

**Queer Identities During the Troubles in Northern Ireland:
The Birth of Queer Theatre in Northern Ireland.**

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Abstract

'Exploring Queer Identities in Plays Written During the Troubles in Northern Ireland (1969-1998)' is the first truly concerted attempt to examine the placing of non-heteronormative characters into Irish or Northern Irish plays set within the time frame of the Troubles. These plays are few in number, comprising Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island*, Martin Lynch's *Crack Up*, *Ecce Homo* (written/devised by Joe Reid and Belfast Community Theatre) and Frank McGuinness's *Carthaginians* (alongside drafts of its earlier incarnation as *Friends*). The critical thesis begins by exploring the reasons for the scarcity of queer dramatic representation at this time, before focusing on the representation of queer characters within its corpus, and exploring the thematic and dramatic reasons for their inclusion. It proceeds through close textual analysis of all four of the plays, while consulting the writings of scholars, theatre practitioners and queer theorists alongside sociohistorical developments. Its final chapter also draws on archival material by McGuinness, which fills in a gap in the evolution of queer identity in Northern Irish theatre. The critical thesis as a whole traces an arc from the queer character deployed as a disruptive mechanism in Brian Friel's early play *The Gentle Island* to fully-formed and unapologetic queer characterisation in McGuinness' 1988 play *Carthaginians*. The insights of the critical thesis provide a context and a supplement to the creative thesis.

In writing my own three plays I provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Northern Ireland's LGBT+ community during the Troubles, giving them a place in the country's history. My play *Pet Shop Boy*, set in 1980's East Belfast, looks at the Troubles and the queer experience through a Protestant lens, a viewpoint that has been overlooked. It explores queer identity through the coming out process of the sixteen-year-old protagonist, and uses the DUP's Save Ulster from Sodomy campaign as a means to highlight the underlying societal homophobia that existed at the time. My second play *Quarry*, also set in the Protestant community, explores queer identity by going right to the heart of the Troubles, looking at toxic masculinity and queer identity inside a paramilitary unit. The final play in my collection places the queer Northern Irish experience in a modern-day context, examining how the Troubles of the past have shaped both the older and younger queer generations.

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Preface

I grew up during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and in the late 1980s I came out as gay. It was during this time that I developed an interest in the theatre and writing plays. My first full length play explored the complexities of coming out in Northern Ireland, and the resistance and homophobia experienced by my main protagonist. The play was well received and had a staged reading at the Lyric Theatre in Belfast. Despite my appetite for queer stories, in particular queer plays, the theatre venues I visited and the plays they staged lacked these representations. This frustrated me as a young gay playwright: I felt alone in my drive to give voice to the queer experience of the Troubles.

Within this PhD I have created a body of work, three stage plays, that explore the queer experience during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. My intention is to dramatize the queer narrative of the Troubles, something that should have happened at the time. As I embarked on writing my plays, I also researched plays that were written during the period of the Troubles by Northern Irish writers, and that contain queer identities. There are four plays in my study, *The Gentle Island* by Brian Friel, *Crack Up* by Martin Lynch, *Ecce Homo* by Joe Reid and Belfast Community Theatre and *Carthaginians* by Frank McGuinness: four very different plays, written at different times throughout the 29 years of the Troubles. There is significant disparity between the plays that I have written and the body of work that already exists. The most significant difference between the two is that my overall intention in writing my plays was to place the queer character firmly at the heart of the drama, and to have the action of the play revolve around queer experience. It was also important that there was a strong presence of the Troubles throughout the plays; in other words, a lot of the circumstances and action of the plays are driven by the events in the Troubles society. However, in all but one (*Ecce Homo*) of the plays that I have studied as part of my research, the queer experience is not the dramatic driving force. The central story of the plays revolves around a range of different issues, from the demise of a small island community to a society's collective unresolved grief. In these plays the playwright has positioned the queer characters inside the dramas as a mechanism to disrupt the on-stage world.

Why did I feel it was important that plays written about the Troubles contain a strong queer narrative? My initial response to this question was that I had a need to see a dramatic re-enactment of my own queer experience on stage, but on deeper reflection I realise it was more than just that. From researching queer stories connected to the Troubles I unearthed a multitude of queer stories, from battles to establish equal rights, people's individual struggles when coming out in communities strongly opposed to non-heteronormative identities and the threats from paramilitaries. The queer experience is an exuberant territory for drama. Many stories were left untold, buried beneath the narrative of Northern Ireland's violence and political turmoil. It became clear to me that it was high time that queer stories of the Troubles were granted their place in the story of Northern Ireland's troubled past.

Being queer in Northern Ireland during the Troubles provided an additional insight that those in the mainstream would never have had access to. The queer space created a

community of diversity, containing people from a range of backgrounds, enabling them to interact socially, forming strong friendships and in some cases deeper relationships. It was not uncommon for members of the security forces to socialise with people from Nationalist backgrounds, and for people from Loyalist communities to form close relations with those from the Nationalist side. No greater mixing pool existed in Northern Ireland than that of the gay scene. It was a desegregating space by default. Queer people were a community unto themselves, most of the time an invisible community; they were for most of the time integrated within the mainstream, but hidden in the no-go dark corners of the city there were queer venues in which the queers and non-conventional citizens would gather. Actor Tony Flynn remembers that,

The city was very cloak and dagger. The scene was very cloak and dagger. The city was dead. It was only the outcasts who went into town. The Punks and the gays, the alternatives. The gay clubs were in the back end of no-where.¹

Northern Ireland was and still to the present day is a country full of fragmentations and deep divisions, with political and religious divisions still separating both Unionist and Nationalist communities. However, during the three decades of the Troubles towns and city centres in Northern Ireland were desegregating spaces in which people from different communities merged for work, shopping and to socialise. Within these spaces people avoided overtly identifying with any community, conversations would be carefully engineered, controversial issues around religion and politics evaded. So, for the queer community, their ability to hide was intuitive and deeply ingrained. In order to survive in Northern Ireland the concealment of queerness was vital. Northern Ireland is the most religious region within the United Kingdom; here both the Protestant Church and the Catholic Church remain powerful societal influences. Both were strongly opposed to homosexuality. The political parties during the Troubles were for the most part non-supportive of LGBT issues and rights. Contrary to today's political landscape, the Nationalist Sinn Fein party did not challenge the Unionist DUP party's vehement anti-gay rhetoric that was ubiquitous in the everyday life of the province. The paramilitaries, both Loyalist and Nationalist, were anti-gay, viewing gays as high risk primarily due to gay people's vulnerability at being blackmailed into becoming informers for the security forces. Jeff Dudgeon, a founder of the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), said that if the paramilitaries shot a gay person it was a bonus. Like other queer people across the world, the LGBT community were forced to live double lives, but what made being queer in Northern Ireland different was the enormity of anti-gay sentiment that existed, and the real threat of danger that came with the territory of the Troubles.

