

THE IRISH THEATRE AS IMAGINATIVE SPACE: A VEHICLE AND VENUE FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE IRISH IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT: *Current cultural and political changes have prompted the theatre to play a significant role in staging the transformations of the Irish identity. Over time, it has provided an impetus for expressions of the collective new self-image of the Irish. Re-inventing the self requires a manifestation of space and the production of space whether geographical, metaphorical or a physical stage representation. 'Space' has been utilised in Irish drama in terms of geographical location, cartography, social media, technology, immigration, and the theatre stage. Globalisation has also played a crucial role in terms of creating overlapping spaces and multiple belongings. This study will examine through Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, how this type of spatial awareness manifests itself in Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980); Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996); Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998); Michel Tremblay's *Solemn Mass for a Full Moon in Summer* (2009) and Emma Donoghue's adapted stage play *Room* (2017).*

KEYWORDS: Irish Drama; Spatial Theory; National Identity; Post-Colonialism; Theatre, Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Space is more than just part of the language of theatre, it is one of the main elements of its existence. This study of space in the work of five contemporary international Irish playwrights: Brian Friel, Martin McDonagh, Marina Carr, Michel Tremblay and Emma Donoghue refers to real Irish landscapes being exemplified in their works and to the ways in which the stage setting is rearranged physically. The first part of the study is an analysis of the dramatic texts; while the second part of the analysis, focuses on performance. The plays examined here share recurring themes pertinent to the notions of belonging, exile and otherness.

The plays selected will be analysed in context of Henri Lefebvre's dynamic theoretical model of space: perceived space, conceived space and the lived representational space. The analysis aims not just to understand the ways in which theatre produces space, but, explore the significance of space in reconstructing the Irish identity. The selection of the texts is not arbitrary, but rather, they are selected because they are key texts and performances that use space in a number of different ways. At the same time, the notions discussed in this analysis take on a global perspective which can be applicable to a variety of contemporary dramatic texts from around the globe.

Underpinning Theory: Defining Space

The study of place and space has gained increased attention in recent years despite the irony of our contemporary globalized lifestyles and borderless multinational belongings. A large body of recent work by cultural and geographical experts which examines the construction of space

has been used to deepen our understanding of theatre and drama. This study relies not only on the work of theatrical critics like Eli Rozik, Una Chaudhuri, and Erika Fischer-Lichte but also on Henri Lefebvre and Rob Kitchin's constructions of space.

Space in terms of geography, is simply an empty area. The construction of space is dealt with by Henri Lefebvre (1974), Gay McAuley (1999), and David Wiles (2003) in their works as they explore the spatial triad, a theory that has since been used by theatre scholars. To understand the reconfiguration of theatre space resulting from contemporary developments, we need to differentiate between the different types of spaces that theatre can produce including virtual space and as well as global. Space is one of the five irreducible elements of theatre: time, language, body, sound and memory. In theatre, space is not just occupied; it has an ontological as well as a semantic existence. Andy Merrifield, in *Thinking Space* (2000), refers to space as fluid and organic. In *Space II*, Professor Rob Kitchin (2009) explains that what is produced or constructed through social interactions is called 'relational space' (268). Light also becomes part of the production of space in theatre when used to define an area on the stage and structure the passing of time. In that context, the theatre becomes spatial and is thus, most powerful when it is dramaturgical.

When we think of theatrical space, quite often it is the stage space which is referred to and the analysis barely goes beyond the 'absolute space' (Kitchen 2009). Audience in a theatre, are bound by the spatial parameters of the performance; they become a temporary community. Likewise, when audiences visit a play's website, they immediately come together as an imagined community despite the geographical distance of users. This technological construction creates conceptual space.

