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Monologue Plays in Contemporary British and Irish Theatre

Monologické hry v současném britském a irském divadle

Disertační práce

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1. Introduction

In the mid-1990s, American critic and journalist Ed Siegel sighed: "All the world's a stage, but are all stages now devoted to monologues? It seems that way lately."[1] Like Siegel, other theatre critics and scholars have noticed that in the last two and a half decades, an amazing number of playwrights and theatre practitioners opt for various versions of the monologue. What is the attraction of this multi-faceted genre? Why is it popular both in mainstream theatres and on alternative stages not only in the Anglophone world, but also in continental Europe? Why are there even entire international theatre festivals devoted primarily to this dramatic form?[2] The answer, perhaps, is that a monologue is a challenge for all: it makes us ask questions about the very nature of theatre, performance and our role as audience. A monologue-based performance is attractive to watch because the condensed form tests the skill of the theatre-makers. As Deborah R. Geis suggests,

> Monologue is the quintessential instrument for demonstrating the virtuosity of both the performer and the playwright, the litmus test of an actor's or writer's ability to seize the imagination and attention of the audience. [...] It constitutes a moment in which theatre must summon up all its powers to command the ear as well as the eye.[3]

Despite the attractiveness of monologues and their recent boom, however, academic studies dealing exclusively with this phenomenon in the context of contemporary British and Irish

[1] Ed Siegel, "Molly Sweeney Masterclass Take Monologues to an Art Form" *Boston Globe*, 25 February 1995, 8 January 2012, http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-157146582.html.
[2] International festivals of monodrama are held regularly, for example, in Germany (THESPIS festival), in Slovenia (Festival of Monodrama) and in the Czech Republic (Divadlo jednoho herce).
[3] Deborah R. Geis, *Postmodern Theatric(k)s*: *Monologue in Contemporary American Drama* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995)1.

theatre in a systematic way are still quite rare.[4] One of the reasons might be that "monologue is an incredibly widespread mode"[5] and it is difficult to decide on what basis such miscellaneous theatrical form may be effectively approached. As Patrick Lonergan has argued, "Although the monologue may have dominated Irish drama from the mid-1990s, the variety of ways in which it was used makes categorization difficult."[6] Despite these obstacles, this dissertation will try to argue that in order to engage critically with the contemporary monologue boom it might be worthwhile to examine further the reason Ed Siegel gives for the popularity of monologues as it might provide the necessary systematic framework. In his view, the theatre stages are devoted to monologues "not so much because of the ongoing popularity of one-person shows, but more because of the ways the monologue has been incorporated in larger shows."[7] This dissertation is interested in analysing what these ways of incorporation of the monologue have been and how the particular employment of the monologue form enables playwrights and actors "to seize the imagination and attention of the audience," to return to Geis's phrase. In other words, by using a systematic framework based on the various incorporations of the monologue this work aims to examine how specific strategies of the realisation of the monologue elicit audience engagement.

Due to practical reasons this study deliberately limits its focus only to traditional text-based monologue plays and leaves out other incorporations of the monologue in the innumerable one-person shows (biographical or autobiographical) and various solo performances that are not based on text. It is also beyond the scope of this work to provide an overview of all the types of monologue plays as used in contemporary British and Irish theatre. Instead the term 'monologue play' is used here as an umbrella designation encompassing four different ways

[4] The most up-to-date commentary is provided in the collection of essays *Monologues*: *Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, ed.Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006). Other critical studies will be commented on later.
[5] Clare Wallace, *Monologues*, 2.
[6] Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalisation: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era,* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 177.
[7] Siegel.

the monologues have been employed most often by contemporary British and Irish playwrights. First, it is used for plays written for one actor or actress who perform one character. Secondly, it includes plays that feature one actor or actress, who re-enact also other characters. Thirdly, the term is employed for plays in which the performer presents different versions of himself or herself in inner conflict. Finally, as there exist very numerous plays featuring two or three actors who deliver alternating monologues without much interaction with each other, the term 'monologue play' is used here to include these plays in the discussion as well. It has been chosen over other terms, such as monodrama, monologue, soliloquy, etc., since the term 'monologue play' describes the variants of the realization of the monologue this work is interested in exploring. The term monodrama,[8] which is traditionally used in the Czech and German context, is limited only to plays for one performer and thus is not adequate for prominent monologue plays such as Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*. Moreover, using only the term 'monologue' might be confusing as well since many anthologies called "Monologues" for actors and actresses invariably include extracts from traditional dialogical plays, such as Lucky's speech from *Waiting for Godot*, rather than including only 'proper' monologue plays that do not include any dialogue. In order to avoid further confusion, the term soliloquy is not used either as its definition differs significantly from author to author: According to A.F. Scott, soliloquy is associated more with dialogical plays that include passages in which the character is thinking out loud and talking to himself or herself without addressing the listener.[9] In Patrice Pavice's definition, on the other hand, "soliloquy is

[8] Kurt Taroff in his PhD dissertation follows closely the German model and uses the term monodrama also in English. He divides it further into a single-character monodrama, divided-self monodrama and multi-character monodrama. Yet, even this more precise definition is not suitable here as Taroff defines multi-character monodrama as a play "in which we see the world filtered through the consciousness of the protagonist, with all people, places and things on stage through the hero's subjective lens." In other words, Taroff's understanding of multi-character monodrama is identical to the second type of monologue plays, where the actor re-enacts other characters, and not as a play for multiple actors delivering separate monologues. Kurt Taroff's "The Mind's Stage: Monodrama as Historical Trend and Interpretive Strategy"(PhD diss. University of New York, 2005).
[9] A. F. Scott, *Current Literary Terms* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965) 272.

addressed directly to an interlocutor who does not speak."[10] Therefore this dissertation will use the term 'monologue play' as defined above in order to overcome the problems of the looseness of terminology.

The main reason for the choice of the text-based monologue plays rather than other forms of monologue theatre and solo performance is the fact that in the context of British and Irish theatre, the tradition of the playwright's theatre and the importance of the dramatic text is still prevalent even in the twenty-first century. New writing for the stage has been flourishing both in the UK and Ireland. As Aleks Sierz has argued, "[...] since the mid-1990s, the good news is that British theatre has been a great success story. It is now universally acknowledged that text-based theatre in Britain is booming, that it has been booming and that it might even continue to boom."[11] In Ireland, since the 1990s the theatre scene has also experienced an extraordinary rejuvenation. As Patrick Lonergan has suggested, "The so called 'Celtic Tiger' period of economic growth was matched by what some critics called a 'third renaissance' in Irish dramatic literature."[12] The new generation of Irish playwrights also embraced the tradition of the text-based theatre. In Fintan O'Toole's words, "Irish theatre is […] still overwhelmingly literary in the simple sense that the great driving force is the production of new plays written, for the most part, by single authors sitting at home rather than theatrical collectives."[13] Although dialogical plays still prevail, plays employing the monologue format have been an inherent part of this incredibly fertile wave of new writing and deserve our critical attention.

[10] Patrice Pavice, *Dictionary of Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, trans. Christine Schantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 218.
[11] Aleks Sierz, *From Disney to Enron: British New Writing in the 1990s and 2000s*, Lecture at Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts, Prague, 6 April 2011.
[12] Lonergan 22.
[13] Fintan O'Toole, *Critical Moments: Fintan O'Toole on Modern Irish Theatre*, (Dublin: Peter Lang, 2003) 295.

While the critical discussion on monologues is still scant, the situation in the academia has improved in the last couple of years, and pioneering scholarly studies dealing with monologues have finally emerged. Analyses of monodrama in Central Europe, however, appeared already in the 1980s – Sybille Demmer's seminal book *Untersuchungen zu Form und Geschichte des Monodramas*[14] in Germany, Vladimír Justl's collection of essays and portraits of Czech solo performers *Divadlo jednoho herce*[15] in the Czech Republic. In the Anglophone context the first substantial study of monologues is more recent – Deborah Geis's *Postmodern Theatric(k)s*: *Monologue in Contemporary American Drama* (1995). In terms of Irish and British theatre, the invaluable source of information is the already mentioned collection of essays *Monologues*: *Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity* (2006), edited by Clare Wallace, which includes essays dealing with monologues on British, Irish and American stages, but also in France and Canada. In the United States a very interesting study *Straight White Male*[16] (1997) by Michael Peterson focuses on the dominance of white straight men in contemporary performance art monologues. There are also further studies dealing with monologues in the context of a particular playwright's work, however, in such context the scholars usually do not examine the monologues in relation to monologues by other playwrights, but merely in relation to the rest of each playwright's oeuvre.[17] Moreover, there are several unpublished PhD and MA theses, for instance Kurt Taroff's *The Mind's Stage: Monodrama as Historical Trend and Interpretive Strategy* (2005),[18] Judith Hoffman's *Darstellungen eindimensionaler und gestörter Kommunikation in auswählten Monodramen*

[14] Sybille Demmer, *Untersuchungen Zu Form und Geschichte des Monodramas*, (Köln, Bählau Verlag, 1982).
[15] Vladimír Justl, *Divadlo jednoho herce* (Prague: SČDU, 1989).
[16] Michael Peterson, *Straight White Male* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997).
[17] For example, Kristin Morrison, *Canters and Chronicles: The Use of Narrative in the Plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); Tony Corbett, *Brian Friel: Decoding Language of the Tribe* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2002); H.H. Lojek, *Contexts for Frank McGuinness's Drama* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004); Robert Wilcher, *Solo Voices and the Voice of the People: Caritas, Annie Wobbler* and *Whatever Happened to Betty Lemon?* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991) etc.
[18] Taroff.

des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts (2007),[19] Linda Anne Buchart's MA thesis *Private Words in a Public Space. Female Monologues in Contemporary Irish Drama* (1995),[20] or Sinead Ni Neachtain's *Monologues and Masculinity: Contemporary Irish Theatre and the Works of Conor McPherson* (2002),[21] which not only offer valuable insights into this contemporary phenomenon, but are a proof of the international interest in this theatrical form.

Scholars who write most often about the importance of the monologue in contemporary theatre, however, are from Ireland. Eamonn Jordan, Melisa Sihra, Patrick Lonergan, Brian Singleton and others have devoted single chapters to contemporary Irish monologues, as part of their more extensive studies of contemporary Irish theatre.[22] The reason for such exceptional attention to the monologue is the already mentioned quantity of plays using various versions of the monologue and also the international success of the strong generation of star male playwrights such as Conor McPherson, Mark O'Rowe, Enda Walsh or Owen McCafferty, who all have used the monologue format in many of their plays. Thanks to their achievement and the academic attention given to their work, the monologue plays are now associated more often with Irish theatre rather than with British theatre. In other words, since the mid-1990s monologue has become one of the trademarks of Irish theatre. Such critical attention to monologues is not that common among British theatre scholars, in spite of the fact that the most eminent British playwrights, such as David Hare, Caryl Churchill, Alan Bennett, Arnold Wesker or Mark Ravenhill, have all used the monologue format successfully as well. One of the reasons is probably the fact that their plays are thematically so diverse and each

[19] Judith Hoffman, "Darstellungen eindimensionaler und gestörter Kommunikation in auswählten Monodramen des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts" (master's thesis, University of Vienna, 2007).
[20] Linda Anne Burkhardt, "Private Words in a Public Space. Female Monologues in Contemporary Irish Drama" (master's thesis, University College Galway,1995).
[21] Sinead Ni Neachtain, *Monologues and Masculinity: Contemporary Irish Theatre and the Works of Conor McPherson* (master's thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway, 2002).
[22] Eamonn Jordan, *Dissident Dramaturgies – Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010); Melisa Sihra, *Women in Irish Drama – A Century of Censorship and Representation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalisation: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) etc.

playwright uses the monologue form very differently that they cannot be grouped together as conveniently as the monologue plays by Irish playwrights, whose plays share many common thematic and formal features, as will be shown in the following chapters of this dissertation. Nevertheless, the disparate monologue plays by the above mentioned British playwrights share some similar concerns with their Irish counterparts. For this reason, in this dissertation the monologue plays from Ireland and the UK will be examined together: the distinctive criterion will not be the nationality of the playwright, but the way they utilise the monologue in their plays.

Another reason for not dealing with the monologue plays merely in the confines of geographical boundaries of the UK and Ireland, is that the aim here is to look at the dramas in their shared cultural space. The globalized Anglophone world is presently so intertwined that the sense of the local, or the national, is largely displaced. As Clare Wallace has argued, since the 1990s, "the UK and Ireland are culturally a good deal more contiguous and interconnected than at any other time in the twentieth century."[23] British and Irish, but also American playwrights, producers, actors, critics, audiences share a common cultural market. It has become a common practice for premieres of plays by Irish playwrights to take place either in London or in New York, or the U.S. playwrights to be commissioned to write a play for an Irish theatre or an international theatre festival[24]. In the same way, numerous British and Irish actors have been starring on Broadway stages and American superstars have given guest

[23] Clare Wallace, *Suspect Cultures – Narrative, Identity and Citation in 1990s New Drama* (Prague, Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 315.

[24] The most notable examples are Conor McPherson, Owen McCafferty or Frank McGuinness. Their plays invariably premiered in the UK, most often either at the Royal Court Theatre or the National Theatre. Moreover, Martin McDonagh's *Behanding in Spokane* premiered in Schoenfeld Theatre on Broadway in 2010, with Christopher Walken in the leading role. On the other hand, Sam Shepard's play *Kicking a Dead Horse* with Stephen Rea in the leading role premiered at the Abbey Theatre in 2007. To give just a few recent examples of the lively artistic exchange across the Atlantic: in 2013 Sir Ian McKellen and Sir Patrick Stewart starred on Broadway in the latest production of *Waiting for Godot* and *No Man's Land*. In 2007 Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* premiered on Broadway with Vanessa Redgrave in the leading role and the production was directed by Sir David Hare. Other notable Broadway successes have been Fiona Shaw in *Happy Days* (2007) or *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* (2013). Al Pachino famously starred in the London transfer of David Mamet's *American Buffalo* (1984), in 2014 he returns with *The Merchant of Venice*.

performances in London. Therefore, in order to critically engage with the monologue phenomenon and the ongoing international cultural dialogue within the Anglophone world, a more adequate approach than the traditional focus on either British or Irish theatre should be adopted.

Furthermore, given the interest this dissertation has in the role of the audience of monologue plays, it analyses the critical reception of the British and Irish monologue plays not only in the UK and Ireland, but to some extent also in the United States. Both British and Irish plays, or even entire productions, have been very common export articles on Broadway. By examining the similarities and differences of the audiences' reaction in the USA this work aims to demonstrate that the reception of the monologue plays may significantly differ, as the recent cases of the controversial documentary monologue *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* (2006) by Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner or Caryl Churchill's monological play *Seven Jewish Children* (2009) have clearly shown.[25]

Despite the interconnectedness of British and Irish theatre, however, the critical reflection of the mutual influences of both theatre cultures is not that common. As Clare Wallace argues, "The issues of shared influence, traditions or crosspollination often remain problematic, being either minimised, awkwardly accommodated or omitted."[26] It is important to note that the uneasiness with mutual influence is shared both ways. Just as the British scholars have sometimes treated Irish theatre as a part of British theatre, Irish theatre analyses, on the other hand, seem to address predominantly their theatre in the context of national identity and history. As Wallace has suggested, "Whereas studies of British, or even English drama often make room for commentary on Irish theatre […], critical work on Scottish and Irish theatre

[25] Both plays and the scandals they caused will be discussed later in the thesis.
[26] Wallace, *Suspect Cultures*, 4.

rarely, if unsurprisingly, addresses the role of influence of English theatre."[27] This dissertation, on the other hand, wishes to explore the existence or absence of mutual influences, and the examination of the monologue plays in the context of national identity and history is only of marginal interest.

The present discussion of the monologue plays in British and Irish theatre will be organized not only according to the specific form of the monologue plays, but also chronologically. Although the main focus of this work are the monologue plays written since the mid-1990s, the opening chapter will discuss monologue plays by British playwrights Alan Bennett and Arnold Wesker written already in the 1980s. Its purpose is to introduce the characteristic features of two different approaches to the monologue, mainly Alan Bennett's insistence on minimalism, in using a minimum of the expressive means offered by theatre, in contrast to Arnold Wesker's stress on equal employment of other theatrical components, such as minute integration of stage directions concerning non-verbal stage action. Critical reception of both playwrights will be analysed in detail as well, since the problems raised by the critics in the context of Bennett's and Wesker's monologue plays from the 1980s echo the criticism aimed at the later monologue plays from the 1990s and 2000s, which are the main concern of this work. The relevance of the recurrent complaint about monologues being "undramatic," "de-contextualised," and "untheatrical" will be examined in the next chapter, first in relation to the monologue plays by Jennifer Johnston and Frank McGuinness, but also in plays by a younger generation of playwrights - Conor McPherson, Simon Stephens and Owen McCafferty. In addition to the analyses of the consequences of the various approaches to the form, the thematic similarities will be pointed out as well. In particular, it will be argued that the overall tendency of the younger generation of Irish and British male playwrights is to use the

[27] Wallace, *Suspect Cultures*, 7.

monologue form for dramatizations of masculinity in crisis, whereas representations of femininity in contemporary monologue plays are alarmingly much less numerous.

The potential of the monologue form to enrich the predominantly verbal dramatization of the direct address of the audience by the actor's re-enactment of other characters in their own story will be analysed in the third chapter. The purposefully artless, straightforward way of narration of the first type of monologue plays will be contrasted with the plays from the 1990s - written by Marie Jones, Dermot Bolger, Moira Buffini and Donal O'Kelly–, and subsequently from the 2000s, including works by Geraldine Aaron, Maureen MacManus, and Mark Ravenhill. This chapter will include also an examination of Tim Crouch's specific use of the monologue in his play *My Arm*, which may be viewed as his playful commentary on the theory of the emancipated spectator by Jacques Rancière.

The following chapter will deal with the most challenging, yet quite rare, monologue plays, which go beyond 'storytelling', and dramatize inner conflicts within their traumatized narrators, whose identity is shattered and their self split into conflicting identities. Frank McGuinness's neglected masterpiece *Baglady* will be analysed in detail in relation to the monologues of Samuel Beckett and the theory of monodrama by Russian director, playwright and scholar Nikolai Evreinov. Caryl Churchill's play *Seven Jewish Children* will be analysed subsequently since when performed by a single actress, the play offers an insight into a troubled, traumatized consciousness of the speaker who is trying to suppress the unacceptable reality of the complicated situation in Israel. This chapter will also include a commentary on the media controversy caused by *Seven Jewish Children* and examine the reasons why some critics accused Caryl Churchill of anti-Semitism.

The next chapter will explore the use of the monologue in the context of documentary theatre. In the monologue play *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* the actress performs one character, but the

play does not fit into any of the previously described categories: its text was not written by a playwright and it was originally not intended for the theatre at all. The actress does not portray a fictional character as in all the earlier mentioned plays, but the eponymous Rachel Corrie, who was killed on 16 March 2003 while defending a Palestinian home in Gaza against an Israeli bulldozer. The chapter examines the genre of the documentary monologue as employed by Rickman and Viner in *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* and analyses both its merits and drawbacks as the play has received unusually biased reactions. A detailed commentary on the media scandal caused by the cancellation of the upcoming production of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* by New York Theatre Workshop and the analyses of the subsequent debate on censorship will be provided as well.

The penultimate chapter will focus on a very specific approach to the monologue format that combines elements of all the previously mentioned types. David Hare's monologue plays about the Middle East, *Via Dolorosa* (1998) and its sequel *Wall* (2009), which the playwright performed himself, are based on storytelling using a minimum of the expressive means offered by theatre, the monologist portrays other characters within his narrative, he uses documentary material, but also examines his own identity in frequent self-reflexive, autobiographical passages. His monologue plays might be viewed as Hare's polemics with "the elaborate conventions of theatre"[28] that provoke general questions about the function of theatre and the role of playwrights and media in contemporary society.

The final part of this dissertation will deal with the already mentioned numerous monologue plays for two or three actors delivering alternating monologues. These monologue plays stand or fall with narrative of the isolated characters who strive for the attention of the audience. The chapter will be introduced by a detailed analysis of Brian Friel's pioneering monologue play of this type, *Faith Healer*, in order to demonstrate how this format has the potential to

[28] David Hare, *Via Dolorosa and Where Shall We Live?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) 3.

make the audience actively participate in the interpretation of the play and challenge the narrative presented by the unreliable protagonists of Friel's monological masterpiece. Subsequently, different variations of the form will be examined, as employed by Conor McPherson, Sebastian Barry, Abbie Spallen, Elaine Murphy and Mark O'Rowe, with the aim to analyse the advantages and limits of this technique.

Although this work cannot present a full discussion of all the numerous monologue plays in contemporary British and Irish theatre, the examples that have been chosen hopefully illustrate the main tendencies of the use of the form in the last two and a half decades. The main criterion for choosing the plays for discussion was that they may serve as good illustrations of the particular form of the employment of the monologue this work aims to explore. Moreover, most of the selected plays have been internationally successful and present innovative and challenging theatre. In addition to these, the dissertation includes also a few examples of monologues plays that are not so accomplished theatrically and have therefore had a mixed reception; these plays are included in order to examine the debate and/or controversy they have triggered.

In the Czech Republic there exists a comprehensive database created by the Czech Theatre Institute that features an exhaustive list of all monologue plays and monodramas that have been performed in Czech theatres since 1948, plus the already mentioned pioneering study by Vladimír Justl provides a detailed commentary on the productions. In the context of British and Irish drama, no such comprehensive list (or commentary) is available, although databases such as 'doolee.com' or 'Irish Playography' enable to look for plays on the basis of the number of male or female characters. They also provide the invaluable data about the first productions, cast and synopses and the information whether the plays have been published or not. The number of plays for one male or one female performer is incredible, however, it is

important to note that not all monologue plays listed in the databases were published, as many of them were parts of various one-time projects. Therefore, this dissertation includes also a list of selected published scripts of monologue plays that represent the individual categories, which is appended to the bibliography. It must be stressed, again, that given the incredible number of the monologue plays in contemporary British and Irish theatre, the list is by no means exhaustive.

2. Solo Characters on Stage

"A monologue is one person speaking but *not engaged in any action*; it suggests a character thinking out loud and addressing no one else. A *play* for one actor on the other hand, suggests a character responding to a situation, involved in an action, engaged in an exchange of some tension."[1] This is how British playwright Arnold Wesker describes the difference between a monologue and a monologue play in the introduction to his *Plays 2: One Woman Plays*. For him, a monologue play is similar to a dialogical play in that "it contains most of the ingredients one expects to find in a play: complex structure, cause and effect, development, rhythm, dramatic dialogue, metaphor, resonance and interaction between people – even if only different people within one person."[2] Indeed, his characters are always in conversation with someone off stage, be it imaginary journalists or God and they are always involved in a realistic activity – cooking, grinding coffee, dressing up, shopping etc. For other playwrights, however, a monologue play is something else - it could literally be only 'one person speaking'. Conor McPherson, for example, purposefully strips the dramatic action from everything but words: "I just want the actors to put their faith in the language, just let the words do the work."[3] Mark Ravenhill commented on his acting debut in a similar vein: "[...] a play could just be me telling a story. That is still theatre."[4] In terms of their form thus, most of contemporary text-based monologue plays oscillate between these two basic approaches, i.e. between richly theatrical plays that include most of the above mentioned ingredients, and more minimalist plays based on storytelling.

[1] Arnold Wesker, *Plays 2 One Woman Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) ix.
[2] Wesker x.
[3] Conor McPherson in "So There's These Three Irishmen...", *The Observer*, 4 February 2001, 19 August 2012, (http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2001/feb/04/features.review27).
[4] Mark Ravenhill in 'Think of it as Bridget Jones Goes Jihad', *The Observer*, 31 July 2005, 19 August 2012,(http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/jul/31/theatre.edinburghfestival2005).

Monologue plays by British playwrights Alan Bennett and Arnold Wesker will be used to introduce the characteristic features of both approaches, mainly Bennett's focus on minimalism and seeming artlessness in contrast to Wesker's stress on equal employment of other theatrical components, his minute integration of stage directions concerning non-verbal stage action in particular. Critical reception of both playwrights will be analysed in detail as well, since the problems raised by the critics in the context of Bennett's and Wesker's monologue plays from the 1980s echo the criticism aimed at the later monologue plays from the 1990s and 2000s, which are the main concern of this work.

"How could I make it believable that men and women would talk for at least fifteen minutes without interruption?"[5]asked British playwright Peter Barnes. Like Arnold Wesker, he decided to make his characters either talk to themselves, to God, an audience, an interviewer, a scribe or a tape-recorder.[6] In other words, both playwrights were very cautious to provide the monologists with credible motivation for speaking alone. Alan Bennett, on the other hand, was probably not worried much about the realistic motivation for his characters to speak alone, and even longer at that. All of his monologists do not talk to any mechanical device or imagined characters, they talk directly to the audience. As Joseph H. O'Mealy has pointed out, "Bennett's monologists remind us of the apparently self-sufficient protagonists of Beckett's monologues – Winnie, Krapp, the Mouth in *Not I* –who do not know why they speak, only that they must."[7] Moreover, like Beckett's monologists, the speakers in Alan Bennett's series of monologue plays *Talking Heads* (1987) "don't quite know what they are saying and are telling a story to the meaning of which they are not entirely privy."[8] Given the monologue format of the plays, however, the audience do not know the complete story either. In contrast to plays with more characters, whose perspective can help the spectators fill in the

[5] Peter Barnes, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen Drama, 1996) 415.
[6] Barnes 415.
[7] Joseph H O'Mealy, *Alan Bennett – A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001) 87.
[8] Alan Bennett, *The Complete Talking Heads* (London: Picador, 2003) 32.

gaps in the narrative, in monologue plays as employed by Alan Bennett the audience have to rely more on their own knowledge and opinions to interpret what they hear. As Bennett himself explains, "were these monologues [regular] plays there would be room for qualification and extenuation, allowances could be made, redemptions hinted at, a different point of view. Instead, there is a single point of view, that of the speaker alone […] [W]ith the rest of the story pictured and peopled by the viewer more effort is demanded of the imagination."[9] The interplay between what the audience are told and what is excluded brings the necessary dramatic tension to the monologue plays. If the speakers fail to engage with the audience, they lose their only communication partner as there is no one else on stage. For such engagement to be possible, it is crucial for the monologists to attract and keep the attention of their listeners. With the monotony of a single voice, there is always a risk in the monologue. The means to achieve this dynamic relationship are various. On one hand, the listeners might be attracted by the eloquence of the speaker, the unconventionality of the story they hear, the richness and beauty of the language used for narration. On the other hand, the audience could be attracted by the complete opposite – the simplicity, the familiarity, the ordinary nature of what they hear. For Alan Bennett, the latter approach is at the heart of *Talking Heads*.

For Bennett, a monologue is just "[...] a stripped down version of a short story."[10] In his view, "the style of its telling is necessarily austere. […] The narrators are artless."[11] Bennett achieves the effect of artless storytelling by simplifying the language used for live narration: "'Said' or 'says' is generally all that is required to introduce reported speech, because whereas the novelist or short story writer has a battery of expressions to choose from ('exclaimed', 'retorted', 'groaned', 'lisped'), in live narration such terms seem literary and self-

[9] Bennett 32.
[10] Bennett 32.
[11] Bennett 32.

conscious."[12] Bennett also argues that the same is true for the use of adverbs: "'she remarked, tersely' seems to over-egg the pudding or else acquire undue weight in the mouth."[13] This tendency towards simplicity, ordinariness, the everyday is a feature typical not only for Alan Bennett: many of the younger playwrights, who are going to be discussed later, use language in a similar way.

Furthermore, simplicity is key not only for the text, but also for the visual aspect of Bennett's *Talking Heads.* Here it is important to note that *Talking Heads* was written originally for the TV screen, while it soon transferred to stage with no textual changes. Minimalism and simplicity, however, is common to both versions. The title of the series is ironic, since in TV jargon a "talking head" is "The image of a person, as on a television documentary or news show, who talks at length directly to the camera and usually appears on the screen with only the head and upper part of the body visible."[14] In Bennett's monologues, however, such seemingly unexciting image becomes very engaging as it allows the audience to focus directly on the actors' performance and observe the minute, subtle details of their accomplished acting. Moreover, such approach presents another challenge for the imagination of the spectators as they not only have to fill in the gaps in the narrative, they have to visualize the dramatic world of the narrative presented to them in such austere way. For instance, Maggie Smith in *Bed Among the Lentils* (1987), plays a miserable lonely wife of a popular vicar and tells the story of her unhappy marriage, resulting in a serious drinking problem and her affair with an Indian grocer. Smith narrates her story on a bare stage in a subdued way, without many gestures, but she concentrates the drama in her voice and eyes, which reveal glimpses of her inner demons and sadness. A comparison with Beckett's Winnie from *Happy Days* is relevant here as both women are in their different ways paralysed. As Jim Murdoch argues,

[12] Bennett 32.
[13] Bennett 32.
[14] "Talking heads definition", *The Free Dictionary*, 28 October 2013, http://www.thefreedictionary.com/talking+head.

"Winnie is, of course, literally buried; Susan, figuratively so, and, as the play progresses we see her sink deeper and deeper. She begins the play as a social embarrassment but is still allowed a certain freedom of expression. [...] By the end she has become completely entrenched, buried up to her neck in a life from which there is no escape."[15] Bennett's text is written in such a way that it does not need much embellishment. As one of the reviewers aptly commented, "*Talking Heads* are vivid, wry, psychological X-rays of individuals who don't even know they are being examined."[16] The audience can access the world of the lonely protagonist via her insights, comments, vivid descriptions, but also evasions, pauses and silences. Similar to other speakers in *Talking Heads*, "none of these narrators after all is telling the whole story."[17] The thoughtful and intricate way Alan Bennett constructs the texts of his monologues is arguably the reason why *Talking Heads* is successful not only on TV[18] and the stage, but also as an audio-book.

Bennett's *Talking Heads* has been so successful that it has even included as part of the A-Level and GCSE English Literature Syllabus.[19] As Kara McKechnie suggests, "As a consequence of *Talking Heads* success, Bennett now dominates the market for the genre of monologue, and all monologue plays, be it for stage or screen, are compared to his work."[20]

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[15] Jim Murdoch, "Alan Bennett – An Introduction" *The Truth About Lies*, 18 March 2010, 27 August 2012 (http://jim-murdoch.blogspot.cz/2010/03/alan-bennett-introduction-part-one.html).

[16] Sala Krulwich, "Bed Among the Lentils" *New York Times*, 6 April 2003, 17 February 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/06/theater/theater-excerpt-bed-among-the-lentils.html.

[17] Bennett 32.

[18] The first series of *Talking Heads* was broadcast in the 1987 – 1988 season with a stellar cast of British actresses, featuring also Bennett himself in the introductory monologue *A Chip in the Sugar*. The first series includes five monologues: *A Lady of Letters* (Patricia Routledge), *A Bed Among the Lentils* (Maggie Smith), *Soldiering On* (Stephanie Cole), *Her Big Chance* (Julie Walters) and *A Cream Cracker under the Settee* (Thora Hird). Due to its success Bennett was encouraged by the BBC to write a sequel to *Talking Heads*. *Talking Heads 2* (1998) features again Patricia Routledge in *Miss Fozzard Finds Her Feet*, Julie Walters in *The Outside Dog* and Thora Hird in *Waiting for the Telegram* (BAFTA TV Award for Best Actress 1999), the rest of the series presents Eileen Atkins in *The Hand of God*, David Haig in *Playing Sandwiches* and Penelope Wilton in *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. Both series were released together under the title *The Complete Talking Heads* first as an audio-book and later also as a DVD. The audio book of *Talking Heads* is one of the most successful audio releases of all time.

[19] Simon Parkin, "It's good to talk in Alan Bennett's classic monologues", *Norwich Evening News*, 10 July 2012, 13 August 2012 (http://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/what-s-on/theatre/it_s_good_to_talk_in_alan_bennett_s_classic_monologues_1_1439916).

[20] Kara McKechine, *Alan Bennett* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) 163.

Outside of Britain, however, Bennett is not considered so influential. In the critical discussions of the Irish playwright Conor McPherson, for instance, whose use of monologues has been examined many times, the only influence mentioned is Beckett, not Bennett, since analogies with British drama have been extremely rare in Irish drama criticism. Jim Murdoch suggests that one of the reasons why Bennett is relatively unknown to outside the UK is "that he is a quintessentially English playwright. Not only that but a quintessentially Northern playwright and there's definitely a sense of the parochial about his work. [...] He is to theatre, and in particular television drama, what Larkin, another Northerner, was to poetry; both draw attention to the plight of ordinariness."[21]

Interestingly enough, the only criticism aimed at Bennett's *Talking Heads*, who is often regarded as "something of an institution, known for the way he can encapsulate a world of voices within a single monologue,"[22] is that his plays portray only white older middle-class people and he excludes any of the British ethnic voices. On the other hand, it must be stressed that Bennett's speakers are mostly older women. As Daphne Turner pointed out, "Until recently, much English drama has been about the middle classes and for male actors. Though this is now less true of theatre and even less true about television, Bennett's alternative voices are still rare, perhaps because of their age as well as their gender, region, and class."[23]The positive reception of Bennett's monologue plays[24] becomes even more noteworthy in comparison with the younger generation of playwrights, who tend to use the monologue form in a similar way, but usually receive a mixed reaction by the audiences as well as the critics.

[21] Murdoch.
[22] Magdalena Ball, "Alan Bennett *Talking Heads* – Book review", *Blogcritics*, 11 May 2009, 21 November 2013, http://blogcritics.org/book-review-talking-head-by-alan/.
[23] Daphné Turner, *Alan Bennett: In A Manner of Speaking* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997) 56.
[24] For detailed analyses of *Talking Heads* see also Joseph H. O'Mealy, *Alan Bennett A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2001), Peter Wolfe, *Understanding Alan Bennett* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

In contrast to Alan Bennett, whose *Talking Heads* has never left the stage and are still performed, Arnold Wesker had to wait for his comeback until very recently. The revival of his 1950s play *Chicken Soup with Barley* in the Royal Court Theatre (2011) sparked a new wave of interest in the work of the "kitchen-sink realist" and a former "Angry Young Man". In 2011 the National Theatre in London revived *The Kitchen* (1959) and the Nottingham Playhouse staged *Roots* (1958), both productions earning positive response from the critics as well as audiences. Moreover, the King's Head Theatre organized in June 2012 a mini-festival to mark Wesker's 80th birthday and presented his 1997 play *Denial*, his opera *Caritas* (1980) and a new edited version of *The Wesker Trilogy: Revisited*. (2012)[25] His monologue plays, however, are still waiting for revival.

Wesker has always been resentful about being called "a 'socially realistic' playwright" since, as he claims, there are other aspects of his work that people usually overlook, such as "the paradoxical, the lyrical, the absurd, the ironic, the musical and the farcical."[26] These aspects are present in his plays for women from the 1980s and the 1990s that do not deal with socialist ideals and international politics as his 1950s plays, but instead offer less ideologically burdened, detailed studies of women who "all seem to be driven by a sense of disharmony, of something missing."[27] Wesker's richly theatrical monologues with minute and elaborate stage directions concerning every single detail, including refined changes of costume, might arguably make the one-woman plays more attractive for contemporary audiences than his "concern for socialist principles."[28]

[25] Verena Voght, "London's King's Head celebrates Arnold Wesker", *Loving London* , 14 March 2012, 15 August 2012, http://lovingapartments.com/London-News-Londons-Kings-Head-Theatre-Celebrates-Arnold-Wesker-poi-10324-en.html.
[26] Arnold Wesker quoted in Klaus Peter Müller, "Dialogic and Monologic Contexts in Arnold Wesker's Monologues and Monodramas", *Arnold Wesker: A Casebook*, ed. Reade W. Dorman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998) 183.
[27] Wesker xv.
[28] Wesker in Müller 187.

Wesker already began writing monologues first as parts of his multiple-cast dialogical plays in the 1950s. As Klaus Peter Müller suggests, "from the very beginning of his writing Wesker is fully aware of the conditions in which language becomes monologic."[29] For Wesker monologues occur very naturally in everyday life whenever people do not listen to each other and refuse being involved in a dialogue. Müller points out that "monologue is a substantial and essential formal as well as thematic element in Wesker's plays. […] It has become evident that his characters live monologically, the dialogue which could improve their lives has not yet begun."[30] However, it was not until 1983 that Wesker wrote his first 'proper' monologue play *Annie Wobbler*. As with his previous plays he continues to write in a realist mode – the setting is always a room and all his female characters have a clearly defined background, social class, education, and linguistic register that "make them readily identifiable figures in contemporary society."[31] Similar to Bennett's *Talking Heads*, Wesker's protagonists are lonely, desperate white middle-class women - in *Four Portraits of Mothers* (1982), *Yardsale* (1987), *The Mistress* (1991), and *Letter to a Daughter* (1992), or less often working-class women as in *Annie Wobbler* (1983) and *Whatever Happened to Betty Lemon?* (1986).

In *Annie Wobbler* Wesker's technique is most innovatively and complexly used. The monologue play is written in three parts that are only loosely connected thematically. Part I takes place in 1939 and presents the character of an old faithful servant, Annie, who is occupied with cleaning the kitchen and "speaking to 'madam' (who is not there) off-stage right, and to 'God' who seems to be in the crevice of the ceiling."[32] In Part II the character of old Annie changes into a strong and attractive young woman Anna, who is dressing up for a

[29] Müller 183.
[30] Müller 185.
[31] Margaret Rose, "Wesker's One-Woman Plays as Part of a Popular Tradition", *Arnold Wesker: A Casebook*, ed. Reade W. Dorman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998) 133 – 134.
[32] Wesker 3.

date and meditating about her future in front of a mirror. In Part III Anna transforms again, this time she is a middle-aged Annabella – "a writer rehearsing three different interviews in which she plans to present three different personas – the modest writer, the arrogant writer, and the real writer crippled by doubt and self-denigration."[33] Contrary to Bennett's minimalist "stripped-down short stories" that do not need any embellishments to draw the attention of the audience, for Wesker the text is only a part of the space the monologue format offers and he ingenuously explores also other layers of the theatre medium – costume, props, movement, musical leitmotifs, voiceovers etc. Wesker included all the ingredience in order to create plays that could compete with plays for more characters.

Despite being a realist playwright, in *Annie Wobbler* Wesker very skillfully includes many meta-theatrical features that chiefly make this one-woman play worth examining. To achieve fluid transitions between the characters of Annie, Anna and Annabella, the actress is recommended to wear all three costumes at once, each hiding a new role under the surface. Wesker makes the audience clearly see what theatrical means are used, the fact that they are watching a theatre performance is not hidden as in the plays written in naturalistic conventions. Moreover, as the three characters are of different age, the actress must age in front of the gaze of the audience. In his stage directions Wesker suggests that the oldest character Annie, "part time tramp, part-time cleaning woman," should wear "a hat on her head that seems ever to have been there" and voluminous skirts that hide all the props which she uses during her scene. At the end of her scene, the actress "slowly rises, walks downstairs, turns her back on the audience, secretive, as though doing something private."[34] She is accompanied by the melody of the song *Ah Sweet Mystery of Life*[35], which is the play's leitmotif. Meanwhile the set is changing and the actress is "unhooking her entire costume

[33] Wesker xii.
[34] Wesker 15.
[35] Sung by Richard Crook with the orchestra from 'Naughty Marietta' by Young and Herbert, available from BBC archives. Wesker 3.

which – she throws aside, sweeping her hat with wig off from her head, revealing – a strong young woman with a mass of red hair who is Anna. Anna is in black underwear, black stockings and suspender belt. Annie's black Victorian boots are not out of place." [36] Wesker recalls that in the first production (New End Theatre, London, 1983) the actress walked down the stage, where Annie had a bowl "that looked as though it contained cat's milk."[37] In reality, it contained oil with which the actress washed off her make-up, using Annie's tea-cloth to wipe herself dry. After this undressing, the actress begins to put on new make-up as the stunning Anna, while contemplating the leitmotif of her scene – the question "What is there about you?" At the end of the scene Anna is fully dressed and looks really beautiful. Again, to the melody of *Ah Sweet Mystery of Life* the set changes, the actress unhitches her dress beneath which is another, flings off her wig of red hair, to become the middle-aged novelist Annabella, "dressed with intellectual as opposed to chic elegance."[38] In Part III Wesker employs another device to enrich this already fascinating meta-theatrical performance and adds a voiceover, which represents the imaginary journalist interviewing Annabella. The voice-over is recorded by the actress and is "hard and brittle, echoing as though she's imagining it."[39] The actress in the final part undergoes three micro changes as she is rehearsing three different personas. The costume stays the same, as it is one character, but the actress must use other means to present a character who is consciously play-acting. The voice-over in her third rehearsal echoes the previous ones and the same questions are repeated simultaneously, thus creating a plethora of buzzing voices spinning in Annabella's head. In order not to be repetitive, in the climatic part of her scene, Annabella begins to ask the previously imagined pre-recorded questions herself and begins to strip off her elegant costume, her protective shell: "In one go she peels off her underwear and dress turning to

[36] Wesker 15.
[37] Wesker 15.
[38] Wesker 24.
[39] Wesker 24.

reveal a vulnerable middle-aged woman in bra and panties."[40] After that she removes her make-up and the leitmotif of *Ah Sweet Mystery of Life* closes the play, with lights slowly fading.