My intention in this PhD is to address the fact that the queer narrative of the Troubles has not been given a place. In the body of plays that do contain queer identities all but one fall short of capturing the struggles and sense of jeopardy that LGBT people in Northern Ireland experienced during the Troubles. The plays are of course still highly important and were extremely worthwhile in the fact that the playwrights constructed non-conventional, queer identities and placed them in their plays. The very presence of these queer identities meant that Northern Irish audiences were being introduced to characters that they may not have

¹ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author, 03/04/2019.

encountered before. There were many reasons why playwrights did not go further with their queer identities, reasons I explore further in the main body of the thesis itself.

I am aware that I am writing my plays from a position of privilege. In 2020 public perceptions in Northern Ireland are a lot more open than they were during the Troubles. The annual gay pride march in Belfast is attended by thousands of people each year. A successful queer arts festival, Outburst, has been running for the last thirteen years in Belfast, and the mainstream press in Northern Ireland has adopted a more supportive tone to issues around LGBT+, as was seen recently. In March 2019, 28-year-old journalist Lyra McKee was murdered in Derry during a riot by dissident Republicans and security forces. Lyra was a lesbian and was in a same-sex relationship. Lyra's murder was reported throughout the world and her sexuality was often highlighted as part of the reporting. The *Belfast Telegraph* carried a story with the headline 'Lyra McKee's partner leads rainbow rally demanding same-sex marriage in NI'. What is significant about this headline and the newspaper story itself is the fact that it is supportive of Lyra and her same-sex partner. This is in stark contrast to how the media in Northern Ireland, and in particular the *Belfast Telegraph*, reported on past LGBT+ issues. It appears that this newspaper, along with the rest of the main stream media in Northern Ireland, have on the whole adopted a positive attitude in reporting of LGBT+ issues in recent times.

it is perhaps worth pausing for a moment here over the question of terminology. For this study, the word 'queer' seems to be the most useful expression for holding in place the varied and shifting concerns of lesbian-, gay-, bisexual-, trans- and queer-identifying individuals (LGBTQ). Although my principal focus is on the placing of gay men in plays, I use the word queer as it best describes the disruptive and unsettling effect that these non-heterosexual identities had within the dramatic context in which they were placed.

Sara Ahmed reminds us in *Wilful Subjects* that the idea of queer, and its straying from the mainstream, is a concept originated by Eve Sedgwick.

The word 'queer' derives from the Indo-European word 'twerk', to turn or to twist, also related to the word 'thwart' to transverse, perverse, or cross (...) That this word comes to describe sexual subjects is no accident: those who do not follow the straight line, who to borrow Lucretius' term, 'snap the bonds of fate', are the perverts swerving rather than straightening, deviating from the right course.²

And David Halperin, another leading queer theorist, reinforces this when he defines queer as 'by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant ... It is an identity without an essence'.³

Both these theorists, then, insist on queerness as a relational, and often oppositional or conflictual, quality. These senses are doubly resonant for the texts I am exploring, which as dramas, depend on some form of conflict, and as dramas linked to the Troubles, are written

² Sara Ahmed, *Wilful Subjects*, (Durham University Press, London, 2014), p11.

³ David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pg62.

or staged in the context also of wider political conflicts. As we shall see, it is often the disruptive effects of a character's queer sexuality which my playwrights emphasise.

At this stage it is important to point out that with the exception of *Dido* in Frank McGuinness's play *Carthaginians*, the queer characters in my corpus are cis-gendered gay men, this was not a deliberate choice on my part but due to my being unable to source any other queer identities in plays written during my specified period. But why label these cis-gender gay men queer instead of gay? Queer is an umbrella term that delineates a complex matrix of sexual/ gender identities, therefore it allowed me a wider scope to include a character such as Philly from Brian Friel's play *The Gentle Island*, who is most likely gay or bisexual but avoids being placed within any defined sexual identity. Meanwhile, in the case of Dido in *Carthaginians*, although he is deliberately constructed by McGuinness as a gay man, he is more than just that, with his frequent cross dressing McGuinness is adding an extra layer of fluidity to this character's sexual/gender identity. Also within *Carthaginians* is Hark, a character who, although straight acting and in a relationship with Sarah, flirts with Dido. Although he is outwardly repelled by Dido's actions of love and sexual advances towards him it is clear there is a shared sexual history between these two men. There are of course other identities that fall within the queer umbrella such as people who identify as transgender, pan sexual, non-binary, lesbians, bisexuals, inter-sex and others who resist any identity labelling but none the less are non-conforming within their sexual/ gender preferences. None of these are to be found within my corpus. But for the playwrights in my study to place any gay characters in their plays during the period in question strikes me as bold and innovative, and their inclusion has the effect of opening up public awareness of non-conventional sexual and gender identities, presenting Northern Irish theatre with a starting point in which to bring forth other representations of queer identity.

Throughout the thesis I use the terms queer, gay, homosexual and LGBT+ in which to discuss the non-heteronormative sexualities within my study. My reasoning for using interchangeable terminology is based upon context. I use queer when I aim to be fully inclusive of all non-conforming sexual and gender identities, I also use it when referring to theorists or activists who self-identify with the term. Gay is used when I am referring to gay men exclusively, while the term homosexual is used when I am discussing theorists or academics whose thinking stems from a pathological basis or when considering characters and playwrights from a period of history which predates more contemporary terminologies such as queer, gay and LGBT+. LGBT+, similar to queer, is an all inclusive term that views non-conforming sexual identities through a contemporary lens: it's used in place of queer at times when it is more befitting to the period of time or the identity of the individuals being discussed.

As part of this PhD study, I have written three stage plays that address queer identity during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Each play is set during a different period in the Troubles. The first, *Pet Shop Boy*, is set in East Belfast in 1980. There are several reasons why I set the play in this particular part of the city and why I placed it in 1980. The majority of the plays that have addressed issues around the Troubles in Northern Ireland are written from a Nationalist point of view by a Catholic playwright. The four playwrights in my study, Brian Friel, Martin Lynch, Joe Reid and Frank McGuinness, are all Catholic. I grew up in a Protestant community in Belfast and my experience of the Troubles was from this