METHODOLOGY

The attention given to the idea of belonging or sense of place in Irish criticism, prompts us to look at the dense signification invested in the representation of the Irish landscape. Irish playwrights have often represented on stage fictional geographical spaces which had meaning since the late eighteenth century. The spaces were places already heavy with signification. This signification allowed for a unique active participation of the audience in a shared culture that is not bound by the geographical space of the Irish nation, but rather based on a shared set of beliefs or memory of those beliefs. The same would easily apply to Irish drama produced and performed outside Ireland where audiences join in what can be called the conceptual space of the theatre (Kitchin 2009). The representation of fictional space is only one type of the many types of theatrical spaces.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980), is not just about linguistic colonialism; it is about the ability to comprehend and control space. Act Two and Three open with a map of the Donegal area spread across the stage space. The play takes place in a hedge school, a disused hay-shed. The converted space is described as a room with emblems of the past. The school master, Hugh and his son Manus, shortly after the play begins, rearrange the space used as their home into a school classroom. The set on the stage shows the transformation of the disused barn to a hedge school and then again into living space highlighting the spatial instances of the characters'

social interactions. As domestic space alternates to public space, the relationships are reconfigured. The cultural importance of space changes with every time the hedge school space is transformed on the stage set. The shifting space is symbolic of the instability of the world in which the play takes place.

Colonialism being fundamentally about occupying space/territory is signified by the physical entrance of two soldiers Yolland and Lancey inside the hedge school. Friel uses this powerful indicator on the theatre stage to provide a visual image of the intrusion into Irish space by a colonial power. The British army is on a short term mission with long lasting effects: the renaming of the Irish landscape. The renaming, is accompanied by the plotting of the geographical features of Donegal on a map, hence, rearranging the exterior space. The rearrangement of the hedge school space and the landscape of Donegal on a 'paper landscape' (Lojek 2011), draw attention to the old and new ways of comprehending space. The competing claims between the British and the Irish to Donegal highlight the complexity of renaming the exterior space. Donegal is a '... land, homeland and history' (Lojek 2011). It is a geographic space that defies translation and its inhabitants resist being reduced on a map to 'a set of mathematical data' (20).

Resistance is associated in a number of instances with space in the play. The hedge school is often associated with colonial resistance. Hugh, is resistant to the English language teaching on the hedge school premises and by suggesting that the Irish focus on the classical worlds of Greece and Rome, Hugh is implying Catholic resistance to British Protestantism. Hugh explains to Yolland, a British soldier, that he is unfamiliar with Wordsworth's poetry because 'we're not familiar with your literature ... We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean. We tend to overlook your island' (Friel 1980). While Hugh may be willing to overlook England, the British are overlooking the mapping process of his homeland. Ironically, it is inside the hedge school that the Irish and the English are able to connect in contrast to the violence outside: the murder of the British cartographer and the mysterious disappearance of Yolland. Mathew Johnson (1996) argues that the replacing of cultural significance with "utilitarian" (114-15) descriptions creates a gap between the landscape and what it signifies. The violence is a direct result of these powerful changes in the understanding of space.

The inhabitants of Donegal, are threatened to be wiped away. Hugh will fossilise as a drunken man held back by the Classic Worlds, Manus leaves Ballybeg and Maire is eager to leave for America. Ballybeg, Friel's fictional space '... nurtures neither children nor crops and where future generations do not survive, let alone thrive' (Lojek 2011). The cartography disrupts Ballybeg's stable notions of space leaving it an 'empty abstraction' (Lefebvre 1974). The colonised space has become home to no one and requires the Irish to learn new ways to understand their homeland. Helen H. Lojek (2011) points out that 'The Irish know their literal place very differently than the map does, and they understand their figurative place very differently than the English do' (35).

McDonagh's dramatic text *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996), is a narrative of frustrated dreams, immigration, homeland and love; but, it is also about a national identity crisis within a global context. Rendering Ireland and Irishness unstable, McDonagh's characters are ingrained in a truth made up of trivial particularities such as brand names and Australian soap-operas. The imaginative geography of borders in this play is considered within a post nationalist context. Edward W. Said (1979) refers to 'imaginative geography' (55) as 'the process of identifying a sense of self by distancing or Othering that which is considered foreign. He further explains that geographical borders are imaginary states, artificial and potentially

divisive' (Rees 2010). The imagined space occupied in McDonagh's text is just that, an imaginary line to blame all troubles on.