Margaret Rose classifies Wesker's one-woman plays as part of a popular tradition of one-person sketches and plays dating as far back as the late eighteenth century. She argues that this tradition, and by implication also Wesker's monologues, are very different from the tradition in which Samuel Beckett's plays are to be situated. With Beckett

> the disintegration of dialogue and the isolation of the individual derive from radical changes which came about at the end of the nineteenth century with the theatre symbolist movement. Beckett's monologue plays represent modern-day soliloquies and come closer to being performance poems than drama, given their emphasis on diagesis rather than mimesis.[41]

Rather than to Beckett, Margaret Rose links Wesker to the neglected playwright and actress Beatrice Herford (1868 – 1952), who is considered to be the pioneer of the one-woman play. Contrary to her predecessors such as Frances Maria Kelly (1790 – 1882), who were creating sketches where the performer was portraying many different characters, Rose developed a single female protagonist.[42] The similarities with Wesker are rather striking, though Wesker almost certainly had never heard about Beatrice Herford. Herford depicted her women realistically, her plays possessed "the basic elements of drama having a minimum of plot, development, action, interaction, conflict and pseudo-dialogue."[43] In her play *Piazza Ladies* (1908) the protagonist is a high-society lady talking to invisible company and the audience is

[40] Wesker 24.
[41] Rose 129.
[42] Rose 131.
[43] Rose 131 – 132.

forced to imagine what the others were saying in the pauses. Similar to Wesker, Herford also carefully considered the use of costumes and scenery, but she was mainly relying on "her skill to create the protagonist and the invisible characters, through carefully planned movements and gestures as well as her extremely versatile vocal range."[44]

Margaret Rose managed to find a predecessor also to Wesker's technique in Part III of *Annie Wobbler*. Dividing the protagonist into multiple personas had been used in monologue plays by another less known playwright Ruth Draper (1884 – 1956). Her play *Three Women and Mr. Clifford* (1928) contains three personas, always involved in realistic action "busily working in Mr. Clifford's office, answering the phone, talking to her boss and dealing with the mail."[45] Moreover, Draper also innovatively used foreign languages within the same play,[46] which is a device often used in modern monologue plays. Another feature that makes Draper's one-woman plays surprisingly modern and close to Wesker is her use of tragi-comic mode, black humour and irony. Margaret Rose concludes by suggesting that "Wesker can be seen to be a late twentieth-century proponent of what is essentially a popular tradition [...] and stands as an important male exponent of this dramatic form in miniature."[47]

The reception of Wesker's monologue plays, however, has not always been favourable. Klaus Peter Müller, for instance, argues that Wesker fails to challenge the audience. In his view, "the speaker in Wesker's monodramas is often too much like the spectator, the otherness, the differences and oppositions needed for a real dialogue are not sufficiently presented."[48] Furthermore, Müller claims that although Wesker is aware of the fact that "there must be a certain amount of freedom whenever there is to be a dialogue, he does not give enough

[44] Rose 132.
[45] Rose 132.
[46] Rose 133.
[47] Rose 135.
[48] Müller 188.

imaginative freedom to the spectator in his monodramas."[49] The most serious complaint by Müller is that the characters in Wesker's one-woman plays are too close to being stereotypes: "the abandoned wife in *Yardsale*, the lonely elderly person in *Betty Lemon*, the mother figures in *Four Portraits of Mothers* , the frustrated eponymous lover in *The Mistress* , or the personae chosen in *Annie Wobbler*."[50] All three points of Müller's criticism could be agreed with to a certain extent, yet despite these flaws, Wesker's monologue plays for women offer the actresses the opportunity to create powerful theatre performances as the plays are theatrically imaginative. Wesker's strength is the intricate integration of all the expressive means of the theatre, the inclusion of "most of the ingredients one expects to find in a play."[51]

Nevertheless, there are certain points in Müller's criticism that are not so easy to accept. He appreciates Wesker's skillful use of language in his monologue plays, but argues that "they do not really constitute dramatic art, they do not create the kind of dialogue the spectator is involved in Wesker's other plays."[52] The main problem being, in Müller's view, that the monologue plays are too devoid of context and that the spectator is too easily inclined to adopt a stereotypical response, "he is intrigued by the language and the characters but not aroused to indulge in a dialogue with the characters or their problems."[53] Müller blames this on one of the key features of a monologue play – the privileged solo voice and the fact that "the characters are shown from the inside and present things from their point of view." [54] The consequence being, for Müller, that "their views are not really 'contradictable'"[55] in contrast to the use and function of monologues in traditional dialogical plays, where "the monologues are put into contexts which give them a certain profile, a concise individuality and

[49] Müller 188.
[50] Müller 188.
[51] Wesker x.
[52] Müller 188.
[53] Müller 189.
[54] Müller 188.
[55] Müller 189.

meaning."[56] His argument seems to suggest that context might be created only by incorporating the monologue into a dialogical play, by creating other characters, views, and contexts that would challenge and contradict the monologue speaker. I would argue, however, that if the context is necessary for the creation of a valid dialogue, it is principally the main addressee of the monologue, the spectator, who can create the context and contradict the monologists, not necessarily the other characters. In other words, Müller is underestimating the audience of monologue plays, who, in his view, are in danger of "too-ready identification with the character that can stifle any dialogue at all, as can a complete lack of identification."[57] This may sometimes happen, depending on the particular play and the individual audience members, but definitely it is not a given of the monologue format. When faced with a solitary actor or actress, the audience do not necessarily identify with what they see on stage, but are made to examine their role in the performance.

Alan Bennett and Arnold Wesker in their monologue plays used two diverging approaches: one emphasizing the austerity of storytelling, the other stressing equal employment of other theatrical components. Moreover, Wesker's protagonists are always engaged in some realistic activity and address an off-stage character, Bennett's speakers, on the contrary, talk directly to the audience. Despite these differences, however, both playwrights aimed at creating a dynamic relationship between the monologist and the audience. The following chapters of this dissertation will deal with more recent monologue plays, but the questions raised by Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* and Arnold Wesker's one-woman plays, especially the question of the 'decontextualisation' of monologues and the role of the audience in such performances, will reappear often and will be addressed in detail. As Eamonn Jordan has pointed out, "If

[56] Müller 189.
[57] Müller 189.

[the] monologues set aside the interpersonal, they also often set aside context, and it is here where some benefits and complications emerge."[58]

[58] Eamonn Jordan, *Dissident Dramaturgies* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010) 222.

3. Solitary Storytellers

While in the UK the mid1990s were dominated by in-yer-face theatre, in Ireland theatre began to be influenced by the monologues. Contrary to their British predecessors Alan Bennett and Arnold Wesker discussed in the previous chapter, who wrote most of their monologue plays for women, in Ireland the majority of monologues were written by star male playwrights for male actors (e.g. Conor McPherson, Dermot Bolger, Mark O'Rowe, Enda Walsh, Owen McCafferty).[1] As Brian Singleton rightly pointed out, "the monologue was the primary form of drama by Irish male authors for the stage, [...] [t]he focus here has been on Irish masculinities as constructed by male authors and male characters in dramas that do not permit women to appear on stage."[2] The example *par excellence* from the 1990s are the early plays by Conor McPherson, in which he made the monologue his trademark. His monologists are solitary male storytellers, standing alone on a bare stage, telling the audience the story of their lives without much embellishment. As Eamonn Jordan suggests, "There is little by way of sweeping physicality, in that the composition of the visual image is relatively static, especially when working within unaltered physical scenographic environments, apart from lighting."[3] McPherson's plays are personal micro-narratives composed purely of words. His monologues are, in Clare Wallace's words, "rarely underpinned by abstract, mythical or epic structures; instead they unfold the ways in which ordinary people attempt to make sense of their lives and their decisions."[4]

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[1] See *Monologues Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006). Eamonn Jordan, "Look Who's Talking, Too: The Duplicitous Myth of Naive Narrative," Brian Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself? Men, Masculinities and the Monologue in Contemporary Irish Theatre," or Eckart Voigst-Virchow and Mark Schreiber "Will the 'Wordly Body' Please Stand Up? The Crises of Male Impersonation in Monological Drama."

[2] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?" 276.

[3] Jordan, "Look Who's Talking, Too" 147.

[4] Clare Wallace, "The Art of Disclosure, the Ethics of Monologue in Conor McPherson's Drama: *St. Nicholas, This Lime Tree Bower* and *Port Authority*", *Theatre of Conor McPherson 'Right beside the Beyond'*, ed. Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2012) 43.

Their minimalism provoked not only praise, but also questions as to whether such performances are still theatre or not. For instance, Irish playwright Marina Carr commented that "there is something intrinsically un-dramatic about the monologue. [...] You can indulge your 'literary sensibility', you can show 'I can write beautiful sentences', but finally, that is not what theatre is about. It is about the spoken word and conflict."[5] Contrary to Bennett's *Talking Heads*, where the dramatic conflict arises from the incompleteness of the narratives, from the parallel stories the speakers refuse to tell, in McPherson's monologues such introspection of the psychology of the characters is not an issue. His speakers are on stage primarily to tell stories, his plays are purposefully about the spoken word. Such over-reliance on language has been very often contested not only in the context of McPherson's monologue plays, but this argument has been raised as criticism of many others in contemporary Irish drama. The playwright limits the possibilities of the theatre medium to mere oral delivery of the text. If the monologue plays were performed on radio instead of on stage, there would not be much difference. As pointed out in reviews, once you replace action with static narration, "the production becomes essentially a literary experience of listening"[6] and the play might very easily become "trying even for the best of audiences"[7] as they are obliged to "rely on the nuances of language and story structure as much as on the visual, with far more emphasis on verbal codifications than is the norm in contemporary cultures, where the visual dominates."[8] Or, as John Heilpern wrote provocatively, "Monologues aren't plays but tales. They tell beguiling stories. But they aren't theatrical. With monologues it is too easy to close your

[5] Marina Carr in Jordan, *Dissident Dramaturgies*, 220.
[6] Tom Sellar, "The Irish Gift for Gab Not Always Welcome in *Pride of Parnell Street* and *Spinning the Times*," *The Village Voice*, 8 September 2009, 9 September 2011, <http://www.villagevoice.com/content/printVersion/1348557/>.
[7] Paulanne Simmons, "The Pride of Parnell Street," *CurtainUp*, 3 September 2009, 9 September 2011, <http://www.curtainup.com/prideofparnell09.html>.
[8] Jordan, "Look Who's Talking, Too" 147.

eyes."[9] One of the aims of this present dissertation to analyse to what extent such criticism of the dominant trend in the 1990s and 2000s single character monologues is relevant.

Critical attention[10] that has been paid to Conor McPherson's early plays such as *Rum and Vodka* (1992), *The Good Thief* (1994) or *St Nicholas* (1997) might seem today quite surprising as these plays are actually only slight pieces that are only rarely revived or performed internationally. They are humorous stories about desperate lonely male characters, dealing mainly with alcoholism, petty crime, lack of self-esteem and familiar troubles with people around them. "What I really want to tell you about is what's happened to me over the last three days."[11] says the un-named protagonist of *Rum and Vodka* and then describes his drunken escapades in a hip Dublin of the roaring 1990s. *The Good Thief* begins in a very similar vein: "Let's begin with an incident. I was sitting in Joe Murray's bar one night, as I usually did. [...] Something about it changed the way I felt about Joe Murray and the way I felt probably contributed to the mayhem that happened over the next few days. And that's what I really want to talk about."[12] McPherson did not have ambitions to address wider issues, the plays are more like character sketches of his anti-heroes, criticised by some as "embryonic exercises in character construction."[13] Even his later monologue plays *This Lime Tree Bower* (1995) or *Port Authority* (2001) that feature not a single solitary storyteller, but three storytellers delivering alternating monologues[14] do not enlarge their scope much. Aleks Sierz's complaint that many contemporary plays thematically do not offer much more than

[9] John Heilpern, "Waving or Drowning in the Irish New Wave?", *The Observer*, 31 May 1999, 15 August 2013, http://observer.com/1999/05/waving-or-drowning-in-the-irish-new-wave/.
[10] Among the many academic studies of McPherson's work, Clare Wallace's *Suspect Cultures*, Eamonn Jordan's *Dissident Dramaturgies* and the latest *Theatre of Conor McPherson 'Right beside the Beyond'*, edited by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, offer the most detailed accounts of McPherson's work in the context of the 1990s and 2000s Irish drama.
[11] Conor McPherson, *Four Plays –Rum and Vodka, The Good Thief, This Lime Tree Bower, St Nicholas* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1999) 244.
[12] McPherson 54.
[13] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?" 276.
[14] This form of the monologue play is going to be dealt with in a separate chapter.

stories about "me and my mates"[15] is very relevant here. It is only in his first 'regular' play *The Weir* (1997) that McPherson's art of writing monologues stands out as an integrating device, "deriving diegetically from action."[16] In *The Weir* McPherson works within the classical unities of time, space and action and uses the monologues strategically to punctuate the key moments of the play. In *The Weir* the seemingly everyday dialogues that form most of the play text serve as a build-up, an exposition, to the core of the play; i.e. to the mesmerizing ghostly monologues where the characters reveal most about themselves, both willingly and unwillingly. Most importantly, though, the monologues in *The Weir* are not "de-contextualized" as the play explores various effects of the rapidly changing nature of Celtic Tiger Ireland.

Arguably, the attention paid to the earlier plays is due to the enormous success of *The Weir* first in the Royal Court Theatre in London and later also internationally. Conor McPherson himself reflected on his early monologues with retrospect on the occasion of the premiere of his penultimate play *The Veil* (2011) and suggested that the boom of the monologues in Celtic Tiger Ireland was caused by

> the crazy explosion of money and stress [that] was happening too close to us, too fast for us, making it impossible for the mood of the nation to be objectively dramatised in a traditional sense. It could only be expressed in the most subjective way possible because when everything you know is changing, the subjective experience is the only experience.[17]

[15] Aleks Sierz, "'Me and my Mates': The State of English Playwriting", *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 20, Issue 01, February 2004, http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=191715.
[16] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?" 271.
[17] Conor McPherson, "Spotlight: Playwright Conor McPherson*", Nick Hern Books Blog*, 14 October 2011, 9 September 2012, http://nickhernbooksblog.com/2011/10/14/spotlight-conor-mcpherson/.

In other words, direct storytelling flourished in theatres because "it was a mirror which took you inside your own eye. [...] Big old 'state of the nation' plays simply couldn't have reflected that feeling."[18] There is another reason, far more down-to-earth: writing such direct monologues as McPherson was writing in the 1990s is not only relatively easy, but it is also faster, "because it could take you right where you wanted to be so fast and keep you there because it just felt real."[19] Critics such as Michael Billington really appreciated the revival of traditional storytelling as "the restoration of the lost art of narrative"[20] and praised McPherson's wit, humour and mainly his poetic, vivid, captivating use of language. Critics also still continue to appreciate his ability to portray male loneliness. "No one is better than playwright Conor McPherson at dramatising the loneliness of the Irish male."[21]

Yet, there is definitely competition for McPherson, as many other male Irish playwrights were concerned with the same topic, as mentioned earlier. As Karen Fricker has argued, "Irish drama is an ongoing chronicle of male weakness, frailty, failure, reflecting a culture in which representations of masculinity and femininity have been historically, and problematically, linked to national identity."[22] Northern Irish playwright Owen McCafferty began his career also with short monologue plays, formally and thematically very similar to McPherson's early work. Despite McCafferty's international success, however, academic studies of his work are very sparse. As Mark Phelan complained at the end of his chapter on McCafferty in *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights* (2010), "although McCafferty is one of the most prolific and original playwrights in Ireland today, his work, paradoxically, has been grievously neglected by scholars of Irish theatre (Grant's entry in *British and Irish*

[18] McPherson," Spotlight".
[19] McPherson," Spotlight".
[20] Michael Billington in Jordan "Look Who's Talking?" 128.
[21] Michael Billington, "*Night Alive* –review", *The Guardian*, 20 June 2013, 15 August 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jun/20/the-night-alive-review.
[22] Karen Fricker in Jordan, *Dissident Dramaturgies*, 220.

Dramatists Since World War II remains the single academic overview of his work)."[23] Moreover, his plays have been neglected also by the Abbey Theatre until very recently. His latest play *Quietly* (2012), which is a three-hander about the problematic reconciliation after the Good Friday Agreement that incorporates monologues at strategic moments of the play in a similar way to McPherson's *The Weir*, was McCafferty's debut in Dublin.

His early monologues *The Waiting List* (1994), *I Won't Dance Don't Ask Me* (1993) and also his later play *Cold Comfort* (2005) feature again desperate male anti-heroes, unable to communicate with their families. Theatrically, though still minimalist, McCafferty's monologues are more crafted than McPherson's straightforward storytelling. In *I Won't Dance Don't Ask Me* the protagonist Gus is talking drunkenly to his cat Sparky as he is left alone at home after his busy wife left to go to work and his son to school. Similar to Arnold Wesker, for instance, McCafferty gives his character credible motivation and creates a believable dramatic situation. The cat remained Gus's only communication partner as he is unable to talk to his family: "[...] but you see sparky when you've time on your hands you start thinking about these things and everything gets jumbled up – you start examining yourself and then you look at your family and think who am i? – who are they? – do they know me do i know them?"[24] McCafferty captures the confusion, depression and despair of his male protagonist without sentiment. Masculinity in crisis is presented with black humour, sarcasm and minute observations of small details of everyday existence: "i don't love my wife and she doesn't care about me because i've been married for thirty years and she doesn't know i don't like currant squares – that's all bollocks."[25] It is also important that McCafferty concludes his play with an ambiguous image and leaves the audience space to come to their own conclusion. Gus proclaims that "tomorrow can't be like today, something has to turn up

[23] Mark Phelan, "Owen McCafferty", *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer eds. (London: Methuen Drama, 2010) 210.
[24] Owen McCafferty, "I Won't Dance Don't Ask Me", *Mojo Mickybo* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002) 82.
[25] McCafferty, "I Won't Dance Don't Ask Me", 82.

you see or i'll keep asking questions and it'll destroy me... tomorrow will be different. i'll take up ballroom dancing..."[26] and he stands up from his chair and his frail figure starts to dance slowly around the stage. As Mark Phelan wrote, this final gesture is "an evocative image eloquent with possibilities and yet frightened by the suspicion that tomorrow may well be the same. These closing lines can be played as a redemptive release from the past or as a poignantly empty gesture and are reminiscent of the final lines of another old man reflecting on his life in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape.*"[27] In other words, by using not only oral narrative, but by including movement and music, McCafferty created a powerful stage image that is still minimalist, but enriches the otherwise purely aural experience of the performance and makes this short monologue play theatrical, you cannot "close your eyes" easily with *I Won't Dance Don't Ask Me*.

In *The Waiting List* there are no stage directions concerning gestures, movement etc., just the character's text, yet the way McCafferty structures this monologue is dramatic enough to engage the audience. The monologist, an unnamed Catholic very strongly suspects that he is on the list of the paramilitaries and could be shot any minute. As Peter Geoghegan wrote in his review of the revival of *The Waiting List* in 2008, being on the list "is the reason that we find him trawling through his past to try to discover which act of sectarian treachery has warranted such unwelcome attention."[28] This dramatic situation is only a departure point for the play; McCafferty creates suspense by leaving his protagonist in doubt, none of his questions are answered fully. In Geoghegan's words, "In the *The Waiting List*, the fear of being next in line destroys the fragile domestic world the character has built. This constant unknowingness provides the play's dramatic motor."[29] Furthermore, this play has again an

[26] McCafferty, "I Won't Dance Don't Ask Me", 82.
[27] Phelan 200.
[28] Peter Geoghegan, "Theatre review: *The Waiting List*", *Culture Northern Ireland*, 12 March 2008, 16 August 2013, http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/124/theatre-review-the-waiting-list.
[29] Geoghegan.

open ending: "McCafferty offers no resolution to this state of unknowingness and as the play closes the character is no wiser about either his fate or his crime."[30] McCafferty commented that although he was happy that *The Waiting List* was revived and that it still works even after 15 years from its premiere, in his view, "the subject matter belongs to a different era."[31] Yet, with the unnerving image of Belfast he gives in his latest play *Quietly*, which presents the reconciliation of the Troubles as far from over, *The Waiting List* "provides an important reminder of Belfast's unseemly past, one that is often glossed over in tourists' guides and property developers' press releases."[32]

McCafferty's third monologue play *Cold Comfort* is theatrically most elaborate. It is a fragmentary drunken meditation of a son over his father's coffin about their dysfunctional relationship. McCafferty provides detailed stage directions that concern the set, props, costume and movement on the stage. This bleak one-man play is set on an almost empty stage, whose centre is occupied by a black coffin that is resting on two simple chairs. This scene is lit merely by a bare light bulb. The protagonist Kevin is dressed in a shabby overcoat that used to belong to his father and throughout the play keeps on drinking from a whiskey bottle. During his solitary wake he converses first with his dead father, but later he summons also his mother and his wife Theresa. None of the characters are present, Kevin only imagines them sitting on three empty chairs that together with the coffin make the set of this monologue play. In *Cold Comfort* Kevin addresses his absent family and the audience are indicated only indirectly. Kevin's changing attitude to the other characters is played out by his interaction with the chairs or the coffin that he forcibly draws into conversation. At first, Kevin just talks to the dead body in the coffin from a distance, but later he gains the courage to look into it closely. As Brian Singleton describes, "He challenges his imagined father about

[30] Geoghegan.
[31] Owen McCafferty in Geoghegan.
[32] Geoghegan.

the past in a torrential narrative of rhythms and repetitions that conjure up a whole gamut of emotions both for him and the audience."[33] By the end of the play Kevin pours whiskey over his dead father's face and even punches the body in the coffin. In the same way, Kevin is at first ironically polite to the chairs representing his mother and wife, but later he pulls the chairs closer to the coffin and pushes his wife's chair over violently. In the final scene, Kevin ritualistically buries his mother together with her husband by lifting her chair and placing it in the coffin. After this private family funeral, the only comfort that remains for Kevin in his desperate attempt at finding peace is an empty whiskey bottle.

This dramatic on-stage action is carefully integrated into Kevin's narrative that McCafferty destabilises by unexpected twists. The set being so ghostly, "we are at first unsure if even [Kevin] is dead as well, and both are in the other world [...]."[34] Moreover, given the intrinsic form, Brian Singleton has argued that "like all monologues, damaged thought processes are unable to be challenged."[35] The representation of the grievances Kevin had to suffer is necessarily subjective and one-sided, thus many things remain highly dubious, especially his accusation that his wife is mainly at fault for the decline of their marriage. In Singleton|s words, "[...] It is thus difficult to have any sympathy for him, save perhaps for the cycle of the past repeating itself from which he is unable to escape."[36] The final twist in the narrative, however, comes as a shock for the audience, as they have to re-evaluate their understanding of the play entirely. In the original production directed by McCafferty (Primecut Theatre Copany, Belfast, 2005), the backdrop of the set was decorated by a newspaper obituary ripped in two. As Singleton describes, "One of its columns had the death notice of a Kevin Toner and one immediately thought that this was the death notice of his father. But as the play proceeded

[33] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?"274.
[34] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?"274.
[35] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?"274.
[36] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?"274.

it became clear that this was not his father at all but that of his son. [...]"[37] Towards the end of his narrative, Kevin vaguely describes his troubled family life with Theresa and mentions their son only in a few short sentences. Seen first as a change that might save their marriage, their son is soon neglected by his parents, who continue arguing and drinking heavily: "night before fuckin crazy/drinkin /me and her into it/ woke up [...] fuckin kip/ Kevin wakes up/ lift him out of his cot/ soakin/ nobody changed him all night/ full / drunk / didn't change him / it's cold [...]."[38] The death of the child is not described, only a few lines of Kevin's narrative focus on a very poetic image of snow and angels in a better place. In the first production, Kevin collapsed while trying to describe the moment he discovered his baby son dead. According to Singleton, the actor "crashed to the floor and delivered a series of very painful primal screams. He held them to the expiration of the breath and continued with more until it almost became unbearable to listen to him."[39] McCafferty thus forced the audience not to look away. As Singleton concludes, "Rather than the requiem approach by McPherson or the comic spectacle of collapsed masculinity of O'Rowe, McCafferty's monologue brings us into the heart of the drama through direct address to us as characters within the fiction. [...] The form thus creates a role for the spectator beyond witness and begs us to offer absolution so the character might be redeemed."[40] In other words, McCafferty's monologue plays succeed in creating a dynamic relationship between the solitary speakers and their listeners by drawing the audience into play by thoughtful structuring of the relationship of the speaker and his text. In *I Won't Dance Don't Ask Me* the fate of the speaker is put into question via contrasting his narrative with the ambiguous final image of silent dance, in *The Waiting List* by preventing the speaker from receiving answers to any of his questions, and in *Cold Comfort* by

[37] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?"274.
[38] McCafferty, *Cold Comfort*, 51 – 52.
[39] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?"274.
[40] Singleton, "Am I talking to myself?"275.

intertwining the text with powerful non-verbal action and addressing the audience indirectly via the ghostly presences on stage.

The popularity of the solitary male storytellers is not restricted solely to Ireland of the 1990s: monologues about male loneliness definitely appear also in British drama, but the frequency with which contemporary male playwrights write such plays is not as striking as in Ireland. An example of this type of monologue play from the UK that has been very successful is Simon Stephens's play *Sea Wall*, which premiered at the Bush Theatre in London in 2008. It has been revived many times not only in Britain, but also internationally and is available in its film version as well.[41] The similarity to McPherson in particular, in both form and content, is rather remarkable. According to Stephens's stage directions, "This monologue should be performed as far as possible on a bare stage, as far as possible in natural light and as far as possible without sound effects. Alex addresses the audience directly."[42] Yet the Irish influence was not noted in any of the reviews, which praised the actor Andrew Scott (famous for his role as Moriarty in the latest Sherlock Holmes BBC series) for a "30 minute *tour de force*" and Simon Stephens for his gift of storytelling: "Stephens' amiable, inclusive, raw-sounding writing – full of non-sequiturs, self-deprecating humour and trailing sentences – and Scott's convivial delivery, complete with flashed grins, shuffles, mumbles and pauses, make this an electric experience."[43] Alex is a successful photographer with a lovely wife and daughter, leading a happy life in London. Every summer they go on a holiday to France to visit his father-in-law. Alex tells his story in a light manner, tells jokes, is sarcastic, until he comes to the tragic loss of his daughter and reveals his real despair: "I'm holding my entire head together. The skin and the shell of me. I'm falling absolutely inside myself. But you can

[41] *Sea Wall* (2012), directed by Andrew Porter and Simon Stephens. For details see http://www.seawallandrewscott.com/.
[42] Simon Stephens, "Sea Wall", *Simon Stephens: Plays 2* (London: Methuen Drama, 2009) 284.
[43] Siobhan Murphy, "Andrew Scott's remarkable performance in Simon Stephens' Sea Wall is devastating", *Metro*, 30 July 2013, 23 August 2013, http://metro.co.uk/2013/07/30/andrew-scotts-remarkable-performance-in-simon-stephens-sea-wall-is-devastating-3902905/.

see that. You can see the – in my–"[44] At the end of his confessional monologue, Alex is almost unable to speak, the death of his daughter paralyses him, there are more and more gaps and silences in his narrative.

The way Stephens narrates Alex's story is very direct, there are no ambiguities, no contradictions, yet it is structured in a very intricate and effective way. The personal experience of loss is presented merely at the very end of the monologue play, and comes as a shock for the audience, a twist in the otherwise casual narrative. As Dominic Cavendish wrote, the narrative seems at first as "something quite shallow, superficial, even smug in its tone,"[45] but the ending "suddenly launches us into a flux of profound, unanswerable questions."[46] In other words, most of the narrative is actually an exposition as Stephens very carefully prepares the atmosphere for the shattering ending. Just as the seabed slowly descends to the sea wall and then falls down abruptly into impenetrable darkness, so does Alex's story. Yet, the experience of loss remains mostly suppressed, Alex is still in a state of shock as it is only three weeks since his daughter died:

> There is a wall in the sea? It drops down. Hundreds of feet.[...] And swimming there, with the sun, even bright as it is above us, and it is a bright day. Even then the darkness of the fall that the wall in the sea reveals is as terrifying as anything I've seen.[47]

How will Alex cope with such tragedy in the future is not part of the story, yet there is a tiny glint of hope in the last sentence of *Sea Wall*: "Just because we don't know doesn't mean we

[44] Stephens 297.
[45] Dominic Cavedish, "Sea Wall at Traverse Theatre – review", *The Telegraph*, 7 August 2009, 23 August 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/edinburgh-festival/5990471/Edinburgh-Festival-2009-Sea-Wall-at-Traverse-Theatre-review.html.
[46] Cavendish.
[47] Stephens 288.

won't know. We just don't know yet. But I think one day we will. I think we will."[48] The grief of Alex's wife is also not commented upon as Stephens's monologue play focuses primarily on the male experience of loss. Stephens succeeds in engaging the audience by a compelling story and thanks to Andrew Scott's pitch-perfect performance *Sea Wall* definitely makes a memorable theatre experience.

The absence of the female voice becomes all too visible, especially when seen in the context of most of the monologue plays written in Ireland in the last two decades. The women are presented mainly via male narratives, "as an aspect of [the men's] personal haunting."[49] Yet, though definitely less numerous,[50] there are single character monologue plays for a solitary storyteller that bring in the much needed female perspective, written both by male and female playwrights. One of the reasons for the uneven representation of women in contemporary Irish monologues is that many plays for solo performances by women are unfortunately unavailable in print, particularly those written by female playwrights.[51] For instance, Jennifer Johnston's *Christine* (1989), *Mustn't Forget High Moon* (1989) or *Twinkletoes* (1993) or Elaine Murphy's latest play *Little Gem* (2010) have been published, but many other plays by women have not. For example, Nell McCafferty's interestingly titled monologue *Sheep, Shite and Desolation* (1994), based upon the author's experiences of an open lesbian living in a remote area of county Cork, was performed at a festival called *There Are No Irish Women Playwrights* at the Project Art Centre in Dublin, but it does not exist as a published script, similarly to Mia Gallagher *Normality* (2001), Billie Traynor's *Redser* (2001), Ena May's *A*

[48] Stephens 297.
[49] Emily Pine, "*Quietly* – Review", *Irish Theatre Magazine*, 23 November 2012, 11 July 2013, http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Reviews/Current/Quietly.
[50] The Irish Playography Database lists 57 monologues for one female cast and 117 for one male cast. (http://www.irishplayography.com/search-advanced.aspx#).
[51] See Irish Playography, Advanced Search – unpublished scripts.

Close Shave with a Devil (2001) and many others.[52] The position of women writers and playwrights has undoubtedly improved significantly in comparison to previous decades, yet it is still far from being equal. As Mária Kurdi notes in her conclusion to her recent study *Representation of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama*, "the small number indicates a recognizable general problem of women playwrights in Ireland: the publication of their texts is 'often a struggle', and the relative lack of the availability of their texts 'prevents them from intervening in the dominant exchange of images and debates within the culture'."[53]

An early example of monologue plays offering female perspective are the above mentioned plays by Northern Irish playwright and novelist Jennifer Johnston that offer the less often heard female experience of the Troubles. Johnston's trilogy of monologues, *Christine*, *Mustn't Forget High Moon,* and *Twinkletoes* is less known than her novels, yet the whole trilogy definitely deserves attention. After the success of the Portuguese translation and revival of *Christine* and *Mustn't Forget High Moon* in 2004, which coincided with the Madrid bombings, Johnston was invited to contribute to two European projects. In 2007 she wrote a monologue play *Seventeen Trees* inspired by her visit to World War II memorials in Normandy which "prompted the writer to delve into the emotional and sensorial imprints left in the mindscape of those who experienced terror of warfare."[54] This very short play has not been performed yet, but it has been published in a special issue of *Revista Anglo-Saxonica* on Irish drama.[55] In its published form the monologue play *Seventeen Trees* resembles a poem, as

[52] Other unpublished scripts include, for example, Nell McCafferty's *A Really Big Bed* (1995), Mary Halpin's *Are You Listening To Me Gaybo?* (1997), Iris Park's *I Am A Man* (2010), Carolyn Swift's *Lady G* (1987), etc. See Irish Playography.
[53] Maria Kurdi, *Representation of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 222.
[54] Teresa Casal, "Jennifer Johnston's Monologues: Introductory Note", *Revista Anglo-Saxonica*, 2.27, 9 November 2013, http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/3531/1/AngloSaxon27Teresa%20Casal%20175-180.pdf.
[55] *Revista Anglo-Saxonica*, 2. 27, 9 November 2013, http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/3531/1/AngloSaxon27Teresa%20Casal%20175-180.pdf

its speaker is not specified, there are no stage directions, just very brief text narrated by a ghost of the speaker, who is buried in a cemetery in a small village somewhere close to the coast of Normandy. The play is a collage of reminiscences from the speaker's childhood during the Second World War. The war is at first absent from the speaker's world, yet on the D Day, 14 May 1944, the retreating German soldiers invade their village and take some of the neighbours away, including the speaker's best friend Julie, after whom she named one of the seventeen trees that were planted in the honour of the victims.

Johnston wrote another brief monologue play *I Have Desire to Go* on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights in 2008. Like *Seventeen Trees* the monologue play exists only in its printed form. It was published by *The Irish Times* as part of a series *From the Republic of Conscience: Reflections on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by 31 Irish Writers with an Introduction by Seamus Heaney*.[56] Again, a nameless speaker reminisces about her childhood spent in hiding during the Second World War. This time it is not a voice from afterlife, but a voice of a resident of an old people's home: "Of course they call this place a home but to me that is laughable. It is a storage unit: a place to keep unwanted people, old redundant people, people who are no longer needed. If you can call us people."[57] The speaker then shares her memories of her family, who all perished in a concentration camp. In terms of its form, this monologue is devoid of any stage directions and consists only of the character's text, yet it has the potential to engage the audience as Johnston's language is rather poetic and the life experience of the female speaker is presented with dark humour.

In contrast to these last two monologue plays that exist only on the page, Johnston's earlier Northern Irish trilogy of full-length monologue plays *Christine, Mustn't Forget High Moon,*

[56]Casal.
[57] Jennifer Johnston, "I Have Desired to Go", *Revista Anglo-Saxonica*, 191.

and *Twinkletoes* have all been performed successfully. The first monologue *Christine* was first presented under the title *O Ananias, Azarias and Misael* at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin in 1989. The form Jennifer Johnston uses is again identical to McPherson, McCafferty or Stephens; as Frances Gray wrote, "the 'stage' here is the simplest of all, that of the storyteller who addresses us directly."[58] As Maria Kurdi noted, "regarding form, these [monologue plays] are not alien from [Johnston's] fictional world as several of her novels represent female characters' interior, self-revealing speech too."[59] For this reason, *Christine* was later transferred from the theatre stage to radio, as this monologue form "suits the intimacy of the radio perfectly."[60] What is different, however, besides the female perspective, is the tone of Johnston's monologues. Unlike contemporary monologues for single male performers penned by male Irish playwrights, which are to a large extend sarcastic black comedies, "illustrating anti-social masculinity, its aggression and cruelty as well as its communicative shortcomings,"[61] Johnston's monologue plays are rather tragic. Furthermore, her use of language is less extravagant, her speakers are quieter as silence plays a very important role in all her monologues. Her plays are not visual; she does not include elaborate stage directions, but requires from their audience very attentive listening. As Teresa Casal argues, the viewers must have "the ability to listen carefully to the words and silences and trail of associations that they trigger. In that sense, listening to those intimate voices enhances our ability both to listen to them, and to listen to the voices and associations that they awaken in us."[62]

The protagonist in *Christine* is an average middle-class woman who was supposed to ask no questions, she was quiet all her life as her husband "thought [she] thought like him, believed

[58] Frances Gray, "Introduction", *Best Radio Plays of 1989*, (London: Methuen Drama, 1990) 9.
[59] Maria Kurdi, *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 145.
[60] Gray 9.
[61] Eckart Voigst-Virchow and Mark Schreiber, "Will the 'Wordy Body' Please Stand Up? The Crises of Male Impersonation in Monological Drama – Beckett, McPherson, Eno," *Monologues*, 295.
[62] Casal 178.

like him."[63] After his violent death and the simultaneous death of her father-in-law, Christine decides to sell her house and leave. While preparing the house for new owners, she meditates on her past life and finally reveals her own thoughts freely, this time her only censor being herself, not the husband, not the family or the community. Nevertheless, there are still many things she keeps to herself. Not being used to communicate, she is still secretive, thus enabling the audience to reveal only small glimpses of her life and thoughts. The silences and gaps in her narrative create the necessary dramatic tension and make the audience want to learn more about the protagonist:

> Maybe old Mr. Malsteed would still be going strong if... If if's and and's were pots and pans there'd be no need for tinkers. She used to say that too. If... It was shock that killed him. If only... I had to tell him... There wasn't anyone else really. [...] There are times you should keep your mouth shut. Hold your tongue.[64]

Johnston in *Christine* uses the monologue form to give voice to the previously silenced narrator, and thus might be considered a good example of a very important trend in the contemporary monologue boom, where, as Brian Singleton suggests, "the monologue form of drama has been used strategically by muted groups in Anglophone theatre to give voice to the voiceless, particularly for the subjectivities of race, class, gender and sexuality."[65]

After the success of *Christine*, Johnston was asked by the BBC to write a sequel to the play in which the audience would find out more about the quiet, yet captivating narrator. As Johnston herself explained, this task was a challenge for her as she "was in a quandary as to how to give them more without overburdening Christine with explanations, but luckily Billy

[63] Jennifer Johnston, *Christine*, *Best Radio Plays of 1989*, 42.
[64] Johnston, *Christine*, 43.
[65] Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself?, 260.

sauntered into my head and both pieces were done together […]"[66] The second monologue *Mustn't Forget High Noon* is thus narrated from Christine's husband point of view and makes use of the inclusive monologue form to emphasise the separateness of Christine's and Billy's lives. By isolating these two characters into two separate monologues Johnston achieves unique dramatic tension as the audience are given two parallel perspectives that merge only in a very few details. The audience are thus left wondering what these two people could have had in common. Their marriage, which both of them claim was a success, seems a social bond between two individuals living in two, utterly separate worlds. While Christine's world is created from memories of her mother, Billy's is a men's world formed by his father and his best friend Sam, who has just been shot by the IRA. In Billy's monologue Johnston draws parallels between the Northern Irish reality and the fictional world of the Wild West as depicted in American film westerns that Billy adores. The title of the play thus refers to the cult American western *High Noon* with Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly. Billy was introduced to the world of cowboys and Indians by his father, an active participant of the Protestant marches. The western movies belong to their secret male world, similar to the pubs and marches. They agree not to tell Billy's mother the details of their adventures, such as the father drinking in a pub or the presence of images of 'bad women' in the movies: "Men must stick together, son."[67] Billy thus naturally desires to have a son, who would have a similar bond with him, yet Billy's and Christine's marriage is childless: "I always thought I'd have a son. It's rough to think there is no one to follow you in the world."[68] The bitter paradox of the situation is, however, that the fault is not on Christine's side as Billy thinks, but on his. Christine admits in her monologue not having the courage to tell Billy: "So many things we didn't say to each other. […] The doctor said just to tell him to go along to the clinic. […] I just didn't have the heart to tell Billy. I suppose I was wrong. He liked to play the big

[66] Jennifer Johnston, "Introduction", *Three Monologues* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1995) 10.
[67] Johnston, *Three Monologues,* 35.
[68] Johnston, *Three Monologues,* 35.

guy…"[69] In the final part of *Mustn't Forget High Noon* the school bus driver Billy, who though no longer a teenager is in his mind still living in the idealized cowboy world and dreaming about Grace Kelly, decides to get involved in the revenge of his best friend's death: "I am going to go and get me a big hat and a white horse and a gun."[70] Even though Billy's final words are full of hope, the audience know from the previous monologue by his wife that his death is inevitable and thus despite all his faults, they might sympathize with him. As Johnston herself said, "I feel sorry for him, no one deserves to die like that, and he served his purpose, which originally was to illuminate Christine."[71]

The third monologue play from the trilogy, *Twinkletoes*, is connected with the other two plays only indirectly, in that it also deals with the harsh reality of the Troubles. Its protagonist Karen is much more outspoken than Christine or Billy, as Johnston explains: "Karen danced into the room and took over from me. I really hadn't much say in her creation. I merely cut out a few swear words after she had gone away."[72] In contrast to *Christine* and *Mustn't Forget High Noon*, the last play includes stage directions concerning Karen's costume, use of props and on stage action. Most of the non-verbal action, however, is included in the main text of the play as the character herself comments on what she is doing. The choice of the monologue form again has a credible motivation. Karen is a wife of Declan, who is serving a life sentence in prison. She comes back home late at night after their only daughter's wedding and not being able to go to sleep, she decides to continue drinking. In her monologue Karen randomly reveals snippets from her life. She is admired by the community as a wife of a hero, yet by the end of her monologue she admits, encouraged by drink, that her husband has ruined her life. Similar to Christine, she lives a double life: an official, outward one, where she plays her role of the wife who keeps her duty to her husband, and an unofficial, private one, of a lonely

[69] Johnston, *Christine*, 41.
[70] Johnston, *Three Monologues*, 48.
[71] Johnston, *Three Monologues*, 10.
[72] Johnston, *Three Monologues*, 11.

young woman, who loves dancing and company and wishes to be loved again. Johnston avoids being sentimental by making Karen fight despair by black humour and mockery of her own situation. Yet after having drunk a few glasses, the protagonist looses her sarcastic and courageous mask and her frailty becomes visible. The tension between what she tells her husband and what is really on her mind becomes more and more unbearable: "I wonder if Declan knows all the things I don't tell him? I don't want him upset. I loved him. He did what he had to do. Even after nine years I haven't worked out what to say to him on Thursdays."[73] The reason why Karen is so desperate is that her daughter is very likely to repeat her own mistakes. Already pregnant, Karen married at the age of seventeen in order to escape from home. Her daughter is in the same situation. As her father is in prison, she is led to the altar by Karen's father, who has always disapproved of Karen's husband's involvement in the Troubles: "I hope this young lanky isn't in the same line of business as your daddy. […] Of course he isn't, grand-dad. Things have changed. Amen, said my daddy. Amen, I said, inside my head. Nothing changes and everything changes."[74]

Despite all that is said out loud, however, Johnston makes silence very eloquent. Although the pauses, gaps, suppressed thoughts and feelings corrode the masks put on by Karen, her family and the community, it is very likely that everyone will go on with their lives as before. Like Alan Bennett, Jennifer Johnston succeeds in creating monologue plays that activate the imagination of the audience by drawing the attention to the more or less subtle evasions in the narratives of the not often heard voices. As Teresa Casal summarized, Jennifer Johnston uses the monologue form effectively to dramatize tragic stories of "personal secrets and misunderstandings reflecting a larger and more collective history of confrontations."[75] The

[73] Johnston, *Three Monologues,* 29.
[74] Johnston, *Three Monologues,* 30.
[75] Casal in Paulo Eduardo Carvalho, "Irish Drama: Views Across Borders", *Revista Anglo-Saxonica,* 43.

proof of the power of Johnston's monologue plays was their successful revival in December 2013 as part of the City of Culture 2013 in Derry/Londonderry.