perspective: that alone has given me a particular need to look at the Troubles through a Protestant lens. I feel that the Protestant experience, as with the queer experience, has often been overlooked in favour of what is viewed as the more oppressed Catholic community experience. That Protestants also existed under an oppressive sexual regime is demonstrated, though, by the fact that 1980 is the time when the Rev Ian Paisley had launched his anti-gay campaign of Save Ulster From Sodomy, a campaign set up to derail NIGRA's efforts to force the British Government to extend the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 to Northern Ireland, which if this was successful. If not, would have brought Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the UK and decriminalize male homosexuality (Lesbian sex was never criminalised in fact it was arguably rendered invisible). Ian Paisley, with the full support of his Free Presbyterian Church and his political party the DUP, actively campaigned throughout Northern Ireland to oppose any change in the current legislation regarding homosexuality. The petition that the campaigners circulated gained 70,000 signatures, showing they managed to drum up a lot of support for their cause. *Pet Shop Boy* is set on the Woodstock Road in Belfast, an area close to the Ravenhill Road, where Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church is situated. The Woodstock Road is a strong loyalist area, the residents are staunchly proud of their Protestant heritage, and a large proportion of them would have been very supportive of Ian Paisley and the issues that he stood for. I grew up close to the Woodstock Road, and the pet shop where the play is set is a pet shop that I visited often, so I know the area and the setting very well. Although the setting is a real one, the story itself is mostly a work of fiction. The play centres around a sixteen-year-old boy, Charlie, who is in denial about his homosexuality, so much so that he has been coerced by a neighbour to help in the Save Ulster from Sodomy campaign, as a way to distance himself from gay suspicion. I chose to set this play during a deeply conflicted time in Northern Irish history, with the country fragmented and several communities battling for their identities. It is rich in its complexities and is a strong dramatic vehicle to depict the pressures and hostility that many LGBT people experienced while growing up in Northern Ireland at this time.

At the time of my coming out, several plays were written depicting life in Northern Ireland during the Troubles: Martin Lynch 1981 *Dockers*, Graham Reid 1982 *The Hidden Curriculum*, Christina Reid 1986 *Joy Riders*, Stewart Parker 1987 *Pentecost* and Anne Devlin 1994 *After Easter*. The experiences they were writing about depicted the conflict between the two main communities, the Protestant Loyalists and the Catholic Nationalists. The plays had strong political messages which resonated with people from both religious sides. However, there were few plays that contained the queer voice. There was an invisibility around queer identity, but despite that there was a large queer subculture existing inside the no-go area of Belfast city centre at night, a subculture rich in story and lived experience, experiences that involved homophobic intimidation by security forces, ostracization from their families and community. The queer clubs that ran in the darkest parts of Belfast city centre were unique places that offered desegregated spaces where Catholic and Protestant queers socialised with each other, neither side caring about religion or political beliefs. For many it was a safe place.

My second play, *Quarry*, is set five years before *Pet Shop Boy* and is located on the other side of the city, in West Belfast. As with *Pet Shop Boy*, the play takes place within the Protestant community, inspired by two true stories that I discovered during my research. In this play, I really wanted to confront the Troubles full on. The principal character is Chick, a

twenty-one-year old man who has been recruited into the Loyalist paramilitary group of the UDA. He has been selected due to his hunger for fighting and his merciless beatings of Catholics. Like Charlie, Chick is in denial about his homosexuality, and it is only when he befriends the openly gay son of the UDA unit's Brigadier that he begins to give way to his true sexual feelings. In this play, I wanted to break down stereotypes around paramilitaries and gay men, such as that gay men were effeminate and weak, and paramilitaries ruthless psychopathic killers.

With *Club*, my third play, I decided to bring the setting up to date. The main character Russ is a forty-five-year-old gay man who has grown up in the Troubles and came out just before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Russ meets Alfie, an eighteen-year-old student at his school, and the play explores the differences between the old gay culture in Belfast that was shaped during the years of the Troubles and the new gay culture: a culture that is a lot more fluid and confident, and has been shaped through contemporary culture and social media. The play is anchored in the past during the period of the Troubles. Placing the play in the present was a deliberate choice. I felt that it was a good way to bring the issues that I had explored in my first two plays up to date, and to examine how they have impacted on the gay community and filtered through to future generations.

So how do the plays that I have written connect to my critical thesis? The most obvious way is that the plays contain a queer narrative to the Troubles, they give voice to the queer experience and fill the (mainly) empty void that exists in Northern Ireland's theatrical history, which my critical thesis explores in detail. The construction of the queer characters in my plays is fully explicit: there is no room for misinterpretation or ambiguity regarding these characters' homosexuality and the issues and obstacles that they face in their journey as gay men. This is something I wanted to ensure right from the start. My intention in all three plays is to elucidate the complexities around being gay in Northern Ireland during the period of the Troubles, to highlight how these issues around culture, religion and blatant societal homophobia added to the struggle of self-acceptance and coming out for LGBT+ people at this time.

I am aware that in writing my plays at this time I have the privilege of writing without censorship or fear of causing too much offence: there is a greater openness for queer stories. Since 1982 the trajectory of LGBT rights in Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles and up to the present day has been littered with obstacles, disappointments and achievements. In 1982 homosexuality was decriminalised in Northern Ireland, bringing it into line with the rest of the United Kingdom, the age of consent was equalised in 2001, civil partnerships for same-sex couples happened in 2005, same-sex couples were granted full adoption rights in 2013, the ban on blood donations by men having sex with men was lifted in 2016 and in January 2020 same-sex marriage was legalised in Northern Ireland. Despite this Northern Ireland is still lagging behind England, Scotland and Wales in terms of societal acceptance. Peter Tatchell has described Northern Ireland as the most homophobic place in western Europe, and ILGA rates Northern Ireland as the worst place in the United Kingdom for LGBT. Therefore, my plays are an important reminder of the existence of queer identities and the place they have earned in Northern Ireland society, and more significantly their place within the story of the Troubles.

Introduction

The distinct absence of a queer presence in the body of plays written in Northern Ireland during the period of the Troubles (1969-1996) raises many questions. What are the reasons behind this absence? Is the queer absence more pronounced in Northern Irish plays than plays written during the same period in the rest of the United Kingdom? And when queer identities *are* placed in Northern Irish plays, how are they constructed and what purpose, if any, do they serve? And finally, how have the plays themselves impacted upon the Northern Irish theatre scene of the time? This thesis deals with several plays which have queer characters, written and performed mainly during the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The plays in my study are written by four different writers, and the plays themselves are different both in content and style. Early in my research, it became clear that I would be dealing with a small corpus. Let me begin by setting the stage, and suggesting why the lack of queer presence exists.

