in contemporary literature.

As Sihra's observation suggested, male authors, actors and characters were the primary mediators and therefore controllers of (hi)stories; it is also necessary to remind that the male gaze was inevitably a heterosexual one. Correspondingly, as an illustrative example, Margaret Llewellyn-Jones remarked more specifically in relation to *Dancing at Lughnasa* that "slippery memories of women from childhood are filtered through the discourse of an adult male."[164] Michael creates the illusion of power by "owning" the narrative; for instance, he demonstrates this through indulging in dramatic irony towards the conclusion of the first act by disclosing the impending outcome of the play: "But what she (Kate) couldn't have foreseen was that the home would break up quite so quickly and that when she would wake up one morning in early September both Rose and Agnes would have left for ever" (41). The initial moments immediately reveal that both *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *The Mai* are not presented to the audience directly: as memory plays, set several decades back in the past (1936 and 1972 respectively) they are framed, mediated and constructed by a narrator who also only retrospectively maintains control over the narrative which is thus necessarily subjective and selective. Also, these narrators assume an ambiguous schizophrenic temporal presence/absence; in both productions, Michael, the audience's guide through *Dancing at Lughnasa*, and *The Mai*'s Millie are present on the stage as grown-ups reminiscing over the family past they witnessed as children. However, although Michael thus to a certain degree corresponds to the traditional male voice mediating a female and feminine story, we can also deprecatorily note that it is easy to colonize a narrative when there is nobody else to even attempt it. More

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[163] Singleton 2.

[164] LLewellyn-Jones 35.

importantly, given the time shift and the aunts' absence in the narrative present, there simply is not anyone else present.

In addition, Mary Trotter comments on Michael merely as a functional device, as "the play's narrator and the sole example of a child resulting from an Irish–English union in Friel's dramatic career. As a character he remains an empty cipher, for we are never informed of the adult Michael's career or personal life"[165] – it is deeply ironic that a narrator bringing to life a whole group of vivacious characters should be himself altogether lifeless. Furthermore, Tony Corbett to a certain extent defines Michael as an unreliable narrator and summarizes the failure of a male voice to grasp a female narrative:

> Michael evokes a golden past (...) Michael's ruminations are clouded by nostalgia, and, although he is aware of the details of the plot, he is also aware that his strongest memory of that time owes nothing to fact: 'In that memory atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusory.[166].

McGuinness' drama lacks a similarly central mediator. However, it is Hark's male voice that conspicuously attempts to usurp the narrative and maintain the illusion of male power by mercilessly exposing and exploiting the others' traumas and making them admit their sins; nonetheless, his imagined strength only insufficiently disguises painful efforts to construct the coveted masculine role of a hard IRA man. His violent urge to at least verbally control the past events, his own integrity and perform certain superiority over the other characters (and especially Dido) compensates for what he considers to be his own male failure. Nevertheless, in the end it is Hark who is unable to control and connect with his own narrative and past.

Bradley and Valiulis maintain that for a long time "the lives of actual Irish women were arguably colonized by Irish men, at the same time as both genders were

[165] Trotter 172.
[166] Tony Corbett, *Decoding the Language of the Tribe* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2003) 137.

colonial subjects of England"[167]; according to Brian Singleton, as a consequence, subsequently "the reality was that the construction of the nation was in fact an overt performance of patriarchy that re-colonized the people again in terms of gender and as a lived reality, not as metaphor."[168] A corresponding compensating effort to perform manliness and masculinity is applied by Hark and subverted most visibly by Dido[169] who asserts its simplistic insufficiency by refusing to fit into any neatly labelled box. Singleton claims that "no quick resolutions are presented to right wrongs, including differences (sexual or otherwise), but instead the play presents a crucible in which pluralism accommodates all."[170] In addition, Hark's inability to re-colonize his own narrative and rejection of continuity with his former self foreshadows and supports Singleton's notion of a crisis of masculinity.

As an attempt to reassert their masculinity diminished by British colonialism, the stage Irishmen desired not only to re-colonize the narratives but also to subdue the female characters. As an illustration to this claim, in the initial scenes of *The Mai*, Robert "lifts" and "plays" the Mai (108) when his cello is substituted by her body. Thus in fact, apart from crudely demonstrating his superior power, he also joins in the patriarchal pattern of objectifying females; however, in the second act, the emancipated Mai "plays herself." In a violent gesture she communicates at least some degree of physical independence from men. On the other hand however, we can find a contrasting example of successful male and masculine invective: The Mai's sister, Beck, accepts the inferiority ascribed to her by her husband in their loveless marriage; by identifying and presenting herself based on this degrading marriage she counterbalances The Mai's emancipated attitude.

4.2 Deceptive Surfaces

While mapping out the rapid societal developments regarding gender and sexuality, Brian Singleton mentions the 1982 gay man murder trial which is

[167] Bradley and Valiulis 6.
[168] Singleton 45.
[169] Singleton constructs very ostensibly a direct opposition between the two characters: he describes Hark as "a hardline and homophobic nationalist hardman" and Dido as "his polar opposite in electric blue Doc Marten boots". Singleton 107.
[170] Singleton 107.

inevitably reminiscent of a carefully rehearsed performance of the accused party – two Air Corps men who "appeared in court in dress uniform as a clear signal of their other more legitimate masculine practice with a clear intent to renegotiate their masculinity and separate it from their criminal action in an iconic reminder for the judiciary of their own hegemony."[171] This minutely staged performance was primarily designed to hit the "normal" and normative heterosexual majority cord. McGuinness provides an artistic reaction to such deceptive surfaces and outward substance-less appearances; his critique of propagandist images delivered by costumes and props is clearly pronounced especially in *Carthaginians,* where the characters are given simple props and fragmentary costumes to enter their stage personas within Dido's shallow playlet. Slipping into their respective farcical characters is maybe suspiciously too effortless given the necessity to cross gender boundaries and adopt distinctly dissimilar personalities and sexualities; arguably, McGuinness thus suggests how easily artificial surface identities (and deceptions) are created and subsequently shifted. Also, he subverts the supposedly contradictory identities by allocating the characters unifying mutations of the same name hinting that in reality there is very little that distinguishes them from one another. The characters immediately recognize the superficiality of the little drama but unanimously fail to discern the identity performativity this reality-mirror suggests.

Moreover, we can claim that especially men within all three dramas embrace various props and costumes to reinvent themselves in order to display and enhance their masculinity. For instance, Brian Friel is very meticulous concerning the costumes of both Jack and Gerry in *Dancing at Lughnasa;* in fact, he dedicates far more energy to portraying the appearance of these two male characters than their five female counterparts all of whom he devotes merely two sentences. Arguably, women are more recognizable in the domestic space whereas men are strangers that need to be described and analyzed; in this way, Friel might explore the aforementioned notion of dual male estrangement through colonization. In his initial stage direction Friel states: "Father Jack is wearing the uniform of a British army officer chaplain – a magnificent and immaculate uniform of dazzling white; gold epaulettes and gold buttons, tropical hat, clerical

[171] Singleton 98.

collar, military cane. He stands stiffly to attention." (1) As the text says, he is "resplendent", "magnificent". At first sight, Father Jack is seemingly a representative of both ultimately male organizations closed to women: the Church and the army (subsequently, the secular and the sacred are significantly joined once more towards the end of the play when Gerry, in search of a new masculine adventure, subscribes to the army in a church). However, Friel's following mocking remark degradingly compares Jack's outward splendour to "comic opera" and warns against subscribing to first impressions; Uncle Jack is simply too masculine and too perfect to be true. In addition, the unpractical white uniform is inappropriate in both Ryanga and down-to-earth Ballybeg; its empty surface magnificence and lack of meaning in given circumstances also provides a commentary on the ability of costumes and props to create a solid identity; this can also be read as a comment on the court incident mentioned by Singleton.

Moreover, also Gerry's masculinity is forcefully asserted to such extent that it easily becomes subject to ridicule: according to Friel, he "is wearing a spotless white tricorn hat with splendid white plumage." Nevertheless, Friel already in his initial stage directions further degrades these props by announcing that "soiled and shabby versions of Jack's uniform and Gerry's ceremonial hat are worn at the end of the play, i.e. in the final tableau". Arguably, the notion of a "tableau" further enhances the idea of a static staged performance incapable of communicating but incomplete surface impressions. Chris' lover engages in meaningless domestic repairs but dreams of earning a lot of money as a travelling salesman in gramophone-crazy Ireland (28); however, despite fantasizing about providing for his family, he necessitates the sisters' food and accommodation. There is even a suggestion that Michael might resemble his father in this respect when Chris comments: "Michael! He always vanishes when there's work to be done." (71) Thus, ironically enough, all sisters' hopes of a better future and redemption are focused on elderly Jack; the strong young man in productive age is completely disregarded since he is productive solely through unrealistic promises of brighter tomorrows. In addition, Gerry transplants his desire to construct himself as highly masculine even on his son Michael. The only pastime Michael indulges in is drawing, quite vague in terms of gender, possibly leaning slightly

towards the feminine side; upon his very first arrival, Gerry promises his son a bike, and black one at that, since it is "more manly" (29).

Also, although Gerry attempts to avoid the notion of an intruder, he can also be constantly perceived as an impostor: he never seems to represent just himself as if his own unembellished identity was not sufficient. Michael always sees him in a certain role; despite Gerry's outwardly confident manner, the ceaseless performance camouflages his uncertainty of his place in the world and prompts the question whether there is a self at all beyond the mask. At first, he acts out the clichéd part of Chris's suitor with all the overtly romantic aspects such as dancing among the flowers or proposing. Secondly, when Michael meets him for the last time, he compares Gerry to Fred Astaire ("The last I saw of him was dancing down the lane in imitation of Fred Astaire, swinging his walking stick... Even the role of maimed veteran, which he loved, could never compensate for that." 61) and Charlie Chaplin (he "does a Charlie Chaplin walk across the garden, his feet spread, his cane twirling." 69) In the meantime, Gerry excels as a slight caricature of a family man, executing petty repairs around the house and charming the five sisters. Even his military career is prompted by his desire to imprint his mark on the world "And I thought I should try my hand at something worthy for a change. Give Evans a Big Cause and he won't let you down. It is only everyday stuff he's not so successful at." (31) The last role Gerry impersonated (and allegedly enjoyed) was that of a wounded veteran. Sadly enough, Gerry is aware of the lack of substantial self-definition and his desperate search of identity: "Who wants a salesman that can't sell? And there's bound to be *something* right about the cause, isn't there? And it's somewhere to go – isn't it? Maybe that's the important thing for a man: a named destination – democracy, Ballybeg, heaven." (51) In the last moments, when we discover the truth about Gerry's other official family, we realize that Gerry's whole presence in Ballybeg was just an act: an existence that perhaps did not intend to be harmful, but was still mendacious and selfish to a certain extent. Chris, just like the Spanish war, was just another adventure and mission of a pleasure-seeking tinker, a cause to be enthusiastically fighting for.

