Looking Through Gender

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Post-1980 British and Irish Drama

By

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PART I:

ON DRAMATURGY

CHAPTER ONE

GENDER ON THE BRITISH AND IRISH STAGES (1980-TODAY): AN OVERVIEW

Introduction: performing bodies, performing genders

On 14 February 1979 Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* opened at London's Darlington College of Arts. The play offered an astute parody of gender stereotypes; the regulation of gender was illustrated by the performing body itself. While the first half of the play performed gender as a range of compulsory positions assigned by western social dynamics in a Victorian setting, the second half showed that England, in the period from 1970 to 1980, was not that different from the colonial reality in South Africa. This counter-reading embedded in *Cloud Nine* both provided a model for and represented a watershed moment for visions on gender which sprang up in Britain and Ireland throughout the following years and right up to the present moment. For Elin Diamond, Churchill was inspired by Michel Foucault in "her evocative ways of understanding gender oppression as the production of 'docile bodies' in the family that, by extension, buttresses schools, the military, and other branches of state power" (1988, 196). Foucault contested that there exists a physicality of the body "prior to its signification and form"; for him, "[t]he culturally constructed body is the result of a diffuse and active structuring of the social field with no magical or ontoteological origins" (Butler 1989, 607).

Foucault's theories have substantially altered the way playwrights and critics view the body in performance. Richard Allen Cave argues that there is a cause-effect relationship between theories on the body from different contexts of contemporary theory and the rise of physical performance in the 1990s. These different readings show "how to *read* both social and performing bodies and how to discriminate in the process between the performing and the performative; how to be alert to the individual body's shaping under acculturating influences; how to determine the degree to which that body is *constructed* by external forces" (2001, 108). The

presentation of the body in *Cloud Nine* was informed by a markedly materialist feminist agenda. This volume shares the assumption that, in theatre studies, as women working in post-war drama started to explore possibilities to find a voice of their own—at the level of playwriting, directing, and acting—they were developing radically new strategies of empowerment and resistance to normative regimes. These strategies proved to be a major turning point in British and Irish theatre histories and gender then became the point of entry into the articulation of human experience.

For British audiences Churchill's play was a daring, successful attempt to cope with times of radically changing politics, in particular to the conservatism which would dominate in England in the upcoming fifteen years. The text joined a wave of political writing which included women playwrights like Michelene Wandor, Sarah Daniels, and Churchill herself. In Ireland, the history of women's performance since the 1980s is a mirror of the commitment of activist movements against a (hetero)patriarchal society hallowed by the Catholic Church. Theatre writing by women grew at great speed. Northern Irish drama by women acquired in Christina Reid and Marie Jones's works its feature of "resilience, fortitude and ... the sharp and vibrant humour" (McMullan 1993, 120) which was able to respond to the local culture, thus giving a paradigmatic answer to the sectarian violence of the Troubles. The South was to undergo a period of economic crisis, from which the country would rise and in very little time ascend to the Celtic Tiger era.

Brechtian and Artaudian influences are obviously interspersed in the various forms of experimentation and explosion of conventional theatre boundaries, and have been extensively reworked by contemporary criticism. In most cases, these influences pertain to the role of the body and its relation to power, and the depiction of violence. The contradictions of Margaret Thatcher's government—of apparent freedom from state intervention while centralising power "within itself" (Peacock 1999, 41)—were unveiled by politically aware feminist theatres such as Churchill's and Timberlake Wertenbaker's, where the body was the favoured site for the articulation of resistance to political and sexual oppression. Post-1980s plays by Harold Pinter explore violence, torture, and silence as means of protest (Luckhurst 2006, 366-7). Conspicuous Pinterian roots can be found in Sarah Kane's combination of "small scale and large scope," (Quigley 2001, 21) as for instance in the bombing scene which leads from the hotel room in Leeds to the war in Bosnia in *Blasted* (1995), or in her version of Hyppolitus in *Phaedra's Love* (1996).

