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ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY A AMERIKANISTIKY

Troubles on Stage: Theatrical Representation of the Conflict in Northern Ireland

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Prague, 6 September 2007)

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Permission:

Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the diploma thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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The choice of plays and social segmentation

The aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which the conflict in Northern Ireland, especially the period labelled as “the Troubles”, was reflected in modern Irish drama. The thesis provides a close reading of three Irish plays which have achieved a considerable critical acclaim. Each of the plays is analysed from three different points of view: religion, gender and locale; the three plays chosen for the following discussion are: Christina Reid’s play *Tea in a China Cup*, produced for the first time at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, in 1983, Frank McGuinness’s *Carthaginians*, originally performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1988 and *At the Black Pig’s Dyke*, written by Vincent Woods, premiered at the Druid Lane Theatre, Galway in 1992.

The choice of the plays was determined by several criteria. Firstly, the selected plays were not written as an immediate reaction to the outbreak of the Troubles – the oldest of them dating back to the early 80’s, i.e. more than a decade after the escalation of violence at the end of 1960’s. The reason for choosing plays which are (as regards their origin) detached time-wise from the events they describe was led by the effort not to include plays written in the heat of the moment, without much artistic premeditation.

On the other hand, all three plays appeared before the 1994 IRA ceasefire, which was generally regarded as an unprecedented milestone in the history of Northern Ireland: “Few people in Ireland have forgotten where they were when they heard the news that after twenty-five years of conflict and more than 3,000 deaths the IRA [...] had finally decided to call a halt. [...] One thing was clear: Northern Ireland had entered a new phase.”¹ Therefore, the selected plays have originated in a period of political stasis in which the conflict remained caught between repeatedly disappointed hopes for a solution.

The following discussion does not intend to draw conclusions about the current situation in Northern Ireland and it is by no means a general survey. It focuses on a specific era in the history of Northern Ireland – the years which followed the outbreak of the conflict between Protestant majority and Catholic minority. The analysis of the plays enables a closer look at several important aspects of the Northern Irish society and the ways in which these aspects were at that time depicted in drama.

Another factor which influenced the initial process of selection was the point of view of each of the plays in respect to the religious segmentation in the province. The story of *Tea*

¹ David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 199.

in a China Cup is narrated solely from a Protestant perspective, whereas McGuinness's *Carthaginians* represents a portrayal of members (though not exactly typical) of the Catholic community. The third play, *At the Black Pig's Dyke*, being a history of a mixed marriage, is deliberately religiously equivocal. Similarly, when it comes to the setting of the plays, each is set in a different geographical location, significant in the conflict – Belfast (*Tea in a China Cup*), Derry (*Carthaginians*) and the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic (*At the Black Pig's Dyke*). Finally, there is also a regular distribution according to the gender orientation: Christina Reid focuses on women's lives, Vincent Woods's play (despite being framed by the story of three women in one family line) primarily reveals the way in which the men respond to the pressure caused by the conflict. Frank McGuinness pays equal attention to both sexes in *Carthaginians*, challenging, nevertheless, traditional gender roles, mainly by introducing the character of an extroverted homosexual as well as by the metatheatrical device of a play-within-the play, which utilizes gender reversal.

Each of the selected plays will be discussed from three different aspects – religion, gender and locale. These three notions represent three important indicators of social segmentation in Northern Irish society. The theory of social segmentation, or the theory of cleavages, is a concept used initially in political science. It was originally formulated by Norwegian sociologist and political theorist Stein Rokkan (1921-1979) who noticed the existence of several social frictions which evolved in the Western society after the industrial Revolution.² These social frictions are also called cleavages and in Rokkan's theory they indicate the political behaviour of a society as well as popular support of respective political parties. According to Rokkan, there are four basic cleavages: centre vs. periphery (represented by nationalist or separatist parties), religious affiliation (secular and religious parties), owners vs. workers (Social-Democratic, Liberal and Conservative parties) and urban vs. rural (agrarian parties).³ Rokkan himself was primarily interested in the cleavages because of their potential to determine the behaviour of voters; however, the social segmentation which is now believed to be more numerous than the above mentioned four, manifests itself in every sphere of society. In this thesis, two cleavages of the original set defined by Rokkan will be discussed (centre vs. periphery and religious affiliation) together with the issue of gender, one of the most frequently debated indicators of social segmentation in recent decades.

² Maximilián Strmiska et al, *Politické strany moderní Evropy* (Praha: Portál, 2005) 124.

³ Strmiska 124.

Interestingly, although the social friction which defines the socio-economic status of the population (defined as an ‘owner-worker’ opposition or ‘class consciousness’) was the key concept of Rokkan’s theory, its significance for the 20th century Northern Irish society was to a certain extent secondary. Historically, Northern Ireland, as a territory which has spent a considerable part of its history under control of the United Kingdom, had absorbed the principles of the class structure dominating the British society. After the partition of Ireland in 1921, the importance of the class as a primary source of social segmentation was challenged by religious affiliation due to constant conflict between the Protestant majority and Catholic minority thus creating an unstable political milieu in NI. During the following years the religious aspect seemed to prevail over the otherwise dominating class. However, the religious cleavage has existed alongside the class division and its significance had always grown when the conflict between the two communities escalated. This trend of increasing religious awareness manifested itself especially during the Troubles, therefore religion rather than class will be discussed in the following comparative study.

In *Contemporary Northern Irish Society*, Colin Coulter argues that “Socioeconomic status represents a strictly secondary source of political identity in the six counties. While the political alliances forged within the province routinely transcend class barriers, only rarely do they supersede ethnoreligious distinction.”⁴ In other words, when compared to ethnoreligious sentiment, class consciousness fails to be the primary source of identification for people from Northern Ireland – being a Protestant or a Catholic is more telling than being working or middle class.

The issue of class, though not to be discussed in detail, will not be entirely omitted in this thesis, as all three plays are set in a working class environment, both urban (*Carthaginians* and *Tea in a China Cup*) and rural (*At the Black Pig’s Dyke*). Indeed, it is the members of the respective Northern Irish working classes who advocate most vehemently the principle of ethnoreligious separation, not realising that they may have more in common with workers from the other community than with “their own” superior classes. According to Coulter, “socioeconomic status rarely enjoys an effective power comparable to that of ethnicity or nationalism largely because it fails to produce an equally potent symbolic programme.”⁵ The innumerable amount of myths, stories, songs and images which nurture the ethnoreligious sentiments on both sides of the conflict usually prove to be more attractive than

⁴ Colin Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society: An Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 1999) 96.

⁵ Coulter 99.

clear and simple facts – and the class which is most susceptible to such interpretations is the working class. During the Troubles, the worst cases of sectarian violence took place in working class areas, where the population served equally as initiators and victims of the violence. According to Coulter, “most of those who have played a direct role in the conflict have been drawn from working class communities,”⁶ joining both the official and unofficial organisations involved in the violence.

⁶ Coulter 71.

Theatrical representation of the Troubles:

The reality of the Troubles has, similarly to many other conflicts affecting the society so enormously, gradually sought its expression in an artistic form. However, despite the advantages of the dramatic representation (such as the immediate impact or wider audiences) the first years following the outbreak of violence at the end of the 1960s did not experience any immediate boom of politically oriented plays. In *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*, Tom Maguire quotes Ian Hill who has argued that “there has indeed been little written in Irish theatre which tackles the reality of The Troubles head on.”⁷ Maguire summarizes the situation in early 1970s Belfast: “while other theatres closed, a staple fare of uncontroversial Irish classics at The Lyric [Theatre] offered respite from the imploding civil society and collapsing state outside.”⁸ As the solution of the conflict seemed to be disappearing in the distance rather than drawing closer with the beginning of the new decade, this attitude has changed and theatre practitioners soon adopted a more engaged posture.

In the early 1970’s, the first plays inspired by the reality of the sectarian conflict suffered from one common denominator – schematic design. According to Maguire, the playwrights created “a separate genre of ‘Troubles plays’ which rapidly degenerated into hackneyed representations.”⁹ In *Carthaginians* Frank McGuinness uses the principle of the play-within-the-play to make his characters perform such a clichéd melodrama on stage – *The Burning Balaclava* is a parody and a perfect embodiment of Maguire’s “degenerated Troubles play” including a mixed young couple in love, bigoted Catholic mother, vicious RUC member, nameless British soldier, distraught priest and a final shootout etc. Therefore, one of the criteria for choosing the plays to be discussed in this thesis was also a certain time lag separating the outbreak of the Troubles from the time in which the plays were written/performed: *Tea in a China Cup* in 1983, *Carthaginians* 1988 and *At the Black Pig’s Dyke* in 1992. It also seems that after a lapse of time, the theatre makers are encouraged to employ more complex and intriguing concepts of the conflict.

Maguire further admits that the theatrical representation of the Northern Irish conflict has always faced difficulties and distinguishes two chief sources of complications: Firstly, it

⁷ Ian Hill qtd in Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006) 22.

⁸ Maguire 22.

⁹ Maguire 22.

is the way in which the conflict has already been mediated to the prospective spectators – in other words, “the familiarity of such events in the consciousness of the audience, both through direct experience and through representations in the press and other media.”¹⁰ Secondly, the authors themselves frequently struggle to discover the most convenient dramatic form; the act “of finding a form of representation which fulfils the function intended by the theatre makers”¹¹ became a much debated issue of theatre criticism.

As for the dramatic representation of the sectarian conflict in the province as such, Maguire recognises two main types of dramatic expression, two “dominant poles between which theatre makers have steered.”¹²

One pole is constituted by performances which have sought to confront the audience with the reality from which they have been protected by their own strategies of reception or by the intervention of forms of censorship and propaganda by those responsible for the mediation of that reality in print and broadcast media. [...] The second pole is the mode of performance which has sought to alienate the audience from its experience of actuality and its own strategies for selective perception and reception. By creating a distancing effect through its subject matter, its form and context, such performances have tried to break down the habituated response of the spectator.¹³

The first type of dramatic representation is basically equivalent to the western tradition of realist drama, based on theatrical illusion and the missing fourth-wall convention – “at its historical roots in naturalism [...], realism had concerned itself with how individuals act under environmental pressures, offering a critique of how society determined the conditions under which its members lived, particularly in extending the focus of drama beyond the aristocratic and upper classes.”¹⁴ The genre of realist drama offers numerous possibilities of its actual manifestation: in *Tea in a China Cup* Christina Reid does not intend to deprive theatre audience of the illusion. Nevertheless, the play is structured as a sequence of flashbacks and the action on stage moves repeatedly back and forth among several time levels – at least in this respect Reid’s play does not represent the typical realist drama.

The second type of theatrical representation is the opposite of realism. According to Maguire, “if realism is the most illusionist of forms, the form which relies on the recognition of proximity, its antithesis is performance which signals its own theatricality, distancing the

¹⁰ Maguire 21.

¹¹ Maguire 21.

¹² Maguire 25.

¹³ Maguire 25.

¹⁴ Maguire 22-23.

audience from what is being represented.”¹⁵ In other words, the second method (which was widely popularised by Bertolt Brecht) is simultaneously working with both the presented action and with the act of representation, thus breaking through the restrictions imposed on the narrative by realism.

Both McGuinness’s *Cathaginians* and Woods’s *At the Black Pig’s Dyke* include scenes which would fit into Maguire’s definition of the second type of dramatic representation, though the plays themselves still operate within the realm of theatrical illusion. In *Carthaginians*, the distancing effect is achieved by the above mentioned play-within-the-play. Woods uses, in opposition to McGuinness, a method of absolute permeability of different environments and time levels in his play, thus disrupting “the unitary dramatic framework in terms of the multiplication of frames.”¹⁶ Moreover, in *The Politics of Drama and Theatre*, G. Holderness argues that:

The kind of theatre (such as that of Brecht) which lays bare the device, exposes the mechanisms of its own construction [...] can be regarded, whatever its ostensible political content, as politically more progressive – because it targets the most powerful weapon of social control, ideology – than a theatre which collaborates in form and content with a hegemonic ideology and with dominant cultural forms.¹⁷

Indeed, ideology has always been “a powerful weapon of social control” on both sides of the Northern Irish border. As the Troubles in Northern Ireland did not seem to be resolved soon, the playwrights and theatre practitioners gradually began to diverge from the purely realistic, agit-prop plays to the second type of dramatic representation, the one which “targets” and questions the ideologies which keep the conflict alive.

¹⁵ Maguire 24.

¹⁶ M. Bleeker qtd. in Maguire 25.

¹⁷ G. Holderness qtd. in Maguire 24.

A note about the historical context

The roots of the conflict in Northern Ireland are deeply embedded in the history of the island. The following note discusses the aspects that are most relevant for the plays under discussion, i.e. primarily the turbulent years after the outbreak of violence in late 1960s, together with a few necessary flashbacks into Irish history. Apart from being mentioned in the plays themselves, the following historical events represent important keystones in both Catholic and Protestant discourse. The events will be presented in chronological order.

The first event to be mentioned is also essential for the understanding of the origins of animosities which exist between the two communities in Northern Ireland. In July 1690, James II, the Catholic pretender to the throne, and his Irish supporters were defeated by the army of the new Protestant king of England, William of Orange, in the battle on the river Boyne. Since the so called “Plantation of Ulster” at the beginning of the 17th century, the northern part of Ireland was populated mostly by Protestant settlers¹⁸, and those who supported king William in the battle came predominantly from Ulster.¹⁹ Especially in unionist discourse, the Battle of the Boyne is a historical moment which has once and for all divided the people of Ireland into the winners and the defeated; the annual celebrations of King William’s victory – the Orange Order parades – have been traditionally used as an opportunity to assert Protestant supremacy over the Catholic population of Ireland.²⁰

The Orange Order²¹ was officially founded in 1795 as a consequence of one of the many violent clashes between Catholic and Protestant groups in county Armagh.²² Gradually, the purpose of the annual marches of the Orangemen has changed from a celebration of Protestant religious and moral credo into sheer provocation of the Catholic community and an excuse for the escalation of sectarian violence. In expectation of the annual confrontation, the public has labelled the days immediately preceding 12 July – the actual day of the victory – as “the marching season.”²³ This shift of attitude is recounted in Christina Reid’s play *Tea in a*

¹⁸ Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2005) 115.

¹⁹ Bardon 163.

²⁰ There was, however, another significant victory of King William a year later, near the village of Aughrim. According to Bardon, „over time the Williamite triumphs of 1 July 1690 and 12 July 1691 – partly as a result of the eighteenth-century shift from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar – fused into one celebration.“ (Bardon 165)

²¹ Orange Order or the Loyal Orange Institution is the largest of three main Loyal Orders; the others being the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the Royal Black Institution; it is currently estimated to have between 80,000 to 100,000 members in NI (source: CAIN Web Service)

²² Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2005) 226.

²³ Bardon 226.

China Cup – for one of the characters, Beth, is the tense atmosphere during the marching season in the early 1970s different from the pride and joy felt by her mother years ago.

Traditionally, Protestant celebrations of the 12 July anniversary have been an opportunity to show the loyalty of Northern Irish Protestants to the British monarchy. Apart from this demonstration of loyalty, another way to prove one's devotedness to the Crown was active service in the British army. In this respect, especially World War One turned out to be a crucible for volunteers from Ireland. The soldiers, who recruited largely from Ulster²⁴, joined the British forces on the Continent. Since they were frequently used as army vanguard, the number of casualties among Irish soldiers was very high²⁵. The war experience of the working class men from Belfast who decided to serve the King and Country in both world wars is also depicted in Reid's play. The play contrasts the enthusiasm of the Ulster volunteers and the indifference on the part of the British army officials. However, in unionist discourse, the lives sacrificed by soldiers from Ulster in both world wars have irreversibly tied Northern Ireland to Great Britain.

The unofficial partition of Ireland, based on ethno-religious difference between the Protestant North and the Catholic South became definite and legal in 1921 by the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty²⁶. Ireland was officially divided into the Irish Free State, a dominion within the Commonwealth, and Northern Ireland which remained part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland comprised six of the nine historical counties of Ulster (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone), populated mostly by Protestants.²⁷ However, the new border separated the three remaining counties (Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan) from the rest of Ulster, not taking into account those regions along the borderline which had a mixed or even a largely Catholic population on the Northern Irish side - and *vice versa*. Officially, a Boundary Commission²⁸ was established to re-examine the demographic situation along the border and make necessary changes according to the religious affiliation of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, only minor changes have ever been suggested and the whole issue was eventually abandoned.

²⁴ Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2005) 448-9.

²⁵ Bardon 455.

²⁶ Bardon 482-3.

²⁷ Bardon 484.

²⁸ The Boundary Commission was provided for in Article XII of the Anglo-Irish Peace Treaty, signed in December 1921. Its report on frontier adjustments should have been completed by November 1925. Because of the unofficial though very accurate map showing only a minor changes to the frontier published in the *Morning Post* prior to the official publication of the report, the powers of the Commission were revoked, the report suppressed and the existing border maintained. (Bardon 505-8.)