Uncle Jack's uniform outwardly immediately identifies him as hero: a chaplain to the British Army in East Africa and subsequently a member of a leper colony;

however, Michael describes him as an old man, "shrunken and jaundiced with malaria" whose appearance shocked him. (1); in addition, Uncle Jack is directly linked with death. Curiously enough, Jack is in Michael's memories also often juxtaposed with the Marconi radio: the negative emotions invoked by the "forlorn figure shuffling from room to room" are contrasted with "delight, indeed my awe at the sheer magic of that radio" (2). The inanimate object (also imbued with certain masculinity as has been mentioned before) thus inspires more admiration and joy than the eagerly expected village hero and intended family saviour. Michael admits the discrepancy and the deceptiveness of the outward image already in the initial moments of the play:

> And even though I was only a child of seven at the time I know I had a sense of unease, some awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before my eyes, of becoming what they ought not to be. That may have been because Uncle Jack hadn't turned out at all like the resplendent figure in my head. (3)

The incapacity to live up to high expectations is also noticed by the sisters; eventually, Jack fatally fails to perform the role prescribed by his overtly masculine costume and the hopes raised by his initial resplendent aura are shattered. Curiously enough, after Jack's definitive descent into madness, the state of his uniform finally for once corresponds to his inner self. Last but not least, the white colour's connotation conventionally suggests purity, innocence, asexuality and virginity; the latter is also reinforced through Uncle Jack's status of a chaplain. However, it is revealed in the course of the play that Jack might have forsaken his vow of celibacy in favour of a homoerotic relationship. Friel portrays Jack's appearance in his last stage direction quite mercilessly but at the same time, the author's lack of mockery (present in the initial scene) suggests sympathy with this decrepit yet finally truthful image:

> Jack is wearing a very soiled, very crumpled white uniform – a version of the uniform we saw him in at the very beginning of the play. One of the epaulettes is hanging by a thread and the gold buttons

> are tarnished. The uniform is so large that it looks as if it were made for a much larger man: his hands are lost in the sleeves and the trousers trail on the ground. On his head he wears a tricorn, ceremonial hat; once white like the uniform but now grubby, the plumage broken and tatty. He carries himself in military style, his army cane under his arm. (68)

Rather than expressing his identity through a costume, Carr's Robert is equipped with a multitude of props: among his scarce material possessions, the most vital objects are his cello case and a bag of insignificant gifts that immediately characterize him as an intruder. Infatuating The Mai with a subversive vision of Prince Charming returned, he enchants her with quite uninventive femininity-evoking gifts of flowers, a perfume and a scarf. In the first scene, "he takes a scarf from the bag and ties it around her neck" (108) a gesture that offers numerous interpretations; apart from reinventing the central metaphor of a thread that would bind the family together, Robert might symbolically use it to reattach himself to his wife. Thus, like both Gerry and Jack, Robert initially also represents the hope of a better, more complete and conventional future in accordance with societal expectations. More sombrely however, his move could also be perceived as a demonstration of his power (mirrored in his lifting and playing the Mai) and the inevitably in-creeping image of strangling is potentially suggestive of the play's outcome. Furthermore, the subsequent gift of tickets to Paris (127) is so clichéd that it is painfully reminiscent of a romantic caricature. The presents that The Mai receives in Act 2 communicate Robert's decreasing desire for his wife and promises encompassed within the space of the dream castle; also, the invoked lack of emotional involvement inspires The Mai's tears: "The Mai starts crying, He gave me this (birthday card) and this (ten-pound note) and he's gone to Spiddal with her." (150). Apart from estranging his wife, Robert's choice of gifts suggests that he also fails in the traditional male role of a father when he brings sweets for his teenage children; this highlights the length and intensity of his detachment. Whereas Uncle Jack enters a space that is on the verge of disintegration and fails to prevent its final fall, Robert's absence of sensitivity infects a relatively sane and safe environment with madness.

However, from a reversed point of view, men themselves become props and mere objects to a certain extent: as Mary Trotter puts it, "men are important to the women for physical and emotional love and for the purposes of begetting children, not to uphold a moral code or to fulfil an economic need"[172]; in her judgment, Trotter echoes Gerry's own assessment of himself – he admits he is not really for the "practical stuff". Similarly, The Mai arranges a job for Robert in the local school (118); in other words, she attempts to cast him into a socially acceptable role of a working husband. However, both of these men are also surrounded by a somewhat untameable Romantic and tramp-like aura: as a symptom of this, both are firmly connected to music and dancing. As it has been already noticed, the first image of Robert we get to see in the beginning of the play is when he enters the Mai's house with a cello case. Indeed, he dedicates a piece of music (albeit bleak) to his wife and claims to reminisce over her any time he played his cello: "All those years I was away, not a day went by I didn't think of you, not a day someone or something didn't remind me of you. When I'd sit down to play, I'd play for you, imagining you were there in the room with me." (127) Therefore, the quietness of the house indicated within the initial lines of Act 2 can be read a bad omen foreshadowing the tragedy to come. Robert is not the only musician in Carr's drama displaying poor family skills: Millie describes her lover as an "El Salvadorian drummer who swept me off my feet" (158); in her statement, given the Irish context, we can trace a sense of exoticness and otherness of the male and arguably, the bohemian tramp air, virtually excluding the possibility of sustaining a stable family life. In fact, the instability is hinted at through Millie's description of her infatuation. Moreover, by having an affair with Millie, her lover is unfaithful to his "official" family.

Also, in the first act, Robert communicates the affection for his wife through dancing with her; in the second act, he indulges in the same activity with another woman to seal his disinterest in continuing his marital and family involvement. Gerry does not produce music himself by playing an instrument (he nevertheless indulges in singing), but he is ready to dance to it at any time with anyone and towards the end of the play, he attempts to retrieve the voice and music from the broken Marconi radio. However, his choice of a dancing partner can also be

[172] Trotter 168.

interpreted as suggestive of shifting of his affections. Ashley Taggart quite accurately claims that "men wrap themselves in "the cause", the women look on with clearer eyes, anticipating the pain ahead, and finding solace in rituals of containment so small they make no attempt to hide their ineffectuality – the tea in a china cup"[173]. Also, it could be argued that a kind of peculiar gender reversal is conspicuous: as opposed to the traditional model, women become breadwinners, since men are busy playing, dancing and desperately searching for a deeper purpose of their lives. This corresponds to the crucial physical male absences (and therefore absences from their traditional roles of husbands and fathers) within the plays.

Music and dance are also quite prominent in McGuinness' *Carthaginians*; already the first moments are accompanied by the sounds of Purcell's opera. Similarly to *The Mai* and *Dancing at Lughnasa,* active production of music is again predominantly associated with men. Dido's first entrance is accompanied by a song: "But if you come and the flowers are dying/ and I am dead, as dead as I may well be/Oh, seek the spot where I will be lying/and kneel and say an Ave there pour moi." (301) The song foreshadows several vital notions: it introduces Dido's affiliation with flowers and also his composure. In the initial moments of the play, he is the only one capable of voicing a trauma and mentioning death, albeit in a song. Dido is also the one who initiates a singing spree on the Saturday night, mimicking the YMCA hit song and translating it into the context of Derry (366). Also, there is a tentative suggestion that Seph is connected with music too; in search of other than verbal means of expression, his mother sends him a guitar (303). As it will be discussed later at a greater detail, Seph displays several feminine characteristics; his refusal to play his guitar and thus join the other males in producing music and dancing further confirms his feminization.

In *Carthaginians,* it is undoubtedly Dido who attracts most attention; his appearance either in turns or simultaneously represents both the male and female aspects of his identity. McGuinness selects him as the centre of attention from the initial moments; Dido is the only character who is awarded a more elaborate depiction than the curt indication of age and sex. In his first stage entrée, he is

[173] Taggart 73.

dressed in football gear and pushes a pram (323). Despite the stark contrast between this highly feminine prop (which apart from its already discussed social and historical connotations nevertheless fulfils merely the role of a slightly unconventional container here) and primarily male clothes, Dido easily navigates between the two poles and his ease irritates Hark, whose struggle with his contested maleness among else suggests that he might be a closeted homosexual. Furthermore, Hark's obstinately performed hardness contrasts with Dido's slightly effeminate manner imbuing his equally ostensible football gear with a deliberate caricature of violent maleness.

Later in the play, as a display of almost kitschy femininity, Dido "enters in drag. He wears a black miniskirt, black tights, high-heels and beret. He's carrying manuscripts." (330); in addition to the immediately visible costume, Dido also alters his name to Fionnuala McGonigle, a French dramatist ("You're looking at her, sweetheart. And it's pronounced (fake French) Fionn-u-ala Mc Gon-igle. She's French. 331). Given the political and historical context, it is tempting to conclude that Dido's reinventing himself is a means of displacing his trauma; however for Dido (unlike for Hark) adopting a new self is not a self-preservation escapist strategy. In Dido's world, identity is a matter of choice; what's more, Dido's authority is despite all the mockery sufficiently strong to determine others' identities, albeit solely for the purposes of his playlet. Nonetheless, his stratagem of casting the vigilants conspicuously against their type and gender remains, unlike the quality of the play, unchallenged.

