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Spirituality in the Drama of Tom Murphy

Duchovní rozměr dramatu Toma Murphyho

Vedoucí práce:
doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD

Zpracovala:
Bc. Eliška Šmídlová

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V Galway, 2. srpna 2014

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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 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.

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce “Duchovní rozměr dramatu Toma Murphyho” zkoumá tři hry dramatika zralého období 70. a 80. let, ve kterých se autor zabývá otázkou Boha v současném světě. Hlavním cílem práce je odhalit, jak se Murphy dramaticky vypořádává s křesťanskou tradicí na příkladech duchovních cest jeho hrdinů. Základním tvrzením této práce je, že tyto cesty vedou mimo organizované náboženství a že na jejich konci se ono duchovno či božstvo projeví v člověku samém. *The Sanctuary Lamp*, *The Gigli Concert* a *Bailegangaire* jsou hry, které hluboce prostupuje otázka víry. Každé z nich je v této práci věnována jedna kapitola, ve které je porováváno, jakým způsobem Murphy drammatizuje běžnou lidskou touhu po víře jeho postav, která je ovšem v konfliktu s jejich nutkáním vzdorovat Bohu. Tato práce také analyzuje, jak Murphy zachází s náboženskou symbolikou a jazykem v jednotlivých hrách, obzvláště s podvojnými motivy, kterých autor hojně užívá, stejně jako metody zvratu, kterou Murphy často převrací ustálené významy a interpretace některých klíčových konceptů charakterizujících západní civilizaci, jako například definice Boha či člověka a jeho hranic. Tato práce ukazuje, že Murphyho “divadlo víry” a “divadlo možného” vychází z člověka samého a že ony cesty za sebenaplněním a sebepoznáním jsou v podstatě výsledkem lidské solidarity, v projevech vzájemného uznání, odpuštění a lásky.

Klíčová slova: Tom Murphy, současné irské drama, Irská katolická církev, Bůh, náboženství, víra, duchovno, lidskost, identita, vina, uznání, odpuštění.

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1. *Introduction*

Tom Murphy's dramatic world is one abandoned by God, yet religion, and the Catholic Church as an institution especially, constitute a central element in most of his plays. This apparent dichotomy manifests itself most obviously in the seemingly incompatible compulsions driving and defining Murphy's characters, namely in the urge to defy God while at the same time searching for some kind of transcendence. Therefore so many atheists, nihilists and people lapsed from religion populating Murphy's plays and yearning for miracles and spiritual fulfillment. In this duality, which is so characteristic of Murphy's theatre, the playwright gives us, as Fintan O'Toole believes, "a synthesis of the two great opposites of modern western culture, the desperate revolt against God which has so powerfully shaped twentieth century theatre on the one hand, and a compassionate, religious culture of hope and yearning on the other," an enterprise making his work a kind of "bridge between the culture of Catholic Ireland and the modern atheist culture of contemporary civilisation."¹

John Devitt points out that Murphy was one of the first playwrights in Ireland to reveal and shock the public, non-recognizant for a long time of the disappearance of shared religious values in society, by his critical attitude towards institutionalized religion², for which reason Nicholas Grene labels his plays of the late 1970s as "pre-post-Catholic"³. As Murphy explains:

The church certainly gave me and people of my generation a very positive background. [...] But [...] the church has got between man and the divine. [...] I think everybody has some form of apprehension of the spirit within himself. [...] The church has stopped what could possibly be the personal conversion to one's own spirit.⁴

Despite his repudiation of traditional Catholicism as an institution, Murphy's "rootedness" in Christianity, as Csilla Bertha puts it, "however unorthodox or undogmatic," cannot be denied in his works. For Murphy, as she goes on to explain, "not only operates with religious imagery and vocabulary but also radiates a religious

¹ Fintan O'Toole, *Introduction to Tom Murphy, Plays 2* (London: Methuen 2005) xi-xii.

² John Devitt, Conversation with Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash, *Shifting Scenes*, ed. John Devitt et al. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008) 107.

³ Devitt 107.

⁴ Tom Murphy, Interview with John Waters, *In Dublin*, May 1986: 27.

sensitivity which is clearly rooted in Catholicism but points out towards a transformed understanding of Christianity.”⁵ On Murphy’s stage, this is characterized by the manifesting of the divine through the human and by belief in man and his power to work miracles. This is what Murphy’s characters eventually discover on their spiritual quests: they realize that it is in their very selves as well as in the selves of the beloved around them that they have to look for faith, love and forgiveness. For that is the only way for them to achieve redemption since the justice of this “new religion” of a simple faith in man “is greater than that of the Gods.”⁶

What brings Murphy’s outcasts on their journeys is their incapability of “self’s confrontation with its demons”⁷ – with their unhappy pasts full of guilt, remorse, grief and unfulfillment. Choosing flight - be it literally or figuratively - they try to escape from the pangs of their memories, living in what Colm Toibín calls “spiritual dispossession”⁸ – as outsiders trying to desperately figure out their place in the world. But this is not possible until they fully acknowledge the burden of the past and recognize themselves for who they are/were, which gives them the strength to defy it and finally overcome it.

All of Murphy’s plays deal with the motif of figuring out one’s identity and place/role within society but it is only in his mature plays of the 1980s that Murphy transcends the social and the local, letting the immediate world recede into the background, and directly addresses another plane of his drama, namely the universal and metaphysical. It is the decade during which Murphy became the writer-in-association (1983-85) with the Galway Druid Theatre under the baton of Garry Hynes⁹, a collaboration that brought both parties high acclaim and recognition. *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1976, rewritten 1984), *The Gigli Concert* (1983), *Bailegangaire* (1985) and *A*

⁵ Csilla Bertha, “‘Rituals of a Lost Faith’?: Murphy’s Theatre of the Possible”, *Alive in Time: The Enduring Drama of Tom Murphy*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010) 275.

⁶ Fintan O’Toole, “Beyond Tragedy”, *The Politics of Magic* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994) 198.

⁷ A term applied by Roche to describe *Bailegangaire*, but equally descriptive of all three analysed plays. Anthony Roche, “*Bailegangaire*: Storytelling into Drama”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 114.

⁸ Colm Toibín, “Thomas Murphy’s Volcanic Ireland”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 24.

⁹ Anthony Roche, “Murphy’s Drama: Tragedy and After”, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill&Macmillan, 1994) 146.

*Thief of a Christmas*¹⁰ (1985), which are the subject of this thesis, were all written during this period of Murphy's ripe years after his return from the exile in London.

They are the plays of traditional Murphian homecoming - plays of a spiritual quest and self-discovery. The first of them, *The Sanctuary Lamp*, as Harry White points out, "inaugurates style, technique and dramatic preoccupations of the later plays"¹¹ and sets the ground especially for the two following ones which build on it and further develop its main theme. Its characters, apart from trying to work out their identity and make sense of their life, are the first in Murphy's oeuvre to question and reproach God as unhelpful and unjust – a daring enterprise starting with Francisco's J'accuse, moving on to JPW's critique of the limiting concept of God as "I am who am" in *The Gigli Concert*, and finally finding its climax in Mommo's defying laughter at the misfortunes of her life in *Bailegangaire*. The progress in employing the motif of defying God within the three plays, as will be analyzed in the following chapters, is apparent at first sight, gaining on subtlety, yet power and perfection at the same time, with each consecutive work and reaching its artistic highlight in *Bailegangaire*.

It is also religious imagery and vocabulary, already mentioned above, which helps Murphy's characters defy God while finding redemption through their own individual spirituality. For Murphy does not use such imagery at face value but, as O'Toole observes, "he turns it inside out to give it the meaning he desires". In other words, he "take[s] the religion out of the religious images but put[s] it into the atheistic ones."¹² Thus he plants the sacred into the human, confirming that "the romantic kingdom *is* of this world"¹³ and making his characters the ones who grant forgiveness and who can work miracles. His method, however, also works the other way round, as O'Toole further points out, with the images and motifs deriving from the modern revolt against God, such as Nietzsche's defiance of God or Faust's transgression of the limits of humanity, used so as to suit Murphy's purposes and whose traditional interpretation he challenges and pushes beyond its limits.¹⁴

¹⁰ *A Thief of a Christmas* will not be discussed in this thesis in a separate chapter but will only be used as a complementary text to *Bailegangaire* to illustrate in closer detail Mommo's story of the laughing contest.

¹¹ Harry White, "The Sanctuary Lamp: An Assessment", *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 71.

¹² O'Toole, *Introduction* xii.

¹³ Tom Murphy, *The Gigli Concert, Plays 3* (London: Methuen, 1994) 33.

¹⁴ O'Toole, *Introduction* xii.

Christopher Murray describes Murphy's theatre as "rough and holy"¹⁵ – an oxymoron-like denomination, yet one that quite accurately reflects Murphy's style and also matches his own use of duality of motifs. It is as if in Murphy's dramatic world of contradicting powers, one could not exist without the other, like two halves making one whole or like two sides of one coin. Therefore so many seemingly contradictory opposites filling Murphy's plays: mockery and search of the sacred, hope and despair, damnation and salvation, "I am who am" and "I am who may be", the possible and the impossible, flight and homecoming, etc. The space between these extremes is that which Murphy's characters inhabit. It is only when they live out both opposites and when both halves are recognized, to use Jungian terms, that they become whole/complete and thus fully human. As O'Toole notes, in Murphy's theatre, there is no hope without despair and no salvation without damnation, as one is an indispensable prerequisite of the other, and it is only those who have fallen in the first place that will be saved eventually¹⁶.

The aim of this thesis is to closely analyse the spiritual journeys of the main characters of the above mentioned plays against the background of the modern, post-religious world, devoting a separate chapter to each play. By doing so, it will unveil the identity problems of each character and point out how they reflect the spiritual emptiness/chaos. Last but not least, the thesis will explore the way Murphy engages with the Christian tradition by employing both religious and atheistic images and vocabulary in his work. Finally, the thesis will attempt to show that Murphy's plays of antithetic forces are not only "rough and holy" but also "whole".

¹⁵ Christopher Murray, "The Rough and Holy Theatre of Thomas Murphy", *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 9.

¹⁶ Fintan O'Toole, "Apocalypse Now", *Tom Murphy: The Politics of Magic* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994) 214.

2. *The Sanctuary Lamp*

“It was man who lit the lamp.”
- T. Murphy

“The most anti-clerical play ever staged by Ireland’s National Theatre”¹ read one of a majority of negative reviews after the first staging of Murphy’s *The Sanctuary Lamp* in 1975 which caused, “more heated controversy among Abbey audiences than I’ve seen in two decades.”² Considering that the play, set in a church desecrated by the presence and behaviour of a disillusioned priest, ignorant Jew, angry blasphemer and deluded atheist, was shown to audiences in Ireland at a time when, as Grene notes, “the great majority of Irish people were still practising Catholics”³ despite the “deletion [in 1972] from the Irish Constitution of Article 44, according to which the state recognized the special position of the Catholic Church as ‘the Guardian of Faith’”⁴, the debate around the production of the play seems understandable. Also, as John Devitt notes, the fact that the play was put on in the Abbey Theatre and not in the more alternative Peacock, where a similarly “scandalous” *Talbot’s Box* by Tom Kilroy was more easily accepted, made the reception of the play by the public more difficult.⁵

As Christopher Murray points out, the amendment to the constitution in 1972 did not change much in the actual church-state relationship, further reinforced by the Pope’s visit in 1979, and secularism in Ireland, compared to Britain or the USA, progressed only very slowly.⁶ One way of post-Vatican II modernization of the Church to make it able to keep up with the changing times, as Murray identifies, was establishing (by the Bishops of the English-speaking world) of the International Commission on the Use of English in the Liturgy, which aimed to make religious language more accessible to common people.⁷ In 1970, Murphy was asked to become a member of this committee, an offer which, as O’Toole puts it, was a challenge to his “bitterness at the repressiveness of a Catholic upbringing” and which meant that he would have to

¹ Cited in Nicholas Grene, “Tom Murphy and the Children of Loss”, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 209.

² Grene 209.

³ Grene 209.

⁴ Christopher Murray, “A Generation of Playwrights”, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000) 175.

⁵ John Devitt, Conversation with Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash, *Shifting Scenes*, ed. John Devitt at al. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008) 105.

⁶ Murray, “A Generation of Playwrights” 175.

⁷ Murray, “A Generation of Playwrights” 177.

“confront Catholicism constructively, holding out ‘a naïve hope’”⁸. Murphy accepted the task and “immersed himself in the language of religion” but found that “he was shaping things for others which he did not himself believe.” And as O’Toole elucidates this crucial Murphy’s realization in respect to his work and which also lies at the core of this thesis, “[h]aving failed to transform the old religion to his satisfaction, he went on imaginatively to try to create a new one.”⁹

Although some critics disagree with the above statement, especially in relation to his first “religious” play *The Sanctuary Lamp*, arguing that Murphy’s “theology” brings nothing new apart from “defining [itself] against the inherited mythology”¹⁰, while thereby staying tied up with it, and calling it “a fragile vessel of a religious vision which is imperfectly focused”¹¹, most critics see Murphy’s wrestle with religion as an attempt at its deconstruction or reconfiguration, while recognizing the underlying concept of “a common human need for belief”¹². They still, however, admit that in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, as Murphy’s pioneering play that directly addresses the question of God, the playwright partly “settles private account with the Catholic Church”¹³, an exploit which he will, however, later master in *The Gigli Concert* and *Bailegangaire* in a much more subtle and sophisticated way. Precisely for this reason, nevertheless, *The Sanctuary Lamp* is very important in the Murphy canon, as it constitutes the corner stone on which his later, more mature plays are built.

That Murphy was constantly developing his ideas and refining them is obvious from the very fact that he significantly reworked the original 1976 version of *The Sanctuary Lamp* eight years later in 1984. Although Harry White argues the opposite, claiming that the substantial revisions in the later version caused a serious imbalance of the whole work, especially the omission of the scene with a young priest preaching a sermon “which is not without its inherent problems of tone and content”, nevertheless, which according to White makes Francisco’s virulent attack on the Catholic Church in

⁸ Fintan O’Toole, “Beyond Tragedy”, *Tom Murphy: The Politics of Magic* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994) 184.

⁹ O’Toole, “Beyond Tragedy” 185.

¹⁰ Anne F. Kelly, “Bodies and Spirits in Tom Murphy’s Theatre”, *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press 2000) 164.

¹¹ O’Leary, “Looping the Loop with Tom Murphy: Anticlericalism as Double Bind”, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 81.321 (Spring 1992): 43.

¹² Desmond E.S. Maxwell, Desmond, *A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama: 1891-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 61.

¹³ Alexandra Poulain, “Fable and vision: *The Morning After Optimism* and *The Sanctuary Lamp*”, *Talking about Tom Murphy*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 51.