The last example of this kind of a single-character monologue play to be examined in this chapter is Frank McGuinness's recent play *The Match Box* (2012) as this play integrates thematic issues and formal techniques that have been discussed before separately. Thematically, like Stephens' *Sea Wall*, McGuinness's play deals with a tragic loss of a daughter, yet this time from the bereaved mother's perspective. Moreover, despite being mostly set in the Irish community in Liverpool, this monologue play is similar to Johnston's plays in its use of silence and exploration of violence related to the Troubles. Theatrically, the way McGuinness employs the monologue form to let the solitary storyteller Sal tell her tragic story resembles McCafferty's *Cold Comfort* since in *The Match Box* the text of the speaker is also carefully integrated with her gestures, movement, and use of props. In other words, Frank McGuinness's *The Match Box* is exemplary of both the advantages and inherent problems of this form of the text-based monologue plays that centre around a solitary storyteller on stage addressing the audience directly.

The reviews of McGuinness's play have been mainly positive and Leanne Best, who played the mother in the production of the Liverpool Playhouse Studio (June 2012), has been nominated for TMA Award for the Best Performance 2013. British critics praised McGuinness for compelling storytelling and for creating such a strong female character, "a woman to be pitied and feared in equal measure."[76] Sarah Hemming in her review for *The Financial Times* noted that "McGuinness's script reflects both his Irish background and his experience of adapting Greek tragedy. Here is the confessional monologue often seen in Irish drama; here is an enduring onstage limbo as in Beckett plays; but here too is the unfettered

[76] Alfred Hickling, "*The Match Box* Review", *The Guardian*, 24 June 2012, 11 July 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jun/24/the-matchbox-review.

anguish and rage of a Greek tragic heroine."[77] *The Match Box* is set in the present on Valentia Island, which lies off the coast of County Kerry. Sal talks to the audience from her bedsit, which "looks like an overhang from Martin McDonagh or J.M. Synge."[78] McGuinness divides her devastating monologue into eleven episodes: the first and the last take place on the island, other scenes are a retrospective of Sal's life in Liverpool. Sal first muses on the silence of Valentia Island and tells the audience that she can hear the sheep that are all around on "the green fields"[79] of the island talk to her. It is difficult to imagine a more picture-perfect postcard, bucolic image of Ireland: "Lovely to come here for holidays, see what relations are still living, do the social duties, and then run wild like a billy goat, wild for the rest of the summer."[80] McGuinness in the first minutes of the play mentions that the local people are superstitious, yet religious and well meaning, but that the island is "quite eerie at times"[81]and the green fields "have their own way of talking."[82] Contrary to Martin McDonagh, who mocks such a traditional setting, McGuinness is serious here, no parody is intended. Although the first scene includes many clichés and would therefore benefit from large edits, it features the central visual and aural image of the play: Sal strikes a match and watches it burn. This simple, yet crucial, gesture will be repeated throughout the play, always at key moments, metaphorically punctuating Sal's narrative. Moreover, it will gradually change its meaning, gaining more and more importance for the audience's interpretation of the whole play, *The Match Box*.

Equally important to the inclusion of gestures is the use of silence in *The Match Box*. Its dramatic function is again multiple. It does not only form a counterpoint to the fast flow of the

[77] Sarah Hemming, "*The Match Box* , Tricycle Theatre, London – review", *Financial Times*, 9 May 2012, 19 July 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jun/24/the-matchbox-review.
[78] Carole Woddis, "*The Match Box* , Tricycle Theatre", *The Art Desk*, 13 May 2013, 19 July 2013, http://www.theartsdesk.com/theatre/match-box-tricycle-theatre.
[79] Frank McGuinness, *The Match Box* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012)7.
[80] McGuinness 3.
[81] McGuinness 3.
[82] McGuinness 7.

oral narrative, a pause during which Sal is gaining more strength to continue, but importantly embodies the more and more frequent gaps in her story. Even more importantly, the silence links Sal's tragedy with the Troubles. Her only daughter was shot on her way home from school in a crossfire. As much as an innocent child victim might be viewed as a cliché, *The Match Box* was inspired by a real life event from Liverpool: In 2007 an 11-year-old schoolboy Rhys Jones was shot in the street and those involved were helped by a wall of silence.[83] In *The Match Box* the situation is the same: the police do not know who murdered the child and ask Sal for a press statement that might help them investigate. Sal does a very unusual thing – at the press conference in front of the cameras she at first acknowledges that "so many times before mothers and fathers have appeared on TV begging for information, any information, to assist the police investigating the murder of their children. I've watched them [...] and thought for myself, thank God it is not my child [...],"[84] but then announces that although she does not know how to cope with the loss, she is not going to beg for help:

> No, I am going to offer help. I am going to be there for whoever – man, woman, or child – whoever murdered my daughter. I am here waiting for you, because I have something to tell you. It is that I forgive you. I forgive you for having killed Mary. [...] Go and tell what you have done. Admit it. I will be here, waiting for you.[85]

Yet, despite this unexpected note of reconciliation, nobody gives any information as to who the murderer was. Because of the silence from the community, Sal and her parents decide to take justice in their own hands. However, this is never confirmed as they also remain silent and lay low.

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[83] Dominic Cavendish, "*The Match Box* , Liverpool Playhouse Studio – review", *The Telegraph,* 20 June 2012, 11 July 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/9342407/The-Match-Box-Liverpool-Playhouse-Studio-review.html.
[84] McGuinness 26.
[85] McGuinness 26 – 27.

In the remaining four episodes Sal's monologue becomes more and more gapped, silence and the burning of matches more and more frequent. Sal admits having problems with her memory: "Do you think I could remember? It's strange, but that's what started to happen. I couldn't remember things."[86] She is in denial, slowly collapsing with grief and despair. There is a rumour going around who the murders were: a family of three brothers and a mother. Their house is set on fire and the sons burn to death. From Sal's version of the event it seems that her parents might have their hand in the death of the suspected murderers: "Mum wasn't so much following them as keeping them at a distance, for she said she cannot tolerate the smell of shit. Petrol – she said – a little petrol, it absolves them of everything. And my dad said it was a remarkable fluid, useful in more ways than one."[87] Both parents seem to have direct experience with the Troubles, the father admits that "we torched a fair few in County Kerry – ones who deserved it. [...] Remove them – a match to their thatch. We let them have the lick of sulphur. Lovely word that. Sulphur. Brimstone and sulphur."[88] Sal's continuous burning of matches perhaps points also to her own role in the family revenge on the murderers of the little child.

In the final episode Sal tells about her family's return to Ireland and the early death of her parents, who have never recovered from the tragedy. Neither has she. As Dominic Cavendish writes, "In inflicting her own fiery brand of punishment, an eye for eye, she has become outcast from her own humanity – as dead, in a way, as her offspring. [...] this fugitive creature has found herself in her own kind of hell, lit, by the sulphurous flares of distractedly struck matches."[89] There is no reconciliation for Sal, just utter despair and silence. The last image of the play is very powerful and dramatic as Sal's hand gestures with the matches reveal her agony. According to the stage directions, Sal smells her hands and holds them out and cries

[86] McGuinness 34.
[87] McGuinness 36.
[88] McGuinness 36 – 37.
[89] Cavendish.

for her daughter to come back. Then her hands start to beat against each other and tear her flesh. In the silence she starts to shake, imperceptibly at first, then gathering momentum. The shaking ceases when she raises her head and howls. Sal strikes another match in silence and lets it fall, then she gathers all the dead burnt matches from the stage. She holds up her collection, letting one fall as she recites each name: "Father – mother – daughter – friend – foe – sulphur – brimstone and sulphur – father – mother – daughter."[90] This scene echoes the final image of *Baglady* where such violent hand gestures are also present and the protagonist similarly creates a heap of objects related to her past life and ritualistically drowns them in the river. The experience of watching Leanne Best's performance is devastating, almost draining, "you come out feeling like the contents of the matchbox: completely spent."[91] In Mike Pinnigton words, "There is such horror, madness and violence here as to be genuinely traumatizing."[92] Despite its occasional shortcomings such as McGuinness's occasional use of clichéd representations of rural Ireland, *The Match Box* is a play that uses the monologue format effectively to deal with the very important issues of violence, grief and reconciliation from the perspective of a woman, who "forces you to look even when you would rather look away."[93]

The plays discussed in this chapter provide evidence that in the last two and a half decades, the monologue form has been used by a generation of male playwrights for dramatizing masculinity in crisis. However, despite the potential of the monologue form to express the inner world of the protagonist, the focus has shifted in the work of these playwrights from the introspection of the speaker's subjectivity more to the ability of the monologue play to tell a story. The risk of such approach to the form lies in a lower level of engagement of the

[90]McGuinness 48.
[91] Hickling.
[92] Mike Pinnigton, "*The Match Box* , Liverpool Playhouse Studio – review", *The Double Negative,* 21 July 2012, 11 July 2013, http://www.thedoublenegative.co.uk/2012/07/the-match-box-reviewed/.
[93] Hemming.

audience, who sometimes may adopt a very passive role as the stories presented to them fail to activate their imagination. Moreover, by constructing the narratives as more or less coherent stories, in which the speaker does not allow space for the audience's participation, these monologues again face the danger of losing the emotional involvement of the spectators. On the other hand, this form of the monologue play can be used very effectively both for dramatizations of masculinity, but importantly also for giving voice to women as well as the monologues by Jennifer Johnston or Frank McGuinness demonstrate. When the playwrights refrain from coherent, de-contextualized, "me and my mates" stories, but create a dynamic relationship between the speaker and the text, include gaps, silences and pauses, ambiguous gestures, etc., the dramatic tension thus achieved draws the attention of the audience, who then become emotionally involved with the solitary monologists who strive for their attention.

4. Re-enacting others in their own story

Direct address of the audience via stories without much embellishment, sometimes enriched by a simple gesture or a movement, though dominant in many contemporary monologue plays, is not the only way dramatists choose to create powerful theatre performances. Aware of the danger of the monologues being viewed as "un-dramatic" or "un-theatrical," dramatists such as for instance Marie Jones, Dermot Bolger, Mark Ravenhill or Tim Crouch had their monologists enact other people while narrating their stories. In other words, the performer has to impersonate their communication partners, their antagonists, friends, family, even entire nations and thus create a conflict on stage, which is considered by many the essence of drama. Conflict is then achieved in their plays not only by words, but by re-enactment. As Virginie Privas has described,

> […] the protagonist, standing alone on the stage, speaks for all the characters that surround him. There is no frontier between his speech, the speeches of the persons he had conversations with and his inner reflections. They all make up only one flowing text delivered to the audience."[1]

This kind of monologue play presents an enormous opportunity, but also a challenge for the actors since it demands a very versatile, virtuoso performance from them as they need to "change voices, positions, behaviours, to indicate the shift from one character to another."[2] For the audiences, this type of monologue play is definitely satisfying as it is more lively than the unembellished stories written by playwrights such as Conor McPherson; the stage is peopled with characters, there is much more action, interplay and movement. Nevertheless,

[1] Virginie Privas, "Monological Drama to Reshape Northern Irish Identity: *A Night in November* by Marie Jones*", Estudios Irlandeses*, Number 5, March 2010, 29 August 2013, http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/84/00/71/PDF/Virginie_Privas.pdf.
[2] Privas 76.

the audience must remain aware that even in such monodramatic works, they are "entirely reliant on the performer to organize their perspective on the scenes enacted."[3] Thus despite re-enacting others, the performer always manipulates, selects and filters the conversations and events and such manipulation brings dramatic tension to the play. As Tom Maguire suggests, in monologue plays "where the audience or individual members of it do not subscribe fully to the role which is assigned to them, they are coerced into either rejecting the play in its entirety or accepting an identification with [the character] that runs counter to their judgement."[4] On the other hand, the performer's high degree of skill attracts the audience as it "helps to overcome reservations which the spectator might have with regard to the scenes they are witnessing, encouraging masquerade from otherwise resistant spectators."[5] In other words, the audience are "fooling themselves, but consciously."[6] Moreover, the performer's skill can compensate for the possible flaws of the text, as for instance in Marie Jones's popular monologue play *A Night in November* (1994), where, according to Maguire, "this degree of skill can be regarded as one of the main factors contributing to the longevity of the play in both its initial run and subsequent revivals, particularly as the script has been regarded as unsatisfactory."[7] It is no coincidence that the plays that are going to be discussed in this chapter are among the most popular not only in small theatres but have also been box office hits in mainstream theatres.

Thematically, however, they share similar concerns as the plays with solitary storytellers described in the previous chapter. The theme of male loneliness and masculinity in crisis is central for both Marie Jones's *A Night in November* and Dermot Bolger's *In High Germany* (1990) and its sequel *The Parting Glass* (2010). The theme of domestic violence and male

[3] Tom Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006) 144.
[4] Maguire 144.
[5] Maguire 145.
[6] Maguire 144.
[7] Maguire 145.

oppression is a unifying subject of plays for female performers such as Dermot Bolger's *Holy Ground* (1990) and Moira Buffini's and Anne Reynold's *Jordan* (1992), a one-woman play based on a real life event, which will be analysed as an example of this type of monologue play from the UK. Subsequently in this chapter, Geraldine Aron's bitter comedy *My Brilliant Divorce* (2001) and Maureen McManus's Czech-Irish play *Maureen* (2009) will be analysed as exceptions to the rule where the fate of the female protagonists is not as tragic as in the other examples, although the way in which the relationship between women and men is presented is far from optimistic. In the final part of this chapter focused on monologue plays that are based on re-enactment of other characters, Donal O'Kelly's *Catalpa* (1997) and Mark Ravenhill's *Product* (2005) will be examined as particularly apt examples of the possibility of this type of a monologue play to dramatize even grand epic stories by framing the narrative as a film script. Tim Crouch's debut *My Arm* (2003) is his answer to the challenges he had to face as an actor in other playwrights's plays that examines the mechanics of theatre performance, the nature of storytelling, and the relation of the monologist with his audience. Crouch's play could be also considered a playful response to Jacques Rancièr's theoretical notion of the emancipated spectator, the implications of which for the monologue plays will be analysed here as well.

Marie Jones's play *A Night in November* was written almost twenty years ago at a time after the I.R.A. cease-fire of 1993, but before the Good Friday Agreement, in a transitional period full of political tension. It opened on 8 August 1994, only half a year after the World Cup qualifying match between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which was played in the midst of terrorist attacks from both sides of the Conflict. In Maguire's summary, "A month before the match [in October 1993], a bomb attack on the UDA headquarters on Belfast's Shankill Road led to the death of the PIRA bomber and nine passers-by. In return, the UDA mounted a gun attack on a bar in Greysteel, County Derry, leaving seven people

dead."[8] Moreover, just one month before its premiere, at the time of the World Cup finals between Ireland and Italy, "the UVF shot dead six Catholics watching the opening match in a bar in Loughinisland, County Down."[9] The immediacy of Jones's reaction to the terror is a contextual fact that is often lost in the more recent revivals of this monologue play. For instance, in Charles Spencer's view, the revival of *A Night in November* at the Trafalgar Studios in London in 2007 is pointless, as the play to him felt "like a piece of Republican propaganda now, when, fingers crossed, the long years of killing finally seem to be over."[10] To other critics, however, Jones's play is still poignant as its use of the monologue is an apt device for "reshaping the contours of both the Northern Irish identity and the Northern Irish Drama about the Troubles."[11] What is most interesting about *A Night in November* in the context of this dissertation, however, is its theatricality and the ability to engage with the problematic and complex theme of the ever-changing identity of its protagonist, an average dole clerk from Belfast, Kenneth McCallister. Moreover, in contrast to McPherson's *Rum and Vodka* or Stephens' *Sea Wall*, for instance, Jones's play is deeply political, as "Jones problematises the construction of the self through monologue. She has chosen this theatrical device to enable her character to get free from a particularly challenging social, economic and political environment."[12] In other words, in *A Night in November* the emphasis is not so much on telling a story, but on the evolution of the central character and his psychological transformation.

The play begins with Kenneth's description of his regular work day and the words echo the openings of McPherson's monologue plays quoted in the previous chapter: "That day started

[8] Maguire 140.
[9] Maguire 141.
[10] Charles Spencer, "*A Night in November*: Smug and pointless," *The Telegraph*, 24 October 2007, 28 August 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3668756/A-Night-in-November-Smug-and-pointless.html.
[11] Privas 78.
[12] Privas 71.

out like every other day starts out..."[13] Yet immediately after that Jones draws the audience right in the Belfast reality of that time: "...check under car for explosive devices... you have to be a step ahead of them bastards..."[14] This opening sequence is based on the paradox that checking for explosives had become so natural for the inhabitants of Belfast that Kenneth presents it as a common daily routine. This drastic reality, however, is also tinged with sarcasm as Kenneth's wife Deborah immediately ridicules her husband's self-importance: "For dear sake Kenneth, who would want to blow you up? You are only a dole clerk."[15] The comic effect of this marital exchange is enhanced by the performer who not only has to re-enact this scene as if there were two characters on stage, one standing and the other hiding under a car, but he should also immediately after the exchange turn to the audience and mimic Deborah for them. Although it is not specified in the stage directions how the actor should portray Deborah, Eamonn Jordan has observed that Kenneth uses his privileged position on stage to mock her and "the mimicry is often performed as a heightened, exaggerated, falsetto berating of him by her."[16] This may be regarded as a form of an 'aside', which is a conventional device in traditional drama used often for similar comic effect. In a monologue play of this type it is actually the backbone of the performance. The spectators are drawn into play as "sympathetic confidants"[17] for the central character. Dan Gordon, who starred in the 1994 DubbelJoint Productions premiere of *A Night in November*, managed to capture the conversation between Kenneth and Deborah merely by suggesting the position of the two characters by moving his head up and down. When addressing the audience, Gordon was facing them directly and always made eye contact. In Maguire's words, "It was from the capacity of the actor to achieve the representation of complex dialogical interchanges within

[13] Marie Jones, *Stones in his Pockets and A Night in November*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001) 63.
[14] Jones 63.
[15] Jones 63.
[16] Eamonn Jordan, "Kicking with Both Feet? Marie Jones's *A Night in November*", *The Irish Review*, No. 38, Spring 2008, http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/29736370?uid=3737856&uid=2134&uid=2473816047&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3&uid=2473816037&uid=60&sid=21102620752643. 54.
[17] Maguire 144.

narrative framework that much pleasure of the performance derived. It is through the complex performance of this script by the single actor that the audience is implicated in its action."[18]

Marie Jones incorporates the shifts between different addressees in an intricate way, as the text of the play is very fluid and it is sometimes quite challenging for the audience to figure out whose voice they actually hear. It is up to the individual actor to decide whether to make the hints to the audience obvious or to challenge the spectators to make more effort. For instance, the introductory passage, where Kenneth mimics his wife, changes smoothly into an argument between Kenneth and his child, who insists on Kenneth taking him to a football match. The argument is immediately joined by Kenneth's father-in-law, Ernie, and Deborah. Moreover, Kenneth's inner thoughts are incorporated as well:

> (*He mimics her*) [...] You are only a dole clerk, Kenneth. [...] not even important to be on a hit list... bastards.
>
> Daddy can I go with you and Granda Ernie to the football match?
>
> NO...[...]
>
> But you said you weren't taking him if you are taking me which means you are taking me...
>
> You don't like my father do you...?
>
> NO.
>
> No, you're not going, I don't want to go, but I have to take Granda Sixty Cigarettes A Day Ernie because Granda Polluted Lungs can't go on his own and Mammy in her wisdom has instructed Daddy to take Granda

[18] Maguire 143.

> Nicotine because Granda can't get up the steps on his own because he has inflicted early death on himself so thank you very much Mammy. [19]

Furthermore, this scene changes without a pause as the audience are taken into a completely different location, which is indicated by a short stage direction, "*Jumps out of the car.*"[20] New characters appear on stage immediately: "Ah, good morning, Box D and how are you...?"[21] All this action, dialogues, inner stream of consciousness, change of location and addressees are to be performed very rapidly on a bare stage without any props, it is only up to the actor to create the vibrant dramatic world of this monologue play. This scene is not only as humorous as the entertaining stories narrated by the monologists of Conor McPherson or Owen McCafferty, it is presented in an engaging, highly theatrical way, while still being visually austere. It would be humorous also as a story, since Marie Jones commands the vernacular as well as her male colleagues, but the effort the actor has to put into re-enacting such comic scenes is very likely to be appreciated by the audience even more.

Behind the humour of *A Night in November*, however, a very serious and complex issue of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland is lurking. Marie Jones comes from a Protestant background, and was actively cooperating with politically active theatres Charabanc Theatre Company and DubbleJoint Productions, who tried to "counter the sense that, asfar as theatre was concerned, it seemed that half the population in the north of Ireland was being ignored."[22] Marie Jones in an interview commented on the political dimension of *A Night in November*: "It deals with the political situation head on but sometimes you are influenced by more personal political situations that affect you [...] growing up in Belfast has to coulour your work."[23] In Virginie Privas's view, "the playwright seems to map on her personal change the

[19] Jones 63 – 64.
[20] Jones 64.
[21] Jones 64.
[22] Pam Brighton in Privas 69.
[23] Jones in Privas 69.

experience of Kenneth McCallister who aims at redefining his Northern Irish identity."[24] This change is triggered by an epiphany Kenneth experiences at the football match, where his father-in-law ferociously joins other Protestant football fans in their hateful humiliation of the Catholic fans of the Irish team. For many of Kenneth's community the football match is only a pretext, an opportunity to release their hatred against the Catholics. Jones presents Kenneth as an outsider who does not share his community's feelings: "Is this a football match Ernie, or a crowd of lions waiting for the Christians...?"[25] After this epiphany, the play follows the journey of Kenneth's transformation. At first he realizes that despite not shouting at the other team and fans, he himself has been as prejudiced against the Catholics as the rest of his community. As Privas has observed, "This new vision on the situation nonetheless places him at the centre of a conflict, putting his own identity into question all of a sudden. Throughout the play, he explains to the audience the stages of his transformation."[26] The first stage is Kenneth's transgression of the territorial border in Belfast as he offers to give a lift to his Catholic boss Jerry and drives him home to the other side of the city: "Why was I saying that, Jerry lived on the other side of town, bandit country, I'd never been there in my life, never had a desire to go there, but I was curious..."[27] Kenneth's prejudices are revealed through his involuntary slips of tongue and his choice of words. The fact that he has never been to the other side of Belfast seems completely normal to him, he is not aware of the limited nature of his experience. Although the situation is quite alarming, Jones presents Kenneth's adventure with black humour and allows the audience to laugh at the protagonist, regardless of the fact that Kenneth probably thinks that he has his story under control.

Moreover, Jones reflects the changes of Kenneth's perspective also in his language. In the description of his adventure in the Catholic part of Belfast, Kenneth uses almost a poetic

[24] Privas 69.
[25] Jones 70.
[26] Privas 71.
[27] Jones 81.

language: “I had never been on the Falls Road in my life... the sun was shining, the road was hiving with black cabs and women and children...”[28] Yet, Jones twists this idyllic impression immediately by including a bitter paradox in the same sentence: the street is not only full of women and children and taxis, but the list continues “the sun was shining, the road was hiving with black cabs and women and children and army tanks and normality and I was nervous, like a stranger in a foreign country [...] I fitted into the normality just like the soldiers.”[29] When describing his home, on the other hand, the tone is very different, bitter and sarcastic: “[Kenneth’s] lawn is manicured to the last blade... the unwritten rule BIKES AND SCOOTERS FORBIDDEN EXCEPT ON THE CONCRETE PROVIDED... grey cold concrete especially laid so the kids wouldn’t ruin the grass...”[30] Later on in the play, the language changes also, for instance when Kenneth is excited about his trip to America. As Privas noted, “this excitement – conveyed through the numerous short sentences giving a rapid rhythm to the flow of speech – corroborates a haste to find freedom.”[31] By changing the style, speed and rhythm Jones brings variation to the flow of Kenneth’s speech. This dynamic on the verbal level prevents the text from being monotonous, which is very important in a play that lasts more than two hours.

In *A Night in November* the private and public spheres continually mingle. Kenneth’s motivation for re-evaluating his beliefs and identity is partly brought about by his bad conscience and realization of his own prejudices, but also by his personal envy of his boss’s happy marriage that is so different from his relationship with Deborah. Their marriage is in crisis, but the audience have the information only from Kenneth, who blames his wife for everything: “The woman I fell in love with had vanished into the perfect ten-by-ten square of our designed life, bound to the burgundy unopened classics and the scrubbed concrete... and

[28] Jones 82.
[29] Jones 82.
[30] Jones 83.
[31] Privas 75.

me her husband, the man she fell in love with tied to order and loyalty and nothing."[32] The decisive moment that provokes Kenneth to leave his family, however, is Deborah's bigotry and her deeply engrained prejudices against the Catholics: "I hated my wife... I hated her so much, because she had echoed what I'd always thought, so I hated myself... before that awful night in November I accepted myself, put up with myself but what does a man do when he loathes himself?"[33] What is important here, among other things, is the fact that Kenneth never finds the courage to talk to Deborah directly. As Privas observed, "there is always a discrepancy between what he thinks and what he really says to the people concerned. [...] As the audience might expect Kenneth to take some measures, they are also unsure that he will act, precisely because of the gap they have witnessed so far between his thoughts and his action."[34] Jones is again very ironic, as the measure Kenneth finally decides to take is very unmanly – he decides to escape secretly, since he is unable to face his wife, and join the supporters of the Irish team on their way to the finals in America.

Some critics, however, find this turn in the play not as comically unmanly, but highly problematic. Charles Spencer points out the selfishness of Kenneth's escape, "our hero finds a boozy bonhomie entirely absent in his own community, and declares that while he may be a Protestant, he is also an Irishman. That he is an Irishman who hates his co-religionists and has abandoned his wife and kids appears to concern him not one jot."[35] Virginia Privas views Kenneth's escape as a revenge on Deborah, as Kenneth's masculinity is challenged by her.[36] Eamonn Jordan asks: "What is a woman playwright doing representing a female character in such way?"[37] The Protestant female characters that are mentioned in Kenneth's psychological quest for identity are presented as one-dimensional, negatively imagined and stereotypical,

[32] Jones 84.
[33] Jones 87.
[34] Privas 75.
[35] Spencer, "*A Night in November*: Smug and pointless".
[36] Privas 75.
[37] Jordan, "Kicking with Both Feet? " 54.

whereas "the male characters seem to be empowered through the facility of play."[38] In *A Night in November*, women are sidelined, presented as disturbing, hostile elements that disturb Kenneth's world, yet the women from the other community, especially Jerry's wife, seem to him very attractive, as they even understand football:

> [...] the bar was jammed with men and women... buzzin with the kind of excitement I hadn't felt since I was a kid... and the women... just as knowledgeable about their team as the men... now, that did surprise me... I mean, women and football...[39]

Moreover, in contrast to his cold and aloof wife, they are sexually alluring and straightforward, which is quite shocking for the shy Kenneth: "I looked over and there was at least ten of them... God... me and all those women... am... oh God... I was scared."[40] Nevertheless, alongside Kenneth's idealisation of the Catholic women, Marie Jones points to the fact that the Irish men cheat on their wives in a similar way to Kenneth. Most of the football fans from Ireland are on their trip to the finals also in secret. "My wife thinks I've gone to Lough Derg...but I have me face paints and wig in case I'm caught by the cameras... bleeding RTE are everywhere. [...] I told my wife I was going fishing in Donegal. [...]"[41] In the male community of drunken football fans, all husbands are united in boasting about their intricate lies used to deceive their wives. This comradeship helps Kenneth to suppress his occasional doubts about his escape for freedom: "As I walked towards the flight I knew it could go either way, so I said leave it to fate, Kenneth [...] I looked, I was about to head down

[38] Jordan, "Kicking with Both Feet?", 57.
[39] Jones 104.
[40] Jones 104.
[41] Jones 100.

the gangway... and fate and the gods must have said to themselves... fuck it... and I burst out laughing and waved, then turned away into the unknown..."[42]

The final phase of Kenneth's journey to freedom and re-invention of his self takes place in America, where Kenneth experiences the football finals with the Catholic fans. As Privas summarized, "By leaving Northern Ireland, Kenneth not only abandons his wife and children, his relatives, his Protestant background and sectarianism, but he also leaves a part of his identity. This departure thus enables him to create some distance from himself."[43] Theatrically, the last part of *A Night in November* is the most challenging for the actor as he has to re-enact at first an airport departure lounge packed with crowds of football fans, then to portray the drunken crowd flying to America and finally to act out a New York bar full of Irish supporters watching the finals. His performance must capture the deliriously happy Kenneth mingling with the crowds, excited about "being one of the lads."[44] To metaphorically highlight the completion of Kenneth's changed identity, the actor changes his costume. Instead of an indistinct shirt and suit, Kenneth puts on a T-shirt with the logo of the Irish World Cup team: "... every now and then I would nip down to the loo, look in the mirror to see if it was me... (*Reads his T-shirt in the mirror.*) elo, elo, elo, elo... laugh, then take the stairs four at a time back to my fellow Irishmen at the bar."[45] While watching the finals in a New York Irish bar, Kenneth eventually joins the others even in singing the Irish national anthem: "*Kenneth reacts as he hears the Irish National Anthem sung by everyone in the pub... He eventually rises, at first nervously and then defiantly.*"[46] This scene is a mirror image of the scene from Act 1, when Kenneth secretly helped an Irish supporter hiding among the Protestant crowds of football fans with the lyrics of the *Sash My Father Wore*. As the girls in

[42] Jones 100.
[43] Privas 75.
[44] Jones 102.
[45] Jones 104.
[46] Jones 105.

the bar are helping Kenneth with the lines of the Irish football chants, he realises the similarity between the two respective matches: "They sang it in my ear... each song in turn to teach me... to help me to be a part of them... I remembered that night in Windsor Park when I sang the Sash into that man's ear, so he could be part of us... to be part of us, so he could be safe from us."[47] Although this scene is mainly comic, as the actor has to re-enact the girls singing in the bar and use a very high voice, this reflection ends on a serious note. The repetition of the pronoun "us" by Kenneth is crucial for the abrupt final scene, where Kenneth distances himself from his community completely and starts to refer to the Protestant gunmen as "them", because they shot dead six people watching the finals back in Belfast: "I am no part of the men who did that... I am not of them anymore... no, no-one can point the finger at Kenneth Norman McCallister and say, these people are part of you... tonight I absolve myself."[48]

This final scene is dramatically very effective, "it is a chilling moment, a moment when the laughter stops abruptly."[49] Yet, this ending is for many very problematic. As Spencer noted, "Watching this play, you would never realise that Republican paramilitaries were responsible for roughly twice as many deaths as loyalists. Jones, who is more than happy to denounce murderous Prods, can't bring herself to mention even the existence of the Provisional IRA."[50] Moreover, the spectators may object, same as Eamonn Jordan, that *A Night in November* is "laden with two-dimensional representations of the Catholic and Protestant communities of the North,"[51] and the conversion of Kenneth's identity "may come rather too easily,"[52] or view the central character as chauvinist. Yet, as Jane Coyle suggests, "it has always been hard

[47] Jones 105.
[48] Jones 108.
[49] Jane Coyle, "*A Night in November* – Review", *Irish Theatre Magazine*, 12 September 2012, 14 September 2013, http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Reviews/Current/A-Night-in-November.
[50] Spencer, "*A Night in November*: Smug and pointless".
[51] Jordan, "Kicking with Both Feet?"58.
[52] Jordan, "Kicking with Both Feet?"58.

to resist the dark, knowing humour of Marie Jones."[53] Moreover, not only her humour, but her choice of the central character make this play still effective. In Jordan's view,

> Jones opts for a classic everyman figure who has no real serious crimes against his name. For many, Kenneth is a dubious endorsement of change. Despite all the perceived limitations, it is the variable of performance that rattles many of the contesting and disregarding perspectives on the play.[54]

In other words, despite possible flaws in Kenneth's character, the occasional two dimensional representations of both women and both communities, *A Night in November* wins its audience by its theatricality and charm of the well-meaning protagonist. However, in the recent productions of this play, in radically changed social and political circumstances, Kenneth has been interpreted differently. In the 2012 Grand Opera House Production, for instance, Kenneth's "romanticized pursuit of a new identity turns both manic and pathetic."[55] The director Ian McElhinney and the actor Conor Grimes came up with an interpretation that highlighted the stereotypical depictions and reflected "the broad brushstrokes of the surface content."[56] In their version, "Kenneth's final triumphant declaration of being 'a Protestant and an Irishman' carries all manner of world-weary resonances into our better informed, less idealistic consciousness."[57]

Dermot Bolger, Irish novelist, poet, and a playwright, has used the monologue format in three interconnected explorations of complex thematic issues of modern emigration, religious crisis and the problematic return home. His first two monologue plays *In High Germany* and *The Holy Ground* were performed together already in the year 1990 under the title *The Tramway*

[53] Coyle.
[54] Jordan, "Kicking with Both Feet?" 58.
[55] Coyle.
[56] Coyle.
[57] Coyle.

End. Twenty years later Bolger wrote a sequel to *In High Germany* – the monologue play *The Parting Glass* (2010), which features the protagonist Eoin twenty years later and as such provides an apt commentary on the ups and downs which Ireland has experienced in the last two decades. All three monologue plays are highly theatrical and require from the actors an extremely versatile performance as they have to re-enact a plethora of other characters. As opposed to Marie Jones, who gives hardly any stage directions and leaves more freedom to the performer, Bolger describes the non-verbal action on stage in much more detail and thus manages to create complex and vivid theatrical images by carefully interconnecting the text of the characters with movement, music, use of props and costume. Moreover, by focusing on the outsiders, in his plays Bolger manages to capture "the very restless, the shifting, open, unformed nature of the world"[58] by creating "stateless persons, undocumented aliens in their own country, unable to know their place because their place has become unknowable."[59]

Bolger's most successful monologue *In High Germany* features another football supporter in crisis, a thirty-year-old Eoin, meditating on his past life and bleak future prospects, while waiting on a platform at Hamburg Altona train station. Set in the year 1988, the play offers a unique insight into the changing Ireland, whose chief emigration destination stopped being merely Great Britain and America, but the new emigrants started to leave also for other countries in Europe, "An unofficial Europe, the Europe of the *Gastarbeiter* and long-haul truck driver, the Europe of the football hooligan."[60] Eoin belongs to a generation which was supposed to have much better opportunities than his parents and grandparents, yet even he is forced to emigration as he cannot find a good job in Ireland. The only link he maintains with his homeland is attending football matches of the Irish team. As Christina Wald suggests, "once forced to work abroad in Germany, the ritualized attendance of soccer matches became

[58] Fintan O'Toole, "Introduction", Dermot Bolger, *A Dublin Quartet* (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 6.
[59] O'Toole 6.
[60] O'Toole 6.

a means to reunite with the Irish community."[61] However, Eoin's feelings towards Ireland are far from sentimental; on the contrary he feels estranged. In Wald's words, "Eoin realises he feels much more at home in foreign stadiums among diasporic Irish fan community cheering for a hybrid team of Irish players than in Dublin itself."[62] Importantly also, Eoin's blending with the scattered Irish community, "a sense of belonging so ingrained we were never aware of it,"[63] is presented in a way similar to Kenneth's idealization of the male bonhomie in *A Night in November*. Thus, although Eoin manages to "emancipate himself from a particular version of Irish nationalism, he does not depart from nationalism as such."[64] Furthermore, like Kenneth, he does not overcome his patriarchal upbringing: "once he learns his German girlfriend is pregnant, he imagines a patriarchal passing on of a national tradition."[65]

Visually, *In High Germany* is again using sparse theatrical means. The play is set on an almost bare stage, whose white backdrop is decorated with shiny advertisements in German. The railway platform is represented by two poles stage left and right with three plastic chairs attached to each, a large station clock and a sign with the name of the station. The actor wears jeans and 1988 Ireland soccer jersey and carries all his belongings in a rucksack, to which a sleeping bag is attached. The success of the play, similar to Jones's *A Night in November*, depends on the ability of the actor to portray a multitude of distinct characters and even entire football matches with crowds of supporters, but at the same time to convey the emotions of the main character reminiscing about his childhood and adolescence in Ireland. Moreover, the actor must be able to perform a few tricks with the paper football Eoin kicks around the stage from time to time. The actor also sings the football chants, bangs the metal signs *Eingang* and *Ausgang* with his hands rhythmically to achieve a crescendo, thumps his fist off an imaginary

[61] Christina Wald, "Dermot Bolger", *The Methuen Drama to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, 23
[62] Wald 23.
[63] Dermot Bolger, "In High Germany", *A Dublin Quartet*, 104.
[64] Wald 24.
[65] Wald 24.

ceiling to scare off Dutch skinheads in a train, mimes throwing train windows open, mimics accents and parodies some of the characters he mentions in his narration, etc. The fluidity of the changes is supported by simple music background and a few sound effects that help to create the atmosphere of a much larger space than the anonymous, impersonal location seen on stage.