Furthermore, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford notices a significant conventionally feminine prop whose mentions are scattered throughout the play on relation with Dido: flowers. As she summarizes, Dido likes "pressing flowers, a hobby he describes as "[v]ery butch. He enters singing lines from "Danny Boy" about dying flowers; at the end of the play he scatters pressed flowers on his sleeping friends. He received his name from a man who gave him red roses, symbols of feminine sexual passion."[174] Curiously enough, Dido considers flowers to be "more gentle when they're dead" (308).

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[174] Cullingford 233.

Dido also openly voices his opinions about Irish men and their masculinity while playing a passionate dog-lover Doreen in his self-penned drama: “Aye, it’s short for Boomerang. He might run away from his mammy, but he always comes back to her. He’s a real Irishman.” (337). The potentially easily missed commentary on a stuffed dog is however applicable not only to the men in McGuinness’ drama but it can also be related to Carr’s Robert and Friel’s male characters.

As a contrast, all the other “manlier” men in McGuinness’ drama are representatives of a crisis of masculinity. Seph, the youngest of the graveyard outcasts, himself chooses to be silent as a punishment for a failure to live up to the expectations epitomized in his betrayal of IRA colleagues in order to prevent more bloodshed: “I talked because I lived with what was done here on Sunday. I was here that Sunday, I saw it” (347). The numerous torturous repetitions of his crime (“I talked. I ran away. And I came back. I went to those I informed on. I said, kill me. Let me die. They said, live. That’s your punishment. Life, not death. Live with what you’ve done.” 346) suggest the extent to which his perception of himself had been disrupted. Also, the heavily broken speech suggests his troubles with self-expression. Moreover, his breakdown is interpreted by the community (and, more significantly, by Seph himself) as weakness and lack of masculinity; he ceases speaking in other to prevent more disappointments of the identical kind and resigns on further performing his maleness by joining the trio of women in the graveyard - Diya M. Abdo describes him as a “silenced outcast, feminized by his constant company with the women of the graveyard”.[175]

Hark, like Dido, makes a large effort to literally perform his identity, desiring to pass as a hard IRA man. Gradually, he reveals what he considers to be his weakest spot – his being arrested by the British army and subsequently choosing life by deciding not to go on a hunger strike. Hark wants to distance himself from his shameful past to the extent that he refuses to use his name Johnny and embraces the harsh sounding “Hark”:

> Sarah: Has there, Johnny?

[175] Diya M. Abdo 223.

> Hark: Don't call me that. I used to be called that. But I'm not any more. Johnny is dead now and only Harkin remains. The rest is dead. (316)

Also, he strictly refuses all Sarah's attempts to show him kindness due to the underlying persuasion he does not deserve any:

> Maela: You were very good to get us the stuff, Hark.
> Hark: I'm playing chess, Maela. Shut up. (319)

Gradually, it becomes clear that he maintains a code of physical and emotional isolation even outside the graveyard; allowing himself no attachments and relationships translates into his failure not only as a man but also as a human being. In addition, his frustration often culminates in aggression (also sexual, as should be discussed later at greater detail). He claims: "I live on my own in a single room. I keep that clean and I keep myself clean. I want no bother. I am not involved anymore." (317) Paul, commenting upon the automaton quality of Hark's life persuades him to finally forgive himself and embrace he is no longer in his cell, encouraging him both metaphorically and literally to "get out and enjoy himself in the fresh air," (317) insisting that almost nobody in the present turbulent times was completely faultless: "You lived, Harkin. Others died. You never volunteered. What were you, Harkin? What are you? A glorified look-out man who got himself caught. What have you done we haven't all done? (...) Who went on missions and couldn't kill? Coward who couldn't kill? Coward." (317) However, Hark's chief cowardice lies in his inability to accept his personal history and shameful identity. Eventually, Hark acknowledges his craving for human contact and asks Sarah to come back to him (372); this gives him a chance to fulfil at least one commonly accepted definition of manhood.

Interestingly enough, mirroring the fate of both Friel's Gerry and Carr's Robert, we can claim that it is a male patriarchal organization (albeit illegal) that caused Hark's fall. As an army man, his obsession with masculinity is directly voiced when he admits not to be "man enough" (372) based on not being capable of

using a gun, a memory brought back to him by a water pistol prop in Dido's playlet:

> I can't. Can't fire, can't kill, can't eat. Coward. I'm a coward. Want to eat. Want to live, I want to live. And I can't face the dead. Will the dead go away and stop haunting me? I cannot kill to avenge you. All I could have killed was myself. And I couldn't. I can't. Come back to me, Sarah. I'm dead. Come back and raise the dead. (372)

However, this acknowledgment triggers Hark's realization that pursuing his original definition of maleness is detrimental to his own life and that he, despite his antagonism necessitates to be recognized as a member of human society.

Furthermore, Hark transforms his humiliation of being picked up by the British army into disturbingly vengeful sexual imagery by trying to displace his trauma by picking up Dido. Diya M. Abdo argues that he:

> aims to transfer his shame and anger onto Dido, a representative of the homosexuality that so threatens Hark and makes him a target of weakness, ridicule, and torture since his sexuality was the site of violation through which his British inquisitors sought to subdue him.[176]

Anne F. Kelly-O'Reilly maintains that "Hark's abhorrence of the sexuality of the gay man is as abhorrent as the imagined English soldier's image of a united Ireland. "What happens when cocks unite? Disease, boy, disease. The united Ireland's your disease."[177] Undoubtedly, this illogical violent anger might arouse the audience's suspicion concerning Hark's own identity and sexuality; his being a closeted homosexual and envying his more audacious and outspoken comrade could result into similar aggression, further fed by Dido's incessant sexual interest in Hark.

[176] Diya M. Abdo 226.
[177] Kelly-O´Reilly 97-8.

4.3 Being a Man: Sexuality under Threat

When commenting on the treatment of sexuality in the twentieth century Ireland, Brian Singleton claims that "the centrifugal force of a dominant masculinity also meant that there was a dominant sexuality that ruled by the criminalization and thus complete rejection of any possible alternative."[178] The public view on the existence of a homosexual alternative and its absence from universally acknowledged history bears a striking resemblance to the previously discussed struggle for accepting female voices and narratives; according to Senator David Norris, a key figure of the Gay Rights Movement in the Republic at that time, "if you were not heterosexual, Roman Catholic and Republican, you were out of it, [and] women were ignored, as usual."[179] According to Singleton, the tension between male/female and hetero/homosexual is reflected also in the contemporary omnipresent "binarism inherent in sexuality as a marker of identity."[180] The absence of a socially accepted alternative to the universally coveted heterosexuality is captured in Maire Nic Suibhne's 1992 pre-decriminalisation article: she observed that the gay subculture has seen:

> a tentative emergence of small and cautious gay communities in Dublin and about three other cities. The atmosphere is likened to the old closet days in Britain, before the law was reformed. The Irish gay community, with rare exceptions, is certainly not proud. Meek is the term that immediately springs to mind.[181]

Furthermore, she also inquires into the general attitude towards gays in Ireland, still to a considerable extent influenced by the long-lasting tradition of unbreakable Catholic dogma; she indeed describes an atmosphere of repression and silence enforced by long outlived laws:

> There is a small and very low-key gay community which is tolerated - perhaps because it is small and low key - and a handful of gay pubs

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[178] Singleton 17.
[179] Norris quoted by Melissa Sihra 152.
[180] Singleton 97.
[181] Maire Mac Suibhne, *The Independent*, 29/7/1992.

> and clubs. But the fact that the offences remain on the statute book creates a pervasive atmosphere of fear and repression. Many gays are forced into marriage to maintain the pretence of 'normality'[182]. Their careers and jobs are at risk, as every employer knows he can sack a practising homosexual at will. Welfare organisations openly aiding gays put at risk their state funding.[183]

Shockingly, Nic Suibhne concludes that at the time of writing her article, it was more socially acceptable to be a drug addict than being a gay.[184] David Norris bitterly estimates that the status of gays was even lower, subhuman, when he summarized: "a Public Control of Dogs Act will be introduced in the next session. Dogs are more important than the violation of fundamental human rights."[185] Maybe, in tune with this childish politics of closing one's eyes in face of the undesirable, the press article in *Carthaginians* informing about the vigilants in the graveyard speaks about Dido as "Mr Martin", hypocritically righting his extravagant identity to fit the social expectation of the outer world. Brian Singleton notices a contradicting strategy while examining plays by Thomas Kilroy and Brian Friel; in his opinion, the dramas focus on "the issue of the sameness of the 'homosexual' socially and also on the surrounding society's desire to construct his difference, and both plays offer an urban and a rural setting for the examination of how Irish society conspired to eliminate the threat of dissidence and difference."[186]

Although Bradley and Valiulis claim that gradually "the clear, self-evident lines of demarcation between heterosexuality and homosexuality have, moreover, been

[182] Nic Suibhne quotes an Irish gay in the early 1990s: "'we married because we knew each other. I was trying to do the best for myself, and in a way I have. Without my wife I wouldn't be where I am professionally. If I'd left the country and been free to follow my inclinations I might have had a less fulfilled life but maybe a happier one."

[183] Nic Suibhne illustrates the hypocritical silence also with the following quotation: Sandra Campbell, an English lesbian resident in Dublin, sums up the feeling: 'Last year we were having a picnic in Merrion Square (in central Dublin) to assert gay pride. All I could find there was a handful of forlorn figures hiding behind a hedge.' Maire Nic Suibhne, "Outcasts from another age: Homosexuality in Ireland is still criminal," *The Independent* (29th July 1992).

[184] "There are cases in which men contracting the HIV virus through homosexual activities have encouraged the belief that they picked it up from drug abuse. It is a reflection on the present social climate in Ireland that it is more acceptable to be a heroin addict than it is to be gay." Nic Suibhne.

[185] Norris quoted by Nic Suibhne.

