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**Women seen and unseen: The Dramaturgy of
Character, Space and Place in three adaptations
for the Irish Stage 2014-2019**

Thesis presented by
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for the degree of
Masters by Research

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Abstract:

Through an analysis of the dramaturgy of character, space and place in three plays adapted by women since the financial crash in 2008, this thesis argues the case for recognition of a new epoch of female character representation on the Irish stage in line with changes signalled in wider cultural and societal contexts. To do so, this research will look at the texts and performances of three adaptations, *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride (adapted by Annie Ryan, Dublin Theatre Festival, 2014), *Asking For It* by Louise O'Neill (adapted by Meadhbh McHugh with Annabelle Comyn, The Everyman Theatre, Cork, 2018) and *The Country Girls* (adapted by Edna O'Brien in collaboration with Graham McLaren, The Abbey Theatre, 2019). During this period, post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, changes in Irish attitudes and in the Irish constitution in relation to women occurred, leading to an increased visibility of women in Irish theatre both on and off the stage. This is the reason this time period has been chosen for this thesis. This analysis explores the dramaturgy of these three adapted plays against the backdrop of specific societal events such as the economic collapse in 2007/8; the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012 and the repeal the Eighth Referendum; the Taoiseach's apologies to the victims of the Magdalene laundries in 2013; the investigation of mother and baby homes; the same sex marriage referendum in 2015; the impact of the #WakingTheFeminists campaign in 2016 and #MeToo in 2017; as well as a number of high profile rape cases and the #IBelieveHer movement. All these events were happening at a time of high social media engagement and this, of course, made access to information and to platforms to express individual opinions easier than ever before.

My methodology is to analyse the dramaturgy of the published texts and performances of these three adaptations. In the course of this I will draw on:

- a) Theories and approaches associated with performance analysis in looking at issues of space and place and how these are represented on the stage.
- b) Theories and approaches to adaptation and dramaturgy.
- c) Studies on representation of gender on the Irish stage.
- d) Interviews with the practitioners involved in bringing the three plays to the stage.

In doing so, I aim to expose and explore new paradigms in the dramaturgical shaping of female characters in post-Celtic Tiger Irish theatre. To do this I will be looking specifically at the way

in which the dramaturgy of space and place contributes to character representation. This analysis is divided into three chapters, one for each play analysed.

The adaptation of literary works is a genre of its own and deserves research specific to it. As Lonergan notes, ‘it is a form of authorship that is different from composing original plays, but which should not be dismissed as inferior to that act’ (Lonergan, 2019, p. 116). Thus, as he points out, the future analysis of Irish stage adaptations offers a means of forming ‘a more capacious understanding of the achievements of Irish theatre during the contemporary period’ (Lonergan, 2019). In exploring the dramaturgy of female characters in the three stage adaptations in this thesis, I aim to shed light on some of these achievements as well as providing evidence of adaptation as a significant form of authorship in Irish theatre.

Introduction:

When referring to the status of women in Irish theatre, Patrick Lonergan states in the introduction to his book, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, that although it has seemed previously as though ‘positive change was underway’ in Irish theatre, ‘the world often goes back to its old tricks’ (Lonergan, 2019, p. 4). However, by examining three specific adaptations performed between 2014 and 2019, this thesis argues the case for the existence of new dramaturgies in action on the Irish stage which mirror a change in Irish culture in relation to women. In exploring the dramaturgies of character, space, and place in three recent theatre adaptations this thesis looks at ways in which these dramaturgies signal lasting change in female character representation.

In recent years, attention has been drawn to the visibility of women in Irish theatre. This has led to an increase in women working in theatre, both on and off stage, and an increase in the stories of women being told on the stage. The #WakingTheFeminists (#WTF) movement in 2015 and the subsequent *Gender Counts* report played a large part in this and acted as catalyst for change in Irish theatre. Many organisations have ‘incorporated this check of gender representation into their programming processes’ with this being ‘an important factor in planning and in funding decisions’ (Murphy, 2020, p. 2). Female stories and lauded work written and directed by women in Irish theatre had already been gaining ground post-Celtic Tiger with productions like *I Heart Alice Heart I* by Amy Conroy (2010), Anu Productions’ *Laundry* (2011), Deirdre Kinahan’s *Halcyon* (2012) and *Spinning* (2014), the critically successful female led *DruidShakespeare* (2014), and *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* (2014). However, with the Abbey Theatre (Ireland’s National Theatre), the lack of female representation in the Abbey’s 2016 programme sent the message that women’s contribution to Irish theatre was being ignored. Melissa Sihra, in her book *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, notes that ‘the essential and often most difficult first step is to get society to recognise that there is a problem’ and that ‘there is still a long way to go, but much has been achieved’ (Sihra, 2009, p. 152 & 158). This is evident in the most recent update to the *Gender Counts* report (Murphy, 2020) which notes that because of the counting systems put in place in a lot of Irish theatre organisations, improvements in gender balance have been achieved, albeit with more to do. Lonergan, however, notes that the attempt to highlight equality

for women in Irish theatre has happened many times before but every time ‘each iteration occurred as if for the first time’ and that although those in ‘positions of power’ may have taken note, ‘the status quo gradually reasserted itself’ (Lonergan, 2019, p. 4). The fact that reporting and accountability are now in place via the Gender Counts report, may herald an end to this cycle. I will examine how the three chosen adaptations by women of novels written by women expose ongoing shifts in character representation and how together with the Irish context in which they were presented, they have the potential to contribute to a lasting change, a change not so easily forgotten. Baz Kershaw notes that within the right socio-political context, theatre has the potential to ‘influence [...] the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities’ (Kershaw, 1992, p. 1). In this way, theatre can be remembered for its part in a particular social history, and for this Kershaw highlights *The Plough and the Stars* riots at the Abbey Theatre in 1926 as an example of ‘theatre’s relationship with the wider social order’ (Kershaw, 1992, p. 2). The plays studied here are examples of theatre relating to this social order and having a ‘performance efficacy’ (Kershaw, 1992, p. 1) when placed in the specific context of Ireland post-Celtic Tiger. Emer O’Toole draws on Kershaw’s writing to highlight the potential longevity of the #WTF movement in terms of lasting change when paired with what was happening for women’s rights in Ireland at that time (O’Toole, 2017). In the same way, it is possible to link the potential for lasting change in female character representation on the Irish stage with the social change happening in Ireland at the time of staging these three adaptations. It only takes a look at the Dublin Theatre Festival programmes for the years prior to and following #WTF to note that the balance of male to female stories portrayed as well as how the balance of women behind the productions noted has changed. It has gone from four female directors in the 2015 programme to twelve female directors in the 2019 programme. There were only two female driven stories in the 2015 programme and at least six in the 2019 programme (www.dublintheatrefestival.ie).

There were some changes in the role/view of women in Ireland during the last century; from the confining nature of Article 41, under Éamon De Valera and Archbishop Charles McQuaid, to the lifting of the marriage bar in 1973. However, given the patriarchal culture in Ireland, any advances or changes in representation of women on the Irish stage did tend to revert to the traditional masculine form and point of view. There have been attempts to highlight female playwrights in Irish theatre and to address the visibility of women in theatre (Sihra, 2009; Lonergan, 2019). Lonergan cites Charabanc Theatre as an example of a feminist theatre company which had ‘a transformational impact on Irish theatre’ between 1983 and 1995

(Lonergan, 2019, p. 3). However, in a 1989 article by Victoria White addressing the ‘small explosion’ of plays by women, Eleanor Methven, of Charabanc Theatre, noted that critics referred to theirs as ‘the best all-women theatre company in Ireland’ firmly placing them outside of, or not comparable with, other theatre companies in Ireland (White, 1989, p. 35). Sihra notes that the 1990s saw an increase in articles exploring women in Irish theatre and there was an increased interest in plays written by women (Sihra, 2009, p. 11). However, by the late nineties, the male monologue play had become the dominant trend in Irish theatre thereby erasing ‘the embodiment of women on the stage’ (Singleton, 2010, p. 70). I would argue that each time there was a change for women in Irish theatre, it occurred in very different socio-political contexts. Previous attempts in Irish theatre to draw attention to women’s issues or stories or to highlight forgotten female playwrights occurred in an Ireland that was not ready to move forward in how it treated women and other marginalised groups. Theatre made by or about women was considered ‘other’ in an Ireland still under the thumb of a patriarchal structure, making it easier to ‘recapitulate’, to use Christopher Murray’s description, when discussing the cyclical nature of the 100 year history of the Abbey Theatre (Lonergan and O’Dwyer, 2007, p. 13). There is evidence of at least a push/pull pattern for women in Irish theatre in the last century, if not a full cycle. However, given the changes for women in Irish culture and the constitution since the fall of the Celtic Tiger in 2008, changes within Irish theatre have the potential to have a lasting impact.

Feminist writing on Irish theatre highlights the existence of three-dimensional female characters which have been excluded from the Irish theatre canon throughout the history of our National Theatre. It is not that previous representations do not exist - as many feminist writers on Irish theatre such as Cathy Leeney, Melissa Sihra and others have noted in their studies of female dramatists such as Teresa Deevy, Dorothy Macardle and Susanne Day, to name a few - but all of this unacknowledged work has been paving the way for further forward momentum at the right time. That time appears to have been in the years since the financial recession in 2008. Since then, society and the state have begun to recognise the abuse of women and other minorities in Irish society. Arts funding has represented the views and ideologies of the state. However, with changes like #WTF, #metoo and the successful Marriage Equality and Repeal the Eighth referenda, Irish society is changing and therefore the support for certain issues is changing with it. Eamonn Jordan notes that the sources of funding for performances can dictate the ‘who, what, why, where and the how of practices generally’ and therefore ‘are arguably shaped by the imperatives of the state’ (Jordan, 2010, p. 14). In the case of the productions

chosen here, staged from 2014 – 2019, Ireland was then at a point, not seen previously, in which gender and equality were issues being debated, discussed and moved forward via actual change in the form of referenda, policy change and apologies from the state. Therefore, the social (and political) context of the time in which these three productions, alongside the dramaturgies used, helps these particular iterations of female character representations to have lasting impact.

Primary Texts/Performances:

For the purpose of this analysis three plays have been selected:

All three chosen plays for this research are adaptations of Irish novels and feature a young female protagonist, all three protagonists are from rural Ireland and all three deal with trauma. However, all three plays utilise different forms, as outlined below, for their adaptations and I will be analysing these to look at how the form informs the dramaturgy of character or vice versa.

A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing:

The novel was written by Eimear McBride and published in 2013 (McBride, 2013). It was then adapted by Annie Ryan for The Corn Exchange in 2014 for Dublin Theatre Festival with the playscript published the same year (Ryan, 2014). The archival recording was analysed courtesy of The Corn Exchange (Corn Exchange, 2014).

Asking for It:

The novel was written by Louise O'Neill and published in 2016 (O'Neill, 2016). It was adapted by Meadhbh McHugh in collaboration with Annabelle Comyn as a co-production for The Everyman (Cork) and Landmark Productions in association with the Abbey Theatre and Cork Midsummer Festival and the playscript was published the same year (McHugh, 2018). The performance under analysis was attended in October 2019 at The Everyman, Cork.

The Country Girls:

The novel was written by Edna O'Brien and originally published by Hutchinson in 1960. The edition referenced in this research was republished by Faber and Faber in 2017 (O'Brien and McBride, 2017) to coincide with the book's choice as the One City One Book read for 2019. It was adapted by Edna O'Brien for Red Kettle Theatre in 2011 and published that year (O'Brien, 2011b). However, the text was further adapted by O'Brien in collaboration with the director Graham McLaren for the Abbey Theatre production which premiered on the Abbey stage and toured nationally in 2019. The analysis in this thesis is informed by attendance at the Cork Opera House in the same year.

Following on from the success of *Jimmy's Hall* (directed by Graham McLaren, 2018) an Abbey Theatre production featuring music, movement and nostalgia, *The Country Girls* employed a similar form (although without the on-stage band). There are some notable differences between *The Country Girls* (2019) and the other productions explored here. Firstly, this was the only play adapted by the original novelist. *Asking for It* and *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* premiered in the productions investigated in this research, but this was not the first performance of *The Country Girls* on stage. It was produced by Red Kettle Theatre Company in 2011 who were purportedly 'chosen' by O'Brien to produce her script ('Edna O'Brien chooses Red Kettle,' 2011). However, the 2019 adaptation of O'Brien's novel is of specific interest to this research because of its collaborative authorship with Graham McLaren, Artistic Director of the Abbey at that time, and O'Brien's personal history as a female writer writing within the historical patriarchal structures of Ireland's 'national theatre'.

Rationale for selection of primary texts:

The three plays are adaptations of novels by Irish female writers written in varied socio-political contexts, allowing for an exploration of contrasts and commonalities in the dramaturgy of character in the periods involved. The subsequent theatre productions of the adaptations took place in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland (from 2014 to 2019) in a socio-political climate in which stories of young women and their trauma were finding an audience. Susan Cahill, in her writing on girlhood and trauma in Irish literature post Celtic Tiger notes that during this time period there was a 'shift in representation of the teenage girl' (Cahill, 2017, p. 154). She notes that following the recession, young women in literature were no longer

relegated to the position of objectified ‘sexualised commodit[ies]’ as they had been with many texts taking a more feminist approach and linking ‘girlhood, trauma, language and resistance’ (Cahill, 2017, p. 154). In line with Julie Sanders’ assertion in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, this thesis views the adaptation of these three novels as ‘political’ acts which intervene in the perception of character (Sanders, 2015, p. 97).

The three plays are also of interest to this research in highlighting the prevalence of adaptations by women in Ireland in the period following the financial crash in 2008. As well as the three noted here there were many others including Emma Donoghue’s *Room* (2017) adapted by the author in a co-production with the Abbey Theatre and Theatre Royal Stratford East, *Riverrun* by Olwen Fouéré (2013), Rough Magic’s *Phaedra* (2010) adapted by Hillary Fannin and Ellen Cranitch, *Anna Karenina* adapted by Marina Carr for the Abbey Theatre (2016), *Death at Intervals* by Kellie Hughes (2016), *The Scarlet Letter* adapted by Conflicted Theatre for Cork Midsummer Festival (2013) and *The Misfits* (2018) adapted by Annie Ryan. This contests other views, such as that of Lonergan (based on Irish Playography figures) that asserts that adaptations by women happen ‘mainly when writers are commissioned by theatres outside the Republic of Ireland’ (Lonergan, 2019, p. 113).

In selecting these three plays/performances for analysis there is an opportunity to explore the conditions of staging plays produced, written, or directed by women during the period under research. It is also an opportunity to look at significant changes such as the #WTF movement and subsequent *Gender Counts* ‘5 Years On’ report which finds that ‘the percentage of work being written/created by women has increased across all organisations included in the original research’ (Murphy, 2020, p. 3). As Annie Ryan notes, there was already increased visibility of women in Irish theatre in the lead up to #WTF with female-led productions like *Druid Shakespeare* (2015) and female-centric stories taking centre stage in productions such as Louise Lowe’s *Laundry* (Anu Productions, 2011) as well as her own work (Ryan, 2019, p. 6). There has also been an acknowledged rise in co-productions since the appointment of Graham McLaren and Neil Murray as directors of the Abbey in 2016 (Falvey, 2020) with two of these three adaptations being co-productions with other theatres. It is worth noting that there were also socio-economic factors to consider in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, with funding for theatre companies and productions greatly reduced due to the recession. The staging of an adaptation of an already established and popular text helps with meagre marketing budgets. As Anne Fogarty notes, ‘dramatizations of recent award-winning fiction could stand accused of profiting

from lauded texts for their cachet and accessibility’ (Fogarty, 2018, p. 502). Given that this selection of productions includes co-productions as well as a lower budget single-performer production and all are stories of female trauma adapted by women at a time of change in, and increased awareness of, the treatment of women in Ireland, they have a particular relevance to this thesis.