Following the Government Act of Ireland in 1920 Northern Ireland came into existence on 3 May 1921. It consisted of the six north-eastern counties of Ireland being separated from the remaining 26 counties in Southern Ireland, creating two separate jurisdictions, with Southern Ireland becoming known as the Free State, later renamed Ireland. A 500km border divided an independent Ireland from Northern Ireland, which is still governed by the United Kingdom. While Dublin's Abbey Theatre was the first state-subsidised theatre in the English-speaking world (from 1925 onwards it received an annual subsidy from the Irish Free State),⁴ in the newly-formed state of Northern Ireland the theatre was low on the new government's agenda. It was not until 1943, when the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts (CEMA) was set up, that a formal relationship came into existence between the theatre and the state.⁵ Even then there is little to suggest that the Unionist Government at Stormont held any true interest in developing Northern Irish theatre, or that it actively encouraged the development of original artists. The Unionist administration held a suspicious view of theatre owing to its potential to fan the flames of dissent during the volatility of Northern Ireland's infantile state. As Lionel Pilkington states, 'it became important to Stormont that the theatre remain under strict political control while also appearing to exist 'outside politics''.⁶ This unease between state and theatre had a stultifying effect on how identities were theatrically represented, and curtailed the growth of original drama in Northern Irish theatres. The artistic pathways to express conflicting or provocative views in this new state were occluded, and as Pilkington asserts:

⁴ Sean Hewitt, 'Abbey Theatre', <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846719/obo-9780199846719-0141.xml>. Last modified 26/04/2018, last visited 21/006/2019.

⁵ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p.166.

⁶ *ibid*, p172.

Theatre managements in Northern Ireland maintained an unwritten policy of avoiding plays that dealt directly with issues relevant to Nationalist and Republican politics.⁷

My purpose in focusing on this time in Northern Irish theatrical history is to point up the conditions in which such plays were written and staged, and in particular to underscore the sensitivity around the Unionist Government's perception of theatrical performance. Turning more specifically to the question of queer identity, we must add that expressions of queer identities were anathema in both Unionist and public culture. It is worth bearing in mind that homosexual acts between men were still illegal in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland parliament had stoutly resisted any attempt to impose the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, which had partially decriminalised male homosexuality in England and Wales. Even after the devolution of the Northern Irish government in 1972 and the imposition of direct rule, the opposition to any attempt by the Northern Ireland Office to introduce this legislation was voluble and intense.⁸ If the Government was uneasy about the Nationalist representation on stage, it would be unthinkable that they would legitimize any suggestion of queer identities gaining a theatrical representation. Characters who identify as gay, lesbian, trans- or non-heterosexual are, with the exceptions that I will go on to study, for the most part non-existent.

To sum up, from its formation in 1922 the Northern Irish government has not been supportive of theatre within its borders, fearing its power to disrupt and to unsettle. In addition to this, the LGBT community have suffered repression from both Ian Paisley's DUP and the Catholic Church, making any chance of representation on stage unlikely. However, attitudes have changed in Northern Ireland, and there is a genuine desire to unearth stories of queer people's experiences during the time of the Troubles. My work mirrors this desire. For queer writers and critics, it is a way of reminding ourselves that we do have a history and a tradition, so that we may move forward and construct the queer identities that empower the occluded queer narrative of the Troubles. In order to illustrate how important queer identities in theatre are at this time, I would like to draw on the words of Simon Callow from an interview that he did for *The Guardian* newspaper in 2015, in which he talked about his involvement with *Gay Sweatshop* in the 1970s.

I realised I had never read another play in which two men have a romantic affair and never once mention being gay. I immediately said yes. But I had no inkling of what performing that play in front of a gay audience would be like. The sense of their truth being told, of them in their ordinary lives suddenly existing, was overwhelming. I don't believe I've done anything more rewarding or more emotionally overpowering on any stage or in any medium.⁹

⁷ *ibid*, p167.

⁸ <http://voicesandvisibility.org.uk/timeline/decriminalisation-of-homosexual-acts-northern-ireland/>

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/13/Simon-Callow-in-praise-of-gay-sweatshop>. Last visited 08/07/2019.

Callow's account of taking part in a Gay Sweatshop play emphasises just how important having queer representations on stage is for the LGBT+ community. These representations validate their non-heterosexual identities and reaffirm their place within mainstream society.

Subject of Thesis

My thesis makes an important contribution to the exploration of the discourses and dramatic representations through which queer identities in Northern Ireland were formed during the period termed 'The Troubles', which erupted in 1969 and came to an end almost 30 years later with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This was a momentous period in Northern Ireland's sociocultural and political history, which witnessed a titanic change.

By way of context, let me first offer a brief overview of The Troubles and the impact they had on Northern Irish society during this time. As is well known, British troops were deployed to Northern Ireland to quell rioting and civil disorder arising out of a series of civil rights demonstrations and counter-demonstrations. The demonstrations were spear-headed by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), which was established in 1967. The association's aims were: to achieve one man one vote for local council elections, ensure that local councils allocated their homes fairly, stop the practice of gerrymandering, ensure religion was not used as a factor when allocating government jobs, end the use of the Special Powers Act, disarm the B-Specials and to introduce a system that allowed people to report local council violations in any of the above. The clash occurred when counter-demonstrations organised by the Rev Ian Paisley were staged at the same time, causing the police to intervene and come down hard on the Civil Rights demonstrators, with footage of police brutality being broadcast worldwide. These events created a greater divide between the Catholic Nationalist and Protestant Loyalist communities in Northern Ireland.

Throughout these 29 years, thousands of people on both sides lost their lives in the conflict, while Republican groups also launched a terrorist campaign on the UK mainland.¹⁰ Needless to say, the day-to-day life of people living in the province during this time was greatly affected. Throughout the province, there was a strong military presence, and in towns, especially in Belfast city centre, strict security measures were imposed with a fence known as the 'ring of steel' encircling the city centre, inside which civilians were searched as they went through the main gates into the city centre, and were searched yet again as they entered the shops themselves. Belfast city centre was considered a no-go area after six o'clock in the evening, with most people retreating to their areas to socialise. The city centre streets were left desolate as the city's civilians remained in their designated zones.

¹⁰ Much of what I narrate above I know from my personal experience, but for a comprehensive study of the Northern Irish troubles see the following: Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's ordeal 1966-1996 and the search For Peace*, (London: Arrow Books, 1995). David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict*, (London, Penguin Books, 2001). Aaron Edwards, *The Northern Irish Troubles: Essential Histories*, (Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2011).

This in turn reinforced the segregation of the two warring communities of Catholics and Protestants. The restrictions of the Troubles stripped Northern Ireland of its soul, and in turn had a stultifying effect on cultural expressions, as well as on social and political freedoms. As a way of situating the plays within my study, I will go on to show how they were shaped by events around them, and also how they broke away from the main stock of Northern Irish theatre at the time. Bill McDonnell, a theatre practitioner and academic, states that in Northern Ireland:

The theatre space was part of the battleground, both literally as a potential space of warfare and actual violence, and symbolically as a space of resistance and as the ground of cultural action.¹¹

If it is true, as McDonnell says, that the theatre was a space of resistance and the ground of cultural action, it is somewhat perplexing that in my endeavours to seek out queer representations within this theatre space I found their presence difficult to locate. Perhaps the battleground in question was reserved for the main battle of that period, the battle that permeated Northern Irish day-to-day life, the battle between Catholics and Protestants.