[186] Singleton 103.

challenged by a number of influential theorists and critics"[187], Singleton, concentrating specifically on gay stage presence, still remains largely down-to-earth and rightfully notices a "near absence from the stage of any kind of 'out' gay theatrical representation other than in problematic terms."[188] Although the initial absence might have transformed into a cautious deformed presence, the anxiety of the Other was still palpable; Jonathan Dollimore argues that the discomfort was "tied up with a fear that the other might be the same"[189] and subsequently accompanied by manic efforts to construct a viable difference. This strategy is conspicuously reminiscent of the previous, equally artificial artistic attempts to construct a national metanarrative through a crucial opposition between the English and the Irish; thus, in the antagonist national narrative, gays became the official enemy Other.

Brian Singleton summarizes the hostile social climate by stating that "both the law and its predication on the binary oppositions of hetero/homo based on a medicalization of sexuality enshrined the one as healthy and the other as sick, the one legal and the other illegal, the one that could be outwardly performed and the other only performed in the closet."[190] He furthermore elaborated the deliberate artificial negativity imposed upon misrepresented stage gays noticing that:

> while the first Irish gay theatre company, Muted Cupid, emerged in the 1990s to entertain largely niche audiences presenting iconic gay plays from the international repertoire, the years leading up to the decriminalization of homosexuality continued to depict the Irish gay man as a problem or having a problem.[191]

Thus, he hints that gays were accepted and even celebrated when safely classified as foreign and externalized. Interestingly, newly emerging gay characters were predominantly male; this might partially explain the omnipresent ignited reactions towards then; the Irish men, finally free from the subordinating and feminizing

[187] Bradley and Valiulis 2.
[188] Singleton 99.
[189] Dollimore quoted by Singleton 102.
[190] Singleton 121.
[191] Singleton 107.

colonial yoke, eager to establish their maleness were uncomfortably challenged once again.

One of the first authors to breach the taboo was the Donegal-born Frank McGuinness. Before touching upon the Irish Bloody Sunday scar, McGuinness began his historical quest in 1985 returning further into the past to revisit another unspeakable segment of Irish history in his most acclaimed *piece Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme*; however, even in this early piece, there was more on his agenda than solely engaging with sombre spots of Irish history. Quite discreetly at first, he challenged the Irish stage with characters that disturbed the once clearly divided gender roles and disrupted compulsory heterosexual inclinations while profoundly provoking the rule-bound and family-oriented society in Ireland[192]. Being an outspoken representative of the homosexual minority himself, McGuinness seems to be constantly revisiting the topics of sexuality intermingled with history in his work. Nevertheless, in his earlier plays McGuinness was to a certain extent distancing his gay characters at least historically or socially. Still, in relation to McGuinness' ground-breaking heroes, Singleton accuses contemporary critics for "ignoring their existence"[193]; more harshly, according to Sara Keating, this ignorance was not "merely a case of prejudice: it was a case of invisibility."[194] Interestingly, on an equally personal level, McGuinness labels the *Carthaginians'* temporal setting - Bloody Sunday - as the day that ended his adolescence.[195]Metaphorically speaking, the end of adolescence also implies loss of innocence and ignorance; similarly, his play simply tested the maturity of the Irish audience and society when faced with a homosexual transsexual character - writing a play with a contemporary setting

[192] Brian Singleton notices the careful and gradual progress of contemporary productions of *Observe the Sons of Ulster*: "In the first production at the Peacock Theatre the relationship between the two men was not explicit but as the play has gained in currency, from 1994 onwards there have been increasingly overt representations of sexual attraction between the characters Pyper and Craig." Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmilan, 2011) 107. Similar controversy surrounded the later Galway production of *Carthaginians* when members of Derry City Council declared it to "be a travesty of Bloody Sunday and called a special council meeting to consider whether or not to cancel the Derry event." Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland: Through and Beyond the Troubles* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006) 33.
[193] Singleton 101.
[194] Quoted by Singleton 101.
6 Timothy D. Connors, "Derry Comes to Mid-Michigan: Staging Carthaginians at Central Michigan University," *The Theatre of frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability,* ed. Helen Lojek (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006) 85.

featuring a homosexual central character was a brave deed in the 1980s (and sadly enough, still might be considered as such even today).

In fact, all the McGuinness' characters in *Carthaginians* who struggle with their problems are unconventional; in a sense they all represent the feared other disrupting the homogeneous image. Nonetheless, the character that embodies the ultimate Other and yet at the same time truly and comfortably inhabits the borderland is Dido; he stands in between the dead and the living, male and female death and life[196]; he functions as a messenger between the grim graveyard and the outer world and, most importantly, he occupies the blurred territory between two genders. McGuinness had already started preparing the ground for Dido by introducing gay characters in his previous historical plays *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*[197] and *Innocence*[198]; however, both of these ventures were sufficiently veiled by the distance provided by time. Brian Singleton notices that "it was not until 1988 that McGuinness wrote his first openly gay contemporary character, the drag queen Dido in *Carthaginians*".[199] Nevertheless, the graveyard might still be representing a distancing device; anything appears to be plausible in this unconventional alternative space where all difference is acknowledged and embraced.

4.4 Privileged In-Between Characters

Dido derives his name (and jokingly, the title of a queen) from Dido, the queen of Carthage, loved and left by the Roman Aeneas. Drowning in sorrow, his female Carthaginian namesake chose suicide as the escape from her misery and her city

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[196] Anne F. Kelly-O´Reilly even maintains that "Dido assumes almost a mythical status, world wanderer, between times, and places." Kelly-O´Reilly 106.

[197] Helen Lojek indeed mentions the tendency to see *The Carthaginians* as a companion piece to *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme.* Helen Lojek, "Troubling Perspectives: Northern Ireland, the 'Troubles' and Drama", *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880 -2005*, ed. Mary Luckhurst (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 338.

[198] According to Brian Singleton, McGuinness in his re-imagining of the 17th century intended to "depict the life of Caravaggio operating in a state controlled by a corrupt and corrupting Catholic Church, exposing the hypocrisy of a hegemonic masculinity masquerading as asexual for the promotion of heterosexuality." Cullingford also, among the others, suggests that "McGuinness also challenges conventional masculinity through the comic destruction of the phallus. As a cigar, it is smoked; as a banana, it is devoured; as a sausage, it is pulped; as a plastic water pistol, it is chewed up." Cullingford, 233.

[199] Singleton 107.

soon followed her to ruins. Nonetheless, the Dido McGuinness brings on stage is far from a powerless weeper and closeted homosexual: according to Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, McGuinness

> refuses to perpetuate the idea of defeat conveyed by the story of Rome's triumph. His Dido, although rejected by Hark, a homophobic former member of the IRA, is not a suicidal victim but a resourceful and creative gay man who openly defies the Catholic proscription of homosexuality – the energy emanates from him.[200]

Also, as Diya M. Abdo notices, "by equating a gay man, a drag "Queen," with Dido the Queen of Carthage, McGuinness attacks another myth: the myth of Ireland as a beautiful maiden, Ireland as the woman with the harp, Ireland as mother."[201] Indulging in women's dresses, Dido incessantly manifests his sexuality and identity which directly oppose the expectations of his biologically given gender and omnipresent constraints of the Irish society. Emphasizing his feminine side, it has already been noted that he is often juxtaposed with flowers: apart from his hobby of pressing flowers, he receives his name along with a red rose from a Lebanese soldier and in the end of the play (and his mission), he sprinkles flowers over his sleeping companions, providing hope instead of the salt thrust by the Romans into the Carthaginian soil.[202] Nonetheless, as Brian Singleton puts it, he is not a mere caricature to be laughed at:

> Dido is not presented as a spectacle of camp, but as a human being suffering along the same lines as everyone else, projecting a visual image of difference through a personal suffering of sameness. This production of sameness in the play is what is most disruptive of normalcy, and is a queer political transgression. Following on from David Pronger's argument in *The Arena of Masculinity*, David Cregan articulates McGuinness's representation of homosexuality as a dramaturgical device that helps to 'undermine masculinity' and to

[200] Cullingford 232.
[201] Diya M. Abdo 223.
[202] Cullingford 231.

> 'undermine the metanarrative that supports all forms of cultured identity'.[203]

In contrast to the others, Dido is the only one who does not seem to have suffered a direct loss in connection to Bloody Sunday: on the contrary, in his resourcefulness, he manages to gain the attention of media as well as a source of income and accommodation from the graveyard vigil. Being a survivor himself, he provides sustenance for the six hopeless; first in terms of food only but gradually he supplies the vital impulse to initiate the grieving process. As Melissa Sihra summarizes:

> Ultimately, it is the transgender qualities that Dido brings which initiate change. Questions then, of course, need to be asked about the feminization of masculinity and the implications of it. Second, the mobility of Dido within the play's frame must also be considered, as must the fact that none of the male characters seem to have the same type of transformative possibility, locked as they are into patterns of self-justification and denial. Likewise, none of the women characters seem to have access to such misrule or misalliance.[204]

Dido is incessantly made aware of his being different by Hark when his crush is repaid with hostility. Hark is keen to distinguish himself from Dido as he feels his heterosexual masculinity, fragile in his own right, to be uncomfortably challenged; as Eamonn Jordan notices "when Hark pretends to pick up Dido, we have within his performance, a Pinteresque sense of aggression and dominance."[205] Diya M. Abdo agrees that Dido as an undisguised representative of the homosexual community threatens Hark by making him a "target of weakness, ridicule, and torture since his sexuality was the site of violation through which his British inquisitors sought to subdue him."[206] On the contrary, Dido is visibly comfortable in his own skin; the acceptance of his own self is manifested in personal dignity that other characters lack: "I know how to use what's between my legs because it is mine. Can you say the same? Some people here fuck with a

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[203] Singleton 106.
[204] Sihra 222.
[205] Jordan 82.
[206] Diya M. Abdo 225.

bullet and the rest fuck with a Bible, but I belong to neither, so I'm off to where I belong. My bed. My own. My sweet own." The last lines powerfully contrast with Hark's statement "I live on my own in a single room. I keep that clean and I keep myself clean." (317). Whereas Dido inhabits an effortlessly demarcated territory, Hark merely struggles in hiding and in defensive. Moreover, in direct contrast to Hark, Dido's ease with himself allows him to use his sexuality as a weapon while passing the British checkpoint on his way to the graveyard:

> Dido: there could have been an assault. I could have been detained.
> Maela: What did they threaten to do to you?
> Dido: It was more what I threatened to do to them. No luck though. (301)

Dido's shameless display of sexuality reaches an almost obscene dimension, especially while taking into consideration the conservative climate of a strictly Catholic country:

> Dido: Great, did you know my ambition in life is to corrupt every member of Her Majesty's forces serving in Northern Ireland.
> Greta: Jesus, that should be difficult.
> Dido: Mock on. It's my bit for the cause of Ireland's freedom. When the happy day of withdrawal comes, I'll be venerated as a national hero. They'll build a statue for me. (302)

Apart from privileging to a certain limited extent Dido's fearless sexuality and his female and feminine side, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford rightfully notices that McGuinness "also challenges conventional masculinity through the comic destruction of the phallus. As a cigar, it is smoked; as a banana, it is devoured; as a sausage, it is pulped; as a plastic water pistol, it is chewed up."[207]

However, Dido's being a misfit, marginalized by the majority society (and equally to a certain extent the alternative graveyard community) is what enables him to acquire the much needed distance and perspective crucial to overcoming traumas

[207] Cullingford, 234.

and obstacles[208] and rewrite the painful national and personal history; as an in-between character he is heavily privileged over his narrow-minded surroundings. Eamonn Jordan maintains that "homosexuality privileged in a confrontational way".[209] Helen Lojek joins in claiming that "Dido's position (similar to Pyper's in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*) offers us the vantage point of the outsider and provides a useful "perspective – a distance from which events, philosophies, social and moral issues may be evaluated."[210] This can be contrasted with Uncle Jack whose possible homosexuality is only hinted at in his repetitive reminiscences over his servant Okawa; his possible homosexuality is perceived singularly in negative terms.

Passing on the torch the lit by the Lebanese sailor, Dido rejects a clear-cut division between sexualities as well as the sectarian binary opposition; he examines the past to confront the present and enable a future. Questioning the power of art in times of crisis, Dido writes and directs a play, a wonderful satire on Sean O'Casey's work that eventually helps the vigilants to initiate the grieving process. Thanks to his fluidity of gender, Dido assumes the identity of a fictional female French author, allowing himself even more perspective. The caricature play-within-the-play manifests the absurdity and stereotypical perceptions of the conflict: a mixture of Protestant and Catholic characters (all bear various corruptions of the same name from both sides of the barricades demonstrate their ultimate similarity/sameness and therefore pointlessness of any conflict). The message can tentatively reach outside of both Dido's and McGuinness' respective plays. The play-within-the-play equally shows that even terrorism is a mere performance; the absurdity escalates with the terrorist of the year competition (which, tellingly the supposed hard IRA man Hark falls for) and the fact that the play is greeted as "shite" by all performers despite doing little else than a slight exaggeration of commonly held beliefs and widely accepted stereotypes; the

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[208] Diya M. Abdo compares him to a character from Hanan Al-Shayk´s *Story of Zahra,* saying "The two characters' visible differences from societal norms, their fragility and their existence on the margins, give them a unique vantage point from which to view and experience the conflict in their worlds. Their desire to engage in and change that conflict stems from a desire to change also the way they have been treated; since their identities have been proscribed and "othered" by the national self-image, they seek to write new national narratives that do not legitimate political violence against, and oppression of, the nations' sexual Others, namely women and homosexual men.

[209] Jordan 77.

[210] Lojek quoted by Anne F. Kelly-O´Reilly 87.

obvious discrepancy for the first time opens up a space for doubt, thought and discussion. The image of Dido's first entrance with a pram has been examined before; on a concluding note, let us also remark that this image is also necessarily a signifier of future and continuity that babies embody; the metaphor is even more striking upon realizing that Dido himself cannot physically fulfil this promise of creation. However, his presence is strong enough to reawaken in the others the instinct for survival and continuity. Thus, paradoxically, he remain the only true man in the three plays.

5. Performing the Body

As it has already been hinted at in previous chapters, the Irish society´s relationship to bodies, gender and sexuality has always been strenuous and complicated due to the national dogma-bound mentality; however, it is easily observable that contemporary modern theatre has become increasingly physical, body-oriented and body-performative in the several last decades. Therefore, Irish drama inevitably had to negotiate a way to engage with and respond to such development; the progressively liberating social, historical and political context, minutely scrutinized in the initial pages of the present thesis, proved to be quite benevolent. As we have already mentioned in the introduction, the concept of body performativity was originally first introduced by Judith Butler and has been a subject of frequent critical scrutiny and elaboration ever since; in accordance with the universally increased emphasis on physicality, the notion of body and its performativity has inescapably become a crucial aspect of Irish drama. Lib Taylor´s illuminating summary in general pertains to its universal essentiality and function in theatre:

> Performativity is fundamental to theatre in that its conventions are developed through a process of citation or reiteration – quotation and repetition – of historical, social and cultural practices. But in theatre, the notion of performativity goes further than describing a denotative/connotative process since the term implies a self-aware theatricality and indicates a theatrical event which foregrounds the representational functioning of the staged event. What most significantly marks this definition of performativity is its conscious use of the practices and conventions of theatre, its deliberate manipulation of citation and reiteration.[211]

Maria Kurdi´s view is quintessentially identical and corresponds to the above; she notices that "in recent decade a range of theoretical discourses have started to perceive and describe identity as performative, that is not a given but the effect of

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[211] Lib Taylor quoted by Kurdi 69.

a process involving acts of repetition/reiteration and citation or references of socio-culturally based models and patterns."[212] Naturally, the actor´s and character´s bodies became necessarily inevitably also a tool and site of performance and are subject to reiteration and referencing. Kurdi puts this in stark contrast with the previously commonly "underdeveloped state of visual arts in favour of language-driven forms of cultural production, verbal and literary preferred over the physical and performative"[213]; Bernadette Sweeney offers a similar viewpoint, formulating the currently increasingly flexible delimitations and interdisciplinary qualities of of theatre:

> There is broadening of the definition of theatre in Ireland, as inter- and cross-disciplinary performance work is increasingly prevalent, as it is elsewhere. Performance and live art, once the preserve of fine/visual art institutions, is now been recognised for its performance implications and significance.[214]

Simultaneously, Erika Fischer-Lichte volunteered to include an even more ambitious scale of developments reaching beyond the stage; she claims that the shift towards physical performative theatre has not only seen the emergence and rise of innovative kinds of performance "but brought about a general aestheticization and theatricalization of all types of performance. In the course of this development, the borders between artistic and non-artistic performances have increasingly become permeable and have partially collapsed.[215]

Furthermore, as a direct result of the shifting boundaries, Sweeney accordingly elaborates on "creative arts practices that also perform the body in a myriad of ways"[216]. When relating this development to the realities of Irish drama, we can claim that the final long-awaited introduction of previously marginalized voices was appropriately accompanied by their formerly invisible corporeality: substituting for a gaping absence, the male stage was suddenly inhabited by

[212] Kurdi 67.
[213] Kurdi 39.
[214] Sweeney 212.
[215] Fischer-Lichte quoted by Kurdi 67-8.
[216] Sweeney 212.

pronouncedly physical female, gay and sexual bodies. Mária Kurdi confirms this while commenting upon the Irish theatre makeover:

> Central to this kind of experimentalism is the exploitation of performative acts and the presentation of scenes foregrounding performance which enable the female characters to expose the means of objectification; also they offer the possibility of liberation from the compulsive mimetic repetitions of patterns recycling inherited stereotypes and the conventions of gender relations.[217]

However, the introduction of physical bodies and heavily emphasized corporeality with all its natural sexual implications did not experience a unanimously applauded triumphant arrival on Irish stages as performativity of Irish bodies (both on and off-stage) has always been restricted and determined by social, cultural and political climate. More often than not the body (female and feminine in this case) in the past appeared merely in a metaphorical form substituting the nation and serving exclusively ideological nationalist purposes; accordingly, Sweeney assumes that necessarily "representations of the male and female body are undertaken in a context where previous cultural representations resonate and continue to inform current projects."[218] Sweeney also maintains that the Irish body:

> Referenced postcolonial, gender and performance issues particular to the Irish context. The recovery of tradition and ritual, the performance of transformation, the construction of femininity and masculinity, the physicalisation of the cultural condition, the staging of borders and developments in interdisciplinary practice – each of these issues has broadened the possibilities for performing the body in Irish theatre.[219]

Paul Medcalf suggests that the performance of the body was also inevitably considerably influenced by the climate of a dogmatic, traditionally strictly Catholic country: he says that "the power of the church was both ideological, in

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[217] Kurdi 70.
[218] Sweeney 194.
[219] Sweeney 216.

determining how people viewed the body and its functions, and behavioural, in so far as it controlled what people actually did (or did not do)."[220]

The difficulty of acknowledging and accepting one´s body due to rigid religious upbringing is clearly exemplified in McGuinness´ Greta: this woman, participating in the graveyard vigil, gradually accounts for her complicated relationship with her own body and troubled sexuality: her elderly Puritan parents simply chose to retain all the "facts of life" from her, woefully failing to appropriately equip her for real life and enable her to embrace her natural sexuality. Sadly, as a result, she is a teacher who had not been taught in the most elementary subject. Due to her lack of information, her awareness of her own sexuality (and subsequently identity) is distorted when she, upon the arrival of her first period, suspects that she is turning into a man (348). Involuntarily, Greta thus epitomizes the close bond between identity, body and sexuality. As opposed to the other characters, it could be argued that her being traumatised by her body and its manifestations is not aggravated by the underlying shock of Bloody Sunday. Her story is timeless and universal; her desire to "find herself" or "get herself back" (350) can be interpreted as her wish to accept her physicality and shake off limiting restrictions dictated by old-fashioned patriarchal orders rather than to overcome the omnipresent public trauma. In a sense, the body in her case is initially perceived in almost exclusively negative and potentially sinful terms, not as an asset but rather as a part of a human being that indeed needs to be accepted, tolerated and above all, controlled; accordingly, Medcalf rightfully claims that discipline and respectability was closely linked with a control of the body:

> Under the church, being civilized, mannerly, well disciplined and respectable quickly 'became associated with a disciplined control of the body', a notion that was 'instilled into the homes and bodies of most Irish Catholics through the organizations and buildings supervised by priests and religious [orders]' (Inglis 1991: 62, 63). The Irish were thereby transformed into a modern civilized people through

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[220] Medcalf 48.