Unsurprisingly, the tensions existing on both sides of the border did not disappear and the people living in those areas were left to cope with the problem by themselves. Especially after the outbreak of violence in the late 1960s, the Northern Irish authorities were losing control in the districts around the borderline, which soon gained an unflattering nickname – “the Bandit Country”.²⁹ This aspect of the conflict is recounted in Vincent Woods’ play *At the Black Pig’s Dyke*, where the author attempted to portray the hopelessness of life in the borderline districts on a tragic destiny of three families in three generations. Moreover, for many nationalists the existence of the border remains one of the most tangible reminders of the injustice done to the Irish people – a physical barrier which has divided the island into two separate worlds, in which not everyone was lucky enough to find themselves on the desired side of the frontier.

The last historical phenomenon to be mentioned are the Troubles³⁰ themselves, together with the preceding emergence of the Civil Rights Movement and the peace marches in the second half of the 1960s.³¹ These activities were not an exclusively Northern Irish issue, as public awareness and civil rights demonstrations were spreading all over Europe in the late sixties. What was significant for the situation in Northern Ireland was the reaction to these public activities. Given that the segregation and discrimination policies adopted by Northern Irish institutions were aimed chiefly at the Catholics, the Civil Rights Movement naturally focused on the problems of the Catholic community and strove to make the lingering social injustice a public issue.³² The indifferent attitude of the majority population meant that the Civil Rights Movement did not gain much support either on the part of the Royal Ulster Police (RUC) or the Protestant public.

The first Civil Rights march to be suppressed by force took place in Derry on 5 October 1968. The following riots lasted for two days and marked the beginning of the current conflict euphemistically called “the Troubles”.³³ As the hostility towards the Catholics grew more severe during the marching season in 1969, the Northern Irish Executive decided

²⁹ Bardon 729.

³⁰ Historically, the term Troubles has also been used to describe other periods of Irish history – events connected with the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War (source: CAIN Web Service)

³¹ Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed in 1967 to protest against the discrimination of Catholics. The organisation adopted the idea of non-violent campaigns to promote their aims. The peace marches, however, frequently turned to violent clashes, provoked by radical Unionists, usually with silent consent from the Ulster police (RUC). The Bloody Sunday events in 1972 then meant an effective end of NICRA activities. (source: CAIN Web Service)

³² David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 12-13.

³³ McKittrick and McVea 41-44.

to request the assistance of the British army.³⁴ The Catholic community welcomed the armed forces at first, since the people hoped to be better protected against the attacks of militant unionists. However, the welcoming attitude soon changed as the British soldiers were hardly supportive of the civil rights activities (to say the least). Less than three years later, British soldiers got involved in a tragic incident which became one of the symbols of the conflict in Northern Ireland. On 30 January 1972 – the *Bloody Sunday* –, thirteen people were shot and another fourteen wounded by British soldiers during a civil rights march in Derry. The incident caused a lasting controversy, especially because each involved side kept accusing the other of being responsible for firing first.³⁵ Two separate government inquiries have been established so far³⁶ but the exact circumstances of the events of that day have not been satisfactorily explained yet. The mutual mistrust between the two communities in Northern Ireland grew considerably in consequence of the Bloody Sunday bloodshed as well as with the dubious initial enquiry. The emotional trauma caused by the event is thoroughly portrayed in Frank McGuinness's *Carthaginians*. Shortly after the incident in Derry, the Northern Irish Executive resigned, British government established the Northern Ireland Office and installed a new State Secretary for Northern Ireland accountable directly to the government in London. The Northern Irish parliament in Stormont was suspended in July 1972. Several attempts have since been made to change this arrangement, none of them, however, surviving for an extended period of time.

³⁴ McKittrick and McVea 56.

³⁵ McKittrick and McVea 76-77.

³⁶ Lord Chief Justice Widgery Report in 1972 – severely criticised as being flawed – and Lord Saville inquiry established in 1998 (source: CAIN Web Service)

Tea in a China Cup

Religion in *Tea in a China Cup*

Tea in a China Cup is a play about the life of three generations of Protestant women living their ordinary lives in a working class area of Belfast. The previous sentence summarises, in the broadest sense, the gist of Christina Reid's successful play. The key word of this sentence is *women*, but the attribute *Protestant* is almost as important for the play as the following noun. From the religious point of view, the play is focused almost exclusively on the Protestant side of life in Belfast. The only Catholic character which actually appears in the play is Theresa, a life-long friend of the protagonist, Beth. Otherwise, when the Protestants talk about the Catholics in the play, it seems as if they were describing wild animals kept in the zoo.

In Northern Ireland, the national identity is frequently defined on religious basis, with the Protestant community often claiming British identity. Although it seems that Protestantism as a signifier of Britishness is no longer universally acknowledged, in the six counties of Northern Ireland the loyalty to the Crown, Protestantism and pro-British sentiment is still strongly claimed by the Protestant majority. Hand in hand with the problematic political development both in the province and in the United Kingdom, the importance of Protestantism is continually growing and gradually replacing the sense of Britishness as the unifying element. The community identification on primarily religious basis is further strengthened by the need to oppose the other community living in Northern Ireland, which (at least in the traditional Protestant opinion) does not feel British at all and does not want Northern Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom.

A key aspect of Protestant hostility towards the Catholics has always been the fear of them attaining political power in the province. Since the partition in the early 1920's, when the six northern counties of Ulster were separated from the rest of Ireland, the society has been divided between the strong and dominant Protestant majority and the long neglected Catholic minority. However, given the higher natality rate of the Catholic community, the originally significant gap in number has been narrowing down, and the Protestants may in future lose their majority position for good. In the course of the play, the negative attitude towards the Catholics is manifested by the two older generations of Beth's family – by her great-aunt Maisie, by the grandparents and her mother Sarah.

The first scene in which Beth's mother appears physically on stage is after Beth had bought a grave plot for her:

- SARAH Were you able to get a plot near the old cemetery?
- BETH Right at the wall...do you know if you'd been a Catholic, you'd have been out of luck.
- SARAH How do you mean?
- BETH The new cemetery is segregated. Prods to the right, Fenians to the left. The Protestant graves are alongside the old cemetery.
- SARAH (*finds this very funny. She laughs delightedly*) God, isn't it great to know that you'll be lying among your own.³⁷

In spite of the gloomy context of the dialogue, Sarah's relief at knowing she'll be buried in a place surrounded by the people of her own religion is a perfect example of just how deeply the ethnoreligious segregation was rooted in people's minds. Her devotion to the Protestant way of life is also reflected in the old family stories, for instance those of her regular visits to the field at Finaghy (the traditional place for Orangemen parades to commemorate the 12th July), once even with the newly-born Beth in her hands. Actually, her daughter was named Elizabeth "after the heir to the [British] throne."³⁸ – i.e. by the future head of the Church.

In comparison to Aunt Maisie and the grandparents, Sarah seems to believe firmly in the segregation of the two communities, but is not, however, so full of prejudice towards the Catholics. When the family discusses Beth's further education, Aunt Maisie is outraged that Beth cannot afford to go to a grammar school whereas her Catholic friend Theresa Duffy can because of the state subsidy, Sarah defends Theresa's family: "The Duffys always had a wee roughness of money about them...and I don't begrudge Theresa her chance, she passed the exam, she deserves it."³⁹ Nevertheless, this is not satisfactory for Maisie whose reply to this explanation reveals her attitude towards the Catholics:

- MAISIE Not as much as our Beth, she doesn't. No good'll come of this subsidized education, you mark my words. The Catholics will beg, borrow and steal the money to get their kids a fancy education. This country'll suffer for it in years to come when well-qualified Catholics start to pour out of our Queen's university expecting the top jobs, wantin' a say in the runnin' of the country. (*She points to Samuel's photo.*) Is that what him and all the others died for, eh? To educate the Catholics so that they can take over Ulster?⁴⁰

³⁷ Christina Reid, "Tea in a China Cup," *Plays: one* (London: Methuen, 1997) 9.

³⁸ Reid 22.

³⁹ Reid 31.

⁴⁰ Reid 31.

Beth's grandmother and Maisie see the Protestants and the Catholics as two different worlds, in a simple, black and white antinomy of 'us' and 'them', and all that is negative is associated with the Catholic community – Beth as a 11-year-old girl, comes home with a dirty face:

MAISIE *(Spits on a handkerchief and cleans Beth's face. Beth finds this unpleasant and struggles)* Keep still, child...there now, that's a bit more Protestant-lookin'.

BETH Are all Catholic children dirty?

MAISIE I've never seen a clean one yet.

BETH Why are they dirty?

GRANDMOTHER It's just the way they are. They're not like us.⁴¹

For the older generation, the Catholics are bad simply because they are not Protestants. Often, the distinctive feature between the two communities is their attitude towards cleanliness and housekeeping, which suggests that this specific type of religious stereotype is the domain of women. Similarly, the question of publicly asking the authorities for help in financial matters is a taboo for a Protestant household, because doing so, says Maisie, “you bring yourself down to the level of the Catholics, whining and complainin’ and puttin’ a poor mouth on yourself.”⁴² Both Maisie and the grandmother are convinced that the only aim of the Catholics is to gradually take control over Ulster, as Maisie suggested in connection with the idea of subsidised education for needy children. Years later, when Beth and Theresa both apply for a job in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Maisie repeats the same litany again:

BETH [about Theresa] She's a friend. I like her.

MAISIE Will you still like her if she gets a cushy job in the civil service and you don't?

BETH Yes, I will.

MAISIE You've no sense, you, trustin' the Catholics. They're after all our jobs, they're after takin' over.⁴³

It is interesting to compare the attitude of the older generation with that of the younger one. Through the entire play, the spectators watch Beth and Theresa growing up and gradually beginning to understand the divided world around them. As children, they cannot make any sense of the stereotypes they are acquainted with. They soon discover, however, their similarities – they focus predominantly on damaging the reputation of the other Church, regularly in connection with sexuality:

⁴¹ Reid 23.

⁴² Reid 25.

⁴³ Reid 44.

BETH *(to Theresa)* Aren't your teachers all nuns?

THERESA Some of them are. They'll be all nuns when I go to the convent grammar school.

BETH Is it true that they always go around in pairs because one of them's really a man?

...

THERESA Nuns are women. The men are called monks. [...] My granny has a book about a rich Protestant landowner, and all these young Catholic girls worked in his big house and they all got babies, so they did.

BETH Were they married?

THERESA No, they weren't.

BETH Your granny's head's cut. You have to be married to get a baby.⁴⁴

The same theme is further developed in a scene, in which grown-up Beth and Theresa wait for a job-interview in the civil service:

THERESA You know, I reckon I've as good as got one of the three jobs that's going here today.

BETH How do you make that out?

THERESA Well, I was here early, I've seen all the other candidates going in, and they were all definitely Prods. I'm the only Tague here.

BETH How would you know what they were?

THERESA By the look of them. Your eyes are closer set. Did nobody ever told you that?

BETH I was always told that the Catholics are the ones with the close-set eyes.

THERESA Aw, don't be telling me that. I've it all worked out. If I'm the only Tague being interviewed, and there are three jobs going, I'm bound to get one of them.

BETH Why?

THERESA Why? Because low-grade positions in the Northern Ireland Civil Service are allocated on a strict population basis, two thirds to the Prods, one-third to the Catholics.⁴⁵

During the dialogue, several things are revealed. Firstly, the two girls now take the existence of the ethnoreligious segregation as a given fact, a set of rules imposed from the outside, which do not represent their personal values but which would be useless to fight against. Moreover, the stereotypes based on physical differences of the two communities are not clear to them anymore – each of them thinks that the other is supposed to have close-set eyes – and they don't even seem to be interested in them. Theresa's intriguing plan also

⁴⁴ Reid 27.

⁴⁵ Reid 40.

discloses the way, in which the thinking of the ordinary people was damaged by the policy of segregation. One's suitability did not consist as much in his or her competence, as in the required ratio. Finally, it indicates that the 'strict population basis' is, in fact, a cover-up. According to Theresa, "it's to prove to the big wide world that they don't discriminate. Mind you [Beth], the Catholic third haven't a hope in hell of being promoted to the top grades. They're allowed so far and then it stops, but at last they employ us."⁴⁶ Theresa's opinion is in sharp contrast to Aunt Maisie's words, and even though her calculation may not be accurate, it is much closer to the reality of that time.

For most of the play Christina Reid works with the Protestant perspective, the Catholic point of view of the segregation and its consequences the reader/spectator experiences through the eyes of Theresa. In the imperfect but stable constellation of power, each of the communities lives its own life, more imagining what the others are like than actually knowing them.

There is, however, an significant change of atmosphere, when the Troubles break out. Beth is already married and lives with her husband 'up the posh end of the Lisburn Road', Sarah remained in their old house alone. The stage directions say that "the year is 1971."⁴⁷ In the early months of that year, Belfast experienced an escalation of violence provoked by a reciprocal shooting of a serving British soldier and an IRA member at the same night in north Belfast⁴⁸. As north Belfast seems to be the very area in which Beth's mother lives, the riots on the street touch them both very personally, Beth's mother in particular. For the first time, she feels to be on the same boat as the Catholics from the neighbourhood, because the violence does not differentiate between the communities. Beth manages to come to her mother's house and wants to persuade her to leave it:

BETH	Mum, you have no idea how bad it is out there. Its not only shooting and rioting...people are leaving their houses, Protestants and Catholics. Some of the houses at the bottom of this road are ablaze. They're burning the houses as they leave.
SARAH	Who are?
BETH	Both sides. Frightened, desperate people are burning their own houses to stop other frightened desperate people from moving in. ⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Reid 41.

⁴⁷ Reid 54.

⁴⁸ David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 64.

⁴⁹ Christina Reid, "Tea in a China Cup," *Plays: one* (London: Methuen, 1997) 54-5

Similar information Sarah learns from a young man, who identifies himself as a member of “the local defence committee.”⁵⁰ In addition to his rough manners, he turns out to be on bad terms with the British soldiers, so highly esteemed in Sarah’s family:

YOUTH *(there is the sound of a heavy vehicle outside. The youth looks out of the window)* It’s the fuckin’ Army. They’re liftin’ everybody in sight. Prods or Fenians, it makes no difference to them bastards. I’ll go the back way. I’m warnin’ you two [Sarah and Beth] – get out of here and quick – if we don’t come back the IRA will...Either way, your house is goin’ to burn.⁵¹

Fortunately, his threats prove wrong, but this incident turns Sarah’s life upside down and she is forced to realise that being a respectable, obedient and God-fearing Protestant wife and mother is not enough to keep herself and her home safe. As Beth says, “from that night onwards my mother began to die.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Reid 55.

⁵¹ Reid 56.

⁵² Reid 59.

Gender in *Tea in a China Cup*

Undoubtedly, what dominates Christina Reid's play is the gender issue. The protagonist of the play, Beth, shares with the audience the history of her family, focusing on the lives of her mother and grandmother. As the time-span of this play covers more than 30 years (since the beginning of World War Two to the early 1970s), the three generations of women experience both the positive and the negative aspects of domestic life. Moreover, Beth's family has been much determined by their working class Protestant background; especially the older generations (Beth's mother Sarah, the grandmother and her sister, aunt Maisie) seem to be uncompromisingly devoted to the traditional image of Ulster Protestant woman. Their attitude is, however, challenged by Beth who longs for a different life, not restricted by her family's background. Besides Beth and her female relatives, another important female character is Beth's life-long friend Theresa, a Catholic. The play is constructed as a series of flashbacks, it is a family history retold by Beth in the heat of the marching season in 1972 Belfast. Beth's story both compares and contrasts her life with the lives of her mother, her grandmother and her catholic friend "tracing both change and continuity across generations."⁵³

The gender perspective of the play is unequivocally female. The male characters (some of them only mentioned, not physically present on stage) seem to live in a completely different world than the women. They are not present in their lives at all, do not share the important moments with the women, do not live together with them. However, it does not mean that men are not important to the women - on the contrary. Although not present physically, men rule the lives of these women psychologically even in their absence, be it a son fighting in the WW2, a husband spending all his money on alcohol, dogs and horses or another husband who prefers business meeting to his wedding night.

The sense of being under the spell of an absent male figure is a feature common to all three women of the Bell family – the grandmother, Sara and Beth. In the first flashback, the play shifts to year 1939, to the dawn of WW2, when Sarah's brother Samuel volunteers for the British Army, is mortally wounded in Europe and dies. His death has made him an idealised figure in the eyes of his mother, aunt and especially of his sister. In an ironic, though very apt remark, Beth suggests that having died so young, her uncle Samuel "remained in

⁵³ Lisa Fitzpatrick, "Disrupting metanarratives: Anne Devlin, Christina Reid, Marina Carr, and the Irish dramatic repertory. (Critical essay)" *Irish University Review: a journal of Irish Studies*, publ. date Sept 2005, AccessMyLibrary, 2 Sept 2007 <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-15066441_ITM>

their hearts forever young, forever true, a perfect son and brother, a perfect man. If he had survived the war, I wonder would he have lived up to all their expectations. ... Perhaps the Germans, without realizing it, killed the only truly honest Ulsterman who ever lived.”⁵⁴ And precisely such is the vision of her brother Samuel that Sarah has in the moment of her death – a vision of a pure, brave man in British uniform.