In Joe Orton's exaggeratedly flamboyant farce, *What the Butler Saw*

(1969) sexuality and gender stereotypes are radically, anarchically caricatured to merge in "an orgy of cross-dressing, gender confusion, and hierarchical inversion," as Jonathan Dollimore captures it, "an orgy of confused and *refused* gender identities" (1991, 315-6). Most obviously, there are elements of Orton's depictions of sexuality in Mark Ravenhill's social portraits, in which "sex is a commercial transaction and consumption sexually arousing." (Sierz 2001, 128)[1] Also, the "Dyonisiac chaos over order" triumphing in Orton's successful hit finds resonance in Churchill's and Ian Lan's experimental *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), and the same can be said of the "anarchic" sexually fluid communities of Claire Dowie's *Sodom* (2006). If the character of Truscott in Orton's *Loot* (1965), as Andrew Wyllie argues, incorporates "the inevitability of brutality and corruption within an organization whose masculinist culture fosters a kind of clubby criminality"—we may dare to trace its influence as far on as Gerard Stembridge's gay detective Pat (*The Gay Detective*, 1996). It is a truism that *What the Butler Saw* plays with sexuality along "income and social position" (2009, 139). This informs the more striking and relevant treatments of sexuality especially in the 1990s, for instance in the plays by Martin Crimp, Patrick Marber, and Ravenhill; part of Alek Sierz's definition of "In-Yer-Face" drama rests on this point. At the close of the 1990s, Dan Rebellato published his revealing account *1956 And All That* (1999) and brought to attention the extent to which a theatrical counter-culture attributed to John Osborne and the "angry young men" of his generation had been well under way at least since the previous decade.

One can really not think of the paradigmatic shift occurred on stage in the 1990s without considering the rise of queer culture and its spread in English speaking countries. The issue of the performing body as a locus both of power and of resistance staged by contemporary playwrights—Pinter included—has opened productive approaches to drama. *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) is structured, in terms of action and language, around a bodily relationship evolving as a "sadistic display or erotic power game." This game is enacted by placing the speech act and bodily gestures on the same level of action and meaning, even more so when the body substitutes the voice in telling "truths, which the voice would often seek to deny" (Cave 2001, 117-8, 126). This mode of dealing with the body and power returns in Rebecca Prichard's *Yard Gal* (1998).[2] The play uses cockney slang and patois, evidencing how language rewrites histories of oppression, a cogent feature also for British black and Asian theatres (Griffin 2003; Goddard 2007). Just like in Pinter's 1990s plays, in Prichard's *Yard Gal* "the empowered and the victimised are identifiable from the start ... and they are symbolic of a larger picture of state

oppression and abuse" (Luckhurst 2006, 359). There is nothing left for the two teenagers Boo and Marie to lose even if they still have a whole life ahead of them; this is the reason why Boo saves her pregnant friend from a murder charge and is sent to prison. The story is, as Boo says, "about me and Marie and the posse that we used to move with. It's about chatting shit, getting fucked, getting high and doing our crimes innit" (5). There is even less girls like Boo and Marie can expect from others, as conveyed when, under their first arrest, the policeman who pays them "for a bit [of sex] on the side" (11) pretends not to know them.

Prichard requires audiences to ask questions about British society at large: the two girls emerge somewhat as women successors of "the wives of unemployed working-class men, and the mothers of children with jobless futures" in Thatcherite Britain (Aston 1995, 76). But, as was the case with the recent production at the Oval House theatre (October-November 2008),[3] the play may still bear the same meanings for the London of today. The students making up the audience reacted very well and could easily engage in the language of youth mirrored so well by Prichard's style; through laughs and whispers, they also seemed to interact with the two performers. *Yard Gal* consists of a "shared, rather than single narration" (Aston 2003a, 73). Body language plays a fundamental role in Boo's and Marie's storytelling. In particular, the actresses have to re-create specific movements as markers of the characters' identification with a specific class and its social contexts. Prichard seems to draw again from Pinter in showing that private experiences are "the source of appeal against anything political that loses touch with the personal" (Quigley 2001, 17).[4] *Yard Gal* remains one of the most successful and harrowing examples of how gender, class, and a renewed notion of politics converge in a drama looking at the past and the present, yet with the future in mind.

A year before Prichard staged her outstanding success, Crimp had destabilized and amazed audiences and critics with his highly experimental *Attempts on Her Life*, a "recipe for an avant-garde theatre" (Sierz 2006, 53).[5] A leading example of post-1980s dramaturgy, the play alternates seventeen different "scenarios for the theatre." Anne's identity is acted out and evoked by a series of contrasting viewpoints and perspectives, the most awkward and challenging ones being a new brand of car and a suicidal terrorist. She is "a presence ambiguously conjured as an absence." But for Crimp, she is essentially "a theatrical device" (Sierz 2006, 126, 237). *Attempts on Her Life* allows an unprecedented freedom regarding the performance of genders and theatre strategies. During its last Italian production by the Accademia degli Artefatti (Rome 2009), I was personally led onto the stage to impersonate a possible version of Anne.