Methodology/Theoretical frames:

When referring to the ‘dramaturgy of character’ I am referring to the composition or construction of character as this is defined by the text and subsequently the relevant *mise-en-scène*. My specific interest lies in the dramaturgy of character when that character is (a) female and (b) originally written as the main protagonist in a novel and then adapted for the stage. I am also interested in transitioning forms or, more precisely, what happens when a novel has been written or set in a different ‘epoch’ (Fuchs, 1996, p. 8) than the one that the stage adaptation belongs to, and the different approaches taken to the adaptation of character. My approach will be to engage methods of performance analysis alongside theories of feminism and gender in Irish theatre. As I employ my methodology of performance analysis, I will be referencing interviews with members of the production teams. These interviews provide insight into the two stages involved in the adaptations - the adaptation of the text and the adaptation in performance - as these stages required specific choices which influenced the dramaturgy of character. My research is further supported by studies on dramaturgy and adaptation in looking at what happens to character when transposed from novel to live theatre performance.

This analysis will investigate the dramaturgy in the adaptation of novel to performed play looking specifically at the dramaturgical relationship between space and place and the character of the female protagonists.

Feminism/Female point of view:

In exploring the dramaturgy of character in this thesis, I want to investigate ways in which pivotal experiences of female trauma are represented through the composition or architecture of these plays and their performances. These adaptations all stage female trauma, from Kate’s

trauma at the loss of her mother, her father's abuse and neglect alongside sexual predator-ship from another older man in *The Country Girls* to rape, victim-blaming and public humiliation in *Asking for It* and sexual abuse and loss in *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*. The very staging of these traumas is a feminist act because it is 'not only that women find these themes [of rape and sexual violence] interesting (if not necessary) to express, but also that these themes have been part of a developing feminist consciousness in the theatre' (Goodman in Fitzpatrick, 2012, p. 183). In staging stories of female trauma, Irish theatre acknowledges and exposes the mistreatment of female citizens in its wider society. When writing about *The Country Girls*, Elizabeth Weston notes that 'the stories of those who are damaged by trauma and cannot heal provide a foundation for a committed critique of the conditions that create such deep damage' (Weston, 2010). Miriam Haughton likewise acknowledges that in the staging of theatre 'via embodied knowledge and viscerally affective encounters it creates a shared space for the unspeakable to struggle in its desire for articulation and acknowledgment' (Haughton, 2018, p. 2). In terms of female-centric performances, however, this presents challenges to the audience as to whose perspective is being represented. She states:

'Though pervasive in the arts and pervasive in the everyday, the politics of epistemology, of patriarchy, of neoliberal capitalism – manoeuvred by the long arm of history – create a network of value-systems which dictate women-centred traumas are somehow less real, marginal in numbers, not urgent in centralised public discourse, not relevant to the political and economic dynamic of a nation and, thus, easy to diminish in voice, visibility and potentially, bypass politically and thus, socially.' (Haughton, 2018, p. 14)

Cathy Leeney refers this to as the 'issue of identification' in an audience where 'the truths of womanhood, the quality of woman's experience are considered partial' (Leeney, 2010, p. 7). Hence, as Haughton says, women have been trained to identify with the male point of view, but men have not been trained to identify with the female. Therefore, as Haughton also notes,

'[...] the traumas staged become two-fold in narrative arc; telling of the traumatic encounter at the heart of the performance and telling of the traumatic context of women's experience being ignored, dismissed, and de-valued.' (Haughton, 2018, p. 14)

Given the predominant emphasis on the male story and perspective on the stage which, according to Sue-Ellen Case, ‘induces the audience to view the female roles through the eyes of the male characters, thus putting the woman in the impossible position of looking at woman as man looks at woman’ (Case, 1988), these plays are challenging the status quo by letting women look at women as women. Mary Trotter notes that ‘[a]udiences trained to understand and appreciate male discourses are often reluctant to embrace feminist forms, or they regard dramas with female protagonists as the theatrical equivalent of “Chick Flicks”, designed for a solely female clientele’ (Trotter, 2000, p. 165). This was in evidence at all three productions, as I witnessed a much higher number of women at each performance. When speaking to Julie Kelleher in relation to the projected audience figures for *Asking For It* and the audience who did attend, she noted that ‘the book had profile and was likely to have a female audience... And there were young women coming who were massive fans of Louise’ (Kelleher, 2020, p. 7). But given that ‘such an attitude can only change by increasing audiences’ exposure to alternative, gynocentric forms’ (Trotter, 2000, p. 165), these three productions have contributed to the cultural acceptance of the female point of view on the stage as well as bringing female trauma from the ‘shadow’ into the light (Haughton, 2018).

Women in Irish Theatre:

As all three plays/performances analysed in this research have been adapted by women, this study draws on the history of women in Irish theatre as well as gender and representation on the Irish stage. Although they are adaptations rather than new writing, the three plays at the centre of this research are examples of writing women into ‘Irish theatre history’. As Mary Trotter states ‘To write women into Irish theatre history, women playwrights write outside of Irish theatre history, finding new subjects (real Irish women) and alternative forms...to break out of the male-centred traditions of Irish drama’ (Trotter, 2000, p. 164).

Cathy Leeney notes that ‘Irish drama, even more than that of most countries, has been conditioned by the nation’s history’ (Sihra, 2009, p. 62). Women on the Irish stage have been used as a trope of ‘nation’ since Gregory and Yeats’s *Kathleen ni Houlihan* in 1902, but with very little life or subjectivity of their own. As Sihra notes:

‘The social and cultural position of woman has historically been one of symbolic centrality and subjective disavowal as both colonial ideology and nationalist movements promoted feminized concepts of the nation, while subordinating women in everyday life’. (Sihra, 2009, p. 1)

Although promised equality in an independent Ireland, women found their freedoms curtailed by Éamon De Valera’s government and as Lisa Fitzpatrick notes, ‘[i]ncreasingly in the decades after independence, female characters in Irish plays are confined to the domestic space’ (Sihra, 2009, p. 84) thus reflecting the reality for Irish women. More commonly, female characters were simply a support vehicle for the male narrative, there to ‘provide the protagonist with emotional support, a source of conflict, or as sexual interest’ (Trotter, 2000, p. 165).

The three plays analysed in this study are noteworthy in that their dramaturgy situates female protagonists with three dimensional inner lives, needs, traumas, and desires of their own at the fore with male characters occupying supporting roles. This dramaturgy radically challenges the status quo and historical configurations of gender representation on the Irish stage.

Theorizing Character:

Bert O. States defines character as ‘first and foremost, an intensified simplification of human nature’. He goes on to explain that ‘[he is] a Personality with a Character – someone who appears and behaves in a certain way and who carries within him a certain ethos or disposition’ (States, 1985a, p. 91). This definition falls short for the purposes of this thesis as it assumes character is gendered male and solely represented by its corporeal embodiment in an actor. Bert O. States does, however, point to the dispersal of character as ‘personality’ in his exploration of theatre of the image in which he asserts that ‘the thing traditionally allocated to dramatic character is dispersed into the physical universe of the stage’ (States, 1985a, p. 94). He explains further that this physical universe includes ‘any element of the production (light, sound, projections, montages, images, puppets) through which the performance achieves its meaning’ (States, 1985a, p. 94).

When writing about ‘the human figure’ in contemporary experimental theatre in her book, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism*, Elinor Fuchs notes that ‘instead

of providing perspectival unity to a stage whose setting acts as backdrop and visual support' in the Western tradition, character 'is treated as an element in what might be described as a theatrical landscape' (Fuchs, 1996, p. 92). This 'theatrical landscape' (Fuchs, 1996, p. 92) and the 'physical universe' (States, 1985a, p. 94) of the stage are critical to the analysis of the dramaturgy of character in three stage adaptations explored in this thesis.

Following on from the views of States and Fuchs in arguing for new definitions that apply the concept of character to the entire physical universe of the stage, it is also important to note the impact of the actor in character portrayal. Brian Richardson notes that the portrayal of a character by an actor can 'greatly affect the representation and its reception; dramatic representation by its very nature tends to complicate, enhance, or dissolve the unity of character' (Richardson, 1997, p. 95). Thus, in looking at the dramaturgy of character through the frame of performance analysis, it is through the work of the actor together with the physical universe of the stage that leads us to the representation of character.

This thesis is looking at the dramaturgy of character alongside the contextual situating of these productions in Ireland with a view to highlighting how the dramaturgy of character in these plays may be contributing to a lasting change in how female character is represented on the Irish stage. Fuchs notes:

'Each epoch of character representation – that is, each substantial change in the way character is represented on the stage and major shift in the relationship of character to other elements of dramatic construction or theatrical presentation – constitutes at the same time the manifestation of a change in the larger culture concerning the perception of self and the relations of self and world. 'Character' is a word that stands in for the entire human chain of representation and reception that theatre links together.' (Fuchs, 1996, p. 8).

As previously noted, female character representation has been limited in the history of Irish theatre. However, William Storm notes that characters in books, film and theatre 'accomplish a great deal on our behalf. They represent us, they stand in for us, and in so doing they profoundly extend our range of experience' (Storm, 2011, p. 246). This helps to underline the potential importance of the representation of character in these plays and thus their contribution to a change in the wider Irish culture as '[c]haracters collectively traverse a multitude of story

progressions so as to expand *our* experience, to fill in our world through a description or enactment of theirs' (Storm, 2011, p. 246).

Theorizing and Analysing Space and Place:

In the following chapters, I will be analysing the three selected plays and looking at the impact that dramaturgical choices regarding space and place have on the character representation of the main, female, protagonists. In the course of this, my argument will be that these representations, together with the social context they were performed in, contribute to a new paradigm of female character representation in Irish theatre since 2008 with the potential to have a lasting impact on Irish theatre.

In the analysis of each play, I will be focusing specifically on the geography of each play as well as the effect dramaturgical decisions have on point of view in the performances. Through the analysis of the performances, I will use material gathered from interviews with the various practitioners to identify specific aspects of the various dramaturgies that contravene established patterns of character formation and outdated tropes of the young woman on the Irish stage, tropes which deny female subjectivity. Mary Trotter states 'Irish female characters have embodied the nation, the land, the desires or responsibilities of male characters, but rarely have they been authentic, complex autonomous women' (Trotter, 2000, p. 164). In these adaptations, I argue that all three female protagonists are pushing back against these tropes of woman as nation, woman as mother or woman as 'other' and at the time of each performance this was in line with certain societal contexts in Ireland helping to cement this female representation. Each protagonist exists as a whole person, with needs, thoughts and desires of their own which are articulated dramaturgically throughout each adaptation in the way space and place as well as point of view are shaped and utilised. In the three productions, perspectival female subjectivity is embedded into the scenic elements of the performance ensuring that this subjectivity is to the fore and shared with the audience. This is evidenced through various scenic elements in each production including, for example, the use of video (*Asking for It*), props (*The Country Girls*) and lighting (*A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*) as well as sound, set design and costume in all three plays.

According to Jane Barnette, '[i]n approaching a literary source text for stage adaptation, some of the most crucial questions an adapter must ask revolve around considerations of geography' (Barnette, 2017, p. 89). Adaptations, as she goes on to say, 'rely on the transformation of imaginary into theatrical space' (Barnette, 2017, p. 89). These considerations include the location of characters, set design, as well as sound and lighting design and venue. When adapting a play from a novel, and then when creating a performance from a play-text, these decisions are not ambivalent or without consequence in the interpretation and understanding of the play. Chris Morash and Shaun Richards note that in a society, theatre occupies 'physical and cultural spaces' (Morash and Richards, 2013, p. 4). They further point out that 'theatre is not simply shaped by existing spatial formations, but itself produces space' (Morash and Richards, 2013, p. 4). In the spaces produced by Irish theatre, there has been a tradition of creating specific places for women and the domestic space has been to the fore. When referring to 'imagination of place' in modern drama, Una Chaudhuri notes there are certain 'figures and tropes that the imagination consistently favours, most notably the figure of home' (Chaudhuri, 1997, pp. xi-xii). Indeed, from Lian Bell's 'non-located' set design of *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*, to Paul O'Mahony's use of modern institutional architecture as well as the confined domestic space in *Asking for It* and the flowing, contemporary staging of *The Country Girls*, designed by Francis O'Connor, home, or the lack of it, is a feature. Each one of these adaptations has expanded the field of representation from the world of the novels by materially contextualising it for an audience.

Jane Barnette, when defining the terms 'space' and 'place' in her book *Adapturgy: The Dramaturgs Art and Theatrical Adaptation*, acknowledges that the definition of these two terms is difficult to pin down as they are continuously being debated. However, she defines the term place as 'locations with specific geographical coordinates' and she understands space as a 'more generic concept' (Barnette, 2017, p. 90). She notes that 'space is created by activating a place', therefore 'from a theatrically savvy point of view, space can be understood as a general concept, more amorphous than place' (Barnette, 2017, p. 90). She goes on to explain that '[T]he *place* itself is simply the location; once meaning is attached to the site, it becomes a *space*' (p. 90). In analysing the dramaturgy of character in these plays as it relates to space and place, I will be referring to space as the set design and staging of the play and place as the specific geographical setting (e.g., Ballinacorney in *Asking for It*), both space and place will refer to the world of the plays and not the venues in which they were staged, unless otherwise specified. All three productions were staged in various theatre venues and whilst the venue

itself is another space, ‘the spectators’ space’ (p 90), my point of emphasis in this analysis is primarily concerned with issues of space and place as relevant to the world of the play and the dramaturgy of their central characters. However, as I argue elsewhere in this thesis, venue is also significant in terms of contextual relevance (see pages 21 to 24) when referring to the cultural positioning of each of the plays analysed and the role that Ireland’s national theatre has played in the staging of two of these. Chaudhuri notes that ‘theatre grounds its meanings in that essential element of all theatrical presentation: space’ (Chaudhuri, 1997, p. xi). She further notes that an ‘intricate and often contradictory circuitry links the various spaces, places and representations of place’ in theatre (Chaudhuri, 1997, p. xi). To choose to stage a particular play or literary work is to state that this work is of relevance and value, Katalin Trencsényi refers to this choice on the part of a theatre as ‘an intervention’, one that can draw attention to the particular work and can ‘play an important part in their canonisation’ (Trencsényi, 2015, p. 31).

As there were two stages in the adaptation of these three plays, the text adaptation and then the staging, it is important to note how each play-text outlines space and place and therefore how much scope for decision making there was for the directors or set designers. Although the place, Ballinacorney, is clearly outlined in the production notes in the published script for *Asking for It*, the script does not specify a particular set or location in the notes on text. Some of the scenes have stage directions that indicate a particular location, e.g., Act 1. Sc. 1: ‘MAM is standing in EMMA’s bedroom’ (McHugh, 2018, p. 4). However, others indicate more indirectly where the scene takes place, e.g., Act. 1, Sc. 2: ‘The bell goes’, which indicates a school setting (McHugh, 2018, p. 8). In the play-text for *Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*, the notes are more explicit, ‘This adaptation was conceived for a solo performer on a space set with no props or furniture’ (Ryan, 2014, p. 11). Annie Ryan, the director and adapter, notes in her foreword that she intended to place it in ‘some kind of abstract Beckettian landscape’ (Ryan, 2014, p. 7 & 11). This she did with a non-landscape, one that, like Beckett’s, was ‘generic’ and ‘elemental’ with no specific signifiers other than ground and some slight changes in the lighting to signify time of day or location (Scarry, 1971, p. 280). This was in line with E.M. Scarry’s view on Beckettian landscapes that ‘such elemental settings universalize the situation presented and enable us to examine character and idea’ (Scarry, 1971, p. 280). This setting then allows the representation of the Girl without external pollution. *The Country Girls*, adapted by Edna O’Brien, very clearly states place in the very first stage direction of Act One, ‘A field in the west of Ireland’. Place continues to be specified throughout the script, e.g. ‘They are in a

convent' (p. 9) and 'Dublin' (p. 38). However, this script also utilises the indirect indications which should be included in the set, lighting or sound design; for example, 'Repeated chapel bells' for the convent (p. 9) and 'Street lights...' for the Dublin location (p. 38) (O'Brien, 2011b). This is a much more prescriptive script than either *Asking for It* or *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* in terms of stage direction and design elements for any production team.