Irish drama is frequently preoccupied with diaspora and the packaging of Ireland for a global market. Such commodification of space, denies the reality of a place in an age of multiple belongings and globalisation. David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990) describes globalisation as "time-space compression" (xxv) leading to the rise of what critics have dubbed "McDonaldization" and "Disneyfication" (Harvie 2005), hence rendering distances, redundant.

McDonagh's *The Beauty Queene of Leenane* is littered with references to global products. The domestic space has a framed picture of the Kennedys in the kitchen and Mag Folan the seventy year old mother spends her days watching foreign soap-operas. Ray, Pato's messenger and Mag's visitor, remarks: 'Everything's Australian now' (McDonagh 1999). Establishing that Ireland is cluttered with global products, particularly television programmes, is not the sole aim of the play. There is an underlying concern related to global distractions undermining Irish history and culture. The characters in the play take their experiences from the media. Ray and Mag's discussion of an Australian soap opera "*The Sullivans*" exposes the constructed reality sold to the public viewer through television:

Ray: Who wants to see Ireland on telly?

Maureen: I do.

Ray: All you have to do is look out of your window to see Ireland. And it's soon bored you'll be. "There goes a calf" (McDonagh 1999).

Experiencing rural Ireland physically is far less fascinating than experiencing it through television, not because the televised reflection of rural life is authentic, but because it is designed to be more likable. The fabrication of 'fictional space' (Morash 2012) is not just of Leenane, but of Ireland as a whole. McDonagh's play skillfully employs the different types of spaces Henri Lefebvre (1974) uses to demystify space. Leenane is the lived space where televised Irishness is mongered creating a fictional Ireland more suited to a diasporic community. Fintan O'Toole (1994) argues '... a [televised] synthetic image may be actually better for consumption than a real one' (189) and as a result, the constructed reality is more meaningful than actual life. Catherine Reese (2010) elucidates that "This "once removed from reality" syndrome can only contribute to a sense of dislocation with community and nationality, removing, ... the certainty associated with a secure Irish national identity" (227). This dislocation from the communal space is mirrored in the repulsion of others often used to reinforce self-identity. In Scene One, Mag is complaining that the language on the radio is Gaelic. Maureen reminds her that 'It's Irish you should be speaking in Ireland. ... If it wasn't for the English stealing our language and our land [...] we wouldn't need to go over there begging for jobs and for handouts" (McDonagh 1999). The binary relationship between Ireland and England is concomitant to Pato's leaving Ireland to find a job in England. In Scene Three, Pato shares his experience of consuming space in two distinct geographical spaces with Maureen: '... when it's there I am, it's here I wish I was, of course. Who wouldn't? But when it's here I am ... it isn't *there* I want to be, of course not. But I know it isn't here I want to be either' (McDonagh 1999). The promotion of Ireland as a perfect homeland idealised from a distance, is reflected in Pato's confused emotions of longing for the nation and acknowledging the reality of life as he knows it. Pato attempts to make sense of how he experiences his time

in London: 'In England they don't care if you live or die, and it's funny but that isn't altogether a bad thing' (McDonagh 1999).

Difford Hall, is a mental hospital where Maureen had been admitted as a result of a nervous breakdown when she worked as a cleaner in Leeds. Mag in an attempt to spite her daughter, in front of Pato, mentions the place. The harshness of the city life is contrasted with the role of Difford Hall as a healing space. It is a space where the ruptured by geographical borders are exiled and isolated from communal space. Maureen, admitted to Difford Hall, is twice removed, from Leenane and from normal society in Leeds. The ineffectiveness of the healing space is realised when we see Mag under the moonlit stage, fall out of her rocking chair and her fractured skull rolling across the theatre's 'present space' (Merrifield 2000).

The intimacy between Pato and the American girl Dolores Healey at the party is a union of two continents. The intimacy foreshadows Pato's departure to America. The action of the play interchanges between a number of spaces, Leenane, inside the cottage, the outside field, England (London, Difford Hall, Leeds) and Boston. The promise for wealth abroad lures Pato twice and encourages him to escape first to London, then to America leaving Maureen desperately dreaming 'Of anything! ... Of anything other than this' (McDonagh 1999). Like Friel's Donegal, 'There's always someone leaving' (21). The idea of prospects awaiting in America in relation to Ireland, uncovers the crisis within Irish nationalism. The play both criticizes the use of simplistic national images and highlights migrant aspirations and the diasporic dreams of home. Ireland is mythologized by the media for an overseas audience and is reduced to a space that is packaged and peddled as a product for a global market.