In contrast to *A Night in November*, whose story is structured chronologically and the events described happen at the time of the narration, in *A High Germany* more time frames are used. Eoin‘s story shifts back and forth in time and he intersperses his narration about his present situation in Germany by re-enactments of the past events from his life. He also comments on the past events with retrospect and adds his current opinions on his past. Towards the end of the play his narration returns to the present moment and the audience find out that Eoin is waiting for two of his friends to watch the final match. All three are aware that their lives are about to change:

> We were nervous, but I knew it was different from any nervousness we'd ever known before. This was no longer just a match, no longer just how long the team could stay in Germany, but how much longer we could remain together pretending our lives were the same, that we were still part of the world of youth.[66]

Eoin then describes the finals of the European Championship 1988 in an ecstatic manner, similar to Kenneth's description of the finals in the climax of *A Night in November*. Yet, in 1988 the Irish team lost to the Netherlands. The lost finals metaphorically symbolize the end of Eoin's dreams and his final separation from the Ireland of his childhood and adolescence: "I raised my hands and applauded, having finally, in my last moments with Shane and Mick,

[66] Bolger, "In High Germany", 104.

found the only Ireland whose name I can sing, given to me by eleven men dressed in green. And the only Ireland I can pass on to the son who will carry my name in a foreign land."[67] The final scene shows a sobered and melancholic Eoin returning by train to his pregnant German girlfriend Frieda and his new adult life in Germany.

The Parting Glass is a sequel, but the play can stand on its own as well. Bolger revisits the form, the character of Eoin and the theme of emigration and the highly problematic return home. Football has for Eoin the same symbolic importance, but the world in which Eoin lives now is so different that when coming back home to Dublin, the protagonist feels more foreign than his German wife and son Dieter. As Eoin is waiting in the airport lounge in some kind of limbo, he reminisces about the last twenty years of his life abroad, his return at the height of the Celtic Tiger boom and its subsequent collapse and the consequences of the current economic crisis on the lives of the less fortunate ones. Written and performed in 2010, when the bubble of prosperity burst, dramatic tension is brought to the fleeting moments of happiness of Eoin's life in the 1990s. The audience and the performer know that all Eoin's hopes of financial prosperity and security for his son will be in vain. As Emily Pine suggests, "performing the play in the bleak light of the post-boom period, with ghost estates and bank bailouts all too familiar territory, gives an audience the chance to knowingly laugh and groan any time that Anglo-Irish Bank is mentioned."[68] *The Parting Glass* thus functions in the Irish context as David Hare's play *The Power of Yes* (2009) or Lucy Prebble's *Enron* (2009) in the British one. The playwrights, though using different techniques, all explore the paradoxes of the on-going crises with the audience safely on their side, laughing bitterly at the bleakness and absurdity of the irresponsible pre-bust era.

[67] Bolger, "In High Germany", 107.
[68] Emily Pine, "*The Parting Glass* –Review", *Irish Theatre Magazine,* 10 June 2010, 23 November 2013, http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Reviews/Current/The-Parting-Glass#.

Although in many ways *The Parting Glass* feels like a "state-of-the-nation" play, it is at the same time a sensitive and insightful study of loneliness and bereavement. In Emily Pine's words, "the reason the play succeeds is because of its emotional weight – emigration is understood not simply as a concept, but as a force which separates families, and the play does not shy away from the pain of farewell."[69] Despite its frequent bitterness and sadness, *The Parting Glass* turns out to be about survival and hope. Bolger explores bereavement both seriously in the scenes of despair which Eoin feels after the loss of his wife, but also with irreverent black humour in the case of the death of Eoin's friend Mike. Mike is a ghostly presence on stage, as an urn with his ashes. Instead of being uncanny, this situation is a catalyst for on-going jokes. *The Parting Glass* is as much about Eoin's struggle for a new life as about Dieter's fight for independence. The repetitions and mirroring of themes and mistakes by three generations of Eoin's family are emphasised by the monologue format in which the actor performs all the characters. Re-enactment of the past here serves not only as illustration of Eoin's retrospective narrative, but emphasises the recurrent thematic patterns in the fate of Eoin, his father and his son. This emphasis on the links between the lives of the three generations of men, perhaps unintentionally, points to the slightly less convincingly envisioned women characters of Eoin's wife and mother.

Bolger's monologue has gained mainly positive reviews, the only objection being the final scene of the play. Paula Meehan praises the neatness of the ending, in which the message is "loud and clear as a bell."[70] On the other hand, in Catrine Rampell's view, "The manufactured motivational speech that concludes the play, however, feels unworthy of the trancelike poetry of that glorious soccer scene. Eoin, lovable loser that he is, deserves a more winning send-

[69]Pine, "*The Parting Glass* –Review".
[70] Paula Meehan in Dermot Bolger, *The Parting Glass* (Dublin: New Island, 2011) vii.

off."[71] In other words, the straightforward final message of *The Parting Glass* could be seen not only positively, but also as the play's flaw. As is often the case, the audience are not given enough space for their own interpretation, but they are told what to think about the play by the protagonist.

In his Edinburgh Fringe Award-winning monologue *The Holy Ground* (1990) Dermot Bolger offers a complementary perspective on Irish identity and addresses the issue of domestic violence and oppression of women. As ChristinaWald points out, in *The Holy Ground* "a woman in her late fifties rather than a young man reflects on her life, which was troubled not by the opening up of possibilities through emigration but by the cruel narrowing down of chances in a section of Irish society that oppresses and marginalizes women, in particular women who are not mothers."[72] Bolger uses powerful imaginative language and black humour, combined again with carefully elaborated stage directions that together with the text serve as a foundation for a rich and thrilling theatre performance. Bolger creates a credible dramatic situation and justifies the choice of the monologue format rationally – Monica, a widow in the black of mourning, is going through her recently deceased husband's letters and putting them in a black plastic sack. She is alone in an empty house and talking to herself, as people in such situation sometimes do. The performance consists of not only an unadorned delivery of the text, but the stage presence of the actress, her movement, the props and the set are carefully orchestrated. Like Eoin, the widow changes her voice to impersonate various people from her life and includes lively conversations in direct speech in the monologue. The props in *The Holy Ground* function as triggers for Monica's stream-of-consciousness-like recapitulation of her life with her husband Myles, whom she imagines sitting in a comfortable armchair we see on stage. Her chair, on the contrary, is a hard wooden kitchen chair – to

[71] Catrine Rampell, "The Unluck of the Irish in Love, Soccer and Business", *The New York Times*, 24 June 2011, 23 November 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/25/theater/reviews/the-parting-glass-at-barrow-street-theater-review.html?_r=0.
[72] Wald 24.

metaphorically symbolize the difference between their lives. The chairs function also as her communication partners, she touches them for support or angrily swings them or pats them tenderly and thus the actress creates minimalist, but powerful stage imagery. The use of monologue in *The Holy Ground* is justified also for another reason. Monica is alone not only after her husband's death, it turns out that she had been alone during their marriage as well. Having no one to talk to, she even invented and later desperately killed her imaginary children, similarly to Martha in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*:

> (*Myles' voice as she turns*) 'Are you mad, woman! Don't think I don't hear you, up in that spare room talking away to yourself!'
>
> *She fights to put herself back together.*
>
> That's what I was, a crazy woman inventing children for herself. Oh, God forgive me, but who else had I to talk to from dawn to dusk?[73]

Monica in her confessional monologue finally manages to break the silence by telling the audience her story, in which she is voicing the mental abuse she had to suffer. She bitterly talks about her body as well, her denied sexual desire and the following death-in-life. Her impotent husband, who after discovering they will not have any children became a religious fanatic, has turned her into a void, an absence. In a monologue of a woman who was forced to silence "a connection is made between the female body and the process of speech as a form of resistance."[74]As Mireia Aragay has pointed out, "it is first and foremost through strategy of representation, of giving voice, of turning Monica into a presence and a speaking subject, that

[73] Dermot Bolger, "The Holy Ground" *Plays 1* (London: Methuen, 2000) 117.
[74] Rebecca de D'Monte, "Voicing Abuse, Voicing Gender", *Monologues*, 213.

Bolger effects a deconstruction of the myth of the submissive, suffering, maternal Irish woman."[75]

Yet, the play ends on a bitter note as Monica's liberation came too late for her to start a new life. Ironically, Monica's revenge on her oppressive husband turns against her. Only after his death she learns that her desperate decision to kill him slowly by adding rat poison in his meals actually delayed his death. She is told by the doctor that "Rat poison contains Warfarin that prevents clotting and thins out the blood. If you did give it to him you probably lengthened his life. Go home now Mrs Ó Muirthile and keep your mouth shut."[76] After this revelation Monica sits down for the first time in Myles's armchair and very bitterly and sarcastically mocks herself for not being even able to kill her oppressor. Her despair is deepened by her inability to believe in spiritual afterlife: "You've stolen my youth and left me barren, you've stolen my gaiety and gave me shame, and when I die I will die unmourned."[77] The fatalism and pessimism of *The Holy Ground* contrasts with the melancholic, yet not so desperate tone of the ending of *In High Germany*. Eoin is facing new life in emigration with a new baby, while Monica remains alone, with no hope of reconciliation as she could not forgive her husband for taking God away from her: "I could forgive you Swifty, everything except that… seated there at the right hand of God, you had stolen my Christ away from me."[78] According to Wald, Dermot Bolger thus points to the "suffocating, repressive impact of radical Catholicism […], while at the same time he raises the question whether the liberation from the strict rules of the Catholic Church necessarily entails the abandonment of

[75] Mireia Aragay, "Reading Dermot Bolger's The Holy Ground: National Identity, Gender and Sexuality in Post-Colonial Ireland", *Links and Letters* 4. 1997, http://www.raco.cat/index.php/linksletters/article/viewFile/49870/87845.
[76] Bolger, "The Holy Ground", 124.
[77] Bolger, "The Holy Ground", 125.
[78] Bolger, "The Holy Ground", 125.

the Christian faith."[79] The greatest merit of *The Holy Ground*, however, is Bolger's ability to dramatize the tragedy of Monica's loneliness with an exceptional emotional intensity.

British playwright and actress Moira Buffini co-wrote *Jordan* with another playwright, novelist and screenwriter Anna Reynolds in 1992. The monologue attracted large crowds of viewers and won The Writers Guild Award and Time Out Award for the Best Play of 1992. Since then it has been revived many times not only in the UK, but also in the United States or Poland. *Jordan* is still a regular part of the repertoire of the Edinburgh Theatre Festival. One of the reasons of the incessant popularity of this play is the fact that this monologue is written from the point of view of a modern day Medea. It is based on the real-life story of Shirley Jones, who was acquitted of murder of her child and released on probation in 1987, but committed suicide the day she left the court[80]. *Jordan* offers not only an in-depth insight into the psychology of the suffering protagonist, but by interweaving of the true story with a grotesque fairy-tale frame of Brothers Grimm's *Rumplestiltskin* Buffini and Reynolds add the necessary extra level to the tragedy.

At the time of its premiere in 1992, however, there was another reason for its popularity. The play was preceded by a largely mediatised case of the co-author of *Jordan* Anna Reynolds who had had personal experience with murder and imprisonment. When she was sixteen she killed her mother in sleep with a hammer. Reynolds was given a life sentence and served two years in prison before her conviction was overturned on medical grounds. The playwright was suffering extreme hormone imbalance after the birth of her son. After her release she was sent to a mental health institute in Northampton to seek additional help. Her subsequent plays

[79] Wald 26.
[80] Anna Reynolds in Nick Curtis, "Nothing but the truth: At 17 Anna Reynolds was given life for murder. She's going back to prison next month, as a playwright.", *The Independent*, 23 March 1994, 3 November 2013, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/nothing-but-the-truth-at-17-anna-reynolds-was-given-life-for-murder-shes-going-back-to-prison-next-month-as-a-playwright-by-nick-curtis-1431062.html#.

Jordan, *Red* or *Wild Things* are concerned with the experience of imprisoned women, serving Reynolds as part of her therapy. As she stated in an interview, "It's a release to step over the edge and realise that you have not gone to pieces. When you drag those things out of the cupboard you wonder what they will look like because they have been hidden for so long. The more you do it, the less frightening it is."[81] In addition to writing plays, Reynolds also wrote articles for newspapers, gave television interviews etc. Moreover, she toured prisons with her plays and participated in workshops with the inmates as, in her view, it is crucial for the inmates to see drama and take part in the workshops because it makes them know that people still care about them: "Otherwise, they are just banged up in cells afterwards, without the chance to talk about what they have just seen."[82]

In *Jordan*, Reynolds and Buffini dramatize such situation focusing on the story of the infanticide of Shirley Jones. Shirley is alone in her cell only with her traumatizing memories and nightmares. Having no one else to talk to, she imagines her dead son Jordan listening to her. Even when Jordan was still alive, he was Shirley's only companion: "I used to talk to you all the time. There was no one else to talk to, ever; and you listened."[83] The prison cell is represented only by an oversized chair placed in the centre of an otherwise empty stage. The actress in her early twenties is fashionably dressed, reading a women's magazine, drinking water from a bottle and eating yoghurt. The first fairy tale scene of *Jordan* indirectly introduces the bleak content of the rest of the play. The actress opens the play by telling the audience a well-known Brothers Grimm fairy tale *Rumplestiltskin*. Only gradually it turns out that the tale about the goblin asking the beautiful miller's daughter to give him her son in exchange for saving her life by weaving gold out of straw is not addressed to the spectators, but to Shirley's dead son Jordan. The soothing tone and melody of the actress's voice

[81] Reynolds in Curtis.
[82] Reynolds in Curtis.
[83] Moira Buffini and Anna Reynolds, *Jordan* (London: Peters Fraser and Dunlop, 1992) 29.

narrating the fairy tale changes into an ugly, screeching voice of the goblin while re-enacting the dialogues between the daughter and her menacing saviour. While portraying the goblin, the actress Dearbhail Carr, who toured Ireland with *Jordan* in 2010, made a grotesque facial expression, mixing horror and ugliness with chilling laughter.

By interweaving this fairy tale with the main narrative Buffini and Reynolds metaphorically represent Shirley's inner demons and conflicting states of her mind. Shirley is not only the loving and caring mother as the miller's daughter is, she is also as obsessively possessive as the goblin: "You began to laugh and laugh, and gurgle, and I cried, and held you so tightly that you squealed with pain and surprise."[84] The narrative being presented from Shirley's point of view, however, there are more parallels with the nice miller's daughter than the threatening Rumplestiltskin. In the fairy tale the daughter saves her son by leaving the kingdom and never coming back again. Shirley similarly decides to save both of them from separation by leaving forever. She kills her baby first by putting a pillow on his face and slowly suffocating him, then she swallows a deadly amount of pills and pours vodka down her throat. Ironically though, she survives her attempted suicide as she is saved by her neighbour who calls the police. The traditional happy ending of the fairy tale closes Shirley's narrative not only as a bitter contrast to the tragic ending of the real case of Shirley Jones, but it might be understood in a different way as well. While in prison, Shirley had been trying to kill herself many times and was hoping for a death sentence, as the only thing she really wanted was to be united with her son Jordan again: "Hang me! Don't let me linger on like this! I wish for death sentence with all my soul!"[85] Her release from prison gave her freedom to finally end her life and thus, from her perspective, death was a final reconciliation: "But now it's time to go. Jordan? One thing or the other now. A life sentence or… Freedom."[86] According

[84] Buffini and Reynolds 30.
[85] Buffini and Reynolds 58.
[86] Buffini and Reynolds 61.

to the stage directions, after finishing her fairy tale with the traditional phrase "And of course, they lived happily ever after," Shirley calmly leaves and a dedication to the memory of Shirley Jones is projected on a screen. For the audiences unaware of the real context this message is shocking, for others it functions as an affirmation of their sympathy for the protagonist, whom they might perceive due to the monologue form not as a murderess, but a victim of drastic circumstances.

By dramatizing the real-life story in *Jordan* Buffini and Reynolds aim at re-awakening the emotions of the spectators by giving them access to Shirley's inner thoughts, yet for this monologue to be really effective they employ also other means than merely framing the main tragic narrative with a fairy tale. The text of the play is thus interspersed not only with the fairy tale *Rumplestiltskin*, but with various flashbacks from Shirley's life that include fast dialogues in direct speech. Moreover, the narrative is enriched by extracts of advertisements Shirley reads from a women's magazine. Most importantly, though, the text includes also scenes when Shirley re-enacts various therapeutic exercises she had to go through with her psychologist. One of the therapeutic tasks given to Shirley by her doctor is to provide a detailed description of the murder. This brief, fragmented section is repeated more times in the play, each time with growing speed, reaching a frantic tempo followed by a prolonged pause. Going back to the trauma and being encouraged to voice her horrors, however, does not have the desirable effect. Such therapy is presented only as a prolongation of Shirley's suffering. Speaking even only to her imagined son, the protagonist is visibly suffering by being prevented from forgetfulness that in her view might perhaps bring peace. Let alone when forced to talk to her doctors or other inmates. Paradoxically then, while Reynolds in real life advocates communication and access to drama for the inmates that might help them talk about their own situation as well, her protagonist Shirley opts for silence. In this aspect, Buffini's and Reynolds's monologue play *Jordan* differs from Bolger's *The Holy Ground* and

many other contemporary monologues for women that use this dramatic form to empower their speakers to speak about abuse. In *Jordan* the desirable breaking of silence is paid for by enormous suffering of the protagonist.

As opposed to the majority of contemporary Irish and British monologues for women, represented by the tragedies captured in the two previous examples, Geraldine Aron's monologue play *My Brilliant Divorce* (2001) tackles the despair and loneliness of the fifty-one-year-old divorcee with sardonic humour. In Deirdre Falvey's words, "In spite of the darkness at the heart of the play, the piece is bright and breezy."[87] The protagonist is a middle-aged, middle-class window-dresser Angela who has to deal with the problematic relationship with her husband who has left her for a younger woman. Given its subject matter, the monologue form fits the content perfectly as Angela is forced to adjust to sudden solitude. Geraldine Aron focuses on the familiar absurdities of day-to-day contemporary female life experience and lets her protagonist go through various comically embarrassing situations. Though the play deals with depression and despair, it is actually very entertaining. *My Brilliant Divorce* is a celebratory "well-made-play" aimed in particular at female audiences, who can easily identify with Aron's Angela. It could be classified as another example of "the-good-night-out-for-the-girls"[88] show analysed by Elaine Aston in her recent study of the same title. *My Brilliant Divorce* shares characteristics with West End hits such as *Brigitte Jones Diary* or *Mamma Mia*: in Sarah Crompton's words, these women-friendly shows "seem to be designed just for us when we want to have a good time, let our hair down and feel purely happy at the end of the evening."[89] It is thus not surprising that *My Brilliant Divorce* has become a box office hit among mainstream audiences in so many countries around the world and has been translated into 31 languages, including Czech. Nevertheless,

[87] Dierdre Falvey in Geraldine Aron, *My Brilliant Divorce* (London: Samuel French Ltd., 2003) back cover.
[88] Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, *A Good Night Out for the Girls Popular Feminism in Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 1.
[89] Sarah Crompton in Aston, 2.

this monologue play has been successful also with male critics: Charles Spencer for instance commented that "A peculiarly frosty heart is required to resist *My Brilliant Divorce*."[90]

The reason for the mainstream appeal of Aron's monologue is not only the unsentimental, sarcastic, "laughing through tears" approach of the playwright who manages to create "a wonderful mixture of comedy and pathos,"[91] but most importantly its lavish theatricality. In terms of stage directions, the script of the play is even more meticulous than Bolger's monologues. Re-enactment of other characters is only one part of the onstage action. Although still performed on an almost empty stage, by careful integration of lighting, sound effects and movement, the scenic space transforms as fluidly as the actress switches between various roles. In addition to re-enactment, other characters are present via their pre-recorded voices in different accents. The actress thus not only re-enacts her twenty different communication partners live on stage, but her voice is heard also from the recordings. In the scenes involving these audio tracks, the actress usually moves to a designated "telephone area" on the stage that lights up. When finishing the telephone conversations, the actress moves back centre stage and the lights in the telephone area are switched off. Similarly, the lights suggest other locations Angela goes into, such as a clinic, sex shop, or her friend's flat where Angela tried to overcome her solitude by having a one-night stand. The changes of location are emphasised also by appropriate music background, from a moving flute melody in scenes of depression to Ravel's *Bolero* for the sex scenes, or fiery Mexican music for jealousy scenes with Angela's husband's Mexican lover. The most spectacular visual and sound effect, however, are the bursts of fireworks that are used to mark the passing of time as *My Brilliant Divorce* spans over more than three years of Angela's post-divorce life. Props are used in an equally ironic way. When the protagonist is crying with despair, an over-size silk handkerchief falls from above. Even Angela's only companion Axl is not a real dog but a

[90] Charles Spencer in Aron, back cover.
[91] Spencer in Aron, back cover.

stuffed "medium sized dog on wheels, aged eleven,"[92] operated by a remote control. Such exaggerated effects playfully subvert any attempts at realistic staging and have highly comical result, which the audience is likely to appreciate with laughter. As Charles Spencer summarized, in her comedy drama *My Brilliant Divorce* Geraldine Aron uses the monologue form to push "the absurdity of the situation as much as its pathos […] Mixing vaudevillian solo-turn and vicarious soul-baring, she offers an enjoyable evening of stand-up tragedy […]."[93]

As rare as Geraldine Aron's approach to the monologue form is in its comic presentation of a female character, the next play to be discussed in this chapter is an even greater exception in the context of contemporary Irish monologue plays for women. Maureen McManus's *Maureen* (2009) is a one woman play based upon McManus's experience of an Irish woman living in contemporary post-communist Prague, which had its first production in West Bohemian Theatre in Cheb in October 2009. McManus wrote the monologue together with her Czech husband Julek Neumann, a renowned translator, in a very authentic mixture of bad Czech, Irish and English. The play features Maureen waiting for her husband, who was supposed to give a lecture on Irish dancing. The audience are drawn into play even before the beginning of the performance, when the lights in the auditorium are still on. Maureen walks on the stage from time to time and is quite nervous. She is waiting for her husband, but since the lecture is about to start, she is forced to step in and substitute for him. Instead of the originally planned dialogue between the Irish–Czech couple, the play turns into a monologue. At first Maureen starts to give the lecture on Irish dancing, but very soon her attempt slips into a conversation with the audience. As the play is concerned with stereotypes, it turns out that Maureen's Czech husband got stuck in a pub with his friends and did not care to turn up

[92] Aron 1.
[93] Charles Spencer in Aron, back cover.

for the lecture at all. Interestingly, this play focuses as much on the female Irish protagonist as on its Czech audience, whose stereotypical thinking is being challenged by Maureen. McManus lets the actress improvise a lot and even break the fourth wall in order to actively interact with the audience who are forced to take a decisive part in the denouement of the play. After sixty minutes of merciless mockery of Czech national stereotypes, xenophobic behaviour or the ghosts of the communist past, Maureen lets the audience decide on her future by taking a vote. The play thus has three different endings dependent on the decision of the audience. The first possibility is that Maureen leaves her husband and goes to Greece, the second that she comes back to him again. The third option is included in case the audience refuse to participate: Maureen challenges them for the last time and mocks them how typical this passivity of the Czechs is. Despite being given a chance to change the course of events, they do not use it. If the audience refuse to make their choice, they are given the most trivial happy ending – the husband finally arrives to give the lecture.

Despite being a comedy, Maureen McManus's *Maureen* is highly critical not only of the desperate female protagonist, but importantly also of its target audience. By breaking the fourth wall, the actress uses the opportunity even to physically push a volunteer from the audience as a demonstration of the way Czech people behave when they walk on the narrow sidewalks. Having the advantage of a distance, as a foreigner with a Czech passport, she pronounces the unspoken truth about many problematic issues that are for many people still taboo, in particular Czech communist past and hidden racism. In this aspect, McManus differs from Geraldine Aron, whose play *My Brilliant Divorce* is a 'feel-good' play, although it includes many dark and depressing moments. In *Maureen* the actress not only re-enacts other characters, she is given the freedom to improvise parts of her text, to compose her own lyrics to songs and invent new dance steps. Although still largely text-based, in its interactivity and

inclusion of improvisation this play pushes the limits of the monologue form in a way not employed by the Irish and British playwrights who have been discussed so far.

Irish actor and playwright Donal O'Kelly and British playwright Mark Ravenhill, however, break the constraints of the monologue form in a different, yet equally inventive way: they frame their monologue narratives as film scripts. In order to present their epic story lines, they made their monologists a screenwriter and a film producer. In O'Kelly's *Catalpa* (1994) the screenwriter Mathew Kid is trying to persuade Hollywood producers to finance his script, in Ravenhill's *Product* (2005) the film producer James is trying to persuade an actress Olivia to play the leading role. In such framing, they can create elaborate epic dream worlds by combining vivid storytelling with re-enactment, sound and visual effects, use of props etc. Both playwrights, who not only wrote the texts, but performed them as well, thus use the monologue form not to dramatize the inner world and personal story of their protagonists, but they use the speakers as mediators, as a communicative device that enables them to tell complex epic stories that are more often dramatized via the film medium. As O'Kelly explains, for the story of *Catalpa* "the obvious way was to write a movie. But a storyline like *Catalpa* would be a multi-million dollar blockbuster, with all the conservative ramifications that entails."[94] The attraction of *Catalpa* lies in the imaginative transposition of the endless possibilities of the film medium on a small bare stage via theatrical means. For some critics, however, such mixing of forms is problematic. O'Kelly's monologue play thus had a mixed reception. As Pauline Simmons summarizes, "O'Kelly's version is neither movie, nor stage play nor narrative, but rather a bit of all three. For some this mixture of forms might be exciting and innovative. For others it can be confusing and stultifying."[95] Instead of this

[94] Donal O'Kelly, *Catalpa* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997) 8.
[95] Pauline Simmons, "A *Curtain Up* Review *Catalpa*", *Curtain Up*, 12 November 2008, 12 November 2013, http://www.curtainup.com/catalpa.html.

approach, Simmons wishes the story to be dramatized in a different medium: "*Catalpa* might make an excellent movie if an enterprising producer decided to option the property."[96]

Other critics also had problems with O'Kelly's take on the story but wished *Catalpa* to be 'proper' theatre. Neil Genzlinger in *The New York Times* complained that "[…] you may have a nagging sense that what you have just seen is akin to watching an audio book being recorded: the effort was interesting, but real theatre is better."[97] Or, in Patrick Lee's view, O'Kelly fails to make *Catalpa* really work on stage as it is "[…] seldom more than an aural experience."[98] I would argue that the problem of O'Kelly's monologue play is not its challenging form, but the story its protagonist Mathew Kid narrates. The secret rescue voyage of *Catalpa* to Australia in 1875 to save Fenian prisoners is a rather mediocre adventure story that is not that dramatic. Moreover, the characters as presented by the narrator Mathew Kid are too flat to make the audience emotionally involved with their fate. The narrator of *Catalpa*, Matthew Kid, is after all an unsuccessful screenwriter and O'Kelly makes it clear from the very beginning that Matthew Kid despite all his effort will inevitably fail to persuade the Hollywood film producers to finance his project. Or, as Sharon Pertmutter also noted, "The problem with *Catalpa* the play is that *The Catalpa* the unmade movie isn't that good."[99] However, it must be emphasised that Mathew Kid's unexciting adventure story does not prevent O'Kelly's *Catalpa* from being an unusual and captivating theatre performance because of the way O'Kelly presents it.

Despite the lavish imagery described in O'Kelly's monologue play, theatrically they are again very austere. O'Kelly performed *Catalpa* on a bare stage, in front of a microphone. The only

[96] Simmons.
[97] Neil Genzlinger, "One Captain Courageous in a Daring Solo Voyage", *The New York Times*, 22 November 2008, 12 November 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/22/theater/reviews/22cata.html?_r=0.
[98] Patrick Lee, "*Catalpa* review", *Theatre Mania*, 16 November 2008, 12 November 2013, http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/11-2008/catalpa_16229.html.
[99] Sharon Pertmutter, "*Catalpa* Review", *Talk In Broadway*, 10 March 2005, 14 November 2013, http://www.talkinbroadway.com/regional/la/la171.html,

props he used were objects he fund in his flat such as a bowl, a pair of boots or a towel. O'Kelly improved his casual costume by using a white bedspread, which he wrapped around himself to portray either the female characters, a ghost or ocean waves. His performance of a voyage, paradoxically, is acted out from a fixed position on stage as O'Kelly never leaves his spot with the microphone. It is merely up to the audience to imagine the exotic world envisioned in *Catalpa*. Despite re-enactment, O'Kelly's monologue play goes back to direct storytelling as it relies primarily on the power of words. As regards activating the imagination of his audience, O'Kelly stated that "The instruments used to do this are the text itself – the images described, the bits of dialogue, the words used, the sounds, with movement, gesture, energy, stillness, with music sometimes, with lighting, and the use of a few select props."[100] As Patrick Lonergan has suggested, O'Kelly's approach to the monologue play is thus:

> a significant corrective of prevailing views on contemporary Irish plays, especially those written for one performer.[…] It was suggested that this mode of production turned audiences into passive consumers of information. […] *Catalpa* in contrast shows how plays featuring one actor who directly addresses the audience can be decidedly theatrical.[101]

In other words, O'Kelly's monologue play shares many features with the plays of Conor McPherson described in the previous chapter. It can also be argued that Genzlinger's comparison of the performance to a recording session of an audio-book is relevant here, yet the extra level O'Kelly offers is his virtuoso re-enactment of not only other characters, but also of animals and natural elements. By combining onomatopoeic words, minute descriptions accompanied by precise gestures, O'Kelly creates unusually vivid visual images. His most memorable re-enactment is that of a squawking seabird parading on a table of a film producer:

[100] O'Kelly 10.
[101] Patrick Lonergan, *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, 334.

> Gwawk-kwawk! Gwawk-kwawk! Seabird. Gwawk! I'm a long wet seabird. Kwawk. I am a seabird, long-necked and wet, and I'm squatting on your desk. Mister Big Picture Movieman. My feathers drip. Puddles form between my feet, but I'm still proud.[102]

O'Kelly's impersonation of the seabird is comic, yet it shows the endless possibilities of the playwright's technique of combination of the verbal narrative, the film frame and theatre performance. By incorporating verbal descriptions of characteristic film techniques such as aerial shots, close ups, and cuts O'Kelly manages create a captivating theatre performance. Still in the character of the sea bird, O'Kelly as if leaves the ground and flies above the ocean:

> And now, I'm going to fly. I'm going to spread my wings and fly in the sky. Come with me Movieman from Hollywood. Anyone can fly. Just spread your wings and flap, then dive and haul… fwip fwip fwip fwip fwip. Waves. Choppy choppy waves green-brown tossing toss-schloss waves.[103]

The musicality, rhythm and poetry of O'Kelly's text in such moments are unusually captivating. His strength as an actor is at creating soundscapes and landscapes, not so much in portraying human characters, whose different personalities are suggested by various accents, registers, tone of voice etc. An integral part of O'Kelly's theatre performance is the music, which was played live by a musician and composer Trevor Knight on a synthesizer. The rich music background, together with lighting helps O'Kelly illustrate the epic ocean voyage that takes place only in the imagination of Matthew Kid.

[102] O'Kelly 12 – 13.
[103] O'Kelly 13.

Overall, despite telling an adventure story for almost two hours, which might be trying even for the best of audiences, *Catalpa* succeeds in capturing the vivid visions created in the imagination of its protagonist, the idealistic scriptwriter Matthew Kid. As Sharon Pertmutter suggests, "What is unusual about *Catalpa* is that it is a love letter to the movies. […] What it is really about is a man deeply in love with the magic of motion pictures, in all their sweeping, special effecty, melodramatic glory."[104] O'Kelly's approach functions the best, when he makes his audience imagine the story as a film. In Pertmutter's view, "O'Kelly gives us a film script that uses familiar visual vocabulary, and it resonates with our movie going memories."[105] The audience is thus invited to participate actively in creating the world of the play. However, despite being "a love letter to the movies", *Catalpa* is a theatrical love letter which "ends in showing conclusively that live performance can express just as much (or even more than) a high-budget Hollywood movie."[106]

In contrast to Matthew Kid, the protagonist in Mark Ravenhill's *Product* is very pragmatic. Ravenhill's film producer James unashamedly wants to use the tragedy of 9/11 for a trashy B-movie as he senses the commercial potential of such contentious theme. Written in 2005, Ravenhill's play envisaged the inevitable appropriation of the tragedy by the movie industry and the playwright mercilessly mocks the film clichés that were very likely to be used in dramatizations of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre. Ravenhill makes the script deliberately schematic. It depicts a love affair between a young British manager Amy, whose boyfriend died in the Twin Towers during the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001, and an active member of Al–Queda Mohammed. Their mission is to blow up Disneyworld Europe. The script includes vivid descriptions of spectacular explosions, frequent sex scenes or even Osama bin Laden kissing the heroine on her forehead. Ravenhill's *Product* resembles in tone

[104] Pertmutter.
[105] Pertmutter.
[106] Lonergan 333.

the black comedies of Quentin Tarrantino. The film producer James envisioned also the way these scenes are going to be shot, so similar to Matthew Kid in *Catalpa*, when describing the plot of his film project, he uses filmic language and describes the movement of the camera:

> Take him home? Take him home? Are you going to take him home? Cut to your face. Cut to the knife. Cut to the prayer mat. Cut to his – and the lighting favours him now, okay? Something in the lighting – for the first time he looks handsome.[107]

In addition to these technical details, James re-enacts the dialogues of the film characters and explains to the actress the nature of the character of Amy he wants her to play. With the script, James has access to Amy's inner thoughts and feelings and discloses them to the actress. Ravenhill's monologue play is most comical, when he is revealing the processes through which blockbuster films are made in Hollywood:

> Amy is wounded, there's a wound and it's something about the mobile, something about the… it's a narrative hook and it's empathy. You are going to love her. […] She is three-dimensional. […] You want to thrust the knife into him […]
>
> 'This is for the Towers. This is for civilisation, This is for all of us, you bastard.'
>
> You don't say that. You don't do that. That's an interior monologue. You play that? I want you to play that with your eyes.[108]

[107] Mark Ravenhill, *The Cut and Product* (London: Methuen, 2006) 60.
[108] Ravenhill 58 – 59.

In this perfectly observed satire of Hollywood's worst clichés Ravenhill is simultaneously making fun of his own profession as "narrative hooks" and "interior monologues" are devices used in playwriting as well. On the other hand, *Product* is not only mocking the way Hollywood narratives are made. In Jeremy Austin's words, "As the narrative within the narrative expands, so the audience begins to find itself gripped by the preposterous plot, a testament to Ravenhill's writing but also a clever comment on how even the most ridiculous storyline can entrance an audience if well told."[109] As Ravenhill said, this monologue play "It's a little experiment; I wanted to see how simple a play could be."[110] In contrast to his previous play *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2001) with its "multifarious cast, musical score, era-hopping setting, and West End transfer,"[111] *Product* is set on a bare stage. Ravenhill acts out the film script to impress the actress, who is sitting on a simple chair throughout the performance completely still. The spectacular action described in *Product* contrasts with the austerity of the production. As playwrights such as Conor McPherson, Ravenhill defends the minimalist monologue format: "A play could just be me telling a story. That is still theatre."[112] In 2010 Ravenhill returned to the monologue form in a twenty-minute play *The Experiment*, in which he acts a narrator, who is telling the audience a dubious story about medical experiments on children. The story, and the narrator's level of complicity, keeps shifting. The audience are left wondering which version of what they hear is most credible. In contrast to *The Product*, however, Ravenhill's second monologue play received merely a mixed reception. As Glen Pearce has suggested, "As a stand alone piece without a

[109] Jeremy Austin, "Product", *The Stage*, 19 August 2005, 15 February 2014, http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/9275/product.
[110] Ravenhill in Miranda Sawyer, "Think of it as Brigit Jones goes Jihad", *The Guardian*, 31 July 2005, 16 February 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/jul/31/theatre.edinburghfestival2005.
[111] Ravenhill in Sawyer.
[112] Ravenhill in Sawyer.

background context is somehow fails. A thought provoking but somehow unfulfilled experience."[113]

The monologue format has also another advantage for Ravenhill as it offered him more freedom than a multi-cast production commissioned by the National Theatre in London such as *Mother Clap's Molly House* (2000). As Ravenhill explained, "One of the reasons why I want to do this monologue is because normally, after you've written a play, you're powerless. You're waiting for directors to decide if they want to direct it, for actors to choose if they want to be in it."[114] In *Product* the protagonist is in a way in a similar situation; in order to make his film project he depends on the actress to perform the leading role. Although interrogated by the protagonist, the actress does not answer. Ravenhill does not give any stage direction concerning her reaction, however, in the first production of *Product* at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh (August 2005), Elizabeth Baker looked bored and "suitably unimpressed"[115] by Ravenhill's character James. Her detached reaction to the protagonist's performance thus gives the dramatic situation an ironic twist and makes it even more comical.

Tim Crouch's motivation for writing a monologue play for himself to perform is analogous to Ravenhill's in that the form offered both of them more creative freedom. Crouch's journey to the monologue form, however, started from an opposite direction to Ravenhill's. The playwright Ravenhill decided to act in his own play in order to be independent of the directors, producers and actors. The actor Tim Crouch decided to start writing for himself in order to be independent of "having to manufacture the appearance of emotions"[116] in the roles designed by other playwrights. He was dissatisfied both with the process of rehearsing the plays into fixed patterns by the theatre makers and with the role traditionally assigned to the

[113] Glen Pearce, "The Experiment – Soho Theatre", *Glen's Theatre Reviews*, 22 July 2010, 24 March 2014, http://www.glenstheatreblog.com/2010/07/experiment-soho-theatre.html.
[114] Ravenhill in Sawyer.
[115] Austin.
[116] Tim Crouch in Stephen Bottoms, "Introduction", *Tim Crouch Plays 1* (London: Oberon Books: 2011) 13.

audience: "As an actor, I've often worked far too hard to 'host' an audience's journey through a play."[117] In other words, Crouch as an actor in a role felt that he was doing all the interpretative work for the audience, whose role was thus significantly limited. Such performances, in Crouch's view, lack "real 'liveness' or spontaneity, and indeed rob spectators of any personal agency in the proceedings."[118] In Crouch's *My Arm* (2003), on the contrary, the audience are given a major role. They are actually left alone and invited to make their own way through the performance via their own associations in relation to what is being presented. As Crouch explains, the purpose is to "give the audience a greater sense of its own authority in relation to what it is seeing."[119]

Given Crouch's concern for the role of the audience not only in *My Arm*, but also in his non-monological later plays *An Oak Tree* (2005), *ENGLAND* (2007), and most famously in *The Author* (2009), it is no co-incidence that when published together in the collection *Plays 1*, the book is introduced by a motto from Jacques Rancière's lecture *The Emancipated Spectator* (2007):

> ... a new adventure in a new idiom... calls for spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators.[120]

In his lecture Rancière was concerned predominantly with the negative connotations attributed to spectatorship and explored the presuppositions theatre-makers have about the role of the audience. Specifically, Rancière pointed to the uneven relationship between the

[117] Tim Crouch, "Introduction", *My Arm* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2003) 10.
[118] Crouch in Bottom, "Introduction" 13.
[119] Crouch, "Introduction", 10.
[120] Jacques Rancière in Crouch, *Plays 1*, 6.

viewers, either passive or active, and the knowing performer. He argues that in both Brechtian and Arteudian paradigms, the theatre is understood as "a self-suppressing mediation."[121] He then suggests that when theatre is understood in such a way, it is actually very similar to "the process that is supposed to take place in the pedagogical relation. In the pedagogical process the role of the schoolmaster is positioned as the act of suppressing the distance between his knowledge and the ignorance of the ignorant."(274) Instead of transforming the ignoramuses into scholars, however, Rancière calls for an intellectual emancipation of the spectators. A necessary condition for such emancipation is the "equality of intelligence." (275) In other words, there should be no gap between the intelligences of the spectators and the performers. The only gap is, in Rancière's words, "[...] the distance between what [the spectator] already knows and what [he or she] still doesn't know but can learn by the same process."(275) Importantly, Rancière also challenges the idea of theatre as a specifically communitarian place: "In a theatre, [...], just as in a museum, [...] there are only individuals, weaving their own way through the forests of words, acts, and things that stand in front of them or around them." (278) Yet, the spectators' power is the ability "to translate in their own way what they are looking at."(278) Rather than conveying messages that make the audience active, the theatre performance should work through an unpredictable play of associations and dissociations of any of us as spectators. As Rancière concludes:

> In all those performances, [...] it should be a matter of linking what one knows with what one does not know, of being at the same time performers who display their competences and spectators who are looking to find what those competences might produce in a new context, among unknown people. (280)

[121] Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator", *Art Forum*, March 2007, http://members.efn.org/~heroux/The-Emancipated-Spectator-.pdf. 274. Subsequent references are included in parentheses in the text.