All of this provides the context for the following study, in which I will examine the theatres and the stage plays of Northern Ireland from 1969 up until 1998, and look at how both were influenced and affected by the tumultuous politics and violence that held the country in its grip. My intention is to explore several Northern Irish playwrights of this time and investigate their dramatizing of diversity within this insular province of the United Kingdom. More particularly, I will explain how they explored representing nonconformist identities, and in particular those considered queer. The four plays in my study are written by four very different playwrights at different times throughout the period of the Troubles. Each of the playwrights has a different agenda, and their construction of their queer characters is thus shaped by their motives.

I will come back to a discussion of my corpus later in this introduction. But for now I feel it is important to take a closer look at the emergence of queer as an identity.

Queer Rights

The 1960s have been recognised as the decade in which civil rights were conceived and grew in momentum throughout the western world, a time of minority groups given a political voice where they could demand equality. In turn, this climate of protest created people power and encouraged other repressed minorities to seize their chance to be heard, to have their human rights acknowledged and to claim their right to equality.¹² In particular,

¹¹ Bill McDonnell, *Theatre of The Troubles: Theatre, Resistance and Liberation in Ireland*, (Exeter UK, University of Exeter Press, 2008), p.4.

¹² For a useful insight into the American Civil Rights movement see the following: Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s: Politics and Culture in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press; New Edition, 16/08/2006). Gary Donaldson, *The Second Reconstruction: a History of the Modern Civil rights Movement*, (Florida: Krieger Publishing, 2000).

we can map the emergence and the trajectory of the gay rights movement, and how previous civil rights movements had secured a firm foundation on which the LGBT community could construct an identity and develop a voice. The 1969 Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village, New York, were significant in propelling Gay Rights.¹³ The Stonewall riots gave birth to what we now know as Gay Pride, as the LGBT community marched one year later in San Francisco to mark the anniversary of the Christopher Street riots.

What of LGBT rights in Britain? Here we move closer to the focus of my dissertation: the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which partially decriminalised homosexual acts between two men in private in England and Wales, led to a growth in the LGBT movement, raising a greater public awareness of LGBT people and their rights.¹⁴ In just a few years, the first British Gay Pride Rally was held at Trafalgar Square in 1972. These alterations to legislation about sexuality coincided with changes to legislation over the theatre too. 1968 saw the passing of the Theatre Act, which lifted the censorship over the theatre which had prevailed since the Stage Licensing Act of 1737, and so allowed theatre makers to present more challenging subject areas on stage. These included the presentation of queer identities, which I will discuss further at a later point. Disappointingly, the 1967 Sexual Offences Act did not extend to Northern Ireland or Scotland, and homosexual acts between men were still considered a criminal offence in these two countries. This discrepancy not only placed queer Northern Irish citizens in a position of gross inequality in relation to their English and Welsh counterparts, it created greater repression as their demands for equality were even more distanced from Westminster, and their fate was now placed in the hands of direct rule, which was a Unionist, self-declared homophobic, government. This is the background for the plays I will study in this dissertation.

Let me now home in more locally. The gay scene in Belfast during the Troubles had a nomadic existence, shifting locations around the city depending on which establishment wanted them or indeed needed them. In its last days as a hotel The Royal Avenue Hotel, situated in the heart of the city, hosted Saturday night discos in its palatial ballroom, and was one of the first disco venues. The Europa Hotel in Great Victoria Street, which at the height of the Troubles earned the title of “most bombed hotel in the world”, was for a period the city’s only gay venue. Jeffrey Dudgeon describes the gays’ experience in the Europa Hotel:

Despite at times being the only customers in such a bombed hotel, we were never entirely welcome, and were ultimately driven out.¹⁵

Dudgeon’s account of the Europa’s treatment of their gay clientele is indicative of the anti-gay sentiment that permeated mainstream Northern Irish society. The gay venues in Belfast

¹³ For a comprehensive explanation of the Stonewall riot see: David R Carter. *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: Griffin; Media Tie In edition, 2016).

¹⁴ For further information look at

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/60/pdfs/ukpga_19670060_en.pdf

¹⁵ Jeffrey Dudgeon, *Mapping 100 years of Belfast Gay Life*, (Factotum, Issue 11, Belfast), <https://www.thevacuum.org.uk/issues/issues0120/issue11/is11arthunyea.html>. 24/08/2019.

were socially marginalized and tended to be located in the shadier edges of the city centre, an area desolate and abandoned after nightfall, an area that left stragglers vulnerable and prey to random paramilitary attacks. Marian Duggan describes this:

Paradoxically situations arose in relation to lesbians' and gay men's use of the city centre spaces during the height of the Troubles. For example spaces rendered empty by security fears could become spaces of safety for those who feared general discrimination on the basis of their sexuality.¹⁶

As I have already mentioned briefly, during the Troubles the city centre was encircled by a metal security fence, referred to as the 'ring of steel'. There were entry gates at various points around the ring which, these gates were manned by security forces. Some gay men and lesbians have reported homophobic intimidation from the security forces as they ventured home after visiting the gay venues.¹⁷ In one of the plays I will go on to discuss, *Ecce Homo*, devised and written by the Belfast Community Theatre, there is a scene in which the two main gay characters experience such intimidation.

UDR – MAN

Up against that fucking wall Nancy Boys ... Now spread them, oh I forgot you'd know all about that ... You're both experts I bet (*Manoeuvres gun between legs of Emmanuel and Simon*) I bet you love that don't you? You perverts disgust me.¹⁸

The queers who frequented the clubs made the journey from across Belfast city: from east, west, north and south, Catholics and Protestants occupied the queer space. Once they entered that space, they exchanged their tribal identities for their queer, perhaps more authentic identities. In a country where the people lived in constant segregation, segregated areas, segregated schools, the queer space broke down these walls of deep, entrenched division and gave liberation in a multitude of ways. In this brief account of Northern Ireland's queer past a treasure trove of personal stories lie untold. Playwright Dominic Montague suggests that

Living in Northern Ireland the bigger fight was the conflict that was going on around you at that time. I think inevitably other struggles got sidelined because of that. So, I do think that gay rights, women's rights, workers' rights were sidelined. You can't fight every single fight at every single moment.¹⁹

What Montague has to say may explain why there was little interest from playwrights in placing the queer experience of the Troubles on stage; that and the fact that theatre managements faced a constant financial battle to keep their business afloat during the dark

¹⁶ Marian Duggan, *Examining Lesbian & Gay experience of Homophobia* (New York, Routledge, 2016), p.59.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p.63.

¹⁸ BCT, *Ecce Homo*, unpublished play, 1988, p16.

¹⁹ Dominic Montague in an interview with the author on 06/04/2019.

days of the Troubles, when most people in Northern Ireland feared leaving the safety of their homes in the evenings.