Scene Two look exaggerated and totally unsubstantiated,¹⁴ O'Toole, on the other hand, believes that the 1984 version makes the play more compact and frees it of the limits of its "immediate relevance", thus moving beyond the banality of a specific, dated critique towards showing "images of transformation rather than mere reflections of reality."¹⁵

The Sanctuary Lamp explores the role of God and religion in fulfilling the spiritual needs of modern man. It does so through the first of trinities of Murphy's characters "with different backgrounds, different nationalities, who are adrift in the world, who are abject, broken for whatever reason and who are going into the abyss"¹⁶. Harry, Francisco and Maudie are on the run from their past lives, looking for sanctuary and forgiveness and finding it, although in a very non-traditional, even subversive way, in a church. Coming from different religious backgrounds, the "half-lapsed Jew", ex-Jesuit and a teenage atheist with no idea about any religion whatsoever respectively, compare their ideas of guilt and forgiveness "engage[ing] in a battle of moral supremacy"¹⁷ only to find out that "guilt must be borne without the comforting prospect of a judgment from above"¹⁸ and that real forgiveness can be granted from those against whom one has sinned.

Harry has come to the church mainly in search for physical shelter after he had left his unfaithful wife and dishonest best friend with whom he used to live. He is also looking for strength here to avenge their betrayal: "Oh Lord of Death, stretch forth your mighty arms therefore! Stir, move, rouse yourself to strengthen me and I'll punish them properly this time!"¹⁹ As O'Toole, notes, Harry's situation resembles that of Biblical Samson, "whose power left him because of a broken heart."²⁰ For Harry is also an ex-strongman, "one of the four strongest men in the world" (SL 125) who once used to "top up the bill" (SL 104), until Olga swapped him for Francisco as a result of which all three of them were eventually dismissed from the circus and Harry lost his legendary strength. Another unhappy event that made him a drifter in a hostile world is the death of his daughter Teresa for which he blames both himself and the adulterous couple and

¹⁴ Harry White, "The Sanctuary Lamp: An Assessment", *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 73-75.

¹⁵ O'Toole, "Beyond Tragedy" 207.

¹⁶ Tom Murphy In Conversation with Michael Billington, *Talking about Tom Murphy*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 110.

¹⁷ White 78.

¹⁸ Poulain 54.

¹⁹ Tom Murphy, *The Sanctuary Lamp*, (London: Methuen: 1994) 112. All subsequent references will be cited in the text with the initials SL.

²⁰ O'Toole, "Beyond Tragedy" 206.

which further fuels his desire for revenge. Despite being the avenger, however, he runs away from them and so it is Francisco who has to track Harry back to the church. When it comes to settling accounts, however, a punch satisfies Harry's anger for "I don't want to be like them, I believe in life!" (SL 111)

Despite what Maxwell calls a "common human need to believe"²¹, Harry seems to be the only character in the play with this obvious urge: "I always believed in things. And when you have nothing and you believe in nothing, you have nothing at all!" (SL 142) His endeavour for a dialogue with the sanctuary lamp is, as Alexandra Poulain remarks, "a desperate attempt to ascertain that there still is God"²². Despite Francisco's attempt to convince him that "you're praying to a dying horse here", Harry is unyielding:

HARRY. And what are you doing, kicking him?

FRANCISCO. Not bad. But you agree the horse is dying?

HARRY. No. I don't agree with you. (SL 156)

This kicking is the most characteristic feature of Francisco and Tom Murphy says about it in relation to loss of faith: "When the disenchantment sets in then the person becomes increasingly dangerous as he/she kicks out in agony, against the loss of all these certainties ... or ... of a central certainty."²³ Francisco, in his repudiation of the Catholic Church, has deprived himself of the central certainty that until then held his universe together, which is why now, "painfully orphaned"²⁴, as Christopher Murray puts it, in a godless world he is kicking around desperately, roaring his helpless accusations. If Harry is a "stricken pilgrim of hope", as White puts it, then Francisco is "the high priest of contemptuous cynicism"²⁵, for in his numerous tirades he shows very little sympathy with the Catholic Church which through various institutions has (de)formed his upbringing:

What a poxy con! All Christianity! All those predators that have been mass-produced out of the loneliness and isolation of people [...] Those coonics! They're like black candles, not giving, but each one drawing a little more light of the world. [...] Black on the outside but,

²¹ Maxwell 61.

²² Poulain 52.

²³ Quoted in Kelly 164.

²⁴ Christopher Murray, "The Rough and Holy Theatre of Thomas Murphy", *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 14.

²⁵ White 78.

underneath, their bodies swathed in bandages – bandages steeped in ointments, preservatives and holy oils! – Half mummified torsos like great thick bandaged pricks! Founded in blood, continued in blood, crusaded in blood, inquisitioned in blood, divided in blood [...] these violence-mongering furies [...]. (SL 154)

Poulain goes a bit further than White in labeling Francisco “an Irish Zarathustra” preaching the death of God by “denying the existence of a superior being that might hold the cosmos together and pass the judgment on men”²⁶. This is evident from Francisco’s determination to deny both Maudie and Harry the forgiveness they are looking for: “Have you ever thought who’s going to forgive them? Who’s going to forgive the Gods, hmm? (*Laughs*) The state they must be in! There’s no such thing as forgiveness.” (SL 129) “There’s no one to bless you. And, worse, there’s no one to curse you.” (SL 156)

But Shaun Richards has a valuable point in suggesting that rather than dead, God in Francisco’s vision, is absent and thus ineffectual - “displaced by the fact that ‘they’ turned him into a church,”²⁷ - a view resembling to an extent Harry’s idea about the spirit of Jesus being “nabbed” and put in the church which has made his sense “go a little dim”. (SL 113-114) As Francisco himself tries to explain to Maudie:

God made the world, right? and fair play to him. What has he done since? Tell me. Right, I’ll tell you. Evaporated himself. When they painted his toenails and turned him into a church he lost his ambition, gave up learning, stagnated for a while, then gave up even that, said fuck it, forget it, and became a vague pain in his own and everybody else’s arse. (SL 128)

But Francisco’s resolute accusations and dogged nihilism are finally betrayed by what O’Toole terms “apocalyptic vision”²⁸ in which he completely reverses the Christian idea of damnation and salvation:

I have a dream, I have a dream! The day is coming, the second coming, the final judgment, not too distant future, before that simple

²⁶ Poulain 53.

²⁷ Shaun Richards, “Response” to Poulain’s “Fable and Vision”, *Talking about Tom Murphy*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 60.

²⁸ O’Toole, “Beyond Tragedy” 201.

light of man: when Jesus, Man, total man, will call to his side the goats – ‘Come ye blessed!’ Yea, call to his side all those rakish, dissolute, suicidal, fornicating goats, taken in adultery and what-have-you. And proclaim to the coonics, blush for shame, you blackguards, be off with you, you wretches, depart from me ye accursed complicated affliction! And that, my dear brother and sister, is my dream, my hope, my vision and my belief. (SL 155)

Thus, despite him claiming the opposite, also Francisco demonstrates some kind of belief, however alienated from the original Christian doctrine. By identifying himself indirectly with the above listed sinners he also admits his guilt and expresses hope for salvation. In this, Francisco seems to voice Murphy’s personal belief which he revealed in an interview, namely that “the blasphemer is perhaps closer to God than someone who is observing all the duties that the Catholic or Protestant or Christian or any form is obliged to uphold”²⁹

Maudie is the third main character in the play, yet a comparably marginal one with respect to the philosophical question running through it, for she is an atheist, ignorant of the practices of any, including the Catholic Church, and apart from looking for “forgiveness”, which for her is nevertheless just a vague term she does not herself much understand³⁰, she does not in any way engage in the metaphysical conversation of the two men, nor help towards the resolution of the play as a whole. Theatrically, she could be described as Murphy’s device enabling the other two characters to explain their visions of life, death, sin and redemption, and as a kind of mediator. Her role within the play, as Lynda Henderson argues in her essay, is a necessary, but only supportive one, as is the predicament of most women in Murphy’s dramatic world, and transcendence is actually denied to her.³¹

This is obvious from her experience of climbing the lamp-posts at night: “And sometimes, if I waited up there long enough, everything made – sense.” (SL 120) When she’d come down, she would do cartwheels or stand on her head or just “keep on running into our house, and I’d open the window and I’d have stood on the table, and I’d’ve took off my clothes, and stick my bottom out at them.” (SL 120) Henderson

²⁹ Tom Murphy, Interview with John Waters, *In Dublin*, May 1986: 27.

³⁰ Nicholas Grene, “Tom Murphy and the Children of Loss” 211.

³¹ Lynda Henderson, “Men, Women and the Life of the Spirit in Tom Murphy’s Plays” *Irish Writers and Their Creative Process*, ed. Jacqueline Genet (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe) 1996) 90.

interprets this as an innocent “exultation of spirit in the openness of mind and body”³² but as Kelly readily adds, “her religious experience has been eroticized and taken from her”³³ after she had followed the older boys’ whispers to come out to them, which has eventually caused her pregnancy.

Maudie’s spirituality is thus “confused”³⁴ with her sexuality which, especially after the death of her baby, ensues in feelings of guilt and earns her a name by her grandfather “a whore’s melt”. (SL 118) It is this guilt that haunts Maudie in her dreams in the form of her dead mother and baby and which she believes will go only when she receives forgiveness, which is why she flees to the church. Although she knows nothing about Christianity and is unable to even identify the Holy Family, she hopes Jesus would grant her forgiveness. This possibility is sharply questioned by Harry, who is very sensitive about the idea of sin and forgiveness: “How do you know? He doesn’t have to forgive me. I did nothing wrong. I don’t’ reproach myself. So, y’see? You have to commit the sin first to get that.” (SL 114) Also Francisco, as discussed above, denies Maudie the option: “There’s no such thing like forgiveness.” (SL 129)

The extent to which Maudie eventually receives forgiveness and reaches transcendence is questionable. As Henderson argues, it is possible to interpret her peaceful sleep, which she lacked since committing her “sin”, as coming to terms with herself and as arriving at a new resolution, as is obvious from her last words before falling asleep – “I’m going home to gran. And to grandad.” (SL 157) What is, however, undeniable, is the fact that “she is not present to share in or contribute to the general, self-conferred absolution through acceptance” of the other two characters, as she “literally vanishes – falling asleep in the horizontal Confession box, while Francisco and Harry redeem their pasts.”³⁵

A very marginal character in the play, yet one that starts the deconstruction of the Catholic faith “from within”³⁶, as Poulain puts it, at the very outset of the play, is Monsignor. He is clearly a disillusioned priest who prefers being “at home by [his] fireside reading Hermann Hesse” to being in the church “at two o’clock in the day reading Hermann Hesse”. (SL 104, 105) Harry’s confession to him about his “compulsion to do this - terrible thing” (SL 102) is met with Monsignor’s apathy and a

³² Henderson 90.

³³ Kelly 162.

³⁴ Kelly 161.

³⁵ Henderson 90-91.

³⁶ Poulain 51.

change of the topic to more practical points of their business. He is quite openly indifferent to the whole practice of faith - “lost my humility. If I ever had any. Humility, what? A cunning way of dealing with God.” (SL 126) and prefers to confer most duties to a young priest with a guitar³⁷ and a clerk, who has recently died and whom Harry is now supposed to replace. Monsignor talks about the duties that Harry is to be in charge of, as if these were mere “material, even trivial details, devoid of any spiritual significance”³⁸. Further, as regards the most important of the religious tasks – replacing the candle in the sanctuary lamp so that it never goes out – Monsignor names it only last. Harry, on the other hand, is struck and fascinated by the sanctuary lamp since entering the church (“First thing I noticed” (SL 106)) and while to him it represents a deeply symbolic “mystery”, to Monsignor it is just an object “signifying the constant presence” and which “despite all the modern innovation [...] still needs personal attention.” (SL 106-107) In spite of his alienation from the Christian dogma, however, as Poulain notes, in offering Harry help and shelter, Monsignor displays deep humanity and a “true Christian spirit”³⁹ of brotherly love which, as Richards points out, “while Christian in origin, is profoundly social in effect.”⁴⁰

Similar to the sanctuary lamp, other religious objects are treated as profane, losing their original sacred significance, both by Monsignor and the other three church inhabitants. Although the motivation for doing so is different with each of them – disillusionment and indifference in the case of Monsignor, ignorance in Harry and Maudie’s, and defiance in Francisco’s – the symbolic value of these objects is nevertheless thereby put into question and held up for a reassessment. Thus the Sacristy becomes “kitchen, so to speak” (SL 106), vestments are used as night gowns and a Confessional box serves double function: in the vertical as a cubby hole for “brooms and things” (SL 106) and in the horizontal as a bed. Also the very focal point of the church, the pulpit, is desecrated by becoming a platform for a reversed Christian doctrine, and “Christ’s blood”, the communion wine, is drunk to wash down bitterness and fish and chips.

The desecration does not spare even the very basic concept of Christianity - the Holy Family, which is brought down from the scale of myth to the scale of mundane,

³⁷ A remnant of the 1975 version of *The Sanctuary Lamp* which depicted a whole scene with a sermon held by this young priest.

³⁸ Poulain 52.

³⁹ Poulain 52.

⁴⁰ Richards 65.

everyday life by identifying of the characters with the members of the Holy Family. Maudie identifies with the Infant, because she has lost one while herself being still a child also. Francisco is “inclined to give [his] vote to your man, the Holy Spirit. Alias the Friendly Ghost.” (SL 129) Harry sees himself as Joseph - “I’ve always had a soft spot for Joseph. I’ve always felt he must have been a bit lonely” - while comparing his unfaithful wife Olga with Mary: “See that expression of hers? I know someone like that. And she was a Catholic too. But of course it was all a front to conceal a very highly-strung neurotic nymphomaniac.” (SL 115) His mock-hatred towards her culminates when he swaps himself for Francisco in the role of Joseph and their baby Teresa for dwarf Sam, calling the three “a right-looking Holy Family.” (SL 153) Harry also partly identifies with Jesus who just like him is paralyzed – sitting on what looks “more like a wheelchair” rather than a throne, “locked up here at night, reclining – y’know’ – reflecting his former glory.” (SL 113-14) For Harry too, since the alienation from his wife and the death of Teresa is weak and unable of any action except thinking of the happy past and wondering how it could have gone wrong. In identifying himself with both Joseph and Jesus and his “friends”, who are not without serious faults, with other members of the Holy Family, Murphy, as O’Toole points out, reverses the biblical idea of creation of man, since “rather than God making man in His own image, Harry makes a God who conforms to his own weakness and decrepitude.”⁴¹

Although the obvious misuse and appropriation of the religious symbols and images seems iconoclastic, it is not meant to simply denounce the practices of the Church, as Nicholas Grene points out, or to suggest obsolescence of religion but rather “the spiritual needs of the characters, and their attempts to find substitute symbols to replace the now-dead images of traditional Christianity”⁴² – an act much reminiscent of Murphy’s earlier attempt at a new approach to religion as a member of the Commission on the Use of English in the Liturgy, which for him failed on a linguistic level and thus had to be addressed at the level of its very concepts.