In *My Arm* Tim Crouch addressed most of these issues raised by Rancière. In order to achieve such active and confident approach of the audience to the theatre performance, Crouch modified his role of an actor to the one of a performer/narrator. Crouch still acts his character, which at first seems autobiographical as the story is written as the first person narrative, but his function on stage is more that of a storyteller, who mediates the story to the audience via its dramatization. The means Crouch uses to bring his story to life are inanimate objects he collects from the audience in the beginning of the performance of *My Arm*. When telling the story about the boy, who decided to put his arm up in the air and never put it down, the inanimate objects help Crouch to enliven the characters involved in the story he narrates. The live body of the performer represents the older version of the main character of the boy, who is embodied by an Action Man doll. Otherwise, the relationship between the other objects and the characters is absolutely random. Crouch chooses the roles for the objects very freely and gives voice to all of them. Moreover, every night, the objects differ depending on the audience attending the show. Such substitution of live bodies for objects immediately draws the spectators' imagination and emotions into play because they have a personal relationship to what they see. Crouch obviously does not control what the audience feel and think when they see their own possessions on stage as the characters Crouch involves in his story. Since, as Rancière argued, the performance itself creates a distance: "It is a mediating 'spectacle' that stands between the artist's idea and the spectator's feeling and interpretation"(278).

Crouch does not use the objects as puppets, he does not animate them, just presents them to the spectators via a camera, which magnifies them and projects them on a TV screen. The contrast between the narrative and the objects often creates a comical effect: "Here I am watching TV again. *The doll.* This is the house we lived in. *The performer presents to the*

camera one of the objects from the audience."[122] Sometimes, however, the combination can provoke a different reaction of the spectators. As Steven Bottoms confesses:

> I recall, in one performance, being strangely moved at seeing a pencil case and a can of body-spray bullying Action Man doll which always stands in as the young 'Tim'. Precisely by *not* showing us what the bullies 'really' looked like, or having actors 'emote' their aggression, Crouch allowed me to fill in my own responsive associations with the scene described.[123]

However, as *My Arm* is in its nature "a very traditional piece of work, it's a storytelling piece,"[124] as Crouch himself said, it can be argued that the scene described above might move the audience even without the support of the inanimate objects. If told without the visual embellishment of the magnified images of the objects, the audience still wouldn't be shown what the bullies looked like nor wouldn't the aggression be filtered via re-enactment of other actors. Mere words also allow the audience to fill in their own responses and associations to the scene. In other words, if the point of Crouch's *My Arm* was merely to tell the unusual story of the boy, it might as well do without the items donated by the audience. In such case, *My Arm* would have been be the same as the visually austere monologues plays of playwrights such as Conor McPherson, which were described earlier. Yet, direct storytelling is not what Crouch's monologue play is mainly about. Its focus is on the audience and their relationship to the theatre performance of the story Crouch tells.

[122] Crouch 25.
[123] Bottom, "Introduction", 13.
[124] Tim Crouch in conversation with Aleks Sierz, "Navigating New Patterns of Power with an Audience", *JCDE* 2.1 (2014), "Theatre and Politics: Theatre As Cultural Intervention", eds. Clare Wallace and Ondřej Pilný. (forthcoming in June 2014).

In *My Arm* Crouch emphasises that spectators must actively account for their meaning making and uses the monologue format to investigate the mechanism of the process of viewing theatre. Crouch says that the form offered itself very naturally given the subject of the story he wanted to tell. The reason why the boy decided to put his arm above his head is never explained, he just did it. In Crouch's words, "The boy's action is more meaningful to the others than to himself. His arm becomes the ultimate object onto which other people project their own symbols and meanings."[125] In the later part of the play the narrator describes how he became famous first in the London underground art world, but later also gained attention of major art institutions and the media:

> I was too ill to do anything but I became observed, which perhaps is all that anyone other than yourself can hope to be. There were articles and interviews. Channel Four asked to make a documentary. This is probably where you start to come into the story. Other artists made approaches but Simon took control. He and Erica started to make casts of my arm. Two bronzes were made. One is in Hirshorn Gallery in Washington, DC –
>
> *The performer presents an object or a photo.*[126]

The way the artists projected their own ideas and symbols onto the boy's gesture is mirrored by the audience's involvement with the objects Crouch presents to them. They also give them their own meanings, appropriate them back and "ultimately make their own story out of it." (280).

The spectators do not only add meaning and emotional significance to the arbitrarily selected objects, but they also enliven the text. When writing the play Crouch deliberately removed all

[125] Crouch, "Introduction", 10.
[126] Crouch, "My Arm", 44.

the adjectives so that the story would feel neutral: "I would give no coloration to the story. If there was any to be done it would be done by the audience, not by the performer."[127] Crouch thus again emphasizes the active role the spectators must play in order to enjoy a theatre performance of a monologue play such as *My Arm*. He sees his role as a mere communicator of the story, as a performer, not an actor: "I'm not attempting to represent someone other than myself. I am representing somebody other than myself, but I don't need to do it. It's going to be done by you, rather than by me."[128]

To sum up, as has been shown in this chapter, the monologue play does not necessarily have to be only "a stripped-down version of a short story" that is addressed to the audience directly; it can be used for dramatization of a psychological transformation of the protagonist, for investigation of contested male and female identity, for showing the traumatizing effects of psychological oppression by giving voice to the previously silenced speakers, for a playful and ironic laughing at the everyday absurdities of everyday reality, for merciless mockery of the audience's stereotypical thinking, for mediating spectacular epic narratives usually employed by the film medium or for exploration of the relationship between the performer and the spectators. By enriching the performances by re-enactment of other characters (or by inclusion of inanimate objects), these plays involve conflict not only on the verbal level, but the audience see the conflicts performed on stage. Furthermore, as the actors have to embody a rich variety of characters and express vast shifts in time and space, they broaden the context of these monologue plays. Moreover, in these monologue plays the playwrights focus not only on the text, they do not only "show that they can write beautiful sentences," but they integrate other components of the theatre medium, such as visual and sound effects, props, costume changes, movement etc. in an imaginative way to create highly theatrical performances, in which the verbal is as important as the visual. The virtuosity of the actors and the creative use

[127] Crouch in conversation with Sierz.
[128] Crouch in conversation with in Sierz.

of all components of the theatre medium in such plays paradoxically enable the audiences to enjoy the performance even when the play text is not particularly exciting.

5. Split Identities

The previous three chapters mapped the most commonly used approaches in text-based monologue plays featuring one performer as evidenced by contemporary British and Irish playwrights in the last two decades. This chapter will focus on plays that experiment with the ability of the monologue to go beyond the surface, beyond the mask of the character and explore the consciousness and sub-consciousness of their monologists rather than to address the audience directly with a compelling story. Although for some critics such plays might be dull as they are "without a conflict of varying opinions"[1] of different people and the form "ultimately limits the playwright to the internal conflict of a single personality,"[2] the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that such plays are dramatically very effective. The main advantage of such introspective monologues is that their theatre performance allows the spectators to experience the character "inside out, rather than the outside in."[3] In other words, the audience are enabled to observe the effects of both internal and external conflicts on their protagonists' sensitive minds. Such complex approach to the monologue has been most famously used by Samuel Beckett, whose plays such as *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Not I* (1972), *That Time* (1976), *Footfalls* (1976), *A Piece of Monologue* (1979), or *Rockaby* (1980) all dramatize the consciousness of their protagonists and present their selves as split. As a slightly more recent example of this type of monologue plays, Frank McGuinness's already mentioned one woman play *Baglady* (1985) will be analysed as an unusually complex and insightful theatrical dramatization of the effect of sexual abuse on the consciousness of the victim. Secondly, it will be argued that although there are not many contemporary monologue plays that use the form in such manner, Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* (2009) when

[1] A.R. Kugel in Sharon Marie Carnicke, *The Theatrical Instinct Nikolai Evreinov and the Russian Theatre of the Early Twentieth Century* (New York:Peter Lang, 1989) 76.
[2] Carnicke 76.
[3] Jacob Moreno in Kurt Taroff, *The Mind's Stage: Monodrama as Historical Trend and Interpretive Strategy* (New York, University of New York: 2005) 3.

performed by a single actress might be considered a current example of this category as, in its monologue form, the play offers an insight into a troubled, traumatized consciousness of the speaker who is trying to suppress the unacceptable reality of the complicated situation in Israel. Furthermore, both plays will be examined in relation to Samuel Beckett's experiments with the form as both *Baglady* and *Seven Jewish Children* include significant Beckettian features. Last but not least, this chapter will try to demonstrate which aspects of the theory of monodrama as proposed by Russian theorist and dramatist Nikolai Evreinov might be applied to this type of monologue plays that venture to explore the inner world of their protagonists, whose identity is split into many conflicting selves.

Frank McGuinness's play *Baglady* was revived after 25 years in Focus Theatre Galway in 2010 in the context of the scandalous revelations about the sexual abuse of children committed by the Irish Catholic Church. Its story is perhaps even more relevant today than when it was written. The play is concerned with a homeless woman, a baglady, who carries all her belongings in a bag. She had been raped by her father and gave birth to a child. The father killed the baby and forced his daughter to be silent about the whole affair. The horror and tragedy of the victims of incest or other sexual abuse is a theme reappearing in many subaltern narratives, including documentary or confessional monologue plays, such as Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*, yet McGuinness goes a step further than merely giving voice to the violated speaker. In *Baglady*, he dramatizes the failure of the attempts at relating a trauma truthfully and shows the devastating effect of such painful psychological struggle.

In many ways, McGuinness's monologue play could be considered a theatrical parallel to William Faulkner's modernist masterpiece *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). In the first part of the novel Faulkner famously tried to capture the stream of consciousness of the mentally handicapped Benjy, whose mind is that of a three-year-old child. Benjy is unable to

comprehend the loss of his sister and other tragic events happening around him. Importantly, he is also unable to distinguish between the present and the past and in his distorted mind time is actually frozen. In McGuinness, the rape and mainly the death of her child paralyses Baglady's mind in a way similar to Faulkner's Benjy. Not only is she unable to distinguish between memory and her present situation: in her mind, her drowned son, her father and herself merge into one. Thus, in contrast to the monologue plays discussed in the previous chapter, the actress does not impersonate more characters but tries to act out the inner conflict in Baglady's distorted mind that is no longer able to distinguish between herself and others. Like Faulkner, McGuinness is trying to capture the inner processes of their two vulnerable, traumatized protagonists and to represent their hopeless struggle to come to terms with the surrounding reality they are not able to grasp.

This identity chaos is expressed in McGuinness's monologue play in many interconnected ways – not only in Baglady's speech, gestures and body language, but also in her costume, and the *mis-en-scene* of the play. On stage the audience see a figure carrying a black sack, dressed in heavy clothes of a farmer, rough trousers, dark overcoat and heavy boots, with a grey scarf hiding the hair completely.[4] Moreover, the figure who looks like a man is actually a woman. McGuinness links the ambiguous gender of his monologist with her past and forces the viewers "to read gender-under-construction rather than see gender-as-given."[5] In *Baglady* the asexual, non-feminine costume metaphorically reflects her merged male and female identity. Moreover, the costume functions simultaneously as a link with one of the key props used in the play – the Tarot cards. As Margot Gayle Backus pointed out, Baglady is

[4] Frank McGuinness, "Baglady" *Plays 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 385.
[5] Michael R. Schiavi, "The Tease of Truth in I Am My Own Wife", *Theatre Journal* 58, Number 2, May 2006, 202. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tj/summary/v058/58.2schiavi.html.

reminiscent of the Tarot card "The Fool"[6]. On the card the Fool is carrying a stick with a bundle of all his belongings, is followed by a dog and walking off a cliff. In the older version of this card, the Fool was often portrayed as a ragged vagabond or a beggar, who appears to be getting chased away by an animal, either a dog or a cat, who had torn his clothes. Both versions merge in the iconography of McGuinness' *Baglady*.

Furthermore, the imagery of the card is thoughtfully employed also in the play's *mise-en-scene* that reflects the state of Baglady's mind. The crucial part of the play takes place on the side of a river, where her son was killed and into which she gradually drowns all her possessions. The river functions symbolically as a borderline between the world of the living and the world of the dead, between the present and the past, with Baglady trapped inbetween. Like the Fool on the cliff, Baglady is balancing on the verge, both psychologically and physically. The other image from the card – that of the dog chasing the beggar – though not present visually, is mentioned by Baglady in her fragmented stream of consciousness narrative. The dog is an enemy, symbolizing her father:

> So he took himself from your arms and he walked into the river, turning into a black dog, shaking water from his hair. [...] Get away. Take that dog away. I hate dogs. It's a killer. [...] Stop him following me. I'll shoot it dead. I'll drown the bastard.[7]

McGuinness further explores the ambiguity of his speaker's split identity not only by blurring her gender by asexual costume, by positioning her on the verge, in no-man's-land, but he also reveals her inner conflict by making her speech confusing and slippery. The main obstacle the audience deal with is the fragmentariness of her speech and the unclear referent of the

[6] Margot Gayle Backus, "The Gothic Family Romance", *Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* (London: Duke University Press, 1999) 224.
[7] McGuinness, *Baglady*, 390.

pronouns Baglady uses. She constantly skips from the past to the present and addresses various listeners. She speaks as if she were voicing ideas of different people, yet without indicating whom she actually means. This aspect refers again to the Tarot card of the Fool. Its number is a zero and as such the Fool can replace actually any card. In other words, the Fool can become the King, the Queen or the Knave or any other character. For instance, the above mentioned fragment "So he took himself from your arms and he walked into the river, turning into a black dog, shaking water from his hair" is addressed to Baglady's dead baby, yet it mixes her perspective with the perspective of the father. The first pronoun "he" refers to the father, "himself" suggests the baby as a mirror image of the father, "from your arms" means that Baglady is addressing herself in the second person, "he" refers to the father drowning the baby, who in Baglady's imagination then turns into a black dog from the Tarot card.

The contradictions and tensions between Baglady's simultaneous identities are dramatized even further by the contrast between her words and her gestures. Baglady's body seems to work in spite of her will. As Eamonn Jordan commented, "the body is challenged to dispense its story. [...] Ultimately, it is the physicality of the body which articulates – hands, gestures and the introduction of symbols and props free up the voice to demarcate the trauma."[8] The following passage is an example of the imaginative way McGuinness used a single gesture to dramatise Baglady's inability to communicate. Having no one else to talk to, she uses her hands as partners in conversation. The hands 'speak' and suggest what the truth might be:

> *The Baglady buries her face in her hands, then speaks to her hands.*
>
> Answer me. You know. You were there. [...] I'll tear you apart. I'll cut your tongue out, if you don't tell me what happened to me. Tell me everything. Tell. Clap if you're going to tell me. Clap. Clap.

[8] Eamonn Jordan, "Meta-Physicality: Women Characters in McGuinness", *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. Melissa Sihra (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 133-134.

The Baglady claps her hands.

You were walking towards the water. You were carrying something in your hands. We tried to tell you not to. You couldn't hear what you were carrying. Your Father was with you. [...] can we stop telling you now?

The handclapping stops.[9]

This tension between the gestures and speech in *Baglady* resembles Samuel Beckett's ultra-minimalist monologue play *Not I,* where Beckett famously reduced his speaker to a mere Mouth. The play features a silent auditor, a figure dressed in black, who at several instances of the play makes a suggestive gesture that Mouth is not telling the audience the whole truth. Mouth has been "practically speechless... all her days,"[10] but once the words start to pour out of her, Mouth is unable to stop. Most importantly, Mouth refuses to admit that the fragmented narrative she utters concerns her own past and present, as Beckett's title suggests. In *Baglady* such conflicting situation is also present. In the climactic part of her monologue Baglady reads the already mentioned tarot cards. Like her hands, the cards become her communication partners that reveal the suppressed truth. For example, she raises the Queen of Hearts and tells her: "Your son is dead, his father killed him. She couldn't say my son is my father and my father is my son. She could not say it, but that was all she possessed, the truth."[11] Like Mouth in *Not I,* Baglady is unable to talk about her trauma directly and uses the pronoun "she" instead. Moreover, Baglady includes in her narrative passages which are strikingly untrue. She constantly repeats that her father was a good man and that "he never touched her, never raised his hand, never,"[12] which absolutely contrasts with her reading of the tarot cards. It is thus paradoxically by not voicing the abuse but by being silent about it, by lying about it,

[9] McGuinness 390.
[10] Samuel Beckett, "Not I", *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber) 379.
[11] McGuinness 392.
[12] McGuinness 386.

that the horrors of Baglady's experience are revealed. Frank McGuinness in this monologue play thus achieves exceptional emotional intensity. In Eamonn Jordan's words, "[Baglady's] fragmentary understandings and her unsettling self-revelations do not cohere into a complex and profound understanding."[13] There is no catharsis, McGuinness' monologue does not "generate any sense of easy or vicarious reward for either the character or an audience."[14]

In this context it is particularly useful to explore the theory of monodrama as proposed by the Russian theorist and dramatist Nikolai Evreinov, in whose view the chief characteristic of monodrama is that it is "centrally concerned with the external expression of the internal experience of a single protagonist."[15] Evreinov was one of the first to dramatize the conflicting selves that form one's personality. Although Evreinov used for such impersonations various actors, his theory of monodrama is inspiring also for the plays featuring only one performer. As Spencer Golub summarizes, "among Evreinov's contributions to modern theatre can be listed the following: 1) the concept of a divided self serving as a statement in itself on the condition of modern man; 2) ultra-subjectivism – the tale told from the protagonist's point of view, literally from the inside."[16] In *The Presentation of Love* (1909) he presented the conflict between the younger and the older self of the protagonist. The play features an old man meditating on his romantic love as a young man. The scenes from the past are presented using a structure of a play-within-a play. As Spencer Golub describes: "It is a scene from his youth in which C.S. (Catarrhal Subject) is 'I,' a cheerful twenty-year-old man. 'I' runs on stage with his friends, following a little ball which is rolling away. C.S., who like us is observing the scene from the outside, offers some

[13] Jordan 134.
[14] Jordan 134.
[15] Evreinov in Taroff v.
[16] Spencer Golub, *Evreinov: The Theatre of Paradox and Transformation* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984) 46.

narration."[17] In his 1912 play *Backstage of the Soul* Evreinov put on stage the revolutionary discoveries of Freudian psychology, which were then quite recent. This monodrama is set inside the human skull and explores the conflict among the protagonist's id, ego and superego, who were present on stage as three independent characters. These experiments with the form could be associated with the monologue plays of Samuel Beckett, namely *Krapp's Last Tape* or *That Time* that feature three differently aged selves of the protagonist as well. In Beckett's plays the identity of the protagonists is presented as a continuous shifting between the past and the present, in which the unreliability of memory plays a central role. The monologue format enables the playwright to transfer this complicated inner world onto the stage by, for example, pre-recording various voices and showing old Krapp listening to the tapes of his own voice or by making the stage look like the inside of human skull as in *Backstage of the Soul*.

What is especially inspiring about Evreinov's theory of monodrama in relation to McGuinness's *Baglady* is the way Evreinov suggested for such internal splits and conflicts to be represented on stage. In his monodramas the protagonist's changing states of mind were projected outwardly to the scenery. The aim was to persuade the spectators that they are inside the protagonist's mind and view the surrounding world through his or her eyes. Evreinov believed that the spectators "could be lead to experience a situation in the same way that a character does if they see exactly what the character sees."[18] For instance, when the character was drunk, the set around the stage started moving, when dizzy, the lights were used to swirl beams around him. This unusual approach to the use of scenery and the emphasis on the visual aspects of the theatre performance was based on Evreinov's contention that "we listen more with our eyes than with our ears; and this, […] is the nature of theatre."[19] In other

[17] Golub 40.
[18] Carnicke 72.
[19] Evreinov in Carnicke 72.

words, monodrama as understood by Evreinov is the opposite of the minimalist approach exemplified by McPherson's suggestion that we should "just let the words do the work."[20] Spencer Golub pointed out, Evreinov "believed, as did many of the theatrical innovators who were his contemporaries, that words constitute an insufficient mode of expression in the theatre."[21]

Thus in order for a monodrama to be successful, in Evreinov's view, the props, lights, costumes, make-up etc. must be carefully integrated, but never used in a realistic manner. Moreover, "A set designer must not under any circumstances show things as they are, in and of themselves, instead the designer must reflect the protagonist's associations with inanimate objects."[22] In his public lectures Evreinov gave many examples as to how to achieve the desired effect. For instance, when a character has an emotional relationship to a certain object, such as a park bench where he met his wife, the designer should put a throne on stage, not a real bench. In other words, the props, setting etc. should be used metaphorically. As Evreinov summarized, "the basic principle of monodrama is the principle of the identification of the scenic presentation with the character's presentation. In other words – the outer play must be an expression of the inner play."[23]

Frank McGuinness's *Baglady* employs – regardless of whether consciously or not – many aspects that Evreinov envisioned in his theory of monodrama. First and foremost, McGuinness manages to "express the inner play of the protagonist" outwardly by using the scenic presentation metaphorically. From costume via props to scenery, he does not "show things as they are, in and of themselves," but uses the visual components of the theatre medium to "reflect the protagonist's associations with inanimate objects." The tarot cards,

[20] Conor McPherson in "So There's These Three Irishmen...", *The Observer*, 4 February 2001, 19 August 2012, (http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2001/feb/04/features.review27).
[21] Golub 36.
[22] Evreinov in Carnicke 73.
[23] Evreinov in Carnicke 74.

most importantly, function not only as cards Baglady plays with, but she perceives them as real characters, as herself, her father and their dead baby. Moreover, she herself functions and looks as one of them, the Fool. However, alongside the visual "expression of the inner play of the protagonist", the aural level is just as important. Baglady's identity being shattered, her narrative has ceased to be cohesive. Fragmentation, silences, contradictions, involuntary slips of tongue, lies, etc. are the means used by McGuinness to dramatize the internal experience of the character. The combination of the corroded narrative with her gestures and body language that slip out of her control express the inner play inside Baglady's distorted mind most eloquently. In this aspect, Evereinov's theory is also valid as it is crucial for the audience to "listen more with their eyes," since the discrepancy between what is said and what is seen is crucial for our understanding of the chaos in Baglady's traumatized mind.

None of the monologue plays discussed so far has caused such outrage and controversy as Caryl Churchill's eight-minute play *Seven Jewish Children* from 2009. Perhaps only the cancellation of an upcoming production of the documentary monologue *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*[24] in New York in 2006 might be a parallel to the reaction of the critics, theatre-makers and audiences to Caryl Churchill's play about Gaza. The aim here is to examine to what extent the change of a dialogical play into a monologue play can influence our interpretation and reception of *Seven Jewish Children*. It will be argued that the criticisms of *Seven Jewish Children* for being reductive, reactive and naïve stem from a misinterpretation of the play caused by the openness and fluidity of the text and by the particular staging of the original Royal Court Theatre production, where the lines were distributed among nine actors. However, when *The Guardian* produced a film version of *Seven Jewish Children*, all the lines were delivered by a single actress directly to the audience. Churchill in her stage directions writes enables both interpretations: "The lines can be shared out in any way you like among

[24] *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

those characters. The characters are different in each scene as the time and child are different."[25] By transferring all the lines into a one woman play and transposing the conflicting points of view into a single worried consciousness, the play changed into an almost ritualistic lamentation on violence and grief. In other words, by internalizing the conflict, the play shifted its focus from a debate among adults from different Israeli families about the modern history of their state, concerned with the central question how to explain war, violence, fear and hatred to their children, to an exploration of a psychological state of the speaker trapped in the uneasy reality of the Middle East conflict. Although Chruchill's play includes specific details and is concerned with the political situation current in 2009, it simultaneously functions on a more abstract, general level. In other words, despite being concerned with Israel and Gaza, in its one-actress monologue version the play is again "centrally concerned with the external expression of the internal experience of a single protagonist."[26] Last but not least, the controversial 'off stage' history of the play will be examined in detail as an example of the role monologue plays could have as not only theatre events, but political events as well.

Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* is an unusually short play, which was also written, rehearsed and put on stage in an exceptionally short time. As Churchill herself commented in January 2009: "I wrote it last week; by this week I was arranging it with the Royal Court; it's now being cast; rehearsals are next week; and we perform it on 6 February."[27] The reason for such haste was Churchill's personal outrage at the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine – the armed intervention in Gaza in December 2008. Churchill managed to persuade the artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre, Dominic Cooke, to put the play on

[25] Caryl Churchill, "Seven Jewish Children – A Play for Gaza", *The Guardian*, 26 February 2009, 20 December 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/feb/26/caryl-churchill-seven-jewish-children-play-gaza.
[26] Evreinov in Tarrof v.
[27] Caryl Chruchill in Mark Brown, "Royal Court Acts Fast with Gaza Crisis Play", *The Guardian*, 24 January 2009, 29 November 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/jan/24/theatre-gaza-caryl-churchill-royal-court-seven-jewish-children.

and direct the production as both believe that this is what theatre should do. As Cooke proclaimed, "[…] One of the theatre's strengths is its willingness to react to events."[28] In addition to the brevity and immediacy of *Seven Jewish Children*, the play is unusual also in Churchill's waiving of her royalties as author: the playwright decided to make her play freely accessible for anyone to perform "as long as they do a collection for people in Gaza at the end of it."[29] Instead of charging the audience for tickets, a voluntary collection was made after the Royal Court production and the money was sent to the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians. Furthermore, after the brief run of *Seven Jewish Children* in London, Churchill published the play online, where anyone can download the text. Caryl Churchill's openly proclaimed motivation for writing *Seven Jewish Children*: "It came out of feeling strongly about what's happening in Gaza – it's a way of helping the people there. Everyone knows about Gaza, everyone is upset about it, and this play is something they could come to. It's a political event, not just a theatre event."[30]

Despite Churchill's charitable intentions, however, the Royal Court production of *Seven Jewish Children* caused a furore in the media and Churchill was accused not only of the play being exemplary of "the enclosed, fetid, smug, self-congratulating and entirely irrelevant little world of contemporary political theatre,"[31] but also of anti-Semitism. According to many critics, the text of *Seven Jewish Children* includes anti-Semitic tropes and it is a "10 minute blood libel"[32] which repeats the racial prejudice of Jews rejoicing in the murder of little children. The controversy escalated when the BBC refused to broadcast the radio version of

[28] Cooke in Brown.
[29] Churchill in Brown.
[30] Churchill in Brown.
[31] Christopher Hart, "*The Stone* and *Seven Jewish Children:* A Play For Gaza", *The Sunday Times*, 15 February 2009, 29 November 2013, http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/arts/theatre/article149789.ece.
[32] Melanie Phillips in Siobhain Butterworth, "Open Door", *The Guardian*, 15 June 2009, 26 December 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2009/jun/15/caryl-churchill-seven-jewish-children.

Caryl Churchill's play, claiming they needed to stay impartial – the drama commissioning editor of BBC4, Jeremy Howe, said that although they think it is a brilliant piece,

> After discussing it with the editorial policy, we have decided we cannot run with it on the grounds of impartiality – I think it would be nearly impossible to run a drama that counters Caryl Churchill's view. This play was not commissioned and no indication was given it would be broadcast. After due consideration, we felt it would not work for our audience.[33]

Such controversy necessarily provoked also defensive reactions, especially in *The Guardian*. The newspaper published the text of the play online and in print for their readers to judge for themselves whether the play is "wantonly inflammatory,"[34] "straitjacketed political orthodoxy,"[35] or rather "a heartfelt lamentation"[36] as *The Guardian*'s critic Michael Billington wrote in his rare positive review of *Seven Jewish Children*. Later on, the multimedia department of *The Guardian* initiated the above mentioned project of filming the play with Jennie Stoller in the leading role and thus enabling large audiences not only to read the text but to see the play as well. Such unprecedented gesture also provoked fierce criticism as some readers considered it against *The Guardian*'s values. "It is one thing to publish diverging views on a controversial play. It is quite another for a newspaper to make its own production,"[37] said a complainant; "It seems to me that *The Guardian*, as a newspaper, has to

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[33] Jeremy Howe in Ben Dowell, "BBC Rejects Play on Israeli History for Impartiality Reasons", *The Guardian*, 16 March 2009, 29 November 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2009/mar/16/bbc-rejects-caryl-churchill-israel.

[34] Howard Jacobson, "Let's see the 'criticism' of Israel for what it really is", *The Independent*, 18 February 2009, 26 December 2013, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/howard-jacobson/howard-jacobson-letrsquos-see-the-criticism-of-israel-for-what-it-really-is-1624827.html

[35] Christopher Hart, "*Seven Jewish Children* Review", *The Sunday Times*, 15 February 2009, 26 December 2013, http://wanderingjew.typepad.com/the_wandering_jew/2009/04/seven-jewish-children.html.

[36] Michael Billington, "*Seven Jewish Children* Review", *The Guardian*, 11 February 2009, 20 December 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/feb/11/seven-jewish-children.

[37] Butterworth.

face up to the question, 'Is this play anti-Semitic?'"[38] The polemics between the readers has countless entries and the debate took on a life of its own. A couple of playwrights even wrote plays in response to *Seven Jewish Children*. The authors of the plays, written unanimously in outrage at Churchill's play, however, copy not only the form, but also her waiving of authorial rights. They also make the plays available freely online and ask the audience to donate money to charitable causes. For instance, in America, New York playwright Israel Horowitz wrote a short play entitled *What Strong Fences Make*, arguing "another voice needed to be heard"[39] against Churchill's play, which he regards as "offensive, distorted and manipulative."[40] Moreover, Theatre J and Forum Theatre in Washington organized in March 2009 an evening, in which Churchill's play was followed by a reading of *Seven Jewish Children* by Deborah Margolin, which uses identical form as Churchill's play, but the absent addressee is a Palestinian boy. The performance continued with stage reading of *The Eighth Child* by Robbie Gringas, which included the Palestinian point of view. In May 2009 New End Theatre in London produced *Seven Other Children* by Richard Stirling, which again are narrated from the perspective of the Palestinian children. The debate stirred by Churchill's play has not ceased since, the problem of anti-Semitism and the relationship between art and propaganda being the most often contested issues. Examinations of the reasons why there exist such conflicting readings of *Seven Jewish Children* and how the play works on stage, however, are quiet rare.

With such complicated topic, the political beliefs of the respective 'respondents' must also be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, the open form and the ambiguity of Churchill's text enables such various, even contradictory, interpretations. Be it in the Royal Court Theatre version for nine actors or in its one-woman version, the eponymous seven Jewish children

[38] Butterworth.
[39] Izrael Horowitz, "Why I Wrote *What Strong Fences Make*", *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 April 2009, 26 December 2013, http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Why-I-wrote-What-Strong-Fences-Make.
[40] Horowitz.

never appear on stage. The dramatic tension of *Seven Jewish Children* is created by the incessant repetition of two introductory phrases used by the adult speaker or speakers, "Tell her" or "Don't tell her", which succinctly capture the inherent schizophrenia the Jewish community in Israel lives in. On the one hand, they have their past experience of being victims of years and years of discrimination, while on the other, they cannot avoid admitting the problem of the Palestinians living among their midst. Their bad conscience together with fear of the real threat of the other community traps the speakers in a vicious circle of denial, fear and violence. The adults withdraw to the family circle and their main concern is the safety of their closest relatives. As Billington pointed out, "What Churchill captures, in remarkably condensed poetic form, is the transition that has overtaken Israel, to the point where security has become the pretext for indiscriminate slaughter."[41] The adults debate among each other what their children should or should not know. When performed by more actors, the speakers represent various, conflicting opinions which, however, are presented as firm and coherent. These nine nameless speakers are of different generations and backgrounds, talking to their children in different periods of the modern history of Israel, from the horrors of the Holocaust, via the first Intifada up to the occupation of Gaza. Even in the original Royal Court staging which featured realistic costumes[42], a solid wooden table, and the actors were sitting on chairs or leaning against white walls of the room on stage, the characters depicted invited an allegorical reading. The seven different families and seven different children could be any Jewish family, any Jewish child, at any time. The fact that their dark costumes were in the 1940s style clearly rooted their bodies in the horrors of the Holocaust. This past experience is presented as inescapable, both for the survivors and the future generations. As Kate Leader argues,

[41]Billington, "*Seven Jewish Children* Review".
[42] For images of the production see for instance http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2009/feb/11/royal-court-theatre-gaza.

> As the scenes escalate towards the contemporary, the clothes tie the characters to the past and a modern Jewish identity forged in the darkest circumstances imaginable. *Seven Jewish Children* suggests that a safe home – for Israeli Jews and for Palestinians – is just like the beloved child, always out of sight.[43]

The allegorical reading of Churchill's play, however, becomes even more effective when the debate is not presented as nine people facing each other and discussing realistically what to do and say to their children but when this conflict is being contested instead in the conscience of a solitary speaker. In the version with nine actors, the audience just hear their formed, outwardly pronounced opinions. We do not have access into their inner world, we cannot see behind their public masks. The focus is on the oppositions within their community and stays on the surface. The play performed in such a way thus features a character who is militant, a character who is patriotic, a character who is frustrated, a character who is honest, etc. depending on the way the director decides to distribute the lines. Yet, despite this openness, the final and most controversial part of the play stands out significantly. In contrast to the very short, rhythmical lines of the six previous scenes, the last one includes a sudden climax in which the speaker bursts out a longer passage full of suppressed hatred, fear and violence. When performed by multiple actors, this most problematic passage is assigned to a single character who thus represents a very extreme and militant part of the Jewish community: "Tell her they want their children killed to make people sorry for them, tell her I'm not sorry for them, tell her not to be sorry for them, tell her we are the ones to be sorry for, tell her they can't talk suffering to us."[44] The passage escalates in frantic phrases using the language

[43] Kate Leader, 'Tell her to be careful:' Caryl Churchill's Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza at The Royal Court Theatre", *Platform*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring 2009, http://www.rhul.ac.uk/dramaandtheatre/documents/pdf/platform/41/12performanceresponse.pdf
[44] Churchill, *Seven Jewish Children*.

repeating the accusations used since the Middle Ages about the Jews murdering children in a bloody ritual. "Tell her I don't care if the world hates us, tell her we are better haters, tell her we are chosen people."[45]

Outrageous as the passage obviously sounds, the fact is that the play had previously shown the trajectory that lead to the present situation, it makes the audience understand even such a character. Of course, as Antony Lerman has pointed out, "To understand is not to excuse. Similarly, to show someone expressing brutal feelings is not to deny them some understanding."[46] When performed by a single actress, however, this scene has an even more complex resonance. Rather than "the monologue of genocidal racist hatred,"[47] it seems more like a cry of despair of a grandmother driven to numbness and forced not to have mercy: "Tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? Tell her all I feel is happy it's not her."[48] In other words, what we see is not one character that is triumphant over others, but one that is collapsing inwardly. The hatred against the Palestinians, expressed by a radical Israeli settler in ritualistic tropes, is deliberately provocative and it is understandable that the repetition of the stereotype of blood sacrifice could be interpreted as anti-Semitic, yet the point of this scene is elsewhere. Even if the language used repeats stereotypes and the views expressed by the character are extreme, the speaker's position can be understood. Not only the mentioned experience of the Holocaust, but the unmentioned suffering of the residents of southern Israel, who live within the reach of Palestinian rockets and whose suffering the outside world tends to ignore aims to make the audience empathise with a character with such extreme opinions. We cannot take what they say at face value. As

[45] Churchill, *Seven Jewish Children*.
[46] Antony Lerman, "Anti-Semitic Alarm Bells", *The Guardian*, 4 May 2009, 26 December 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/may/04/caryl-churchill-antisemitism-play.
[47] David Hirsh, "When the CST say "Seven Jewish Children" is anti-Semitic , it is time to take the charge seriously,"*Engage*, 1 May 2009, 13 January 2014, http://engageonline.wordpress.com/2009/05/01/cst/.
[48] Churchill, *Seven Jewish Children*.

Lerman suggests, "Churchill wants us to see it as wrong and reprehensible, but also painfully understandable."[49]

It is the monologue form that enables the audience such understanding. Churchill in *Seven Jewish Children* manages to present the complexity not only of the Middle East conflict, but mainly the complexity and contradictory nature of a personal reaction to such ongoing conflict. The means she uses to dramatize this situation are very effective in their theatrical minimalism. The sparse lines of *Seven Jewish Children* are never straightforward expressions of a position, but work instead with suggestions, pauses, gaps and associations. Churchill uses a technique of erasure similar to that employed by Beckett in his work as well. In all seven scenes nothing is mentioned directly and whenever a disruptive fact is mentioned, it is immediately denied: "Tell her this wasn't their home. Don't tell her home, not home, tell her they're going away. Don't tell her they don't like her."[50] It is up to the audience to fill in the missing context the child is not supposed to know. The scenes are chronological, but the time frame is only hinted at. On the one hand, viewers who do not have basic knowledge of the modern history of Israel might find the play quite cryptic and confusing, nevertheless, those who do are engaged immediately in the play. By giving the audience space to actively create the context, by writing an open text, Caryl Churchill encourages her audience to participate individually in the creation of meaning. In other words, by not being presented with a straightforward narrative, the audience are not preached messages to, which is often a problem in political drama, as the analysis of the next monologue play *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* will hope to illustrate.

Austerity is essential also to the visual aspect of *Seven Jewish Children*. Contrary to the meticulous and complex use of scenery, props and costume in McGuinness's *Baglady*,

[49] Lerman.
[50] Churchill *Seven Jewish Children*.

Churchill does not include any stage directions concerning the visual "expression of the inner play of the protagonist."[51] In this aspect, the *Guardian* production of the play went against Everinov's theory of monodrama as the inner drama of the speaker is expressed solely by the voice and facial expressions of the actress Jennie Stoller. In the *Guardian*'s version of *Seven Jewish Children* the audience see only the face and the eyes of a suffering woman, speaking against a dark background on an empty stage – a talking head. What is different from Bennett's *Talking Heads*, however, is the dramatization of the conflicting voices within one single solitary speaker. Churchill's play in its one-woman version effectively dramatizes the conflicting selves that form one's personality and thus it could be argued that despite not employing the visual components in the way Evreinov suggested, it centres on "the concept of a divided self serving as a statement in itself on the condition of modern man" and thus it fulfils a principal function of monodrama as outlined by Evreinov, while not fulfilling the requirements in terms of the means to be used.

To conclude, although in Frank McGuinness' *Baglady* and Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* the text of their plays is very different, in both cases they are concerned with the consciousness and sub-consciousness of their speakers. They both use fragmentariness, gaps, and silences to dramatize the internal conflicts tormenting their trapped protagonists. The openness and ambiguity of both plays functions as a catalyst for the audience to fill in the missing context and contest the reliability of what they hear. The unreliability of the narrator in *Baglady* whose identity is split into many conflicting selves, is central for the creation of dramatic tension and brings forth the complicated relation between words and silences, revelation and denial, directness and evasion, memory of the past and the present situation of the speakers. Although in *Seven Jewish Children* the content of the narrative makes it physically impossible for the protagonist to be a single individual, but the impression is that it

[51] Evreinov in Carnicke 74.

is a single woman speaking and the audience hear various voices struggling in her consciousness. Both Churchill and McGuinness test in their plays the limits of communication, what can be, should be or cannot be said. The monologue format is thus especially apt not only for telling compelling stories, be it directly or via re-enactment, but for dramatizing these intriguing issues as well.