Northern Irish Theatre

How do these political contexts relate to theatrical ones? An autobiographical passage from Niall Rea's thesis 'Queer Identity in Performance in Northern Ireland', in which he recounts an event at the Lyric Theatre in Belfast in 1980, helps set the stage here:

That season, the artistic director Sam McCready had two notable run-ins with the covert state and mediatized surveillance culture when he produced *Spring Awakening* by Frank Wedekind, closely followed by *Bent* by Martin Sherman. The first production, the 1891 German classic about teenage sexuality, contained a notable scene where two male teenagers kissed. It became known in the Northern Irish press as the 'gay kisses play' and resulted in a sustained campaign against Sam McCready spearheaded by the Rev. Robert Bradford who called for his imprisonment citing a scene which involved two males kissing as the procurement of an immoral act in public.²⁰

This event in 1980 at the Lyric Theatre illustrates the relationship the state had with the theatre in Northern Ireland: anything too controversial that the theatre produced would be met with outrage and protest from prominent, mostly Unionist, politicians. In 1982 the Homosexual Offences Order, in which homosexual acts were decriminalised, came into effect; however, the queer dramatic vacuum still existed.²¹ Such a momentous act, which removed Unionist control over the queer community, extricating them from years of legal repression should, we might have thought, have ignited a wave of queer plays onto the Northern Irish stage supporting this new climate of gay liberation. But of course, internalised prejudice outlasts changes in the law: and perhaps therefore this lack of theatrical representation reflects a profound unease with the spectre of homosexual identity. Moreover, this unease is related to larger questions of national politics, and to the way these are conceived in terms of gender and sexuality. The media in Northern Ireland contributed significantly to the shaping of societal attitudes towards the LGBT community. A short time after the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favour of Jeffrey Dudgeon, the *Belfast Telegraph*, the main evening newspaper in Northern Ireland, carried a story commenting on the court's decision.

The fact remains that the homosexual minority in this community now has a European court ruling on its side and such individuals can look forward to an

²⁰ Niall Rea, 'Queer Identity in Performance in Northern Ireland' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queens University, Belfast, 2015), p.41.

²¹ A high-profile case brought to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), *Dudgeon v United Kingdom*, eventually forced the United Kingdom government to impose the partial decriminalization of male homosexuality in Northern Ireland in 1982. Indeed, it was a landmark case at the ECHR itself. It was the court's first case to be decided in favour of LGBT rights, and it now forms the basis in European law for all member states, in particular new states joining the EU.

increased measure of personal freedom. For their part they should resist any temptation to *flaunt their new rights*. At all times they must remain aware of the realities in Northern Ireland – a change in the law does not in itself mean public approval but only a greater degree of tolerance.²²

The tone of this report, including that provocative word ‘flaunt’, illustrates the resistance to LGBT+ equality rights that permeated mainstream society. The media in Northern Ireland perpetuated anti-gay sentiments in their reporting of gay rights campaigns. A further example of this is when *The Sunday World*, a prominent Irish newspaper, carried a story regarding a prominent child sexual abuse case known as ‘The Kincora Scandal’. The scandal involved boys in a residential care home who were systematically abused over many years by the wardens who looked after them. Several Loyalist politicians, high ranking civil servants and prominent celebrities were linked to the case. *The Sunday World* referred to the case as ‘The sordid saga of the homosexual scandal’, equating homosexuality with paedophilia in a homophobic manner, and in their article the newspaper laid the failings of the RUC investigations on Kincora at the doorstep of NIGRA and their campaign for the decriminalization of homosexuality, also labelling it ‘An embarrassing campaign’.²³ *The Sunday World’s* conflation of homosexuality and paedophilia was not uncommon. The concerns expressed over the decriminalizing of homosexuality in Northern Ireland at the time focussed obsessively on the lowering of moral standards. A few days after the European Court of Human Rights declared in favour of Jeffrey Dudgeon’s case against the British Government the *Belfast Telegraph* reported the Rev Ian Paisley as saying,

People who wanted to keep purity and defend morals were likely to be forced to change ‘by alien interference’. He warned that if the law was changed it would open the way to more perversity and would lead on to licensed brothels and the legalizing of buggery and incest.²⁴

In her essay ‘Living Lives of Quiet Desperation’, which explores accounts of gay men and lesbians during the Troubles, Jessica Toops makes much of the connection between attitudes in Northern Ireland and this definite societal homophobia.

The examination of first-hand accounts reveals societal approaches to homosexuality, unique to or exaggerated in Northern Ireland as a result of the Troubles, such as hyper-masculinity, religiosity, and an impulse to curb homosexuality through violence and intimidation.²⁵

Given these contexts, it is perhaps hardly surprising that there is little representation of queer identity in contemporary Northern Irish theatre. In fact, the surprise is that there is

²² *Belfast Telegraph*, 23/10/1981, third edition, p.1.

²³ John Carey, ‘Pulse of the North’, *The Sunday World*, January 1982, p.29.

²⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 26/10/1981, p.3.

²⁵ Jessica Toops, *Living Lives of Quiet Desperation: Accounts of Gay men and Lesbians during the troubles*. (*Western Illinois Historical Review* Vol. VI Spring 2014).

any at all. Frank McGuinness, writing in the *Irish Times* in 2009, gives a greater insight into the theatre of the time:

You must never underestimate the sheer historical depth of homophobia in Ireland. And that exists in the theatre as well – perhaps it’s even more pronounced in the theatre, where there is this almost heterosexual panic in case you engage too deeply with gay issues.²⁶

McGuinness’s conjecturing of heterosexual panic being the reason for a lack of any significant queer presence on the Irish stage in 2009 must have been even more the case in 1969. And it is with this significant postulation in mind that I look at the state of the theatre scene at this time in Northern Ireland, and question the openness to diversity and how the theatres were positioned in programming plays that challenged the public attitudes. The principal theatres of the time in Northern Ireland were The Grand Opera House, the Belfast Civic Arts Theatre, The Group Theatre and the Lyric Players Theatre in Belfast. To the north-west, The Waterside Theatre in Londonderry and the Riverside Theatre in Coleraine. An article in *Culture Northern Ireland* explains the role that the theatre had to play in Northern Ireland during the Troubles.

Throughout the Troubles particularly, it provided brightness to a society that was often in real need of it, offering sheer escapism or work that reflected local situations rather than seriously challenge them.²⁷

The Lyric Theatre in Belfast was the only non-commercial theatre in Northern Ireland and relied heavily on state funding. The Ulster Unionist council of the time were not the most forward thinking and would most certainly have been guilty of McGuinness’s accusation of heterosexual panic, so plays that contained homosexual identities would not have been encouraged.