Gender confusion was thus strategically employed to add to the humour of the overall piece. Despite its uncanny experimentalism, however, *Attempts on Her Life* remains a rather unified play, in that its characterisation is still the main issue, even though it is rendered in a decidedly unconventional way.[6]

In the 1990s, Ireland celebrated the advent of the Celtic Tiger, a period of economic boom whose first-hand effect on the theatre was to bring Irish playwrights to attention in Britain. This was true for new women writers like Marina Carr, as well as for the challenging theatre of Conor McPherson, Martin McDonagh, and Enda Walsh. Discussions over the new role that theatre could play within this process were channelled into how new writing hinted at "a series of micro-Irelands, all widely differing from each other in terms of the social reality they represent" (Roche 2006, 2000). This introduces the relationship between the new drama of global Ireland and issues of the postmodern—a relationship which is certainly harder to define than for Britain—to which I return in the following section.

The new millennium opened with Sierz's influential and still debated study, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* (2001). In its early formulation, the label referred to "any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation ... it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort" (5). Sexuality is perhaps the area in which this is particularly true. Marber's *Closer* is a case in point. Its explicit sexual language and content, along with its treatment of love, dependency and betrayal, of art and sex, and especially of the increasing appeal of chat-room sex are dramatized as indicators of the need to control those who are loved and desired. Sierz is surely right when he claims that sexuality in 1990s drama was presented as "raw, aggressive and often very troubling." More effectively, *Closer* addressed the ways in which innermost feelings can be turned into sexually abusive relationships, as well as sex which can be an escape from the constraints imposed by contemporary, affluent societies. Marber made it clear, though, that sex was "less seen as an exploration of liberating eroticism than of a desperate attempt to communicate" (Sierz 2001, 179), thus aligning himself with the playwrights of his generation.

In his study, Sierz went on to clarify that "In-Yer-Face" playwrights' use of shock tactics attempted to search a "deeper meaning" and that they were questioning "the distinction we use to define who we are," (2001, 6) that is, the binary oppositions which structure society and Western thought. This seemed to justify his criteria for selecting the diverse

playwrights included in the label. However, his undoubtedly well-informed study still poses problems. To consider the act of labelling a "democratic" and "political" process (Sierz 2002, 18) contravenes, in my view, the fact that the playwrights, as he himself wrote, were rejecting dualisms in order to replace them with "grey areas and ambiguous situations" (2001, 231) which lastly are not easily reducible to "good" or "wrong." The next section will explain the comparative approach of the overall volume and provide the context of the subsequent chapters.

The theatre and the "literary Canon": an analysis of Britain and Ireland

In a British context, the idea of a theatre canon is associated with the controversial rupture effected in post-war drama by Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956). From this point of view, Rebellato's book can be considered the first major attempt to question the revolution which the play is thought to have started. For Rebellato, Osborne's play made it clear that the decline of Britain and of Britishness happened "*within* British culture" (1999, 142). Together with other plays and playwrights converging at London's Royal Court, Rebellato continues, *Look Back in Anger* sought to establish a conservative tradition with the purpose to "masculinize" theatre against the "queer" subculture staged in the West End throughout the previous decade, for instance in the works by Terence Rattigan and Noël Coward:

> these were precisely what the New Wave felt were responsible for the crisis in British culture and identity; indeed, the whole revolution in British theatre can be seen as responding to the linguistic perversity of homosexuality which seemed on the point of constituting itself as an oppositional subculture, destabilizing the vital unities which seemed the foundation of a strong national identity. (1999, 190-1)

The book emerges, then, as a counter-reading of the dominant canon which had apparently been dismantled by Osborne and his fellow playwrights. This historical retrieval of queer sources in Britain has played an important role for some playwrights such as Neil Bartlett and Ravenhill.

The association of a theatre canon in Ireland and of its deconstruction with the formation of the nation as narration is of primary importance for the rise of women's theatres in the 1970s and their dismantling of conventional assumptions on gender and nationalism. I am obviously referring to Homi K. Bhabha's assertion that narratives and nations are

characterised by a shared development as fictional constructs. For Bhabha, the language narrating the nation is essentially performative, a space "where meanings may be partial because they are *in medias res*; and history maybe half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image" (1990, 3). In my view, the stage could function as one such space, and the queer subjectivities in the works of Frank McGuinness, the resistance to the Celtic Tiger in the plays by Carr and Gina Moxley, or the ambivalent positions occupied by women in the productions of Charabanc Theatre Company I will examine here are cases in point. In their remaking of history—meaning a single exclusionary narrative involving domination and exploitation—they lay "the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as 'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production" (Bhabha 1990, 4). This aspect is complicated by the increasing interest in globalisation in recent Irish theatre studies, as well as by the new directions taken by Irish drama. Part of the problem lies in the use we make of "Ireland" and "Irish," which I am now going to discuss.