The way Murphy employs religious images is very cunning and highly subversive. He does not simply desecrate them by suspending the sacred but he moves the sacred elsewhere. For his central method is reversal. As O’Toole remarks, Murphy turns these images “inside out”, placing them outside their original contexts so that their once unfaltering meaning is now seriously undermined. While he thus extracts the

⁴¹ O’Toole, “Beyond Tragedy” 194.

⁴² Grene “Tom Murphy and the Children of Loss” 211.

sacred from religious images reducing them to profane ones, O'Toole continues, he also makes the originally atheistic images sacred by planting the religious into them⁴³, so that the result is Christianity "turned on its head"⁴⁴.

Similar manipulation happens with religious language and vocabulary which is spoken especially by Francisco, into whom it has been deeply ingrained by the Jesuits. He is able to use it in various ways: in its original context, to make Harry feel guilty:

But the pattern of man's sins will be the pattern of his punishment!
See the depraved ones, who so loved their own pleasures, now bathing
in black, hot, bubbling pitch and reeking sulphur! [...] And what of
the tardy-footed giants who did not lift a finger? See them: masters of
sorrow, howling like dogs for very grief! Do you want absolution,
Har? (SL 145)

Misplaced or reversed, Francisco uses the rhetoric of the pulpit not only to tell a very profane and humiliating story about the trio's last engagement – of how "a certain troupe [...] were called upon one evening to tender service, and sow the seeds of merriment at the mansion of a mighty man" (SL 147), but also to preach his apocalyptic rendition of Christianity discussed above.

"Sin, repentance and forgiveness are at the core of Christianity," as Bertha points out, however, they are also at the core of Murphy's drama, but not as Christian but as very human concepts (re)establishing interpersonal relationships⁴⁵. For his characters have to first sin and then recognize the fact and ask forgiveness, or alternatively, be sinned against and grant forgiveness to become "whole"⁴⁶, as Richards puts it. Then "the interhuman is saturated with the transcendental"⁴⁷ which brings about little miracles. In *The Sanctuary Lamp*, the characters still need to identify their problems through the inherited ideology and vocabulary of the church, only to find out that these can be solved outside this context – within the human realm, while still providing redemption which feels truly divine.

⁴³Fintan O'Toole, *Introduction to Tom Murphy Plays 2* (London: Methuen 2005) xii.

⁴⁴O'Toole, "Homo Absconditus: The Apocalyptic Imagination in *The Gigli Concert*", *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 90.

⁴⁵Csilla Bertha, "Rituals of a Lost Faith'? Murphy's Theatre of the Possible", *Alive in Time: The Enduring Drama of Tom Murphy*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010) 279.

⁴⁶Richards 59.

⁴⁷Bertha 277.

One little miracle manifests itself through Harry's lifting up of the pulpit, which in itself offers lots of interpretive readings. Grene argues that by it the authority of the church is literally suspended and shaken, comparing the act with that of already mentioned biblical Samson who, after his strength has come back to him, destroys the pagan temple of the Philistines.⁴⁸ This reading would work with Murphy's method of reversal, as it was the unbelievers who Samson proved wrong by his heroic deed, whereas Harry shakes the pulpit of the Catholic Church. The case is, however, complicated because of one single fact, namely that Harry lifts the pulpit with an unbeliever in it.

What is undoubtedly unambiguous, however, are the circumstances under which Harry regains his legendary strength and is able to lift the pulpit. It happens after he silently acknowledges that he too is responsible for Olga's death by letting her be humiliated by offering her body to the hosts at the end of their private engagements – “This senseless desire we had to please, you see? And be liked.” (SL 145) – and for not being around at their last performance which proved fatal to her. For at this engagement, before which Harry deliberately left the trio to punish them, Olga's final “number” turns into a disaster which ends up in a row and expulsion of the performers, topped by the humiliation of having to ask for money through a letterbox flap in the door. This leads to Olga's overdose a few days later for which also Francisco blames Harry because he wasn't there to support her: “Y'know- y'know – y'know! There was no one else but myself to kiss away the tears of that poor, unhappy, lost, unfaithful wife.” (SL 146)

Through self-recognition and accepting what he was trying to run away from – his guilt for letting things go wrong, Harry moves beyond despair and is miraculously metamorphosed into the erstwhile strongman. This is what O'Dwyer calls “the power of revelation” when the false ideals are first recognized and thereby defied, opening the possibility of change and a new start.⁴⁹ Harry is thereby also cured of his urge to revenge and offers Francisco freedom. The latter, however, wants to stay with his once best friend and asks Harry for a second chance: “We'll go together, right?” (SL 160) In Harry's sleepy nod, Francisco is granted forgiveness which has a touch of ceremony about it, as it happens while and after Harry is replacing the candle in the sanctuary

⁴⁸ Grene, “Tom Murphy and the Children of Loss” 211.

⁴⁹ Riana O'Dwyer, “Play-Acting and Myth-Making: The Western Plays of Tom Murphy”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 36.

lamp. The scene thus shows a double manifestation of the divine in the human: through the “release [of the] mortal human good” into a redemptive “secular nirvana”⁵⁰ and through the literal substitution of the burnt out candle which puts man before God – for as Murphy notes about the ending of the play, “[i]t’s about the campfire in the distance, the candle in the window and the proof of hope in man. Perhaps he’s only just alive – but he’s man. And it was man who lit the lamp.”⁵¹

As O’Toole points out, man in Murphy’s theatre “outgrows” God because his morality and justice are greater.⁵² He claims that Murphy’s drama is an amalgam of Greek tragedians and modern absurdist which, however, moves beyond the desolation and despair of the two by adding to it a touch of Christian redemption, and thus pushes the very limits of tragedy as a genre by ending in reconciliation and forgiveness.⁵³ This is why Harry at the end of the play forgives Francisco for sneaking away his wife, and God for the absurd death of his innocent daughter, and transcends the grief of the loss of his beloved ones by his theory about immortality of souls which purges him and makes it possible for him to start anew:

The soul - y’know? – like a silhouette. And when you die it moves out into... slow-moving mists of space and time. [...] And if a hole comes in one of the silhouettes already in the wall, a new one is called for, and implanted on the damaged one.[...] And the merging – y’know? Merging? – merging of the silhouettes is true union. Union forever of loved ones, actually. (SL 158-9)

The Sanctuary Lamp explores the question of faith and religion in modern world with respect to man’s spiritual needs. It portrays people undergoing crisis of spirit – both on the level of belief and identity - which brings them into the abyss of despair and – into a church. There they discover that it is only in their very selves as well as in the selves of the others that they can find forgiveness and redemption – through showing human solidarity. Murphy said about his play that “it is a religious play in the sense of personal religion as against institutionalized religion”⁵⁴, which is obvious from the fact that his

⁵⁰ Henderson 87.

⁵¹ Cited in Murray, “The Rough and Holy Theatre of Thomas Murphy” 17.

⁵² O’Toole, “Beyond Tragedy” 198.

⁵³ O’Toole, “Beyond Tragedy” 187-191.

⁵⁴ Tom Murphy, Interview with John Waters, 27. Interestingly, in an interview after the play’s first production in 1975, Murphy said about its ending that it “hasn’t anything to do with religion.” (Compare Murray, “The Rough and Holy Theatre of Thomas Murphy” 14.

characters find the church and its traditional symbols devoid of any spirituality and thus of no help. By planting the divine into the human, he shifts the focus of the sacred from institutionalized religion towards man and thus abridges the journey between man and the divine on which, he believes, the Church is but an obstacle. For in Murphy's opinion, "the Church has got between man and the divine" and "has stopped what could possibly be the personal conversion to one's own spirit"⁵⁵

Murphy's characters thus undergo "a quest for life through which God can be found in the innermost humanity of man"⁵⁶. This combination of religion and belief in man which makes it possible for them to go on, is what Richard Cave calls "a profoundly moving [...] conviction that even in a godless world humanity retains some religious instincts which compells them for good or ill to shape their own strange rituals of belief behind which one can still sense as it were a palimpsest of Western traditions of faith and practice."⁵⁷

In respect to this thesis as a whole and the other two plays that are its subject, *The Sanctuary Lamp* plays a very significant role as it is their twofold corner stone. Firstly, because it is the first play in the Murphy-canon to bring up the topic of religion as its main theme on which both *The Gigli Concert* and *Bailegangaire* build, and secondly, because it "anticipates the movement of those later dramas that work through violence and tragedy towards some sort of healing through talking, singing and laughing."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Tom Murphy, Interview with John Waters, 27.

⁵⁶ Catherine Maignant, "The New Prophets: Voices from the Margins", *Contemporary Catholicism in Ireland*, eds. John Littleton and Eamon Maher (Blackrock: Columba, 2008) 104.

⁵⁷ Richard Cave, "Tom Murphy: Acts of Faith in a Godless World", *British and Irish Drama Since 1960*, ed. James Acheson (London: Macmillan, 1993) 89.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Grene, "Voice and Violence in Murphy" *Alive in Time: The Enduring Drama of Tom Murphy*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010) 37.

3. *The Gigli Concert*

In contrast to *The Sanctuary Lamp*, abounding in religious images, symbols and language, emphasized moreover by its very setting – a church, *The Gigli Concert*, with its obsession with opera and obviously lacking all of the above features, seems to be a very different play altogether. However, what links the two plays together is the motif of hope and faith and their general reference to religion, or rather to the absence of it, followed by the search for a different kind of spirituality. If *The Sanctuary Lamp* proved a petrification of institutionalized religion and emptiness of its symbols, *The Gigli Concert* looks for its substitution as a means of reaching the divine, finding it in the form of music.

The Gigli Concert presents another trinity of Murphy's characters, of which, again, two are male and one is female. Not any differently from *The Sanctuary Lamp*, it is the men who are the main protagonists both on the stage and in making of the meaning, as it is JPW and the Irish Man, the psychiatrist and his patient, who try to resolve their problems and transcend their present selves, while Mona, JPW's constantly neglected lover, is only allowed a marginal space. Critics have pondered on her (in)significance within the play at many occasions and although some eagerly defend her role within the play as indispensable¹, it could be summarized, similarly to that of Maudie, as a necessary but only supportive one, for while serving as a catalyst on JPW's quest for transcendence, this very experience is denied to her. This time, however, she will not be the only one left at the gateway to self-discovery, as the Irish Man will give up the quest before the very end.

Fintan O'Toole described *The Sanctuary Lamp* and *The Gigli Concert* as "plays of flight and sanctuary", depicting the characters "on the run, somewhere between fear and hope, between a need to run away and a desire to find a safe place to hide."² What they're trying to escape is the harsh reality of their lives, which they are unable to face, and what they are looking for is the courage to recognize who they are and what they have or have not done, and the strength to change things. In doing so they are searching for a metaphysical home, finding it, provisionally and only physically, in a church and a therapy office – in "liminal spaces", as Poulain points out in reference to the former,

¹ For example Declan Kiberd, Anthony Roche.

² Fintan O' Toole, *Introduction* to Tom Murphy, *Plays 3* (London: Methuen: 1994) ix.

where “the rules of the outside can be suspended”³ and where anything can happen. In keeping with this is the view of Anthony Roche who sees JPW’s office secluded from a larger social context as a refuge where the characters can hide from the confines of the outside world and from their miserable lives or where they can afford a little fantasy to improve it somewhat. He identifies, how “pronounced [a] sense of dialectical opposition between here and there” is established by the device of such a therapy office, “with ‘out there’ characterised as the insistently determined world of normative relations and material acquisition, and ‘in here’ as a relatively more open space in which possibilities beyond that closed world can be considered.”⁴

JPW’s office is by definition a place where the impossible can become possible, as the inscription on his window suggests, for he practices “dynamatology”⁵ which, as Richard Kearney elucidates, “derives from the Greek *dynamis*, meaning potentiality or potency” and which conveys “the meaning of this ‘logic of dynamizing possible’”⁶. As JPW himself explains to the Irish Man, its philosophy lies in the ability “to project you beyond the boundaries that are presently limiting you,”⁷ so that anything is possible. This formula, which is the theme tune of the play, becomes also its central conceit, challenging the limits not only of man but also of God.

Asking for the impossible is what seems to be The Irish Man’s wish which he reveals to JPW upon entering his office, namely to sing like Gigli, “no inverted commas” (GC 175). JPW suspects that trying to make his patient sing like the famous Italian tenor might require supernatural assistance, however, he is ready to help him. As becomes obvious from their sessions, what the Irish Man suffers with is a serious identity problem caused by the clash of two worlds between which he lives: “the world of facts” and that of “values”, as Declan Kiberd puts it, which “have moved too far apart,” leaving “no remaining connection between the *is* and *ought*, between the

³ Alexandra Poulain, “Fable and vision: *The Morning After Optimism* and *The Sanctuary Lamp*”, *Talking about Tom Murphy*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 51.

⁴ Anthony Roche, “Murphy’s Drama: Tragedy and After”, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill&Macmillan, 1994) 162-163.

⁵ As Richard Kearney acknowledges in his Introduction to *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion*, himself and Murphy “hit upon” the term in a conversation about what was to be *The Gigli Concert*. While Murphy applied it on a branch of psychology in his play, Kearney uses the term as a name of his philosophy of God, synonymous to *metaxology*.

⁶Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington IN: Indiana UP, 2001) 6.

⁷ Tom Murphy, *The Gigli Concert, Plays 3* (London: Methuen 1994) 169. All subsequent references will be cited in the text with the initials “GC”.

realities of [his] life and [his] aspirations.”⁸ The Irish Man is a successful developer, or as he himself prefers to have it, “an operator”. (GC 172) He is “a self-made man” (GC 170) but one, as Anthony Roche points out, “who is profoundly dissatisfied with the self he has made.”⁹ Despite his great fortune and achievements in the building industry, he feels unfulfilled, for as he himself makes clear, although “always conscious of money”, he was “never interested in it”. (GC 188) Thus the Irish Man revolts against the ethics of what Kiberd calls “the world of work, effort and reward”, in which “once the transcendental tie with God was broken [...] work could no longer be cast under the aegis of divinity: and so it lost much of its traditional value and meaning”¹⁰:

Will I build a thousand more? No, I’ve made up my mind on that one. There’s more to life than working myself to death or wheeling and dealing with that criminal band of would-be present-day little pigmy Napoleons we’ve got at the top [...] I need a breath of fresh air. (GC 224)

Despite such a decision, he remains a prisoner to the world of facts and materialism, as he is unable to enjoy beauty for its own sake anymore, seeing in the beautiful nature around him, just “fine sites for development.” (GC 224) As far as he can tell, this complex goes back to his childhood years spent with his two brothers, the tyrannical Mick and the continually beaten Danny, who has given him a life lesson about the use of beauty:

But Danny – he was eighteen! – and he was inside, crying. And it was the only thing I could think of. And. And. I took the fuckin’ flowers to our Danny [...] and I said, which do you think is nicest? The most beautiful, yeh know? And Danny said ‘Nicest?’ like a knife. ‘Nicest? Are you stupid? What use is nicest?’ Of what use is beauty, Mr King? (GC 216-217)

The Irish Man suffers with what Ben Barnes calls “spiritual emptiness”¹¹. He loathes the material world he is part of and which he only conformed to because of the poor social and economic conditions of his family and because of the oppression from his

⁸ Declan Kiberd, “Theatre as Opera: *The Gigli Concert*”, *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009) 151.