Through her works Marina Carr has conjured the midlands world existing within the triangle of Clonmacnoise, Tullamore and Birr, Co Offaly. Space in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), to use Henri Lefebvre's (1974) words is not 'the passive locus of social relations' but an 'active' space (11). Hester Swane, a member of the tinker travelling community, has made the Midlands bog her home. Seamus Heaney has often presented the bogs as 'preserves of Irish history, myth, artifacts and often human bodies' (Meredith 2000). This quintessentially Irish space serves as the exposition of national anxieties, family feuds, defining identity and social conflicts. Hester is Irish and is both at home on the bogs and alienated at the same time; she belongs and doesn't belong.

The visual imagery of the opening scene of the play, Hester Swane trailing a bloody corpse of a black swan across white snow, is an indication of Hester's ties to the landscape, and an evocation that it is not one of the rural Ireland. The geographical space of the bog is represented on the liminal space of the theatre stage. Carr's bog is a place where only Hester, a native of the land, can distinguish the changes taking place 'always shiftin' and changin' and coddin' the eye' (Carr 1998). The representation of the bog on the theatre stage is impressionistic with the use of light to create a moment that could be dusk or dawn and violin music to detract the audience's attention from the representational space. Eli Rozik (2008) describes this as a stage practice that compensates for the impossibility of creating a bog; this 'imagistic' stage convention functions to make a literal setting far from fictional (67-8). The use of the bog as a space for the exploration of the play's themes highlights the boundaries set between the characters of the settled community and this landscape. Both the audience and the characters of the play are outsiders; except for Hester and Catwoman.

Helen H. Lojek (2011) points out that the simple contemplation of an urban setting for *By the Bog of Cats*, stresses all the more the significance of using the bog as an unmapped, rarely

visited geographical setting. The play ‘... is able to present rural Traveller culture with a veneer of romanticism precisely because it is so distant from the urban realities of most audience members’ (68). Carr on a more significant level, presents a realistic landscape that is neither Dublin nor the Aran Isles, yet one which must be imaginatively created by the audience. The central importance of the setting of the play is the ability of the swampy land to preserve the Irish past.

Hester comes from a line of *tinkers*, an ethnic minority. Like the swampy bog, Hester and her ancestry pose a threat to the outside community; they must be eradicated to ensure an effective reformulation of Ireland’s cultural identity. The Cassidy’s farmhouse is contrasted against Hester’s home. The contrast poses the question of belonging and what can be accepted as being essentially Irish. Labeling Hester as a *tinker* dismisses the value Traveller culture brings to Ireland. Tinkers, as put by Marina Carr, are Ireland’s ‘national outsiders’ (Marina of the Midlands, 2000). Rosi Braidotti (1994) describes wandering/ homelessness as a rhythmic displacement: ‘... an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity’ (22). Hester is a Traveller who does not wander the lands, but is described by the settled community as nomadic and transpires as an outsider with an innate attachment to the bog. Her relationship to the bog is of one who knows through experience and tradition, she knows ‘where the best bog rosemary grows and the sweetest wild bog rue’ (Carr 1998). Her relationship with the landscape space is one that is remarkably different from the one farmers have with the land on which they toil. Carr shifts in her play between exterior and interior space when she refers to the house built for Hester by her lover Carthage Kilbride. We never see Hester inside the house. Hester’s discomfort inside the domestic space is a rejection of her role as a wife, a disappointment with the institution of marriage. She burns the house Carthage built for her: ‘it should never have been built in the first place. Let the bog have it back. Never liked that house anyway’ (Carr 1998). Interior space has often in theatre history been regarded as feminine space. Hanna Scolnicov (1994) sees this association as a sort of residential arrest or jail.