Patrick Lonergan analyses the impact of globalization on the drama of the Celtic Tiger era (1990-2005) and outlines four different elements to sustain his thesis, the most important of which seems to be the way globalization has changed the "the old vocabulary of analysis" available to theatre and performance studies. He goes on to write that "the performance of Irish economy was influenced by the international profile of Irish drama," accelerating the process of internationalization present in literature since the eighteenth-century (2009, 5, 22-3). Lonergan points out that the term Irish has by now become "deterritorialized: it may refer to the physical territory of Ireland, but it also acts as a brand—a commodified abstraction that gives meaning to its purchaser instead of signifying the physical territory of a nation." He uses the term with reference to plays and playwrights coming from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in an attempt to "*ignore* those differences" (2009, 28). I acknowledge the value of Lonergan's proposal; yet, for the purposes of my study, it remains crucial to distinguish between the North and the South of Ireland even when tendencies towards a global drama emerge. Despite the new directions, we still need to map the specific contexts from which alternative subjectivities and views contest cultural hegemonies and hierarchies. To affirm the locality of any particular strategic place—be it geographical or metaphorical—at the same time as to acknowledge its effects on a transnational context seems an efficacious method to see, as

Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh write, that "the categories of 'Irish culture' and 'Irishness' are highly performative, effected through a multitude of social practices, cultural formations, and discursive utterances, and in timely need of critical address" (2009, 1). I would therefore speak of an *inter*nationalization of Irish drama, to borrow a phrase from Bhabha, a drama defined by "a chiasmatic 'figure' [or, figures] of cultural difference whereby the anti-nationalist, ambivalent nation-space becomes the crossroads to a new transnational culture" (1990, 4). Such a position is embedded, for instance, in Loughlin Deegan's *The Queen and Peacock* (2000) which will be looked at in Chapter 5.

My second observation concerns the postmodern questioning of the legitimacy of a theatre canon in terms of the shaping and performing of gender identity on the British and Irish stages. As a strategy to read contemporary theatres, "looking back" is the method that has offered major inspiration for criticism. For instance, Wandor's *Post-War British Drama: Looking Back in Gender* (2001)[7] casts a look at sexual politics and its representation in British plays after WWII; Harriet Devine's *Looking Back* (2006) analyses the changing politics of British plays staged at the Royal Court over the same period via a series of interviews with the playwrights; Melissa Sihra's *Women in Irish Drama* (2007) surveys a century of (partially lost) women playwriting in Ireland, whereas Dimple Godiwala's edited series, *Alternatives Within the Mainstream* (2006 and 2007) focus on post-war theatre histories of racial and sexual difference. Taken together, these works can be viewed as thorough, much needed archival accounts of post-war Irish and British cultures. Their analysis follows a more or less linear trajectory of time also recurring in my focus on the period from 1980 to the present. What is different, though, is how the analysis is articulated in terms of the orientation of gender in "space." Their relationship to the canon may be summarised by what Dollimore calls "perverse dynamic," that is, an opposition that means also "to be against (close up, in proximity to) or, in other words, up against" (1991, 229). I will try, instead, to "look though" gender; it will become clear that this looking through is also associated with a notion of politics rooted in the everyday, useful in coming to terms with the paradigmatic shift in "political theatre" that has taken place over the three decades under examination here. I take orientation to mean not only the relation towards objects, but also the way spaces are inhabited in relation to how one is directed towards objects (Ahmed 2006). Michel de Certeau's concepts of "tactic" and "space" can explain the movement of "looking through" carried out in my analysis.

In the 'General Introduction' to his *L'Invention du Quotidien* (1980),

de Certeau indicates a strategy which clears a space for "the other," such as the structures of organized power which constitute what is generally perceived as the norm. It is the end result of isolating a subject of power from its own environment; this subject gains the status of "*proper*" and thus determines its own exclusivity from what it is in relation with (1988, xviii). Politics and economics are the results of such forms of production. Gender, as the effect of institutionalized coercive practices played on the body may well be another. The tactic, on the other hand, "depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities.'" To associate gender to a tactic as understood by de Certeau is to follow the ways in which "the act and manner in which the opportunity is 'seized'" (1988, xviii-xix); which is also to say, in this case, the various ways in which gender identity is shaped and performed on stage. The stage, in this reading, may function as a space, for de Certeau a locus of passage and instability, yet one which gives everyday life a fundamentally political dimension. As a "*practised place*," the stage becomes in this formulation "a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts" (de Certeau 1988, 117)—hence, the gesture on stage is a political act.[8] Indeed, the relation between the terms "performative" and "theatrical (performance)," as Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris note, has rapidly become one of interchangeability. This, for instance, "potentially fosters the illusion that all 'repetitions' of gender roles ... are equally 'resistant,' and alongside this that the imagining or enactment of transformations of the sex/gender system in this sphere is enough in itself to (performatively—as in instantly) effect a transformation in the world of the social" (2006, 11). In a profoundly daring way, a very outward one, gender becomes a means to deconstruct, via the gesture on stage, the dominant practices which regulate everyday life.