⁹ Roche, 169.

¹⁰ Kiberd 150.

¹¹ Ben Barnes, “The Fell of Dark: *The Gigli Concert*”, *Alive in Time: The Enduring Drama of Tom Murphy*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010) 156.

brother which he had to suffer his entire childhood. As a boy, however, he wanted to be a priest – he dreamt of “dedicating [his] life to others” (GC 216) but all his goodness and innocence was killed by the reality he lived in and by Danny teaching him “street sense:” “He used to tell me never to trust anyone, and that everything is based on hate. He used to tell me that when I got big, if I was ever in a fight with Mick, to watch out, that Mick would use a poker.”(GC 216) Entering his life with such preconceptions, the Irish Man has built a world around him in which everybody and everything is isolated and alienated from each other, including himself. Coming to his fifties, however, he realizes that his life has taken a different route than he had imagined as a child. Thus he comes to JPW with the desire to sing which could in fact be seen as an original conceit for what Kiberd calls “a search of his lost sensuality, his lost artistry, his anima – all those aspects which years of graft and money-grubbing had led him to suppress and deny in himself.”¹²

As Riana O’Dwyer points out, starvation of the spirit is a common motif in the work of Tom Murphy, functioning as a metaphor for disintegration. She believes it is an “unacknowledged but powerful legacy” of the real Famine, still “underlying mid-twentieth century living in the small towns and countryside in Ireland”, which made the post-Famine generations up to 1960s “cling to security and respectability”, creating “the narrow rural definition of success in terms of economic achievement”¹³ and ignoring personal spiritual fulfilment. As Murphy remarked about his play *Famine*, which is not merely a dramatization of physical starvation but also a metaphor: “Living in the 1960s, I found that I was a famine victim, that it wasn’t over. [...] *Famine* to me meant twisted mentalities, poverty of love, tenderness and affection.”¹⁴ Although Murphy refers here to a different period than when *The Gigli Concert* was written, it could be easily applied also to the Ireland of the 1980s with its building boom which further transformed the society into materialistically-oriented one and made several people immensely rich. One of these is the Irish Man who gave up the idealism of his childhood and “gave his soul” in pursuit of material success. As O’Dwyer concludes, however, “the quest for beauty, for song, for an expression of the spirit beyond the drudgery of every day must be pursued by individuals and communities if they are not to destroy themselves or be

¹² Kiberd 151.

¹³ Riana O’Dwyer, “Play-Acting and Myth-Making: The Western Plays of Thomas Murphy” *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 33-35.

¹⁴ Quoted in O’Dwyer 33.

destroyed”¹⁵ and so the Irish Man wants to sing and must sing if he wants to be liberated from the prison of the world of facts.

As Murphy gives away in an interview, behind the evolution of the play was the “idea that someone has sold out spiritually”:

This was the era of the developers, the terrible things that have been done to buildings in Dublin, and these people came from small villages and town and cities in the country. It was from this background that there emerged someone who, having sold his soul, now wants his soul back.¹⁶

It is this bargain, reiterated by both JPW and the Irish Man in the magic formula “I’d give my life for...” and supported by numerous verbal references, that made many critics discover in *The Gigli Concert* Faustian parallels. Both men could be compared with Faust and Mephistopheles at some stage of the play as these two roles go through several reversals and repetitions.¹⁷ The opening of the play puts the Irish Man in the role of Faust who seeks Mephistopheles-JPW to fulfill his impossible wish which he is ready to die for: “I’d give my life for one short sweet hour to be able to sing like that [Gigli].” (GC 210) Also JPW, although he is “contracted to assist him” (GC 190), displays Faustian traits when he echoes the Irish Man’s plea and is willing to die “for one short sweet hour” in bed with Helen. Later, however, it is the very Gigli who through the “diabolical siren-song”, as Kiberd puts it, emanating from the record player, tries to attain JPW’s soul after he had already won that of the Irish Man – as the latter admits:

I-can’t-stop-listening-to-him! Fills me! The – things – inside. Tense, everything more intense. And I listen carefully. And it’s beautiful – But it’s screaming! And it’s longing. Longing for what? I don’t know whether it’s keeping me sane or driving me crazy. (GC 184)

This is confirmed by the title on the record which reads “Mefistofele” and to which JPW adds “ah yes, he is the devil”. (GC 201) By the end of the play, however, after the

¹⁵ O’Dwyer 36.

¹⁶ Tom Murphy In Conversation with Michael Billington, *Talking about Tom Murphy*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Caysfort Press, 2002) 106.

¹⁷ This is in sharp contrast with the view of O’Toole who, despite his detailed analysis of the whole Faustian motif recognizing parallels in *The Gigli Concert* down to Faust’s Helen and their child Euphorion, however, tends to, rather restrictively, see *The Irish Man* and *JPW* in their single roles only, namely as Mephistopheles and Faust respectively.

Irish Man decides to withdraw from the bargain, it is JPW who turns into his final role of Faust and quoting Marlowe (“This night I’ll conjure” (GC 238)) he asks Hell for assistance in his operatic achievement:

The soul! Of course! The soul of the singer is the subconscious self.
Realistic thinking, honest desire for assistance. (*To heaven*) Rather
not. You cut your losses on this little utopia of greed and carnage
some time ago, my not so very clever friend. (*To the floor*) You, down
there! Assist please. (GC 239)

It has been discussed in the previous chapter how Murphy “turns Christianity on its head”¹⁸ by subverting both its language and concepts. What was literal, physical attesting of the symbols of the Church in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, however, gains on more sophistication in *The Gigli Concert* as it rises onto a figurative level, thus acquiring indirect and even latent but highly subversive means of re-evaluating Christianity and its concepts. Reimagining of the Faustian myth is one such way.

As O’Toole points out, both Marlowe’s and Goethe’s versions of Faust were “meant to illustrate Christian concepts of salvation and damnation, and in doing so to fend off the dangerous heresy of magic.”¹⁹ Murphy, however, subverts this traditional interpretation by making the “heretic” and “alchemist” JPW overcome despair through his revolt against Heaven and “transgressing God’s stony limits on humanity”²⁰ with the assistance of Hell, after which he is reborn to a better self, that is saved. This is reminiscent of Francisco’s utopian vision in *The Sanctuary Lamp* of the reversed concept of damnation and salvation, where the downcast, “the goats”, are saved eventually, however, in *The Gigli Concert*, it is not just proclaimed but directly enacted. The reversal also reiterates the fact that in Murphy’s dramatic world, one has to sin first to be saved later and that the two are actually not “irreconcilable opposites” but rather two sides of one concept – damnation-salvation – where “the former is a precondition to the latter”²¹.

The daemonic and its representative Mephistopheles, who assisted Faust in transcending his human limits, is thus in Murphy’s vision portrayed not only as “the

¹⁸ Fintan O’Toole, “Apocalypse Now”, *Tom Murphy: The Politics of Magic* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994) 213.

¹⁹ O’Toole, “Apocalypse Now” 214.

²⁰ O’Toole, Fintan O’Toole, *Introduction to Tom Murphy, Plays 2* (London: Methuen 2005) xii.

²¹ O’Toole, “Apocalypse Now” 214.

spirit of absolute destruction”, but also as that of creation for “his negations contain within themselves the necessary seed of new life”²². This is also in keeping with how Kiberd sees the devil in the world which has abandoned religion: “Whereas traditional religion offered man a sense of continuity and a way of taming the daemonic, Murphy, like other artists now seizes the initiative lost by religion and, far from suppressing the daemonic, he explores and exalts it as a source of creativity.”²³

The whole concept of magic is a very subversive and destabilising one when put into confrontation with reality, as O’Toole points out, which makes it no surprise that Tom Murphy should choose it as a vehicle to suit his own “reconstructive” purposes:

[t]he great age of magic was the period of the breakdown of the old, fixed order of the universe, when astrology, alchemy and natural magic sat side by side with science and with radical politics in the ferment of ideas which broke down the hierarchical notion of the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁴

Although Murphy wrote his play in the 1980s, what he is trying to achieve in terms of the deconstruction of Christianity by using the motif of magic is similar to what magic and alchemy did in their heyday. In relation to that, another achievement of “the cult of magic”, as Christopher Hill puts it, is very significant to Murphy since he exploits it abundantly through the character of JPW, namely the “liberation from the consequences of Fall” “through mastery of the secrets of nature” so that “[...] men could help themselves – mankind, not merely favoured individuals.”²⁵

JPW elaborates on the concept of the Fall and original sin to a great degree, as will be discussed later. What is important in relation to Hill’s statement, however, is that he does so in order to help The Irish Man, the Fallen one, haunted by the guilt of his sins – “corruption, brutality, backhanding, fronthanding, backstabbing, lump labour” (GC 173), yet who, despite being far from a “favoured individual”, will receive help. All he has to do is confess to JPW his sins. This process is obviously reminiscent of the traditional sinner-priest confession to which Roche has a very fitting remark, namely that the psychiatrist is nothing else but “the contemporary equivalent of the priest, a figure in whose eyes all people lapsed from a traditional religion are equal and most of

²² O’Toole, “Apocalypse Now” 215-216.

²³ Kiberd 150.

²⁴ O’Toole, “Apocalypse Now” 209.

²⁵ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (Penguin: London, 1975) 163.

all in their spiritual crisis of the self²⁶. The use of the motif of therapy sessions as a palimpsest of traditional confessions conducted by a church authority is once again reminiscent of *The Sanctuary Lamp* where Harry overturned the confessional box, thereby, as Roche points out, not only “overthrow[ing] of the old, outmoded aspect of doing things, but also setting free [...] of the confessional space out of the confining box into the space of the theatrical frame.”²⁷

But it is important to remember that JPW is not a standard psychiatrist but a “dynamatologist”, whose job is literally to make the impossible possible. Therefore, he could be seen as a magician, which is also suggested by several verbal references both by Mona (“My magician friend” (GC 238)) and by himself (“This night I’ll conjure.” (GC 234)). Rather than a magician, however, JPW seems to be more of an alchemist, since his “magic” lies in the transformative power, characteristic of an alchemist’s practice of turning cheap metal into precious gold. For his task is to literally forge a new man, a better man, out of the miserable identity of the dissatisfied Irish Man – as becomes obvious from the Irish Man’s concealing of his real name and by substituting his life story with that of Gigli’s, he does not only want to sing like him, but he wants to be him, which in other words means, to become someone else.

Katie McArdle explains how it can be done: “The alchemist’s operations involve dissolving and disintegrating, breaking down the physique of substance to free the ‘divine breath’ or quintessential spirit within it.”²⁸ In his technical jumble, JPW describes something similar. Based on his notion of a subatomic world where the particles waste their energy by chaotically “dancing with each other”, he suggests

[...] a process of destratification until we arrive at that state we call Nihil where we can start putting our little dancers to proper work, and working properly they can go a very long way indeed to project you beyond the boundaries that are presently limiting you. (GC 169)

Following these instructions, JPW starts getting at the “physique of substance” of the Irish Man’s identity but only breaks the matter down half way for after the Irish Man’s greatest confession which starts to magically dissolve him, he aborts the treatment. This once again confirms the above discussed adherence of the Irish Man to the world of

²⁶ Roche 166.

²⁷ Roche 166.

²⁸ Katie McArdle, “The Blue Macushla: Anatomy of Failure”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 82.

facts, to which, despite his attempt to change it by seeking JPW's help, he remains a prisoner. The reason he actually manages to attend so many sessions is because he sees in JPW what Barnes calls a "fellow traveller"²⁹ – a man who is just as confused, desperate and in need of help as himself. Also, as Kiberd points out, because JPW is not an "orthodox" therapist and has put the reputation of the whole practice of dynamatology in question before he even started his treatment by mentioning the doubtful career of its founder ("I think it is likely they shipped Steve back to the States. I do not even know if we are still in existence." (GC 186)), he will probably "not be able to probe too embarrassingly into those areas which his client wishes to remain unseen" and which – dangerously for him – magic could but "mere reason cannot illuminate."³⁰ The Irish Man's encounter with JPW could therefore be seen as representing the above mentioned fixed world with given order, temporarily destabilized by the encounter with magic. Unfortunately for The Irish Man, he is too careful not to let that world perish.

And so The Irish Man is happy enough with only a partial recovery before the treatment is finished. It is a recovery which, despite his "fierce resistance" and JPW's "crass incompetence"³¹, as Poulain puts it, was possible through simple human solidarity of listening to and sharing painful fates among fellow sufferers. For having opened himself to JPW on the fourth day of their session and revealed to him the biggest trauma of his childhood – the story with Danny's lesson on the use of beauty in life (as discussed earlier) – in combination with the despair of his wife and son having abandoned him on the same day, he breaks down in a hysteria which purges him of the trauma. However, he would not admit that his healing and recovery derived from this confession, and, ironically, on the basis of this very same confession, which he finds embarrassing the next day and which he tries to disown, he terminates the therapy. He has thus "taken himself captive again" (GC 237), making do with "normal adjustment" (GC 172), which he refused at the start, "to the poxy, boring anchor of this everyday world [he has] sold [his] life for", while "dread still lies nesting". (GC 237)

As is obvious, The Irish Man did not have the courage "for an encounter of a most strange and singular kind (GC 198) and so it is left to JPW who, obsessed with his patient's obsession eventually also takes on that obsession, only to see it through to the

²⁹ Barnes, 158.

³⁰ Kiberd 148.