> the ‘systematic discipline, surveillance, and sexualization of the body.[221]

By way of example, the immobility or even paralysis of the five Mundy sisters within the static opening tableau of Friel´s play is sufficiently illustrative of such repressed asexual bodies; this starkly contrasts with the subsequent notion of the selfsame dancing body, subversive of rural life and church restrictions. However, Medcalf equally acknowledges that historically, the Catholic Church, albeit a permanent and forceful dogmatic presence, was not the only power presiding over Irish bodies; he asserts that it was the Church *and* State who:

> Struggled for ‘control of the Irish body’ throughout the 19th century in which the British colonial state’s attempts to repress the Irish economically and politically were gradually supplanted by a policy of pacification and control, tasks ultimately conceded to the Roman Catholic Church.[222]

Similarly, Eamonn Jordan explores the impact of the unnatural detachment through which patriarchy schizophrenically “prescribed and fictionalized societal, gender, class and race relations, and it has also, to a considerable extent, fashioned and fabricated the dramaturgical practices of Irish theatre in terms of how plays are written, programmed, directed, produced, marketed and consumed”[223].

Inevitably, the modern Irish stage body necessarily reflects the recent liberating developments within the Irish society, since, as Jordan suggests: “while the notion of the Irish body is an essentialist one, the body performs within a culturally specific set of conditions, which shift and have shifted considerably in the last twenty-five years of Irish history.”[224] Sweeney deems that the said transformation also significantly influenced genesis of modern plays: “an emphasis on issues of performance was already inherent to the plays and their production histories (…). The body of the actor is therefore the site, indeed the agent, rather than a mere

[221] Medcalf 48.
[222] Medcalf 48.
[223] Jordan quoted by Sihra 17.
[224] Sweeney 199.

vehicle of signification."[225] Moreover, the same might be claimed in relation to characters´ bodies that are equally awarded more significance: in confirmation of her new identity, Sarah frenetically stretches out her arms to prove she is not a drug addict anymore. On the other hand, Paul, in search of stability and persevering values, exclaims: "I´m building my pyramid, my monument, my hands. My hands, my hands." (341) Accordingly, when discussing the performativity of bodies and the notion of a body as a site of meaning in *Carthaginians,* Eamonn Jordan asserts that "McGuinness' theatre adopts a performative epistemology which he denotes as 'a metaphysicality, located in the possibilities, circumstances and the make-up of the mask [and] grounded in the sensibility of the body and its intuition'.[226]

In addition, the increased public visibility of bodies leads to their adopting new meanings and importance: Paul Medcalf, in a historical precedent, mentions the body as a "weapon of resistance towards the powers that seek to control it"[227] and he quotes a male Provisional IRA prisoner who claimed "From the moment we entered the H-Blocks we had used our bodies as a protest weapon. It came from the understanding that the Brits were using our bodies to break us."[228] Accordingly, Carr´s Mai equally uses her body, the partial site of her trauma, as a weapon: echoing the first romantic scene in Act 1, her body in the subsequent act almost vulgarly demonstrates disappointment but also the Mai´s initiative to reprise control and strike a revengeful blow to her unfaithful husband:

> She taps the bow along her toes, stops, pulls a string from it, looks at Robert, looks away, resumes playing herself: knees, thighs, stomach. Then she stops to snap a string as it suits her. She plays her breasts and makes notes on her throat with her other hand. (156)

Furthermore, as the previous chapters aimed to prove, bodies and gender are inextricably linked and strongly mutually defining; interestingly enough, even dead bodies are gendered in the three dramas; with the exception of Uncle Jack

[225] Sweeney 194.
[226] Eamonn Jordan quoted by Melissa Sihra 17.
[227] Medcalf 59.
[228] Medcalf 59.

and the initially nameless dead of Bloody Sunday, all the present bodies of the significant deceased (The Mai, Maela´s daughter, the two desolate Mundy sisters) are female. Mária Kurdi, while scrutinizing the canon of Carr´s plays, suggested that dead female bodies are "reminiscent of the patriarchal representation of the female as silent and passive"[229] and prompted that "autonomy for the female is achieved only in death."[230] The gendered dead bodies definitely mirror the pressure of patriarchal organizations and conventions; the fact that a dead body is subsequently subject to the Church and buried in an assigned place is a further confirmation of the woeful lack of autonomy voiced by Kurdi. The Mai´s dead body equally appears in fantasies that eventually unromantically lure Robert home; the Mai´s assertion that the bleakest meaning "is usually the right one" foreshadows the outcome of the play. However, as it has been noted before, in Carr´s terms, death loses its exclusively tragic connotation and lends itself to be partially positively interpreted as the heroine´s return to sympathetic nature.

Also Friel´s drama is endowed with certain fatality; only deaths of two sisters are mentioned but the underlying tension implies equally ungraceful outcome for the remaining lonely embittered women. The men, albeit scarred physically by war or emotionally by distressful childhood or failed marriage significantly remain alive. Moreover, it could be argued that death, again strongly associated with women, is both antagonist and protagonist in McGuinness´ drama; as Greta suggests, death is so omnipresent in the devastated post-Bloody Sunday Derry that it is gradually absolved of its terrifying definitiveness:

Greta: God rest us all.
Maela: You only say that over the dead.
Greta: We´re all dying. (297)

However, at least Carr´s Mai attempts to defy the traditional post-mortem loss of autonomy by leaving carefully ponedered instructions for her family as how to

[229] Kurdi 56.
[230] Kurdi 57. Later in her book, Kurdi dedicates considerable space to the comparison of Carr with Beckett. One of the conclusion she draws suggests that "a persistent theme with both writers is the process of dying and the act of death itself, as well as their strangely inextricable links with sexuality and birth. In Carr´s dramatic world it is women characters who represent this kind of symbiotic relationship." Kurdi 177.

dress her for the funeral; having achieved material independence in her life, she arguably succeeds at manipulating her family and defying the social codes even after death (rather than succumbing to the traditional black, she chooses to once again emphasize her connection to the nature, namely water, through her blue funeral garb). Nevertheless, she is one of very few women in Irish drama of the 1990s that at least partially control their own bodies.

5.1. Subversive Dancing Body

Paul Medcalf introduces a further example which scrutinizes how the strenuous relationship of the Irish towards their bodies translated into dance and potential threats it represented; while describing the 1960s habits in remote country areas not dissimilar to Friel´s secluded Ballybeg, he says "some curates suppressed courting, dancing, visiting, and other behaviour either directly or "indirectly" sexual in nature by taking physical action: they policed the lanes at night to deter young lovers and inhibited dancing by their disapproving presence".[231] Such an unflattering perception of dance is the merciless extension of repressed sexual desires, lack of inter-gender communication and emotional underdevelopment; Medcalf thus also reminds us of the amount of anxiety accompanying such encounters: "villagers were careful about the boundaries of their body, and were anxious both about activities (such as dancing) that might bring them into physical contact with the opposite sex."[232] Also, in order to maintain sexual purity and avoid temptation "bodies were clothed 'defensively', concealing their form, and nudity was considered an embarrassment to be avoided or quickly covered up."[233]

The crucial image of dance is another key aspect that importantly connects Friel´s and Carr´s and to a lesser extent McGuinness´ respective plays. Brian Friel represents dance with all the negative connotations attached to it by society; also, the bodies inhabiting his play are the bound religious bodies. Kate constitutes primarily the controlling voice of convention; accordingly, Margaret Llewellyn-

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[231] Messenger quoted by Medcalf 47.
[232] Messenger quoted by Medcalf 47.
[233] Messengre quoted by Medcalf 47.

Jones notices that “Kate only dances once she has let out a repressed “Yaahh!”[234] Her first invective aimed at dance (“Do you want the whole countryside to be laughing at us? – women of our years? – mature women, *dancing?* What´s come over you all? And this is Father Jack´s home – we must never forget that – ever. No, no, we´re going to no harvest dance” 13) communicates, apart from its direct opposition to religion, also her traditional interpretation of dances as social gatherings with a set function where young girls encounter their husbands, women (and more specifically their bodies) are presented as marketable objects and marriage is viewed as a mere financial transaction. Kate is well aware that in such a showcase of goods the Mundys, far beyond their prime, do not stand a chance of success. It is Agnes, who defies this notion and function of dancing and longs for unrestricted motion for its own sake: “How many years has it been since we were at the harvest dance? – at any dance? And I don´t care how young they are, how drunk and dirty and sweaty they are. I want to dance, Kate. It´s the Festival of Lughnasa. I am only thirty-five. I want to dance.” (13) Indeed, through their dancing, the sisters and their bodies subvert conventions and social politics they are subjected to. Friel also subtly suggests Kate´s isolation and her own indecisiveness sourcing form the clash between her moral code threatened by her desire to dance is also embodied in the movement. Also, apart from her liberating initial exclamation and in contradiction to her sisters, Kate´s dance is a silent one, still indicating some restrictions and reservations:

“Kate dances alone, totally concentrated, totally private; a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic; a weave of complex steps that takes her quickly round the kitchen; a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time ominous of some deep and true emotion.” (22)

Friel indeed endows the sisters´ first dance with certain clumsiness (“the movements seem caricatured; and the sound is too loud; and the beat is too fast; and the almost recognizable dance is made grotesque because – for example – instead of holding hands, they have their arms tightly around one another´s neck, one another´s waist. 21); according to Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, the author emphasizes the “grotesque and hysterical quality of the dance, (…) redolent of the

[234] LLewellyn-Jones 36.

forces of repression, the relationship between hysteria and the carnivalesque body indicative of liminal states."[235] The dance also symbolizes difference and stepping out of established routines in favour of what several critics consider to be a touch of otherness in a Dionysiac moment; ironically enough, the awkward dance brings Ballybeg closer to Ryanga ("It [their dance] is the most wonderful sight you have ever seen!", 47) which Uncle Jack does not fail to recognize and comment upon. Ironically, this comparison might bear more truth value than Jack´s attempt to equal both nations´ gentleness from which the Irish emerge as prejudiced and narrow-minded.