Structural and political notes

Contemporary post-structuralist feminist theories have informed my analysis of feminist and lesbian plays. In particular, Rosi Braidotti's views on "becoming-woman" has offered political opportunities in this direction. Braidotti theorises a subject of feminism "simultaneously sexed and social; s/he is motivated by the political consciousness of inequalities and therefore committed to asserting diversity and difference as a positive and alternative value." This subject "may no longer be a she, but the subject of

quite another story: a subject-in-process; a mutant; the other of the Other" (2003, 44-5). It is an individual always in movement, as if in an on-going process of postmodern deconstruction of self and others; one who, as Gilles Deleuze's Nomad which inspires Braidotti, thwarts power differentials in order to affirm fluidity and change, the "transformative flows that destabilize all identities" (2003, 52). In much more generalised terms, this position is akin to views on progressive (Brewer 1999) or inclusive (Aston 2003b) approaches to feminisms and feminist theatres.[9]

There is another consideration to be made. In this study, the term "feminist" will be used with reference to "factors and considerations (financial, political, social, personal)" (Goodman and De Gay 1996, 6) for women working in different theatre sectors, and in light of the developments in feminist and queer theories. For playwrights such as Churchill and Wertenbaker (Chapter 2) this will include the influence of and reactions to the "bourgeois-feminist" look (Peacock 1999, 25) embodied by Thatcher's "masculine" look. The issue of feminist futures will also be addressed (Aston and Harris 2006; 2008). The chapter does not cover Churchill's later, more experimental plays, in which a series of themes exceeding gender are paralleled with the search of a new theatrical language for discussing a politics ahead of globalisation. The critique on Western exploitation and politics is also more encompassing, such as in *This is a Chair* (1997), *Far Away* (2000), and *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* (2006). For the women working in Northern Ireland, women's and feminist issues emerge in tandem with visions on the nation as a cultural production that has tended to exclude or ignore them. Chapter 3 focuses on works by Anne Devlin and Jones; the second part of the chapter looks at women playwrights in the Republic of Ireland, and the plays by Carr and Moxley.

In the past two decades, some women have questioned their own "situated perspective[s],"[10] contesting "the exclusionary operations and differential power-relations that construct and delimit feminist invocations of 'women'" (Butler 1993, 29). Its effects in terms of the consolidation of a drama by black and lesbian women are the subject of Chapter 5. In the 1980s, lesbians in the theatre continued to claim a group identity even though they exposed the exclusionary mechanisms implied in sexual categories. The future of lesbian theatres seems to lie in replacing aspects of performing sex and gender with a fluidity of identity (Aston 2003a, 98-9), as shown by the characters of Nina Rapi's plays. Black feminist and lesbian voices have offered outstanding contributions to British drama often rejecting "simple, coherent or complete understanding[s] of the text[s]" (Goddard 2007, 52). I have chosen to look at the plays by Mojisola

Adebayo, Jackie Kay, and Valerie Mason-John as representatives of the three decades under exam. My interest in this transnational perspective is the reason why I have included a section on Rapi, originally Greek but based in London. Her bi-cultural viewpoint is also relevant in the critical work on lesbian theatre and playwriting.[11]