The reason why Samuel is so often remembered by the women seems to be the existence of another absent male character, Sarah’s husband and Beth’s father. He is never present on stage during the whole play, in fact he is not even given a name, simply talked of as “he”. Beth’s father misses the moment when his young brother-in-law gives his last farewell to the family, he is not there when his wife Sarah goes through a difficult childbirth and last but not the least, it is his addiction to drink and betting which forces his wife to sell the most valuable article of her household – a china cabinet. Despite being a burden to his wife, the idea of possible separation or divorce never comes to her mind. Sarah’s husband is treated like a natural disaster – as a devastating but inevitable force.

Interestingly, when Beth and Sarah talk about him long after his death, Sarah seems to defend her husband against the bitterness of his daughter:

SARAH ...He wasn’t a bad man your father, just weak, easily led, he loved us all you know, especially you. You were his pride and joy.

BETH He’d a funny way of showing it.

SARAH Now, you mustn’t speak ill of the dead, especially your own flesh and blood...he could have been worse...he never lifted a finger to any of us in his life, he just had a weakness for the drink and bettin’...he couldn’t help it, he was only a man, God help him.

BETH Next thing you’ll be saying it was all your fault.

SARAH I sometimes think if I’d been a stronger sort of person, you know, took him in hand a bit more, that he’d of turned out all right. I was always too soft.

BETH You do blame yourself.

SARAH A bit...mostly I blame his mother and sisters for the way they spoilt him...What are you smiling at?

BETH You and all other women like you. No matter what a man does wrong it’s always some woman’s fault, isn’t it?

SARAH Men need lookin’s after, like children, sure they never grow up.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Christina Reid, “Tea in a China Cup,” *Plays: one* (London: Methuen, 1997) 31.

⁵⁵ Reid 38.

The call for family respectability has shaped Sarah's mind to such an extent that she is blind to the flaws of her late husband, or more precisely, looking for their origin in herself and other women, not in her husband's nature.

This inertia of public morality proves itself also in Beth's case. In spite of criticising her mother for her hypocrisy, she behaves in a similar way when it comes to her own troubled private life. Her husband Stephen disappears to America and leaves Beth up to her neck in debts, but she refuses to admit this fact to anyone. Finally, she confesses everything to her friend Theresa, and when asked why she had kept it all to herself, she replies that she comes from "a long line of respectable women, who never let themselves down in front of the neighbours."⁵⁶ It is a double-edged remark: on the one hand, it is not difficult to feel the irony of it, since Beth is well aware of the absurdity of such her standpoint, on the other, her reply is meant seriously. One cannot so easily dispute one's own family traditions and beliefs.

It seems that respectability is all that matters to the women in Reid's play. This is their position within the male-dominated loyalist world. Women are completely excluded from political as well as cultural affairs, deprived of power anywhere else apart from the domestic front. Not that they have chosen this position themselves, but they take it as a given fact and try to play their role as well as they can. Female respectability is dependent upon the ability to keep up appearances. This idea is symbolised in Reid's play by the china cup - a fragile, delicate, beautiful, "essentially feminine"⁵⁷ object. As long as the Protestant woman can make herself a cup of tea in a real china cup, she has paid her duty to the King and country, i.e. she behaves as a respectable housewife. Respectability is the key concept in the Protestant female consciousness; it is something that separates the Protestant woman from her Catholic counterpart.

This partly explains why the china cabinet means so much to Beth's mother Sarah. In one of the flashbacks little Beth tells her aunt Maisie and the grandmother that – because of her husband's debts – her mother had to sell her beloved china cabinet and all the items in it, "except for one china cup and a saucer... Afterwards she made herself a cup of tea in it and she cried and said she'd never forgive my daddy as long as she lived."⁵⁸ Significantly, Beth is forbidden to tell anyone about the sale of the china cabinet, the greatest family disgrace must be kept a secret. Furthermore, Sarah is prepared to risk her life for her china. Another of the

⁵⁶ Reid 60

⁵⁷ Lisa Fitzpatrick, "Disrupting metanarratives: Anne Devlin, Christina Reid, Marina Carr, and the Irish dramatic repertory. (Critical essay)" *Irish University Review: a journal of Irish Studies*, publ. date Sept 2005, AccessMyLibrary, 2 Sept 2007 <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-15066441_ITM>

⁵⁸ Christina Reid, "Tea in a China Cup," *Plays: one* (London: Methuen, 1997) 25.

flashbacks takes the readers/spectators back to the turn of the 1970's, when the Troubles in Northern Ireland were under way. Sarah is repeatedly asked to leave her house, because of the riots in the surrounding streets. Nonetheless, she refuses to abandon the house and all the things in it, especially her china. When threatened that the house will be burned down, she replies: "I moved into this house after my mother and father died. Three generations of my family have lived here, three generations. No IRA Gunman is goin' to intimidate me out...no, nor no Protestant defence committee either."⁵⁹ Sarah talks about the whole house but the stage directions show that what really matters to her, is the china tea-set – a symbol of her respectability.

Apart from being a symbol of social decorum, the china cup also symbolizes continuity. It is a family treasure handed over from one generation to another, very intimately connected with the female world. Typically, each gender has a different attitude towards such objects, which is obvious from a scene where Beth as a child discusses the tea set affair with her Catholic friend Theresa:

BETH Sure you won't tell anybody about it?
...
THERESA All right...I think it's rotten-looking anyway.
BETH My mammy loved it. She used to polish it every day.
THERESA My daddy says it's daft having all those cups and saucers and things just for looking at.
BETH That's what my daddy said too.⁶⁰

This short dialogue points to two things. Firstly, to men the china cabinet is something "just for looking at", which, in their language, means wasting time on something useless. In Reid's play, men often tend to judge material objects around them by their usefulness or potential profit, they are focused on the future, whereas women value things because of their connection with the past, with the memories they evoke, with tradition. This attitude is not limited to the Protestant men only: Theresa admits that her father considers buying the china cabinet a "daft" decision too. In spite of all the proclaimed differences between the Protestant and the Catholic families, there are some general tendencies, which run across the two communities and create a new friction – between the male and the female worlds.

Christina Reid focuses on the idea of two communities that are more alike than they would ever admit in the characters of young Beth and Theresa. The audience can follow their

⁵⁹ Reid 55.

⁶⁰ Reid 26.

friendship evolve in several of the play's flashbacks as they share all the inevitable milestones of growing up. Through their open-hearted dialogues, hiding nothing of what is going on in their minds, the audience learns that both girls experience the same kind of prejudiced behaviour in their respective communities – a similar reluctance to discuss certain more intimate areas of human life, a similar attitude to education. For instance, when Beth and Theresa talk about their school experiences, the prevailing feeling a spectator might get from this scene is, that the most significant difference between Protestant state school and a church-run Catholic school is the colour of their uniforms.

The girls have very limited understanding of things which were considered unsuitable or improper by their respective communities. The play points out the negative aspects of this attitude, which seem to consist in the lack (or non-existence) of mutual communication – both between the men and the women in the same community and between the two respective communities. Significantly, both communities feel insecure about similar issues. One of the things which seem to worry both the Catholics and the Protestants is the possibility of the collapse of the patriarchal order in society. Men and women play each their approved role, which was given to them by God, and it would be a disgrace and betrayal of the whole community to rebel against it. Such way of thinking has been deeply embedded in both communities – the best way to fight the enemy is to show that we do not question the social order and therefore we are the superior ones.

In *Tea in a China Cup*, Christina Reid investigates in great detail the female part of the community life. What is especially pointed at is the silence. The repression of women deprived of their “voice” by dominant males is a popular issue with the gender studies and Reid's play places this problem before the spectators vividly and realistically. In her representation, the role of the female in the Protestant community consists in a combination of stereotypes and prejudices. Women are expected to be silent about their domestic problems in order to retain respectability in the public; hand in hand with this enforced silence goes their ignorance in sexual matters. Ania Loomba focuses on the scene in which Sarah explains to her daughter what menstruation is. Despite the obvious intimacy of the moment, the situation is “hampered by mutual embarrassment and the absence of a familiar vocabulary to denote female anatomy”⁶¹ Moreover, during their conversation, Sarah doesn't look her daughter in the face, but turns her back on her, as if the topic was totally unimportant to her. The feeling

⁶¹ Lisa Fitzpatrick, “Disrupting metanarratives: Anne Devlin, Christina Reid, Marina Carr, and the Irish dramatic repertory. (Critical essay)” *Irish University Review: a journal of Irish Studies*, publ. date Sept 2005, AccessMyLibrary, 2 Sept 2007 <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-15066441_ITM>

of mutual embarrassment gradually grows into a sense of shame – female sexuality is taboo in ordinary conversation even among the closest female relatives.

The inherited belief in silence about private matters is also responsible for a sort of communication barrier between men and women in the play. When Beth in the same scene demands to know whether her father and brother know about the matter, Sarah warns her against telling them anything at all about it, because “you don’t talk to men about that sort of thing, it is not nice.”⁶² Similarly, in a different flashback – a scene when the family receives the news about the death of Sarah’s brother in the Second World War – the grandfather asks about money they should be receiving from the army. His wife gives him her own money and sends him rather contemptuously to the pub. To this, the grandfather replies helplessly “he was my son too, you know.”⁶³ In both scenes, there is a strictly delimited space of female and male worlds - the private life of the family, with all its emotions belongs just to women. The latter scene, however, suggests that even when the grandfather attempts to break the line and enter the female territory, the grandmother would not allow him in. The social separation, which was originally ordained by the male-dominated society, has already nestled so firmly in the collective female identity that women themselves refuse to dissolve it.

The life of Reid’s female characters is further restricted by the political instability in the province. The play as such is not primarily focused on the effect of the Catholic-Protestant conflict but rather on the general notion of people’s character and the way it is involuntarily determined by historical and cultural forces. Nevertheless, the tense atmosphere of the working-class Protestant Belfast is present in the play from the opening scene. At first, the audience watches Sarah as an old, dying woman, listening to the Protestant bands practising loyalist songs for the celebration of the 12 July, then the attention shifts to Beth who is discussing the religious segregation of the new graveyard with the council official. According to Lisa Fitzpatrick, in these two simultaneous scenes “Reid immediately establishes the sectarian context by juxtaposing the song with its *reductio ad absurdum* in the segregation of the dead.”⁶⁴

Although the reviewers tended to ignore the political aspects of the play, *Tea in a China Cup* makes an important statement concerning the attitudes towards the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Its episodic structure and use of the flashbacks also allows the spectators to

⁶² Christina Reid, “Tea in a China Cup,” *Plays: one* (London: Methuen, 1997) 29.

⁶³ Reid 20.

⁶⁴ Lisa Fitzpatrick, “Disrupting metanarratives: Anne Devlin, Christina Reid, Marina Carr, and the Irish dramatic repertory. (Critical essay)” *Irish University Review: a journal of Irish Studies*, publ. date Sept 2005, AccessMyLibrary, 2 Sept 2007 <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-15066441_ITM>

follow the development of the conflict from the outbreak of World War Two to the escalation of violence at the turn of the 1970s. The Troubles are viewed mainly from the Protestant female position, i.e. position of those who are not expected to be active participants in the conflict. As Fitzpatrick puts it, “for men, loyalism is publicly and politically marked. But for women, life centred around the home and around tiny details of domestic life”⁶⁵ In other words, they supported and cared for male members of their families in their loyalist efforts.

However, the play also reveals a considerable change in attitudes towards the conflict across the generations. Sarah is a proper Protestant woman, as devoted to her own community as she is firm in her negative attitude towards the Catholics; her daughter Beth, however, struggles not to make the community hatred a part of her life, her best friend being a Catholic. Sarah inherited most of her opinions of the Catholics from her own mother and aunt. Still, she lives in different times – more complicated times, when things are not simply black and white anymore. As an ageing lady she witnesses her beloved neighbourhood fall into pieces. Sarah is shocked not only because the law and order in which she has always believed are gone, but also because she’s being bullied by one of her own people in her own house. When the young man shouts at her: “Get out of here and quick – if we don’t come back the IRA will ... Either way, your house is goin’ to burn,”⁶⁶ the whole concept of Protestants being always law-obedient, hard-working and respectable people, is destroyed.

Generally, the play supports the idea that the role of women (both Protestant and Catholic) in the conflict is heavily influenced by the traditional social division between male and female spheres. Women of the two communities were elevated to the place of a sacred object - a life-giver, which needs to be guarded by men against the male dominance of the other community. It is, however, necessary to keep in mind the contrast between the image of a woman, as it has been created by the patriarchal society, and the reality of a woman in everyday life. Both Protestant and Catholic women shared similar fate of being tied to domestic duties without much chance to join the decision-making processes of any kind – let alone any direct participation in the conflict. In Beth’s family, the men proved their loyalty to Ulster serving in the British Army whereas the women were providing service at home. Interestingly, it is the women who tend to have more sense of reality in hard times than their men. The men talk self-confidently about their courage and loyalty but women know the darker side of such empty phrases. In this respect, there is not much difference between the

⁶⁵ Lisa Fitzpatrick, <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-15066441_ITM>

⁶⁶ Christina Reid, “Tea in a China Cup,” *Plays: one* (London: Methuen, 1997) 56.

Troubles and any other armed conflict in which the men are involved – the grandmother comments ironically that World War One being called the “Great War” sounds very similar to Sarah’s bitterness about the phrase “to keep law and order” during the outbreak of the Troubles. In both cases, these “noble” phrases had in reality disastrous consequences for both women.

Locale in *Tea in a China Cup*

Tea in a China Cup is a specifically located play - it is set in Belfast of the past and the present. The structure of the play takes the spectators in a number of flashbacks back and forth in time, but the setting (with a few exceptions) remains the same. Within Belfast, the action takes place in several locations. However, the two key ones are Sarah's old house in the poorest area of Belfast and its counterpart, Beth's elegant house standing in a rich part of the city. The sujet of the play begins to unwind in Beth's house as she begins to tell her family history and comes back to this place after each of the flashbacks. Still, it is Sara's old house, which comes to Beth's memory most often and takes over the scene. It is in fact only an echo, a memory, but the house formed the lives of its inhabitants for more than three decades and it cannot be simply forgotten.

Applying the centre-periphery model on the play, Sarah's and Beth's houses appear to be two centres, to which the other locations are bound. Though the story is narrated by Beth from her own house, thematically, the primary centre of the play is Sarah's old house where the three generations once lived together. Moreover, in the last scene Beth has to sell her noble house because of her husband's debts and the valuer remarks that Beth must be "sorry to leave this lovely house," Beth simply replies she "won't be sorry at all."⁶⁷ The house once served as a means of escape from the constraints of life with her family, but she gradually realised it was not the end of her journey and not what she was looking for. So in the end, she takes only one china cup with saucer as a symbol of continuity and leaves to find a better place to suit her.

Sarah's house, originally the house of her parents – of the first generation – stands in an area where both Catholic and Protestant families live together, as we learn in the course of the play, probably somewhere in North Belfast. The social status of people living in this part of Belfast, their poverty to be more precise, was able to overcome the ethnoreligious separation and forced both communities to share one common space. Beth and her family belong to the Belfast working class – they live on the periphery, both geographically and socially.

In terms of the centre-periphery model, the setting of the play offers a whole chain of relationships. Northern Ireland is a part of Great Britain, but has always played a role of a dependent region - politically, economically and culturally. Belfast as the capital of the region

⁶⁷ Reid 64.

may represent a local centre but even within this local centre, the place where Beth's family lives is just another periphery. Interestingly, the Protestants from Belfast seem to draw most of their energy, pride and courage from the fact that they are part of the United Kingdom. No matter how far they may live from Buckingham Palace, they consider themselves subjects of the monarch, members of the British community and therefore more in the centre than their Catholic neighbours.

Beth's family has actually created confined centre of their own in Belfast - they are the centre of distilled loyalist values, trying to be more British than the British themselves. The play itself is structured around one of the finest examples of this allegiance, the recurrent celebrations of 12 July, the tradition of the Orange Order marches. The almost fanatic proclamation of loyalty to the British monarchy, raises a question concerning the congruity of the Ulster Protestant idea of being a subject to the King or the Queen with the same concept as it is perceived in Great Britain as such. This is, however, not the problem of Beth's family and their local community in the play, at least not a problem of the two older generations.

The centre-periphery model can be applied not only on the geographical level, but also as regards the involvement in the conflict. The present timeline of the play – the beginning of the 1970's, sees the adult Beth taking care of her dying mother in the middle of sectarian violence in Belfast. The generation shift in opinions between Beth and her mother is suggested also in terms of space. Sarah lives alone in the old house in the poor suburb, whereas Beth has married and moved to a respectable house “up the posh end of the Lisburn Road.”⁶⁸ Despite Beth's private troubles, her house is an oasis of safety during the Troubles, whereas her mother is literally surrounded by it. However, when Sarah is threatened to have her house burnt down, Beth rushes from her safe home to her mother's house to make her leave it, and when she fails to persuade her, stays with her despite all danger until the situation calms down.

This scene is significant in two aspects. Firstly, up to this scene, it have always been the men of the family who got directly involved with violence of any kind. The women simply had to put up patiently with the consequences of what had happened to their men. For the first time, women are shifted into the centre of events (although they do not actively participate in the violence), this time there are no men around to guard them. Both the grandfather and Sarah's brother Sammy are dead, as well as Sarah's husband. The only surviving male member of the family – Sarah's son Samuel is serving in the British army in

⁶⁸ Reid 48.