6. Documentary Monologues

As has been shown in the previous chapters, the monologue form of drama is very flexible and the playwrights employ it in various ways - to present solitary storytellers relying mainly on verbal presentation of their own narrative, to show characters who re-enact others within their stories, or to dramatize the inner conflicts tormenting their monologists and present various voices within their psyche. The earlier mentioned controversial theatre piece *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* (Royal Court Theatre, 2005), however, does not fit into any of the previously described categories. It can even be argued that it is not a 'proper' play since its text is not written by a playwright and originally it was not intended for the theatre at all. The monologist is not a fictional character as in all the earlier mentioned plays, it is the eponymous Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old American activist, who was killed on 16 March 2003 while defending a Palestinian home in Gaza against an Israeli bulldozer. The text of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* is a compilation taken largely from Rachel's journals and emails, which were edited by the British actor Alan Rickman and *The Guardian* journalist Katharine Viner. The bits and pieces of the mosaic that the audience hear from the stage are non-theatrical texts that were originally private recollections and musings, yet it is their authenticity, their documentary status, that makes them theatrically attractive. The editors opted for the monologue form as the most effective means to tell Rachel's tragic life story. The aim of this chapter is to examine the genre of the documentary monologue as employed by Rickman and Viner in *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* and analyse both its merits and drawbacks as the play has received exceptionally polarized reactions and is a good example of one of the main trends in the late 1990s and early 2000s theatre – docudrama[1]. For some reviewers *My Name Is Rachel*

[1] For detailed analyses of recent political docudramas see for example *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, ed. Will Hammond and Dan Steward (London: Oberon Books, 2008).

Corrie is "a remarkably moving 90-minute solo piece about human dignity and suffering,"[2] for others "It is a slight piece, worthy enough for a minor night of theatre if seen in terms of its considerable limitations, but profoundly unsatisfying, even retrograde, if regarded as a complex realization of either the art of monologue or the mission of 'progressive' theatre."[3] Furthermore, the analysis of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* will not only complement the previous analysis of Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* as the problematic production history of both plays is closely related, it will serve as a starting point for the discussion of David Hare's monologue plays *Via Dolorosa* (1998) and *Wall* (2009), with which it shares not only the subject matter, i.e. the Israeli/Palestine conflict, but significant formal traits.

After the smooth run of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* in the UK, the production was supposed to transfer to Broadway. However, on 27 February 2006 New York Theatre Workshop withdrew its upcoming production of the play because they were worried about the reaction of the local Jewish community. Given the controversy caused by the cancellation of the production in the US and the following heated debate in the media, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* has now a privileged status. As Walter Davies observed, it is considered "the epitome of progressive, challenging, politically relevant and experimental theatre."[4] The decision to cancel the production seems paradoxical from a theatre who prides itself "to develop and produce theatrical experiences that reflect and respond to the world around us and re-invigorate the artists and audiences we connect with each year."[5] Its artistic director, James Nicola, explained that by staging *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* at the time of the Israeli Lebanon war (winter 2006) and also at the time of the protests in the Arab countries against the Muhammad caricatures, it would put their theatre in a position they did not want it to be.

[2] Philip Fischer, "*My Name Is Rachel Corrie*", *British Theatre Guide*, 14 April 2005, 10 March 2014, http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/rachelcorrie-rev.
[3] Walter A. Davies, *Art and Politics Psychoanalysis, Ideology, Theatre* (London: Pluto Press, 2007) 27.
[4] Davies 27.
[5] New York Theatre Workshop website, 22 January 2014, http://www.nytw.org/about.asp.

Nicola argued that "In the current climate the work could not be appreciated as 'art' but would be seen in political terms."[6] His noncommittal argumentation and the cancellation of the production caused a media scandal and Nicola was rightly accused of censorship. Alan Rickman even forbade the NYTW the right to produce the play because of Nicola's attitude.[7]

When taken purely on artistic merit, it might actually be surprising that it could have caused such reactions – both such uncritical praise and such paranoia. Theatrically, it is very simple as the performance is based on straightforward telling of Rachel's story to the audience. The narrative is complemented by two brief video projections: the first presents a detailed account of Rachel's death by an eyewitness, the second features Rachel Corrie herself as a ten-year-old school girl giving a speech at Fifth Grade Press Conference on World Hunger. The play is set first in Rachel's bedroom, whose floor is littered with magazines, books, clothes, etc., later she starts packing for her trip to Gaza and the stage becomes empty. In the original Royal Court production the final scenes were set against a grey concrete background riddled with bullets. The actress acting Rachel delivers her text in the first person directly to the audience. She partly speaks from memory and partly she is seen reading or writing Rachel's diary and emails. The text being composed of extracts from Rachel's diary, the participation of the audience is not encouraged by questions in the second person or other interactive rhetorical means. However, Rachel mentions in the very beginning that her intention was to become a writer, so her diary includes also a few poems and sketches of some future literary work. In other words, despite not being originally intended for public presentation, her diary has a certain literary quality.

As with other documentary, verbatim plays, it is crucial to keep in mind that the dramatic structure of the play *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* is not the way Rachel intended diary to be

[6] Nicola in Davies 6.
[7] Davies 6.

presented, it is merely the work of the editors Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner, who were given permission by the Corrie family to use Rachel's private writings. In Davies's words, "There is no way to know what she would have done with these materials nor what she would have thought of the play Rickman and Viner have fashioned from them."[8] Moreover, the play includes also extracts from selected private emails between Rachel and her parents and friends that the editors were allowed by the family to read and use. The text of the monologue thus includes more voices and perspectives than just Rachel's. So although Rickman and Viner in a way disclaim their authorship and present themselves as mere editors, i.e. they position themselves in the background, their role is absolutely essential. It is the dramatic structure of the play that creates the meaning, no matter whether the material used for the text of the play is purely fictional or documentary, 'real' and 'authentic.' In David Hare's words, as a creator of a documentary play, "you have to organise the material just as you organise the material as a playwright, to lead the audience in a certain way, through the material."[9] The chronology of the extracts, from the chatty, humorous, naive and childish comments of the pre-Gaza Rachel via her activism and disillusionment in Gaza to her tragic ending, is what creates the narrative and the desired effect of the play. Rickman and Viner carefully prepare the terrain for the final shattering of the audience's emotions: the play ends with Rachel writing her last email to her mother. This scene is contrasted with the video footage of the eyewitness's brutal account of Rachel's death and the sweet image of the ten-year-old girl that is preceded by a caption with the announcement: "Rachel Corrie was killed on March 16, 2003."[10]

Being a young zealous American activist, Rachel tends to make big statements:

> I am disappointed that this is the base reality of our world and that we, in fact, participate in it. This is not what I asked for when I came to this

[8] Davies 18.
[9] David Hare in Hammond 59.
[10] *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner, eds. (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005) 51.

> world. This is not at all what the people here asked for when they came into this world. [...] When I come back from Palestine I probably will have nightmares and constantly feel guilty for not being here, but I can channel that into more work. Coming here is one of the better things I've ever done.[11]

The audience know Rachel's tragic ending and this real life context adds even more pathos to the 'message' of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* and brings the desired catharsis. As Davies points out, "Dramatic placement thus identifies these words as a final summing up by Rachel of what she *learned* from her experience."[12] Rickman's and Viner's choice of the quasi-naturalistic monologue form is just the easiest way to convey the message. By using the monologue form in such straightforward manner, Rickman and Viner created a play that can be consumed very easily as it offers readymade answers, sentiment and pathos. *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* is an 'agit-prop' that sells well as it is not only associated with the star name of Alan Rickman as editor, but it has the aura of progressive political theatre given the initial media controversy. Paradoxically, in Davies's words, "What caused Mr. Nicola to back off from this play has now become the very thing that will lead others to produce, imitate and applaud it."[13] Not only did the play eventually open in New York in October 2006 at Minetta Lane Theatre, it became a box office hit.[14] Moreover, there were no protests, no controversies at all from the local community. Since then this documentary monologue play has been produced internationally and has been translated into many languages, including Arabic

[11] *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, 49 – 50.
[12] Davies 19.
[13] Davies 27.
[14] Ben Brantley, "Notes from a Young Idealist in a World Gone Awry", *The New York Times*, 16 October 2006, 22 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/theater/reviews/16rach.html?_r=0.

(Haifa Theatre, 2008) or Icelandic (Reykjavik City Theatre, March 2009), and many of its productions received prestigious theatre awards.[15]

In addition to the critical appraisal and commercial success, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* managed to achieve its main mission – to draw the attention of the audience to the actual legal case. The Corrie family brought a civil claim for negligence against the Israeli Ministry of Defence, and the trial took almost three years. In August 2012 the judge of Haifa Disctrict court announced the verdict that "the 23-year-old's death was a 'regrettable accident' and that the state was not responsible."[16] The decision of the Court has been disputed by renown human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and the debate still continues. The public response included, for example, the creation of a Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace and Freedom, Rachel Corrie Memorial website, or an annual football tournament in Palestine in the honour of Rachel, to name just a few. However, it is the website called *Rachel Corrie Facts* that is worth attention in particular as it offers a public forum where people can present other points of view and add information that was omitted from the play. For instance, the fact that the house Rachel was defending against the Israeli army allegedly had in its cellar a tunnel leading to Egypt that was used by the Palestinians for smuggling weapons.[17] Rachel very likely did not suspect anything of the sort due to her idealism. This 'detail' contrasts with Rachel's observation that "The vast majority of Palestinians right now, as far as I can tell, are engaging in Ghandian non-violent resistance."[18] In the play, however, Rachel is presented as a victim, a martyr, her naivety is not the target of criticism, although her claims about

[15]In Canada, the 2008 production at Theatre Yes in Edmoton was nominated for Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role, Costume Designer Brian Bast, nominated for Outstanding Set Design, Director Heather Inglis nominated for Outstanding Director in Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Awards where the play nominated as Outstanding Independent Production. See http://theatre-yes.ca/past-projects/my-name-is-rachel-corrie/.

[16] Jon Donnison, "Rachel Corrie: Court Rules Israel Not At Fault for Death," *BBC News*, 28 August 2012, 20 January 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19391814.

[17]Gaby Wenig, "Human Rights Activists or Aids to Terrorists?", *Jewish Journal*, 11 September 2003, 27 January 2014, http://www.jewishjournal.com/community_briefs/item/human_rights_activists_or_aids_to_terrorists_200309.

[18] *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* 48.

Palestinian non-violence are so idealistic that they lead the critic Clive Davis to a very sarcastic comment that "Even the late Yassir Arafat might have blushed at that one."[19]

Despite the above described success of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, there are many aspects of the play that earned justified criticism. In terms of its use of the monologue format, the main limitation of the play is that the central character is presented as a self-assured speaker. As Davies suggests, in *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* the monologue "is no longer a way of exploring oneself, but of declaring oneself in a way that puts an end to all doubts and fears."[20] In other words, despite using personal diaries of Rachel that might have offered an insight into her soul, Rickman and Viner fail to dramatize and reveal the world of Rachel's inner consciousness. She is presented as a speaker who does not interrogate her inner dilemmas, does not ask troubling questions, nor doubt her mission in Gaza. On the contrary, as demonstrated above, Rachel mainly 'preaches messages.' However, this lack of depth is not primarily the problem of the real young naive Rachel, but of the dramatic form of the play. Framing Rachel's story as quasi-naturalistic documentary monologue as it was done by the editors is not a very creative approach to the material. As Davies argues, "Rickman and Viner are not up to such an effort because they don't know how to interrogate either their materials or the dramatic form they employ."[21] Instead they present a straightforward story which in effect is 'agit-prop'. What Davies wishes for is a more imaginative approach to the form, "What, for example, if she became an annihilating voice interrogating her experience form beyond the grave?"[22] If dramatized from this perspective, the play would offer more space for reflection, it might reveal possible anxieties and could challenge the audience more than when told as a straightforward 'message.'

[19] Clive Davis, "*My Name Is Rachel Corrie*", *The Times*, 18 April 2005, 24 January 2014, http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/.
[20] Davies 26.
[21] Davies 27.
[22] Davies 27.

This criticism of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* echoes the arguments raised very often against the whole genre of documentary theatre. For example, in Aleks Sierz's view, "docudrama is a rather dry way of staging politics"[23] and "though interesting in content, being a verbatim theatre, it is somewhat unexciting in form."[24] Similar to Davies, Sierz also wishes for metaphor and creativity, as theatre should not only mimick journalism, but awaken our imagination.[25] In this context, it must be stressed that although being edited from 'authentic' materials, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* differs in some aspects from most documentary plays of the late 1990s and the early 2000s that Sierz criticizes. First and foremost, its language is different as the play is based on diaries of a young woman, who wanted to become a writer. In Mark Fisher's view, "It is the vigour of the language that distinguishes *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* from other pieces of verbatim theatre."[26] In other words, the text of the play is not based on transcriptions of actual public inquiries, as the famous Tricycle tribunal plays by journalist Richard Norton-Taylor and director Nicolas Kent,[27] or on transcripts of interviews that were conducted as part of the research by a group of actors with the intention of creating a stage play, as for instance Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists* (2005). The language of verbatim plays is mostly commonplace, its attraction lies in the fact that what we hear on stage are the actual words of real people and not in the poetry or musicality of their language. In *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, however, the source materials include a few passages that are poetic, imaginative and use metaphors. In the opening scene of the play Rachel lies on her bed and muses about her writing; suddenly she is seized by panic: "And then the ceiling tries to

[23] Aleks Sierz, "The world stage", *Newsstatesman* , 24 November 2003, 27 January 2014, http://www.newstatesman.com/node/146788.
[24] Aleks Sierz, "An invented reality", *Newsstatesman* , 5 December 2005, 27 January 2014, http://www.newstatesman.com/node/151457.
[25] Sierz, "An invented reality".
[26] Mark Fisher, "*My Name Is Rachel Corrie* – Review", *The Guardian*, 8 March 2010, 20 January 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/mar/08/my-name-is-rachel-corrie.
[27] The series of tribunal plays at the Tricycle Theatre in London included *Half the Picture* (1994), *Nuremberg* (1996), *Srebrenica* (1997), *The Colour of Justice* (1999), *Justifying War* (2003), *Bloody Sunday* (2005), *Guantanamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom* (2004), *Called to Account: The Indictment of Anthony Charles Lynton Blair for the crime of aggression against Iraq – a Hearing* (2007).

devour me. [...] I get off guard for a minute and my eyes roll up towards the sky and I'm fucked now – I'm fucked – 'cause there is no sky. There's that ceiling up there and it has me now – 'cause I'm looking at it and it's going to rip me to pieces. [...] I am inside a terrifying mirror."[28] Such an intriguing opening scene immediately captivates the imagination of the audience as it offers a glimpse of Rachel's intimate thoughts and vivid imagination. Yet, the potential of this scene is not developed any further. The monologue is not a "terrifying mirror" of Rachel's troubled consciousness, in contrast to Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* or McGuinness' *Baglady*, for instance. In Davies' words, "Several such moments in *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* come, like a thunderbolt, to disrupt the tedium of the commonplace. They are not, however, sustained or developed and so the play described here dies aboring."[29]

Given the commercial and critical success of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* it thus might be surprising that the play is actually quite tedious as it includes many banal passages alongside the few poetic ones. Aleks Sierz's complaint about the docudramas that were very popular on London stages at the turn of the millennium is relevant to *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* as well: "You can't help feeling that the show appeals more to our civil duty than to our sense of fun."[30] In other words, even though theatre can't of course be understood as entertainment only, the play must awaken its audience's imagination and challenge them more. As Davies argues, "*My Name is Rachel Corrie* is no longer the play it was. It is now the cultural event it has become."[31] As it is, it can be criticized as being only a spectacle for the converted. As mentioned earlier, despite its flaws, the main reason for the attraction of the documentary monologue *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* is its source material and its off-stage history as it triggered a debate not only about the strengths and weaknesses of the documentary form of theatre, but importantly also about censorship.

[28] *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, 3.
[29] Davies 22.
[30] Sierz, "An invented reality".
[31] Davies 27.

The media scandal caused by the cancellation of the production of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* at New York Theatre Workshop had a very paradoxical effect on its artistic director James Nicola. When faced with another controversial British play about the Middle East – Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children*, which was discussed in the previous chapter. In contrast to BBC4 that decided not to broadcast Churchill's play, Nicola agreed to stage *Seven Jewish Children*. His positive attitude towards the controversial play surprised the critics, who remembered his attitude to staging *My Name Is Rachel Corrie.* As Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* is "a play that carefully represents many conflicting emotions and points of view (as opposed to agit prop), it is even more challenging than Rachel Corrie was. If he couldn't deal with Corrie how will he deal with this?"[32] James Nicola's idea of a progressive and challenging theatre was quite bizarre. He took precautions in order to "avoid another international controversy."[33] The theatre scheduled three readings of *Seven Jewish Children* (March 2009), but the performances were followed by a discussion with experts on the Middle East from both sides, including the American playwright Tony Kushner, whose task was to "illuminate the dialogue."[34] After the politically correct discussion, the play *Seven Jewish Children* was performed again[35] – to make sure the audience 'understand the message.' Thus despite allowing the play to be staged, Nicola did not let it speak for itself. The purely fictional, imaginative *Seven Jewish Children* in a way shared the fate of the documentary monologue *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* – both were victims of the advance self-censorship of a politically correct environment that is especially sensitive about the Middle East. David Hare's monologue plays *Via Dolorosa* and *Wall*, which are going to be discussed in the following chapter, expand the debate even further as David Hare's focus is not on the

[32] Richard Silvestein, "Jeffrey Goldberg's Head Explodes over Caryl Churchill's Gaza Play", 19 February 2009, 27 January 2014, http://www.richardsilverstein.com/2009/02/19/jeffrey-goldbergs-head-explodesagain-over-caryl-churchills-gaza-play/.
[33] Nicola in David Smith, "Seven Deadly Scenes", *The Observer*, 23 February 2009, 27 January 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/feb/22/seven-jewish-children-royal-court.
[34] David Cote, "*Seven Jewish Children* in NYC", Timeout, 16 March 2009, 27 January 2014, http://www.timeout.com/newyork/upstaged-blog/caryl-churchills-seven-jewish-children-in-nyc.
[35] Cote.

character of the monologist, but on the playwright's responsibility for presenting such complicated real-life material as the Israeli/Palestine conflict on stage.

7. Playwrights on stage

This chapter focuses on a very specific approach to the monologue format that combines elements of all the previously mentioned types. David Hare's *Via Dolorosa* (1998) and its sequel *Wall* (2009) is based on storytelling, using a minimum of the expressive means offered by theatre, the monologist portrays other characters within his narrative, he uses documentary material, but also examines his own identity in frequent self-reflexive, autobiographical passages. In 1997 the international department of the Royal Court Theatre initiated a challenging project dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel. They asked David Hare and two other playwrights, from Israel and Palestine, to write a play about the British Mandate in the 1930s and 1940s. Hare set out on a modern pilgrimage and visited the region, where he met many people from both sides of the conflict, the Israeli settlers in Gaza as well as people from Europe and the US. After his return to the UK, Hare wrote instead of a conventional play about the assigned historical topic a self-reflexive monologue about his present journey to Israel in which he acts not only himself, but another 33 different characters. With *Via Dolorosa* the Royal Court Theatre thus literally became the playwright's theatre as David Hare entered the stage himself instead of the actors.

The subject of Hare's play is not only the Middle East crisis, but the playwright himself. As a Westerner he cannot pretend to understand the complicated situation and thus he came to the conclusion that he must be self-reflexive because in this case, as he says, "you could only trust the witness if you could see who the witness was."[1] In the monologue play *Via Dolorosa* David Hare the playwright changed into David Hare the actor, who was playing the character of David Hare the playwright. Hare examined his own values as searchingly as the values of the people he met: "The metaphor of the play was not about Israel and the Palestinian territory, it was about the contrast between lives of people in certain parts of the world for

[1] David Hare, *Acting Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 75.

whom everything is at stake in every daily decision, as opposed to those who live in the West who face no such daily pressure, [...] namely myself."[2]

Via Dolorosa differs from the monologue plays *The Product* and *Catalpa* or *My Arm* which were discussed previously. The playwrights Mark Ravenhill, Donal O'Kelly and Tim Crouch also performed on stage, but they did not act themselves. They played the roles of the central characters of their respective plays – unsuccessful screenwriters or the boy who decided not to put down his arm. If the characters were performed by somebody else, the monologue plays would not change much. In other words, Ravenhill's, O'Kelly's and Crouch's presence on stage does not significantly determine the meaning of *The Product*, *Catalpa* or *My Arm* as their role as playwrights is not the main focus of their plays. These monologue plays belong to a different category than the autobiographical monologues *Via Dolorosa* and *Wall* that are the subject of this chapter also because *The Product*, *Catalpa* or *My Arm* are not based on the personal experience of the authors. Furthermore, Hare's monologue plays differ from the very popular autobiographical monologues that are presently seen so often in British and American theatres that focus on the personal experience of the solo performers, as the autobiographical aspect of *Via Dolorosa* and *Wall* creates only a part of the meaning of both plays. This is because the character of David Hare is only one of the many people the plays feature and Hare is more interested in self-reflexivity and his responsibility as a playwright than telling the story of his life. In other words, autobiography is for Hare only a means to talk about Israel and Palestine. As he put it, "I am a playwright and I did it purely and simply because it was the only way to convey what I wanted to say about the region."[3]

In the context of British drama, David Hare's venture into the acting profession is quite rare: it does not happen very often that well established playwrights such as Sir David Hare

[2] David Hare, *Verbatim Verbatim*, Will Hammond and Dan Steward eds. (London: Oberon Books, 2008) 67-68.
[3] David Hare in Richard Boon, *About Hare: The Playwright and the Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003) 156.

suddenly, at the age of fifty, turn into actors. On the other hand, there exists a long tradition of actors becoming playwrights, such as Harold Pinter, John Osborn, or Alan Bennett, to give just a few examples. David Hare being a political playwright and a world-known public figure, the often discussed question of the possibility or impossibility of an artistic response to the complexities of our political reality and its form has always been of immense importance for him. His plays famously deal with such diverse subjects as the privatization of British railroads (*The Permanent Way*, 2004), the war in Iraq (*Stuff Happens*, 2004), the era of New Labour (*Gethsemane*, 2008), or most recently, the current economic crisis (*The Power of Yes*, 2009). Throughout his career, Hare has been trying to discover the most effective form of conveying his thoughts and ideas to the audience, which has led him to a gradual abandonment of the traditional mimetic theatre and towards his specific use of docudrama, where he combines documentary material with imaginative fictitious scenes, but importantly also to essays and lectures, which are an important part of his artistic oeuvre.

Despite being an active commentator on the domestic political situation,[4] it was the crisis in the Middle East, which was for Hare so urgent, pressing and personal that he wrote two monologues for himself to perform. Susan Bennett in her essay on autobiography and theatre described the advantage of this theatrical form: "When there is a coincidence between the subject of the autobiographical performance and the body of the performer for that script, then the frenzy of signification produced along this axis has, for audiences, an unusual strong claim for authenticity."[5] Hare was so convincing that even his colleague, playwright Arnold Wesker, identified the character Hare performed with the actual David Hare and wrote him an open letter, in which Wesker expressed worries about his friend and the opinions expressed in *Via Dolorosa*: "I'm concerned that you imagine you've raised inflammatory issues and

[4] Hare was for example commissioned by *The Guardian* to cover the latest general elections in Great Britain in a blog that was read by thousands of the newspaper readers.
[5] Susan Bennett, "3D A/B", *Theatre and Autobiography, Writing and Performing Lives in Theory and Practice*, ed. Sherill Grace and Jerry Wasserman (Vancouver: Tanlonbooks, 2006) 35.

offered inflammatory views when, to my mind, you've uttered nothing more dangerous than the equivalent of 'yes – but what about the Palestinians?" [6] Given the power autobiographical monologues have, one might ask whether our understanding and interpretation of these monologues is different when Hare does not act himself, as he does in *Via Dolorosa*, but presents/performs his latest autobiographical text *Wall* as a stage reading. With *Wall* it seems that at least for Hare a 'mere' reading of his text was enough. Moreover, his monologue *Wall* works very well also in other media – it was published as a newspaper article in *New York Review of Books* (30 April 2009)[7] and also broadcast as a radio reading by the author on BBC4 (25 May 2009)[8]. Hare claims that a traditional play about such a complicated subject as the Israeli/Palestine conflict would never achieve "anything you could call 'authentic' or 'real'."[9] His monologue plays might be thus viewed as Hare's polemic with "the elaborate conventions of theatre"[10] that provoke general questions about the function of theatre and the role of playwrights and media in contemporary society. In Hare's own words, "I hope the play will be seen as a meditation on art. The test of *Via Dolorosa* will be whether the audiences respond to the questions that certainly intrigue me. What does art add to this situation in the Middle East? How, if at all, does it illuminate?"[11]

Hare introduces his doubts ironically in the beginning of *Via Dolorosa*, but as we can see from his published diary *Acting Up* (1999), which he kept throughout the rehearsals and the consequent performances of *Via Dolorosa*, the use of *mimesis* and the problematic relation between facts and fiction is for Hare extremely important. In his view, traditional theatre based on *mimesis* has its limits when one wants to write a play about Israel:

[6] Arnold Wesker, *Open Letter to David Hare*, 18 July 2002,1 February 2014, http://archive.is/jQkxr.
[7] David Hare, "Wall", *New York Review of Books*, 30 April 2009, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/apr/30/wall-a-monologue/.
[8] David Hare, "Wall", BBC4, 25 May 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00kjb73.
[9] David Hare, *Acting Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 75.
[10] David Hare, *Via Dolorosa and Where Shall We Live?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) 3.
[11] David Hare, "Why Fabulate?", *Obedience, Struggle and Revolt* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) 78.

> And it's a preference, a long-held preference, what you might call a 'habit of mind' – putting words into other people's mouths. And those people are played by people whose profession is to pretend to be other people. [...] The elaborate conventions of theatre, so loved – by me at least – so treasured. So much the very heart of my life. And yet. Asked to go to Israel, I think 'And what? Go to Israel and *write a play*?'[12]

Hare says that he "could never write so-called 'scenes' which would one day be played by British actors on a British stage. [...] It would seem ridiculous."[13] Mimetic representation and enactment is associated with artifice and viewed by Hare as something inherently false in this context. Yet, as a playwright, David Hare still needs "the elaborate conventions of theatre" to construct all the characters he plays, including the autobiographical version of himself.

For *Via Dolorosa* there exists personal evidence by the real people depicted in the play who confirm that the words Hare uses on stage to represent them are true.[14] We also know that Hare sent them their sections of the text to check whether they agreed with the way he represents them.[15] As in docudrama, such authentic material may "cause the audience to forget that verbatim theatre is a lesson in suppression; more material is recorded than can ever be used. It is manipulated, crafted and edited to create an effect."[16] In other words, in *Via Dolorosa* Hare combined documentary and autobiographical approaches, both of which use facts, but necessarily in a mediated way. To Hare's credit, he did not try to hide behind the authentic material and admitted that "the play did not literally correspond to the letter of my experience, but it conveyed the spirit of that experience more faithfully than a 'mere' diary

[12] Hare, *Via Dolorosa* 3.
[13] Hare, *Acting Up* 75.
[14] Hare in *Verbatim Verbatim* 73.
[15] Hare, *Verbatim Verbatim* 73.
[16] Alison Jeffers, "Refugee Perspectives: The Practice and Ethics of Verbatim Theatre and Refugee Stories", *Platform*, Autumn 2006, 30 January 2014,www.rhul.ac.uk/drama/platform/PDF/Refugee%20Perspectives.pdf.

would have been able to."[17] However, the notion of conveying "the spirit" of an experience remains inherently problematic as we shall see later. Hare believes that "people think more deeply when they think together. That's what theatre does. [...] I could have written an article... but journalism doesn't stick."[18] *Via Dolorosa* is therefore neither a mere transcript of the interviews, nor a montage of extracts from his diary, where he recounts his experiences from Israel and comments on the people he met. To make the play work dramatically, Hare took some chronological liberties: "The feelings the encounters aroused in me did not in fact precisely represent the reality of my first journey to the area."[19] Hare insists that a monologue based on real life experience takes as much labour to write as any other play and that it was similarly crafted: "I tried to order [the] words [of the people he met] in the most dramatic and effective way possible."[20] In the text of the monologue itself, however, these artistic 'intrusions' are skilfully subdued: "It ha[d] to seem artless, natural [...]."[21]

An appearance of artlessness was also a key to the actual theatre performance. The bareness and simplicity of the play was emphasised by the sparse and minimalist set design of both the London and the Broadway productions (Royal Court Theatre, September 1998, Booth Theatre, March 1999). Only two significant moments were accentuated by sound effects. First, when Hare crossed the border of the Palestinian territory, the audience could hear the sound of muezzins calling the Muslims for prayer. And second, the climax of Hare's personal pilgrimage is emphasized by the symbolic appearance of a model of Jerusalem's skyline at the end of the play, accompanied by lyrical music. Although Hare strived for artlessness, it is ironically this embellished theatrical moment, where his play becomes emotionally powerful.

[17] Hare, "Why Fabulte?" 79.
[18] Hare, *About Hare* 154.
[19] Hare, "Why Fabulate?" 79.
[20] Hare, "Why Fabulate?" 79.
[21] Hare, *Acting Up* 7.

The following scene sharply contrasts with the austerity of the whole play because Hare describes Jerusalem in an almost poetic language:

> I have felt ever since I arrived that Jerusalem doesn't need my admiration. Enough people are obsessed with it already. [...] But even I, inside the Arab sanctuary, taking the cleanest, most oxygenated sun-dazzled air you ever breathed, looking across to the Mount of Olives, yield to the splendour of the place and realize: oh I see, how provoking it is to own beauty, to own the most breathtaking space of them all.[22]

Because of the 'artless' way *Via Dolorosa* was written and performed some critics wondered whether it was still a play, describing it more as a travelogue or a diary delivered in a theatre.[23] At first sight, *Via Dolorosa* really resembles a diary, because after a short introduction, Hare describes the sophisticated city of Tel Aviv and his drive across the desert to the Israeli settlements in Gaza. After that he continues to Palestine and finally he visits Jerusalem, the spiritual centre of all the three main monotheistic religions. In a brief epilogue, divided by an abrupt change in lighting and also a change in his style of narration, Hare captures his confusion and amazement after his return to his home in London. By focusing on telling instead of showing, Hare is able to give a complex account of the problematic situation in the very short time span of 90 minutes. He lets the audience hear various opinions of people, who otherwise wouldn't have the chance to speak. He carefully contrasts and orchestrates the individual voices to create a vivid mosaic of people with strong beliefs. Hare does not give his own opinions about Israel and Palestine. He is drawing attention, through his personal impressions, to the similarities and differences between the two communities. This

[22] Hare, *Via Dolorosa*, 37.
[23] John Leonard, "Last Year in Jerusalem", *New York Magazine*, 4 September 2000, 10 March 2014, http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/tv/reviews/3723/.

technique, in his view, "stopped people finding it unbalanced."[24] The play oscillates between his rendition of other people's comments, i.e. passages rendered in quotation marks in the text and reported speech, and his reactions and feelings during these particular situations:

> On the one hand, Sarah is telling me that the Jews have to be here. On the other hand, she says they are surrounded by people who will always want to kill them. What is the way forward? 'Not pieces of paper called Oslo.' 'No, I know what you think the way *isn't*. I am asking what the way forward is.' 'I look at my children and I want them to live in a peace I haven't had.' 'But how is it to come?' 'I don't know.'
>
> More walking, more silence, this time gloomier.[25]

This double focus is a crucial structural and also rhythmical device of the actual performance, and the swift changes are emphasized by slight changes in voice, movement and lighting. Hare's approach to acting is consistent with his polemics with the traditional use of *mimesis*. Hare's acting was carefully adjusted to the desired 'simplicity' of the show. Together with Steven Daldry, who directed Hare in *Via Dolorosa* as well as in *Wall*, they decided that instead of "putting-on-one-hat-and-then-another,"[26] which Hare wouldn't be able to do anyway, he could "give the [characters] intonations or characteristics, which is perhaps the most [he] can give them. [...] [He] hope[s] [he] became a sort of medium for these people."[27] Daldry made sure that Hare "didn't become too good"[28] as an actor and storyteller: "If Hare got too good and too clever and too smooth, some of that may have gone, because it would

[24] Hare, *About Hare*, 156.
[25] Hare, *Via Dolorosa*, 18.
[26] *About Hare* 156.
[27] *About Hare* 156.
[28] *About Hare* 156.

have been just depicted instead of *lived*."[29] The success of this strategy was testified by David Spencer: "Hare's acting is a mixture of things that are brilliantly professional and starkly amateurish."[30] Thus, his performance felt real as the audience could see David Hare's vulnerability while performing for the first time one stage[31].

However, in *Via Dolorosa* Hare created a paradoxical situation in which his stage presence actually subverted his arguments. At one point in the play he describes his visit to the Holocaust museum and explains why he finds art in such situation inappropriate and advocates the facts. Contrary to Aristotle, who famously wrote in his introduction to *Poetics* that "objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies,"[32] Hare views *mimesis* as an intrusion of the artist between the viewer and the experience one can get from the records, the objects, the photographs:

> The museum's power is in its very simplicity, a bleak photographic record [...]. The only false notes in the museum are hit by works of art. Sculpture, painting. They seem superfluous. In every case the gesture seems inadequate. What is a painting, a painting of a starving man? What is a painting of a corpse? It's the facts we want. Give us the facts.[33]

Via Dolorosa presents us with the following paradox: on stage we see a playwright acting a version of himself, i.e. a fictional character criticizing works of art and requesting facts. The same playwright, however, has admitted in interviews that the play involved fictionalizing.

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[29] Rick Fisher, "Working with Hare" in Boon, 199.
[30] David Spencer, "Via Dolorosa", *Aisle Say (NY) The Internet Magazine of Stage Review and Opinion*, 16 April 2006, 30 January 2014, www.aislesay.com/NY-VIA.html.
[31] David Hare's performance on Broadway was filmed and is available as a DVD *Via Dolorosa* (2000). Director John Baily.
[32] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b 10-12, trans. S.H. Butcher, 30 January 2014, http://classics.mit.edu//Aristotle/poetics.html.
[33] Hare, *Via Dolorosa* 38.

Hare's monologue does not give us "a bleak photographic record" or pure facts, though during the performance it seems to do so, as explained above.

Hare's self-reflexivity is even more evident when he rhetorically asks in the play whether literal truth matters. Although Hare presents this episode as an anecdote illustrating the complexity of the religious disputes in Jerusalem, he even sinks to his knees and kisses the floor, this passage may be simultaneously interpreted as a comment on the complex narrative technique of *Via Dolorosa*:

> Where was Calvary indeed? Nobody agrees. So for now – look, is anything certain? – let's just do as the family next to me and drop alarmingly to our knees, on the working assumption – let's just *assume* – X marks the spot, and kiss the stone. After all, does the literal truth of it matter? Does the literal truth matter? Aren't we kissing an idea? Stones or ideas? Stones or ideas?[34]

The tension between the words Hare delivers and the stage situation intensifies when he questions the relevance of his own medium – the theatre. He tells a story of a Jewish actress who became religious and gave up acting because she thought it was wrong: "All theatre is wrong, all fiction is wrong. God makes the stories. Why we have to invent new ones?"[35] The last question Hare elaborated on in a lecture "Why Fabulate?", which was inspired by *Via Dolorosa.* There he suggested that the late twentieth century saw a shift "in how the public wanted its cocktail, in exactly how many parts lies it was prepared to tolerate mixed up with how many parts truth."[36] It can be assumed that a conventional play about the Middle East might be added to the list of inadequate artistic responses according to Hare, and he thus, in a

[34] Hare, *Via Dolorosa* 37.
[35] Hare,*Via Dolorosa* 11.
[36] Hare, "Why Fabulate?" 76.

way, seems to agree with the actress's opinion. On the other hand, *Via Dolorosa*, "for all its unusualness of form, is nevertheless operated by all the conventional measures of fiction."[37] In other words, Hare's approach seems appropriate because he took great pains not to invent fictional scenes and distract the audience from the subject matter, but at the same time, he needed fabulation to make the play really work. In Hare's view, even in a verbatim play it is important to "dramatise things that needed to be dramatised – and which were true – but which didn't necessarily happen in the events or in that order."[38] Contrary to the critic Ellen Brockman, who interpreted Hare's call for the facts as the need to abandon fiction, Hare suggests the opposite: "we should strive to make fiction more original, more distinctive, to strive even harder to prove that only the greatest art comes near to matching the world's infinite suggestiveness. The enemy of art is not reality, but formula."[39]

In the analysis of *Via Dolorosa* and we should carefully distinguish David Hare the playwright, who went to Israel and Palestine and later wrote the text of both monologues, and gave interviews and lectures, from the autobiographical character he created and played. As Susan Bennett warns us, in this kind of solo autobiographical performance the audiences easily forget that "this is just the kind of self as fictive structure that consumers of autobiography have long been warned against, [and that] the live presence of the performer's body works to disavow such a caution."[40] Hare struggles very much to create the impression that the performance is purely his authentic subjective reaction to a real life experience. In the words of David Spencer: "Hare has stripped everything that could stand between the viewer and the issue except the truth […] as *he* experienced it, and as *he* sees it […] which is truth enough."[41] The 'trick' Hare plays with the audience is more sophisticated than in a

[37] Hare, "Why Fabulate?" 79.
[38] Hare, *Verbatim Verbatim* 69.
[39] Hare, "Why Fabulate?" 84-85.
[40] Bennett 35.
[41] Spencer.

conventional play or in a docudrama. For every performer of a monologue, it is crucial from the very beginning to establish a close relationship with their communication partner – the audience. In the first couple of minutes of *Via Dolorosa*, Hare endeavours to engage the audience by admitting his own insecurity and limitations. He even apologizes for being on stage instead of regular actors: "Partly, of course, I just want to see what it's like. That's what I'm doing here. If you're wondering."[42] Moreover, he gains sympathy of his viewers by placing himself in the same position as most of the London and New York audiences, who might easily identify with him: despite being almost daily in the news, the Israeli Palestinian conflict is difficult for a Westerner to understand and *Via Dolorosa* is thus "a story of a Westerner trying to understand two societies where belief is at the centre of the way of life. It is about the wrenching effects on a person apparently without faith meeting a whole lot of people who have only faith."[43] With *Via Dolorosa* it is probably relevant to criticize Hare for 'playing it safe'. The fact that "the only objections – literally in a year of playing it – the only objections that [he] had were occasionally from supporters of the settlers who felt [he] was unfair to them."[44] might be understood not only as his achievement, but on the contrary, as some of Hare's critics such as Arnold Wesker have argued, as Hare's failure to be really challenging.