To analyse these productions, I will be drawing on theatre semiotics as well as gender theory. Semiotics is a mode of analysis involving the 'encoding and decoding signs and symbols with Signifier and Signified (Binary – Saussurean model) or Sign, object, interpretant (Ternary – Peirce model)' (Pavis, 2003, p. 14). Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd further explain that 'the signifier represents the marker while the signified represents the idea of that marker' (Wallis and Shepherd, 2010, p. 155). This is taken further with 'vectorization' whereby 'each sign only has meaning through the dynamic that relates it to other signs' (Pavis, 2003, p. 17). I will also be utilising Aston and Savona's semiotic 'levels of operation' to consider the dramaturgical and production choices for the 'stage picture' and creative team choices regarding space and place for the three productions (Aston and Savona, 2013, p. 146). As set out by Elaine Aston and George Savona in, *Theatre as Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* semiotics is a method used for 'Reading the Image' in theatre productions (Aston and Savona, 2013, pp. 146-149). It has four levels: the Functionalistic, which is the practicalities of matching the staging to the text (e.g., needing stairs or specific entrances and exits etc.); the Sociometric, the visual indicators of class or social issues; the Atmospheric, which is the stage creation of atmosphere (e.g., claustrophobic or airy); and the Symbolic, which is as it sounds, the use of staging to symbolise themes or ideas. All four of these levels may be in operation in a production and the analysis here will apply them to the three productions under investigation. However, as Patrice Pavis points out, it is important not to discount phenomenology when analysing a performance; he notes that in phenomenology, 'perception of the performance event is global', meaning that it is experienced as a whole. He explains that by breaking down a performance into a series of codes it does not take into consideration the 'perceptual impression' that the whole experience makes on the audience. He quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty who says that, 'it is impossible [...] to decompose a perception, to make it into a collection of sensations, because in it the whole is prior to the parts' (Pavis, 2003, p. 17). Therefore, for this thesis, I will be drawing from Bert O. States who states that 'semiotics and phenomenology are best seen as complementary perspectives on the world and on art' and that together 'they constitute a kind of binocular vision' (States, 1985b, p. 8).

Space has particular relevance in theatre in Ireland with women having been confined to very specific and limiting spaces on the Irish stage. This represents where women have been situated in our society for the most part as ‘for the last 70 years the position of women in Ireland has been officially located within the domestic sphere in De Valera’s Family Article’ (Sihra, 2009, p. 2). According to Enrica Cerquoni, the realm of woman on the Irish stage has been confined to the domestic, the kitchen and the living room, and this has ‘been seminal in enabling and upholding the unbalanced gender architecture at the basis of the notion of theatrical nationhood’ (Cerquoni, 2007, p. 162). However, Sihra notes that ‘[p]lays by Irish women in particular, have sought to challenge this limiting constitutional ideology [...] employing dramaturgical strategies which challenge conventional realist modes and realms of representation’ (Sihra, 2009, p. 2). Given the restrictive history regarding women and space on the Irish stage, it is not surprising that in the contemporary staging of these three adaptations focused on young Irish women ‘space’ varies from no place in *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* to a fluid and constantly changing geography in *The Country Girls* and specific locations which subvert the traditional use of the female space in *Asking for It*. These dramaturgies of space and place acknowledge and work against what Morash and Richards refer to as the ‘metonymic representation of the nation through a set which increasingly owed more to conceptions of a national ideal than to its social realities’ (Morash and Richards, 2013, p. 4). As I outline below, feminist dramaturgical interventions identified in these three adaptations adopt strategies of ‘space’ to both unmask subjective experience and challenge the tropes of woman as passive, silent and denied subjectivity. These interventions begin in the text adaptations but are fully realised in the performances of each play.

Defining Dramaturgy:

This thesis explores the dramaturgy of character, space and place in the three stage adaptations outlined above. My definition of dramaturgy is drawn from a series of sources including that of Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt who note that ‘the dramaturgy of a play or performance could [...] be described as its “composition”, “structure” or “fabric”’ and the verb or ‘doing dramaturgy’ associated with it as being ‘an engagement with the work’s composition’ (Turner and Behrndt, 2016, p. 4). Mary Luckhurst then provides further definition of dramaturgy as the ‘manipulation of text into multi-dimensional theatre’ (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 11) including:

‘external elements related to staging, the overall artistic concept behind the staging, the politics of performance, and the calculated manipulation of audience response.’
(Luckhurst, 2008, p. 10)

As mentioned, dramaturgy has many definitions and the understanding of what is involved in dramaturgy can vary in different parts of the world. It can mean selecting plays, advising directors or educating the audience (Cardullo, 1995). Teresa Lang sees dramaturgy ‘as a mindset rather than a function’, ‘a way of seeing and communicating, a way of engaging with material and audiences and ultimately a way of looking at the world’ (Lang, 2017, p. 4). Writing in the context of Irish theatre, Eamonn Jordan states that ‘text-based dramaturgy is both the what and the how of theatre-as-text and as-performance and it is concerned with what narratives are being told and how they are being told’ (Jordan, 2010, p. 19). According to Barnette, meanwhile, it seems to be universally acknowledged that dramaturgy is ‘both product and process, noun and verb’ (Barnette, 2017, p. 29).

Dramaturgy can also refer to the ‘aesthetic architecture of a piece of drama’ or the ‘functional means by which that architecture is discovered in rehearsal’ (Posner in Barnette, 2017, p. 29). When writing here about the dramaturgy involved, this refers to the ‘structure’ or ‘composition’ chosen to present the material for an audience in a theatre space but as Turner and Behrndt also point out, ‘while it is a term for the composition itself, it is also a word applied to the *discussion* of that composition’ (Turner and Behrndt, 2016, p. 5). When referring to the dramaturgy of character in these adaptations, this thesis will be referring to the transference of character from the original texts to the theatre. In particular, I will be exploring how the three plays selected chose to stage space and place through the composition or structure. In doing so, I will look at different elements in these productions that manipulate the ‘text into multi-dimensional theatre’ (to borrow Luckhurst’s term) from the choice of theatre space to set design and other stage elements and then how this contributes to the representation of character in these adaptations.

Defining Adaptation:

In this research I draw on approaches to adaptation that will shed light on my analysis of the dramaturgy of character in the three productions under investigation. My aim is not to explore adaptation as a ‘process’ but to draw on approaches that point to its outcomes in the plays analysed in this thesis.

This research will lean on Jane Barnette’s approach to the dramaturgy of adaptation. She notes that the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of adaptation, as ‘[a] process of change or modification by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment’, is applicable to theatre adaptations (Barnette, 2017, p. 9). Expanding on this, Julie Sanders’s view is that in ‘adapting’ the work of other artists, ‘[t]he aim is [...] expansion rather than contraction’ (Sanders, 2015, p. 12). Likewise, as Linda Hutcheon has observed, adaptation is not merely parasitic or vampiric, but gives work new life. Through adaptation ‘stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places.’ (Hutcheon, 2012, p. 176)

In the case of the three plays in this research, by analysing the adapted texts and then the performances, I will be looking at how the adapted dramaturgy contributed to the ‘expansion’ (Sanders, 2015, p. 12) of the original novel to perform it for a live audience. I will be looking at whether the stories in the novels have evolved by being staged and if so, what the dramaturgy of the adaptation contributed to the stories being ‘materialized visually and scenically’ (Pavis, 2003, p. 201) to provide more information for a spectator than for a reader.

If, as previously noted (pg. 11), adaptations are ‘political acts’ (Sanders, 2015, p. 97), then one of the objectives of this research is to question how these plays related to the context in which they were performed. Barnette notes that representation ‘is one of the ways that theatrical adaptation can either reify or challenge societal norms’ (Barnette, 2017, p. 124). This supports the argument that the representation of character in these plays reflects significant and lasting changes in Irish society and, in line with this, concomitant changes in Irish theatre. This research also examines how or if, the original stories contained in the respective novels have changed in their transition to the stage. For example, in the case of *The Country Girls*, the novel was written for an audience in a different time and is an example of Hutcheon’s view of stories mutating ‘to fit new times and different places’. This novel was written half a century before this production and the director was intent on celebrating the writer and respecting that ‘people

go kind of dreamy-eyed’ about the book while staging it for a modern audience (Anton, 2019, p. 25).

As Barnette states in the opening line of her introduction to *Adapturgy: The dramaturg’s art and theatrical adaptation*, ‘The history of theatre is a history of adaption’ (Barnette, 2017, p. 1). She insists that adaptations have a dramaturgy of their own, hence her term ‘Adapturgy’ (Barnette, 2017, p. 1). For the purposes of this research, ‘Adaptation’ refers to both the process and product of using a previously published novel and turning it into a live performance for an audience. While the analysis in this thesis will focus on the dramaturgy of the adaptations and not on the process of adaptation itself, I will be referring at times to the process in order to identify specific aspects of the dramaturgy that relate to my thesis argument.

Defining Form:

The three plays under analysis here have each taken different theatrical forms. *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* has taken the monologue form with a stream of consciousness in its language, *Asking for It* is a mixture between non-realist and realist storytelling within the traditional structure of a two-act play, while *The Country Girls* takes the form of a flowing story mixing music, dance and dialogue with internal voiceovers. A basic definition for form in theatre is that it is the method selected to tell a story (BBC). Form can be dictated by the practicalities of a production as well as the aesthetic or artistic choices of the adapters. There are immediate limitations to staging a novel as books can be as long as they need to be and can be set anywhere as the readers can, in theory, travel anywhere the book does. On a practical level, a play needs to be only as long as an audience or venue can commit to it and the number of, or types of, locations represented will be limited by the practicalities of budget, set changes and what it is possible to represent. These two most basic limitations mean that the adapter must decide what is essential (a subjective decision) for the storytelling and the way in which they will portray it. This all contributes to deciding the form. Annie Ryan notes that she always saw her adaptation of *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* in monologue form; in her interpretation it was the girl recounting her story after death (Ryan, 2019, p. 1 & 5). However, Graham McLaren notes his intention in a marketing video in 2019 that the Abbey’s production of *The Country Girls* be ‘a reverie or dream play [...] like a Chagall painting’ with a sizeable cast combining music and movement with dialogue and narrative to find a flowing, ‘lyrical’ form in order to be a

‘celebration’ of the author (McLaren, 2019). When explaining the adaptation of literature for the stage Barnette refers to this as finding ‘the spirit of the source’; this ‘spirit’ or essence of the source book informs choices regarding theme and the form that would best communicate it. (Barnette, 2017, p. 109).

Much as form has a direct correlation to the choices made regarding the ‘spirit of the source’, form is also subject to societal and cultural influences and ‘in Ireland the content often mirrors the form, and vice versa’ (Lonergan, 2019). The monologue form was adopted in Irish playwriting around the turn of the millennium and became a particularly male domain (Singleton, 2010, p. 70). Annie Ryan’s monologue adaptation of *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* contests this view along with a prevalence of female authored monologues since the financial crash. Examples of these include Elaine Murphy’s *Little Gem* (2008), Stacey Gregg’s *Scorch* (2015), Irene Kelleher’s *Mary and Me* (2017) and Tara Flynn’s *Not a Funny Word* (2018). The use of a more traditional narrative form alongside the use of the traditional domestic space in *Asking for It* raises the question as to how far Irish society has yet to travel in terms of how it treats women. The kitchen table, a common place for general family chat becomes the site of discussion of Emma’s sexual assault and the victim-blaming that contributes to her confinement in the domestic space. The imagistic and flowing staging of *The Country Girls* serves to provide a nostalgic look-back for a modern audience while celebrating the original literary work. This research will examine the form of each production, how it was influenced by the content and context for performance and how that contributes to a feminist dramaturgy of character.

Contexts:

In writing about dramatists such as Tom Murphy, Patrick Lonergan notes that recessionary Ireland produced a new era of Irish theatre, one that ‘demonstrated a determination to face truths that, both before and after the crash, [...] society at large seemed determined to ignore’ (Lonergan, 2019, p. 183). Greed and consumerism alongside a widening gap between rich and poor during the Celtic Tiger years, the violence against and abuse of women and vulnerable members of society and inequality, particularly in relation to gender, were some of the themes that found their way on to the Irish stage. Thus, it seems prudent at this stage to look at some of these ‘truths’ that had not been addressed, such as the under-representation of women in Irish theatre, the confinement of women in the domestic sphere in the Irish constitution, the abuse of women in mother and baby homes, the Eighth Amendment and its impact on women’s lives, sexual abuse and victim-blaming. This section will look at these issues in an Irish context in order to better understand the previous era of Irish theatre and therefore, how these three plays may seem radical within that historical context.

In the staging of William Butler Yeats’ and Lady Augusta Gregory’s *Kathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), for example, Ireland as nation, was feminized on the Irish stage. With the titular character entreating a young man to fight for her, she became an inspiration for nationalists in the movement fighting for an independent Ireland. When the young man, Michael, agrees to fight for her, she becomes a young beautiful woman, symbolic and objectified. She is a woman without a home, without a name, being known as the Poor Old Woman, a symbol without subjectivity. Woman as nation was not a new concept in Ireland at that time as there had been the poetic use of the *aisling* in previous centuries to evoke a ‘dream image’ of ‘a beautiful young woman as metaphor for Ireland’ at a time when Ireland could not be named in poems and ballads (Sihra, 2009, p. 5). For a large portion of the twentieth century, women on the Irish stage were merely symbolic and provided support for male characters but were not ‘real’ or independent entities in themselves. As Mary Trotter notes, ‘Irish female characters have embodied the nation, the land, the desires or responsibilities of male characters, but rarely have they been authentic, complex, autonomous women’ (Trotter, 2000, p. 164). Female playwrights during the twentieth century, who gave women more complexity and represented their stories and struggles, contest this viewpoint however. Feminist scholars such as Melissa Sihra, Cathy

Leeney and others point to playwrights such as Teresa Deevy, Susanne Day, Geraldine Cummins and Patricia O'Connor who were writing plays with more multi-dimensional female characters. This is the premise for *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (Sihra, 2009), which works to 'recover' plays by Irish women. Sihra, drawing on Elizabeth Grosz, notes that the exclusion of female writing from the Irish theatre canon happens by 'strategic amnesia' and not by accident (Sihra, 2009, p. 9). Regarding the process of canon formation, Cathy Leeney points to the 'intentionality underlying the omission of women: in order that cultural and epistemological power continue to be identified as patriarchal.' (Leeney, 2010, p. 4). Paul Murphy adds to Leeney's point by noting that Yeats' eulogising of Lady Gregory led her to be ossified in history and her work has not been subject to criticism and examination in the same way Yeats' own work has. This has relegated her plays to being stagnant, untouched and outside of the canon, although her place in the formation of Irish theatre is not forgotten (Murphy, 2007, pp. 28-29).