Cyprus. Although the women did not get into the centre of the situation voluntarily, they accepted the danger around them and stayed in the house. Secondly, the women are faced with a conflict in their own hometown, in their own street, where the enemy could be their own neighbour, and it touches them personally; the men always fought against a well-defined, distant enemy, in an international conflict far from home.

Tea in a China Cup: Conclusion

In comparison to the other analysed topics, the issue of gender seems to play the most important role in Christina Reid's play. More specifically, in *Tea in a China Cup* Reid focuses solely on the role of women in the Northern Irish Protestant family. She pays much more attention to the female characters than to male ones; men are portrayed rather schematically, despite (or maybe just because of) the fact that the position of women in the society is inferior to the position of men. Women are restricted to their homes and their children, but the play also implies that it is mainly the women who hold their families together and who, in the moments of crisis, prove to be the stronger of the two sexes.

Simultaneously, Reid also pays attention to the ways in which the Protestant community affiliation forms the opinions of the female characters and their social roles. Apart from one Catholic, the play is exclusively focused on the members of the Protestant working class neighbourhood and emphasises the negative effect of the lingering prejudice which increases the barrier between the two communities. The play, however, also stresses that this barrier is much more a result of a long restricted communication than a factual difference between the Protestants and the Catholics.

Less attention is paid to the notion of setting. Nevertheless, Christina Reid places her female protagonists in a difficult position. They struggle to lead a "normal" family life, but they are surrounded by a society which is strictly divided into two mutually hostile communities, which is manifested in the demographic segregation of their city. The central concept of their lives (especially of the older generation) seems to be the idea of the family home as a shelter, a place in which they can feel safe. Unfortunately, when the old animosities finally lead to the outburst of physical violence in the streets, it threatens to destroy what the women value the most. On the other hand, it also enables the younger generation to realise the importance of family continuity and the power of tradition.

Carthaginians

Religion in *Carthaginians*

McGuinness's *Carthaginians* is a play which analyses to a large extent the issue of human faith. It is necessary to emphasise the word 'faith', because religion forms a significant part of faith, but it is not a synonymous expression, especially not in this play. However, since the community violence in Northern Ireland is historically based on the religious difference of its inhabitants, religion cannot be omitted in any play dealing with the Troubles.

Derry is the second largest city in Northern Ireland and religion is wrought in its very roots. According to historical sources, St. Columba (in Irish *Colm Cille*) founded a monastery there on the place of an earlier settlement, whose original name was *Doire Calgaich*, i.e. 'the oakwood of Calgach'. In 546 A.D. the area surrounding the monastery was renamed *Doire Cholm Cille*, 'Colm Cille's oak grove', as a tribute to the saint.⁶⁹ Part of the name is still being used as the Irish equivalent of Derry, which it is also recalled in the play, in one of the quiz-like moments:

DIDO	Where do we live, Maela?
MAELA	That's a hard one.
DIDO	Do you want a clue? Derry is –
MAELA	Doire. Doire Colmcille.
DIDO	What does that mean?
MAELA	The dove. The bird of peace. ⁷⁰

In old Irish, 'Colm Cille' actually means 'the dove of the Church' and the whole place seems to be predestined to become a stronghold of Christian faith and love. Obviously, this plan has not been accomplished. As a result of the British supremacy, it has changed its name into Londonderry in the 17th century and gradually became divided into two parts, according to the religious affiliation of its population. The Catholics remained a majority in the town, despite their inferior status. At the end of the 1960s, with the Irish border at a stone's throw, Derry proved to be a perfect location for outbursts of sectarian violence.

All characters in the play seem to share Catholic background, although it is arguable to what extent they feel formally attached to the Roman Catholic Church. Members of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland are united, however, not only by their religious

⁶⁹ WIKIPEDIA, the free encyclopedia, "Derry," 1 Jan 2002, 2 Sept 2007 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derry>>

⁷⁰ Frank McGuinness, "Carthaginians," *Plays: one* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 353.

background, they also share one political, social and cultural tradition, in which their religion is a shielding element, but not necessarily the prevailing one. The sense of total separation is omnipresent and is manifested in many of the characters' lines. Once, Dido says to the girls "nobody believes you in Derry", but the word 'nobody' is immediately redefined: "The Catholics think you're mad, and the Prods think you're Martians."⁷¹; when Hark mock-acts Martin Luther King's famous speech, he announces:

HARK Brothers and sisters, I have a dream.
GRETA What is your dream, brother?
HARK That someday we shall be one.
GRETA One people.
HARK One nation.
GRETA One country.
...
HARK Catholics shall stand with Catholics, Protestants with Protestants
GRETA Should it not be 'Catholics will stand with Protestants.'
HARK I speak of dreams, sister, not of insanity. Let us be like the asshole and let us
 be apart.
GRETA Hallulia.⁷²

This originally rough joke takes on a bitter tone later when Hark summarises the whole tragedy of the Northern Irish people: "Let us live apart as we chose to live apart. Let us hate as we wish to hate.[...]Let us wander forth into wilderness of bigotry and let us spread more bigotry. Let us create a nation fit for assholes to live in.[...]For as assholes are we known to each other and like the asshole let us forever remain apart."⁷³

In fact, the whole play-within-the-play, which Dido persuades the others to act out in the graveyard, is a parody of such separation. In the scene in which Greta plays a vicious RUC man interrogating Sarah – an unemployed Derry character:

GRETA What is your religion, wee Jimmy?
SARAH Religion, religion, isn't it a great wee thing, religion? Where would we be
 buried if it weren't for the wee religion?
GRETA Together.⁷⁴

The effort to remain apart even after death may seem absurd, but is taken seriously. It resembles the opening scene from Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*: when Beth goes to

⁷¹ McGuinness 307.

⁷² McGuinness 323.

⁷³ McGuinness 323.

⁷⁴ McGuinness 340.

buy a grave plot for her dying mother, she is told that the new graveyard has two separated areas – one for the Catholics, the other for the Protestants. Inevitably, the ‘keeping ourselves to ourselves’ policy has led to a simplifying and stereotypical view of the other community. In this respect, Reid’s play is a brilliant example of this attitude - McGuinness created his concise overview of religious stereotypes in Dido’s *The Burning BalACLava*. For example, everybody’s surname is a variation on ‘Doherty’, with a spelling appropriately modified to fit their respective affiliation – O’Dochartaigh, Dogherty, etc. What could more clearly illustrate the artificiality of the idea of separation than the fact that even if the name is the same, it is necessary to demonstrate the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ at least in its spelling.

As for purely religious stereotypes, *The Burning BalACLava* makes use of the most common symbols representing either the Catholics or the Protestants in Northern Ireland. These stem from a deliberate shallowness of understanding, the usual tactics used by radicals on both sides in order to emphasise the difference between the two communities. According to Sarah Pia Anderson, director of McGuinness’s plays, one of the levels on which Dido’s play operates is “a straight parody of so many plays that were written at the time about the Irish Troubles in the North.”⁷⁵ McGuinness’s hyperbolic treatment of the stereotypes makes Anderson add that the author actually “is being wicked about his fellow playwrights”⁷⁶ One of the classic clichés is represented by a young couple: a Protestant girl Mercy (played by Paul) and her Catholic boyfriend Padraig (Maela), whose mutual affection is, of course, doomed from the very beginning. Apart from the obligations to their respective communities, another problem arises in the most intimate sphere of sexuality and child breeding:

PAUL-Mercy	So you see, Daddy. I have a terrible choice.
GRETA-her father	About your future family’s religion?
PAUL	Yes. Daddy. The Catholic Church will never agree to me bringing them up as children.
GRETA	Don’t you mean Protestant?
PAUL	No, Daddy. Catholics are conceived at the age of forty. That way there’s no sex. What am I going to do, Daddy. I love him.
GRETA	Kill him. ⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Helen Lojek, ed. *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability* (Dublin: Carysford Press, 2002) 122.

⁷⁶ Lojek 123.

⁷⁷ Frank McGuinness, “Carthaginians,” *Plays: one* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 342.

A similar prejudice focusing on intimacy and sexuality of the other community can be traced in Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* and to a lesser extent also in Woods' *At the Black Pig's Dyke*, though not as a matter of parody.

Another stereotypical representation is the heroine herself, Mrs Doherty, "a fifty-year-old Derry mother, tormented by the troubles, worn away by worry to a frizzle"⁷⁸, symbolized by a headscarf and an apron. A religious dimension is added to the mother by her "fanatic devotion to the Sacred Heart."⁷⁹ The Sacred Heart is "a religious devotion to Jesus' physical heart as the representation of the divine love for humanity. This devotion is predominantly used in the Roman Catholic Church. [...] Religious imagery depicting the Sacred Heart is frequently featured in Roman Catholic homes. Sometimes images display beneath them a list of family members, indicating that the entire family is entrusted to the protection of Jesus."⁸⁰ In art, the Sacred Heart usually takes the form of a statue or a picture, depicting Jesus with a flaming heart, surrounded by a crown of thorns – symbols of love and suffering of Jesus Christ. Dido's 'Derry mother' has a statue of the Sacred Heart and carries it everywhere for protection. Unsurprisingly, the statue falls victim to sectarian violence, is "riddled with bullets"⁸¹, in front of the Derry mother's eyes. The mother figure is also responsible for the final twist in the tail of the play, when she is revealed as the true *éminence grise*, responsible for all the violence and killing.

The Burning Balaclava also includes the figure of Father Docherty, a silent Catholic priest played by Seph. As Dido explains, Father Docherty "has stopped speaking entirely and now communicates only by means of white flags."⁸² Undoubtedly, the Irish audience would immediately recognise this image – the actual Catholic priest who was on the Civil Rights march on Bloody Sunday, Father Edward Daly, became one of the lasting media images of the tragedy when he was photographed "waving a white handkerchief while helping carry a fatally wounded youth out of the killing zone."⁸³ In Dido's play, the silent Father Docherty, waving his handkerchiefs in vain effort to stop the violence, represents the powerlessness of the Church during the outbreak of the Troubles – its calls for peace talks were large ignored

⁷⁸ McGuinness 331.

⁷⁹ McGuinness 332.

⁸⁰ WIKIPEDIA, the free encyclopedia, "Sacred Heart," 1 Apr 2003, 2 Sept 2007

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_Heart>

⁸¹ Frank McGuinness, "Carthaginians," *Plays: one* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 342.

⁸² McGuinness 333.

⁸³ David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 77.

by radical wings of both communities. Eventually, as if suppressing their guilty conscience, Father Docherty is shot dead unanimously by both the Catholic and the Protestant characters.

It seems that none of the symbols used in *The Burning Balaclava*, religious or other, are spared the derision and irony. Even the rosary and the crucifix are used for the most unholy purposes: Greta as the RUC interrogator uses them to beat and strangle Catholic suspects. Kelly-O'Reilly suggest that McGuinness "focuses attention on how much of the war in Northern Ireland is in fact a war about symbols and how and what they mean."⁸⁴ Further analysis of the play-within-the-play drew Kelly-O'Reilly to a conclusion about the impact it may have not only on the characters of *Carthaginians*, but also on the theatre audience:

The easy stereotyping of the other through the use of symbols in the play allows the audience to see the power of symbols at work in a community. The war over symbols suggests a collapse of the symbolic function into literalism. When the real ambiguity and ambivalence of symbols is denied, the resultant literalism ultimately leads to the death of the symbol, at least in its more liberating aspects. When a symbol ceases to function in an open-ended symbolic way but collapses into banal literalism, it functions in a diabolic way, tearing people apart, and may result in violence and death.⁸⁵

If the theme of religion runs through the entire *Burning Balaclava*, then the concept of human faith is an issue which dominates *Carthaginians*. A simple summary of the play – a group of people waiting in the graveyard for the resurrection of the dead – corresponds to the basic Christian dogma of life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Kelly-O'Reilly even proposes "to consider the play as a contemporary passion narrative, and [...] interpret the unfolding days of the play as a mirroring of the traditional Holy Week in the Christian calendar, as the community prepared for Easter."⁸⁶ Generally, McGuinness's play operates within a Christian frame, but presents the "journey from death to life" in a broader context. Despite the vision which the three women experienced in the graveyard, the play reveals that "there is no promise of salvation from outside, and the characters are called to be saviours of themselves and each other."⁸⁷

Indeed, the dead who need to be raised in *Carthaginians*, who need to recover their faith in themselves and humanity, are the characters themselves. At least Sarah Pia Anderson

⁸⁵ Lojek 101.

⁸⁶ Lojek 93.

⁸⁷ Lojek 93.

makes this point clear: “If the play’s worked, you get the sense that yes, they rose, the point is *they* (the characters we’ve been watching on stage all night) rose, *they’re* the dead, *they* rose. As a group, they brought themselves back to themselves. There was no *Deus ex Machina*.”⁸⁸

Very much in the Christian tradition, before the characters achieve the final resurrection, they have to endure a moment of deep suffering, in which each in turn recall their innermost traumas and share them with the other characters. However, they draw strength to do so not from their faith in Christ but from the faith they find in themselves and in the others who suffer as much as they do. Having told their own stories and thus purifying themselves from their private traumas, they need to come to terms with the troubled past they all share – the events of Bloody Sunday.

At the beginning of the final scene, which takes place on Saturday night, the characters are seated in a circle, as if invoking the spirits of the dead. This impression is further developed when Maela starts to recite a well-known mysterious poem by Walter de la Mare, *The Listeners*, in which “only a host of phantom listeners/[...]/stood listening in the quiet of moonlight/to that voice from the world of men.”⁸⁹ In the poem, the phantom listeners do not answer the voice of the Traveller, who came to find them, and he leaves unsatisfied. But Maela and her friends do not want this to happen to the victims of Bloody Sunday. They perform an incantation-like ritual that reaches beyond the Christian tradition: at first, Paul repeats the names and addresses of all the victims, linking their fate with the fate of Derry, and then they recite together a simple but powerful chant, evoking the journey from death to life.

As Kelly-O’Reilly remarks, the chant resembles an ancient prayer, attributed to St. Patrick. The prayer is known under several names, *The Lorica*, *St. Patrick’s Breastplate*, or *The Deer’s Cry*. Similarly to the situation in the graveyard, the prayer is said to invoke “God’s protection on a difficult journey (either literal or the metaphorical “journey of life”) against all manners of evil.”⁹⁰ The formal structure of the prayer (its rhythm and the repetitive pattern) together with its contents addressing the Nature as the true kingdom of Christ, are believed to be influenced by pre-Christian nature worship⁹¹ - the blending of pagan and

⁸⁸ Lojek 124.

⁸⁹ Frank McGuinness, “Carthaginians,” *Plays: one* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 376.

⁹⁰ WIKIPEDIA, the free encyclopedia, “St. Patrick’s Breastplate,” 12 Feb 2005, 2 Sept 2007
<[Http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/St._Patrick's_Breasplate](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/St._Patrick's_Breasplate)>

⁹¹ WIKIPEDIA, the free encyclopedia, “St. Patrick’s Breastplate,” 12 Feb 2005, 2 Sept 2007
<[Http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/St._Patrick's_Breasplate](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/St._Patrick's_Breasplate)>

Christian religious motifs was a phenomenon not unusual in the early centuries of Christianity. In the very end of the play, McGuinness combines both Christian and pre-Christian traditions, as if to show that the most important things in human life, such as forgiveness and compassion, are universal and stand above religious differences.

Gender in *Carthaginians*

There are altogether seven characters in McGuinness' play. The small group of inhabitants of the Derry graveyard consists of three women – Maela, Greta and Sarah – and three men – Hark, Paul and Seph. According to the stage directions, Maela is the oldest of the female trio, being in her forties, Greta and Sarah are of a similar age, which is about ten years younger than Maela. Paul and Hark are also in their thirties, and Seph, who is the youngest of the party, is a decade younger than the other two men. The last but not the least character in the play – Dido Martin – is a young homosexual, about the same age as Seph. Dido does not live in the graveyard with the others but supplies them with food and news from the outside world.

What all the characters have in common, regardless of their gender, is a „deep personal tragedy“ which they all experienced in the past, as Dido informs *The Irish Times* in a newspaper article read by Greta in the opening scene of the play. Although it may sound as a cheap journalistic phrase, and as such the party in the graveyard understands it, it actually is an apt summary of their situation. Moreover, these tragedies are all connected with a specific date, one of the key dates in the history of Northern Ireland: 30 January 1972, Bloody Sunday.

The stories of the characters as they get revealed in the course of the play vary from a direct involvement in the events of that day to a coincidence and are rather traditionally gendered. In the case of the women, their tragedies are all very feminine-based. The oldest of the women, Maela, spends most of her time in the graveyard talking to and dressing up the grave of her only daughter, who died of cancer as a child. Her death occurred on the same day during which the shooting occurred. The first female character to join Maela in the graveyard is Sarah. Her tragedy is that of losing human dignity. Sarah used to support the Civil Rights movement and most probably took part in the Sunday march through the Derry streets. Disillusioned, she left Northern Ireland, went to live in Amsterdam and ended up as a drug addict and a prostitute. The last woman who comes to the graveyard is Greta and she is also the last one to reveal the trauma from her past. In her case, interestingly, there seems to be no actual link between her story and the Bloody Sunday events - having grown up as the only child of extremely reserved parents, Greta is unable to cope with herself and her female body because of an unspecified surgery, after which she will never be able to bear children.