A recent collection of essays on "Cool Britannia" by Rebecca D'Monte and Graham Saunders demonstrates that the concern for the languages of political theatre is not limited to future perspectives. Here, it may be sufficient to comment on how these radical breaks have influenced sexual politics and gender performance on stage. The previous section has shown that in Ireland this aspect is intimately connected to the passage from the local towards a global contextualization of experience. It is a truism that, as Luckhurst writes, "for many in the 1990s 'politics' had become infinitely more complicated not just in terms of ethnicity, gender and class, but also in terms of the purpose of theatre and the dilemma of claiming to 'represent' anyone." After the fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent breach caused in the European Left, a decade of conservative government, and an economic crisis in Ireland, the parameters of political theatre had to change. We now associate the idea of a unified "political theatre" with the kind of drama initiated by Osborne and his contemporaries "and [it] is a term that suggests an unassailable claim to authority in the representation of the political" (2008, 58-9). To look at the implications of this process on gender is to see how the interrogation of identity politics has opened paradigmatic possibilities for a rethinking of exploitative mechanisms of the sex/gender regulations which have dominated Western thought since the late nineteenth-century—to such an extent that "state-of-the-nation" drama is now a matter of placing gender within a transnational perspective. Within this framework, queer has intervened in theory severing the link between gay and lesbian identities and radically left-wing political commitment; moreover, it has substituted the terms of discourse with non-normative discourses which do "not just apply to sex and gender, but to other axes of identity such as race, class or sexuality, none of which can be broken from its context and singled out as a person's primary identity" (Gauntlett 2002, 136). Fluctuating economic structures in late-capitalist societies such as England and Ireland have also exerted their influence.

A couple of texts chosen as examples of these phenomena in the context of gay may help to clarify this point. Towards the mid-1990s, Jonathan Harvey's *Beautiful Thing* (1993) gained success for its dramatization of coming-out in a working-class context. Harvey's theatre ventured as far as to present conventions of hetero/homo and of white/black equally

disrupted, a rosy view which the film version possibly reinforced. Grae Cleugh's *Fucking Games* (2001),[12] by contrast, framed the anxiety over the lack of "political" concern in the gay community that characterises post-Aids uncertain times; it certainly did so in the words of the twenty-year-old Scot Danny:

> The gay community?! Yes, you're right. But then the idea of a community, as I understand it, is where people look out for each other. Most of what I've caught on the gay scene has been a bunch of narcissistic, tacky, cock-obsessed, sad fuck-ups who happen to share a common sexuality—I've never wanted to be part of that kind of community. (20)[13]

Sociology and cultural geography have recently drawn on the principles of anarchism and analysed the potential embedded in queer theory to create subjects aware of non-hierarchical, highly relational political interventions, and whose forms of aggregation are inspired by the collective gatherings of 1970s Britain. The commodification of gay culture, more the result of embracing capitalist consumption than of fading political ideals, is embedded in the figure of the affluent gay consumer, which Gavin Brown defines as:

> a man ... assumed to be white ... well educated, and employed in a professional capacity. He lives in the city centre, probably in a minimalist loft apartment that is largely decorated in a normatively 'masculine' style ... well-dressed, and immaculately groomed ... He has a long-term partner, but they have a open relationship that allows each of them to enjoy casual sexual encounters within carefully negotiated parameters. (2009, 24)[14]

Cleugh's play deepened this tension. But its refusal of reaching absolute political answers was used to accuse it of depicting old-fashioned moralities and stereotypes (de Jongh 2001; Taylor 2001). I think the play sounds very realistic in terms of what it portrays and the anger it raised at the time of its opening in London. Indeed, a parallel can also be drawn to the Irish context. For, the Celtic Tiger will be remembered also as an era of great motivation in making Ireland a leading example of economic, social, and cultural advancement (Lonergan 2009). The increasing appeal of the Irish queer communities figures the "Irish queer," as Anne Mulhall writes, as the marriage of future and past, of "tradition and modernity rolled into one; totem of a tolerant and modernized state, and domesticated unit ensuring the continuity of white Irishness and the containment of irresponsible rogue elements" (2006, 215).[15] The debate is wide open and cannot certainly be resolved easily. The past is still inextricable from questions around Ireland and Irishness, but theatre "must now tackle (or

exploit) the commodification and essentialization of identity within global culture in the present—a theme that makes Irish drama resonate internationally" (Lonergan 2009, 27). And, I would add, it is in describing this passage and the uncertainties it touches on, that adequate forms of seeing "the political" in drama need to be found, in Ireland as well as in any other Western context.

Post-structuralist anarchist studies, in my view, seem to offer a very interesting approach to the whole idea of political practices and anti-identitarianism. This study will show that they sometimes bear similarities with how gender and sexuality are approached in recent drama, without underestimating in any way the contexts of their production. Jamie Heckert proposes that anarchism may draw from the rejection of binary thought of queer and other post-structuralist (feminist, postcolonial) ideas as to evaluate "the possibility of recognizing complex political positions that involve more than one form of hierarchy" (2005, 102-3). These complex positions will emerge or be alluded to in the form of intricate mappings of dissident gender performances. A case in point is Bartlett's personal reading of what queer represents:

> spectacle as transgressions, emotional excess as both a tactic and a goal, the all-importance of eroticism, gender as masquerade, image interpretation as the subversion of image production, the prioritising of wit and aggression over authenticity and positive images, of internal contradiction over narrative coherence, the profound sense of an autonomous sensibility that can run rings around the dominant sensibility. (1996, 50)[16]