Woman as nation was not the only notable trope on the Irish stage; the domestic set became the theatrical place of the woman, while De Valera's government was increasingly driving women into their homes. Having been promised equality as citizens of the new free state, Irish women had played a part in the fight for Irish independence. However, as Sihra notes, De Valera's government along with Catholic Archbishop Charles McQuaid in the 1930s placed many limitations on the citizenship rights of women in Ireland. This directly contravened Article 3 in the 1922 constitution which stated 'every person, without distinction of sex, shall [...] enjoy the privileges and be subject to the obligations of such citizenship' (Sihra, 2009, p. 2). De Valera's Article 41 of the Irish Constitution (the Family Article) made the terms 'Mother' and 'Woman' interchangeable, firmly placing women within the domestic sphere. With other limitations such as the 'marriage bar' women could not hold civil service jobs after marriage and therefore any potential for public life was limited. These limitations had knock-on effects that have lasted until the present day with gender quotas only being effected in Irish politics in 2016. The re-wording of Article 41.2 to remove the clause placing women in the home with a less gender specific wording and noting the value of care within the home and in the community has been under discussion since both Sihra's and Leeney's writing on women in Irish drama. A Constitutional Convention was commenced to examine gender issues in our constitution in 2012 and finally in 2019 it was put to a Citizen's Assembly for recommendations with the results of their deliberations being announced in April 2021. This recommended, in a list of forty-five recommendations, that the text of Article 41.2 (woman in

the home) be replaced with language that is not gender specific. As Chair of the Assembly, Catherine Day, noted, '[t]he recommendations the citizens agreed don't just call for incremental change. They call for big changes that can make Ireland a better and more gender equal place to live for all of us' (citizensassembly.ie, 2021).

McQuaid's input into The Family Article meant that Catholic restraints on Irish women held huge influence in Irish culture and especially at the time Edna O'Brien wrote *The Country Girls* in 1960. Writing about young women with wants and sexual desires was at extreme odds with what was expected for young women in rural Ireland at that time. This put O'Brien on the banned books list in Ireland, although, this appears to have had far from negative impact, cementing Nietzsche's 'Critical History' theory that the more something is talked about, even criticised, then the more it lives on (Murphy, 2007, p. 29). As Eimear McBride states, 'the moral hysteria that greeted the book's first appearance has since ensured that both it, and O'Brien, have become era-defining symbols of the struggle for Irish women's voices to be heard' (O'Brien and McBride, 2017, p. ix). But O'Brien was not only writing characters 'who dared desire more from life than the traditional domestic and sexual servitude' (O'Brien and McBride, 2017, p. x); she was also writing about a young woman who was 'subject to sexual predatorship rather than rebellious transition' (Cahill, 2017, p. 157). Kate makes decisions to live a life not approved of by the patriarchal and religious Irish society she lives in, but she also has no mother, an abusive/absent father, and was not making an independent statement so much as being a victim of her circumstances in an Ireland that was intolerant of and abusive to vulnerable young women.

Emerging stories in the 1990s of the Magdalene Laundries, alongside scandals involving the Catholic priesthood highlighted the role that the Catholic church has played in curtailing of women's place in society in Ireland. These stories also show how the church has been responsible for the labelling of young women as the responsible party in all matters sexual by hiding pregnant or 'troubled' young women in mother and baby homes, by sending them to Magdalene Laundries or even just by sermonising about immoral behaviour in young women. These conditions led to a society in which young women were victimised even when they were the victims. Evidence of this Ireland, the Ireland cruel to young women and children, continues to occupy news stories today with the Tuam Mother and Baby Home atrocities and the most recent situation (at the time of writing) regarding the decision to seal the evidence on this episode, seen to be once again silencing the voices of the victims and protecting those to blame.

Celtic Tiger Ireland:

By the late 1990s Ireland was entering an economic ‘boom’ brought on by direct foreign investment and soaring property values. This brought with it a national attitude of consumerism while also widening the gap between rich and poor (Lonergan, 2019, p. 181; Cahill, 2017). It also contributed to both the objectification of young women and the blaming of them for this objectification, as Susan Cahill notes:

‘In the context of an Ireland rapidly undergoing major social, economic, and cultural transformation, it is no wonder that the girl becomes both the figure around which such anxieties about the new Ireland circulate and the personification of the negative aspects of twenty-first century Irish consumerism.’ (Cahill, 2017, p. 155)

This was not confined to Ireland, with this particular link between young women and consumerism referred to as ‘commodity feminism’ in the UK (McRobbie, 2008, p. 532) and Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra referring to links between female consumerism and film production reaching a peak in the US just as the recession settled in with films like *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009) or *Bride Wars* (2009) (Tasker, 2014, pp. 15-16). Referred to as ‘Celtic Kittens’ by journalist Ailish Connolly in an *Irish Times* article (Connolly, 2006), young women were seen as consumers of all the Celtic Tiger had to offer. However, as Cahill notes, these young women still had to rely on marrying the banker or the developer in order to gain capital currency. They were not granted ‘access to the structures of power’. Young women were seen to be using their femininity to gain an ‘empowerment’. However they held no real power or voice (Cahill, 2017, p. 155).

This was carried through to Irish theatre during the Celtic Tiger years where the rise in monologue plays (Lonergan, 2019, p. 187) were mostly written and performed by men. Brian Singleton notes that these male monologues represented both ‘the performance of male authority’ and the paradoxical idea that these men were ‘performing their own abjection’ given the subject matter and characterisations performed (Singleton, 2010, p. 71) Singleton explains that the monologue, the solo speaker, represents the voice of authority - they speak and others listen. However, the themes in the male monologue plays of the 1990s and into the Celtic Tiger

years were based on the fears, anxieties and failures of the men portrayed (Singleton, 2010, pp. 70-71). These plays represented a masculine uncertainty about the position of the male in Celtic Tiger era Ireland without embodying the female on the stage. The balance of male to female stories has now been addressed somewhat as I note with the example of Dublin Theatre Festival on page 8 of this thesis.

Recessionary Ireland and Girlhood Trauma:

In 2008 a bailout deal was reached whereby the Irish government would guarantee the assets of the national banks and, rather than stabilising the economy, this caused a huge decrease in confidence and a subsequent financial crash. This economic crash ended the Celtic Tiger era in Ireland and brought about many socio-political changes. Notably for this research, there has been an increase since 2008 in visibility of the issues surrounding women's rights, gender and feminism. Feminist theorists Negra and Tasker, when writing about feminism and gender in popular culture, note that in 'a moment [the financial crash of 2008] characterized by widespread public anger at and lack of trust in corporations, [...] political questions about equality are deservedly acquiring a new centrality' (Tasker and Negra, 2007, p. 3). Emma O'Toole suggests a link between the traditionally male coding of austerity ideology and the 'need to uncover the other side of the national narrative' (O'Toole, 2017, p. 138). Recessionary Ireland, traumatised and broken, became the time to publish stories that provided more of a 'feminist critique of the commodification of girlhood' (Cahill, 2017, p. 155). At the same time, in an article in *The Guardian*, the UK novelist Sam Byers notes that it has become a particularly fertile time for literature 'largely thanks to women breaking down traditional forms' (Thomas-Corr, 2021). *The Country Girls* was published in 1960 (and banned) but was chosen as Dublin One Book of the year in 2019 and the play was produced by the Abbey Theatre the same year. This suggests that the time was right for these stories both in literature and adapted for the stage.

When countering statements about Irish literary girlhoods being 'rare and obscure' given that 'Ireland boasts some of the most notable examples of literary boyhoods', Cahill points out that it is 'not that these narratives do not exist. It is rather that the Irish literary canon fails to take account of them' (Cahill, 2017, p. 156). As referred to earlier, Irish literature seems to mimic Irish theatre in this regard with a century or more of women's voices being silenced or written

out of the theatrical canon (Sihra, 2009). It was not that there were not plays featuring or written by women; it is just that they were forgotten or neglected.

It is possible that Irish girlhood and girlhood trauma were incompatible with the perception of girlhood and young womanhood in the Celtic Tiger era. Eimear McBride wrote *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* during the Celtic Tiger, but it was ten years before it finally got published in 2013. Cahill suggests that this may be because of a link between young women representing capitalist success (and excess) and the reluctance to acknowledge negative or traumatic female stories during that period (Cahill, 2017, p. 155). Labels such as ‘shopaholic’ became a badge of honour and television programmes during the boom years such as *Sex in the City* highlighted shoe shopping and designer label obsession. Tasker and Negra note that this reached ‘a higher and higher pitch [...] pathologizing competitive female consumerism’ (Tasker, 2014, p. 14). This was reflected in Ireland with the rise of outlet centres like Kildare Village and the fashionable annual shopping trip to New York for many young women. This is in contrast to the years following the recession which meant increased activism and protest in many countries (Vassallo, 2020, p. 46) and in Ireland that meant increased demand for women’s issues to be heard.

Recessionary Ireland and Irish Theatre:

In Irish theatre, the recession prompted the rise of the ‘theatre maker’. This is the phenomenon whereby the actor becomes actor/writer/director/producer and therefore can create, market and perform their own work (Lonergan, 2019, p. 7). As ‘theatre makers’ actors have agency in a profession previously heavily reliant on larger theatre and production companies and this can give freedom to foreground issues that may otherwise be ignored. With funding cuts for most of the arts after 2008, finding new ways to create work and earn a living became paramount for artists. Fishamble Theatre Company recognised this with their ‘show in a bag’ project from 2010 in conjunction with the Irish Theatre Institute and Dublin Fringe Festival. This project, which was a response to the financial crash and subsequent funding difficulties in Irish theatre, was intended to help actors ‘develop new plays that they could write, perform in and take on tour’ (Lonergan, 2019, p. 199). In these circumstances, with funding shortages, choosing to adapt an existing work can be more financially viable as the production can make use of existing marketing of well-known stories or books to help sell their production and have

audiences already familiar with the work and therefore willing to attend (Fogarty, 2018, p. 502). Examples of these smaller touring adaptations by women include Eve O'Mahony's *The Bold Bridget Cleary* (2017), Irene Kelleher's *Gone Full Havisham* (2019), Katie McCann's *The Little Matchgirl* (2013) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (2011). Annie Ryan stated that because of the reduced funding The Corn Exchange Theatre Company had received in 2014, she was looking for material which could become a 'low-budget' production and on reading *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*, she could see it in practical terms as a one-woman show, therefore suited to the budget they had (Ryan, 2019, p. 5). She went on to note, that when the play was performed she was a little disappointed that the form did not reflect the radical form of the book, McBride having drawn on the post-dramatic form with the work of James Joyce as influence (McBride, 2016)). Instead the adaptation used the monologue form which feminism has used for decades to give 'voice, and particularly a solo voice, to the voiceless' (Singleton, 2010, p. 71). However, Ryan did want to point out that although the form was not radical, it was 'from a female point of view which was at that time, and still is, a radical thing' (Ryan, 2019, p. 7).

Recessionary Irish theatre has also seen the rise of co-productions and the 2018 production of *Asking for It* which comes under this heading is just one of many. The rise in co-productions at the Abbey was a source of debate in theatre circles with the delivery of a letter signed by over three hundred theatre professionals which highlighted the rise in co-productions at the national theatre and the potential negative effects this has on Irish theatre (Falvey, 2019). This rise in co-productions was reflected across the country with producers, theatre venues and festivals linking up to develop projects which would be beyond the means of any one production company. Examples include Landmark Productions co-production with Octopus Theatricals on *Theatre for One* (2019) for Cork Midsummer Festival and the co-production between Cork's Everyman Theatre and Project Arts Centre on *Best Man* by Carmel Winters (2013).

Julie Kelleher, former Artistic Director for The Everyman Theatre in Cork, confirmed that the origins for the theatre adaptation of *Asking for It* stemmed from the #WTF movement. She had been to The Irish Times Theatre Awards and heard Anne Clarke (theatre producer) of Landmark Productions speak about the need to acknowledge the work of female writers, directors and those neglected in Irish Theatre. Having worked with her previously, Kelleher knew that Clarke's knowledge would be invaluable for an adaptation and approached her

regarding a co-production between Landmark Productions and The Everyman Cork. Kelleher and Clarke approached Louise O'Neill about adapting her novel which she was open to. Shortly after this, the new directors took over at the Abbey and announced that they wanted to 'hear the stories that weren't being told' (Kelleher, 2020, p. 3) This prompted Kelleher and Clarke to approach the Abbey about an adaptation of *Asking for It*. It then became a three way co-production and this helped to win the production an 'Open-Call' grant from the The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and paved the way for work to start (Kelleher, 2020, p. 3). But the benefits of a co-production did not just end at the financial. As Kelleher states, adapting a story like *Asking for It*, a story of rape and unapologetically from the point of view of the female victim, and putting it on a main stage was possible because 'a national theatre engaged with it' (Kelleher, 2020, p. 12). She explains that having the Abbey involved 'put it on the record... and it can't be overstated how important it was for the current directors to acknowledge that and give it the kind of unequivocal support they did, financially and morally as well' (Kelleher, 2020, p. 12).

Ireland Present:

As mentioned above, the recession of 2008 led to an increase in protest (Vassallo, 2020). Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland has become a place for hearing the voices of the silenced, addressing the balance and telling stories of 'girlhood, trauma, language and resistance' (Cahill, 2017) with the year 2015 being of particular note in relation to this thesis. In May 2015, Ireland voted for Marriage Equality, to give same sex partners the same legal marriage rights as heterosexual couples. This followed many stories of homophobia including Rory O'Neill's interview on RTE in which he spoke about homophobia and the subsequent 'noble call' made by his alter-ego Panti Bliss on the stage of the Abbey in February 2014 which went viral at that time (both nationally and internationally). This marked a huge step away from 'the centuries old structures, attitudes and beliefs that conduced to homophobia at the heart of our laws' and reflected a social acceptance in Ireland for 'the otherness of others' (McAleese in Healy, Sheehan and Whelan, 2016) thus making permanent in the constitution a change in Irish society and culture and making it difficult for a reversion to the 'status quo' on this issue.

In October of 2015, as part of the Decade of Centenaries cultural project (2012-2023) to commemorate the many centenary milestones in the foundation of the Irish state, Fiach Mac

Conghail announced the ‘Waking the Nation’ programme for 2016 at the Abbey Theatre. This programme was greeted with astonishment at the lack of representation of half of the nation by side-lining Irish female writers, directors, actors, designers and other women in roles in Irish theatre. Lian Bell, set designer, was the initiator of this movement. As Annie Ryan notes ‘we had an expectation to be part of the conversation’ (Ryan, 2019, p. 6). This echoes the sentiments of women after 1916 who, having taken part in the fight for independence and been promised equality in the 1922 Constitution of the Free State, found themselves pushed back into the home under De Valera and their active role was selectively forgotten (Sihra, 2009, p. 2). Being excluded was a surprise to the women working in Irish theatre, given that their contribution had always been a present, if occluded, force in Irish theatre and that ‘powerful theatre makers’ and ‘powerful texts by women’ were a prominent feature of Irish theatre in the years leading to Mac Conghail’s announcement (Ryan, 2019, p. 6). Included in this category of powerful theatre makers were Ryan herself with her adaptation of *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* in 2014, as well as Garry Hynes’ *Druid Shakespeare* which put women in male roles, and the work being made by Louise Lowe (Ryan, 2019, p. 6), all of which had been well received. Ryan felt that the work such women had produced ‘was instrumental in laying the ground for #WTF’ (Ryan, 2019, p. 6). The #WTF movement emerged as a direct response within the theatre community to the Waking The Nation programme and led to the *Gender Counts: An Analysis of Gender in Irish theatre 2006 -2015* (Donohue *et al.*, 2017) which was funded by The Arts Council of Ireland. The result of the report urged that Irish theatre companies should ‘put in place meaningful policies to promote equality’ (Lonergan, 2019, p. 5). The follow up document, *5 Years On: Gender in Irish Theatre – An Interim View* (Murphy, 2020), notes that the reporting on and counting of women in Irish theatre organisations has had an effect on addressing the gender balance. Evidence, perhaps, of a break in the previous cycle whereby ‘people in positions of power listened, they became engaged and they sometimes became enraged - but then they forgot’ (Lonergan, 2019).