Generally, Maela, Sarah and Greta symbolise the most traditional/emblematic female fears: a mother who loses her child, a woman who sells her body for money and a woman who cannot have children. According to Anne F. Kelly-O'Reilly, women in this play

represent futility and emptiness as “their respective wounds make it impossible for them to be life givers.”⁹²

There is, however, an ironic twist to the traditional image of Maela as a grieving mother, especially in the context of the conflict – Maela did lose her child on Bloody Sunday, but unlike other mothers mourning their dead children that day, Maela’s daughter was not a victim of the Troubles, was not killed in the streets and will not be remembered as a martyr by anyone, apart from her mother. Maela’s innermost tragedy was as if reflected by the streets of Derry, through which she walked on her way home from the hospital. Having witnessed the suffering around her together with the pain of her own loss, Maela lost the grip on reality, refused to accept her daughter’s death and moved to the graveyard to stay in touch with her. Maela is the first one to have a vision that “the dead will rise in the Derry graveyard”. Although the play does not say what exactly her vision was about, it must have been powerful enough to make her believe that she will meet her daughter again.

Interestingly, only the three women experience the spiritual moment. They “know”, they have seen the dead rise. Nevertheless, they do not speak about the details of their visions, which creates a certain invisible connection among them, something the men (or any other outsider, for that matter) can never fully understand. In an essay on *Carthaginians*, Anne F. Kelly-O’Reilly claims that „the original vision is not validated by those who dismiss it, according to their own paradigms [...] the three women in this play support one another, thus authenticising what the other has experienced.”⁹³

GRETA	What’s wrong, Maela?
MAELA	Talking about it.
GRETA	About what, Maela?
MAELA	What I’ve seen.
GRETA	What the three of us have seen, Maela.
MAELA	Aye, the three of us. First, I’m living in the graveyard. Then Sarah came to it. Then you, Greta. And all because we believe in the same thing. The dead will rise here. A miracle. But we can’t talk about it, for fear if we talk about it, it won’t happen. ⁹⁴

Similarly to Maela, the other two women came to the graveyard to make peace with themselves and their past. Sarah is the only one from the female trio who has already overcome her personal crisis:

⁹² Helen Lojek, ed. *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability* (Dublin: Carysford Press, 2002) 95.

⁹³ Lojek 96.

⁹⁴ Frank McGuinness, “Carthaginians,” *Plays: one* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 298.

SARAH: ... I walked by the canals of Amsterdam. I was sinking under the weight of powder. I sank and I sank until I felt hands lift me. I thought they were yours, Hark, but they were my own. I saved myself, Johnny. I saw myself dead in Amsterdam. I've come back from the dead.⁹⁵

Sarah's story does not fit into a stereotypical scheme of a penitent 'fallen woman'. Traditionally, such woman is not supposed to find her own way out of her misery. Since the cause of women's fall from grace is frequently a man, it should also be a man's task to lift her up again – a knight on a white horse who comes to save a lady in distress. At first, Sarah also expected her saviour to be a man – Hark. However, she managed to restore her life herself, relying on her own powers. Still, Sarah felt obliged to do more. In the speech above, she mentions one specific man – Hark – whom she calls Johnny. Hark and Sarah used to be a couple, “a king and queen of Derry”⁹⁶ before the Bloody Sunday, but Hark spent several years in prison because of his involvement in the Troubles and now lives alone, disillusioned and cynical, and earns his living as a gravedigger. When Greta asks Sarah about Hark, Sarah admits that she has come to the graveyard for him, but that “he has to save himself first.”⁹⁷

Throughout the play, Sarah is the most active character of all (apart from Dido, who, however, does not live in the graveyard) – not only has she won over her addiction and is trying to help Hark, but she is also the first to reveal the trauma of her past to the others, thus encouraging them to do the same. Sarah suggests this is the solution for them all:

SARAH: ...I've come back from the dead. I'm clean. (*she removes the cardigan and shows her bare arms.*) Clean. It's true. And if what we saw is true, if the dead are to rise again, then we must tell each other the truth. For us all to rise again.⁹⁸

In opposition to Sarah, Greta is the last to confess the truth and seems also extremely distracted by it. From the beginning, Greta is the most ambiguous character. On one hand, she seems to be very rough in her behaviour and language. Being a heavy smoker who enjoys alcohol, dirty jokes and betting on horses, she resembles a man rather than a woman. On the other hand, in the opening scene we find Greta attending to a wounded bird and she repeatedly hums a childish rhyme. She opens her heart partially to Sarah, in a scene reminiscent of a debate between Beth and Theresa in Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*: Her parents desperately wanted to be acknowledged in the entire neighbourhood as a

⁹⁵ McGuinness 328.

⁹⁶ McGuinness 327.

⁹⁷ McGuinness 348.

⁹⁸ McGuinness 328.

respectable family. Similarly to Beth's family in *Tea*, this respectability included a family home called by neighbours "a doll's house on High Street"⁹⁹ and went hand in hand with a restriction on all issues which were not considered decent: "When my Mammy wanted to tell you anything secret, she would whisper it to you very lowly. Up to her dying day, she did that."¹⁰⁰ Expectedly, the most strictly forbidden issues were the female bodily functions and its sexuality. In Greta's case, this taboo was taken *ad absurdum*, when she was told that menstruation is caused by the tooth fairy. Confused, Greta thought she was changing into a man. Judging from her appearance through most of the play, she has almost become one.

The true nature of Greta's psychic instability is revealed almost at the very end of the play. Firstly, when Sarah meditates about others' reasons for coming to the graveyard, Greta says that she came because "I want myself back."¹⁰¹ Kelly-O'Reilly rephrases Greta's word "myself" as "her inner female self."¹⁰² Finally, in her introspective, almost stream-of-consciousness monologue, Greta explains (in 3rd person):

GRETA She was an only child, this woman. She kept herself to herself. And her parents, they were both dead. So she went to her parents' grave. She said, Mammy, Daddy, I'm afraid. And she saw the dead. She saw herself. She saw nothing, for she is nothing. She is not a woman anymore. She's a joke, a dirty joke."¹⁰³

The dirty joke that life had played on her is the fact that her childhood dream of turning into a man ("whenever I was feeling lonely, it was some consolation to think that I'd grow into my own brother"¹⁰⁴) has come true. However, it has been fulfilled in a perverted manner – an illness has deprived Greta of her femininity. She has not grown into a man in fact, but in her mind she is not a woman either – she is 'nothing', she does not belong to the living anymore but to the dead in the graveyard. Her trauma is so deep that she is able to talk about it only in 3rd person, as if telling a story which happened to somebody else. The only words she repeats in 1st person are "I'm afraid."

Greta's character and her personal story don't seem to have anything to do with the events of Bloody Sunday. McGuinness does not reveal much about Greta's previous life,

⁹⁹ McGuinness 348.

¹⁰⁰ McGuinness 349.

¹⁰¹ McGuinness 350.

¹⁰² Helen Lojek, ed. *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability* (Dublin: Carysford Press, 2002) 97.

¹⁰³ Frank McGuinness, "Carthaginians," *Plays: one* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 373.

¹⁰⁴ McGuinness 349.

apart from the fact that she used to be a teacher in Derry, same as Paul. Still, it is Greta who asks the crucial question of the play – what were the characters doing on Bloody Sunday. Apart from their subjective tragedies, the characters also share a common burden – the experience of the killing during the Civil Rights march on Sunday in January 1972 and the life in Derry after this event. “Where were you on Bloody Sunday,” asks Greta the others plainly, and they all admit that they were in Derry on the march that day. Therefore they have to make peace not only with themselves but also with what happened to their city and its people.

Whereas the women represent an element of activity and anticipation, their male counterparts – Hark, Seph and Paul – only passively observe the women in the graveyard. Unlike the women, these three had known each other long before they met in the graveyard. Together with Sarah, they used to be friends, involved in the civil rights movement. However, the aftermath of the Bloody Sunday separated them and each of the three had to face their own demons, raised by the Troubles. When they meet again in the graveyard, it is obvious they have not found any remedy for their problems yet. Hark does not believe the visions of the female trio at all and until the revelation of his own life-story at the end of the play, he maintains the position of a distanced and cynical commentator. Seph, the youngest one, does not speak through most of the play, as a form of self-punishment, and seldom reveals any emotions. There is, however, a slight change with the character of Paul. In opposition to the other two men, his reaction to his personal trauma is not resignation, rather a withdrawal to a sphere of his private reality. In his own world, he is not passive, but preparing himself to join the dead and be buried together with them. Nevertheless, witnessed by anyone from the outside, Paul has resigned to live a meaningful life, just like his two friends.

If the most typical gender stereotype of trauma for a woman is her inability to bear children and the worst disgrace the act of selling her body, then its counterpart in the men’s world is weakness – either physical or that of one’s character. Sarah, Greta and Maela have experienced the former. As for Hark, Seph and (at least partially) Paul, they have gone through different forms of the latter.

Hark, for instance, is called ‘a ringleader’ or ‘a hard man’ by Sarah and ‘a glorified look-out man’ by Paul, when they remember their old days. Through most of the play, Hark behaves in a typically masculine manner towards Sarah, the other two women and especially towards Dido, because of the latter’s sexual orientation. But while Paul forces Hark to confess the truth, he blames Hark for being “a coward, who went on missions and couldn’t kill, a

coward who ran away.”¹⁰⁵ Finally, Hark admits he was not able to use a gun and that he “wasn’t man enough” to kill anyone. Moreover, he refused to join the hunger strike in prison because he wanted to live. Hark is suffering from a survivor complex of a kind, he “can’t face the dead”¹⁰⁶ but his survival was not a coincidence, it was his own decision to stay alive. Quite paradoxically, he feels guilty for not being able to kill either himself or others – one of the heaviest crimes, forbidden by God’s Commandments. Having returned from prison, Hark decided to live with the dead in the graveyard and not return back among the living. In a society so distracted by chronic violence and revenge, his humanism is mistaken for failure and cowardice.

Similarly to Hark, Seph is also suffering in consequence of his involvement in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday. As well as Hark, Seph chose life instead of death, but the way he chose to help the living was dubious and made him feel so ashamed that he has stopped speaking. It is not difficult for the audience/reader to imagine what he is guilty of – several remarks of his graveyard friends, together with his only line in the first three scenes of the play: “Tell him. Tell. I’ll tell,”¹⁰⁷ suggest that he gave away confidential information. Seph is an informer, “a traitor. Nothing more,” as Hark says. However, when Seph finally decides to talk, the others can see the true complexity of his motivation:

SEPH	Thirteen dead on Bloody Sunday. It could have been thirteen hundred. Thirteen thousand. Thirteen million. One. One left alive, that one is me and I’m going to tell.
HARK	You’ve told enough.
SEPH	Have I told you this? ... They said after Bloody Sunday they wanted to avenge the dead but they only wanted to join them. And I would tell on the living who wanted to join the dead. I’d saved them from themselves. I’d saved them from the dead. I’d saved you, Hark. ¹⁰⁸

Seph’s explanation is definitely arguable and it is not accepted by Hark, who calls him a traitor. Paul, the third member of the party of old friends, provokes Hark to tell his own story immediately after Seph’s confession. As it turns out, they had similar reasons for what they had done – they refused to add more deaths to the already considerable number of the victims of the Troubles. In the end, Harks is ready to make peace with himself as well as with the others, even with Seph.

¹⁰⁵ McGuinness 371.

¹⁰⁶ McGuinness 372.

¹⁰⁷ McGuinness 315.

¹⁰⁸ McGuinness 370.

Paul, who served as a mediator in the conflict between Seph and Hark, keeps this role through most of the play. As for his background, it is revealed that he used to be a teacher in Derry, that he is emotionally attached to the town, that he knew the other men and Sarah before the Bloody Sunday events and was also involved in the Civil Rights movement. He seems to be the most educated and contemplative member of the graveyard party, resembling partly a philosopher, partly a prophet on the verge of madness. Paul spends his time building a pyramid made of Derry garbage, expecting the moment when the dead will rise, and he has clearly self-destructive tendencies:

SEPH Why are you mad, Paul?
PAUL Derry destroyed.
...
PAUL Every bullet, every boot put through it – I’ve felt them all.
SEPH Can you feel anymore?
PAUL The pain comes and goes and I go mad with pain. The living can’t heal it, but the dead might. I believe they’ll rise because I am mad, for if the dead don’t rise to meet me – I will meet them for I cannot last much longer in this town.¹⁰⁹

Paul seems to be psychologically extremely vulnerable, possibly more than Greta or Maela. From the point of view of gender there seems to be a lot of femininity in him – compassion, a sense of community spirit, certain decency of behaviour. He is the first of the men to reveal his trauma – the memories of Bloody Sunday dead and the destruction of Derry, which he calls “this city of hell”, make him feel insane and drive him away from the decent life he led before:

PAUL The war in my head. ... It’s driving me mad. I’m losing a grip on myself. ... I was a good teacher. I was popular with people. ... I run two quizzes in different pubs to save a bit of money. I want to see Egypt. I want to go to Carthage. But I’m losing a grip on myself. I don’t want to go mad.¹¹⁰

Similarly to Seph and Hark, Paul is also traumatised by his personal failure. In spite of his intellect, education and judgement, Paul’s mind refused to accept seeing his city turn into a battlefield. That is the weakness and the failure which he realises, as Greta says, “when he’s in his right mind.”¹¹¹ Watching his own psychological deterioration without being able to

¹⁰⁹ McGuinness 369.

¹¹⁰ McGuinness 368.

¹¹¹ McGuinness 350.

reverse or at least control it, that's what Paul fears the most – moreover, to have all things under control is another feature often associated with male behaviour. If Hark sees himself as a coward and Seph as a traitor, then together with Paul's problems they form a perfect example of manhood failure. Significantly, the men reveal the truth about themselves in a rapid sequence, in fact not of their own will, but rather as a result of mutual provocation.

Very specific as to the question of gender is the character of Dido Martin. He does not belong to the graveyard party, he is their connection with the “real world”, both physically and psychologically. Dido is a young man in his twenties, a homosexual, whose real first name does not get revealed throughout the play, but who uses the name of an ancient queen of Carthage. Expectedly, McGuinness uses the double meaning of the word “queen” in the wordplay “Dido, queen of Carthage - Dido, queen of Derry”, referring to Dido's homosexuality. Moreover, it also evokes the colloquial (rather derogatory) expression “the drag queen” – the homosexual transvestite, which proves to suit Dido, when he appears on stage dressed as a provocative female playwright Fionnuala McGonnigle.

In many respects, Dido fulfils the stereotype of an extrovert gay – he is continually showing off. He has to deal with various situations resulting from the life in a religiously hightened environment. Even in the graveyard, he repeatedly experiences homophobic attacks from Hark. However, Dido seems not to give up, in spite of his difficult position both in the society and within the small group in the graveyard - he has an extraordinary plan to make use of his sexual orientation in the fight against the British army in Northern Ireland:

GRETA	How can you chat up Brits?
DIDO	Greta, you know my ambition in life is to corrupt every member of Her Majesty's forces serving in Northern Ireland.
GRETA	Jesus, that should be difficult.
DIDO	Mock on. It's my bit for the cause of Ireland's freedom. When the happy day of withdrawal comes, I'll be venerated as a national hero. ¹¹²

Dido is responsible for yet another gender-related aspect of *Carthaginians* – for the play-within-the-play – *The Burning Balaclava*. Apart from being a parody of the Troubles (see chapter X), the play is also a complex gender-swap operating on three different levels: firstly, this play was supposedly written by Fionnuala McGonnigle, a French woman with an Irish pseudonym (not surprisingly, Fionnuala turns out to be Dido himself). Furthermore, Dido is supposed to play two characters in the play – a man and a woman – a nameless British soldier as well as a nationalist Catholic girl. This combination of characters and gender has a

¹¹² McGuinness 302.

certain tragicomic quality, most of all when Dido has to act out a dialogue between his two characters. Finally, Dido plays a little trick on the graveyard party when he casts male characters as women and *vice versa*. Hark becomes a devoted Derry mother, Greta a vicious RUC policeman etc. Interestingly, only Seph is allowed to keep his real gender – a Catholic priest, who does not talk but waves white sheets instead. Sarah Pia Anderson remarks that in *The Burning Balaclava* “ the gender bending, the role reversal, was very deliberate on Dido’s part. [...] it is a therapeutic session that he sets up for them.”¹¹³

¹¹³ Helen Lojek, ed. *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability* (Dublin: Carysford Press, 2002)

Locale in *Carthaginians*

Similarly to *Tea in a China Cup*, McGuinness's *Carthaginians* is a precisely localised play. However, there is the very same setting throughout the entire play – a graveyard. The setting operates, however, on two levels. Firstly, it may be regarded as a general idea of a place of transition, a point in which two realms meet: the world of the living and the world of the dead. Secondly, it is simultaneously one specific graveyard – the Creggan graveyard in Derry, where the characters spend a lot of time meditating on the destiny of their town, partly with humour and exaggeration, partly with bitter factuality. The third locale which the play directly refers to is the ancient city of Carthage. It should not be understood as an actual place in space and time, but rather a virtual place with both legendary and historical connotations, used by the characters as a symbol with which they compare and contrast their own hometown.