³¹ Alexandra Poulain, "A Voice and Little Else': Talking, Writing and Singing in *The Gigli Concert*", *Echoes Down the Corridor*, ed. Patrick Lonergan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007) 110.

end himself. That it eventually works is possible by the recognition of his miserable identity: “I am a charlatan and a quack and I have *never* achieved *anything* in my life!” (GC 228) For, just like the Irish Man, JPW was pretending to be someone else than he actually was, his biggest fantasy of all being his idea of domestic bliss in a “clematis dwelling” (GC 205) with his apron-clad, sock-darning Helen-chimera who is in fact “a peculiar combination of flirtatious and seductive behaviour which, having aroused me, instantly turned to resistance and rejection.” (GC 206) His indignation at her is accompanied by a remark on her “madonna face” (GC 205) which is very reminiscent of Harry’s comment on Olga in *The Sanctuary Lamp* who despite looking saintly was in fact the very opposite. Having realized that he has been a prisoner of this idea for four years which has made him a desperate drug and alcohol addict locked up in his office and completely ignoring the world around him, JPW eventually frees himself of the illusion. At the same time he realizes his love for Mona, whom he never acknowledged until their last meeting when she tells him she is dying of cancer. Having recognized his false ideals and the general misery of his life, hopelessness has risen in the “pool” of his life, to follow JPW’s terminology, to “total despair”, and as his theory follows,

[t]hat state achieved, two choices. One, okay, I give in, I wait for the next world. Or, two, what have I to lose, and I take the leap, the plunge into the abyss of darkness to achieve that state of primordial being, not in any muddled theocentric sense but as the point of origin in the here-and-now where anything becomes possible. (GC 211-12)

Determined not to give up, JPW goes for the second option and, high on drugs and alcohol, he takes the magical leap before which the Irish Man turned back, to be at last rewarded by experiencing the feeling of a “rebirth of ideals, return of self-esteem, future known”. (GC 239) Immediately after, he sings an aria like Gigli and collapses. The voice he sings in is clearly Gigli’s, as Murphy instructs in the stage directions (“*Gigli’s voice; the recording he made solo, without bass and chorus.*” (GC 239)), yet, as JPW himself checks after he wakes up, the record player is disconnected. Whether he was hallucinating that he could sing like the famous tenor, or he made the impossible possible and actually did sing like him – Murphy of course leaves this puzzle open to interpretation – what makes all the difference is that JPW believes that he did sing and that it felt like he was singing like Gigli. For through this belief he managed to transform his miserable life into a moment of pure possibility that allowed him to break

free and start anew. And by leaving the office with the repeat button on the record player placed on the window and proclaiming that “mankind still has a delicate ear” (GC 240), he declares that anyone has the potential to achieve anything, if they find the courage to do so and if they believe it enough.

If the Faustian myth and magic work for Murphy as tools for the subverting of Christianity, this achievement is fully accomplished only by combining it with a traditional Murphian melange of just as subversive biblical references. The most significant of them in the play is the story of the Fall and the original sin, whose implications JPW describes as the first of the three aspects on the basis of which he wants to cure the Irish Man: “one, your existential guilt, two, its twin paralysing demon, the I-am-who-am syndrome, and three, despair.” (GC 199) As he points out, the first two aspects are interconnected which he tries to explain and illustrate by his comical collage of the stories of Fall and Exodus, in which he identifies as the original sin Adam’s curiosity about the nature of God:

God taking his stroll in the Garden, as we were told, and passing by innocent Adam, he would nod, and say ‘I am who am’. [...] ‘Whatever can he mean,’ said Adam, “I am who am”?’ And he waited until the next time God came strolling by, and he said, “Excuse me” – or whatever they said in those days. I must find out. And he put the question to God. But God said, ‘Out, out’ ‘I only asked!’ said Adam. But God said, ‘Out!’ And, naturally, after such rude, abrupt and despotic eviction, the wind was taken out of Adam’s intellectual sails: not surprising that he was not up to pursuing the matter. Which is a pity. Because, the startling thing, God had got it wrong. Because what does it mean, ‘I am who am’? It means this is me and that’s that. This is me and I am stuck with it. You see? Limiting. What God should have been saying, of course, was ‘I am who may be’. Which is a different thing, which makes sense – both for us and for God – which means, I am the possible, or if you prefer, I am the impossible. (GC 211)

What Murphy is doing here, as O’Toole points out, is putting the foundational phrase of Christianity, on which the overall understanding of the nature of God in western

theology and philosophy is based, into question.³² For as Richard Kearney explains, God's self-denomination "'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh" which He revealed to Moses when speaking to him from the burning bush, can be translated in several different ways which then offer completely different interpretations of the nature of God. Translated as "I am who am" which is a traditional Christian, ontological reading and the point of Murphy's critique, God reveals himself as an eternal and unchangeable presence.³³ Translating the above as "I am who will be", however, as it is taught in the Hebraic tradition, offers an eschatological reading based on a promise – as Kearney explains: "The transfiguring God is not a once-off deity but one who remembers the promise of the past and remains faithful to them into the eschatological future."³⁴

From these two translations, as Kearney notes, stem "two rival ways of interpreting the divine."³⁵ Kearney endorses the latter, eschatological approach, however, he is not fully satisfied with the image of deity this definition creates. In his point of view, "it is divinity's very potentiality to be, that is the most divine thing about it"³⁶. Therefore he offers a third possible translation, which also refers to the future but does not connect it to the past, and which is also a promise, yet one which is conditioned by man's willingness to accept and respond to it. "I am who may be", according to Kearney describes most accurately the nature of God in contemporary sense – God who has not yet been and "who can be God only if we enable this to happen"³⁷:

Refusing to impose a kingdom, or to declare it already accomplished from the beginning, God-who-may-be offers us a possibility of realizing a promised kingdom by opening ourselves to the transfiguring power of transcendence. Each human person carries within him/herself the capacity to be transfigured in this way and to transfigure God in return – by making divine possibility ever more incarnate and alive.³⁸

And as he notes about the notion of the possibility of God's being based on a promise,

³² O'Toole, "Apocalypse Now" 219.

³³ Kearney 22-23.

³⁴ Kearney 25.

³⁵ Kearney 1.

³⁶ Kearney 2.

³⁷ Kearney 2.

³⁸ Kearney 2.

[p]recisely because this promise is just that – a promise, and not an already accomplished possession, there is a free space gaping at the very core of divinity: the space of the possible. It is this divine gap which renders all things possible which would be otherwise impossible to us – including the kingdom of justice and love.³⁹

These two extracts help illustrate what happened to JPW at the final stage of the play when he sang/“sang” like Gigli. Having opened himself to the “transfiguring power of transcendence” embodied in the vehicle of music, he was transfigured in return. Believing that it was possible in the first place, he has entered the “divine gap” which enabled him to do so. JPW was not looking for God, however, but for faith and belief in himself, which would enable him to change his life for the better and which he found with the help of music. By thus achieving or believing to have achieved the impossible – to sing like Gigli – he manifested the divine in himself. He has himself become “who he may be”.

Since Murphy’s theatre is one profoundly oriented on the future – a theatre of hope, possibility and transformation, it is obvious that the definition “I am who am”, be it that of God or man, is too limiting for Murphy. Opting for “I am who may be” and applying it to the condition of man, he thus artfully manages to express faith in man, making the human “saturated with the divine”⁴⁰ and the physical blended with the metaphysical – transforming thus both man and God in their mutual relationship.

This method is obvious throughout the play: when the Irish Man first comes to the JPW’s office, he is “who he is” – a desperate middle-aged man in the crisis of the self. He is obviously stuck with it, which is why he seeks help. JPW is ready to make him “who he may be” – if he finds the courage to face his mean, guilty self and if he is ready to undertake a journey which is not without risks. The initial openness on behalf of the Irish Man, to this possibility of transformation is suggested, as Bertha believes, by the fact that he does not reveal his real name and that he substitutes his past life for Gigli’s, which makes him simultaneously “who he is” and “who he may be”⁴¹. However, since his determination is not strong enough and he eventually changes his

³⁹ Kearney 4.

⁴⁰ Csilla Bertha, “‘Rituals of a Lost Faith’? Murphy’s Theatre of the Possible”, *Alive in Time: The Enduring Drama of Tom Murphy*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010) 277.

⁴¹ Bertha, 284.

mind, it is up to JPW himself to fully reveal “who he is” and recognize his miserable life which eventually transforms him into “who he may be”.

The fact that the vehicle enabling Murphy’s characters to become “who they may be” is music, is very symbolic and further connects to Murphy’s idea of transgressing the limits imposed by God. For as Poulain argues, music exceeds the law of Word from which communal order is derived⁴². Poulain tries to justify this by quoting from Michel Poizat’s essay *La voix du diable* in which he claims that both Christianity and Islam, were originally distrustful of music because “[they] detect the face of the devil behind the transgression of the divine law which singing and music tend to commit – a transgression of that law of language which governs every individual and which the figure of the Word-God deifies.”⁴³ Poulain further compares the conception of music in the contexts of orthodox religion and in its mystical counterpart, quoting from Poizat:

Contrary to the ‘orthodox’ worshipper who postpones the promised enjoyment of God until after death and salvation, and who therefore conforms to the divine law to earn this salvation, the mystic wants to enjoy God now. His sacred project, then, is the transgression of the law of the Word, which he considers only as the ineffective human expression, or the debasement, of a divine law which transcends it. Whatever participates in such a transgression thus participates in the divine essence: voice and music are defined as its privileged instruments.⁴⁴

The breaking of the law of the Word evokes Murphy’s belief that “the church has got between man and the divine”⁴⁵ and therefore has to be deconstructed, that is literally cleared away. Murphy is the “mystic” who wants to “enjoy God now” and therefore does not need any authoritative mediation. By making JPW sing in a voice of an opera singer – possibly the most accomplished form of the art of singing, Murphy allows him to reach the divine in a supreme way, transcending superbly all “ineffective human [ways of] expression”, including the law of the Word. This is echoed at several stages throughout the play by the conviction of the characters, that singing is “the only

⁴² Poulain 114-115.

⁴³ Quoted in Poulain 114.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Poulain 115.

⁴⁵ Tom Murphy, Interview with John Waters, *In Dublin*, May 1986: 27.

possible way to tell people [...]... Who you are?" (GC 179) or that the lyrics of Gigli's music do not matter at all and that one can substitute them for whatever they like and want to believe:

MONA: What's he singing, what's he saying now?

JPW: You don't have to know, whatever you like. (GC 231)

This idea is in keeping with the concept of music as "the image of the absolute and of the ideal order" to the condition of which, as Murray points out, quoting Walter Pater, "all art as well as Tom Murphy's work aspires"⁴⁶.

JPW's triumph seems a much greater achievement in the quest for transcendence than in *The Sanctuary Lamp*. For what Harry, Francisco and Maudie were trying to achieve mostly by physical means by what had features of a blasphemous desecration, JPW arrived at in a non-violent and cunning way by subverting the very concept of God from which the whole thought of western civilization is derived, by means of magic and, most importantly, music. Although there is one feature in *The Gigli Concert* reminiscent of *The Sanctuary Lamp*, namely the speculation of the nature of God by JPW, echoing Francisco's apocalyptic tirades and Harry's quiet contemplations, it is much more skilfully built into the whole theme and structure of the play, which takes altogether a very different shape in terms of dramatic expression from the previously discussed play. Even in *The Gigli Concert*, however, the transcendence via a newly discovered means is possible through the "interhuman" which releases the power to work miracles. What seemed miraculous in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, however, when Harry lifted the pulpit, gains in scale in *The Gigli Concert* where JPW, freeing himself of all physical laws, sings like an Italian tenor.

⁴⁶ Christopher Murray, "The Rough and Holy Theatre of Thomas Murphy", *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987):16.

4. *Bailegangaire*

“Nothing is funnier than unhappiness”

– Beckett, *Endgame*

When Murphy was sketching his first play in his early twenties in collaboration with Noel O’Donoghue, “one thing [was] fucking sure” to them: [i]t [was] not going to be set in a kitchen.”¹ With this resolution they reacted sharply against what was seen as “clichéd stereotypes” of “the country-cottage-kitchen settings of the early Abbey plays”, which, as Nicholas Grene points out, were “to be avoided at all costs”². That is why *On the Outside* takes place in the open space, outside a ballroom. Twenty-five years later, however, after having experimented with different forms and settings, including also the previously discussed *The Sanctuary Lamp* and *The Gigli Concert*, Murphy returns to exactly what he rejected at the start of his career – the kitchen-set “safe, realistic [peasant] drama”³ as he plants his *Bailegangaire* in “a country kitchen”, “probably the central room of the traditional three-roomed thatched house”⁴.

This move back to what he previously avoided is reminiscent of his return, in an attempt of a new, constructive approach, to religion by joining the Commission on the Use of English in the Liturgy. For in *Bailegangaire*, Murphy tries to reimagine the stereotype of the peasant play by linking it firmly to the present and by subverting some of its myths and clichés, of which the most relevant to this thesis is that of man’s enduring of the hardships of life as God’s will. Because of this “return to roots/origins”, however, most critics tend to overlook Murphy’s ongoing engagement with faith and the Christian tradition in this mature play, started most evidently in *The Sanctuary Lamp* and further developed in *The Gigli Concert*. Fintan O’Toole is one of few who interprets the play through the frame of a Christian perspective and who draws parallels between its two interconnected stories and that of nativity. Building on O’Toole’s view, this chapter will analyse the development of the motif of spiritual quests of the characters and their revolt against God, as well as the play’s overall engagement with the Christian tradition. While doing so, it will examine the characters’ identity problems

¹ Nicholas Grene, “Murphy’s Ireland”, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 220.

² Grene, “Murphy’s Ireland” 220.

³ Jose Lanters, “Playwrights of the Western World: Synge, Murphy, McDonagh”, *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage*, ed. Stephen Watt et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) 205.

⁴ Tom Murphy, *Bailegangaire, Plays 2* (London: Methuen, 2005) 91. All subsequent references will be cited in the text as “BG”.

stemming from the sense of guilt located in the past, which is also closely linked to the crisis of spirit in a religious sense. The focus will be pointed primarily on *Bailegangaire* but marginally, *A Thief of a Christmas*⁵, the play's prequel and an enactment of the story recounted by Mommo in *Bailegangaire*, will also be referred to.

Bailegangaire is a complex play which, as O'Toole points out, "evolved out of what was to be a trilogy of plays tracing the connection between grief and faith, the private sorrow and the public language in which that sorrow turns into aspiration", and the idea behind which was to dramatize religious practice in Ireland, "mov[ing] from Catholicism and its failure [...] to the paganism which underlies Catholic faith in Ireland, and on to what Murphy calls "hysteria", the pagan superstition dressed in Catholic trappings which is the distinctive religion of rural Ireland."⁶ However, after *Brigit*⁷ and *A Thief of a Christmas*, the last part of the trilogy was never written as intended and instead, *Bailegangaire* came to be, integrating both of its predecessors, as well as the third planned play together.⁸ As such, *Bailegangaire* can thus be described as a "culmination of the trilogy", as Grene puts it, yet one which "does not stand in narrative need of its other two parts" as it "subsumes its prequels within itself"⁹. It does so, however, not only on the level of the narrative but also on that of religion, fusing together the images of failed Catholicism with those of paganism at its roots of *Brigit* and *A Thief* and adding to them a prospect of the possible future of man's relationship to God, placing thus *Bailegangaire*, characteristically of Murphy, beyond tragedy, or as the playwright put it himself, "after tragedy"¹⁰.

Bailegangaire presents another idiosyncratic trinity of Murphy's characters searching for transcendence and a way out of their predicament. They are the first ones in Murphy's oeuvre, however, to be solely female, as women are otherwise usually assigned only marginal roles in Murphy's work, as discussed in previous chapters in relation to Maudie and Mona. This extraordinary decision to bring on stage three

⁵ Both plays were first staged in December 1985: *Bailegangaire* in Galway's Druid and *A Thief* in the Abbey Theatre.