Another occurrence relevant to this research at this time was the #metoo (2) movement. Although this was a movement started in the US in 2006 by Tarana Burke to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual abuse in society, it had a resurgence in October 2017 when, in the wake of the initial Harvey Weinstein accusations, actor Alyssa Milano issued a tweet for any victims of abuse to reply with ‘me too’. Ripples from this iteration of the #metoo movement were felt here in Ireland, alongside #IBelieveHer and #misefosta and there is a visible ‘jump between 2017 and 2018, and between 2018 and 2019’ in complaints to the Workplace Relations

Commission about sexual harassment at work (RTE Brainstorm 'What's Been The Impact of the MeToo Movement on the Workplace,' 2020). In Irish theatre, Grace Dyas revealed that the #metoo 'moment' contributed to empowering her 'as a woman' to speak out about Michael Colgan's alleged sexual harassment of creatives and staff at The Gate Theatre in October 2017 (Lynch, 2019).

Alongside these two movements was the publication of Louise O'Neill's novel in 2016, *Asking for It*, a story with the rape of a young woman under the influence of alcohol and drugs at the centre of it. There was a case in the US in the same year mirroring the subject matter. This case, the Brock Turner case, of an athlete raping a young woman under the influence of alcohol (and comments from the judge in the case) led to a change in the law of several US states regarding a victim's ability to say no to sexual advances and what exactly constitutes consent. Although O'Neill cites The Steubenville Case (in 2012) as the catalyst for *Asking for It*, it was a helpful coincidence that the Brock Turner case made the novel particularly relevant at the time of publication (O'Neill, 2015). O'Neill describes herself as an 'accidental activist' and she became a go-to for comments whenever the subject of rape and/or consent made headlines (O'Neill, 2020). As an example, in 2017, when Irish broadcaster George Hook made comments that victim-blamed a young woman in a similar UK case, O'Neill posted on social media that his remarks were 'toxic' and she was then quoted by many media outlets in their reporting of the story. Her name has become synonymous in Ireland with the issue of consent and when there is discussion around the issue, it seems inevitable now that her name, comments or tweets are included. In response to the uproar surrounding Hook's remarks, O'Neill observed that 'the furore is a good thing in one way as it's a sign that cultural values are shifting' (O'Connor, 2017). In the lead up to the premiere of *Asking for It* in 2018, a case closer to home involving Paddy Jackson and fellow Ulster Rugby players in Northern Ireland completely dominated the headlines in Irish media (as well as social media commentary), ensuring that the play had the same contextual relevance as the publication of the novel.

The last big societal change I will look at in terms of the socio-political context for these three plays is the #RepealThe8th campaign which resulted in the removal of the Eighth Amendment to the Irish constitution with amendments to allow abortion and prioritise the health and safety of Irish women over that of the unborn child. This iteration of the pro-choice movement became more mobilised with the death of Savita Halappanavar in Galway as a result of a prolonged miscarriage in 2012. The event galvanised the Irish pro-choice movement 'to renewed levels

of activity' (Field, 2018). Investigations into the death of Halappanavar did not directly address the amendment but the evidence provided by doctors and her husband repeatedly explained that because there was a foetal heartbeat, they were not allowed by law to provide a medical termination and had to wait for nature to take its course. The ensuing media coverage made it clear that being denied a termination caused the death of Savita. As a result, her name became part of the debate regarding the repeal of the Eighth Amendment. The referendum in May 2018 passed the bill to repeal the Eighth Amendment with 66.4% of the vote. This was a further sign (along with #WTF, the success of the Marriage Equality Referendum and #MeToo) that Ireland had entered a new era, one that is beginning to recognise the right to equality and safety for all genders and sexualities. This is the Ireland that is reflected in the adapting and staging of these three plays.

Conclusion:

There is some truth in Lonergan's words about Irish dramatists presenting the development of Irish society 'as something that happens in cycles' and there have definitely been 'recurrent attempts to call attention to the unequal status of women dramatists in the Irish theatre' (Lonergan, 2019, p. 4). As he states, there have been notable attempts to highlight women in Irish theatre and 'through the efforts of successive generations, positive change has gradually been achieved in some areas' (Lonergan, 2019, p. 5). However, I would argue that there have been changes in the last decade that, unlike previous attempts to highlight women in Irish theatre, will have a lasting effect and may break the cycle. Because of the socio-political climate concurrent with increased visibility of women in Irish theatre and the way in which performances and social changes are documented, this is an iteration that will be difficult to ignore.

It is also worth mentioning that for all of the above movements and changes in Irish society since the recession in 2008, social media has played a huge role. The accessibility of news and commentary is specific to this era and the ease with which any individual can voice an opinion in the public realm is a new element in our society. As an example of how accessible social media is, IPSOS MRBI notes that in June of 2018 (the month *Asking for It* premiered) 66% of Irish adults were on Facebook and 33% on Twitter (IPSOS, 2018).

In looking at the dramaturgy of character in the three plays and their subsequent productions in this research, I intend to expose their significance alongside the context in which they were performed in the breaking of the patterns that saw women in theatre highlighted and then forgotten once again. Lonergan states that Irish theatre in the 1950s ‘began a process of reinventing what Irish theatre could be, showing that it need not be focused on the three themes that then dominated Irish literature: religion, nation and land’ (Lonergan, 2019, p. 6). As pointed out above, a series of events and movements here in Ireland from the financial crash to #WTF and #metoo have begun to indicate that Irish theatre is moving into a new era in character representation based on an unprecedented wave of resistance and subsequent changes in the real lives of women today.

These three productions are asking the audience to identify with a female experience at a time when the subject of gender has taken centre stage in Ireland. Leeney notes:

‘The truths of womanhood, the quality of woman’s experience are considered partial [...] that is to say, women’s experience is defined as applying only to a subset of humanity, and it is inflected with bias. Unlike men’s experience, it has not been defined as universal [...]. Through training and habit women identify with the male point of view. If they did not they would have a dull time of it. Men, however, are rarely skilled at taking the female point of view. Thus, in the process of making performance, the audience’s identification with the stage is infected with gender division.’(Leeney, 2010, p. 7).

The socio-political landscape, the success of the novels adapted and the involvement of the Irish national theatre, has provided the context and together with the dramaturgy of character in these plays there is a strong argument to suggest that they have contributed to lasting change in gender imbalance on the Irish stage.

Lastly, it should be noted that I am writing from a female perspective and the majority of this research and writing has been conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and challenged by the conditions that this created for women in Ireland. This has been a trying time for women given that most childcare and emotional labour falls on the woman in a household. The weight of trying to work from home while home-schooling children and making life work in difficult

circumstances has, in the majority, fallen to women. Research is still on-going, so reports are scarce but already it is noted that:

‘The lockdown and school closures mean that just as their access to paid work diminishes, women face an increase in their unpaid labour. “Domestic duties, things like childcare, preparing food for the extra youngsters who would normally be at school, and looking after sick family members, these responsibilities fall disproportionately on women”.’ (Wenham in Burki, 2020)

This pandemic is putting women firmly back in the domestic sphere. UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted that ‘COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights’ (Burki, 2020). It remains to be seen if the women of Ireland can find their way back to where they found themselves before March 2020, during the period examined in this research (2008 – 2019), when they still had some distance to go but were well on the road to equality as recessionary Ireland had been providing a space for women’s voices to be heard and for their stories to be known.

Chapter 1: *Asking for It* (Everyman Theatre, 2018)

This analysis of the 2018 production of Louise O'Neill's *Asking for It*, adapted by Meadhbh McHugh in collaboration with Annabelle Comyn (Everyman Theatre, Cork) will explore the dramaturgy of the play's central character of Emma arguing that the use of space and place in this production foregrounds the concept of *seeing* and *being seen* through design choices relating to the domestic and institutional which signal a feminist message. This use of the domestic space as a place of (self)confinement for a rape victim, the use of voiceover and strategies to create a subjective experience, together with the particular social context for the production, work to show how an old trope can be reused to create a new representation of character for a new era in Irish culture. Sihra notes that '[p]otent threshold spaces such as windows and doorways emphasize issues of containment and transformation in performance' and that this reinforces 'the place of the body within history and culture' (Sihra, 2009, p. 3). In this production, the confinement of a traumatised female body in the second act highlights issues of victim-blaming while the windows and screens are representative of a social media culture that oppresses as much as it inspires young women.

Asking for It, the novel by Louise O'Neill, is the story of a Leaving Certificate student, Emma O'Donovan, who feels the expectation of perfection from all of those around her as well as society and social media. Examples from the text (McHugh, 2018) highlight the pressure on the central character to be:

Pretty - MAM. 'And brush your hair, darling, please [...]. Who'll have you looking like that?' (Act 1, Sc. 4).

Clever - EMMA. '[re. Zoe's higher result in a test] It was as if the number drifted off the page, came towards me and seared itself into my eyes' (Act 1, Sc. 2).

Sociable and popular - EMMA. 'People don't fall out with me' (Act 1, Sc. 1).

Petty and unlikeable - ALI. 'Being friends with Emma is a bit like being lady-in-waiting to the queen' (Act 1, Sc. 2).

Her inner dialogue is often centred on what she should or should not be doing or saying:

EMMA. 'I feel something melting in me and it's something I have to shut down and control' (Act 1, Sc. 4).

The setting up of her character in the first half of the story and how her character is situated in her world culminates in a party scene at which she drinks too much, takes drugs and what begins as consensual sex with an older local sports 'star' becomes the gang rape of an intoxicated and non-cognizant young woman. This is not described explicitly at this stage in the playtext but is recovered piece-meal from photographic evidence and Emma's memories and the reader learns about what happened to her at the same time she does, thus sharing in her subjectivity. The second half of the novel deals with the victim-blaming culture around rape from Emma's perspective. The novel does not provide a cathartic ending with the rapists punished or Emma finding resolution and the adaptation followed suit. In moving this story from the page to the stage, as designed by Paul O'Mahony, windows and screens, seeing and being seen (or not), took prominence.

Louise O'Neill's novel (2015) was given to playwright Meadhbh McHugh to adapt into a text-based play; it is the only one of the three productions analysed in this thesis to have employed a playwright in this way. Edna O'Brien adapted her own novel for the stage and Annie Ryan was both theatre maker and adapter. McHugh's 2018 published playscript of *Asking For It* lists her as the author but states on the cover that the play was adapted 'in collaboration with Annabelle Comyn', the director. McHugh explains that she took the novel apart to rewrite it in play form but that it was being reworked throughout the creative and rehearsal process (Armstrong, 2018).

As this was developed as a new play, I will be examining the set designed by Paul O'Mahony as well as lighting (Sinead McKenna), sound (Philip Stewart) and video design (Jack Phelan). Of particular note is that Paul O'Mahony was designing the set simultaneously with McHugh's writing of the script. Therefore, a lot of the design ideas for the set came from the novel as opposed to the script (Kelleher, 2020, p. 4). There are occasional references to props indicating what needs to be included in the set (the functionalistic aspect) but largely the script allows room for various staging interpretations for future productions.

Julie Kelleher (Producer), in her former position as Artistic Director of The Everyman Theatre, Cork, was the driving force behind this adaptation. In my interview with Kelleher, she provided some background for this production in which she explained that this play was a direct result of the #WTF movement in 2015. She was looking specifically for a production to reflect a new

era for women in Irish theatre. Having read *Asking for It*, she knew that she wanted to adapt it for the stage not only because it was a female-centric story, but because it was a universal story and it fit with her thoughts on ‘what kind of stories should be told and who should be telling them’ (Kelleher, 2020, p. 2). She partnered with Anne Clarke of Landmark Productions and with the Abbey Theatre. They assigned a director (Annabelle Comyn) and an adapter (Meadhbh McHugh), and the rest of the team was brought on board and worked collaboratively alongside the writing of the script.

When realised on stage, the setting was visible to the audience on arrival, with a series of glass panels and structure taking up a large part of the stage (see Fig. 1). This structure is reminiscent of contemporary architecture in design, vaguely like contemporary commercial or industrial property. As noted previously, during our interview Kelleher confirmed that Paul O’Mahony began designing the set based on the novel while the script was being adapted alongside the creative developments. His glass box design was in response to the many references in the novel to symbolise ‘glass cages’ and ‘playing with that idea of screens, feeling like you’re on exhibit [...] or feeling trapped and people looking at you’ (Kelleher, 2020, p. 5). There are references during the play (and novel) to Emma having had her face on a billboard outside town the previous year. Each time it is mentioned it compounds the way in which she is objectified thereby reinforcing the idea of the male gaze, ‘[...] her face is up on a billboard outside town. Every man in the town fantasising about her that month’ (Act 1, Sc. 4, McHugh, 2018, p. 20). O’Mahony’s glass box set in Act 1 represents the act of voyeurism on one level, both looking through windows and via the reflective use of the glass to view images on screens in an enlarged and public way, similar to a billboard.



Figure 1: Asking for It (2018). Photography: Patrick Redmond (courtesy of Landmark Productions and The Everyman).

The play opens with video footage playing on this glass box structure on stage of body parts, and a face – a foreshadowing of the way in which Emma is photographed naked and exhibited via social media without her consent later in the play. This matches with the prologue in which a present-day Emma lets the audience know that something has happened to her ‘I don’t have anything to say, but you want to hear from me anyway. Everyone wants me to tell my story.’ (McHugh, 2018).

From a semiotic perspective, these glass panels/screens are a visual reminder of the prevalence of screens and photos in the lives of young people in the twenty-first century. The large-scale glass panels as well as the reflective floor means that images and screens are multiplied. This is perhaps a reminder of social media and the problematic nature of lives viewed, lived and requiring the approval of others via a screen as well as being a reminder of the dangers involved in social media. It works to highlight the way in which social media has magnified access to (and therefore abuses towards) women’s bodies. This digital noise is made visible at various times on the screens/glass panels with images or lighting (see Fig. 2). Louise O’Neill stated that the novel was inspired partly by the ‘Slane Girl’ case in which photos were circulated of a

17-year-old girl performing a sex act (O'Neill, 2015). This was in 2013 but the case of 'Coco' Fenlon in 2018 has led to Irish legislation to deal with the dangers of image-based sexual abuse.

The structure of the setting, as well as resembling industrial property and the commercial world, is reminiscent of the contemporary architecture dotting the countryside in Ireland alongside and sometimes built on to existing traditional domestic and institutional buildings. In the *mise-en-scène* this structure serves several functionalistic purposes: it provides the screen for Jack Phelan's video footage as well as becoming the set for various scenes, being both the school and with a slight adjustment to the shape of the structure, it becomes the private house holding the post-match party later. However, symbolically it works on many levels; it acts as a window into a world indoors, whether that is school, home or a party scene. The twenty-first century has seen an increased appetite for 'reality TV' with the lives of others in programmes like *Big Brother* or *The Kardashians* being played out in many living rooms. This visual of being on the outside and looking through a window *in* to the action happening symbolises a disconnection for Emma, her feelings of being outside herself, and nods to the voyeuristic streak in many of us, which Emma also mentions in Act One: 'I peer into the houses as we drive home' (Act 1, Sc. 4). However, it is at odds with the traditional role of the window on the Irish stage. Previously on the Irish stage, for women in particular, the window represented a view to the world outside the confined space of the domestic. As Sihra states when writing about women confined to the domestic space in Irish theatre 'the limen of the window powerfully frames the emptiness that it outlines on the stage' (Sihra, 2009, p. 3). The outside world was not available to the women confined to the indoors. The window represented opportunities that they did not have, whether that was the Mundy sisters peering out the window in Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* to spy on relationships denied to them or the negotiation of the threshold in *Katie Roche* that sees the crossing of it become 'increasingly fraught' due to 'the security of "in here"' at odds with the 'potential of "out there"' (Roche, 1995, p. 145). Since the early years of Irish theatre, it has continued to be more usual to see the space on stage as the inside of a home, kitchen or living room. However, in the first act of *Asking for It*, most of the scenes take place outside with the space inside the frame remaining upstage, variously lit and empty or inviting and full of action. Through the glass in O'Mahony's set design, we see the school interior, we see characters moving through the structure as if through corridors and stairs in their uniform. This glass box changes shape to become the site of a post-match house party later in Act 1, through which the audience can see the activity. But whether the glass box is school or the party, it reflects Emma's feelings of being outside herself,

of not quite belonging. It can also have the effect of creating a separation from the home, perhaps reflecting the displacement of the home in Irish society (buying or even having a home is out of reach for many in Ireland since 2008) and therefore displacing it a little as a reflection of the nation. She feels a pressure to behave and look a certain way, to be glossy and perfect like the glass structure, but just like that structure, she feels empty:

‘...filling me, filling me *up*. This is what I’ve craved, and I craved, I have craved so much. To feel powerful, to feel like I’m *something, someone...*

Elsewhere.’ (Act 1, Sc. 4, McHugh, 2018, p. 37)

Ultimately, this building becomes the site of the events that lead to Emma’s trauma and self-imposed incarceration in the second act. Because of the glass, the voyeuristic nature of ‘looking in’ as well as the voyeurism and breach of privacy involved in sharing and looking at photos of someone without their consent, this set becomes the site of trauma and as such mirrors Emma’s body being the site of trauma. The set becomes part of the physical invasion of her person thus shaping the dramaturgy of her character. Her character is not represented simply by the actor playing Emma, but Emma is diffused on the whole stage in line with States assertion that ‘the thing traditionally allocated to dramatic character is dispersed into the physical universe of the stage [...] into any element of the production [...] through which the performance achieves its meaning’ (States, 1985a, p. 94). So, to return to Fuchs, where the actor ‘stands in’ for the character Emma in order to allow the audience to experience Emma, the glass box is now also standing in for Emma to allow the audience to experience her trauma (Fuchs, 1996, p. 8). This is compounded by the images played on the glass, body parts ‘pale limbs, long hair’ (Act 1, Sc. 4) and the whole dramaturgy is experienced by the audience who experience both Emma’s trauma and being on the other side, as the voyeurs of this experience.