What Christopher Morash has to say about the Lyric Theatre in Belfast gives us an enormous insight into the politics that dictated the theatre’s artistic freedom:

The situation of the Lyric Theatre in Belfast was particularly precarious. From the beginning, its founder Mary O’Malley had conscientiously steered the Lyric down a narrow, rocky path of liberal, non-partisan engagement. This meant that while the Lyric never avoided controversial plays, it also stumbled endlessly into apparently innocuous questions that exploded like hidden landmines. Do you sing ‘God save the Queen’ before performances? Do you close for the national day of mourning called for the victims of Bloody Sunday? How do you respond when, as happened in 1974, you arrive at the opening night of *Jesus Christ Superstar* to find the theatre surrounded by members of Ian Paisley’s Free Presbyterian Church, praying for God’s

²⁶ *Irish News*, ‘Observing a Son of Ulster’, 14/09/2009, last seen 05/08/2019).

²⁷ <https://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/performing.../theatre-northern-ireland>, last visited 20/06/2019.

judgement on a 'diabolically inspired and iniquitously blasphemous production'? At every step of the way, the Lyric risked alienating audiences, government funding bodies, and private sponsors from all sides of the community.²⁸

Christopher Morash paints a clear picture of the pressures and constraints that theatres in Northern Ireland faced. The description of Ian Paisley's protest highlights the religious and moral barriers that were firmly in place. Despite the theatre's liberalism, we can see that a queer play, or a play that depicted a fully rounded queer character, would have been met with huge resistance. Indeed as Mark Phelan, another historian and critic of Northern Irish theatre suggests, much of the drama of the time confined itself to rather predictable, stereotypical material:

Narratives of tribal revenge and thwarted romance also proliferated, as the dramaturgy of love-across-the-barricades and melodrama conveniently removed complex causes of political violence to present a murderous Manichaean struggle between good and evil; right and wrong; Taigs and Prods; 'two men fighting over a field'—all of which, it could be argued, absolved the state from its responsibility whilst expropriating audiences of their political agency by presenting the ongoing conflict as inevitable and intractable.²⁹

In the difficult 1970s and early 1980s, plays were staged at the Lyric by writers such as John Boyd, Patrick Galvin, Christina Reid, Graham Reid, Stewart Parker and Martin Lynch, which directly addressed the socio-political realities around them. In the 1980s other companies did likewise, particularly Charabanc (founded 1983), whose early new work was collectively written out of the life of working-class communities in the city. Their productions, such as *Somewhere over the Balcony* (1987) set in Belfast's Divis Flats, reacquainted a whole new Belfast audience with the theatre. It regularly toured internationally and launched the career of playwright Marie Jones, who enjoyed much success with *Stones in His Pockets*, first seen in 1996 and rewritten in 1999 for a production that went on to London and New York. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the arrival of a clutch of new independent companies, including Tinderbox and Prime Cut; the former has become Northern Ireland's main originator of new writing, while the latter presents international work. Replay Theatre in Education Company has commissioned an impressive amount of new writing, while Kabosh focuses on a more physical style of theatre. Throughout, the Belfast Festival at Queen's University has brought international theatre, opera and dance companies to the city each year; events are regularly staged at the Grand Opera House, which was magnificently restored in 1980 with government funds to become the principal theatre in Northern Ireland for such large-scale performances. The Group Theatre, meanwhile, was re-

²⁸ Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), p.244.

²⁹ Mark Phelan, *From Troubles to Post-Conflict Theatre in Northern Ireland*, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016), p.372.

opened in 1976 to become the home of amateur drama, amateurs having done much to keep theatre alive during the Troubles.³⁰

Thus far we have discussed several contexts for my study: that of the Troubles, of the larger political culture within Northern Ireland, of the international and local LGBT movements, and Northern Irish theatrical cultures. In order to fully understand the plays that I will be discussing in my thesis and to grasp their significance, one last piece of context is needed: it is important that I briefly look beyond Northern Ireland and consider other theatrical endeavours, so that Northern Ireland's position in its production, or lack, of queer theatre is given a meaningful context. In the 1960s the gay playwright Joe Orton's plays were shocking and outrageous with his overt gay characters whose same-sex desires were depicted. Mart Crowley's off Broadway play *The Boys in The Band* (1968) revolves around a group of openly gay men living in New York; the play was significant as its depiction of authentic gay men discussing the intricacies of their queer lives was ground-breaking and placed the non-heteronormative on centre stage. Caryl Churchill's play *Cloud Nine* (1978), produced by Joint Stock Theatre Company, was also radical as it contained several queer characters and examined the complexities contained within straight and gay relationships, in turn challenging the perceived normality of heteronormativity. Martin Sherman wrote his play *Bent* in 1979, in which he dramatized the fate of an openly gay man, Max, imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp: at the core of the play is the homosexual relationship between Max and another male prisoner. At the time the play was extremely controversial and shocking, but was transferred to Broadway, where it won a Tony award, indicating the world was ready for plays containing queer issues and identities.

A good example of queer theatrical endeavours beyond the level of individual plays is the theatre company Gay Sweatshop. In the late 1970s Gay Sweatshop was the most established openly gay theatre company in the UK.³¹ They had a reputation for well presented, innovative plays which were upfront and unapologetically around queer experience. Gay Sweatshop's focus was to bring queer theatre into the mainstream, to educate and to challenge ingrained homophobia. Simon Callow says the following about Gay Sweatshop:

Their work was not indulgent or frivolous: it reached out in many directions – historically, theatrically, politically – in a determination to affirm the place and existence of gay people within society, that we're here and we're queer and we've been here and been queer for a very long time – since records began. We've made astonishing contributions to this civilisation, but more importantly, we're right at the

³⁰ My discussion in the paragraph above derives from <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/genres/northern-irish-drama-iid-21658>

³¹ Gay Sweatshop's 1975 manifesto states:

To counteract the prevailing perception in mainstream theatre of what homosexuals were like, therefore providing a more realistic image for the public and to increase the general awareness of the oppression of sexuality, both gay and straight, the impact it has on people's lives and the society that reinforces it.