⁶ Fintan O'Toole, "Moving Statues", *Tom Murphy: The Politics of Magic* (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994) 230.

⁷ *Brigit* was originally written as a television script and only in September 2014 it will receive a world premiere by the Druid Theatre Company in Galway and will consequently be published.

⁸ O'Toole, "Moving Statues" 230.

⁹ Grene, "Murphy's Ireland" 220-221.

¹⁰ *After Tragedy* was the original title of the collection of three plays by Tom Murphy including *Bailegangaire* (and also *The Gigli Concert*) published by Methuen in 1988. The title suggests the hope which the plays' characters find at the end of their journeys.

women has its roots in an incident after the first performance of *A Whistle in the Dark* in London in 1962 when, as Murphy recollects,

[a] woman came up to me after the play, and she said it was very good, and so on, but ‘if you don’t mind, Tom, you know nothing about women’. So I wanted to write a play for three women, not just based on that incident of the first night, but it did contribute to it.¹¹

The main character, as becomes obvious at the outset of the play by the stage directions, is Mommo, occupying confidently the centre of the stage half sitting, half lying in her ancient double bed and being taken care of by her granddaughter Mary who has succeeded her sister Dolly in this role. Mommo is an eighty-something year old senile woman who fills the space between her naps with rambling and telling endlessly – and without an end – one old story. “The condition of senile dementia”, symptoms of which Mommo undoubtedly demonstrates is, as Nicholas Grene fittingly points out, “almost by definition, that of imprisonment within the self, the inability to connect with a world without.”¹² In Mommo’s case, however this isolated, locked-in state is a result of not only old age but also of an old trauma that has not been vented. It is a trauma of loss which happened more than thirty years earlier and for which she feels guilty without ever having publicly acknowledged the fact. The story which she interminably tells but never finishes, is a proof of it. It is an attempt at a confession, yet one which always breaks down only to be retried – in vain – later, again and again. Having been trapped in her story since the tragic event, her only way out of it is to tell it in full which will bring her relief and propel her to the present that she is currently unable to inhabit.

The story is that of a laughing competition or “how the place called Bochtán – and its ground inhabitants – came to its new appellation, Bailegangaire, the place without laughter.” (BG 92) In the style of the formal seanchas, which is an art of traditional folk tale story-telling based on embellished rhetoric and dramatic suspense¹³, Mommo recounts how two Strangers on the way home from a Christmas fair were forced to seek shelter in an unknown pub because of inclement weather and how they got involved in a laughing competition which ended up in several deaths. The first is the

¹¹ Anthony Roche, “Murphy’s Drama: Tragedy and After”, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill&Macmillan, 1994) 147.

¹² Nicholas Grene, “Talking it Through”, *Talking about Tom Murphy*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 77.

¹³ Grene, “Murphy’s Ireland” 222-223.

death by over-exertion of the Stranger's laughing opponent, Costello, as a consequence of their six-hour contest, second is that of the Strangers' grandson who died in a fire accident while waiting for his grandparents' belated return, and third is the death of the Stranger himself two days later as a consequence of the severe beating the Bochtáns gave him after winning the contest. Mommo, however, never tells the whole story, leaving the tragic part, as well as that revealing her role in it, unsaid. She always stops "at obvious high points of the narrative"¹⁴, as Roche notes, leaving the end open. When Mary tries to bring her to tell more, Mommo reluctantly does so, however, she always cuts the story short with an imagined happy ending: first proclaiming that the competition was dismissed before it could properly start, and later, after having acknowledged the contest, by her assurance that when the Strangers eventually got home, the grandchildren "wor safe an' sound fast asleep on the settle." (BG 160) It is only at a later stage of the play, when Mary conducts her confession, that Mommo actually admits that Costello has died in the contest, which she prompted to go on, and it is entirely up to Mary to finish the story by adding her part which she has experienced herself – the tragic death of Tom, Mommo's grandson and Mary's brother, as well as that of the Stranger, Mommo's husband. For as it becomes gradually obvious from Mommo's obsession with the story and Mary's joining in while translating Mommo's third-person narrative to first person (Mommo: "And what happened to them? Mary: "What happened us all?" (BG 96), and finally from referring to a few of the protagonists by names (Tom, Mary, May Glynn), the story of the Strangers is about no one else but Mommo and her husband Seamus.

The third-person narrative which she opts for, allows her to distance herself from the traumatic event. It reflects the conflict between her desire to confess the trauma and the shame to recognize it as hers. As Roche suggests, quoting Alec Reid's comment on Beckett's *Not I*, "she has suffered an experience so traumatic that she cannot accept it; she must insist that it has happened to somebody else."¹⁵ Should Mommo, however, be compared to the traditional storytellers – *seanchaithe*¹⁶ - with whom she otherwise shares all attributes, it has to be noted that her narrative perspective is one key aspect which differentiates her from them. For as Grene points out, the traditional *seanchaí* would tell his/her story in the first person, "pretending that the events actually happened

¹⁴ Roche 152.

¹⁵ Quoted in Roche 152.

¹⁶ Traditional storyteller, in Irish *seanchaí*, pl. *seanchaithe*.

to him/herself”¹⁷, while Mommo does the very opposite: she pretends that it is someone else, not herself and her husband, that she is talking about. However, while her story serves “to conceal her from her lived experience”, as Roche notes, it also “provid[es] her only means of access to it.”¹⁸ Thus her confession has to be told as a story about Strangers if it is to be told in full, after which it can eventually be owned up to as hers.

Not unlike the Irish Man in *The Gigli Concert* who was not able to make a confession, despite coming to JPW voluntarily, assuming the identity of someone else instead and giving an account of a false history, happier than his own, Mommo, going one step further than him, makes an attempt at confessing her story but dresses it up as that of the Strangers. Both are strategies of evasion, springing from the inability to face the reality as it is. However, only when the hidden self is revealed, or as O’Dwyer describes, “when the self-protecting mythologies have been stripped away”, there arises a possibility of a change and a new start.¹⁹ Mary seems to understand this when she urges Mommo to tell her story in full, to confess all: “Mommo? Live out the – story – finish it, move on to a place where perhaps, we could make some kind of new start.” (BG 147)

Mommo knows well the blessing of the power of revelation from the night of the laughing contest when she publicly confessed her repressed guilt, telling everyone how by her hardness and destructive vengefulness, which Grene compares to “an old sow [...] eat[ing] her farrow”²⁰, she lost all of her sons:

An’ how Pat had come back for the two sheep (that) wor his –
An’ they wor – An’ he was her first born – but you’ll not have them
she told him. Shy Willie inside, quiet by the hearth, but she knew he’d
be able, the spawgs of hands he had on him. ‘Is it going’ fightin’ me
own brother?’ But she told him a brother was one thing, but she was
his mother, an’ them were her orders to give Pat the high road, and no
sheep, one, two or three wor leavin’ the yard. They hurted each other.
An’ how Pat went back empty to his strap of a widdy, and was dead
within a six months. [...] An’ for the sake of an auld ewe stuck in the

¹⁷ Grene, “Murphy’s Ireland” 222.

¹⁸ Roche 153.

¹⁹ Riana O’Dwyer, “Play-Acting and Myth-Making: The Western Plays of Thomas Murphy”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1 Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987) 36.

²⁰ Grene, “Talking it Through” 77.

flood was how she lost two of the others, Jimmy and Michael. (BG 157-158)

What Mommo reveals to the community of Bochtán are, in one word, her misfortunes – a key concept of *Bailegangaire*, echoing throughout the whole play. Misfortunes, as O’Dwyer points out, are “what people try to keep secret and others to find out.” As long as held away from public, “[they] trap people in their guilt and shame” but once vented, they “lose their potency for evil.”²¹ Having disclosed her misfortunes to the public, Mommo has acknowledged her guilt and freed herself from its burden, so that judgments like “[t]hem (*that*) weren’t drowned or died they say she drove away” (BG 96), cannot hurt her any more. The context of Mommo’s confession, however, shifts it to a completely different dimension and changes altogether its meaning. For Mommo offers her misfortunes for recognition to public not as a serious matter but as a laughing stock and along with the whole she pub bemocks their tragic aspect. Thus although the relieving laughter redeems her that night and enables a mutual recognition after many long years between her and her husband in their shared grief (“[a]n’ then, like a girl, [she] smiled at her husband, an’ his smile back so shy, like the boy he was in youth. An’ the moment was for them alone.” (BG 155)), offering what seems like a new start for both, it is only a “fleeting cathartic release as well as a momentary connection”²², since when they get home, another misfortune will await them there and two days later, Mommo will lose her husband forever.

What Murphy dramatizes here is man’s frustration at the realization of his “helplessness in the context of the ultimate”²³, a kind of “disenchantment” in the absurd universe where God afflicts the wretched with perpetual suffering, followed by man’s “kick[ing] out in agony”²⁴ – here expressed in defying laughter. In contrast to the two previously discussed plays, however, here this recognition ends up not with human communion and the overgrowing of God, but with another misfortune, which lends itself to reading as God’s punishment. For where Harry and Francisco start together again at the end of *The Sanctuary Lamp* and where JPW eventually finds the courage to

²¹ O’Dwyer 39.

²² Gleitman, Claire, “‘I’ll see you Yesterday’: Brian Friel, Tom Murphy and the Captivating Past”, *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*, ed. Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2008) 43.

²³ Ivor W. Browne, “Thomas Murphy: The Madness of Genius”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 135.

²⁴ Quoted in Anne F. Kelly, “Bodies and Spirits in Tom Murphy’s Theatre”, *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press 2009) 164.

move on with his life in *The Gigli Concert*, Mommo, her husband and the whole of Bochtán laughing away at the general misery of their lives and mocking “the unbaptised an’ stillborn [...], the wretched and neglected, dilapidated an’ forlorn, the forgotten an’ despairing, ragged an’ dirty” (BG 157-8), get further misfortunes as their answer – the deaths of Costello, the Stranger and the Strangers’ grandson. Further, there is no prospect of any happy future for either of them, since Bochtán is renamed Bailegangaire, the town without laughter, where “the creatures left in that place now can still *smile*, on occasion” and where children laugh only “until they arrive at the age of reason” (BG 92), and Mommo, robbed of the last two males left in the family, becomes trapped in a trauma which will prevent her from any meaningful relationship with her granddaughters.

It is interesting to compare the contrast between the iconoclasm and its consequences in *The Sanctuary Lamp* and in *Bailegangaire*. For where in the former, besides the virulent verbal attacks in the form of Francisco’s tirades, the iconoclasm is also very physical, taking the shape of profanization of the sacred objects and symbols of the Church, while the characters get away with it, the verbal blasphemy of those involved in the laughing competition in *Bailegangaire*, “ridiculing an’ defying of their lot on earth below – [...] driving bellows of refusal at the sky through the roof” (BG 158), ends up in a tragedy. It is a clear diversion from Murphy’s “theatre of transformation” and “of hope”, governing unwaveringly Murphy’s mature work, including *The Sanctuary Lamp* and *The Gigli Concert*, not leaving any doubt about the new possibilities of a happier future for its characters. *Bailegangaire* as a whole obviously does eventually end up in the style of those plays – with redemption and a second chance granted to its characters, but the fact that its embedded story does not, despite including Murphy’s central concept of recognition which usually enables his characters this second chance, is striking. It is the first instance in Murphy’s drama, where recognition takes place and yet is rewarded by a dead end.

O’Toole argues that it is a classical Murphian reversal of rooted meanings. He maintains that Murphy exploits the classical motifs of reversal and recognition in a way which “unites these two devices, since the reversal lies in the different consequences of things being recognized.” That is why within one play, he believes, we get recognition followed by death (the Bochtáns and the Strangers recognizing the misery of their lives and being punished by death), as well as by hope (Mommo recognizing her guilt and Mary, rewarded by love and hope for a happier future). O’Toole believes that the play

thus “reverses Christianity, turning the Christian story of knowledge being punished by banishment into a Promethean tale of knowledge being rewarded by the possibility of homecoming.”²⁵

The difficulty lies in the fact that when Murphy reverses traditional meanings, he does not usually present the original meaning as a comparison to his new one, as is also obvious from the analysis of *The Sanctuary Lamp* and *The Gigli Concert*. Moreover, O’Toole’s interpretation is further complicated by the fact that the mutual recognition among the characters, followed by a possibility of a new start in the action of the play, includes also what could be described as recognition of God, and not his defiance, as in the case of the play’s embedded story. For in Bochtán, apart from recognizing her guilt and misfortunes in public, Mommo also defied God at the same time, laughing at her misfortunes and asking God to send more. At the end of *Bailegangaire*, however, she recognizes her guilt in the new misfortunes after the laughing contest – the death of her husband and grandson (it was her who urged the competition to go on although it could have been dismissed in time and they could have got home, which would have prevented the death of Tom as well as that of Seamus a few days later, and she also suggested the topic which kept them going – misfortunes), but she also perhaps finds her lost humility when she, although uncertainly, returns to God in her prayers: “Hail Holy Queen – Yes? Mother of Mercy – Yes? Hail our lives? – Yes? Our sweetness and our hope.” (SL 160)

These implied cause-and-effect relationships of the two stories: *recognition of one’s miserable self – defiance of God – punishment* on the one hand, and *recognition of one’s miserable self – recognition of God – a new start* on the other, seemingly cast the reading of the play under the Christian moral of humility before God being rewarded by salvation in return. However, Murphy’s opinion of religion, analysed in the previous chapters, clearly denies the possibility of such interpretation, which is further confirmed by Murphy’s repeated revisions of the play, ensuing in the leaving out the passages discussing God’s role in the characters’ misfortunes.

A Thief of a Christmas as well as the first version²⁶ of *Bailegangaire* make it possible to read the defiance of God on the night of the laughing competition in Bochtán with its tragic consequences as God’s punishment. For in *A Thief*, the defiance is

²⁵ Fintan O’Toole, “Murphy’s True Stories”, *The Irish Review*, No.2 (1987): 93-94.

²⁶ *Bailegangaire* was first published in 1986 by The Gallery Press and reprinted with further revisions in 1988, 1993 and 2005 by Methuen.

generally more pronounced while also counter-balanced by the character of John Mahony, warning the blasphemers against their profanity – a role which in the 1986 version of *Bailegangaire* is inscribed in a much more definite shape in the character of Mommo’s father:

OTHERS: [...] Miadh, misfortunes! An’ there’s more to come!

STRANGER’S WIFE Send them! (*To the heavens.*)

COSTELLO Oh, there’s more to come!

OTHERS Send them!

STRANGER We’re waitin’!

COSTELLO We are!

OTHERS We are!

STRANGER For anything else to come, or might care to come!

COSTELLO (*like the others, shouting at the heavens.*) Send us your best!

