

## **Abstract**

The thesis “Spirituality in the Drama of Tom Murphy” analyses three of Tom Murphy’s plays of his mature period of the late 1970s and early 1980s in which the playwright explores the metaphysical question of the existence of God in contemporary post-lapsarian world. The main aim of the thesis is to elucidate how Murphy dramatically engages with the inherited Christian tradition and to analyse the spiritual quests for transcendence of his characters, stemming from a state of “metaphysical homelessness”. Its overall claim is that these quests take place outside the realms of an institutionalized religion and that at its end the divine manifests itself through the human. The works examined are *The Sanctuary Lamp*, *The Gigli Concert* and *Bailegangaire*, all of which demonstrate a profound engagement with faith. Devoting a separate chapter to each, the thesis examines and compares, how Murphy dramatizes the “common human need for belief” of his characters, despite their urge to defy God at the same time. This thesis also analyses how Murphy employs religious imagery and vocabulary in the individual plays, paying special attention to his dual use of the motifs that seem as irreconcilable opposites and which is closely connected to the author’s frequent use of the dramatic method of reversal with which he subverts traditional meanings and understandings of some of the key concepts of the western thought, such as the definition of God and the limits of humanity. The thesis shows that it is in the human that Murphy’s theatre of hope and of the possible finds its roots and that man’s experience of transcendence is enabled by his manifestation of simple humanity, in the acts of recognition, forgiveness and love.

**Key words:** Tom Murphy, contemporary Irish drama, the Irish Catholic Church, God, religion, faith, transcendence, humanity, identity, guilt, recognition, forgiveness.