The physical rape and trauma are not written into the script, nor are they performed on stage. According to Louise O’Neill, she omitted the actual abusive event from the novel so as not to sensationalise rape, but McHugh stated that she ‘wanted a play that will challenge our voyeurism. Emma blacks out. I thought it was interesting that we black out as an audience with her.’ (Armstrong, 2018). In the theatre, the audience did black out with her, the stage blacked out and held for a beat longer than was comfortable, in the script it states ‘*BLACKOUT. Hold the blackout*’ (McHugh, 2018, p. 41). The space we occupy then is within Emma; it is her blackout. Therefore, in foregrounding the stage image in O’Neill’s *Asking for It* as a

dramaturgical strategy, the audience is positioned within the subjectivity of the character of Emma; inside her blackout we only know as much as she does. The next part of that scene lights up on her parents as they discover her on their front steps, the threshold. This is the last time we see Emma outside her home. This signifies the theft of her old life as a result of her trauma, foreshadowing that once she crosses the threshold she cannot go back. It can be read in terms of both being trapped on the outside of her old life but also that once she crosses over, she will be trapped inside the confines of the family home. The short time left in the first half is then given to Emma's discovery via her friends and Facebook of what happened to her, as a third-party observer along with the audience. This is disorienting as the space is both inside and outside Emma. The audience is moving between her perspective and that of her parents, representing the confusion Emma is experiencing. Because she blacked out, she has no memory of the events of the night before. She is piecing it together from photos, stories, reactions and her physical state. The disorienting dramaturgy works to place the audience inside Emma's experience.

For the second half of the play, there are no directions in the script regarding the staging or set but Scene 1 opens with the directions '*CONOR has come to visit EMMA at home*' (McHugh, 2018, p. 45). So, on returning to their seats, the audience is still looking at the same set but with the props denoting Emma's bedroom on the stage, mirroring the opening of the play. It is her personal space but as it is on view to the audience, it is not a personal or private space.

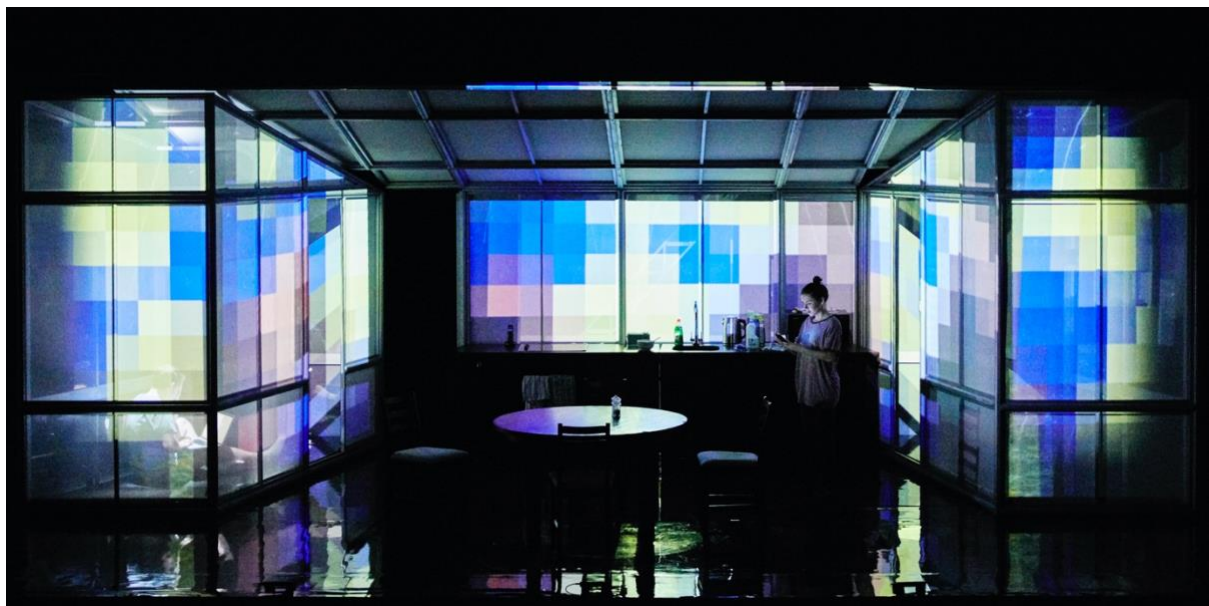


Figure 2: Lauren Coe in *Asking for It* (2018). Photography: Patrick Redmond (courtesy of Landmark Productions and *The Everyman*).

It is at the beginning of Act 2, Scene 2, that the play moves to a new time and a new space. The script states '*A Year Later. Radio voices play to an empty room*' (McHugh, 2018, p. 49). At this point in the performance analysed here, the set closes in on itself, the modern glass structure becoming a traditional kitchen space (see Fig. 2) with the lowering of the glass to become a ceiling giving the set a distinct sense of confinement (and a not altogether subtle visual 'glass ceiling'). This happens with full hydraulic sound and in full view, so the audience does not just witness Emma's confinement and ostracization from her old life because of her trauma, but also experiences it. This was not a happy by-product of the set-change, it was a conscious dramaturgical decision on the part of the creative team. It utilises the Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt* to 'estrangle' the audience from watching the story in order to notice and feel Emma's world shrink to what she calls the 'square box that I'm trapped in' (Act 2, Sc. 7, McHugh, 2018). This closing of the set from open and transparent to an interior kitchen space is a stark representation of how Emma, as a victim of a sex crime and online bullying, is now imprisoned in her home. She is cut off from her old life and although there is the potential to leave (MAM. 'You can come to the stall with me. You need to leave the house.' Act 2, Sc. 2) she chooses not to. The outside world is not for her now. However, she is still on view to the audience and there is further potential for discomfort for the audience if aware of the voyeurism here.

Her family come and go to differing extents throughout the second half of the play but she stays. This echoes the tradition established in Irish theatre of a woman's place being the domestic and the kitchen, and hearing about the world through visitors while highlighting that women can still be trapped at home in different circumstances in twenty first century Ireland. This does not only apply to Emma as her mother is also trapped with her to an extent and that is highlighted in Act 2, Sc. 6 with Emma's mother at home alone with Emma after Emma's father is free to go 'out' when there is tension at home (Act 2, Sc. 5, McHugh, 2018, p. 79). Emma's mother continues to face her community at her baked goods stall; this highlights the pressure on women in the twenty-first century to continue to occupy the traditional, domestic, role of wife and mother while also feeling a pressure to contribute to the finance of a household. This is especially relevant in recessionary Ireland, given that many of the jobs that were lost were related to the building trade with a majority of those being male-dominated roles (Russell, 2014, p. vii). Although the novel also references difficulties for Emma's father and brother, the

play concentrates on the female ‘fall-out’ and in Act 2 places the emphasis, through the use of the confining domestic space, on the women in the house, but especially on Emma.

The whole of the novel after Emma’s sexual assault is about how her world shrinks to the walls of her home and although much of playscript has changed from the novel (scenes and characters as well as structure), this remains. The second half of the play is all about Emma’s world and the stark change from how her world used to be. One of the initial decisions regarding the set was that it would reflect this shrinking of Emma’s world (Anton, 2018, p. 20), ‘and on it goes, my world gets smaller and smaller, wrapping itself around me’ (Act 2, Sc. 2, McHugh, 2018). And the set does just that; it physically wraps itself around the cast. The change from open atmosphere in the first act to the claustrophobia in the second act is a striking example of the ‘Atmospheric’ level of operation (Aston and Savona, 2013, p. 147) to highlight a gendered dramaturgy. The shrinking of Emma herself is conveyed by her placement on the stage with a lot of her time spent upstage and left or right instead of downstage centre. She is also overwhelmed by both her oversized clothing and by the set and lighting as can be seen in Fig. 2.

Because the use of the traditional domestic-kitchen space in the second half signals a woman’s place in an older, more traditional and patriarchal Ireland, it draws attention to the change in status for Emma, from a modern girl with choices to young woman with the traditional ‘curtailed and enforced identity of enclosure and regulatory domesticity’ (Cerquoni, 2007, p. 162). This made the ‘iconic’ (O’Gorman, 2019, p. 228) realist glass box set of the second half of the play the perfect space for projecting the imprisonment of Emma following her assault, taking the many years of the symbolic imprisonment of women in the domestic sphere on the Irish stage and using it to represent Emma’s imprisonment. This transformation of the contemporary glass box of opportunity and action becoming the traditional confining domestic space in front of the audience has the ability to underline the change in circumstance for Emma, but also to place the audience in the position of having the walls close in, becoming ‘the small, small world of this house with no escape’ (Act. 2, Sc. 7, McHugh, 2018, p. 88).

This audience experience is compounded by the socio-political contexts at the time of the production. 2018 saw the death of Nicole (Coco) Fox Fenlon, a young woman who took her own life following online bullying, some of a sexual nature. Her death provoked the drafting of legislation titled ‘Coco’s Law’ which was finally passed in 2020. In the months before the

premier of *Asking for It* in Cork, there was a case with striking similarities to the play's storyline being tried in Northern Ireland. This story occupied the Irish news cycle and involved the accusation of Ulster rugby players in the rape of a young woman, with many features of the case mirroring the story of *Asking for It*. Indeed, even McHugh acknowledges that the defendant's messages presented as evidence in that trial helped to form some of the male 'locker room' talk in the play (Armstrong, 2018). During the trial, details of text messages to and from the alleged victim were used as evidence and her sexual history was brought up in court. The evidence being presented by the defence showed an intention to prove she was 'asking for it'. It brought to the fore, once again in Ireland, the debates surrounding consent and what constitutes rape. Louise O'Neill wrote an opinion piece for the *Irish Examiner* following the 'not guilty' verdict in March 2018 in which she decried the system that allows for the shaming and blaming of victims in the very small percentage of cases that see a court room. She also points out that 'not guilty' is not the same as innocent (O'Neill, 2018). The intense media scrutiny and public commentary that surrounded this trial just months before *Asking for It* opened meant that the play entirely captured the zeitgeist, a moment in Irish history that heard debate and divided opinion on the matter of consent, what constitutes rape and whether or not a young woman can ever be 'asking for it'.

The dramaturgy of the character of Emma has been shaped by the director, together with the design team, through the use of space and place. This is a production that places the point of view firmly with the young woman on the stage through the open, free space in the first half to the confinement of the second half. For Annabelle Comyn, this perspective, the point of view of Emma, was vital to the staging. She describes it as 'listening in' (33:00, Farrelly, 2018). This sense of 'listening in' to Emma is achieved in this production through the increased use of voiceover recordings as the play progresses. Hearing her voice, her thoughts, but from outside the body, representing her on the stage, becomes larger than the embodied character and fills the space. This inner voice becomes more pronounced as the play progresses, while the actress physically says less and less and her body is becoming less noticeable in baggy clothing and is moved to upstage corners. As Crawley notes in his review, this is the silencing of Emma, 'a girl being erased' (Crawley, 2018). Through this and the use of the domestic space trope, it is made clear that her house is a place of confinement, and she is now trapped both inside it and inside herself. The outside world is no longer a place of opportunity for her and that has implications for her future. She no longer feels like herself or even that she belongs to herself. She refers to herself in one of these voiceover asides as 'pink flesh' or 'I read about

the Ballinatoon girl as if she's not me' (Act 2, Sc. 4). The lines from her brother Bryan, 'So she's going to be sitting her Leaving, is she?...What college is she hoping to go to? What course is she thinking of doing?' (Act 2, Sc. 8) are all the more impactful given the space they are spoken within as this setting places the outside world and its opportunities out of reach for Emma. This is compounded when Bryan asks, 'When was the last time she went outside?' (Act 2, Sc. 8, McHugh, 2018, p. 96).

To return to Sihra, Paul O'Mahony's set in *Asking for It* firmly notes the containment of the female body within Irish history and culture in the domestic. His set uses windows to gaze in at lives from outside and to look out via screens, or in, at the world happening to others and draws attention to the history of hiding and blaming victims of trauma in Ireland instead of believing and helping them, whilst also highlighting the contemporary ways in which young women are abused and shamed. The choices outlined regarding 'place' in McHugh's play-text with the varied locations in the first half of the play text (home, school, a party) becoming a single domestic kitchen set in the second half work to create a sense, for the audience, of being confined with Emma after her rape. However, O'Mahony's realisation of these choices and creation of 'space' in the 2018 production with the glass box set made up of screens and windows to allow for the varied locations in the first half, putting an added emphasis on screens and social media, work to add another dimension to the dramaturgy of Emma's character. This works to place the audience in her perspective at times, and outside it, in order to judge her, at other times. The use of a blackout for the audience as well as Emma works to disperse Emma throughout the whole theatre space, including the audience, so that when the set closes in on Emma, it closes in on the audience also. The use of the traditional domestic trope of female confinement in the second half, with the experienced closing of ceiling and walls, serves to place the audience in Emma's world before the final scene and the questions that they need to ask of themselves about their attitudes to victims of rape. This dramaturgy of character, in tandem with the national discussion in 2018 on consent and the justice system when it comes to rape victims works to cement this use of the domestic in a feminist way. Although this is not the first time the domestic space has been used in this way on the Irish stage, because of the cultural context and subject matter in this play, it has the potential to have a lasting impact on how the domestic space is viewed and used in future representations of female characters.

Chapter 2: *The Country Girls* (Abbey Theatre, 2019)

This analysis of the Abbey Theatre's 2019 production of *The Country Girls* analyses the dramaturgy of space and place as it relates to the character of Kate. In doing so, I argue that McLaren's use of form, alongside the set design and other stage elements, was underpinned by interests in canonizing the original novel and its female author above that of the representation of the novel's female protagonist. In this regard, the dramaturgy of character as dispersed across all elements of the stage of this theatre adaptation highlighted the success of the novel through a nostalgic and 'lyrical' adaptation geared towards audiences with knowledge of the novel's history, its banning, and the mistreatment of the author by her home country. (Abbey Theatre, 2019a).