JOHN Are ye t-t-temptin’ the Almighty? Stand back, clear back, let the k-contest continue! [...] An’-an’ temptin’ God’s goodness!²⁷

As is obvious from the above, compared to *Bailegangaire* the contest in *A Thief* reaches the dimensions of pagan “hysteria”. As is further evident, John might be a God-fearing man who detests the defiance of God of his fellow-citizens, however, he will not stop the competition for the sake of the money which he has bet on his champion. Mommo’s father from the 1986 version of *Bailegangaire* is therefore more clearly and unambiguously a contrary character to the rest of the community, providing a critical view of the events of the night in Bochtán and calling the laughing contest “a double insolence at heaven”²⁸. Throughout the play Mommo quotes many a wisdom of her father, all of which relate to man’s desperate condition on Earth and the consequent need for structure and system, as he explains on an example of a snail: “[T]he snail knows his place [...] and understands the constant parameters – and the need for parameters – in case under consideration, God’s prize piece, the earth. And therefore the snail is free and all he does is in innocence’. (BG I 37) As O’Toole adds, Mommo’s father “also understands that humanity makes mockery of structure and system, being

²⁷ Tom Murphy, *A Thief of a Christmas, Plays 2* (London: Methuen, 2005) 228.

²⁸ Tom Murphy, *Bailegangaire* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1986) 71. All subsequent references will be cited in the text as *BG I*.

like the earwig the flaw in that system.”²⁹ For the most notable of his theories is that of man and the earwig being, as he believes, created by God’s mistake:

I have wrestled with enigmals (*all*) my life-long years. I’ve combed all of creation [...] and, in the wondrous handiwork of God, have found only two flaws, man an’ the earwig. Of what use is man, what utility the earwig, where do they either fit in the system? They are both specimens desperate, without any control, and therefore unfree. One cocks his head, [...] the other his tail. But God will not be mocked. Especially when He was so clever at creating all things else. Still, God must have said, I’ll leave them there an’ see what transpires. [...] Maybe the earwig isn’t doin’ too bad at all. (BG I 72)

Hence the description “double insolence on heaven”, as Mommo’s father calls the laughing contest – for mankind mocks heaven by its very existence, let alone by an act of defiance. His referring to man’s desperateness as a metaphysical condition echoes the philosophy of Schopenhauer whose thoughts, as Lanter’s argues, permeate Murphy’s work as a whole. Lanter’s suggests that Schopenhauer’s characterization as “the philosopher of the pain of secularization, of metaphysical homelessness, of lost original confidence”³⁰, is equally applicable on Murphy who dramatizes this metaphysical homelessness in his theatrical world suffering from God’s indifference. Schopenhauer, however, as Oaks mentions, also “pointed out how religion achieves its greatness when it unsparingly points out the bleakness of the human condition”³¹, which seems to describe the situation of Mommo’s father. It is a condition of endless strife, suffering and frustration to which we subscribe by our “will-to-live” – an instinctual, blind urge, which “can itself be reduced” by using our intellect, through “minimizing one’s desires”.³² However, as Lanter’s points out about Schopenhauer’s theory, human intellect assists man in a twofold way: it is not only a “release from the will” but it also

²⁹ O’Toole, “Murphy’s True Stories” 94.

³⁰ Jose Lanter’s, “Schopenhauer with Hindsight: Tom Murphy’s *Too Late for Logic*”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 89.

³¹ Edward T. Oakes, ed. *German Essays on Religion* (New York: Continuum, 1994) 75.

³² Robert Wicks, “Arthur Schopenhauer”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2014) <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/schopenhauer/>> 28Jul 2014.

Apart from asceticism, Schopenhauer also recognized other ways of overcoming the frustration, for example through moral or aesthetic awareness, the latter of which seems to be the Irish Man’s means for survival and JPW’s ultimate way out of the frustration of his life – in the form of the obsession with the music in *The Gigli Concert*.

“serves the will”³³. That is where Mommo’s father’s critique of man as being “without control” and therefore desperate because/despite of man’s intellect, meets with Schopenhauer’s proposition urging man to control the will-to-live in order to reduce man’s suffering and reach tranquility.

All of the philosophical passages from the original version of *Bailegangaire*, however, have shrunk in the most recent 2005 edition, to Mommo’s recollection of her father as a visitor with “a big stick” who “doesn’t like calling when there is strangers in the house” (BG 108) and who used to call the Bochtáns “a venomous pack of jolter-headed gobshites” (BG 117). Murphy is notorious for constant revising of his work but the radical reduction in the latest version of *Bailegangeire* of the character of Mommo’s father, who in the first edition has functioned as a counter-balance to the “unholy” defiers and who has thus put the events of the tragic night into the context of God’s punishment, quite significantly changes the division of the forces in the play and therewith its overall meaning, leaving it more obscure and ambiguous and definitely open to interpretation, as is obvious from varying opinions by numerous critics³⁴.

Even without the insights of Mommo’s father, however, some of Schopenhauer’s thoughts find resonance in Murphy’s latest version of *Bailegangaire*, although, they are tested by the play’s characters and become partially subverted. His conviction that “[t]he surest way not to become very unhappy is for us not to expect to be very happy,”³⁵ echoes the stories of two notoriously known characters: the biblical Job and Synge’s Maurya from the *Riders to the Sea*, whose features Murphy borrows for his characters, yet again, in a way that suits his own purposes.

Many critics have pointed out, how Mommo, with her life full of hardships, suffering and loss, resembles Maurya³⁶. This heroine of Synge’s is renowned for her “stoic acceptance”³⁷ of life’s hardships and misfortunes, including the premature deaths of all of her sons, as God’s will. As is obvious from her memorable last words in the play, closing with a provision of a decent burial for her departed, “[w]hat more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.”³⁸ Where Maurya gives in to the misfortunes of her life, however, Mommo decides that she has

³³ Lanthers, “Schopenhauer with Hindsight” 88.

³⁴ Roche, for example sees the conclusion of the play as a “humanist consolation”, while O’Toole or Russel read it as a kind of resurrection of God – see the conclusion of this chapter.

³⁵ Quoted in Lanthers 89.

³⁶ Grene, Roche, Lanthers.

³⁷ Roche 149.

³⁸ John Millington Synge, *Riders to the Sea*, in *The Complete Plays* (New York: Random House 1960) 97.

had enough of them and sets to defy “the angels of destruction”³⁹, as Roche puts it, by her laughter. This is when Mommo transforms into Job who, as Vivian Mercier points out, despite his “‘patience’ [which] has become proverbial, is in fact the bitterest complainer in the whole Bible, [...] far from accepting silently whatever misfortune God chooses to inflict him with [and] insisting on his own righteousness [...]”⁴⁰ As Mercier explains, Job’s story tries to illustrate the puzzling question, “why the good often suffer more than the wicked”, to which the answer given is: “because it is the will of God”⁴¹. However, as Mercier points out, Murphy’s characters, Mommo including, are far from being “the good” since they are all sinners (as opposed to Job). And yet, in contrast to Job, who eventually accepts evil “as the price one may be forced to pay for good in this life”, Mommo and other Murphy’s characters take good for granted but reject evil and “even a minor frustration may arouse him or her – usually him – to murderous fury against fellow humans, or impotent yet ingenious blasphemy against God”⁴².

Mommo’s frustration, just like that of Harry and Francisco’s in *The Sanctuary Lamp* or JPW’s in *The Gigli Concert*, is definitely not minor, yet she sets on “driving bellows of refusal at the sky through the roof”, “inviting of what else [misfortunate] might come or *care* to come! (BG 158) By doing so, Mommo subverts one of the myths of the “Irish rural West”, namely that of noble peasants enduring the suffering and hardships of life with silent acceptance and resignation, characteristic of much of the first half of twentieth-century Irish literature. Although her act of defiance is in itself desperate and does not help her out of her predicament, it represents a different stance from that of the above mentioned resignation by Maurya and which Sedlmayer calls the “celebrat[ion of] the human will to survive and carry on in a world full of adversity,”⁴³ which once again reverses Schopenhauer’s idea of the will-to-live. And thus, in spite of the disputable consequences of the defiance, it is worth undertaking an analysis of its very act.

If in *The Gigli Concert* the main tool for the defiance of God and subverting Christian concepts was the Faustian myth, in *Bailegangaire* it is Nietzsche and his God-

³⁹ Roche 149.

⁴⁰ Vivian Mercier, “Noisy Desperation: Murphy and the book of Job”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1 Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 19.

⁴¹ Mercier, “Noisy Desperation” 20.

⁴² Mercier, “Noisy Desperation” 20, 23.

⁴³ Garold Sedlmayer, “Bailegangaire”, *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, ed. Martin Middeke (London: Methuen, 2010) 317.

defying laughter. Similarly to the Zarathustrian Francisco in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, and even to JPW in *The Gigli Concert*, defying God by questioning and ridiculing His statements, Mommo and the whole of Bochtán manage to do the same if not more, by laughing at His work – at the misfortunes which He has inflicted upon the poor people. In making the “afflicted laugh at their afflictions”⁴⁴, as Grene puts it, Murphy achieves a much more superb enactment of defiance than in the other two plays, as he omits direct addressee of the insults and thus makes do without a conversation with/about God, so characteristic of *The Sanctuary Lamp* and still tangible in *The Gigli Concert*. As O’Toole points out, however, Murphy characteristically takes the concept of the Nietzschean defiance a bit further, since he reverses its philosophical and theatrical meaning. As O’Toole explains:

For Nietzsche, that God-defying laughter is a mark of tragedy and of the hero’s division from the unworthy crowd. For Murphy, it is a theatrical move beyond tragedy into black comedy, and the moment at which the crowd, the unwashed of history, becomes collectively heroic.⁴⁵

While what O’Toole describes here could be applied to Mommo’s embedded story of the laughing contest, enacted in full in *A Thief of a Christmas*, where the whole community of Bochtán is redeemed by laughing at the misery of their lives and which could thus justify labeling the play a black comedy, *Bailegangaire* as a whole, despite its complexity, is not a comedy of any sorts. Because of its embedded story, however, there are several features in the play that bear resonances with this genre.

Vivian Mercier argues that “[t]he Irish propensity for macabre humour” has its roots in “the world-renown Irish wakes, at which merriment alternates with or triumphs over mourning, in the very presence of the corpse.”⁴⁶ Mommo’s recounting of the laughing at the deaths of the deceased during the competition in Bochtán, as Richard R. Russel suggests, is then “a kind of oral, figurative wake”⁴⁷, evoking both tears of grief and joy at the same time. Also Mommo’s laugh accompanying the recitation of her misfortunes, which Murphy notates phonetically as “Och hona ho gus haa – haa!”, is

⁴⁴ Grene, “Murphy’s Ireland” 233.

⁴⁵ O’Toole, “Moving Statues” 238.

⁴⁶ Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition* (London: Souvenir Press, 1991) 49.

⁴⁷ Richard R. Russel, “Tom Murphy’s *Bailegangaire* as Comedy of Redemption”, *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 2007): 82.

similarly dichotomous and reflects the duality of the character of wakes, since, as Grene points out, although misleadingly sounding like the traditional Irish lament “ochón”, it is in fact “a cry of triumph”⁴⁸.

O’Toole sees the “God-defying laughter at the face of death” even as “a sort of resurrection of the dead, a coming to life of all the nameless generations of sufferers to blast heaven.”⁴⁹ A literal resurrection reminiscent of that of Shaughraun or Dan Burke in *The Shadow of the Glen* actually happens when Costello, after falling down to ground apparently dead, manages to give one last laugh, eventually winning the competition and thus redeeming all of the Bochtáns who bet against the publican Mahoney on their local champion.⁵⁰ The event of his death is thus “turned into a triumph” which, in the style of a wake, has exceeded the sorrow, whereby, symbolically, “death has been defeated and banished.”⁵¹ However, O’Toole’s theory is again valid only partly – while it to a certain degree describes the situation of the Bochtán community, whose “paganism” allowed them by their financial victory to surpass the tragic occasion of Costello’s death, in *Bailegangaire*, death is not banished, since when the couple get home, they will discover that Tom has died, and not long after, Seamus will die too.

Bailegangaire features many a motif from the Christian tradition, employed by Murphy mostly in a subversive way. O’Toole draws numerous parallels between the events and characters in *Bailegangaire* and the Christian narrative. He compares Mommo’s story to that of nativity and the Strangers’ involuntary stop in Bochtán to Mary and Joseph’s seeking shelter in Bethlehem. Murphy, however, reverses the traditional meaning of this story and so the holy couple are bringing not birth but death, namely that of Costello in Bochtán and of Tom in Strangers’ home on the same night.⁵² Mommo as Mary is somewhat different from Olga in *The Sanctuary Lamp* and Helen in *The Gigli Concert*, whose main attribute was pretend holiness, since rather than abundance of love, Mommo suffers from the lack of it. Her main feature in Bochtán, however, as well as that of her husband’s is grief and guilt, which is why Richard Russel sees them rather as descendants of Adam and Eve, “a post-lapsarian couple

⁴⁸ Grene, “Talking it Through” 78.

⁴⁹ O’Toole, “Moving Statues” 238.

⁵⁰ This ending is hidden but only suggested in *Bailegangaire*, as Costello whispers something in the Stranger’s ear before he collapses. His trick and victory is fully revealed in *A Thief of a Christmas*, which enacts the whole laughing contest in full.

⁵¹ O’Toole, “Moving Statues” 239.

⁵² O’Toole, “Moving Statues” 240.

forced to suffer hardships because of the lingering effects of the original sin.”⁵³ Even to Russel, however, *Bailegangaire* is “a very Irish nativity that restores redemptive hope to this most hopeless of families.”⁵⁴

The story of nativity is that of Christmas, which is also the time in which Mommo’s story is set. However, as the title *A Thief of a Christmas* suggests and as the action of the story itself reveals, it is about “a black Christmas as much as a white one”⁵⁵, as O’Toole reveals. For apart from the Strangers as Mary and Joseph bringing death instead of life, “the traditional image of Christmas as time of plenty” is mocked by the stock at the Christmas fair being unsalable and the “the prayers of supplication and thanks offered by the faithful [...] become shouts and howls of defiance delivered at God.”⁵⁶

Despite his treating some of the concepts of Christianity in a subversive way, Russel maintains that Murphy’s work cannot deny acknowledgement and influence of “the potential narrative and moral strengths of the Bible”. He argues that the life stories of the three women and their predicaments in *Bailegangaire*, “echo the main divisions of the grand Christian narrative of Fall, Resurrection and Redemption, mov[ing] into a freedom from their bondage to sin and guilt.”⁵⁷

Sin and guilt is a common denominator for all three women, responsible for the present desperate situation in the family. Although these stem from different events in their lives, at their root is one tragic event they all share – the death of Tom, Mommo’s grandson and Mary and Dolly’s brother. However, as Grene points out, the situation is “the more desperate because [although] it is one they share, [they] can apparently only experience [it] alone”⁵⁸ since they are unable to communicate with each other. Despite being the last surviving members of the once big family, the women thus live on their isolated lives, unable to relate to each other in any way: Mommo is locked in her thirty year old story, Marry in her loneliness and search for home, and Dolly in her failed marriage and unwanted pregnancy.