Burial grounds have been recognised as sacred places since the dawn of human civilisation. Traditionally, they evolve an aura of mystery around themselves, provoked in people's minds by the powerful enigma of death. Kelly-O'Reilly calls them "liminal or threshold place[s]." ¹¹⁴ Before the graveyard in the play becomes a specific place with a name and an exact location, it works in its universal meaning as a refuge for the characters haunted by their past: "The graveyard, hiding place in time gone by for outcasts, lepers, fugitives, the insane; shunned by the living because of their fear of the dead; becomes for McGuinness another borderland. The watchers have moved into this borderland under the stress of loss or guilt." ¹¹⁵

Although the stage directions say nothing more about the setting of the play than 'a graveyard', it gets soon revealed that it is an actual place. Greta reads aloud an article in *The Irish Press*, brought in by Dido:

GRETA (reading) 'Graveyard Girls Greet The Ghosts. Three Derry women have solved those holiday blues by turning into ghostbusters. They are sitting in Creggan graveyard in Derry, waiting for the dead to rise...' ¹¹⁶

For a non-Irish spectator/reader, this fact may not ring any bell; the Irish audience, however, would immediately recognise the significance of this location. Creggan is a large housing estate on the outskirts of Derry, behind the old city walls. It was originally built with

¹¹⁴ Helen Lojek, ed. *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability* (Dublin: Carysford Press, 2002) 93.

¹¹⁵ Lojek 93.

¹¹⁶ Frank McGuinness, "Carthaginians," *Plays: one* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 306.

the single purpose of housing the Catholics, and it is a predominantly Catholic area till today, as is in fact the whole left bank of the river Foyle. Creggan is also directly connected with the Bloody Sunday tragedy – it was the starting point of the entire march. Moreover, most of the thirteen victims of the shooting are actually buried in the Creggan graveyard.

The constant presence of the British army, which arrived in Northern Ireland in 1969 and remained there for more than thirty years (withdrawal is planned to take place over summer 2007), has grown deeply into the minds of the Derry people, it has become a part of their everyday routine. In Scene One of the play, Greta argues with Dido about him arriving late with their supplies. Dido replies: “I had to fight my way to this graveyard through three army checkpoints...I could have been detained.” His words seem to be meant seriously, but when Maela asks Dido with sympathy what did they “threaten to do to you,” he suddenly turns the whole conversation into a joke and Maela learns that “it was more what I threatened to do to them. No luck though... No score. [...] One of them was nice. Blond. From Newcastle. Interested in football. Fancied him.”¹¹⁷

In terms of the centre and the periphery, the play also operates in different ways. The city of Derry was one of the centres of violence during the Troubles, and as the characters confess in the course of the play, their lives have been immensely influenced by it. However, the general idea of a graveyard is that of a peaceful place, detached from the disturbance of everyday life, the Creggan graveyard being no exception. All the characters in *Carthaginians* came to the graveyard because they wanted to run away from their past, haunted by troubles (or the Troubles) of their past. Living in the graveyard, they try to keep their distance from the violence which has destroyed their private lives and is gradually destroying their hometown. Hidden behind its walls, they created a small peripheral area in the centre of the city brimming with the Troubles. Nevertheless, the graveyard walls cannot make personal traumas disappear, neither can they erase what happened on Bloody Sunday. The play shows that it is impossible to find an easy way to escape violence and hatred, be it caused by external forces or by the voice of our subconscious.

Apart from the private problems of each of the graveyard inhabitants, there is one common pain, which they all share, and that is the disintegration of Derry, caused by the Troubles and their aftermath. Everyone in the graveyard seems to be emotionally attached to the city, to their “dear lovely Derry”¹¹⁸, as Greta remarks, but there is one among them whose

¹¹⁷ McGuinness 301.

¹¹⁸ McGuinness 322.

mind is extremely affected by its devastation. When Paul appears on stage, his first words are concerned with Derry: “Pack of whores. Pack of queers. Pack of traitors. Look at the state of this town. Do you know who I blame for the state of this town? Do you know who I blame?”¹¹⁹ Kelly-O’Reilly remarks that his greeting may actually be “applicable to the characters we have just met”¹²⁰, but it primarily remains a commentary addressed to Derry and its citizens. Despite Paul’s strong sense of belonging, he now calls Derry “this city of hell,” he claims that Derry “has grown foreign”¹²¹ to him and he does not know his way around it anymore.

Paul’s remarks concerning Dante and Virgil open a series of his historical and mythological musings, the most important being about Carthage. Carthage, an ancient city in North Africa, which was, according to a legend, founded by Queen Dido and destroyed by the Roman Empire in the third Punic War in 146 BC. For Paul, Carthage bears a disquieting similarity to Derry – in a complex mixture of bits and pieces of ancient history, he explains:

GRETA	It’s only a town.
PAUL	A port of sizeable population.
GRETA	It’s only home.
PAUL	A harbour. An empire. Part of a great empire.
GRETA	British Empire?
PAUL	The British Empire is dead.
GRETA	The Roman Empire?
PAUL	Roman Catholic Empire. This city is not Roman, but it has been destroyed by Rome. What city did Rome destroy?
GRETA	Carthage. [...] How are we in Carthage?
PAUL	Tell them you saw me sitting in the ruins, in the graveyard. I live in Carthage, among the Carthaginians, saying Carthage must be destroyed, or else – or else –
GRETA	What?
PAUL	I will be destroyed. [...] I would like to see the pyramids. I’m building a pyramid. But I’m no slave. I’m a Carthaginian. This earth is mine, not Britain’s nor Rome’s. Mine. Am I right? ¹²²

It is a difficult task to draw a single conclusion from this multi-layered dialogue. Possibly, Paul’s troubled mind is whirling around a central theme, which is that any empire

¹¹⁹ McGuinness 308.

¹²⁰ Helen Lojek, ed. *The Theatre of Frank McGuinness: Stages of Mutability* (Dublin: Carysford Press, 2002) 96.

¹²¹ Frank McGuinness, “Carthaginians,” *Plays: one* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 310.

¹²² McGuinness 310-311.

and its ideology is a destructive force, with no regard to its subjects. It does not matter to the subjugated, whether the dominant ideology is religious or political. In the end, the only important virtue is freedom.

Although none of the other characters suffers as much as Paul, the past and the future of Derry are on everybody's mind. Sarah remembers the days before Bloody Sunday and her involvement in the Civil Rights movement: "They were all good mates. They went on walking through the streets of Derry. Hark and Paul and Seph and Sarah. Alone, together, and then in hundreds, and thousands [...]. They had a dream. Civil rights for all. We would change Derry. And we did. We all changed."¹²³ In spite of an inevitable touch of sentimentality, there is a feeling of wasted opportunity, a missed chance – the change was not for the better, neither for them nor for Derry.

When Maela recalls her journey from the hospital in which her daughter died of cancer, she happens to witness the chaos following the shooting at marchers on Bloody Sunday. She recites the names of the streets and the numbers of victims – and similarly to Paul, she does not recognise her hometown anymore:

MAELA "...I'm walking home through my own city. Everybody's running and everybody's crying. What's wrong? Why cry? Two dead, I hear that in William Street. I'm walking through Derry and they're saying in Shipquay Street there's five dead. I am walking to my home in my house in the street I was born in and I've forgotten where I live..."¹²⁴

Interestingly, Dido – the only one of them who does not live in the graveyard, and who is not tortured by painful memories and who seems to worry the least about Derry – delivers a touching monologue at the end of the play. For Dido, the future does not mean to come back from the dead:

DIDO "...What do I believe? I believe it is time to leave Derry. Love it and leave it. Now or never. [...] What's the world? Shipquay Street and Ferryquay Street and Rosville Street and William Street and the Strand and Great James Street. While I walk the earth, I walk through you, the streets of Derry. If I meet one who knows you and they ask, how's Dido? Surviving. How's Derry? Surviving. Carthage has not been destroyed. Watch yourself."¹²⁵

Unlike the others, Dido does not need to make peace with himself and with Derry in order to be able to live in it again, but in order to find the courage to leave it. Since he spent

¹²³ McGuinness 327.

¹²⁴ McGuinness 352.

¹²⁵ McGuinness 379.

so much time in the company of his troubled friends, he has, however, also learnt something about himself and his relationship to his hometown. Derry means much to him and has influenced him more than he would have admitted earlier, but if he wants to live a full life, it must be in some other place. Life will never be easy for Dido as it will never be easy for the town of Derry – they will, however, struggle to survive.

Carthaginians: Conclusion

Frank McGuinness's play touches one of the emblematic moments in the history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland: Bloody Sunday - a peaceful Civil Rights march turned into bloodshed. McGuinness focuses on the ways in which this incident influenced the lives of ordinary Derry citizens. The play emphasises predominantly the aspect of people's faith and its deterioration in extreme circumstances, when it is undermined at its very roots. Although McGuinness describes only the members of the Catholic community in Derry, their lost faith in humanity works in the play in a more universal manner – it encompasses the whole mankind which is (and has ever been) unable to cope with painful events from its past.

The theme of shaken faith in humanity resulting from the Bloody Sunday trauma is connected in the play with the importance of space. Apart from Dido, the other characters leave their Derry homes and move to the graveyard, in which they seem to belong now. In their opinion, their city has suffered as much after Bloody Sunday tragedy as they did suffer themselves. McGuinness's play makes a link between Derry and the ancient city of Carthage, which was totally destroyed by the Roman Empire. The characters in the play – same as the Carthaginians centuries ago – have witnessed the destruction of their hometown. However, according to the final scene of the play, just as Carthage was eventually renewed, the same might happen to Derry.

As for the gender aspect of the play, it is not so much gender oriented as the other two plays. Given the primary interest in the question of faith, McGuinness pays more attention to what the two genders have in common, rather than what divides them. Nevertheless, both the male and the female characters in *Carthaginians* suffer from their private troubles which are unanimously conditioned by their gender; but only when they get together as a single group of people, they are able to face their common trauma of the Bloody Sunday tragedy.

At the Black Pig' Dyke

Religion in *At the Black Pig' Dyke*

The first note on the stage setting of Vincent Woods's play *At the Black Pig' Dyke* says „Leitrim and Fermanagh, past and present.”¹²⁶ Leitrim and Fermanagh are two neighbouring Irish counties – the latter being one of the six counties of Northern Ireland, the former a part of the Irish Republic. In other words, the play is set in a region in which affiliation to the Catholic or Protestant community respectively plays a fundamental role in the lives of its people. In some respects, discrimination on religious basis is worse in the country regions along the frontier than in the big cities in the North. Woods's play makes use of this concept of religious intolerance and explores its consequences.

First of all, the physical segregation of the two communities, similar to that in Belfast or Derry, is not possible in the villages and small towns in the country. In those areas, people had to find a certain model of coexistence with one another. Nevertheless, the coexistence also meant that if a conflict between local Catholics and Protestants sprang up, it happened on a more personal basis – the relative anonymity of the city crowd was not applicable in the conditions of a small country neighbourhood. Emotions such as injustice, hatred and revenge were focused on a specific person or a specific family and were passed on from one generation to another, especially as there was usually little or no will at all to bury the hatchet. The religious difference frequently served as an excuse, hiding the real motivation of violence, such as envy, jealousy or intolerance.

After the partition of Ireland in 1921, there were people on both sides of the new frontier who belonged (ethnoreligiously) to the opposite community (see pg. for details). Vincent Woods in his play reacts to this cross-community issue and suggests that it does not actually matter what side of the border you live on or what God you believe in – human malice knows no borders and escape is no solution.

There are several family lines in the play and the stories of their members are considerably determined by the religion in which they were brought up. As the story spreads over more than three generations, a short overview of the characters will hopefully make orientation in the text easier:

¹²⁶ Vincent Woods, „At the Black Pig's Dyke,” *Far from the Land: Contemporary Irish plays*, ed. John Fairleigh (London: Methuen, 1998) 2.

1. Flynn family (Elizabeth Flynn, her father Michael Flynn) – Catholics, Leitrim, Republic of Ireland
 2. Boles family (Jack Boles, his father Jim and brother Tom) – Protestants, Leitrim, Republic of Ireland
 3. Brolly family (Hugh Brolly, his brother Seán, great-grandmother Mae and her brother John) – Catholics, Fermanagh, NI
 4. Beirne family (Frank Beirne) – Catholics, Leitrim, Republic of Ireland
- Hugh Brolly's grandfather had a Catholic mother but a Protestant father
 - Sarah Boles, daughter of Elizabeth Flynn and Jack Boles
 - Elizabeth Brolly, daughter of Sarah Boles and Hugh Brolly

In Act One, the main action of the play is set in an unspecified village in Leitrim some time during the Second World War. At that time, Leitrim was already under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland; although the era of the Protestant Ascendancy is recalled only in local storytelling, it is not forgotten.

The first act follows the story of a mixed couple – Lizzie Flynn, a Catholic, and Jack Boles, a Protestant. Lizzie tells Jack a local story which happened when the county was governed by a Protestant landlord, lord Leitrim: a story about Letrim's nephew Clements who drowned in a lake after having killed his Catholic servant Brolly in a fight over a woman. The true consequences of this story are revealed later, but to Lizzie, the gist of the story resembles her relationship with a Protestant boy:

YOUNG LIZZIE ...that's what some will see if the two of us gets married. Master and servant, Protestant and Catholic, Boles and Flynn. They still see it, Jack – after near a lifetime – they still remember every little thing.¹²⁷

At this point Lizzie does not know yet to what extent will this old story affect her own future life. Still, she managed to touch the most substantial religion-related issue of the play: the problem of exogamy (i.e., marrying outside a group with which one is identified). Although the discussion of exogamy may seem inappropriate the modern society, it remains a controversial issue in some regions where two different communities have to share a piece of land. In the specific environment of Woods's play, religion is the officially proclaimed

¹²⁷ Woods, 19.

distinctive feature. However, Woods shows how simple it is to misuse religious difference as a disguise for intolerance and racism; the personification of this principle in the play is the character of Frank Beirne. Throughout the entire play, Frank uses primitive language based on racial stereotypes to denounce the Protestants, he degrades human relationships by expressions usually associated with animals, often making sexual allusions. For Frank Beirne there is a sharp line between “us-Catholics” and “them-Protestants” - including physical difference:

FRANK BEIRNE [to Lizzie’s father] And while there’s still them [Protestants] that’d
glawn our women and have their pick of the best of them – I’ll drink
*to the hand that made the ball [that shot lord Leitrim.]*¹²⁸
 [to Lizzie] ...He [Jack] will not marry you. He’ll be like Clements –
 only he’ll be cuter and won’t drown. He’ll find *one of his own* – and
 you’ll be left high and dry with a *brown-eyed bastard*.¹²⁹
 [about Jack] The shopkeeper that can’t *keep his hands for his own*
breed, but has to go after our women.¹³⁰
 [to Lizzie in Fermanagh] I want ye to come back with me *to yer*
own people [...] You shouldn’t be over here on yer own.¹³¹
 [about Hugh Brolly] He had *bad blood* in him. *Mixin’ like that*
breeds informers.¹³²

Woods’s play suggests that there are certain physical features traditionally ascribed to either Catholics or Protestants (e.g., different eye colour), which may help to “tell the difference”. Similarly, in *Tea in a China Cup*, Beth and Theresa believe it is possible to distinguish the members of the two communities by the way their eyes are set. Although the distinctive physical features are marginal, they may (just as in Frank’s case) be a decisive factor for passing judgement on other people. Frequently combined with cultural prejudice, this attitude is primarily the domain of the working class. According to Colin Coulter, “the hostility that often defines relations between the ‘two communities’ ensures that individuals of working class stock, possess an intimate understanding [...] of those ethnographic cues that signal communal affiliation.”¹³³

Frank Beirne undoubtedly comes from a working class background; he seems to be obsessed with the preservation of the purity Protestant blood and sees the possible religious

¹²⁸ Woods 27.

¹²⁹ Woods 28.

¹³⁰ Woods 29.

¹³¹ Woods 54.

¹³² Woods 58.

¹³³ Colin Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society: An Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 1999) 40.

intermarriage of Lizzie and Jack as a transgression of the law of Nature, producing only “bastards” with “bad blood”. Together with his personal desire to have Lizzie for himself, Frank represents an element of imminent danger. In order to escape possible complications, Lizzie and Jack decide to move to the other side of the border to get married (in a registry office!) and start a new life in Northern Ireland.

Act Two follows the story of the second couple – Lizzie’s daughter Sarah and her husband Hugh Brolly. For the second generation the situation is reversed: Sarah and Hugh are a Catholic couple living in a Protestant surroundings. On the chronological line, their story takes place in the late sixties, a decade which saw the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland on the rise again. The tense atmosphere of the bordering regions is represented by the episode of Hugh’s brother Seán, killed by British soldiers guarding the border. The play implies that Seán was involved in some illegal cross-border activities, however according to Lizzie, “there was no call for them to shoot him.”¹³⁴ Both Sarah and her mother Lizzie reject violence but Hugh, distressed by his brother’s death, takes up his job with the smugglers. It is only when he finds out that he’s supposed to smuggle explosives to be used on a Protestant policeman’s wedding that he informs the police. Eventually, Hugh accepts the fact that sectarian violence is no solution, even though he knows that the terrorists will come to revenge his betrayal.