The Country Girls, written by Edna O'Brien in 1960 and subsequently banned for its sexual content, has become an important symbol (along with O'Brien herself) for the 'struggle for Irish women's voices to be heard' (O'Brien and McBride, 2017, pp. ix-x). The novel is the story of rural girl Caitheleen/Cait/Kate Brady told in the first person, it covers her life from the death of her mother, the neglect and abuse from her father, her lack of agency and her romantic and spirited inner life. The novel also covers a 'relationship' with an older, married, man that when viewed through the lens of twenty first century Ireland can be seen as the grooming of a young girl by a sexual predator. This is recounted in the manner of a love story with the end of the book aligning with a failed attempt to leave Ireland with him to start a new life. It is a story of love, loss and coming of age for a young Irish woman in 1950s Ireland and is told from her perspective. However, in this adaptation the dramaturgy of space and place foregrounds the original book and its author as well as Kate's point of view. While doing so, it is possible that opportunities for highlighting contextual relevancies in the text for Ireland in 2019 may have been lost.

Whereas Emma's on-stage world is all about the confined domestic space in the Everyman/Landmark production of *Asking for It* as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the 2019 staging of the Abbey Theatre's *The Country Girls*, designed by Francis O'Connor and directed by Graham McLaren, is almost the opposite. Edna O'Brien, as adapter of her own novel, states in the opening stage direction '*A field in the west of Ireland*', laying out the 'place' of the first scene very specifically (O'Brien, 2011a, p. 3). However, in the 2019 production it is not a field in a realist sense as Graham McLaren (director) describes the adaptation. It is 'not

a conventional play’ as he says, ‘it is a reverie or a dream play, it’s deeply poetic and lyrical, it’s like a Chagall painting.’ (1:10 - 1:20, Abbey Theatre, 2019a). McLaren previously utilised this form of a reverie play in his previous work with *The Guardian* noting his reframing of *Great Expectations* as a memory play (Gardner, 2013). This is noted in reviews of McLaren’s work with descriptions such as ‘musical and nostalgic [...] pleasing poetry’ to describe *Jimmy’s Hall* in 2017 (Crawley, 2017) and his version of *In Time O’ Strife* was described as a ‘meeting of music, dance and drama’ with the use of a ‘fluid space’ (Fisher, 2013). Where Comyn and O’Mahony allowed the original novel to dictate the staging of *Asking for It*, McLaren applied an approach to the staging of O’Brien’s text similar to that of practitioners such as Robert Wilson or Pina Bausch. Wilson states that audiences should look at his performances like they ‘would look at a painting’ and that they should ‘listen to the pictures’ (Shyer, 1989, p. xv). Aston and Savona note that ‘the stage picture is subject to continual change, even where a setting is constant’ (Aston and Savona, 2013, p. 158). In creating this world of reverie ‘through effects of lighting and through the movement of the actors’ (Aston and Savona, 2013, p. 158), McLaren employs a form that utilises a variety of ingredients for the staging to ensure that unlike a painting, the image on stage is subject to ‘continual change’.



Figure 3: Grace Collender in *The Country Girls* (2019). Photography Ros Kavanagh (appears courtesy of Ros Kavanagh).

For the arrival of the audience, this production makes use of the front curtain to hide the stage, a rare experience in Irish theatres in recent years. Some visual references to the novel lie downstage along the lip, in front of the curtain in the form of an installation of black sand, lilac stems and shells (see Fig. 3). However, when the curtain is raised to unveil McLaren's 'painting', the audience sees a bare set with side and back walls painted white with some curled edges. In explaining his design concept, Francis O'Connor describes the bare white walls as 'blank sheets of paper' that represent a life story about to be sketched out on it (10:00-12:45, O'Connor, 2019). In interview, O'Connor described his work on this production as a way of 'finding the visual language in which to tell a broad narrative but in a way that doesn't feel episodic, that allows the scenes to meld and mesh with one another' (O'Connor, 2019). This is in keeping with the wishes of O'Brien as she states in her stage directions at the beginning of Act 1 '*The story unfolds through Kate's eyes and is told in one continuous sweep*' (O'Brien, 2011a). Thus, O'Connor's setting presents the space as a blank page on which to write the story of Kate Brady and designates the places in which she resides through objects that are lowered to the stage. Like the closing of the glass box set in *Asking for It* and the use of the stage curtain at the beginning of *The Country Girls*, the use of objects and the fly space has the Brechtian effect of both reminding the audience that this is a play and placing the audience at a distance. O'Connor's 'paper' set, meanwhile, is a constant reminder of the origin of the play, the novel. However, these objects are imbued with symbolic and codified meaning; washing on a line is intimate and domestic and signals home, while a chair and desk tell the audience it is a learning institution and so on. After the functionalistic use, these props never disappear completely back up into the fly space, they remain above the heads of the actors (see Fig. 4) to 'build a collage of her story' (10:30) (O'Connor, 2019) so that at the end of the performance all of the pieces are lowered to the stage and flown off to punctuate the end of the story. These impermanent domestic objects also appear to signify home as a place of precarity rather than security in Kate's life. Each time she finds a place to settle, it moves or is taken from her, be it her childhood home or the convent school she attends.



Figure 4: Grace Collender and Steven McCarthy in The Country Girls with hanging furniture (2019). Photography: Ros Kavanagh (courtesy of Ros Kavanagh).



Figure 5: Ensemble in *The Country Girls* (2019). Photography: Ros Kavanagh (courtesy of Ros Kavanagh).

There is a flow to the way in which place keeps changing during this production that adds to the sense of reverie and sentimentality and how Kate's story moves from one chapter to the next without stopping for very long in any particular place. This dramaturgical choice contributes to the representation of Kate's character, placing the audience into the experience of constant motion in her life. But the mood of nostalgia was helped by the choreography of Vicki Manderson for the ensemble which Peter Crawley of *The Irish Times* likened to the 'murmuration of starlings' who moved in waves to the 'misty' music of Ray Harman (Crawley, 2019). Manderson's choreographic arrangements are highly resonant of Pina Bausch's *Rite of Spring*, thus carrying resonances of the young woman sacrificed. However, this production has chosen to tell this story in a way that makes Kate the manager of her own destiny, the actresses playing Kate and Baba confirm this in interview with Lisa Farrelly for the Abbey podcast series. They state that, within the story being told, they wished to represent these characters as being in charge of their own destiny and making their own decisions, that it is a 'tale of female empowerment' (42:15, Abbey Theatre, 2019b). This would appear to be a twenty-first century ideology being imposed on the play. In Ireland in the 1950s/60s there was no female

empowerment, as evidenced by the ‘clamour of an ultra-conservative, ultra-religious and institutionally misogynistic society’ (O’Brien and McBride, 2017, p. x) in response to *The Country Girls* in 1960. From this perspective then, the design reflects the intention in the production which is to show a story that moves freely and fluidly, each ‘chapter’ leaving its mark on the protagonist, Kate, as reflected in the furniture and props hanging above her throughout the performance, ‘sketched’ on the blank paper of the set design with the impermanence of her life highlighted. It tells a story from a distance; the dramaturgy choosing not to linger or point to specific issues or themes in the life of this character for the timeframe given. From the information on the Abbey website, it seems McLaren’s intention was for this to have the effect of offering the opportunity for enjoyment of the aesthetic of this staging of a very well-known novel. In his own words ‘the reason for doing it is as much as celebration of Edna as it is of the story’ (Anton, 2019; Abbey Theatre, 2019a). McLaren confirms that the adaptation was initially intended to be performed in 2018 but due to schedule issues it was deferred until 2019 (Anton, 2019). This then coincided with *The Country Girls* trilogy being named the ‘One Dublin One Book’ choice for 2019 which highlights a particular book relevant to the city. For a book which was initially banned to be chosen as a book to be read by ‘everyone’ in 2019, was an acknowledgement of the importance of O’Brien’s contribution to Irish literature. It was a ‘celebration of its author’s achievement’ and a chance to honour ‘her talent and legacy’ (*The Country Girls* trilogy by Edna O’Brien is Dublin One City One Book 2019,’ 2018).

McLaren worked with O’Brien to revise the adaptation to reflect his idea of a dream play (Abbey Theatre, 2019a). Strindberg (author of *A Dream Play*, 1901) describes his dream plays as ‘[U]pon an insignificant background of real life events the imagination spins and weaves new patterns: a blend of memories, experiences, pure inventions, absurdities and improvisations’ (Strindberg, 1983, p. 205). This description would seem to be one that fits the form used for McLaren’s production. Strindberg further describes dream plays as being from the ‘consciousness’ of the ‘dreamer’ (Strindberg, 1983, p. 205). In this case, Kate is presumably the dreamer. However, for this production, one could argue that it may also be O’Brien’s dream and therefore a mix between her consciousness and that of Kate (the character). As McLaren notes in interview with Saoirse Anton, ‘there’s something about Edna’s story that’s intrinsically linked to *The Country Girls*’ and he goes on to note that both the character of Kate and that of Baba represent different sides to the author (Anton, 2019). Therefore, who the dreamer is in this ‘dream play’ is in question which may cloud which character’s perspective

is being offered. This is noted in Peter Crawley's review in *The Irish Times* in which he points out that the 'voice' of the staging is 'uncertain' (Crawley, 2019) due to the inclusion of voiceovers from the author.

This raises the question as to whether this staging of *The Country Girls* is failing to address female subjectivity in the novel and the script or if this staging is representing the character of Kate but from a removed position. The life of Kate is dispersed on the stage, her story and her experiences. Whilst this staging of *The Country Girls* necessarily deals with some of the themes of the play such as the loss of a loved one, the bond between mother and daughter and the lack of agency for young women in mid-century Ireland, significant issues such as the male predatorship of the young woman at its centre are not sufficiently critiqued or challenged. Kate's subjectivity is not dealt with in depth except for the representation of the constant lack of control she has over the motion in her life. Her life happens to her, she does not really make choices for herself in this staging. This is carried through to the choreography of the cast whereby at times they are moving her and dressing or undressing her. Again, there is a connection to Bausch's *Rite of Spring* in the way in which the choreography works to expose the roles imposed on women and the symbolic use of colour, in the splashes of red for specific items symbolising the passing of time, menstruation, fertility, and the coming of age of Kate. Her red high heels, for example, could signify womanhood, maybe even the enslavement of womanhood and red can signify danger, sexuality and passion, especially when viewed against the white background. If white can signify pure, clean or innocent, then the red items of Kate's can indicate the notion of the duality of women being either saints or sinners, the virgin or the fallen woman. The semiotics of this choreography together with the diverse symbolism of the colours compounds Kate's complex positioning as a victim of circumstances and the misogynistic era she lives in and not the director of her own life. When looked at with States' binocular vision, the music, choreography and the beauty of the stage design and costumes help to create an emotional response while the semiotics point to a lack of agency for Kate. Thus the elements of the mise-en-scène worked together to have an impact that lasted beyond the end of the play, in line with what dance critic Arlene Croce dubbed 'afterimages' in her 1977 book of the same name (Manko, 2017). In the analysis of the performance, meanwhile, the set design acted as a constant reminder of the book and story whilst at the same time having a Brechtian effect in removing the audience from the experience of being Kate. In summary, then, the mise-en-scène worked as a constant reminder of Kate as a character on a page, a character created by Edna O'Brien.

Francis O'Connor wanted to tell the story as a story, and unlike Paul O'Mahony (set designer for *Asking for It*) he had specific images from the story that he wanted to explore, rather than specific references to the inner life of Kate. This means that the dramaturgy of character for Kate is stuck in a particular frame of reference, that of Kate in a book published in 1960. However, O'Connor's design encourages reflection on the development of her story as she passes from one chapter in her story to the next. This open and 'blank page' set sets Kate apart from those, like her mother, who was trapped within the domestic sphere (denoted in this production with clothesline and other housekeeping props). The use of an open stage presents a range of possibilities in contrast to the character in the novel and the world occupied by women in Ireland at the time of publication. The set without interior wall, door or window could indicate a prison without exit while also indicating a freedom from the usual place of the woman on the Irish stage within the domestic setting. However, at the same time it tells the story of a young woman displaced, with no place to call home.

The fact that McLaren chose to focus on the aesthetic rather than the personal perspective of Kate has to be considered. He states that he chose to focus on this production as a celebration of a much loved book and on Edna O'Brien as a much loved and mistreated Irish writer (Anton, 2019). Therefore, Kate herself is almost a vehicle for this intention rather than the protagonist in her own story. This production completely embraces the fact that this book has special place in the hearts of a generation of women who had read it in secret while it was on the list of banned books and caters to that sense of nostalgia. It therefore occupies an uneasy position in the programming of the Abbey when programmed alongside plays like *Asking for It* (2018) or *Not a Funny Word* (2018) by Tara Flynn. These plays tackle issues of a contemporary Ireland (rape, consent and travelling for abortion) for contemporary women and help to break the cycle of presenting female characters without subjectivity. O'Connor's set fully acknowledges that it is based on a book and reminds the audience of this in a Brechtian fashion as it is reminiscent of pages turning and a story flowing from the writer to the paper set, a 'stage picture... subject to continual change' (Aston and Savona, 2013, p. 158). However, McLaren retells the narrative in a form meant for a modern audience, placing the female characters to the fore and the mixing of form with movement and music in similar fashion to other recent Abbey Theatre productions under his direction, such as *Jimmy's Hall* (2018). In this way, it seems fair to acknowledge that although the representation of the character of Kate as the main protagonist may not be as three dimensional or immersive as the other productions examined here, McLaren's dramaturgical

decisions in this production serving to highlight O'Brien as a female writer, and her book as a treasured memory for women in Ireland, do work on a feminist level to cement her place as an Irish writer of note. Given what had been happening in Irish theatre since #WTF in 2015 and in the Abbey Theatre in particular, it is particularly relevant for the National Theatre to want to redress the balance, so to speak. As a production, *The Country Girls* acknowledged the importance of O'Brien's novel and thus indirectly addressed how she was treated in Ireland when it was first published, when it and four more of her books were banned here because of her discussion of female sexuality (Anton, 2019, p. 27). The title of Peter Crawley's review in *The Irish Times*, 'Subversion reimagined as sentimentality', sums up the production's lost opportunities in relation to the representation of a female character and provides evidence that this production exemplifies the complex relationship between the Abbey and its wider society (Crawley, 2019). However, it does not give the merit due to the Abbey Theatre for choosing to stage it. This adaptation makes a particular statement about what is happening culturally in Ireland when the National Theatre chooses to make a production such as this, when it chooses to right a perceived wrong. In January 2019, a letter with over three hundred signatures from Irish theatre professionals was delivered to the Abbey. It outlined the various ways in which people in the industry were being let down by their national theatre. In a written response to this letter, the journalist Fintan O'Toole stated that the Abbey was suffering a 'profound uncertainty about what it is for' and that it does not appear to be for Irish writing. He points to 'the awkward question of the Abbey's present and its past' (O'Toole, 2019). I suggest that in this production, by highlighting a much-maligned female writer, staging her work and dispersing her own character throughout the stage and the actors on it, the Abbey has gone some way towards bridging Ireland's present and its past.

Chapter 3: *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* (Samuel Beckett Centre, 2014)

When writing about what she perceived as ‘the death of character’ in relation to the possible end of theatre anthropocentrism, Elinor Fuchs asked ‘[...] what notion of ourselves as audience is theatre reflecting back to us?’ (Fuchs, 1996, p. 176). She suggests that ‘we are actually coming to perceive ourselves as the fragmented, ephemeral constellations of thought, vision, and action that the Buddha saw as the truth of human nature’ (Fuchs, 1996, p. 176). This production of *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* highlights the fragmented and ephemeral while sharing the experience of Girl’s thoughts. The challenge for the staging of this adaptation was to create a performance that would immerse the audience in the subjective world of the girl and place the audience inside her thoughts in a way that could reflect Ryan’s intention to place the audience ‘inside the breath’ (Ryan, 2019, p. 3). This chapter argues that the dramaturgy of character, space, and place in this stage adaptation worked together so as to reflect the experience of female subjectivity in the context of heightened trauma in an era of revelations of female trauma in Ireland. This was achieved in performance by dispersing Girl throughout the staging, in the set, costume, lighting and sound, so that the character representation could seem as though ‘there is no thinker, there is only thought; no one to feel, but only feelings’ (Zimmer in Fuchs, 1996, p. 175).