Mommo’s guilt in Tom’s death has been discussed earlier. However, Dolly and Mary (the latter especially) feel responsible for the tragic event too, as is obvious from Dolly planning to call the baby Tom, be it a boy or a girl, and from Mary’s choice of a

⁵³ Russel 83.

⁵⁴ Russel 81.

⁵⁵ O’Toole, “Moving Statues” 240.

⁵⁶ O’Toole, “Moving Statues” 240.

⁵⁷ Russel 81, 92.

⁵⁸ Grene, “Talking it Through” 78.

nursing career which, as Lanthers points out, is nothing else but an atonement for her failure to save her brother's life after an accident which could have been prevented altogether, had she minded him more carefully⁵⁹. Ironically, she abandons her career only to become a permanent caregiver to ungrateful Mommo, "still haunted by a sense of misplaced responsibility."⁶⁰

The fact that Mommo does not recognize Mary as her granddaughter and rejects to call her by her name, addressing her instead disdainfully as "miss", is very significant in the play. It is just as willful blocking out as that of the tragic end of her story revealing her guilt. If there is to be a new start, however, recognition must take place. And so Mary makes Mommo in what Roche terms their "theatrical collaboration"⁶¹ tell the whole story and recognize it as hers after which, miraculously, Mary is eventually also recognized. Also the names of Mommo's husband Seamus and grandson Tom are for the first time pronounced in their right context, namely in Mommo's prayer, which marks Mommo's final recognition of her trauma of loss. Her "postponed grief"⁶² is thus eventually vented in a renewed ability to feel: "And sure a tear isn't such a bad thing, Mary, and haven't we everything we need here, the two of us." (BG 162) As Russel adds, the banished members of the family, who were blocked out because of the troublesome memories, are thus eventually readmitted, which once again reunites the family and allows it to "emerge from their participation in the trans-generational tragedy of their lives"⁶³.

What brings the family back together is thus an act of recognition – of each other and of one's sinful self, which in return brings about mutual reconciliations. The sisters reconcile with each other, very notably, in the style of Mommo in Bochtán long ago – by laughing at their own misfortunes: "Good man 'Josie'! ... And you're 'Josie's' aunt! [...] Jesus, misfortunes!" (BG 155) Unlike Mommo, however, they do not defy God while doing so – on the contrary: they resurrect Him symbolically when Mary (with an apt name in this context) decides to adopt Dolly's illegitimate baby, including him in the hopefully happy future of the family in her concluding prophecy:

⁵⁹ Lanthers, "Playwrights of the Western World" 211.

⁶⁰ Russel 87.

⁶¹ Roche 156- 157.

⁶² O'Toole, "Moving Statues" 245.

⁶³ Russel, 90, 80.

It's a strange old place alright, in whatever wisdom He has to have made it this way. But in whatever wisdom there is, in the year 1984, it was decided to give that – fambly ... of strangers another chance, and a brand new baby to gladden their home. (BG 162)

Roche reads these final lines as “not of heavenly but of humanist consolation, acknowledging the second chance afforded them through their opening up Mommo’s past-fixated narrative into the mutually enacted dramatic present.”⁶⁴ O’Toole and Russel, on the other hand, interpret the last words as a kind of re-annunciation, since the God who had been previously defied and dead, they see now as resurrected by Mary’s “accept[ance of] God’s sovereignty over her family”⁶⁵, suggested further by the coming birth of Christ-child Tom.

Although Murphy undoubtedly composed the nativity story, as well as much of Christian symbolism, into the dramatic structure of *Bailegangaire* with an obvious design in his mind, claiming that by resurrecting God at the end of the play Murphy – and his characters – returned to God in an orthodox sense, would be a simplification. Equally, maintaining that the play’s end offers merely a “humanist consolation” discards Murphy’s deep and ongoing engagement with faith in his drama.

It is important to view the ending of the play in relation to its embedded story, for the very conclusion merges together the two stories and links the past to the present. It has been noted earlier, that both stories follow the same pattern, namely that of the nativity story. Whereas one of them ends up with death, however, the other closes with the coming of new life. It is not enough, nevertheless, to see the latter one as a mere reversal of the former, for Murphy in his play does not simply show what was (and what must be rejected), as opposed to what is (which is the rejection of it). It is the very fact that the two stories intersect and that this intersection has to be acknowledged, if the future shall be habitable for the characters, that is the key to understanding the conclusion. Murphy tries to suggest that the future lies in the recognition of the past, not in its denial. That is why Mary, who initially tried to stop Mommo from telling her story, eventually decides to let her to say all. She realizes that their common future lies not in the blocking out, but in the embrace of the past. That is also why in her conclusive passage of the play, she adopts Mommo’s narrative style, for just like

⁶⁴ Roche 160.

⁶⁵ Russel 90.

Mommo eventually recognized Mary, so Mary recognizes Mommo and her guilty past. This reconciliation of the past and the present is represented by Mary's decision to stay with her grandmother, who will therefore not be put in the nursing home, and their future is embodied in Dolly's unborn baby which, despite Dolly's threats to prevent so, will "gladden their home". (BG 162) Thereby also the two nativity stories merge into one, namely that with the traditional ending.

To apply this on the question of God echoing throughout the whole play, yet which is not as straightforward as in the previously discussed plays, the ending could, again, be seen as the merging and reconciliation of two worlds in which God plays different roles: of the old world with God-fearing and superstitious people, and of the contemporary world in which God is dead. Murphy's play seems to suggest that the possible future relationship with God lies not in a complete denial of the past, including the defiance of God, but in some kind of embrace of the God of past and in His transformation for the future. That is why Mary in her final lines resurrects God by calling His name and accepting his "sovereignty". He is still called God but it is not the God of Mommo's father's times. It is a God of "whatever wisdom there is" (BG 162) and whose synonyms are possibility, hope and future. He is belief itself.

In *Bailegangaire* Murphy thus seems to have made a certain progress in the question of God. While *The Sanctuary Lamp* and *The Gigli Concert* dramatized the critique and even replacement of the old God and His symbols, *Bailegangaire* seems in a reconciliatory way to embrace this God and, while preserving its form, to try to engulf it with a new meaning. It is a transformation reminiscent of the attempts of JPW to magically transform his patient in *The Gigli Concert* and who said about his method that it is "simply new mind over the old matter"⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ Tom Murphy, *The Gigli Concert, Plays 3* (London: Methuen, 2005) 238.

5. Conclusion

Murphy's complicated relationship with the Catholic Church and obstinate anti-clericalism are notorious. As he said on account of institutionalized religion, "church has got between man and the divine" and "has stopped what could possibly be the personal conversion to one's own spirit"¹. Murphy believes that "everybody has some form of apprehension of the spirit within himself" and that there are different means of accessing it². None of them goes through the Church as an institution, though. His fascination with religion and faith has been an ongoing process for Murphy in his dramatic work, reaching its climax in his mature plays of the late 1970s and early 1980s, represented in this thesis by – *The Sanctuary Lamp*, *The Gigli Concert* and *Bailegangaire*. All three plays demonstrate a profound engagement with faith; they are non-religious plays, yet they are about religion. For Murphy tries to explore in these plays the relationship between man and God in contemporary world.

Murphy's characters usually have a complicated relationship with God, despite the fact that in the world they inhabit, God is dead. They are desperate and despairing creatures, suffering from the metaphysical homelessness, which is why Christopher Murray describes them as "painfully orphaned"³ and Nicholas Grene calls them "children of loss"⁴. This loss characterizes them in two ways: they are themselves lost – metaphysical orphans trying to make sense of their lives in the universe lacking any purpose without God's guiding hand, while their lives are also full of loss, grief and pain. They are Job-like characters, complaining about God's justice (or rather injustice), reproaching Him, questioning Him and even defying Him at times, yet yearning for some kind of transcendence which they eventually find in the human realm, namely through the ability to love and to forgive and which is enabled by their courage to face the miserable reality of their lives from which they previously fled at the crossroads between fight and flight. This conflict between mocking and searching for the divine is what Murray believes that characterizes Murphy's "rough and holy theatre"⁵. The quest for secular redemption and transcendence, however, is dramatized differently in all

¹ Tom Murphy, Interview with John Waters, *In Dublin*, May 1986: 27.

² Tom Murphy Interview 27.

³ Murray 9.

⁴ Nicholas Grene, "Tom Murphy and the Children of Loss", *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 209.

⁵ Christopher Murray, "The Rough and Holy Theatre of Thomas Murphy", *Irish University Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 9.

three plays and reflects the playwrights' gradual evolution in his wrestle with the question of God.

In *The Sanctuary Lamp* Murphy to a certain extent “settles his private account with the Catholic Church”⁶, accusing the institution, through the character of Francisco, of many an evil committed in the name of God. In this play, which Murphy described as “a religious play in the sense of personal religion as against institutionalized religion”⁷, the Catholic Church is deconstructed by emptying its traditional concepts and symbols and by turning them literally upside down, suggesting that those symbols and concepts have no value anymore and have to be reinvented. *The Sanctuary Lamp* is definitely more rough than holy, but despite its rage and physicality verging on iconoclasm, the play, however, cannot deny the underlying yearning for faith and for the divine, expressed most explicitly by Harry in his attempt at dialogue with the sanctuary lamp, but also by the “Zarathustrian priest” Francisco who reveals in his beatific vision his hope of reaching salvation. The play overflows in religious imagery and symbolism which reflect Murphy’s attempt to cover a lot of ground in the question of man and God. In his next plays, however, he will be more sophisticated in his eclecticism and subtlety.

In *The Gigli Concert* Murphy breaks free from the immediate rage at the Christian doctrine poured out in *The Sanctuary Lamp* and moves on to a different level. This could not be done, however, without the “heavy jobs” of the “demolition gang” in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, “clearing old structures for new sites”⁸, as Henderson puts it. In the place of the Church, Murphy finds music as the vehicle for mediating the divine in *The Gigli Concert*, and closely tying it to the motif of magic and the Faustian myth, he manages to subvert the basic Christian concept of salvation and damnation. For Murphy has now mastered the method of reversal which allows him to play freely with traditional meanings and concepts based on western philosophy and theology. As opposed to Harry and Francisco, however, JPW and the Irish Man are clearly “great lapsed churchgoing people” (GC 214), as the former puts it, with very little interest in religion and it is definitely not a philosophical/theological matter that brought them together, as in the case of *The Sanctuary Lamp*. The Irish Man is suffering with what

⁶ Alexandra Poulain, “Fable and vision: *The Morning After Optimism* and *The Sanctuary Lamp*”, *Talking about Tom Murphy*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 51.

⁷ Tom Murphy Interview 27.

⁸ Lynda Henderson, “Men, Women and the Life of the Spirit in Tom Murphy’s Plays” *Irish Writers and Their Creative Process*, ed. Jacqueline Genet (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1996) 88.

could be called “spiritual emptiness”⁹, yet rather than yearning for God, he is yearning for art and beauty which, in the material world that he took for his own, has vanished from his life and which in fact is a way to feel the divine, as JPW eventually discovers. The tractates about the nature and purpose of God, characteristic of *The Sanctuary Lamp*, abate in *The Gigli Concert* and find echo only in JPW’s theory about God having “got it wrong” for he should have called himself “I am who may be” (GC 211), a term borrowed from Richard Kearney and a key phrase of Murphy’s “theatre of the possible”¹⁰, which JPW – and Murphy – readily apply on man’s situation, letting man transcend “God’s stony limits on humanity”¹¹ and transforming God in return.

Bailegangaire is in many ways different from the two previous plays. It has a more traditional form and it also returns to the concept of God in a more reconciliatory way. For where *The Sanctuary Lamp* criticized God as ineffectual and unhelpful and *The Gigli Concert* tried to reinvent God by changing His name, *Bailegangaire* is mature enough to defy as well as evoke God without speculating about his nature. In *Bailegangaire*, Murphy still operates with his tools of employing Christian imagery and the method of reversal, however, he is much more subtle and also more intricate and the overall reading of the play is thus much less straightforward than in the other two plays. For *Bailegangaire* is a complex play combining two stories from different time frames, which eventually come together to enable the future. Both of them have the shape of the nativity story, however, while the first story ends up with death, the other offers hope in the symbol of a new life. Since in the former God is defied and in the latter God is resurrected by the coming Christ-child, *Bailegangaire* seems, in the context of Murphy’s other two discussed plays, to be going against his previous attempts. By the resurrection, however, Murphy tries to resurrect hope. For the God Murphy brings back to life is more of an embodiment of hope itself rather than any superior being. It is an expression of man’s belief in a better future. By calling the hope God, Murphy is trying suggest that this future is possible only if we embrace our past, including the God of the past, whom we engulf with new meaning while calling Him His old name. O’Toole said about the play’s conclusion that “if this is not exactly an expression of faith, it is at least

⁹ Ben Barnes, “The Fell of Dark: *The Gigli Concert*”, *Alive in Time: The Enduring Drama of Tom Murphy*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010) 156.

¹⁰ Csilla Bertha, “‘Rituals of a Lost Faith’?: Murphy’s Theatre of the Possible”, *Alive in Time: The Enduring Drama of Tom Murphy*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010) 275.

¹¹ Fintan O’Toole, Introduction to *Plays 2* (London: Methuen, 2005) xii.

a coming to terms with God.”¹² That seems to recall the statement of Ivor Browne, who believes that Murphy in his “answering back” through his writing, is “answering back the power of God” which makes man feel somewhat “helpless[...] in the context of the ultimate”:

It all seems mindless, chaotic, without reason, unless one identifies with it, accepts that one is part of it, part of the ongoing creative happening, and then it doesn't have to make sense at all. One simply contributes to the whole.¹³

Bailegangaire's engagement with faith is very profound but also very complex. What is certain is that in this play, Murphy comes closer to the “holy”, rather than the “rough” theatre and thereby moves to the opposite side of the spectrum from that which marked the start of his engagement with the question of God in *The Sanctuary Lamp*. However, despite this development which differentiates the three discussed plays from each other, what is undeniable in all of them, is the deep faith and belief which is the driving force of all characters and which makes it possible for them to look towards the future.

As Richard Kearney notes, “the philosophical question of God is far from dead” and “the dialogue between philosophy and religion is one of the most burning intellectual tasks of our time”¹⁴. And thus it is hopefully not shameful to conclude by saying that just as there is no definite answer to the question of God, there is none to the question to what ends Murphy turns this mystery into a dramatic possibility.

¹² Fintan O'Toole, “Murphy's True Stories”, *The Irish Review*, No. 2 (1987): 94.

¹³ Ivor W. Browne, “Thomas Murphy: The Madness of Genius”, *Irish University Review*, 17.1, Thomas Murphy Issue (Spring 1987): 135.

¹⁴ Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington IN: Indiana UP, 2001) 3.

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