The end of the play also reveals that Hugh Brolly is a descendant of the servant who had been drowned on the lake in the old story told by Lizzie. As Sarah explains to her mother, “[Hugh’s] grandfather had one blue eye and one brown. [...] His grandfather with the two-coloured eyes was the child of Mae Brolly and Clements – the man who drowned her brother.”¹³⁵ According to a strong belief of some of the characters in the play, blue eyes are traditionally associated with the Catholics, whereas brown eyes are a typical Protestant feature - some of the stereotypes of physical difference seem to be generally acknowledged by both communities, not necessarily having negative or racist connotations (just like Sarah’s comment above). In opposition to Sarah, Frank Beirne claims over the dead body of Hugh Brolly that Hugh “had bad blood in him”¹³⁶, clearly referring to his half-Protestant grandfather.

Finally, the play makes use of the tradition of mumming, repeatedly referring to the story of St. Stephen and the wren – the mummers sing a traditional folk tune about the bird and the saint as part of their performance, while Lizzie is making wrens out of straw. In the

¹³⁴ Woods 51.

¹³⁵ Woods 50.

¹³⁶ Woods 58.

Christian tradition, St. Stephen is known as the first martyr of the Roman Catholic Church; he was stoned to death by an infuriated mob. The day of St. Stephen is celebrated in the Western church on 26 December, usually as a public holiday, and is traditionally dedicated to family reunion, to visiting friends and neighbours. In parts of Ireland “persons carrying either an effigy of a wren, or an actual caged wren, travel from house to house playing music, singing and dancing. Depending on which region of the country, they are called Wrenboys, Mummers or Strawboys.”¹³⁷

Another part of St. Stephen’s legend (in some of its Irish versions) is explained in the play by the mummers themselves - a singing wren gave away the place where Stephen was hiding from Romans “and ever after he was hunted and killed for a traitor.”¹³⁸ An alternative (Northern Irish Protestant) version of the wren-as-traitor story is told by the mummers’ couple, Tom Fool and Miss Funny – a wren betrayed a regiment of king William’s men at the Battle of the Boyne and all the soldiers were killed. As Tom Fool concludes, “That’s why the Orangemen kill the wren the same as everybody else.”¹³⁹

On one hand, Tom Fool’s remark about the wren can be understood as an ironic commentary. It suggests that behind the publicly emphasised differences, the two communities are very much alike; when there is a need to punish someone – be it an animal or a human being – some reason is always near at hand. On the other hand, in the context of the play, the wren represents two contrasting religious aspects: positive – it is a part of an old religious tradition, a celebration of community, as well as a negative one – it reminds of the Christian martyr killed in fury by his fellow citizens and a bird hunted by everyone, with no justifiable reasons.

¹³⁷ WIKIPEDIA, the free encyclopedia, “St. Stephen’s Day,” 27 Mar 2003, 2 Sept 2007
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Stephen%27s_Day>

¹³⁸ Vincent Woods, “At the Black Pig’s Dyke,” *Far from the Land: Contemporary Irish plays*, ed. John Fairleigh (London: Methuen, 1998) 45.

¹³⁹ Woods 46.

Gender in *At the Black Pig's Dyke*

At the Black Pig's Dyke is a play swarming with male characters; nevertheless it is, in fact, a play about a woman's life and about the consequences of her decision – a decision for which she pays for the rest of her life. Generally, gender roles are distributed among the characters in a traditional way, just as it would be expected in a rural, religious area of Ireland. Christianity has always emphasised moral values stemming from a patriarchal arrangement of social roles in the family – male and female parts each have their ascribed rights and obligations, which must be observed.. Despite the unsurprising distribution of gender roles, the text offers some exceptions to the rule. Interestingly, these exceptions refer to male characters rather than to female ones.

The list of female characters is not very long. There are only four who actually appear on stage and one more character is mentioned during the play. Three of the characters, Lizzie Flynn, Sarah Boles and Elizabeth belong to three generations of one family line. The fourth female character is Miss Funny, one of the masked characters of the mummers, her male counterpart being Tom Fool – a traditional folklore couple on the British Isles. The last female character (only talked of) is Mae, great-grandmother of Hugh Brolly, who was seduced by a Protestant landlord and gave birth to a son of “mixed breed”.

Lizzie Flynn is the central character of the play, the story of her life being framed by her death both at the beginning and at the end of the play. She comprises all the attributes of a typical country housewife: peacefully rocking a cradle with a baby, making straw toys, playing a good hostess for the Mummers. When the scene shifts back to the past, we can see her as a young decent Catholic girl who obeys her father and dutifully works in a shop owned by their Protestant neighbours. She breaks out of her stereotypical gender role just once, but her transgression has tragic consequences. Lizzie decides to prefer the Protestant boy Jack Boles to the Catholic Frank Beirne and she maintains her decision against all. However, she has to pay for it: she leaves her home and her sick father and moves to a different country – Northern Ireland, where people of her religion are not welcome. Moreover, Frank Beirne finds her even on the other side of the borderline and murders her husband. Later, Frank comes to Lizzie again to persuade her to marry him and return back to Ireland. In this scene Lizzie, who has always rejected violence, acts in a very resolute and up to this point unexpected way:

LIZZIE

[to Frank] Did you see the dunghill on the way in? Well, I'd sooner eat shite from that than marry you. I'd let me daughter go in rags and beg the length of the country before I'd have you set a hand on her. I'd no more set foot in that shop again than I'd sell my soul. For that's what it'd be. [...] Go back to yer slaughterhouse and yer shop and yer killin'. Get out of this house – and don't ever come near me or my daughter again (*grabbing knife beside the straw wren on the table and stabbing blindly at the air*) Or by Christ if you do I'll sink this blade so deep in your hide that whoever pulls it out will have to choose which side to pull it from.¹⁴⁰

Lizzie's reaction to Frank's hypocritical offer, however psychologically natural, is in the context of the play surprising. Lizzie has so far represented a rather passive character, especially when compared to both Jack Boles and Frank Beirne, always avoiding to solve problems by violence – for instance during the Fools' wedding in Act One, Lizzie is harassed by Frank but she keeps refusing him in a polite though resolute way. Later in the same scene, when Jack and Frank end up almost fighting over the murders of Jack's brother and father, Lizzie persuades Jack to stop the argument and return to the wedding celebration. However, in the above cited and considerably extreme situation, in order to protect her family against the intruder who killed her husband, she does not hesitate to use a weapon. In broader sense, Lizzie is defending her whole life, the life she had chosen when she had agreed to marry a Protestant. Although the scene does not go beyond the level of a threat, Lizzie's words sound strangely forceful, even within a play which is so full of violence and menace.

Lizzie's daughter Sarah, whose story Woods recounts in Act Two, is not such a thoroughly portrayed character as Lizzie, but she resembles her mother a lot. Only the circumstances in which she lives are different. She is a Catholic woman living in Northern Ireland, her husband, Hugh Brolly, is a Catholic too. Similarly to Lizzie's husband Jack, Hugh has also experienced a violent death in the family. In opposition to Jack, Hugh chooses revenge. Sarah is suddenly forced into a typical nationalist's wife role – her husband is always away, does not tell his wife the real nature of his job, she is left alone with a small child – just waiting. However, she refuses to accept this role and as she despises violence same as her mother, her relationship with Hugh slowly deteriorates. The couple reunites only when Hugh reveals that he had informed the police in order to thwart a terrorist attack which he had helped to prepare. In contrast to Lizzie and Jack, this couple has nowhere to escape and

¹⁴⁰ Woods 54.

Hugh's decision to step out of the circle of violence is at the same time a death warrant for them both.

Elizabeth, Sarah's daughter, is the only survivor from the entire family. Her ghostly appearance in the prologues to both acts and in the final epilogue creates an unrealistic, horror-like background to the play. Dressed in white, with blood-coloured flowers in her hand, Elizabeth resembles a spectral bride who came to haunt the black consciousness of the culprit. The author does not reveal anything of her destiny at all, only that she was found by the Mummers, sleeping in a cradle, while the rest of her family was slaughtered. However, the story of the Strange Knight, which Elizabeth tells in several parts throughout the play, implies that her mother's and grandmother's rejection of violence was not in vain: when the Strange Knight kills everybody, he realises that he is alone and begs to be forgiven.

The flowers that Elizabeth holds in her hand – red poppies – are a traditional symbol of remembrance of the war dead and they also appear in her story as a symbol of redemption of the Strange Knight. In the United Kingdom people wear red poppies on their lapels on Remembrance Sunday – the Sunday following 11 November – to commemorate the dead of World War One as well as subsequent wars.¹⁴¹ The symbol works more universally in the play, though – it does not differentiate between the war dead and the victims of other forms of violence, it also echoes the IRA bombing of a Remembrance Day commemoration service in Northern Ireland in 1987 leaving eleven Protestant victims.¹⁴² The end of Elizabeth's story implies that only when violence and destruction turns to labour and creation, there may be a hope for better future: "Petal after petal drifted to the ground and out of each sprang a dozen women with hooks and seeds and implements to sow and harvest. They hooked the Strange Knight to the plough and so began the endless task of restoring the land to life and the beginning of happiness."¹⁴³

The family line of three women in Woods's play resembles a similar line in Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*. Both in her play and in *At the Black Pig's Dyke* it is the female characters who represent the element of stability in the unpredictable and unstable situation in Northern Ireland, in spite of the fact that Woods's female characters are Catholics who live in the country near the borderline and Christina Reid's women are Protestants from a Belfast suburb. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's situation is definitely more tragic than Beth's. In the final scene of *Tea in a China Cup*, Beth leaves the scene with her valuable china cup and saucer to

¹⁴¹ Charles Kightly, *The Customs and Ceremonies of Britain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) 194.

¹⁴² Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006) 31.

¹⁴³ Woods 59.

symbolise her family continuity, her identity and her past whereas Woods's Elizabeth loses her entire family and her only inheritance is the belief in non-violence, an idea which is almost impossible to accomplish under the present circumstances.

As for male characters, the play offers a variety of male gender roles. There are three male characters in mutual interaction: Frank Beirne, Jack Boles and Hugh Brolly. Frank Beirne has all the qualities typical of a village rough – a butcher, brutal both in word and deed, a racist, a liar, a murderer. His counterpart in the first act is Jack Boles. Jack is a very specific character, untypical of the environment in which he lives. As much as Frank Beirne is an evil character, Jack Boles is a good one. Although he is aware of the seriousness of the circumstances, he still has idyllic fantasies of sailing away on a boat with Lizzie aboard:

JACK [to Lizzie] I can see us in a boat [...] We're sailing to the south; past the town where it's Sunday mornin' and the bells of the two churches is ringin' – mine up on the hill and yours bellow in the hollow. [...] We sail on out to the sea, Liz, [...] and we keep on to the south – into the sun – to the new world.¹⁴⁴

Although men generally tend to have great plans about the future, Jack's speech is so idyllic and imaginative that it would probably more suit a woman than a man. That doesn't mean, however, that Jack is a weak character. His response to the slaughter of his family is not revenge, but a wish to leave and start a new life in a new place, as he dreams on:

YOUNG LIZZIE Have we a flag up so?
JACK Aye, we have. The white hand of nowhere. A nice, neat, white hand. The pirates will never take it down.¹⁴⁵

Jack manages to run away, even with his beloved Lizzie, but he cannot escape the sectarian violence bolstered by personal revenge –he is killed a few years later by Frank Beirne, who comes across the border to take revenge on Lizzie for turning him down.

In Act Two, a new character appears to challenge Frank – Sarah's husband Hugh Brolly. Certain similarities between Hugh Brolly and Jack Boles have already been mentioned earlier. They both had relatives who died in consequence of the conflict. Hugh's reaction to the tragic incident of his brother's death is more appropriate than Jack's, according to the expected gender roles – Hugh decides to revenge his dead brother. He gets involved in illegal gun smuggling across the borderline and so meets Frank Beirne. When Hugh realises that his decision bring only more misery to the innocent people, he changes his mind again.

¹⁴⁴ Woods 17.

¹⁴⁵ Woods 17.

Unfortunately, it is already too late and the temptation to give in to violence has fatal consequences both for him and his family.

The last of the male characters to actually appear on stage is Lizzie's father Michael Flynn. World War One volunteer, physically ruined but a good-hearted old man who takes good care about his only daughter. The only rather surprising aspect of his character is that he is not afraid to admit that Britain has done more for him than Ireland, not even when provoked by Frank Beirne:

MICHAEL FLYNN	If a country was good enough to work in...
FRANK BEIRNE	...it was good enough to fight or. I heard that shite before.
MICHAEL FLYNN	A lot ye know... England gave me a good livin'. It put clothes on my family's backs and mate on their bones. And what did I get when I came home?
FRANK BEIRNE	What did ye want? A hero's welcome?
MICHAEL FLYNN	Hero's welcome, me arse. I got a pack o' bastards stickin' a gun in me back and tellin' me I was lucky I wasn't shot for fightin' with the enemy. ¹⁴⁶

Michael Flynn's experience is common to many Irish men who joined the British army after 1914. Apart from Protestant volunteers, there were also the Catholics who felt obliged to fight on the British side. Because of the complicated post-war situation concerning the partition of Ireland and the following civil war, these soldiers were later often regarded as traitors – publicly humiliated, attacked or even killed by radical Irish nationalists. To be socially ostracised in this way is a frustrating and traumatic experience, especially for men, since they generally take their service in the army is as a matter of honour. Interestingly, despite having joined the British Army in World War One, Michael Flynn does not seem to be despised by the villagers – in the course of the play he even takes part in the village wedding celebration. The only one who actually reminds Mr. Flynn of his past is Frank Beirne. Nevertheless, given the violent reputation of Frank and his family, the sincerity of Michael Flynn's replies to Frank's verbal attacks is an unusual quality of his character.

¹⁴⁶ Woods 26.

Locale in *At the Black Pig's Dyke*

In the constellation of the three social segmentations chosen for the analysis, the locale is the key feature in Vincent Woods's play. The title itself – *At the Black Pig's Dyke* – is a description of a place. The 'Black Pig's Dyke' is a local name for a territorial landmark between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, which is symbolically used to describe a virtual place, or a state of mind, of the people who live in that that area. In other words, the space in which the play is set, being itself a borderland in the physical sense, works not only as a historical location, but also as a legendary or imaginary place – borderlands are places which occupy more than just one dimension. The real world exists along with dreams and fantasies, the time sequence of the past and the present can be easily woven into a dangerous maze. Vincent Woods used such a multidimensional border area as the background for the tragic family history of Lizzie Flynn.

There are several versions of the origins of the legendary name. According to Bardon's *History of Ulster*, this pre-Christian barrier is known either as the Worm Ditch or the Black Pig's Dyke: "A tradition survives that it was ploughed up by the tusks of an enchanted black boar."¹⁴⁷ *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* adds that "the name derives from a tale relating how a schoolmaster-magician was tricked into transforming himself into a pig and driven across Ireland, rooting up the landscape as he went."¹⁴⁸ Archaeologists, however, "have proved this great linear earthwork to have been a series of massive defences, not continuous, but guarding the routeways into Ulster between the bogs, loughs and drumlins."¹⁴⁹

The defensive line which separated Ulster from the rest of Ireland in the ancient times has gained a new context after the partition of Ireland in 1921. Although the official borderline copies only roughly the original earthwork, in the imagination of many Irish people these two concepts melt into one. In folk mythology, the Black Pig's Dyke has usually negative connotations and the Black Pig is taken as a bad omen: "The appearance of the Black Pig is generally taken as a warning against an imminent Armageddon"¹⁵⁰ There also exists a prophecy of one of the Irish saints, St. Colum Cille, which concerns the Dyke. Unlike other

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2005) 13.

¹⁴⁸ S. J. Connolly, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford: OUP, 1999) 49.

¹⁴⁹ Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2005) 13.

¹⁵⁰ Werner Huber, "Pig's Back and 'Enchanted Isle': Irish Autobiographers and their I/Is/Ire/land," *Erfurt Electronic Studies in English*, 6 Jan 2006, 2 Sept 2007
<http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/articles/huber/4_95.html>

prophecies ascribed to Colum Cille, this specific one is undoubtedly false, it “does not pre-date the early decades of the last [20th] century.”¹⁵¹ Allegedly, the saint “foretold” a great war (understood by some as a war between Catholicism and Protestantism) in which the evil (Protestantism) would be finally overthrown. According to a local version of this prophecy, there will be a bloody war in the Valley of the Black Pig before the end of the world: “Woe to him who lives in the Valley of the Black Pig when the great war comes. Only those who have escaped across into Connaught will be saved.”¹⁵² In spite of the fact that the prophecy is invented, its persistence suggests the significance of the Black Pig’s Dyke in people’s minds.

A similar account of the Valley of the Black Pig can be traced in the work of W. B. Yeats, who has used the image of the great battle in the Valley of the Black Pig in his first play, *The Countess Cathleen*. Yeats himself has recorded various versions of the story of the battle between the forces of good and evil and his final conclusion about the legend was that “all these battles are one, the battle of all things with the shadowy decay.”¹⁵³ His conclusion can also, in a broader sense, characterise the gist of Woods’s play.