Friel explicitly perceives dance to be subversive in several respects, not only does it install a new order but it also represents a new means of communication. The author´s eagerness to assert the multiplicity of functions is conspicuous in his elaborate stage directions: "with this too loud music, this pounding beat, this shouting – calling – singing, this parodic reel, there is a sense of order being consciously subverted, of the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves, indeed of near-hysteria being induced." (22) Although Bernadette Sweeney considers Friel´s attempt to substitute and privilege movement over language unsuccessful due to further irresolutions it provokes, she nevertheless acknowledges the important presence of dance in his drama: "its staging of the dancing body was a deliberate reach for a stage language that was not spoken, not word-based. It prefigured the commodification of the dancing Irish body which Riverdance has staged so successfully since 1994."[236] However, Friel´s subversive and physical dance constitues a milestone of performativity of Irish bodies; being significantly present already in the title of Friel´s play, its place in *Dancing in Lughnasa* has naturally already been discussed by many critics.

Tony Corbett describes the sisters´ dancing as "intrusions into mundanity"[237] and Llewellyn-Jones summarizes it by claiming that "at crucial moments the women break out of the economic and emotional poverty of their conventionally restricted lives, and are temporarily transformed by different styles of dance that reveal

[235] Llewellyn-Jones 36.
[236] Sweeney 198.
[237] Corbett 133.

aspects of their personalities.[238] Throughout the drama, Friel questions the ability of language and dance for absolute communication; by proxy, he also challenges the Catholic Church, whose central metaphor is the word. It is very significant that the Mundy sisters prove to be capable of expressing their most profound emotions only through nonverbal dance, turning their dancing bodies into the most suitable communication tool. Furthermore, Michael confirms the vitality of dance in the closing lines of the play proclaiming the dancing to be his strongest memory of the fatal summer; therefore, for the Mundy family, dance had indeed become an alternative way of communication and unity as Michael recollects in an almost incantation-like memory:

> When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement – as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary. (71)

The notion of bodies performing certain nonverbal communication is also echoed by Chris, saying farewell to Gerry: "don´t talk any more. No more words. Just dance me down the lane and then you´ll leave (33). Moreover, Carr´s Grandma Fraochlán dances "with the air", communicating her unbroken spirit and strong connection to her past through revisiting her memories in a dream-like quasi-trance.

Furthermore, dance in both Friel´s and Carr´s plays is primarily connected with the two aspiring would-be knights on white horses – Robert and Gerry. Both their initial idyllic entrees after months of absence involve romantic bits of dancing with their respective beloveds – these moments, being only cruel teasing before the dual bitter disappointment are outwardly but deeply clichéd show gestures and

[238] Llewellyn-Jones 36.

never fulfilled promises of bright future. Kate´s commentary at the dismally deceptive sight conveys both a strong sense of amazement and ridicule at Chris: "and look at her, the fool. For God´s sake, would you look at that fool of a woman? (Pause.) Her whole face alters when she´s happy, doesn´t it? (Pause.) They dance so well together. They´re such a beautiful couple." (33) However, later on, dance epitomizes the ultimate in-creeping destruction of the two relationships – it first unites the couples only to separate them later. Gerry flatters far too many women with compliments on their dancing and in the end, much to Chris´s jealous contempt, offers his arms and charm to her older sister Agnes, an old fan of his. Also the "wordless ceremony" of their silent dance halfway through the drama contributes to the "melancholic fatalism" observed by Jordan - it is another prelude to the sad ending.

Ironically enough, the first act of Carr´s drama closes with the image of Robert holding The Mai in his arms; however, this time, it is not the romantic embrace of two dancers, but a guilty husband carrying his dead wife´s body. The Mai´s and Robert´s relationship follows a similar trajectory – the initial promise of a fairy tale in a castle above the lake is in the second act replaced by bitter disappointment – Robert does not hesitate to openly and mercilessly dance with his lover in front of his marvelously dressed up wife. In a way, Carr subscribes to Friel´s strategy and suggestively allows the performative bodies to "speak"; initially, the sexual conjunction of The Mai´s and Robert´s bodies communicates their reunion which the lack of similar contact in the second act entirely annihilates. Consequently, this might provoke certain doubt (mirroring Michael´s skepticism) as to the veracity and credibility of such performance. Subsequently, dance has indeed become a way to speak – it translated into betrayal, despair and misery. As a paradox, before the town dance, The Mai similarly to Kate appeals to its conventional function of showcasing old and generating new couples.

Dance in *Carthaginians* does not play such a significant role; a short dance is performed by the characters during their "party" quiz night of singing and merry-making; however, with all the stress which McGuinness ascribes to bodies and their identity-defining power, dance is but one of their expressions. It nevertheless communicates and contributes to a sense of liberation that is ultimately fully

pronounced is the post-playlet elation. However, McGuinnes also employs a strategy that equally necessitates the performance of the body – the carnivalesque.

5.2. The Carnivalesque

The carnivalesque can be interpreted as another subversive strategy intertwined within the three dramas; it is undoubtedly most pronounced in McGuinness´ *Carthaginians.* Similarly to the above discussed notion of subversive dance, a central performative body is similarly crucial to the concept of the carnivalesque: "it is the source and focus of defiance, particularly as it is the source of suppression and repression. To modern society the recovery of the body has also coincided with the body becoming less and less political."[239] Eamonn Jordan asserts that carnival is "both fictive and subversive at once, insisting on simultaneity, particularly as the presence of the unified subject and the concept of a definable present are undermined."[240] If we assume the carnivalesque necessitates undermining and subversion of order, we can concede it is easily traceable within all the plays; Bakhtin also notes that "carnival (…) does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators."[241] Furthermore, Jordan also claims that "the action of carnival extends beyond the pretence, beyond the performance, thereby facilitating a collision of worlds. Carnival´s intention is to release energy in order to re-shape reality."[242] Dido´s playlet, being the most pronounced instance of the carnivalesque in McGuinness´ drama enables precisely that: abounding in traditional clichés[243] and inhabited by ridiculously exaggerated characters, it is intentionally presented as a mirror to reality; subsequently, the real and figurative death of the old distortive self is hastened to be replaced by renewal and rebirth.

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[239] Jordan 83.
[240] Jordan 79.
[241] Mikhail Bakhtin*, Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 7.
[242] Jordan 79.
[243] Nicholas Grene summarizes these clichés: The characters all called Doherty, the apolitical mother of the politically engaged son with her devotion to the Sacred Heart, the cross-party love affair between the Catholic Republican and the Protestant daughter of the RUC police officer, send up the hackneyed images of conflict which have become the stock-in-trade of the Irish dramatist through the time of the Northern `Troubles'. Grene, Plays in Context. Furthermore, the extent of parody is embodied in Eamonn Jordan´s comparing the playlet to *Pulp Fiction.* Grene *203.*

Moreover, the parody quality of the carnivalesque clearly demonstrates the inadequacies of such representations. This corresponds to Jordan´s claim that “the role playing shows that carnival is unreservedly artificial and calculating. Yet carnival is creative primarily because of the tension between pretence and disguise.”[244] In accordance, Jordan maintains that “laughter generated by parody is essential to carnival. Laughter amounts to the acquisition of a different less rigid language and if this is the case, then carnival holds out the possibility of a substantial subversive function.”[245] Similarly, even language in *Carthaginians* is subject to carnival according to Jordan: “The play stresses connection between language, politics and homosexual repression, language an attempt to bridge the gap between pity and truth, between truth and the joke and between carnival and life”[246]; significantly, it has already been emphasized that Friel equally discredits language as a reliable and truthful way of communication.

One of the major factors contributing to the catharctic effect of the grotesque playlet is its liberating cross-gender aspect; Anthony Roche ascribes this particularity partly to the historical context of *Carthaginians,* claiming that: "as a political structure Northern Ireland has an inherently unstable structure. Any play dealing with the situation there has to acknowledge that instability in its own structure to some degree.”[247] Therefore, it is also only appropriate that McGuinness should choose a main character with similarly unstable identity, who in turn deliberately destabilizes the others; however, as it becomes conspicuous in the end of the play, Dido´s instability remains just surface and it is communicated through props and costumes, since, as Jordan puts it, “in carnival, the mock king is vital.”[248] Eventually, Dido proves to be the strongest and most grounded character in the play. In addition, Melissa Sihra states that “Dido’s own name has overt echoes with the historic, mythic figure of Dido; second, within the play, it is a marker of Dido’s sexual orientation; and third, it is about the transformation through gender and accent that can bring release”[249]. She also rightfully suggests that “the mobility of Dido within the play’s frame must also be considered, as

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[244] Jordan 81.
[245] Jordan 80.
[246] Jordan 89.
[247] Anthony Roche quoted by Diya M. Abdo 229.
[248] Jordan 83.
[249] Sihra165

must the fact that none of the male characters seem to have the same type of transformative possibility, locked as they are into patterns of self-justification and denial."[250]

It is true that Dido´s mobility in its multi-layered meanings (sexual, physical, emotional) is conspicuous and exceptional within the context of the play; this characteristic further confirms his freedom and positively contrasts with his internal stability. Furthermore, Dido is very liberatingly vocal about his sexuality as well as his desire; Eamonn Jordan interprets it as a positive and enabling characteristic: "the expression of longing hints at vitality, touches on repression and sets up many questions as to the source and the implications of desire."[251] On the contrary, the image of the phallus, omnipresent throughout the drama representing the "transcendental signifier"[252] of male desire and controlling patriarchy is ridiculed in the course of the whole play; for instance it is embodied in a vigorously smashed banana.

