

Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filozofická fakulta

Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Filologie: Anglická a americká literatura

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Monologue Plays in Contemporary British and Irish Theatre

Monologické hry v současném britském a irském divadle

TEZE DISERTAČNÍ PRÁCE

Vedoucí práce: doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD.

2014

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 the condensed form presents a challenge for everyone involved: it makes us ask questions about the very nature of theatre, performance and our role as audience. 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 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.

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 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. 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

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>.

dramatic text are 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.”² 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.”³ 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.”⁴ Although dialogical plays are still dominant, plays employing the monologue format have been an inherent part of this incredibly fertile wave of new writing and deserve our critical attention.

Despite being 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 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.”⁵ 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

² 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.

³ Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalisation: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 22.

⁴ Fintan O’Toole, *Critical Moments: Fintan O’Toole on Modern Irish Theatre*, (Dublin: Peter Lang, 2003) 295.

⁵ Joseph H. O’Meally, *Alan Bennett – A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001) 87.

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."⁶

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 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.⁷

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

⁶ 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).

⁷ Conor McPherson in Bobby Kennedy, "Conor McPherson: Unrivalled Storyteller", *Writers' Theatre*, 18 March 2014, <http://www.writerstheatre.org/Conor-McPherson-Unrivalled-Storyteller>.

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,”⁸ 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?”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ 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 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

⁸ Michael Billington in Eamonn Jordan, “Look Who’s Talking Too: The Duplicitous Myth of Naïve Narrative”, *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 128.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ Patrick Lonergan, “Donal O’Kelly”, *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights*, eds. Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer (London: Methuen Drama, 2010) 334.

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"¹¹ 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."¹²

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.¹³

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 testimonies, and instead test the limits of communication. The monologists in both *Baglady*

¹¹ Tim Crouch in Stephen Bottoms, "Introduction", *Tim Crouch Plays 1* (London: Oberon Books: 2011) 13.

¹² Crouch, "Introduction", 10.

¹³ McPherson in Kennedy.

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.”¹⁴ 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.

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

¹⁴ 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>.

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”¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ 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 audiences will salivate on cue in order to leave the theatre congratulating themselves on how liberal, progressive and daring they are.”¹⁷

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

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Brantley.

¹⁷ Walter A. Davies, *Art and Politics Psychoanalysis, Ideology, Theatre* (London: Pluto Press, 2007) 27.

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 on 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 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."¹⁸

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

¹⁸ 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>.

Friel's *Faith Healer*, the form functions exceptionally well since Friel succeeds not only in 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.¹⁹

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

¹⁹ 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>.

trope so clearly established in McPherson's early plays."²⁰ 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."²¹ 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 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."²² 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."²³ Interestingly enough, the spectators of *Terminus* are likely to be so dazzled by the extravagant linguistic surface and the

²⁰ Brian Singleton, "Am I Talking to Myself? Men, Masculinities and the Monologue in Contemporary Irish Theatre", *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, 270.

²¹ 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.

²² Zinoman.

²³ 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>.

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”²⁴ 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 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.”²⁵ 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,”²⁶ what happens during the actual presentation of a monologue play is a “personal interchange between actors and audience”²⁷ 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.”²⁸

²⁴ Marina Carr in Singleton, “Am I Talking to Myself?” *Monologues*, 129.

²⁵ Maria Kurdi, *Representation of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama*, (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 130.

²⁶ Brian Singleton in Jordan, 129.

²⁷ Stephen Di Benedetto in Kurdi, 130.

²⁸ 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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