In the play, the place is mentioned on several occasions. The adult Elizabeth mentions it as the setting of her mysterious tale of the Strange Knight:

ELIZABETH It was not a long time ago at all and it was not far away. It was in a land where the black pig had furrowed an endless tunnel under the earth and where it ran still, trapped and frantic beneath the ground.¹⁵⁴

The first line of her tale echoes a similar story, the one which her grandmother Lizzie tells the baby Elizabeth in the cradle in the opening scene of the entire play:

LIZZIE It was a long time ago, Elizabeth, [...] It was a time when to go east was to go west, when to go south was to go north, when people sang songs at a wake and cried when a child was born. It was in the land where the sun never rose and the sun never set, where the dead prepared shrouds for the livin’ and straw people walked the roads.¹⁵⁵

Whereas Lizzie’s story provides a traditional fairytale opening, Elizabeth’s tale, otherwise a highly symbolic narrative, begins with the reversal of the previous story, claiming that “it was not a long time ago and it was not far away.” The deliberate negation,

¹⁵¹ Fr. Dan Gallogly, “Sliabh an Iarainn Slopes,” *Our Family Past and Present*, 2 Sept 2007 <<http://fortune.city.com/marina/mudhouse/2435/id248.htm>>

¹⁵² Fr. Dan Gallogly, “Sliabh an Iarainn Slopes,” *Our Family Past and Present*, 2 Sept 2007 <<http://fortune.city.com/marina/mudhouse/2435/id248.htm>>

¹⁵³ A. N. Jeffares and A. S. Knowland, *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975) 20.

¹⁵⁴ Vincent Woods, “At the Black Pig’s Dyke,” *Far from the Land: Contemporary Irish plays*, ed. John Fairleigh (London: Methuen, 1998) 3.

¹⁵⁵ Woods 3.

incorporated in the sentence suggests the existence of an indefinite threat - saying, in other words: HERE and NOW, and the first reference to the black pig may point to the hatred which exists between the two communities along the border – it is hidden deep inside the ground itself, trapped in an endless circle of violence and revenge.

A similar account of the place appears in Act Two, in a dialogue between Lizzie and her daughter Sarah. Sarah is worried about her husband Hugh who left the family at Christmas time to do some unspecified “job”:

LIZZIE	I have all locked up. It’s freezin’ out – not a night to be drivin’ far.
SARAH	‘We met his van at the bridge, headin’ south.’ I wanted to believe him, Mother, I wanted to believe he was workin’ on. But he lied to me. [...] Where is he, Mother? Where’s the man I married?
LIZZIE	You know well where he is, Sarah. Open your eyes ... Unless I’m greatly mistaken, like his brother before him, he’s out risin’ the black pig... ¹⁵⁶

After Hugh’s brother Seán had been killed by the British soldiers, Hugh decided to join the radicals and is apparently helping them to smuggle guns across the border. The official state boundary is frequently referred to as ‘the dyke’ by the characters, so when the mummies tell the women they saw Hugh ‘headin’ south’, it is clear that he drove to a meeting with the terrorists and is ‘risin’ the black pig’ again, in order to revenge his dead brother. Later on, Lizzie says in a clairvoyant moment that “revenge is an endless road. Revenge doesn’t know where to stop.”¹⁵⁷ – unknowingly foretelling not only Hugh’s, but also Sarah’s and her own future. On the other side of the Dyke, there are people who are also ‘risin’ the black pig’ and once someone joins them, there is no way back: “An endless road, Hugh – and they’re hunting each side of it for the wren that flew up and betrayed them,”¹⁵⁸ concludes Lizzie her meditation, when she finds out that Hugh had changed his mind and informed the police about the terrorists’ plans.

With the outbreak of the Troubles, the tension existing along the borderline (or in the land of the Black Pig, to stay in the realm of Woods’s play) significantly intensified, especially on its Northern Irish side. Soon, this part of the land was given a telling name – “the bandit country”. According to the CAIN glossary, this term was originally “used by Merlyn Rees, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to describe districts near the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland where the security forces considered the

¹⁵⁶ Woods 48.

¹⁵⁷ Woods 51.

¹⁵⁸ Woods 56.

ancestor John Brolly who was drowned in a lake by his Protestant master. Although the incident happened almost a century ago, the injustice was still hiding deep inside Hugh's mind and was triggered by its re-enactment between Seán and the British soldiers – a perfect example of the persistence of the conflict and the negative *genius loci* of the Black Pig's Dyke.

Hugh changes his mind again, however, when he reveals the terrorists' intentions. Very much in the bandit country style, they plan an armed raid on the occasion of the wedding of Jim Stuart, a local policeman. The representatives of the Northern Irish institutions, especially policemen or soldiers, were a favourite target of radical Republican nationalists. In this specific case, Lizzie and Sarah intended to go to see the wedding, because “the Stuarts are good neighbours – and so is Jim, for all he is a policeman”¹⁶⁴, as Lizzie says. Hugh is shocked by the terrorists' plan because “they're bound to have known half the country would be there. [at the wedding]”¹⁶⁵ Having informed the police, Hugh's only chance is to leave the Black Pig's Dyke for good, but he is traced by the men disguised as a group of mummers and brutally murdered, as well as Lizzie and Sarah who expect the visit of the real Mummers and are deceived by their straw masks.

In *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*, Tom Maguire questions the identity of the mummers, criticising the play for being unclear in this point:

The primary role of the main group of mummers is as members of the same community within the narrative frame as the main action. It is in this role that they perform the mummers' plays and the killings of Jack, Hugh and Lizzie. But their function is not clear, and there are inconsistencies in the narrative. [...] If the mummers who kill Hugh are not the same mummers who discover the bodies of Sarah and Lizzie, this is not obvious from within the performance.[...] Equally, there is no indication as to whether or not these are the same mummers who killed Jack Boles, years before.¹⁶⁶

Certainly, within the multiplication of levels (or ‘frames’) in which the play operates, it is extremely demanding to capture all the details, even more so for a theatre audience. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the author of this thesis that the actual identities of the mummers do not have to be revealed in order to fully appreciate Woods's play – maybe even *should not* be revealed. The real tragedy of the place is that none of those who live there can ever be sure of who the murderer is and who is not. At the beginning of the play, Tom Fool makes it clear: “So them's the mummers that you saw. But who knows what's behind a straw

¹⁶⁴ Woods 39.

¹⁶⁵ Woods 55.

¹⁶⁶ Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006) 40-41.

man.”¹⁶⁷ In this respect, the straw masks work as a rural version of the balaclavas, worn by terrorists and paramilitaries in urban areas (as in McGuinness’s *Carthaginians*). What is most disquieting about living at the Black Pig’s Dyke is the air of permanent suspense caused by insecurity and mistrust. Anyone may be hiding behind a straw mask – and if there is no one to be trusted, the community tends towards disintegration. For Lizzie (and her family), neither side of the Dyke proved safe, not even her life-long struggle to remain impartial in the conflict, judging individuals, not the community.

The sense of permanent danger and the inability to find a safe refuge is further magnified by the set design of the play. According to the stage directions, the “set should capture a sense of interior and exterior. [...] Neither interior nor exterior should be dominant or over-defined.”¹⁶⁸ Apart from the theatrical prospects made possible by such loose definition of space, it also emphasises the immanent penetrability of the actual area – the official borderline dividing the North from the South as well as the homes and shops of the villagers or family celebrations and local traditions – none of these are spared the violence stemming from narrow-mindedness, prejudice and envy. Once again, Tom Fool hits the nail on the head with his warning: “A border never stopped a shot that set its target years before.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Vincent Woods, “At the Black Pig’s Dyke,” *Far from the Land: Contemporary Irish plays*, ed. John Fairleigh (London: Methuen, 1998) 16.

¹⁶⁸ Woods 3.

¹⁶⁹ Woods 16.

At the Black Pig's Dyke: Conclusion

Vincent Woods's drama *At the Black Pig's Dyke* plays with the various allusions enabled by the specific location in which it is set – the Valley of the Black Pig. The story implies that the conflict in Northern Ireland, which is usually associated with the riots in urban areas, manifests itself in the countryside as well, frequently influencing people's lives on a more personal basis. Moreover, the aspect of locale is in Woods's play interconnected with the religious topic. The setting of the play, the area around the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, seems to be heavily imprinted in the minds of most of its inhabitants, independently of the side on which they live. The line existing between the Catholics and the Protestants dominates their lives and any attempt to loosen the ties to one's own community is (sooner or later) punished.

The border area therefore means an imminent danger for the protagonists of Woods's play, a mixed family which does not want to yield to the pressure of the society. Nevertheless, their family finds no peace on either side of the frontier, the sectarian violence is omnipresent. Apart from the story of a mixed couple, the issue of gender is represented mainly by the different attitudes of female and male characters towards violence. With two exceptions (Lizze's father and her husband), the male characters submit to the temptation of sectarian violence which offers itself as the easiest way of solving their personal problems. On the other hand, the women represent an element of non-violence, trying to enliven the community spirit which could be the first step in order to overcome the ethnoreligious differences. In the case of Lizzie and her family, however, neither of the ways could save their lives.

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to provide a detailed analysis of three modern Irish plays which share one common feature – the portrayal of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Apart from the common background of the Troubles, the plays focus on different aspects of the conflict which also demands different theatrical design. Furthermore, each play was analysed from three social perspectives – religion, gender and locale – in order to examine the ways in which these notions were influenced by the conflict as well as on the ways in which this influence is manifested on individual people. Attached to each play are short conclusions to their respective analyses.

Despite their difference, the analyses of the plays also revealed several interesting similarities. Firstly, in the issue of gender, there is a certain discrepancy between the officially proclaimed and recognised division of gender roles and the reality of everyday life. Whereas officially the women are in an inferior position to men, and are expected to be an element of passivity, the three plays suggest that it is rather the men who represent passivity. The plays also point out how the position of men and women in society is further determined by the sectarian conflict. In all three plays, women prove to have stronger characters than men: in *Tea in a China Cup*, the male characters are mostly reduced to pictures hanging on the walls. They are susceptible to drink and hazard and do not participate in the life of the family. The female responsibility is not limited to household matters, in Reid's play women also actively participate in the keeping of the community tradition, in the manifestation of loyalty, in the demonstration of community awareness.

In *Carthaginians*, the female characters also represent the active factor of the small community who lives in the Derry graveyard. In comparison to the men who don't seem to be looking for a way to get over their traumas, the women keep looking for a solution of their problems. *At the Black Pig's Dyke* shifts the comparison between men and women to the sphere of violence. However, women still prove to be stronger than men, although in this play it is because of their passivity. The male characters are attracted to violence and take an active part in it whereas the female characters reject it.

Another similarity which appears in the three plays is the theme of communication, which is, naturally, the basic tool for interpersonal relations, but in a society so deeply divided as the society in Northern Ireland, communication is a problematic topic. Apart from the

obvious barrier between the Protestant and the Catholic community, the plays also focus on communication blocks on a more personal basis.

Tea in a China Cup connects communication with the issue of gender. There is an evident lack of it between the two genders. Men and women seem to lead separate lives and when they are forced to share a difficult situation (e.g. the death of the only son), they find it extremely difficult to find a common language. However, the barrier between the two genders is not limited to the older generation – Beth experiences the same problem with her own husband.

The communication block does not exist only between the men and women in one community, but also between different generations of women in one family. Mainly because of the religious bigotry, it is impossible for Beth to have a more intimate conversation with her mother – or the other way round, it is impossible for Sarah to discuss these things openly with her daughter. Interestingly, the only person with whom Beth feels free to talk is her Catholic (!) friend.

In *Carthaginians* the communication barrier is more emphasised in connection to the Troubles. Most significantly, it is demonstrated in the character of Seph, who does not talk at all. In Seph's case, his silence is his own punishment for being an informer. When it is revealed that he was informing because he wanted to save other people from dying in the conflict, his voluntary punishment turns to a symbol of just how much the sectarian violence deforms people's minds. Seph is also used as another silent character, a Catholic priest in Dido's play, where his silence is a symbol of the hopelessness of the Church which was unable to persuade people that violence is not a solution.

The lack of communication is not so obviously present in *At the Black Pig's Dyke*. The only actual communication barrier appears between the young couple – Hugh and Sarah. Hugh does not have courage to tell his wife that he is helping the terrorists because of the murder of his brother. Nevertheless, Hugh's secret has tragic consequences for both of them.

The final point which is also connected with the issue of communication is the fact that the three analysed plays imply that the core of the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland – the intolerance of the two neighbouring communities – is also predominantly the result of the communication barrier. All plays suggest that the inability to communicate with the other side prevents the two communities to see how much they are actually alike. The plays present to the audience a society which is steep in prejudice, inherited from one generation to the other, the Catholics as well as the Protestants. At the same time, it is also suggested that the only way to overcome this social deadlock is the common will to communicate.

Resumé

Cílem předkládané diplomové práce *Nepokoje na jevišti. Divadelní reprezentace severoirského konfliktu (Troubles on Stage: Theatrical Representation of the Conflict in Northern Ireland)* je analýza způsobů, jimiž moderní irské drama reflektovalo severoirský konflikt, zejména éru tzv. nepokojů (Troubles; období od konce 60. do konce 90. let dvacátého století). Práce se věnuje třem hrám, *Čaji v porcelánovém šálku* Christiny Reidové (*Tea in a China Cup*, premiéra 1983), *Kartagincům* Franka McGuinnessa (*Carthaginians*, premiéra 1988) a *V údolí černého prasete* Vincenta Woodse (*At the Black Pig's Dyke*, premiéra 1992). Všechny hry rozebírá ze tří hlavních hledisek: náboženství, genderu a místa.

Zmíněné texty byly vybrány z několika důvodů. Důležitým kritériem byla doba jejich vzniku, práce se totiž záměrně vyhnula textům, které vznikly jako přímá reakce na vypuknutí násilností na konci šedesátých let a jejichž autoři se především snažili zaujmout postoj k aktuálním událostem a na uměleckou hodnotu svých textů se příliš nesoustřeďovali. Podstatná pro výběr byla však i druhá strana časové osy, tyto hry byly napsány ještě před rokem 1994, kdy Irská republikánská armáda vyhlásila příměří, jež je považováno za zcela zásadní milník ve vývoji Severního Irska. Analyzovaná dramata tak vznikla v období politické stagnace, v němž se konflikt zmítal mezi opakujícími se fázemi naděje na ukončení a následných zklamání, když žádná řešení nepřicházela.

Další faktorem, který sehrál roli ve výběru těchto her, byl jejich pohled na náboženské rozdělení Severního Irska. *Čaj v porcelánovém šálku* je vyprávěn z protestantské perspektivy, *Kartaginci* naopak zachycují členy katolické komunity a *V údolí černého prasete* se úhly pohledu obou náboženství prolínají v příběhu smíšeného manželství. Z hlediska místa se hry odehrávají v různých částech země, pro konflikt vždy příznačných – první v Belfastu (dějiště největšího počtu násilností), druhá v Derry (místo jednoho z nejkrvavějších střetů a symbolu období nepokojů, tzv. krvavé neděle) a třetí na neklidné hranici mezi Severním Irskem a Irskou republikou. Reprezentativní je i rozdělení genderového faktoru. První hra se soustřeďuje na ženský svět, třetí zase primárně odhaluje způsoby, jimiž na konflikt reagují muži. Prostřední jmenovaná hra, *Kartaginci*, svou pozornost dělí mezi obě pohlaví, tradiční genderové role však problematizuje postavou extrovertního homosexuála i metadivadelní „hrou ve hře“, v níž mužské postavy ztvárňují ženské role a naopak.

Práce se nevěnuje současné situaci v Severním Irsku, ani si nečiní žádný nárok na obecně platné závěry, soustřeďuje se na konkrétní období severoirské historie, kdy se naplno

rozhořel latentní konflikt mezi protestantskou většinou a katolickou menšinou. Z analýzy vybraných her pak vyplývají některé důležité charakterizace (nejen) tehdejší severoirské společnosti. Její fatální rozdělení se pohledem všech tří dramatiků zdá být de facto přežitě a vyplývající mnohem více ze zakořeněných předsudků a stereotypů než ze skutečných rozdílů. Bariéry mezi oběma komunitami jsou hluboce zakořeněné a téměř nepřekonatelné, ironií osudu ovšem je, že lidé na obou jejich stranách se mají v podstatě stejně, zažívají obdobné starosti a řeší velmi podobné problémy. Místo aby je ovšem řešili společně, tak si kvůli neschopnosti komunikace navíc přidělávají, eufemisticky řečeno, nové potíže „mezikomunitní“. Dalším důležitým problémem severoirské společnosti, na nějž práce narazila, je vztah mezi muži a ženami. Podle dominantního pohledu jsou vůdčí silou společnosti muži, kteří se starají o zabezpečení rodiny. Ve skutečnosti jsou to však ženy, kdo nesou břímě starosti o rodinu a v krizových situacích se ukazují být silnějším elementem, který dokáže zachovat klid a událostem čelí s o poznání větší vírou a odhodláním.

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