In February 2009, one month before the premiere of *Wall* at the Royal Court Theatre, David Hare wrote another monologue play, in which a wall plays a central role: *Berlin*[45]. In this short play he uses similar technique to the one he uses in *Wall*. As both plays have been published together and Hare even performed these two monologues in one evening, the similarities between the Berlin wall, which came down more then twenty years ago, and the wall that was being built at that time in Israel, cannot be overlooked. However, as the setting

[42] Hare, *Via Dolorosa*, 3.
[43] Hare, *Acting Up*, 7.
[44] Hare, *About Hare*, 156.
[45] David Hare, *Berlin/Wall* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

of *Berlin* is different, it is not going to be part of the present discussion on his plays about the Middle East. When David Hare went to Israel and Palestine in 2009, the political situation had changed significantly for the worse since the late 1990s. The increase in the number of suicide terrorist attacks during the Second Intifada, such as the explosion at the discotheque on the beach in Tel Aviv in 2001, killing 21 people, mostly high school students, and injuring 132 civilians, gave rise to a movement over Israel called "Fence for Life." The main argument was that Israel needs to protect its citizens by separating them from the Palestinian territories. In 2002 the State of Israel started a construction of a concrete wall, which upon completion will have 700 km. David Hare's monologue play *Wall* offers Hare's subjective impressions of the effect the newly built wall between Israel and Palestine has on everyday life of people on both sides. In *Wall* the narrative technique is basically similar to *Via Dolorosa*: it is a colourful collage of Hare's personal commentary and voices and opinions of various people he met there. The questioning of his own role as a playwright, however, crucial to the complexity of *Via Dolorosa*, is missing, as if Hare did not feel urged to justify his choice of theatrical form any more. *Wall* is shorter and more direct than *Via Dolorosa*, and the stage presence of David Hare was even described by one critic as "professorial,"[46] since *Wall* sometimes really resembles a lecture on the Israeli/Palestine recent events, a feeling that is complemented by the fact that Hare did not act the play but merely read it from the stage. Yet, being a playwright and not a journalist, Hare observes details that are 'theatre-genic' and again concern art, the relationship between facts and fiction in particular:

> The victim is shown a wall on which a staircase is drawn, and at the top is a drawing of a bicycle. The victim is told to go and get the bicycle. He says he can't get the bicycle because it is a drawing. He is then told if he

[46] Edward Garet, "David Hare's *Wall*", *The Playgoer*, 13 April 2009, 30 January 2014, http://playgoer.blogspot.cz/2009/04/david-hares-wall.html.

doesn't bring the bicycle downstairs he will be beaten. 'I can't get it. It's a drawing."[47]

This is in fact a description of a Hamas torture technique against the citizens of Gaza suspected of informing which is surprisingly sophisticated. Asking the victim to bring down a drawing, a visual representation of the actual object, traps them in an hopeless situation. The theoretical arguments about the relationship between "stones or ideas" from *Via Dolorosa* suddenly are made painfully real in *Wall***,** as a visual representation of the actual object is now used as a means of torture. The most disturbing aspect of this torture technique is how intellectual and thought-out it is. Hare describes how puzzled he was when a guest told him about it during dinner: "All right, what does that prove? I'm asking myself, as we drive on. Hamas isn't very nice. You wouldn't be nice if you lived under permanent siege. But the ingenuity chills me. […] Is this what we're dealing with? So much thought put into a simple means of torture?"[48]

The attraction of the monologue *Wall* lies not only in Hare's informed commentary on the current situation in the region, but especially in passages where Hare adds his personal perspective that is not one of a Western journalist, but of an artist, a playwright. In Rafael Behr's words, "Hare walks the boundary between politics and art with a sureness of step lacking in most commentary and journalism on the subject."[49] Throughout the play Hare is very observant to the way art, especially graffiti and posters are used in Gaza. On the one hand, Hare notices that art has been used in a positive way: he admires a graffiti on the wall in Ramallah that resembles the subversive paintings on the Berlin wall:

[47] David Hare, *Berlin/Wall* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009) 37.
[48] Hare, *Berlin/Wall*, 37.
[49] Rafael Behr, "David Hare's *Wall* When Words Become Barriers", *The Observer*, 26 April 2009, 2 February 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/apr/26/wall-david-hare-jerwood-theatre.

> The wall may be a bygone for Professor Lochery, but for the inhabitants of the West Bank, it's all too real, blocking out the sun, blocking out the view, forbidding passage. […] The wittiest graffiti by far, in enormous capitals, the instruction scrawled across six cement blocks, just the letters: CTRL-ALT-DEL as if at the press of three computer keys, the wall might disappear. Not a wall, just a drawing of a wall.[50]

However, on the other hand, in the final scene of the play the local 'art' is not viewed so positively. Hare voices his outrage when he discovers a poster of Saddam Hussein hanging on the wall in a café in Nabulus: "It's one of those moments. I know as soon as I look I'm never going to forget. How do you react to that?"[51] The initial anger makes Hare reflect nonetheless again on his own position and set of beliefs:

> [...] Who's the idiot here? Them or me? I think of myself as less naive than Cherie Blair. But am I? Really? At least now I know why the wall's gone up. The Israelis want to separate themselves from people who display posters of Saddam Hussein. Who can blame them? Or—hold on, the old conundrum—do they display posters of Saddam Hussein because somebody just put up a wall?[52]

Hare's effort to stay impartial, to give voice to both sides, is often challenged by the reality of the complicated situation in Israel and Palestine, yet it always leads to self-reflection. As in *Via Dolorosa*, his Western audience are skilfully made see through his eyes, they arguably share his initial outrage and confusion at the poster of Hussein, but simultaneously, by following the stream of Hare's self-reflection, they are asked to inspect their own position and

[50] Hare, *Wall*, 45.
[51] Hare, *Wall*, 42.
[52] Hare, *Wall*, 43.

opinions as well. In other words, by performing his own monologue, Hare indirectly makes the audience answer the same question for themselves: "Who's the idiot here? Me or them?"

Is then our understanding and interpretation of such autobiographical monologue different when the author does not act himself, but reads? When I asked David Hare after a discussion at the National Theatre in London[53] how he would distinguish the character he played in *Via Dolorosa* from the one in *Wall*, he said that when he was acting *Via Dolorosa*, he was in his early fifties and still able to remember the text, but being in his sixties now, he was worried that he would not be able to, so he decided to read *Wall*, thus implying there is no difference. Ironically, in his last play *The Power of Yes* (2009), which is not a monologue, he shatters all the assumptions we could have made about his approach to theatrical autobiography, since in this play the central character called the Author is not performed by Hare, but by another actor. It seems as if all the artistic challenges Hare dealt with especially in *Via Dolorosa* suddenly do not seem to bother him at all. The reason, as Hare explained, was again very practical and simple – he didn't dare to appear on stage together with professional actors from the Royal National Theatre.[54] However, since we should 'never trust the author, but trust the text' it might be argued that in *Wall* Hare's weakening ability to learn things by heart may actually be an advantage. The stage reading may be understood also as a very effective means of bringing the narrative even closer to the audience by breaking the fourth wall and creating an even more authentic effect. In *Via Dolorosa* Hare rejected enactment by other actors and acted all the characters himself, in *Wall* he actually refused to act. By removing the acting, Hare lost the protective mask of the autobiographical character he was portraying in *Via Dolorosa*. By stage reading of the script of *Wall*, the playwright created an intimate atmosphere, in which he could communicate with the audience directly. In other words, David Hare stood on stage as a playwright, who was sharing with the spectators his impressions

[53] National Theatre Platform – David Hare on *The Power of Yes*, 15 April 2010.
[54] Hare on *The Power of Yes*.

from his last visit to Israel and Palestine. In order to convey what he wanted to say, Hare did not need any other means. He sees himself mainly as a reporter "Channelling my own work, that's what I want to do."[55]

"What does art add to the situation in the Middle East" then? In an ideal case, as the promoters of radical theatre wish, "there is the possibility that the immediate and local effects of particular performances might – individually and collectively – contribute to changes of wider social and political realities."[56] In comparison with the lively debates stirred by both *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* and *Seven Jewish Children* that contributed to the discussion of censorship both in the UK and the US, drew attention of the public to the actual legal case concerning Rachel Corrie and helped to donate money to a charitable organization Medical Aid for Palestinians, *Via Dolorosa* and *Wall* didn't have such off-stage effect. Nevertheless, Hare's performance also asks very important questions about the role of art in reacting to such complicated situation as the Middle East conflict, albeit in a different way. However, when Hare read *Wall* on the BBC radio, it triggered a public debate that again concerns the BBC. With Hare's *Wall* the problem was not advance censorship as with Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children*, but the uneven distribution of airtime on Radio 4: Paul Donovan did not challenge Hare's views concerning Israel and consented that Hare is perfectly entitled to say whatever he wishes.[57] However, he pointed out that Hare's talk was classified as a "Personal view" programme and according to the BBC's Editorial Guidelines, there should be an opportunity to respond after "Personal view" programmes on contentious topics. Two hours after Hare's half-hour-long reading there was only a seven-minute discussion on Radio 4's "The World Tonight" with a moderate Israeli historian Professor Benny Morris about some of the issues raised by Hare. Donovan thus wondered whether "it is and equivalent of an uninterrupted,

[55] Interview with David Hare, WNYC Radio, 12 May 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGPSNa7WKt0.
[56] Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 1.
[57] Donovan.

unchallenged half-hour"[58] and suggested that there should be more "personal views, but embracing a wider range of opinions and facts than the BBC usually permits."[59] In this case, Hare's status of a celebrity definitely played its crucial role in BBC's policy and consequently pointed to the possible problems of such a reading by Britain's national bard, whose authority prevents the broadcasters from giving the opportunity to be critical.

Regardless of this failure of the BBC to offer enough airtime for a polemic with David Hare's views, it must be stressed that the merit of both Hare's monologue plays is that he offers personalised opinions and descriptions of the situation in the Middle East that is impossible to see now on television. Michael Billington praises Hare's eloquence as "British drama's leading correspondent"[60] and suggests that thanks to Hare's plays "In a fascinating reversal of values we increasingly look to the theatre, once seen as a source of escape, for this kind of informed commentary on the state of the world."[61]

[58] Donovan.
[59] Donovan.
[60] Michael Billington, "Wall", *The Guardian*, 20 April 2009, 30 January 2014, (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/apr/20/wall-david-hare-theatre-review
[61] Billington.

8. Alternating Monologues by Multiple Characters

The discussion of the most popular trends in the boom of contemporary monologue plays in the U.K. and Ireland wouldn't be sufficient, if the term monologue play was used only for dramas featuring one actor or actress. There exists a large number of plays, especially in Ireland, that feature two or three actors on stage, who do not address each other in a dialogical conversation but seem to be oblivious of each other's presence. Instead of interacting with other characters, they talk directly to the audience. These plays are thus composed merely of their alternating monologues, which either complement or contradict each other. The characters' knowledge of the whole context of the narrated events is deliberately limited by the playwright, their subjective narratives present only a piece in a mosaic which the audience must put together. In order to do so, the spectators must consider the reliability of what they hear from the individual characters. Yet, there is no way for the audience to verify what the speakers say "because we don't actually see the act,"[1] as Karen DeVinney suggests. The audience are thus invited to ask themselves how their opinion of the monologists is actually formed. In Brian Singleton's words, "The interest lies primarily in the divergence in the stories by each, making meaning unstable, and forcing spectators to either thread all together or side with a particular version of events recounted. The 'drama' lies at the points of divergence."[2]

All the monologue plays that are going to be the subject of this chapter are visually very austere: they are mostly set on a bare stage with only minimalist lighting and a few props. These monologue plays stand or fall with the narrative of the isolated characters who strive for the attention of the audience. As Tony Corbett observed about Brian Friel's pioneering

[1] Karen DeVinney, "Monologue as Dramatic Action in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 45.1 (1999):114. http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/441667?uid=3737856&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21103403539797.

[2] Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself? 261.

play of this type, *Faith Healer* (1979), "Because it is a drama of language, the conflict is on the level of language, and it is the discourses of the three characters which come into conflict, rather than the characters themselves, who are never on stage at the same time."[3] The aim of this chapter is to examine how individual playwrights use alternating monologues and analyse the advantages and limits of this technique. Firstly, *Faith Healer* by Brian Friel will be examined in detail as a predecessor to the more recent examples of this type of monologue plays. It will be contrasted with Friel's less-performed later play *Molly Sweeney* (1994), which uses the alternating monologues of its three isolated characters to explore the central theme of blindness and sight. Secondly, the discussion will return to Conor McPherson and the different variations of the alternating monologues structure in *This Lime Tree Bower* (1995), *Come on Over* (2001) and *Port Authority* (2004). As with his plays for one performer, the focus remains primarily on masculinity, loneliness and communication breakdown. McPherson's plays were followed by Sebastian Barry's *Pride of Parnell Street* (2008), Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* (2006) or Elaine Murphy's *Little Gem* (2008) which use similarly structured alternating monologues to give voice to contemporary women. Yet these plays have had a mixed reception, especially outside of Ireland, because by the mid 2000s the way the Irish playwrights have used the alternating monologues to narrate their stories started to be repetitive. Similar technique has been used also by for instance Eugene O'Brien in *Eden* (2008), David Harrower in *A Slow Air* (2011), Sebastian Barry in *Whistling Psyche* (2004), or Mark O'Rowe's *Howie the Rookie* (1999) or *Crestfall* (2003). However, the reviewers have still praised the playwrights for their virtuoso use of language. Mark O'Rowe's nightmarish, eccentric black comedy *Terminus* (2007), on the other hand, refreshes the alternating monologues pattern by using verse which has helped O'Rowe to mesmerize the audience with his hallucinatory visions of the urban landscape of contemporary Dublin.

[3] Tony Corbett, *Brian Friel Decoding Language of the Tribe* (Dublin: The Leiffy Press, 2002) 114.

In *Faith Healer* Brian Friel uses the alternating monologues to present three different accounts of the relationship between Frank – the eponymous faith healer –, his wife/mistress Grace and his manager Teddy. The play consists of four scenes which are set in different locations: in the opening monologue by Frank there are three rows of empty chairs, which are at right-angles to the audience[4]; Grace's monologue takes place in the same set, the rows of seats are removed and she sits on a wooden chair beside a small table[5]; Teddy delivers his monologue sitting beside the same table, only his chair is more comfortable[6]. All three scenes are played against the backdrop of a large, soiled old poster announcing the faith healing session of "The Fantastic Francis Hardy, Faith Healer."[7] The final monologue is delivered again by Frank. The poster is gone and the set is empty, but for a single chair across which lies Frank's coat exactly as he previously left it[8]. The characters are not present on stage together, when they finish their part, they leave the stage. Their scenes are separated from each other by blackouts and set changes. The set and costumes as described by Friel in the stage directions give the initial impression that *Faith Healer* is going to be a naturalist play. It is only later the audience realize the deceptiveness of the realistic setting, as the monologues of Frank and Grace are revealed to be voices of the dead. What actually happened between the characters is very dubious, because each of the characters chose to remember it differently. In F.C. McGrath words, "the facts are less important than their emotional significance within the psychic structures of memory."[9]

Although *Faith Healer* is considered a classic by the critics ever since the 1990s, its original reception was not indicative of this. *Faith Healer* opened in April 1979 at the Longacre Theatre in New York and closed down after only a week, in London the 1981 production at

[4] Brian Friel, "Faith Healer", *Plays One* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996) 331.
[5] Friel 341.
[6] Friel 353.
[7] Friel, 331.
[8] Friel 370.
[9] F.C. McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama Language, Illusion, and Politics* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 168.

the Royal Court Theatre was not successful either. The breakthrough production of *Faith Healer* was the 1982 Irish production at the Abbey Theatre. In the numerous academic discussions of the play its austere monological form is frequently mentioned[10], but it still deserves more attention. Some critics already pointed out the similarities of the structure of *Faith Healer* with the competing narratives in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* or Akiro Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*.[11] However, in terms of drama, the closest parallel to *Faith Healer* is Samuel Beckett's *Play* (1963). Not only do both plays feature characters not communicating with each other and presenting contradictory versions of their relationship, they feature ghostly voices as all three of Beckett's characters and two of Friel's are already dead. Moreover, in terms of structure, both playwrights use the methods of musical composition. Beckett and Friel work with leitmotifs, refrain, repetition and variation. Nicolas Grene even suggests that at structural level the alternating monologues in *Faith Healer* "are like the four movements of a string quartet, with Teddy's comic allegro a deliberate contrast to the more sombre tempi of Frank and Grace."[12] Although the technique Friel used in *Faith Healer* is reminiscent of the way Beckett used refrain in *Play*, there is one crucial difference. Beckett's monologists in *Play* deliver their text at such a tempo that the audience experience the words more as rhythmical units than means of conveying information. Moreover, the monologues in *Play* are fragmented and constantly interrupted. For Friel, on the other hand, it is still crucial that the audience understand the individual words and focus on the discrepancies between the individual versions of the narrative.

The refrain of *Faith Healer* consists of onomatopoeic names of Welsh and Scottish villages that Frank recites in the very beginning of the play, first out of the darkness of the stage and later in dim light with his eyes closed. In the second monologue delivered by Grace, Friel

[10] E.g. F.C. McGrath, Nicholas Grene, Tony Corbett.
[11] See Nicholas Grene "Five ways of looking at *Faith Healer*", *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*, ed. Anthony Roche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 53.
[12] Grene 63.

includes a variation in the incantation: with her eyes first closed and then opened Grace does not repeat all Frank's villages in the same order, but creates her own variation of the refrain. It is very significant that she later most frequently repeats the name of the village Kinlochbervie, where she gave birth to a stillborn baby. Frank in his final monologue does not offer another variation of the refrain, but repeats Grace's final version of the refrain word by word, thus admitting the importance of Kinlochbervie, which he had previously mentioned just in passing. He thus acknowledges the fundamental position of the place in their life together. The similarity of their body language, i.e. the opening and closing of their eyes at crucial moments, emphasizes the importance of the refrain for both of them. The third character, Teddy, does not recite the refrain at all, but he mentions three of the villages anyway, when he is trying to remember the correct name of the village where they experienced the worst week of their life together.

Contrary to Beckett's speakers, who do not make it easy for the audience to decipher what they are saying and why, Friel lets Frank immediately explain the meaning of the strange words. He used to recite these place names as a comforting ritual when he was nervous before a faith healing performance: "[...] I'd recite the names to myself just for the mesmerism, the sedation, of the incantation."[13] In addition to the verbal refrain of the place names, Friel uses real music. The song "The Way You Look Tonight" is employed as a leitmotif: we hear it sung first by Frank, then referred to by Grace and finally we hear the original version sung by Fred Astaire from a recording listened to by Teddy, who later also whistles its melody. Furthermore, as all three character retell the history of their life together, there are other parts of the text that repeat in all three alternating monologues. We can assume that when two of the speakers say basically the same thing that it is probably the way the events happened. As Tony Corbett explains: "[the repeated lines] function as linguistic anchors in the text, the

[13] Friel, "Faith Healer", 332.

nearest thing an audience gets to proof of the truth of any of the monologues. [...] They act as warning buoys of consensus [...]. "[14] In other words, without these repetitions the audience wouldn't be able to make their opinion of the individual speakers.

In *Faith Healer* the characters refer to each other as if the audience did not hear the previous narrative. The stories seem credible on their own, but once confronted with the other versions, it is the power of the individual storytellers that influences our interpretation of the play. When we hear the first two monologues by Frank and Grace we encounter two different, sometimes contradictory versions of their life story and we cannot tell which of the two characters is more trustworthy. The crucial character for forming our opinion is Teddy, not directly involved in the relationship between Frank and Grace, who seems to provide the missing information. Teddy's monologue is the longest and most detailed, which enhances the impression of his version being true. As Richard Pine has pointed out, "Teddy's function is twofold: to act as our guide, a point of reference, to the statements of Frank and Grace; and to relieve with his Cockney humour, the tragedy of the narration."[15]

However, if we look at Frank, Grace and Teddy more closely, we have to admit that none of the speakers is to be really trusted. From Grace's and Teddy's monologues it seems that Frank often makes things up and therefore seems as the biggest liar. However, both Grace and Teddy discourage us from dismissing Frank completely:

> GRACE It wasn't that he was simply a liar – I never understood it – yes, I knew that he wanted to hurt me, but it was much more complex than that;

[14] Corbett 123.
[15] Richard Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* (London: Routledge, 1990)126.

> it was some compulsion he had to adjust, to refashion, to re-create everything around him.[16]
>
> TEDDY I've thought maybe – course it was bloody minded of him! [To leave Grace giving birth alone] I am not denying that! – but maybe the kind of man he was, you know, with that strange gift he had, I've thought maybe – well, maybe he had his own way of facing things.[17]

Grace does not tell the whole truth either as she has barely recovered from a serious breakdown, she herself admits that there are certain memories she is not able to face up to. Her confessional monologue resembles a therapeutic session. Although there are some events from her past life she can confess to her psychiatrist, there are other memories that are still painful and Grace does not tell her doctor about them. These recollections, however, she shares with the audience: "There are certain restricted memories that I can invite now [...] But as soon as I begin to open under them, just as soon as it seems that I am beginning to come together again – (*eyes closed tight*) Abergorlech, Abergynowlyn..."[18] The therapeutic sessions with her psychiatrist did not have the desired healing effect and we find out from Teddy's monologue that Grace finally gave up and committed suicide. We can assume that there are other things she had not told us. Even Teddy, who seems as the most credible, is not honest with the audience. He pretends to have only professional relationship with Frank, but it is obvious that he is emotionally involved with both Frank and Grace. Moreover, he drinks throughout the entire monologue, which also undermines the authority of his account.

Frank, Grace and Teddy might remember certain events differently or not at all, but all three of them make such big omissions in their versions that what they omit actually draws our

[16] Friel, "Faith Healer", 345.
[17] Friel, "Faith Healer", 365.
[18] Friel, "Faith Healer", 343.

attention. In Thomas Kilroy's words, "The important thing is not whether the statements are true or false but the degree of falsehood and its motivation, whether deceits are self-serving or other-serving, black, white or grey."[19] The fact that Frank completely omits telling us about the birth and death of his stillborn baby in Kinlochbervie tells us the most about his character. It seems that he is not only hiding this event from us, but is also in denial of it from himself. In the same way, Grace completely leaves out Teddy from the crucial scene in Kinlochbervie and puts Frank in his place. That tells us about the degree of her obsession with Frank. Teddy's narration in turn betrays him as a hopeless romantic when he tells us about the birth during which he took Frank's role of the husband, which seems to be his wish in a certain way. In other words, what is at play in *Faith Healer* are not so much the facts, but what is presented and how. Friel succeeds not only in creating psychologically complex characters, but mainly in employing the monologue form in such a way that the audience are actively participating in the creation of the meaning of the play. They are invited to challenge the subjective narratives of the unreliable protagonists, whose lives were inseparably intertwined. As Ondřej Pilný has suggested, "the play focuses mainly on the complex relations of the three characters, while the nature of these relations is to be glimpsed only behind the words of the story they narrate."[20]

In *Molly Sweeney* Friel returned to the monological structure of *Faith Healer*, but the characters of the visually impaired Molly, her autodidact husband Frank and the alcoholic ophthalmologist Mr Rice are present on stage simultaneously. The form of the play concurs with the central theme of blindness as all three characters are unaware of each other's presence. This changed set up, when the audience can see all three characters simultaneously, has the effect that the spectators are likely to compare what they hear with the image on stage.

[19] Thomas Kilroy, "Theatrical text as literary text", *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, edited by Alan Peacock (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smyth Ltd, 1993) 100.
[20] Ondřej Pilný, *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 120.

In DeVinney's words, "The audience is drawn to look at the person who is the subject of the soliloquy, to confirm, alter, or elaborate on its own impressions of that person presented."[21] The isolation of the individual characters is emphasised by Friel's distribution of the acting space for the three monologists, who "inhabit his/her own special acting area – Mr Rice stage left, Molly Sweeney centre stage, Frank Sweeney stage right."[22] In the first production of *Molly Sweeney* at the Gate Theatre in Dublin (August 1994), which was directed by Friel himself, the actors were sitting on simple chairs on a bare stage and stood up only when they spoke their part. Significantly, Molly was the only one to look at the others while they spoke, even though she cannot physically see.[23] In the 1997 Philadelphia Theatre production, the set designer Allen Moyer highlighted the isolation of Molly, Frank and Mr Rice even more by providing each character with their own, identical gray room with a wooden chair, which was only barely lit.[24] The audience could thus see the monologists trapped in their own worlds represented by the anonymous 'prison cells.' In both productions of *Molly Sweeney* the alternating monologues "make physical for the audience [the characters'] emotional, and indeed, experiential isolation from each other."[25]

This initial stage image of Friel's *Molly Sweeney*, however, does not change for the entire performance, which lasts almost two hours. The attention of the audience is thus again drawn mainly to the narrative and the characters. In contrast to *Faith Healer*, there are not many discrepancies in the stories we hear in *Molly Sweeney*. In DeVinney's view, "*Molly Sweeney* also presents seeming contradictions, but they are more subtle and reveal less-naked battles for power."[26] This subtlety, however, threatens to induce boredom. Since there are not many significant gaps, no ambiguity, undermining the reliability of the monologists, the audience is

[21] DeVinney 115.
[22] Brian Friel, "Molly Sweeney", *Plays 2* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 455.
[23] DeVinney 113.
[24] Tedy Zinman, "Molly Sweeney", *Philadelphia Citypaper*, 16 January 1997, 8 February 2014, http://archives.citypaper.net/articles/011697/article018.shtml.
[25] DeVinney 112.
[26] DeVinney 115.

likely to get impatient. Due to the form of *Molly Sweeney* we not only get to know the characters from the other monologists' comments, but we are also allowed the insight into the monologists' minds. They explicitly tell how they felt in the described situations and therefore the audience know everything. There is no suspense, no motivation for the audience to rack their brains about the narrated stories. When the audience are told all the details, and the way the characters remember the events is not questioned, the play begins to lack dramatic tension. As the reviewer Sara Keating has argued, "*Faith Healer* was concerned with interrogating the form of the confessional by playing with the idea of the truth. *Molly Sweeney*, on the other hand, is a straightforward exercise in shared storytelling."[27]

What is even more frustrating for the audience is the fact that not only the characters in *Molly Sweeney* do not have a sense of humour, they are static and experience almost no internal development. Frank and Mr Rice are presented as selfish losers, who hurt people around them and remain so throughout the play. Even though Molly is comfortable in her private world without sight, they convince her to undergo a surgery, which enables her to see. Unable to adapt to the new environment, she breaks down and ends up deserted in a psychiatric asylum. Despite the tragedy, even Molly's character is static, she remains the same – a dream of male fantasy: likable, beautiful, understanding and wishing to please. A tragic heroine whose vulnerability is even enhanced by her blindness. In my view, it is disappointing that in 1994 Friel constructs the female character stereotypically as a passive victim. As Anna McMullan commented, "*Molly Sweeney* directly stages the performance of male authority on the female body."[28]

[27] Sara Keating, "Molly Sweeney", *Irish Theatre Magazine*, 28 June 2011, 8 February 2014, http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/reviews/current/molly-sweeney.
[28] Anna McMullan, "Performativity, Unruly Bodies and Gender", *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*, 145.

In contrast to the intricate musical composition of *Faith Healer* that not only structured the text, but brought variation of feeling and emotion, two adagios and an allegro, the alternating monologues in *Molly Sweeney* do not have such dynamics. As Sara Keating observed, "Each of the characters uses a similar register of expression, despite their different backgrounds. They all repeatedly use the word 'anyhow', for example, to bridge the gaps between their diverging trains of thought, and the linguistic echoes that permeate each character's revelations remind us of the authorial voice behind the whole charade."[29] In other words, even the language used for Molly, Frank and Mr Rice lacks dramatic tension, there are no leitmotifs or rhythms that would help the audience engage with the play. The obstacles Friel places in front of the viewers in *Molly Sweeney* are very difficult to overcome. While the play explores an interesting theme, its mixed reception seems to confirm Tedy Zinman's impression, "that Friel is writing himself into a corner, approaching something like silent radio in this moving, but finally deeply untheatrical play."[30] Such criticism echoes the complaints about the single character monologues which have been often described as "undramatic."[31] In *Molly Sweeney*, however, the problem is not in Friel's employment of the alternating monologues, which are suitable for the dramatization of the central theme of blindness, but mainly in the flatness of the characters, the stereotypical representation of the woman, and less imaginative structuring of the narrative.

As mentioned earlier, Conor McPherson made his name in the 1990s by a series of monologue plays for a single performer and also by plays based on alternating monologues. In his first play in this form, *This Lime Tree Bower* (Crypt Art Centre Dublin, 1995) McPherson created an on-stage situation which is similar to the one in *Molly Sweeney*. The protagonists are present on a bare stage simultaneously and never leave their acting area, they address the

[29] Keating.
[30] Zinman.
[31] See chapter 3, p. 30 of this thesis.

audience directly, but contrary to Friel's monologists, McPherson's characters "are certainly aware of each other."[32] *This Lime Tree Bower* tells a story of two brothers, Joe and Frank, and their sister's boyfriend Ray. The play resembles a contest in storytelling between the three characters, who tell their subjective versions of a series of events they participated in. Same as McPherson's other male protagonists, Joe, Frank and Ray have a dysfunctional relationship with women and present, in Brian Singleton's words, "by-now familiar stock character types, all of whom conform to the man-as-victim trope so clearly established in McPherson's early plays."[33] The play features a very brief scene where two of the monologists interact. Although included mainly for its humorous effect, the sudden dialogical exchange immediately attracts the attention of the audience. Ray's story about his encounter with a stuck-up philosopher Konigsberg is so hilarious and expertly told that it provokes the otherwise silent monologist Frank to compliment Ray on his skill as a narrator:

> RAY: Konigsberg was looking around, wondering who was going to say something. And then, absolutely beyond my control, a long stream of orange puke shot out of my mouth. It sailed across the room and all over the people for about ten feet in front of me. [...]
>
> FRANK (*To Ray*): I never heard that.
>
> RAY: I've been saving it.[34]

This scene emphasizes the anti-illusory quality of McPherson's employment of the alternating monologues. In this scene in *This Lime Tree Bower* the characters on stage do not pretend that they are delivering independent monologues which the others cannot hear. It might even be argued that in *This Lime Tree Bower* the actors actually do not need the stage, they could very

[32] Conor McPherson, *This Lime Tree Bower: Three Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996) 134.
[33] Singleton in *Monologues*, 270.
[34] McPherson, *This Lime Tree Bower*, 184 – 185.

easily be sitting among the audience and entertain them with their stories from there. The characters are in a way in the same position as the audience, that is, sitting and listening to the stories they hear from the only person speaking. McPherson thus blurs the barrier between the stage and the auditorium and manages to create an intimate atmosphere in which the narrative is shared between the actors and the spectators. In Friel's monologue plays, on the contrary, the positioning of the characters on stage is crucial, as the visual image emphasizes the theme of isolation of the characters.

In *Come On Over* (2001, Gate Theatre, Dublin) the interaction between the characters occurs more often. The two protagonists, a former Jesuit priest Matthew and his former lover Margaret, narrate their alternating monologues with paper bags over their heads. The two actors sit on chairs on a bare stage. They stare at the audience through "neat holes for the eyes"[35] and speak through a neat hole for the mouth. The paper masks prevent the audience to view the on-stage action as a naturalist performance. As Eckart Voigts-Virchow commented, "McPherson aims at an intimate communication between the actor or actress as a story-teller rather than as a part of a stage world."[36] In contrast to the characters of Friel's plays, who are alienated from each other, in *Come On Over* the monologists are very attentive to the stories they listen to. They even comment on the progress of their performance; for instance, Matthew interrupts a detailed description of his adventure in Africa and starts complaining about the lack of time:

> MATTHEW: (*To* MARGARET). We don't even have time for this!

[35] Conor McPherson, "Come On Over", *Plays 2* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2004) 191.
[36] Eckart Voigts-Virchow and Mark Schreiber, "Will the "Wordy Body" Please Stand Up? The Crises of Male Impersonation in Monological Drama – Beckett, McPherson, Eno", *Monologues*, 288.

MARGARET: (*To* MATTHEW). Well. Go on. Because I have things to say.[37]

Nevertheless, the crucial point of their interaction is the final scene, where the two storytellers embrace after finishing their monologues. This gesture of reconciliation is an expression of comfort and understanding that is completely missing from Friel's monological meditations on isolation, where the story offers no opportunity for reconciliation among the characters.

A tendency to anti-illusory theatre is even more evident in McPherson's as yet last fully monological play *Port Authority* (2004), where the playwright explicitly states in the stage directions that "The play is set in the theatre."[38] What is new in McPherson's employment of the alternating monologues in *Port Authority* is the fact that the three monologists seem as complete strangers. Their stories do not intervene, the only unifying aspect is the Dublin setting and the shared acting space on the theatre stage. Yet, towards the end of the play their relationship is briefly hinted at. In other words, in *Port Authority* McPherson does not create competing versions of a singular event, but three independent stories. Kevin is a teenager who has left home for the first time and describes his difficulties of becoming an adult, Dermot is experiencing a midlife crisis, and Joe is an old man in a nursing home reminiscing about his unfulfilled love. In their independent stories, however, all three mention an old photograph. It shows a picture of a little girl – it is Kevin's grandmother Marion, who died recently. She was the woman Joe loved and who insisted that the photograph must be send to her neighbour Joe. This detail is mentioned by Dermot, who recounts a random conversation he had with his colleage from work during their flight to America. The man, who told him about the photograph, was Kevin's father. As Brian Singleton suggests, "The tri-partite monologue drama does not create competing narratives for the one reality, but rather complementary

[37] McPherson, *Come on Over*, 199.
[38] Conor McPherson, *Port Authority*, *Plays 2*, 132.

narratives in a requiem for masculinity."[39] In the first production of *Port Authority* at the Gate Theatre in Dublin, directed by McPherson, the passivity of the men was emphasised by the set design. Each of the monologists were again positioned in his own space on a bare stage and called into action by the sound of a bell.[40] The function of the bell which calls the speakers into action, however, is different from Beckett's bell in *Happy Days* or Light in *Play*. As Nicholas Grene has pointed out, "the sporting sound (of the bell in *Port Authority*) is far from the violent style of the bell that clangs Winnie awake and commands her to sleep, or from the inquisitorial light that tortures into speech the three urn-bound heads of *Play*"[41]

Although from the critical attention McPherson's monologue plays have received it might seem that he is a leading experimenter with the monologue form in Irish drama of the 1990s, it must be stressed that the moments where McPherson tests the boundaries of the form and departs from straightforward storytelling are very brief, especially in *This Lime Tree Bower* where the interaction between the monologists seems rather accidental. The insistence on the importance of the plain monologue form[42] for conveying the story of Joe, Frank and Ray in *This Lime Tree Bower* seems unnecessary, particularly given that McPherson rewrote the play as a film script. The story is as powerful when conveyed via dialogue, more characters and visual images in McPherson's film *Saltwater* (2000). Similarly, McPherson's stage direction about the importance of the theatre setting in *Port Authority*, which has been commented on many times[43], comes across as en empty gesture as the play functions perfectly well as a radio production. Thus, rather than experimenting with the possibilities of the monologue form,

[39] Singleton 272.
[40] Singleton 272.
[41] Nicholas Grene, "Stories in Shallow Space: *Port Authority*", *The Irish Review* 29.1 (2002): 76. http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/29736074?uid=3737856&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103799488263.
[42] Conor McPherson in Tim Adams "So There's These Three Irishmen..." *The Observer*, 4 February 2001, 20 march 2014, http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2001/feb/04/features.review27.
[43] See e.g. Clare Wallace, "The Art of Disclosure, The Ethics of Monologue in Conor McPherson's Drama: *St. Nicolas, This Lime Tree Bower* and *Port Authority*, *The Theatre of Conor McPherson 'Right beside the Beyond'*, eds. Lillian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2012); Brian Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself?. Etc.

McPherson's strength is in storytelling. The straightforward monologues are a means for him to share stories with the audience, who are attracted by McPherson's eloquent male protagonists.

Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007, Tricycle Theatre, London) is composed of two alternating monologues by Janet and her husband Joe, who retrospectively tell the audience the history of their relationship. Visually, the stage image is very familiar from similar, earlier plays: a bare stage, a simple chair for Janet and a hospital bed for Joe. Barry gives the actors freedom to decide whether they leave their acting area and whether they are aware of each other before the final scene: "The actors might stay where they are, or move about, as instincts dictate. […] Whether they are aware of each other before the last scene is up to the actors' instincts."[44] *The Pride of Parnell Street* was criticised by many reviewers, who did not appreciate the monological form and missed more on-stage action. Tom Sellar for instance commented that "For most of the narrating, Joe speaks while lying inert in his hospital bed, halfway submerged in a grave; it's an apt metaphor for static monodramas that do not rise to use dialogue, scenes, or the three dimensions of the stage."[45] In addition to the form of *The Pride of Parnell Street*, the specific linguistic setting of the play in Dublin caused problems for the U.S. audiences, who had difficulties understanding the thick accent of the actors and had to be provided with a glossary of Dublin dialect. American reviewer John Simon even complained about the frequent use of swearwords as he counted "118 occurrences of the F-word and its derivatives.[46] Nevertheless, the lively and suggestive evocation of the life of the underpriviledged in contemporary Dublin can be praised as the play's merit.

[44] Sebastian Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007) 7 – 8.
[45] Tom Sellar, „The Irish Gift of Gab Not Always Welcome in *Pride of Parnell Street and Spinning the Times*", *Village Voice*, 8 September 2009, 11 March 2014, http://www.vilagevoice.com/content/printVersion/1348557.
[46] John Simon, "Dublin Thief Loses Son, Shoots Smack, Robs Tourists", *Bloomberg*, 9 September 2009, 10 February 2014, http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=abMg.06U_I80.

Another merit of the play is that it highlights the problem of domestic violence. Barry wrote *The Pride of Parnell Street* for Amnesty International's "Stop Violence Against Women" 2004 campaign. As he recalls, the inspiration was an incident during the 1990s World Cup: "After the football matches, there was a sea change between elation and when fellas watching games got home to their flat. They would attack their wives. The women's refuges would be full the next day."[47] In Janet's and Joe's monologues Barry is trying to find out why. What is particularly noteworthy about *The Pride of Parnell Street*, is Barry's representation of the character of Janet. Although she is also viewed romantically as an attractive woman with almost no negative qualities, with the possible exception of her bad language, contrary to Molly in Friel's play, Janet is not a passive victim. She is an emancipated working-class Dublin woman, the eponymous Pride of Parnell Street. Despite being a victim of physical violence, Janet is not presented as submissive or masochistic, as she finds the courage to leave her abusive husband Joe. It is the male playwright Sebastian Barry who points to the alarming fact that most of the female victims obediently return to the men who attack them:

> JANET: He done the worst thing next on nigh killin' me. He killed me love, didn't he? I suppose he musta done. Next on nigh. And I didn't go back to him, like a lot a'girls do, no, I didn't. And I don't know why girls go back, but they do, everyday of the week.[48]

In contrast to Janet, who manages to start a new independent life, her husband Joe fails. Not only had he attacked his wife, but he is a liar, a petty thief, a racist and a drug addict; having contracted AIDS he is on his deathbed, from which he narrates his version of the events. In the final scene, just before Joe likely dies, Janet leaves her chair and moves to Joe's acting area and touches his hand. The separate alternating monologues of Janet and Joe finally merge

[47] Gwen Orel, "Sebastian Barry Returns with *The Pride of Parnell Street*," *Village Voice*, 21 January 2010, 9 September 2011, <http://www.vilagevoice.com/content/printVersion/1327224 >.
[48] Sebastian Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007) 32.

in a simple gesture of forgiveness. The pattern of alternating monologues in *The Pride of Parnell Street* functions in the same way as in McPherson's *Come On Over*: the form is used not to express isolation of the characters, but their final reconciliation.