It is a reading where the anarchic stance typical of 1980s punk when Bartlett started his devised performances at college surface prominently. Once again, for playwrights working in Britain, the sub-text of many of the plays analysed here will have to be traced back to Orton's "anarchic indignation" (Dollimore 1991, 318) which defined his persona and the way he laid bare the moral values of British middle-class and Britishness in general.[17] There is arguably a similar stance in Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004), a book which has provided a number of very interesting points for analysis, especially in Part Three. The challenge posed by the book is invaluable. Its strength lies in the call for "the 'other' side of politics ... the 'side' outside all political sides, committed as they are, on every side, to futurism's unquestioned good," (7) that is, a call to action and to live the present for the sake of life; in that, it seems an extremely responsible call.

A recent approach to the influence of globalisation on playwriting seems to contain traces of the considerations carried out so far. I am

referring to Rebellato's theorizing of a site-unspecific theatre with which he indicates plays whose process of understanding is self-consciously transnational, and which "can be done elsewhere and otherwise." What interests me is that, in Rebellato's formulation, site-unspecific plays express "and articulate a kind of theatrical cosmopolitanism that give it a revolutionary ethical quality that is prior and profoundly resistant to global capital" (2006, 112-3). This last point, I would add, shares the concern of alternative readings of anarchism in providing alternatives to capitalist globalisation from within its economic structures as well as attempting to shape anti-identitarian, ethical communities. There is one last clarification to make. I have at certain points in this study used phrases such as "queer socialism" (Chapter 4) and "queer anarchism" (Chapter 8). I hope it will become clear that my purpose was in no way to coin a new label whatsoever. It was more inspired by the choice to insist on particular figures and their occurrence, or on instances of something which in my view makes the playwrights' contributions to drama significant, instead of reaching towards any clear-cut identification on their or my part. In other words, it can be read very much as an attempt to counter-read the idea of creating a narrative as "a political act, and its first step is an act of labelling, or branding" (Sierz 2008, 24). So, Part I will go on laying out the potential created by women's theatres in England and Ireland as a background to the following chapters.

In Part II, issues of performing genders will be looked at from the standpoint of the notions of "masculinity" and "femininity" when these are turned against themselves, either with the objective to re-think socialism in late-capitalist Britain (Ravenhill) and the nation (the section queer Irish plays) in the new millennium, or to dismantle exclusive notions of "women" (Chapter 5). Chapter 4 also considers three interventions on Oscar Wilde's canon. There, I have used the term "homosexual" in order to stress that it was only towards the end of the nineteenth-century that medical discourse coined the word to associate the sexuality with an identity. The sodomite, meaning "someone who performed a certain kind of act" (Dollimore 1991, 238) disappeared from normative discourse on sexuality. It seemed extremely pertinent to include analyses of Charabanc Theatre Company and Glasshouse Productions (Chapter 6) with which to conclude this part. The five voices chosen for the case-studies in Part III are Neil Bartlett, Claire Dowie, Kevin Elyot, Sarah Kane, Frank McGuinness. It is impossible, and it would be after all unjust, to find a common thread linking voices as diverse as theirs. The gestures on stage shall speak for the texts, and for their creators.

Notes

[1] See also Wyllie (2009).
[2] Prichard [1998] 2000; subsequent references are in brackets.
[3] The play ran from 28 October to 15 November as part of the '33% Festival of Youth Arts' supported by St Mary's University College, Twickenham (London).
[4] Austin Quigley is here referring to Pinter's *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), and *Party Time* (1991).
[5] Crimp 2005, 197-284; subsequent references are in brackets**.**
[6] This point was also discussed by the members of the company Accademia degli Artefatti during a radio broadcast on their previous opening of Ravenhill's *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat* [*Spara, trova il tesoro e ripeti*] at Teatro Mercadante (Naples); see Audino (2009).
[7] The book is a revised version of her *Look Back in Gender* (1987).
[8] I wish to thank Dan Rebellato for the useful suggestions on this argument.
[9] I am here drawing on the difference between an inclusive and exclusive form of feminism which Aston (2003b) outlines in her critique of Wertenbaker's *Abel's Sister* (1984).
[10] Goodman has explained "situated perspective" as that position used by women to foreground "their differences and personal positions in relation to their politics"; the concept, Goodman stresses, "may be applied to feminist performance as well as to writing and reading" (1993: 21); Goodman derives her reading of situated perspective from Donna Haraway; originally, notions of "politics of location" and "positionality" had been theorised by, respectively, Adrienne Rich and Linda Martín Alcoff.
[11] For criticism on other lesbian playwrights, their works, and the contexts of their production, see the following studies: Aston and Harris (2008); Goodman (1993); Goodman and de Gay (1997); Gale and Gardner (2004); Heddon (2008); Wandor (2001); Wyllie (2009).
[12] Cleugh 2001; subsequent references are in brackets.
[13] Quotation from playtexts have been included with due respect to their original published or unpublished versions.
[14] I wish to thank Gavin Brown for kindly sending me a copy of his essay before it came out as a publication; the page reference are to the unpublished version of his essay. For the published version, see Brown (2009).
[15] I am grateful to Ann Mulhall for sending me a copy of her essay.
[16] The quotation refers to a conference paper Bartlett gave for the 1994 edition of the festival 'It's queer up north', in Manchester.
[17] For a survey on Orton's influence on contemporary drama and British queer culture, see Coppa (2003).