All of the characters are forced to step out of their (albeit disturbed) gender roles and identities to assume new ones, supposedly radically opposed to their own experience. Diya M. Abdo claims that "the protagonists' attempts at rewriting the national self are facilitated by their performances of subversive identities and sexualities"; nonetheless, it is also their personal selves that are being rewritten. For instance, as Hark becomes the heavily satirized and cynical mother figure and the sensitive Greta´s alter ego is a blood-thirsty terrorist, it sheds light on the previously accepted and unchallenged binary divisions. It is only Dido, who, despite playing two interacting characters of two different genders, remains reasonably within his comfort zone; allowing the others to flee as far from their selves as possible, he is the only one feels no such necessity. Thus, his play ultimately provides a stepping stone, enables viewing the tragedy with perspective and distance; distancing themselves from their traumas allows the characters to approach and possibly tackle them.

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[250] Sihra 166.
[251] Jordan 82.
[252] Jordan 83.

Accordingly, Eamonn Jordan claims that "carnival reduces morality to the level of sentiment, pretensions and sexual appetites. In the play there is no triumph of virtue over vice"; however the farce distortedly mirrors reality but simultaneously allows for the essential perspective. Therefore, the playlet metaphorically paves the way not necessarily for the aforementioned triumph of virtue over vice per se, but at least enables reason to prevail over dogmas and xenophobia. After days worth of various efforts (silence, discussions, quizzes) it is letting go of one´s identity and embracing a farcical one that unlocks the cycle of impotence; James Hurt greets the outcome as a "purgation process initiated by perverse laughing of play, inappropriateness of the bizarre text that challenges preconceived and incongruous battle lines".[253] Eamonn Jordan comments that within the drama (and the playlet in particular) "the relationship between fiction and self-fictions, which are either imposed or assumed, is highlighted"[254]; he also emphasizes the mutual essentiality of the two spheres claiming that "each world, that of memory, the classical and the carnivalesque is a victim of its own transparency, as each becomes in its turn subordinate to the other, yet no one world is allowed to dominate, as deferral becomes the key to the dramatic reality."[255]

The modern drag queen Dido not only surpasses the ancient queen Dido by surviving hardships, but he also manages to illuminate a way for the others. The forthcoming reciting the names of the dead comes as an incantation and release of the tension. The hope is renewed when Dido sprinkles flowers over his sleeping colleagues and the dead bird from the beginning of the play is replaced by morning birdsong; the dead did not rise, but the living have. Dido abandons his re-born friends, significantly leaving the last word "play" hanging in the air as a key to salvation, an invitation to redefine/reinvent their and their selves after a moment of crisis. Frank McGuinness not only succeeded in bringing upon the Irish stage a gay character, but he also managed to turn him into saviour figure; through Dido, McGuinness invites us to abstain from prejudices and stereotypes, demonstrating the vast amount of knowledge that can be gained. However, it could be argued that the modern day Dido, himself a further example of the subversive carnivalesque, necessitates both his feminine and masculine

[253] Hurt 204.
[254] Jordan 83.
[255] Jordan 91.

characteristics for sufficient completeness to survive. Also, one of the many questions the play asserts is the potential power of art in life threatening situations and dire moments. Embodying Fionnula McGonigle, Dido, sharing McGuinness´s initials (is it actually the author himself speaking through his mouth?) finally finds a means to release the pain: as Nicholas Grene puts it, "the play looks for a new poetry of the theatre to express the bombed-out after-battle experience of Derry, some way of working through mourning and loss towards renewal and resurrection."[256]

[256] Grene 155.

6. Conclusion

Margaret Llewellyn-Jones pertinently remarked that “one of the major concerns of Irish drama is the gap between what is said and what is done”[257]; although this comment was not pronounced specifically in relation to the dramatic interpretation of gender and sexuality, the claim is more than relevant in the Irish context. As we have discussed in detail, the publicly presented sterilized image did not by far correspond to the landscape of fact. The persistent obsession with the questioning of national identity, its subsequent ideological (rather than truth-resembling) resolutions combined with strict Catholic dogmas resulted into a social repression and tabooization of the body on a magnified national scale. The three plays we have examined in this thesis both confirm this gap and simultaneously attempt to dismantle or at least bridge it in an echo of the vast changes within the Irish society in the latter half of the 20th century. Nonetheless, as Brian Singleton remarks, the public performance is necessarily an act of disclosure and as such represents a powerful political act[258]; in this case it means acknowledging and according a voice to the marginalized issues of the national metanarrative such as gender and sexuality.

To summarize the extent of developments explored at length in this thesis, let us juxtapose Singleton´s concise observation with our own conclusions; Singleton, examining the gender distribution and function in earlier Irish drama, further claims that while women have long been “used iconically in popular verse and song to embody Ireland either as Róisín Dubh or the Aisling figure (…), history presents masculine identity in Ireland with a succession of martyrs, heroic, defiant, subversive, but ultimately vanquished by colonial forces.”[259] However, as we have seen, the three plays offer a less dichotomous yet more credible rendition of the Irish social status quo, a testimony that is considerably less flattering especially towards the male characters.

[257] LLewellyn-Jones 7.
[258] Singleton 123.
[259] Singleton 7.

The clichéd concepts of Ireland as a beautiful maiden and O´Caseyesque sentimental odes on motherhood falling back on the myth of Mother Ireland are discarded to give way to erring down-to-earth women of flesh and blood defying any idealization; on the other hand, the female characters are finally allowed to represent only themselves without the necessity to participate in any ideological code. In a partial exchange, women in the plays have become more self-reliant in their resourcefulness and vocal in their newly found subjectivity whereas men increase their passivity with no longer having the colonial excuse to fall back on.

Furthermore, we have also observed that the once strictly defined binary oppositions are gradually blurred. The women adopt certain characteristics traditionally conceived of as male and a similar process is discernible in the opposite direction. This is emphasized in McGuinness´ drama where the character of Dido defies even the once indubitable male/female label. Furthermore, McGuinness then adopts a similarly subversive strategy for confronting the heterosexual majority (severely repressed in the drama by issues related to gender and sexuality) with this previously marginalized, yet largely liberated and likeable homo- and transsexual character. David Cregan´s interpreting the undermining of masculinity in McGuinness´ plays (but equally relatable to Friel´s and Carr´s questioning the patriarchal hegemony) as "undermining the metanarrative that supports all forms of cultured identity"[260] only effectively maps the extent of territory the modern dramas had to conquer.

Although Maria Kurdi argues that "developing an autonomous female subjectivity requires the ability to overcome the long-term effects of painful experiences anchored in time and space,"[261] we have noted that the women within the plays do not translate themselves into modern martyrs. Indeed, as Susan Cannon Harris observed, the notion of a female martyr figure did not prove particularly popular with the Irish public. However, we can daringly claim that the women in the three dramas do not feel the need to assume the martyr status and the complimentary admiration it entails; the female characters are fully consumed by their effort to survive and live. Nevertheless, we have also demonstrated that the latter half of

[260] Quoted in Singleton 107.
[261] Kurdi 179.

Kurdi´s claim concerning time and space is crucially significant; the time and even more spatial settings are accorded considerable importance and largely shapes the characters´ fortunes. Moreover, we have proved that, upon a scrutiny, the theatrical space within the three dramas is largely gendered.

As a contrast, this thesis also attempted to show that male gender and sexuality was not treated so positively; deprived of their heroic and martyr status, the men woefully fail in the everyday life. Possibly as a metaphorical revenge for the glorifying past treatment of Irish male drama characters, the males are depicted either as relicts of repressive patriarchal forces or as a detrimental influence to female integrity. Also, they are portrayed as unsure of their identity; the alternative sexual orientation introduced to disrupt the compulsory heterosexual norm seemed to threaten exclusively the insecure males.

Furthermore, we have demonstrated that Friel, Carr and predominantly McGuinness have dedicated considerable space to performing bodies, attempting to subvert what Medcalf has termed the long-standing "squeamishness about bodies, and in particular their bodily functions."[262] The women´s sexuality, traditionally legitimately performed exclusively within marriage (and even then preferably not discussed publicly) was brought to the fore. Tom Ingliss claims that "sexually transgressive women may have been celebrated in film and literature, but in real life public transgressors were shamed and castigated."[263] The female characters´ sexuality in the plays was not necessarily seen in entirely positive terms (they are certainly not "celebrated") but it was at least acknowledged; the women have finally stepped down from their virginal and/or asexual ideological pedestal. Furthermore, Diya M. Abdo confirms what we have explored at large in relation to gender and sexuality; she claims that the previously marginalized characters manifest the "desire to engage in and change that conflict stems from a desire to change also the way they have been treated."[264]

We have moreover proved that the body has been reinterpreted; nevertheless, not all of the changes were welcome or accepted. As Kathy O´Reilly remarked in

[262] Medcalf 65.
[263] Ingliss quoted in Kurdi 37.
[264] Diya M. Abdo 227.

relation to *Carthaginians,* the characters´ scars make it impossible for them to be life-givers;[265] this claim can be equally applied to other characters in the two remaining plays. Although the three dramas might have successfully partially redefined the status of the body, gender and sexuality, an entirely liberated scar-free body capable of reproductive at that moment laid yet further in the future.

On a concluding note, we can say that the three plays mark a courageous penetration of the private into the public domain going hand in hand with the increased visibility of gender, sexuality and emphasis upon the performativity of the body. More or less audaciously mirroring the societal developments, the plays have undoubtedly contributed towards the plurality of vantage points and topics through engaging with long-omitted issues. Moreover, although it is impossible to shake off the burden of clichéd stereotypes in a few plays enclosed within one decade, the three dramatists have set a precedent for other authors for a further exploration of these questions, which the trio also continued to examine in their subsequent plays. Thus, hopefully, the claim of Patrick Lonergan, who, while reflecting upon the "half-hearted" nature of Irish drama, complained that it was not challenging oneself sufficiently"[266] will not be relevant anymore.

[265] Kelly-O´Reilly 87.
[266] Lonergan quoted in Sweeney 215.

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