Young Irish playwrights Abbie Spallen and Elaine Murphy have also used alternating monologues in their work, but, being women, they were described as "[...] adding a fresh, female voice to the boys' club of Irish playwrights."[49] Spallen's *Pumpgirl* tells the story of a tumultuous relationship between the eponymous Pumpgirl, a petrol station attendant "who walks like John Wayne and looks like his horse,"[50] her abusive boyfriend Hammy, and his wife Sinead. *Pumpgirl* had its world premiere at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2006, then transferred to London's Bush Theatre and New York's Manhattan Theatre; while the first Irish production came as late as November 2008 in Queen's Drama Studio in Belfast. The three alternating monologues complement each other, but the monologists do not interact. The structure Spallen uses is similar to Friel's *Molly Sweeney*: the three monologists tell their section of the story and add their perspective on the narrated events. They sit on three chairs for the entire performance, the setting is a run-down border petrol station in the Armagh countryside, which was represented by bits and pieces or iron and an old BP sign; otherwise the stage was empty. *Pumpgirl* presents the images of bike rides, violence, drug abuse, extra-marital sex, and even a gang rape. Not only such images, but also the language of Abbie Spallen are in the same league of dark comedy as the extravagant plays of Martin McDonagh or Mark O'Rowe. Reviewer David Lewis noted that *Pumpgirl* "is certainly awash with c-words, f-words, b-words and pretty much every other letter in the alphabet words."[51] So

[49] Caryn James, "From Ireland, Love Songs in the Key of Desperation," *New York Times*, 5 December 2007, 4 April 2011, http://theater.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/theater/reviews/05pump.html.
[50] Abbie Spallen, *Pumpgirl* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006) 25.
[51] David Lewis, "Theatre review *Pumpgirl*", *Culture Northern Ireland*, 12 October 2010,10 February 2014, http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article.aspx?art_id=1518.

although "*Pumpgirl* is hardly the most original play to come from Ireland lately,"[52] Spallen's sharp lines, jokes and richness of language are its main attraction. Like her male colleagues, Spallen gives voice to the underdog: patently, female petrol station attendants are not often seen on theatre stages. As the playwright explains:

> I just got fascinated with this character because I don't think anybody like that has actually been represented in a play before. [...] I just thought there was one of those people in every town. I'm interested in people that are more forgotten, people that sort of exist on the peripheries.[53]

In other words, for Abbie Spallen the alternating monologues are a means to give voice to previously silent characters; also, she clearly wishes to tell a good story. As many playwrights of her generation, she relies exclusively on language, other theatrical means or experiment are of no interest to her: "I don't particularly think that I write theatre, per se; I think I am more interested in writing drama."[54] In an interview she even admitted that the motivation for choosing this particular theatre form for *Pumpgirl* was also economic: "And yes... it is a monologue. [...] I know why I wrote one... because it was cheap and I had no money and no investment from any source and a ridiculous thing called a credit card from some very stupid bank on which I was going to fund a production."[55]

Elaine Murphy's *Little Gem* (2008, Civic Theatre, Dublin) resembles in tone Geraldine Aron's highly successful *My Brilliant Divorce*, which was discussed earlier. Although Murphy deals with some serious and sombre issues, such as the death of a loved one, loneliness and depression, *Little Gem* is a 'feel-good play.' Humour and lively language are

[52] James.
[53] Abbie Spallen in Lori Fradkin "'Pumpgirl' Playwright Abbie Spallen Explains the Difference Between Theatre and Burger King," *New York Mag*, 4 December 2007, March 13 2011, <http://nymag.com/daily/entertainment/2007/12/pumpgirl_playwright_abbie_spal.html>.
[54] Spallen in Fradkin 1.
[55] Spallen in Lewis 2.

the play's main assets. Contrary to McPherson's plays about men, *Little Gem* features an all-female cast, who deliver three intertwined monologues about the lives of three generations of women in present-day Ireland. Amber is a teenager who gets pregnant after a wild drinking party and decides to become a single mother. The second monologist is Amber's mother Lorraine, who is separated from her husband and suffers from stress and psychic problems. The third woman on stage is Amber's grandmother Kay, who has to deal with the failing health of her beloved husband Gem, who dies in the final part of the play. *Little Gem* again uses the same structure as Friel's *Molly Sweeney* or Spallen's *Pumpgirl*: the monologists narrate their section of the story and share their views on the events they have experienced.

Despite dealing with very universal problems of love and loss, Elaine Murphy, similar to Geraldine Aron, manages not to be sentimental. The alternating monologue pattern with the three women not interacting with each other reflects the communication problems Amber, Lorraine and Kay have with each other. Although loving each other dearly, all three women do not confide, or share their troubles within the family. Amber has problems telling her mother about the pregnancy, Lorrain fails to find words of comfort, and Kay refrains from mentioning her worries about Lorrain's depression:

> AMBER: Sit there is silence as she irons tea towels. We never really talk. Don't know why I expect it to be any different now. Try to think of something to say. Like: 'I'm sorry for letting you down,' or 'Fucking hell I'm scarred shitless,' but nothing comes out.[56]
>
> LORRAINE: Told her how frustrated I am that, even now, I can't find the words to talk to my own daughter.[57]

[56] Elaine Murphy, *Little Gem* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009) 24.
[57] Murphy 25.

> KAY: She's a bit quiet in herself and I don't know whether it is over Amber or if it's these tablets they have her on. Say nothing; don't want to make her paranoid on top of everything else. Make us a cup of tea and wait for her to tell me about her day.[58]

The alternating monologues format enables the characters, however, to share their inner doubts and feelings with the audience. Elaine Murphy's only problem with *Little Gem* is that both the form and the story are all too familiar. As the U.S. reviewer Charles Isherwood summarized, "The trials of these women's lives are told in lively, pungent language that has its own appeal, but they are still the familiar stuff of everyday drama. Ms. Murphy transmits her affection for her characters clearly, and we come to share it. But at more than an hour and a half (with no intermission) the play's effectiveness is compromised by its excessive length."[59] In other words, although Elaine Murphy's choice of the alternating monologues formula is justified by the relationship between the three women protagonists, who refrain from sharing their thoughts with each other, the straightforward narratives fail to maintain the attention and engagement of the audience for a sustainable period of time since the content lacks originality and is not supported by attractive on-stage images. The success of Aron's *My Brilliant Divorce*, on the contrary, is based on the combination of similar "familiar stuff of everyday drama" with ample theatrical effects that bring in more dynamic than the austere storytelling of *Little Gem*.

Mark O'Rowe's monologue plays *Howie the Rookie* (1999), *Crestfall* (2003) and *Terminus* (2007) repeat the pattern of the alternating monologues that has been described above, but O'Rowe does not have any problems with blandness of subject matter. In Jason Zinoman's words, O'Rowe's unsettling black comedies feature "stunningly written monologues with as

[58] Murphy 28.
[59] Charles Isherwood, "Three Irish Women Bound by Blood and Behaviour", *The New York Times*, 8 January 2010, 11 February 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/08/theater/reviews/08littlegem.html?_r=0.

much sex, violence and cruelty as 10 Quentin Tarantino films."[60] Visually, all three plays resemble each other – minimal stage action, two or three monologists who do not interact and remain on stage throughout the performance. In O'Rowe's first two monologue plays the speakers still have names: The Howie Lee and The Rookie Lee in *Howie the Rookie* and Olive, Alison and Tilly in *Crestfall*. In *Terminus* the characters are described only as "A (female, forties)", "B (female, twenties)" and "C (male, thirties)".[61] The plot of *Terminus* consists of three intertwined stories of A, B and C that neatly merge at the end of the play. A is an ex-teacher, who is trying to discourage her pupil from a brutal illegal abortion and gets involved in a nightmarish journey of her own, which makes her reconsider her past sins. B is a young woman, who experiences an unusual love story with a devil-like creature, who saved her when she was falling from a crane. C is an extremely shy man who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for a beautiful singing voice, after which he turns into a serial killer and a sociopath. These monologists are called into action, i.e. speaking, by lights that switch on and off. The use of the light beam in *Terminus* resembles the function of Light in Samuel Beckett's *Play*, where it was also forcing the characters with generic names, M, W1 and W2, to speak. In contrast to *Terminus*, in Beckett's *Play* Light functions as an independent character.

In the first production of *Terminus* at the Abbey Theatre (June 2007), which was directed by O'Rowe, the illuminated silhouettes of the monologists were framed by a large mirror frame with sharp glass shards still attached at some places. Some of the broken pieces of the mirror were placed on the stage for the actors as platforms to stand on. As Brian Singleton observed, "It is a clearly violent metaphor for the world of savagery they recount."[62] As a director,

[60] Jason Zinoman, "In Savage Quarters, a Reign of Sex, Violence and Alliteration", *The New York Times*, 10 October 2005, 10 February 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/10/theater/reviews/10cres.html.
[61] Mark O'Rowe, *Terminus* (London, Nick Hern Books, 2007) 4.
[62] Brian Singleton, "*Terminus* Review", *Irish Theatre Magazine*, 4 July 2007, 12 February 2014, http://www.irishtheatremagazine.ie/Reviews/Current/Terminus.

O'Rowe highlighted the contrast between the extremely rhythmical and pulsating language and the stillness of the bodies that delivered the monologues by preventing the actors from much movement. As in Beckett's *Play*, where the speakers were trapped up to their necks in large urns, in *Terminus* the actors were as if glued to their glass platforms. As Miriam Haughton noted, such directive choice "emphasizes the power of the spoken word while simultaneously denying the expression of the body."[63]

While the stage image is visually still, the alternating monologues in *Terminus* vividly describe dynamic kinetic action, aggressive fights, violent sex scenes, torture etc. The heightened language, particularly the use of verse, together with the supernatural elements function as a distancing principle that prevents the audience identification and engagement with the characters. In Haughton's words, "O'Rowe's grotesque descriptions of C's killing spree verges on the absurd, resulting in breaking audience identification with the dramatic narrative and confirming the tale as fantasy."[64] However, the audience are mesmerized by O'Rowe's extravagant language and drawn in by the unexpected twists and turns in the narration.

If Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* resembles a string quartet, O'Rowe's monologues sound more like hardcore rap battles. Watching *Terminus* in the theatre is more like listening to music as the sound dominates over meaning. Or, to put it bluntly, the audience succumb to O'Rowe's ostentatious showing off of his skill. As Singleton notes, "O'Rowe appears to revel in the stricture that he has set himself. Some of the rhyming appears self-consciously absurd and occasionally he sets up sentences that appear to have no rhyming possibility at all, but every

[63] Miriam Haughton, "Performing Power: Violence as Fantasy and Spectacle in Mark O'Rowe's *Made in China* and *Terminus*", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 1 January 2011, 12 February 2014, https://www.academia.edu/1960695/Performing_Power_Violence_as_Fantasy_and_Spectacle_in_Mark_ORowes_Made_in_China_and_Terminus.
[64] Haughton.

time he manages to extricate himself from the convulsion."[65] Nevertheless, it must be added that not all of O'Rowe's lines are technically perfect and some rhymes, such as "no time to lose – half-blind with the booze"[66] are not exactly the highlights of poetry.

After one hour and forty five minutes of such exhaustive rollercoaster theatre ride in the nightmarish urban landscape of contemporary Dublin, it is easy to dismiss questions about the actual meaning of *Terminus*. What is there beyond the dazzling linguistic surface and gruesome violence? As reviewer Brian Logan commented, "[...] it's not always clear what, beyond shock value, all this unpleasantness achieves. The play's three mesmerizing tales conjure with life and death, heaven and hell – but have little profound to say about them."[67] *Terminus* is perhaps more concerned with the power of singing, as the last scene seems to suggest. Just before dying, C, while hanging by his intestines in the air from the crane, from which he was pushed by the devil, finally overcomes shyness and manages to use the singing voice he lost his soul for:

> After waiting so fucking long, I launch into song and the crowd all start to sway, I swear, this way then that, all unaware of anything but the disembowelled man who swings the song he sings.[...] And they are all mesmerised – man, look at their eyes! – enraptured, captured, enchanted, transplanted by my voice to a better place, and I rejoice at the hour of my death that I'm getting to show them what I've got.[68]

This scene could be read also as a rather boastful, yet ironic self-reflexive comment on O'Rowe's skill. C's singing voice has the effect that Mark O'Rowe arguably has the ambition

[65] Singleton.
[66] O'Rowe, 36.
[67] Brian Logan, "*Terminus* Review", *The Guardian*, 5 April 2011, 12 February 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/apr/05/terminus-young-vic-review.
[68] O'Rowe 48.

to achieve: to enchant the audience. In other words, this scene could be interpreted as a comment on the form of *Terminus*. In Logan's words, "Who needs substance when the surface is this dazzling? It's a tribute to the potency of O'Rowe's writing that dramatic action isn't – as per so much monologue theatre – conspicuous by its absence."[69] Although often puzzling, *Terminus* is O'Rowe's *tour de force*: O'Rowe manages to dazzle the audience by his narratives in verse and the luscious grotesque visions that are supported by the static stage. The energy this combination creates brings in the necessary dynamic alternating monologues need in order to activate the imagination of the audience. Although watching *Terminus* does not transplant the audience "to a better place," as the play is stays on the surface, it definitely keeps them mesmerized.

[69] Logan.

9. Conclusion

This dissertation has set out to examine a very popular and widespread trend in contemporary British and Irish theatre – monologue plays. One of the reasons for their popularity might be the fact that they present a challenge for everyone involved. In Molly Flatt's words, "One-person performances can show theatre at its most intimate, moving and daring, and brilliantly demonstrate the fragility of the membranes separating author, actor, character and audience."[1] The monologue plays, however, present a challenge also for the academia. The diversity and quantity of such plays have become an obstacle that has deterred most theatre scholars from systematic analysis and thus the number of academic studies devoted primarily to monologues in the context of British and Irish theatre is still quite low. This dissertation hopes to contribute to the research of this interesting phenomenon by providing a systematic framework, based on the various forms of incorporation of the monologue, in order to enable an examination of how specific strategies of the realisation of the monologue elicit audience engagement.

Although this work has been mainly concerned with the monologue plays written since the mid-1990s in the UK and Ireland by a strong generation of younger playwrights, the discussion opened with a detailed analysis of two icons of British drama: Alan Bennett and Arnold Wesker. As has been shown, their work represents two diverging approaches to the monologue that are typical also for the more recent monologue plays: one emphasizing the austerity of storytelling and direct address of the audience, the other stressing equal employment of other expressive means offered by theatre and insisting on elaborate integration of stage directions concerning non-verbal action. In contrast to Wesker's monologists, who are always provided with a realistic motivation for speaking alone and are

[1] Molly Flatt, "Where are the great one-woman shows?" *The Guardian*, 15 February 2008, 17 March 2014, http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2008/feb/15/wherearethegreatonewomans.

in conversation with someone off-stage, the speakers in Alan Bennett's series of monologue plays *Talking Heads* are self-sufficient, in Joseph O'Meally's words, "[they] do not know why they speak, only that they must."[2] Wesker dazzles the audience by richly theatrical images, costume changes, musical leitmotifs, voice-overs, choreography and meta-theatrical features, whereas the attractiveness of Bennett's monologue plays is in their austerity which is combined with an elaborate dramatic structure. With a still visual image, there is always a risk that the single voice of the monologist might become monotonous. Therefore in order to engage the spectators, Alan Bennett has employed an intricate interplay between what they are told and what is excluded from them. The advantage of the strategy Bennett uses is that when the audience are denied the context, explanation, and perspectives of other characters, they must actively participate in creating the world of the play and independently interpret what they hear. The audience can access the world of the lonely protagonists via their insights, comments, vivid descriptions, but also evasions, pauses and silences. The dramatic tension is enhanced also by the fact that Bennett's monologists do not quite understand the meaning of the story they are telling. By obscuring the meaning from both the monologists and the audience, Bennett prevents the spectators from a mere passive consumption of what they hear and see. As Tim Crouch has suggested about drama in general, "[...] for an audience it's more interesting if the thing doesn't look remotely like the thing it is proclaiming to be. That's when I, as an audience member, have to be involved because I have some work to do."[3]

The plays discussed in Chapter Two resemble Bennett's monologues in that they present solitary monologists relying mainly on verbal presentation of their own narrative, but the monologue is used in a different way: the dramatic energy does not arise from the incompleteness of the narratives and the parallel stories the speakers refuse to tell, but from

[2] Joseph H. O'Meally, *Alan Bennett – A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001) 87.
[3] Tim Crouch in Conversation with Aleks Sierz.

the eloquence of the monologists, from the power of their rich and poetic language. As the most successful advocate of this kind of approach to the monologue, Conor McPherson has explained:

> I find monologues liberating. I think the freedom they afford is great, just the simplicity of it and the images that people are creating themselves. In three sentences you can convey a whole day. You cut to the chase. You get to the heart of it. People talk about what's on their minds. I think it's just that I really love stories. I love it when people talk.[4]

While on stage the male monologists of Conor McPherson's, Owen McCafferty's, Simon Stephens's or Mark O'Rowe's plays are extremely eloquent, the stories they tell; however, reveal the loneliness and emptiness of their lives caused by their inability to communicate with their closest family and friends, especially women. Some critics, such as Michael Billington, welcomed the revival of traditional storytelling to Irish and British theatres as "the restoration of the lost art of narrative,"[5] but many others expressed their resentment against such straightforward use of the monologue: Paul Taylor for instance questioned its theatricality: "Is so static and interchange-less a work really theatre?"[6] Others, such as Patrick Lonergan have pointed out the limitations this use of the monologue entails in terms of audience engagement: "[…] this mode of production turned audiences into passive consumers of information."[7] Contrary to McPherson's assertion that the audience are to construct the presented images themselves, the speaker does not allow much space for the audience's participation due to his/her presentation of the narratives as more or less coherent stories, and

[4] Conor McPherson in Bobby Kennedy, "Conor McPherson: Unrivalled Storyteller", *Writers' Theatre*, 18 March 2014, http://www.writerstheatre.org/Conor-McPherson-Unrivaled-Storyteller.
[5] Michael Billington in Eamonn Jordan, "Look Who's Talking Too: The Duplicitous Myth of Naïve Narrative, *Monologues*, 128.
[6] Paul Taylor in Nicholas Grene, "Stories in Shallow Space: *Port Authority*", *The Irish Review* 29 (2002): 70. http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/29736074?uid=3737856&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103799488263.
[7] Patrick Lonergan, *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, 334.

consequently these monologues face the danger of losing the emotional involvement of the spectators. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that whenever the playwrights create a dynamic relationship between the speaker and the text, or enrich the narration by a potent visual image or a gesture, they manage to keep the audience's attention and elicit empathy for their lonely characters. The engagement of the spectators slips very easily in performances lacking on-stage action and captivating visual components, therefore it is crucial to draw their imagination and emotions back into play.

Being aware of the danger that monologue plays might be viewed as "undramatic" and "untheatrical," playwrights such as Marie Jones, Dermot Bolger, Donal O'Kelly and others discussed in Chapter Three have adopted a different strategy of the employment of the monologue: their monologists re-enact other characters while narrating their story. These monologue plays thus involve conflict not only on the verbal level, as in the previous category, but the audience see the conflicts performed on stage. The attractiveness of such an approach to the monologue form is based on the fact that it demands a very dextrous performance from the actors, who are given the opportunity to display their skill at portraying a multitude of other people and express vast shifts in time and space. Moreover, in these monologue plays the verbal is just as important as the visual: like Arnold Wesker, the playwrights integrate all components of the theatre medium and create highly theatrical images. A particularly interesting example of such integration of the text of the monologue with visual images is Tim Crouch's play *My Arm*, where the characters from the story the protagonist narrates are represented by inanimate objects donated by the audience to the performer. The objects do not serve as illustrations or puppets, but their relationship to the content of the narrative is absolutely random as Crouch chooses them very freely. The disintegration of mimetic representation activates the imagination and emotions of the spectators, who are encouraged to make their own associations to what they hear and see.

Crouch as a performer dismisses his role of an interpreter, who filters the story by his own emotional involvement: he refuses to 'help' the audience by "having to manufacture the appearance of emotions"[8] and to interpret the story for them, but leaves them alone instead. The audience engagement is then elicited, in Crouch's words, by giving the spectators "a greater sense of [their] own authority in relation to what [they are] seeing."[9]

This dissertation has also shown that playwrights experiment with the ability of the monologue to go beyond the surface, beyond the mask of the character and explore the consciousness and subconsciousness of their monologists rather than to address the audience directly with a compelling story. Although for some critics the transposition of the dramatic conflict within a single personality might be considered limiting, it has been demonstrated that such plays could be as dramatic as a multiple cast performance: in McPherson's words,

> […] there's enough conflict in one person to make a whole play – all those swings, the oscillation in the mind, the self-doubt, the uncertainty, the stupid courage, the terrible feelings of inadequacy – that's more than enough. The hardest adversary we will ever face in our life is ourselves.[10]

The plays analysed in Chapter Four, Frank McGuinness's *Baglady* and Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children*, however, have used a very different means to McPherson's straightforward storytelling to dramatize such inner conflicts. The monologue functions as an access route into the inner world of the suffering protagonists that allows the audiences to observe glimpses of the internal conflicts and their effect on the psychological state of the speakers. Furthermore, these monologue plays are a far cry from direct confessional

[8] Tim Crouch in Stephen Bottoms, "Introduction", *Tim Crouch Plays 1* (London: Oberon Books: 2011) 13.
[9] Crouch, "Introduction", 10.
[10] McPherson in Kennedy.

testimonies, and instead test the limits of communication. The monologists in both *Baglady* and *Seven Jewish Children* (when performed by a single actress), though still privileged by being the only voice to be heard from the stage, resent relating their trauma and rather present highly dubious narratives full of contradictions, involuntary slips of the tongue, omissions and lies that immediately attract attention. As Bruce Weber has summarized, "To endure the world, people may lie about themselves or to themselves, and the lies are as important as the truth."[11] The openness, fragmentariness, and ambiguity of such monologue plays function as catalysts for the audience to fill in the missing context and contest the reliability of what they hear. The emotions of the spectators are allured to, but the plays do not present any easy reward for the spectators. In *Baglady* McGuinness makes the audience watch the horrendous effect of sexual abuse on the psychological state of the silenced victim and achieves exceptional emotional intensity. The combination of the fragmented narrative with gestures and body language that slip out of control expresses the inner play inside Baglady's distorted mind most eloquently, but offers no catharsis. Caryl Churchill in *Seven Jewish Children* makes the audience face a speaker who voices brutal feelings of hatred against the Palestinian community in a language repeating ancient anti-Semitic stereotypes. However, the fact that the play had previously shown the trajectory that led to the present situation of the monologist complicates a simple rejection of such a character and makes the spectators examine their own political views. Churchill has provoked exceptionally strong reactions, both positive and negative, by writing an open, fluid text that enables various, even contradictory, interpretations. In the extremely short time span of ten minutes, she has managed to present the complexity and contradictory nature of a personal reaction to such an ongoing conflict as the Middle East crisis.

[11] Bruce Weber, "Inventing Her Life As She Goes Along", *The New York Times*, 4 December 2003, 21 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/04/theater/theatre-review-inventing-her-life-as-she-goes-along/printversion/13574689.html.

The authors of documentary theatre, on the other hand, elicit audience engagement by confronting the spectators with straightforward testimonies of real-life events. As has been shown in the analysis of the documentary monologue *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, this technique is inherently problematic as the theatrical presentation of such material inevitably includes fictionalisation. In terms of its use of the monologue format, the main drawback of the play is that the central character is presented as a self-assured speaker, who preaches her truth to the audience. The monologue form has not been used for character introspection, but merely as a convenient medium to convey the story of Rachel. The audience's role is limited to a passive consumption of 'messages.' The most interesting aspect of this documentary monologue, however, consists in the difference between the reception of the play in the U.K. and the U.S. The initial London production was "warmly received without setting off polemical fireworks"[12] by British audiences and critics, whereas in America the media scandal caused by the cancellation of the production by the New York Theatre Workshop started up a heated public debate not only about the actual Rachel Corrie case, but importantly also about the moral cowardice of NYTW. As Ben Brantley recalls: "Rachel Corrie became a name best not mentioned at Manhattan dinner parties if you wanted your guests to hold on to their good manners."[13] It might be argued that were it not for the media controversy in the U.S., the play would have been largely forgotten. As the reaction of the audiences in the U.K. indicates, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* elicited merely a passive, if welcoming, reception of like-minded spectators, but not a true engagement and public debate about its controversial political topic. Because of its unusual off-stage life, however, this documentary monologue is now considered exemplary of progressive political theatre: as Walter Davies has sarcastically commented, "*My Name is Rachel Corrie* is now the Pavlovian stimulus before which vast

[12] Ben Brantley, "Notes from a Young Idealist in a World Gone Awry", *The New York Times*, 16 October 2006, 22 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/theater/reviews/16rach.html?_r=0.
[13] Brantley.

audiences will salivate on cue in order to leave the theatre congratulating themselves on how liberal, progressive and daring they are."[14]

If we were to give an example of contemporary monologue plays that would fit perfectly the description given by Molly Flatt in the beginning of this conclusion, then it arguably must be David Hare's *Via Dolorosa* and *Wall*, which are the subject of Chapter Seven. By deciding to perform them himself instead of regular actors, Hare has brought forth "[...] the fragility of the membranes separating author, actor, character and audience" in a particularly complex way. By blurring the boundaries between David Hare the playwright, David Hare the performer and David Hare the autobiographical character, he has made the audience examine the nature of autobiographical theatre performance and the relationship between facts and fiction. For David Hare, the question of audience engagement and his own role as a playwright has always been of the utmost importance. Throughout his career, Hare has been experimenting with various dramatic forms to convey his ideas to the audience, from big 'state-of-the-nation' plays to his specific use of docudrama, but it is the monologue form that has enabled him to be most self-reflexive. Hare dramatized his struggle to find an appropriate personal and artistic response to the incredibly complicated conflict between Israel and Palestine by placing himself centre stage in *Via Dolorosa*. Apologizing for not being a professional actor, Hare managed to win the audience by admitting his limitations. His performance felt real as the audience could see the famous playwright's vulnerability when performing for the first time one stage. By using the monologue in such a way, Hare makes his Western audience see through his eyes, but simultaneously by being exposed to Hare's self-reflection, the spectators are asked to inspect their own position and opinions as well. In other words, by performing his own monologue, Hare indirectly makes the audience answer for themselves the same questions that trouble him. In *Wall* Hare has pushed the limits of the monologue form even

[14] Davies 27.

further by refusing to act. In the stage reading he lost the protective mask of the autobiographical character he was portraying in *Via Dolorosa* and stood on stage simply as a playwright, who was sharing with the spectators his impressions from his last visit to Israel and Palestine and the everyday problems the newly built concrete barrier presents for people on both sides. In order to convey what he wanted to say, Hare did not need any other means. As Nick Curtis has pointed out, for the audiences, "These monologues are awkward experiences but always formidably well informed, engrossing and passionate. Credit to Hare for stepping to the other side of the keyboard."[15]

The last type of the employment of monologue that has been discussed in this dissertation differs from the preceding categories in that the performance involves not a single protagonist, but two or three monologists who deliver alternating monologues and mostly ignore each other's presence on stage. Instead of a dialogical conversation, they address the audience directly with subjective narratives that the spectators are invited to piece together. In other words, the playwrights considered in Chapter Eight have tried to elicit audience engagement by specific variations of competing or complementing monologues of their protagonists. The dramatic tension chiefly arises from the points of divergence between the individual narratives, the presentation of different perspectives on the described events, and the contrast of the lively oral delivery of the monologues with the largely static visual image of most of these plays. Because of its over-reliance on what is a merely verbal presentation of the individual narratives, these plays face the same danger of losing the attention of the audience as the monologue plays featuring solitary storytellers discussed in Chapter Two. For such plays to succeed, it is therefore crucial in what way the narratives are structured and what role is assigned to the audience. I have joined others in arguing that in the case of Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*, the form functions exceptionally well since Friel succeeds not only in

[15] Nick Curtis, "Hare Bangs his Head against a Wall", *Evening Standard*, 13 March 2009, 22 March 2014, http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/theatre/hare-bangs-his-head-against-a-wall-7413177.html.

creating psychologically complex characters, but also in making the audience actively participate in the construction of the meaning of the play. In *Faith Healer*, spectators have to resolve the contradictions in and among the three conflicting accounts of the unreliable protagonists. Friel's later monologue play *Molly Sweeney*, on the other hand, is exemplary of many problems that this format has been often criticized for. Due to the particular use of the alternating monologues in *Molly Sweeney* the audience not only get to know the characters from the other monologists' comments, but can almost literally read the monologists' minds. The characters explicitly tell how they felt in the described situations and therefore leave no gaps for the audience to fill in. The spectators are presented with a straightforward, coherent narrative that lacks dramatic tension. When the audience "have no work to do" (to refer back to Crouch) it is hard to get emotionally involved with the isolated characters on stage.

Given the fact that monologue plays featuring alternating speakers as a rule have the length of stage plays that feature multiple characters, i.e. more than ninety minutes, the playwrights need to be aware how demanding it is bound to be for the audiences to listen to monologists who mostly do not move around the stage but sit on chairs or stand motionlessly. As David Barbour commented on Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street*, a play which employs the alternating monologues in the same way as Friel's *Molly Sweeney*:

> [This] strategy leaves one impatient for action, conflict, anything like drama. [...] But narration isn't drama, and too often, the play bogs down in lengthy stretches of prose. There is no getting away from the fact that the last half hour, with its unrelieved parade of agonies, is a bit of a trial.[16]

[16] David Barbour, "Pride of Parnell Street", *Lighting and Sound America*, 10 September 2009, 23 March 2014, http://criticometer.blogspot.cz/2009/09/pride-of-parnell-street.html.

Another obstacle the audience have to deal with is that the monologists in the plays that have been discussed in the last chapter do not experience much internal development. The monologue is used to tell stories, not to offer insight into the complexities of the characters' psychology. Moreover, the characters are not unusual types that haven't been seen on stage before: in McPherson's, O'Rowe's or Barry's plays the male speakers are, in Singleton's words, "by-now familiar stock character types, all of whom conform to the man-as-victim trope so clearly established in McPherson's early plays."[17] Representations of women are either missing or are close to being stereotypes: women are either idealized as passive romantic ideals or presented as sexual objects of male fantasies. As Jason Zinoman has provocatively proclaimed, even when Mark O'Rowe wrote *Crestfall* for an all-female cast in 2003, "His range of characters is still limited to virgins and whores for women, and thugs and wimps for men."[18] It is refreshing to see that young playwrights Abbie Spallen and Elaine Murphy have given voice to women as well. However, as they have used the same pattern of alternating monologues as their male colleagues, their plays *Pumpgirl* and *Little Gem* seem all too familiar and suffer from the same problems: the straightforward narratives fail to maintain the attention and engagement of the audience for a sustainable period of time since the content lacks originality and is not supported by attractive on-stage images.

Given all these inherent problems, how is it possible that the plays using the alternating monologues pattern have been so successful both in Ireland and also internationally? The answer is undoubtedly that their power is the incredible command the playwrights have of language. Even when the audience might feel left out as their role is limited to patient listening to the insistent monologists, the virtuoso language of Friel, Barry, McPherson, Spallen and others attracts the attention and has always been positively received. As a

[17] Brian Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself?", *Monologues*, 270.
[18] Jason Zinoman, "In Savage Quarters, a Reign of Sex, Violence and Alliteration", *The New York Times*, 10 October 2005, 23 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/10/theater/reviews/10cres.html?_r=0.

particularly apt example of the mesmerizing effect such technique produces, Mark O'Rowe's *Terminus* has been analysed in detail. The richness, rhythm and dynamic of the alliterated lines in verse delivered by the actors resemble a music session in that the spectators experience the replicas as much as sound units as conveyors of meaning. As Zinoman has observed, "O'Rowe writes [in *Terminus*] like someone who is laughing at his own audacity, testing his own alliterative limits."[19] Even the harshest critics of the form, in whose view the monologue play is not proper theatre, and who admit having developed an allergy to such theatre shows, are likely to acknowledge the power of O'Rowe's play. In Sam Hurwitt's words, "*Terminus* is a spellbinding dizzying show in which it doesn't matter a whit that it's made up of three people standing around telling stories."[20] Interestingly enough, the spectators of *Terminus* are likely to be so dazzled by the extravagant linguistic surface and the bizarre grotesque stories O'Rowe's monologists tell that the question about the actual meaning of this theatrical extravaganza in monologue form will remain unanswered.

Despite many differences in the use of the monologue by the playwrights discussed in the space offered by this dissertation, it can be concluded that a dynamic relationship between the monologist and the audience is absolutely crucial for the plays' success. In order to achieve this engagement, the playwrights have to summon up all their skills not only to write the text for their characters to deliver, but simultaneously to provide the audience with space for participation, otherwise they lose the only communication partner the monologists have – the spectators. Without such interaction, the monologues will just show that the author "can write beautiful sentences"[21] and turn the audiences into passive consumers of information. The essential role of the productive audience engagement as the backbone of monologue theatre performance cannot be emphasized enough. Although it might seem that it goes without

[19] Zinoman.
[20] Sam Hurwitt, "Mark O'Rowe's *Terminus Spellbinds at the Magic*", *KQED*, 3 June 2013, 23 March 2014, http://www.kqed.org/arts/performance/article.jsp?essid=121657.
[21] Marina Carr in Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself?", *Monologues*, 129.

saying, many of the contemporary monologue plays, despite their commercial success and critical acclaim, fail to really engage, as the examples of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* or Friel's *Molly Sweeney* have shown. On the other hand, as Mária Kurdi has asserted, successful "monological drama is capable of achieving an unusual 'theatrical subtlety' as it engages the spectators in an unconventionally vivid dialogue with the performing narrator on stage, which enhances their role in the production of meaning at the same time."[22]

Although for some critics the current boom of monologue plays in British and Irish theatre is a sign of "an anxiety about theatre as a medium of communication,"[23] what happens during the actual presentation of a monologue play is a "personal interchange between actors and audience"[24] which may heighten its communicative function. Yet, the necessary condition for such theatrical event to happen is that the playwrights and actors pass the litmus test the condensed theatrical form presents and win the audience engagement. As the artistic director of the Vineyard Theatre in New York Douglas Aibel has pointed out, "There has to be something special for me to want to be in a room for 90 minutes with a sole person."[25]

[22] Maria Kurdi, *Representation of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama*, (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 130.
[23] Singleton in Jordan 129.
[24] Stephen Di Bennedetto in Kurdi 130.
[25] Cara Joy David, "Theatre Companies Learn the Value of Flying Solo", *The New York Times.* 3 May 2007. 26 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/03/theater/03solo.html?_r=0.

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Monologue Plays in Contemporary British and Irish theatre – Selected Published Scripts

1. Solitary storytellers – One actor/actress performing one character

   Bennett, Alan: *Talking Heads 1*: A *Woman of No Importance* (1982), *A Chip in the Sugar* (1988), *Bed Among the Lentils* (1988), *A Lady of Letters* (1988), *Her Big Chance* (1988), *Soldiering On* (1988), *A Cream Cracker under the Settee* (1988). *Talking Heads 2*: *The Hand of God* (1998), *Miss Fozzard Finds her Feet* (1998), *Playing Sandwiches* (1998), *The Outside Dog* (1998), *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1998), *Waiting for the Telegram* (1998).

   Harrower, David: *Ciara* (2013).

   Johnston, Jennifer: *Christine* (1989), *Mustn't Forget High Noon* (1989), *Twinkletoes* (1993), *Seventeen Trees* (2007), *I Have a Desire to Go* (2008).

   McCafferty, Owen: *The Waiting List* (1994), *I Won't Won't Dance Don't Ask Me* (1993), *Cold Comfort* (2005).

   McGuinness, Frank: *The Match Box* (2012).

   McPherson, Conor: *Rum and Vodka* (1992), *The Good Thief* (1994), *St. Nicolas* (1997).

   Stephens, Steven: *Sea Wall* (2009).

   Wesker, Arnold: *Yardsale* (1985), *Whatever Happened to Betty Lemon?* (1986).

2. Re-enacting others in their own story – one actor/actress performing multiple roles

   Aron, Geraldine: *My Brilliant Divorce* (2001).

   Bolger, Dermot: *In High Germany* (1990), *The Holy Ground* (1990), *The Parting Glass* (2010).

   Buffini, Moira and Reynolds Anna: *Jordan* (1992).

   Crouch, Tim: *My Arm* (2003).

   Donal O'Kelly: *Catalpa* (1997), *Bat the Father*, *Rabbit the Son* (1988).

Jones, Marie: *A Night in November* (1998).

McManus, Maureen: *Maureen* (2009).

Ravenhill, Mark: *Product* (2005), *Experiment* (2010).

Walsh, Enda: *Misterman* (1999).

Wesker, Arnold: *Annie Wobbler* (1983), *Four Portraits of Mothers* (1982), *The Mistress* (1991), *Letter to a Daughter* (1992).

3. Split identities – one actor/actress performing multiple versions of himself or herself.

   Churchill, Caryl: *Seven Jewish Children* (2009).

   McGuinness, Frank: *Baglady* (1985).

4. Documentary Monologues – one actor/actress performing one character based on real-life model and using documentary materials.

   My Name Is Rachel Corrie (2005), eds. Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner.

5. Playwrights on stage – playwrights performing in their own autobiographical plays

   Hare, David: *Via Dolorosa* (1998), *Wall* (2009), *Berlin* (2009).

6. Alternating Monologues – two or three actors performing alternating monologues without much interaction

   Barry, Sebastian: *The Whistling Psyche* (2004), *Pride of Parnell Street* (2008).

   Friel, Brian: *Faith Healer* (1979), *Molly Sweeney* (1993).

   Harrower, David: *A Slow Air* (2011).

   McPherson, Conor: *This Lime Tree Bower* (1995), *Come on Over* (2001), *Port Authority* (2004).

Murphy, Ellen: *Little Gem* (2008).

O'Brien, Eugene: *Eden* (2001).

O'Rowe, Mark: *Howie the Rookie* (1999), *Crestfall* (2003), *Terminus* (2007).

Spallen, Abbie: *Pumpgirl* (2006).

Walsh, Enda: *Bedbound* (2000), *The Small Things* (2005).

Abstract

This dissertation examines a very popular and widespread trend in contemporary British and Irish theatre – monologue plays. One of the reasons of the recent boom of monologue-based theatre performances might be the fact that the condensed theatrical form presents a challenge for everyone involved – the playwrights, actors, and crucially also for the audience. The diversity and quantity of such plays present an obstacle that has deterred most theatre scholars from systematic analysis as it is difficult to decide on what ground such widespread phenomenon might be critically approached. Given the essential role the audience have as the only communication partner of the lonely monologists on stage, this work attempts to analyse the contemporary boom of monologue plays in the U.K. and Ireland by using a systematic framework, based on the various incorporations of the monologue, which enables examination of how specific strategies of the realisation of the monologue elicit audience engagement. First it explores monologue plays in which one actor/actress perform one character, then it deals with plays in which the performer re-enacts other characters, subsequently this work focuses on very rare experiments in the monologue form, where the performer re-enacts conflicting versions of their split selves and the audience are allowed insight in the monologists' consciousness. The discussion continues with examination of documentary monologues in which the performer re-enacts characters based on real-life models and autobiographical monologue plays in which the actors are replaced by the author. Finally, this dissertation analyses monologue plays that feature two or three actors who deliver alternating monologues without much interaction with each other. Regardless of the variation of the employment of the monologue, the backbone of any successful monological theatre performance is productive audience engagement. This dissertation comes to the conclusion that although for some critics monologues are a sign of an anxiety about theatre as a medium of communication, what happens during the actual presentation of a monologue play is personal interchange between actors and audience that heightens its communicative function.

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá velmi rozšířeným trendem v současném britském a irském divadle – monologickými hrami. Jedním z důvodů vysoké obliby této úsporné dramatické formy je skutečnost, že monolog již svou podstatou představuje značnou výzvu pro všechny zúčastněné – dramatiky, herce, ale hlavně pro diváky. Hry využívající různé varianty monologu jsou dnes ve Velké Británii a Irsku tak rozšířené, že jen málo teatrologů se odvážilo tímto fenoménem systematicky zabývat. Největším problémem je otázka výběru vhodné metody, kterou by současný boom monologických her mohl být efektivně uchopen. Vzhledem k zásadní roli, kterou v monologických hrách hraje publikum, jež je v monolozích jediným partnerem pro osamělé protagonisty stojící na jevišti, se tato práce zaměřuje na to, jak jednotlivé varianty využití monologu zapojují diváky do hry. Pomocí systematického rámce, který vychází z jednotlivých typů nejčastějšího využití monologu, tato práce zkoumá, jaký mají jednotlivé strategie použité britskými a irskými dramatiky vliv na aktivní komunikaci s diváky. Prvním typem her, jimiž se zabývá tato práce, jsou monologického hry, v nichž jeden herec či herečka představují jednu postavu. Druhým typem jsou hry, ve kterých herec či herečka hraje více postav. Dále se pak práce věnuje velmi nezvyklým hrám, které používají monolog k introspekci vědomí i podvědomí postav. V tomto typu her herci představují různé varianty sebe sama a diváci mají možnost nahlédnout do jejich rozporuplného vnitřního světa. Následně se práce věnuje využití monologů v dokumentárním dramatu, kde herci přestavují postavy mající předobraz v reálném světě a fenoménu autobiografických monologických her, kde herce nahrazuje sám autor. Posledním typem jsou monologické hry pro dva či tři herce, kteří se svými samostatnými monology obracejí přímo na diváky místo toho, aby komunikovali mezi sebou. Ať už se jedná o kteroukoli z výše zmíněných variant využití monologu, základem úspěchu tohoto typu divadla je vždy aktivní zapojení diváků do hry. Přestože podle některých kritiků současná obliba monologů svědčí o obavách z nefunkčnosti divadla jako prostředku komunikace, monologické hry naopak tuto schopnost zdůrazňují, jelikož při představení dochází k osobní komunikaci mezi diváky a herci.