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN'S BODIES IN THE PLAYS OF CARYL CHURCHILL AND TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

The body is still a primary concern for feminism. The body in performance relates to questions of empowerment and resistance. The site of articulation of difference(s), the performing body is invested with the authority to question patriarchal hetero-normativity. In the 1990s, feminist critics articulated several theories on the body by re-contextualizing the notion of materiality. Crucial in this regard is Judith Butler's call to return to matter "as a *sign* which in its redoublings and contradictions enacts an inchoate drama of sexual difference," (1993, 49) for it has fuelled a series of inter-related ideas and theories on the body itself. The present analysis assumes that the body is the interconnection of gender, race, class, and sexuality; or, as Peter Brooks has indicated, the body will be extended to assimilate "biological entity, psycho-sexual construction, cultural product" (1993, xii). It also presupposes that biology can only be considered through specifically situated perspectives, or locations for resistance.

There is a relation between the body and its investment of power toward the empowerment of "difference." Post-structuralist philosophers like Michel Foucault have taught us that power is not a pre-given, pre-discursive condition; rather, it is a complex set of relationships literally and materially shaping bodies. Butler's studies on the body provide a groundbreaking contribution to theatre and performance studies. She reads materiality in terms of performativity—i.e., "One is not simply a body, but in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well"; she thus views the body as "always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention ... the body is a historical situation ... and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" (1988, 521). This chapter attempts to demonstrate that whereas the performing body of "Women" has contributed to resist their exploitation by dominant,

patriarchal norms, it is primarily a discursive site for embodied feminist alternatives.

The decision to deal with Churchill and Wertenbaker in the same study is motivated by the fact that they have both worked extensively in the mainstream and independent sectors. But there is a clarification to make here. Whereas Churchill's role in contemporary women's theatre has been cemented by several monographs, Wertenbaker has received far less critical attention; not least, perhaps, because she started playwriting in the 1980s, a time when Churchill had already acquired her status as a leading British feminist writer. Also, Wertenbaker's mixed background makes her a rather exceptional figure in contemporary British theatre (Aston 2003a). The following sections will investigate instances of women's bodies in performance through figures such as the body as political resistance, the body in fairy tales and folklore, and the exiled body victimised by capitalist consumption. My analysis will draw from the works of feminist scholars who have started from the body as "an historical idea," as Simone de Beauvoir has claimed (Butler 1988), and look at how the two playwrights have cast a feminist perspective on the British stage and engaged in new possibilities for the future of feminism.

"She's not one of us": plays for Margaret Thatcher

The government of Margaret Thatcher gave rise to a counter tradition within British theatre which influenced gender representations well beyond the 1980s. Extensive cuts in subsidized theatre funding problematized even further the condition of women playwrights. Keith D. Peacock has argued that 1980s women's theatre had by then lost its interest in techniques such as agitprop and documentary, "too simplistic and outdated" for an effective political theatre (1999, 152). Feminist parodies of Thatcher's Britain, its values and ideals are central to the plays considered in this section.

Churchill's political theatre in the 1980s is said to bear similarities with her pre-1980 productions in the way it shows women characters as "surrogate men ... token representative[s]" of the male world (Godiwala 2003, 38-9). *Softcops* (1984)[1] is inspired by Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* (1975) and casts a feminist look on alternative measures of punishment and detention. It also takes inspiration from early Thatcherite policies of control, as Churchill writes: "In 1985 ... the Government are attempting to depoliticise the miners and the rioters emphasizing a 'criminal' element" (1990, 3). The play features no woman character, but it raises some interesting questions about prison as a means of social control, and on how