Hester’s caravan on the bog signifies resistance to a contemporary Celtic Tiger Irish life. Mary Burke (2009) refers to this as ‘Revival fashion for depicting tinkers as the antithesis of the expanding Irish bourgeoisie’ (106). The inside of the caravan is a familiar space to the audiences than the bog landscape, however, the depiction of an unfamiliar domestic space, aids in transporting the audience into a fantastical world of unpredictability. The interior and exterior spaces of *By the Bog of Cats* are ‘a manipulation of space’ (Lojek, 2011) reflecting examples of gender differences. Despite the bog being comfortable terrain for the three eccentric women in the play: Hester, Catwoman and Monica; the gender of the exterior space though reversed, is not exclusively feminine. The first and third acts of the play are by the bog, the second act in the Cassidy home. The penetration of the farmhouse by the inhabitants of the bog shows that the interior space is not safeguarded against the violence of the outside wilderness. The bog is a witness to the murders of Hester’s brother, daughter, Xavier’s son and her own suicide. The wedding ceremony invaded by Catwoman is also proof that supernatural forces are not held back by the boundaries of interior and exterior space.

Hester’s transgressive appearance in a wedding dress at Caroline Cassidy’s wedding is a backdrop against which she is contrasted. Hester’s fierce independence is compared to Caroline’s dependency and the ‘non-productive’ space of marital bliss (Johnson, 1996: p.84). Hester’s cultural worth is evaluated on a commercial scale, and despite her ancient roots to the land, she does not belong. She is a woman who wanders on the “uninhabitable zones of social

life” (Braidotti 1994) and the bog has shaped her identity ‘I’m goin’ nowhere. This is my house and my garden and my stretch of the bog and no wan’s runnin’ me out of here’ (Carr 1998). Her annihilation by the settled community is an attempt at eradicating the past as well as “native outsiders” (Lojek 2011). Hester pays a high price for her nonconformity and exemplifies the oppression faced by a woman degenerated to an ethnic minority by her nation. Hester is a ‘metaphoric outcast in the very space where she feels she most belongs’ (Lojek 2011).

Hester’s final words to Carthage before committing suicide reflect her oneness with the natural landscape:

‘When all of this over or half remembered and you think you’ve almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin’ wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That’ll be me and Josie ghostin’ ya’ (Carr 1998).

Travellers do not respect borders and Hester has transgressed the geographical space of the bog into another world. Just as the opening of the play makes it difficult to distinguish between dusk from dawn, it is difficult to distinguish Hester from the landscape from which she was forced to leave. Her suicidal act is a rebirth of her existence in a new space.

Solemn Mass for a Full Moon in Summer (2009) originally written in 1996 by Michel Tremblay was translated by Irish born playwright Bryan Delaney, from Québécois French. Inspired by the structure of choral secular mass it tells the story of eleven individuals on their separate balconies in a Montreal apartment block offering imprecations to the full moon in longing for peace of mind. The pre- and post-Christian rite is repeated like an oral ‘oratorio’ (Meany, 16 March 2009). The actual production by Rough Magic Theatre Company at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin ran from 5 to 28 March, 2009. Many would argue that this is not an Irish play written by an Irish playwright and hence does not belong in this discussion. But Bryan Delaney’s acclaimed translation with its impressive precision, gives it sufficient attention to be explored in context of the space of Irish theatre and what constitutes an Irish play. Tremblay’s play focuses on the physical space of the stage and Henri Lefebvre’s notion of the production of space.

The scenic space of the play with its three stories apartment building and six balconies moves the play’s theatrical space from the horizontal to the vertical. Paul O’Mahony’s set for the play, creates space using light to define areas on the stage and structure the passage of time. The polyphony of prayers is sung under the full moon. The unseen moon creates an ‘ontogenetic space’ (Merrifield 2000) reflecting a non-linear narrative where monologues and short scenes are weaved together to create the play’s six micro-dramas.