Written by Eimear McBride, *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) is the story of a rural girl ‘unbecoming’, a girl who lives with a pious and troubled mother, an ill brother and no father. She is raped as a young teenager by her uncle and goes through the usual coming of age milestones, school, Leaving Certificate and leaving home for college whilst all the time chasing sexual encounters to numb pain or fill a void. Later in the book comes a reengagement with the same uncle, the death of the Girl’s brother, and ultimately her suicide. Greatly influenced by James Joyce’s modernist literary style, McBride uses first-person narrative that is both wholly immersive and subjective while at the same time being disassociated in its language. None of the characters are named and it is this disassociation and anonymity that guides the set design and staging in the 2014 Corn Exchange production of the play adapted and directed by Annie Ryan. Girl is everywhere on the stage and yet she is nowhere.

While being immersive in its subjectivity *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* is at the same time an example of States’ definition of character in Performance Theatre, which is any form of theatre

that foregrounds the stage ‘image’ with character being dispersed into the physical universe of the stage’ (States, 1985a, p. 94). It is through this dispersal of Girl into the set and staging elements that helps to create the experience of being immersed in the thoughts and mind of the speaker. It is however not limited to the staging. States notes that Performance Theatre replaces a ‘logic of character motives with a logic of audience emotions’ (States, 1985a, p. 95). This adaptation of *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* adds audience emotions to that of the character motives in a way that totally immerses the audience in the character. So much so, that there is no name needed for this character, the audience becomes her instead of learning about her. The play (and the novel) opens with ‘For you. You’ll Soon. You’ll give her a name’ (Ryan, 2014). She is never named despite constant references to her name with the last line of both the book and the play being: “my name is gone”. Shadia Abdel-Rahman Téllez notes that her ‘namelessness’ is a ‘strategy to highlight her girlhood and her position in a male dominated world’ (Téllez, 2018). Not giving the audience a name for her could also indicate that her identity is fragmented and ephemeral, not really existing in a physical way. So, in terms of the physical performance of this play, she is in no specific place, and she has no name. Place can also have an impact on identity; people can identify with place being Irish, or from Cork for example. Girl (played by Aoife Duffin) aided by the soil added to the stage at her feet (see Fig. 6) gives a vague sense of a rural place in the west of Ireland but not an identifiable place. Marc Augé suggests that ‘[i]f a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity’ then a ‘non-place’ is the opposite (Augé, 1995, pp. 77-78). Therefore, choosing a non-place for the staging highlights this aspect of Girl’s (non) identity. She is dispersed throughout the space and is everywhere becoming a phenomenological perception. This experience of character offers a new perspective for an audience used to identifying with the male story as universal and allows them to walk in the shoes of Girl to experience being her and experiencing her fragmented identity which may give them insight in order to effect a change outside the theatre. Her subjectivity is everyone’s subjectivity and it only exists in the moment of performance when all of the elements of performance are aligned and an audience is there to experience it. In 2014, at the time of this performance, the audience would have had a particular social context filter through which to understand and interpret this production. With events like the inquest into the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2013 and the launch of the investigation into the Tuam Mother and Baby Home in 2014, Ireland’s treatment of women was being brought under scrutiny in the media. Added to this were high profile cases of family rape, including Bernard Delaney’s ordered payment to one of his victims in 2013, and the case of Fiona Doyle’s abuse at the hands of her father and uncle in 2013/2014.

This set needed to be a space for Girl to tell her story but not a particular place and for them, a black box theatre was ideal to create this immersive non-setting. As Ryan notes, there is a sense that the story is being told by Girl from beyond the grave and so, she is nowhere. But in practical terms, the set has to be somewhere; the audience attends a specific space. All of the decisions made, therefore, needed to give a sense of no place while actually being somewhere. So, in effect, what the creative team on this production were trying to achieve was a non-setting, no-place. Which needed as much, if not more, attention to the semiotic cues the audience may be receiving than if it were set in a specific place. Nothing could distract them from the words of Girl. What enhances the text in this case is the lighting and sound. According to the production's set designer, Lian Bell: 'Lighting designer Sinead Wallace and I minutely worked through the lighting states on the horizon line and decided on an internal narrative coherence, which gave a constant micro-shift to the space without distracting from the performance' (Bell, 2014). There was a 'broken horizon line' (Bell, 2014) behind the actress and this represented everything from hospital lighting to the edge of a field (see Fig. 6). This line was adjusted and added to at various times to shift with the narrative. In my interview with Ryan, she said that from the outset she wanted it in a 'non-realistic, non-located setting', that 'it didn't matter what it looked like, it was an aural thing' (Ryan, 2019, p. 3). This was aided by a soundscape, designed by Mel Mercier, which was described in one review as a 'rising drone' (Gleeson, 2014). Mercier describes his work in theatre as being 'like painting', he creates a 'palette of sound' (Long, 2019). The soundscape in this production was reminiscent of white noise in places, which is a sound close to a non-sound noise used to drown out other sounds, thus in keeping with the non-located staging. Mixed with the greys and blues of Wallace's lighting, it created a palette of cold and grey colours representative of fog or the colour of breath on a cold morning which built on the sense of being suspended 'inside the breath' (Ryan, 2019, p. 3).

In moving from the imaginary world of the text to the stage Ryan wanted to retain the sense of pictures being completed in the imaginations of the audience so that 'the images happen inside the audience's heads in a similar way to the way it happens when you read the book' (Ryan, 2019, p. 3). However, a novel cannot create an atmosphere of character through the use of colour in the same way this can be achieved in the theatre. Semiotically, grey can indicate a lack of colour or joy in someone or something or it can be reminiscent of fog which itself can

represent a lack of clarity of thought. Taken together, therefore, the semiotics of the theatre space can then suggest an ‘internal narrative coherence’, to borrow Bell’s words cited above, based on tone, mode and atmosphere rather than any literal cohesive meaning or essentializing of character. Bell says:

‘Once we realised we needed a very minimalist stage, the director Annie Ryan and I worked in detail on all the visual decisions – what shape the aperture of the space should be, what shape the platform should be, what the floor texture should be, what height Aoife Duffin should be at in relation to the audience, and what should be behind her. The smallest change had a huge effect on the atmosphere of the space. In a way, I felt like we were making a kind of dark zen garden for Aoife – muted greys, a space she was suspended in (or trapped in) and absolutely nothing to draw attention away from her performance.’ (Bell, 2014)



Figure 6: Aoife Duffin in A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing (2014). Photography: Fiona Morgan (courtesy of Annie Ryan, The Corn Exchange).

As Ryan herself states, ‘everything about the visuals were suggested and embodied but almost never literal’ (Ryan, 2019, p. 3). As well as in the sound and lighting, this attention to the semiotic cues was carried through to the stage and costume. For example, the soil on the stage signals the rural but it also signals death, a return to the earth. It is a reminder of life and decay and the Irish relationship with land. Girl’s costume is a man’s pyjamas signalling comfort, vulnerability and intimacy and not overtly sexual or feminine which may have been the case with certain items of clothing like short skirts or nightdress. Ryan’s choice to dress Girl in this way removed certain loaded social signifiers in direct opposition to the choice of short, fitted party dress for Emma in *Asking for It*. This places the emphasis firmly on Ryan’s intention for this production, as she notes ‘if what is important is the truth of her voice then nothing must get in the way of that so that helps drive all the other choices to keep coming back to that core intention’ (Ryan, 2019, p. 4)

The reviews for the production indicate that the team were successful in their endeavour to keep the audience completing the story images in their own imaginations in the non-located place of the play. Ben Brantley’s review for *The New York Times* opened with:

‘The body is barely there, more phantasm than person, and at first you might mistake it for a shadow. When the astonishing Irish actress Aoife Duffin makes her entrance in “A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing,” drifting through a corridor of grey light, her features are indistinguishable. And though she soon starts to speak, the words that she says also seem curiously inchoate’ (Brantley, 2016).

This speaks to the success of the production team in terms of creating a ‘half-formed’ character to match the title.

However, in terms of a feminist reading of the dramaturgy of character, the form was the most important decision. As previously mentioned, Annie Ryan made reference to staging this play in a ‘Beckettian landscape’ (Ryan, 2014, p. 7). Beckett’s plays analysed the ‘human being at moments of intense self-awareness and anxiety’ (Boulter, 2008, p. 2). Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* in the aftermath of World War II in what Jonathan Boulter refers to as ‘a context of great shock and protracted anxiety’ (Boulter, 2008, p. 2). If, as Boulter suggests, *Godot* was a play ‘stating the anticipation of action rather than action itself’ (Boulter, 2008, p. 2), then it could be said that *A Girl Is a Half-formed thing* is a play stating the experience of *being* Girl

rather a play *about* her. *Godot* was written at a time of revelations about the ‘truth of the death camps’ (Boulter, 2008, p. 2) and as mentioned previously *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* was adapted and staged at a time of many revelations about the treatment of women in Ireland. McBride admits to being influenced by both Beckett and Joyce (O’Keeffe, 2014), therefore the form was shaped by the content but it was also shaped by the context. The novel was written in a fragmented way, and the form for the adaptation became a fragmented monologue due to McBride’s insistence that no words of the novel could be altered, only cut. However, this fragmentation is consistent with trauma and its ‘affective experience’ after the fact, what Miriam Haughton refers to as a ‘liminal homeland of “working through” fragmented shards of memories’ (Haughton, 2018, p. 6). In the published text of *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* Annie Ryan specifically states in her notes that ‘this adaptation was conceived for a solo performer on a spare set with no props or furniture’ (Ryan, 2014, p. 11). Eimear McBride states it was important to her that it was in monologue form (Crompton, 2016) and Ryan confirms that she never considered it in any form other than monologue. This was for two reasons: the first one was a practical one, The Corn Exchange Theatre Company had received only meagre funding that year and Ryan was trying to develop a production that would fit the budget; the second was a dramaturgical one, she saw the adaptation of the book as a ‘Beckettian monologue’ (Ryan, 2019, p. 1) of the inner voice of the Girl. In this production, the form is a feminist decision, especially here in Ireland. The monologue form became particularly popular in Irish playwriting around the millennium, especially so with male playwrights for male actors, playing male characters (Singleton, 2010, p. 70). Therefore, a female monologue, when the stage has been the domain of the male story, is a radical thing. As Brian Singleton notes, it is a ‘challenge and a confrontation’, ‘men are visually erased’ and the audience only knows any men in the piece ‘by the reconstruction of men’s position in relation to how the woman constructs them in her solo narrative’ (Singleton, 2010).

In writing about McBride’s novel and the staging of the play during its run at the Young Vic (London), Sarah Crompton of *The Guardian* defines Corn Exchange’s adaptation of *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* as ‘a show that redefines ‘immersive’’ and ‘a new way of experiencing a book’ (Crompton, 2016). This opposes Annie Ryan’s own conclusion that ‘the book, as an object, has a radicalism that in a way the stage version doesn’t have’ (Ryan, 2019, p. 5) which may be understating what this production achieved because as she also notes ‘this one is from a female point of view which was at that time, and still is, a radical thing’ (Ryan, 2019, p. 7). Girl’s point of view became the focus for the staging. The space and place were nowhere and

yet were somewhere, somewhere new to audiences, as they were within Girl and Girl herself was no one but was someone, 'the fragmented, ephemeral constellations of thought, vision, and action' (Fuchs, 1996, p. 176).

Thesis Conclusion:

Through the connection between the dramaturgy of space and place and character explored in this thesis and the socio-political context in which these adaptations were performed, these plays suggest that we are in a new epoch of character representation in Irish theatre, one that reflects the changing culture around gender. The analysis further indicates a push and pull between progressive and reductive approaches to the representation of female characters on the stage in Ireland during the period under investigation. The link between the confinement of Emma in *Asking for It* (2018) after her rape and her placement in the domestic set, traditionally a place of confinement for female characters on the Irish stage, and the victim-blaming culture in Ireland at a time when the removal of women from the domestic in the constitution is being discussed makes an obvious statement: women should no longer be hidden away or blamed when abused. By confining a woman to the domestic it limits her options and the impact she can make in her lifetime. Using this trope of the 'woman's place' to emphasise the shrinking of Emma's world and the removal of opportunity and freedom highlights the way in which women were confined to this indoor, domestic world both in Irish theatre and in Irish society and still now, the Irish constitution. It also highlights how female victims are blamed for sexual abuse and rape and how this attitude towards female victims belongs to the past, a past that confined women to the indoors, the domestic and to the patriarchal ideology of being either saints or sinners, objectified and vilified. For *The Country Girls* (2019), the 21st century lens in the staging shows a Kate with no place to call home but with options to move forward and explore. However, it also shines a light on the lack of agency for women in the mid twentieth century in Ireland through the staging and choreography, with the movement of props and costume happening to Kate rather than because of any choice she makes. This production, using the Abbey (as Ireland's National Theatre) with a culturally significant stage, also chose to highlight and right a perceived wrong in Irish literary history by giving the book itself a prominent position in the staging. From the 'blank page' set to the flying objects, this representation of turning pages turned the whole production into a tribute to the female writer who had been vilified and had her books banned. *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* (2014) was staged in the midst of sexual abuse cases, the inquest of Savita Halappanavar and the start of the Tuam Babies investigation. The abuse of women, young women in particular, and the disregard for women's bodies helped to place the audience in the mind, the non-located setting, of Girl, making this not just a representation of female character but an immersive experience of being her. All three of the young women in these plays are displaced: Emma from the

specific life-path with choices and opportunities she had been on; Kate constantly moving without a home or family; and the 'Half-formed' Girl belonging nowhere in her story but also being placed nowhere in the production. *The Country Girls* and *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* remove their female characters from the domestic. They are not tethered indoors, or in a physical place. This untethering of the female from the home, represents a 'manifestation of a change in the larger culture' in Ireland (Fuchs, 1996, p. 8) as evidenced by the recent results of the Citizen's Assembly vote to change the wording of Article 41 in the Irish constitution.

The dramaturgical use of space and place in these three plays, at a time when so much was happening in Ireland in terms of constitutional and cultural issues for women, should cement these plays in Irish theatre history. These plays represent a repositioning of the female through the use of specific scenographic and topographical dramaturgies. Because of the contextual relationship between the plays, their content and Irish society rendering them relevant, these plays were toured, reviewed and published which is something that did not happen for previous female-driven adaptations.

The fact that these are adaptations of well-received and popular novels gives the productions a more mainstream platform rather than being from the fringe of Irish theatre. Furthermore, the actual theatre spaces used for these productions are significant in terms of the lasting change they may effect for female character representation. The Abbey Theatre produced *The Country Girls* for the national stage and then proceeded to tour the production to the bigger theatres around Ireland. *Asking for It* had the Abbey Theatre as co-producers and the production premiered on the stage of The Everyman theatre in Cork before a sold-out run on the national stage in Dublin and a further tour to Birmingham. *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* toured to London, Cardiff, Liverpool, and New York, receiving critical acclaim in each place. To have these plays, with their particular representations of female characters set in places and spaces that emphasise a change in where Irish female characters are situated, performed in mainstream venues and to be the subject of discussion in media as well as theatre circles will ensure that this is not an 'iteration' of female characterisation in Irish theatre that will be forgotten.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Julie Kelleher Interview 1 Transcript

Appendix 2: Julie Kelleher Interview 2 Transcript

Appendix 3: Annie Ryan Interview Transcript

Note: The above appended transcripts have been edited to remove superfluous material or elements of the interview question that do not relate directly to the thesis.

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