Although the play is almost devoid of movement, and there are no dramatic transformations to the characters as they are confined to their space in the balconies, the open space between the audience and the actors is transformed from a non-space into theatrical space in two instances: when a pair of young lovers come into the space and when a gay couple with one of them in their final stages of AIDS occupy the same space again. This inevitably accentuates the spatiality of the set through its vertical positioning. This leads us to further explore the fictional space of the play. Landscapes represented in Irish stage plays go as far back as Boucicault indicating that ‘one of the enduring pleasures of Irish theatre has been the *representation of space*’ (Morash 2012). *Solemn Mass* is set in Montreal. Tremblay’s fictional represented space lies parallel to Friel’s Ballybeg, Carr’s Bog of Cats and McDonagh’s Leenane.

Chris Morash (2012) argues that although *Solemn Mass* represents everyday space in which social life happens, it ‘opens up something closer to the idea of a diasporic space than to the more conventional forms of representational fictional space’(15). Based around the structure of Catholic Mass and drawing on near forgotten religious beliefs, the characters’ voices in the play unify and separate and reiterate with architectural precision. Like the recital in a liturgy, a chorus from all of the balconies calls upon the waning moon to bring back inner peace. *Solemn Mass*, creates a different form of space when the audience involuntarily take part in a mock post-Catholic communion as “And also with you” slips from their lips as the correct liturgical response. It is at this instance of responding to the prayer that the audiences share the same space with audiences elsewhere knowing they would have reacted similarly. It is an ‘active participation in a shared culture that is not bound by the absolute space of the nation; it is a form of ... diasporic space that is produced by a shared set of beliefs- or, at the very least, the memory of those beliefs’ (Morash 2012). This ‘conceptual space’ (Lefebvre 1974) is an outcome of an interactive model in which three modes of space interrelate ‘the *perceived*, the *conceived* and the *lived*’ (Morash 2012).

Further extending the notion of interaction with imagined audiences in other physical spaces; Rough Magic’s promotion of *Solemn Mass* through the use of virtual space is another form of *conceptual space*. The pre-publicity included a website, a Facebook link, an archive of photographs, and a YouTube trailer as well as a Twitter feed. The interactive website where audiences could follow the progress of the production created an absolute space that existed in space, giving life to the server space, only when users accessed it. Today, the website is dormant. In this respect, a website is poised between the prospective of reawakening and the acknowledgment that it is dead. By reading an online review of the play’s production or sharing the Facebook link we experience a sense of communion with an imagined community. The ability to access conceptual space from anywhere in the world gives the temporal and spatial parameters of the theatre space a global form.

Tremblay’s play was worth exploring within the context of Irish theatre space because of its’ complex structure in both design and delivery. It provides a preliminary example of the different kinds of space produced by theatre from the absolute space of the performance to conceptual space; or in simpler words from the local space, the lived, to the global and the virtual.

Emma Donoghue’s *Room*, a bestseller in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland has been recently adapted for the theatre stage in (2017). The novel was originally published in 2010. The narrative is of a five-year old boy, Jack, the narrator, and his mother ‘Ma’ who are confined by Old Nick, a sexual predator to a 12 by 12 foot space in his backyard for seven years. The backyard shed, in which Jack was born, is known to him as Room. Jack has never seen the outside world before his Great Escape and his reality is dependent on imagination and TV. The interactions in the play take place inside *Room* and then shift to the space beyond its walls. Big Jack, a stage figure representing Jack’s inner thoughts as a child, highlights the strangeness of a world perceived and lived through media. Jack reflecting on the outside world describes the urban space on TV: ‘houses are like lots of rooms stuck together. ... TV persons stay in them mostly but sometimes they go in their outsides and weather happens to them’ (Donaghue, 2011). The complexity of space in Donoghue’s *Room* is better understood through Lefebvre as it helps us disentangle Jack and Ma’s space by distinguishing it into three modes: the perceived, the conceived and the lived.

Alice in Wonderland, an underground adventure, is a favourite of Jack and Ma. The magical world they conceive creates a loving home for Jack. Overtime, Jack learns through the limited space he inhabits to “shape himself to new and strange landscapes” (Sullivan, 2014). As an innately intelligent boy with no formal education, Jack attempts to make sense of the space he occupies, the imagined space on TV, the social space between him and Old Nick, and the outside world: “Outside has everything. Whenever I think of a thing now like skis or fireworks or islands or elevators or yo-yos, I have to remember they’re real, they’re actually happening in Outside all together. It makes my head tired ... though, me and Ma, we’re the only ones not there. Are we still real?” (Donaghue 2011). In light of Sara Ahmed’s (2006) queer phenomenology of ‘... facing at least two directions: towards a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home’ (p.10), *Room* demonstrates Jack’s queer orientation as he makes the passage from one space to another. The physical escape to the outside world is a divisive event in Jack’s spatiotemporal understanding. Acting dead in the back of Old Nick’s truck, Jack wonders about the space he occupies and how it relates to his existence: ‘Outside. Could I be?’ ... ‘I am not in Room. Am I still me?’ (Donaghue 2011). Moving from inside to the outside and from Room to the world, marks Jack’s move from ‘conceptualisation, imagination, and abstract thought to sense, perception, and experience’ (Davies 2016). Bewildered, Jack continues outside Room to resort to the TV to explain his existence. Through the TV, Jack metaphorically joins a mass of imagined audiences to construct his own conceptual space. After years of spatial confinement, Jack displays a discomfort with the complexities of space and its relation to what constitutes reality.

The horror of Jack’s and Ma’s situation is brought home, by the outer world’s ‘linguistic violence’ (O’Neill 2017) invading the domestic space with grotesque details of their imprisonment ‘bachelor loner converted the garden shed into an impregnable twenty-first-century dungeon’ (Donoghue 2011). The 12 by 12 physical space is referred to by Old Nick, Ma’s and Jack’s captor as a safe space for domesticity ‘[p]lenty of girls would thank their lucky stars for a setup like this, safe as houses. Specially with the kid’ (86). The unwarranted luxury of social support reflects Ma’s dependency for survival on Old Nick. Ironically, Old Nick’s sexual fantasy has become a burden.

Donoghue’s originality lies in showing confinement in a physical space through a child’s eyes as he stands outside the discourses of power of the outside world and how his physical, mental and lived space force him to shape new realities. *Room* represents the figure of the child as a way of ‘negotiating the past in the present [space] and envisioning the future’ (O’Neill 2017). The synchronicity of inner and outer space are embodied in the character of the child.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this study has examined the multiple forms of space and its reconstruction of Irish national identity through theatre. Carr uses the bogs to depict Irish national identity underscoring the threat which such territories are under because of commercial harvesting and cultivation. Like the bog, Hester and her heritage of the Travelling community are also threatened by the advancement of contemporary modern life in Ireland. The inhabitants of Friel’s Donegal are under a similar threat through colonial mapping. The powerful presence of a map on stage space, additionally, reinforces the notions of colonial and postcolonial space in relation to Irish national identity and the notions of belonging.

Space being defined as masculine or feminine is a recurrent sub-theme that emerges in the dramatic texts examined. Gillian Rose's (1993) examination of land space as examples of gender differences can be traced in the repeated reference to urban space, exterior space being masculine and the interior space feminine.

Resistance is exemplified in Hester's belonging on the bogs as a space resistant to male dominance. Similarly, Hugh's resistance is exemplified in the existence of the hedge school. The violent outside of Donegal is contrasted with the inner space of the hedge school; Difford Hall is compared with the urban city life, Ireland with America and Room with the outside world. These powerful references to space, raise important questions as who belongs and who doesn't and what is quintessentially Irish.

The lack of direct encounters in *Room* and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* between the characters and Ireland as a physical space further distances them from their locality and reinforces their need to reassert self-identity. They take their experiences from the media. Ireland is configured to them as a hypothetical space peddled to the diaspora abroad and to the Irish at home. The difficulty of existing in liminal space is scorned and adored at the same time.

At the same time, Trembaly's play revolutionizes our understanding of theater space and space produced by theatre in relation to the evolving technologies of social and cultural developments. Rapid changes and multiple belongings emerging from globalisation compel us to reconfigure the demarcated space of theatre performances and rethink them in a global form.

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