<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/de1f8ea6-ade0-3d46-a020-71c14c052085>, last visited 09/09/2019.

heart of ordinary life. – We’re mothers, we’re brothers, we’re teachers, we’re soldiers, we’re good and we’re bad, but we exist, as we are, with our desires, our dreams, our folly and our majesty. Not enough gay people knew these things of themselves. Once they started to wake up to all of that, then the rest of society did too, and we began to approach the better world (for gays) in which we now live.³²

In 1978, as part of the Queen’s Festival, Gay Sweatshop brought their production of *Iceberg* to the Mandela Hall in Belfast. In his introduction to a collection of the company’s plays Philip Osment (sadly now deceased) described the experience:

Iceberg tried to demonstrate how an awareness of the oppression of women and gay people had to be central to any anti-fascist struggle and that, for gay people, repression was a day to day occurrence. [...] The show caused controversy wherever it played – in trades’ clubs, for Communist party audiences and in Belfast at the festival at Queen’s University where Ian Paisley’s Democratic Unionist Party organised a rally against it. The DUP had earlier organised a rally against it. The DUP had earlier organised a campaign ‘Save Ulster From Sodomy’ (sic) and for Gay Sweatshop’s arrival had plastered the city with bright yellow posters announcing, ‘God Demands Righteousness not Gay Rights’. There was, however, a huge counter-demonstration and the DUP protesters were completely outnumbered. All the same it was a frightening experience.³³

Philip Osment’s account of Gay Sweatshop’s visit to Belfast explains and underlines how attempts to address queer identity on stage were consistently attacked and met with evangelical hostility and blatant homophobia. It also shows how out of step Northern Ireland was in relation to the rest of the UK in terms of sexual politics.

My Study

Having set the stage, we can now turn to the handful of plays on which this thesis will focus. On close investigation of the playwrights and the plays that were written during the period of the Troubles I have managed to locate four plays that I would identify as significantly queer: *The Gentle Island* written by Brian Friel, *Crack Up* written by Martin Lynch, *Carthaginians* written by Frank McGuinness, *Ecce Homo* devised/written by Joe Reid and the Belfast Community Theatre (although never staged).³⁴ Other stage plays containing queer identities may have been performed in theatres around Northern Ireland during the period of the Troubles, but these four plays are significant because they have either a strong connection with the queer experience during the Troubles, or they contain clearly defined

³² Simon Callow, ‘In Praise of Gay Sweatshop’, *The Guardian*, 13 February 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/13/simon-callow-in-praise-of-gay-sweatshop>, Last visited 08/07/2019, 12.50pm.

³³ Philip Osment, *Gay Sweatshop: Four Plays and a Company*, (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), p.xlii.

³⁴ Martin Lynch, *Crack Up*, unpublished; a prompt copy held in Theatre Archive at the Linen Hall Library Belfast.

queer characters who are constructed by the playwright to disrupt the societal perceptions of the time around sexual/social identities.

In my thesis, I will look at each of these plays in isolation, devoting a separate chapter to both *The Gentle Island* and *Carthaginians*, with the two Belfast plays *Crack up* and *Ecce Homo* sharing the second chapter. The reason these two plays share a chapter is due to the fact that they share similarities: both written in the 1980s and set in Belfast, and both dealing directly with gay men and the societal homophobia these men face.

The Gentle Island is the first of the plays in my corpus, written in 1971, just four years after the United Kingdom's Sexual Offences Act of 1967. This play of Friel's is a forgotten play, rarely revived and one of the least written-about of his plays, and yet it is a play that is bold in that it courageously challenges the whole concept of sexuality and heteronormative binaries. Frank McGuinness described *The Gentle Island* as 'a play that was of its time and that was ahead of its time'.³⁵ The play contains two gay characters, a couple Peter and Shane, holidaying on the island of Inishkeen off the west coast of Donegal in Ireland. The island of Inishkeen is a fictional location used by Friel to unpack questions surrounding the patriarchal structures upholding Irish society. By having at the centre of his play a childless married couple Friel examines heterosexual dysfunction, sexual frustration and societal demise. These elements come to the forefront towards the end of the play when Sarah, the frustrated wife of Philly, propositions Shane.

I also examine the homosocial scaffolds that hold the patriarchal framework in its place. Friel's play is set at a time of increasing pressure from the civil rights movement promoting women's rights and lesbian and gay rights that had spread from the US, together with the consistent population drain from the diaspora of Ireland's youth emigrating to America or parts of the United Kingdom in search of better opportunities. These pressures threatened the traditional family cell. And in the North, the violent civil war posed a serious risk to the minority Catholic population living there, eroding the nation's overall morale. In this chapter I look at how Friel uses his queer characters to open up possibilities and contemplate more progressive alternatives, alternatives that may open up healthier, less oppressive structures. In my readings, I explore what is at stake in the connection between queerness and possibility, and in using queer characters as a way of furthering socio-political discussions that are not, or are not primarily, to do with sexuality. *The Gentle Island* needs some special pleading: although it is not set in Northern Ireland but on an island off the west coast of Donegal, the most northerly part of Ireland, the writer Brian Friel is himself Northern Irish, born in Omagh in 1929, and has written considerably about Northern Ireland and the Troubles. The play was performed at the Lyric Theatre in Belfast in 1972, sandwiched between productions of Wilde and Shakespeare.³⁶ For these reasons, it seems right to consider it as a Northern Irish play.

³⁵ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author in Dublin 11/06/2018.

³⁶ Another iconic Irish play, *The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roache* written by Thomas Kilroy, contains the openly gay character of Mr Roache, a middle-aged man living in Dublin. The reason I have not included this play in my study is based on several factors. The play was written in 1968, a year before the Troubles began, and it is not set in Northern Ireland but set in Dublin. And finally, Thomas Kilroy is not a Northern Irish playwright, he was born

Socio-political questions are also to the fore in my next chapter, examining Martin Lynch's play *Crack Up*, and *Ecce Homo*, a play devised and written by Joe Reid and the Belfast Community Theatre. In Chapter Two, I consider the politico-social environment in which these plays are written. Both are set in Belfast in the 1980s, and they share similar territory both thematically and geographically, the reason for pairing them in this chapter. Both plays are set in working-class Nationalist communities. But whereas in Chapter One, queer sexual politics tended to be subordinated to the more symbolic purposes to which queerness was put, here queer sexuality itself is properly under the lens. For Lynch, sexual and class politics go hand-in-hand. Not only does his play explore societal homophobia, but he also challenges social class, in particular the aspirations of the working class and the notion of respectability. This new-found respectability that the working-class characters acquire is consumed with insecurities, and here Lynch makes links to homophobia. Meanwhile, *Ecce Homo*, a play written by Joe Reid from the Belfast Community Theatre, sets out to throw light on the prejudices and struggles faced by the LGBT community, to deliberately enlighten its audience. Two of the actors, young gay men, had a significant input into the play's content and wanted to unearth the turmoil of coming out gay in Northern Ireland at that time. At the heart of the play Emmanuel, the play's main character, speaks directly to the audience.

EMMANUEL (To Audience)

From I can remember I've had these feelings ... feelings I was told that I wasn't supposed to have ... I felt ... ab... abnormal, a freak, as if I had some sort of defect ... everything from school to religion, from advertising to ... to fucking John Wayne movies conspired to make me feel like some horrible side show.³⁷

The play, although it was never performed, was bold in its intention to uncover the lived experiences of the LGBT+ community in Northern Ireland, and to break down the prejudicial barriers that existed within the society at that time. Belfast Community Theatre is a theatre collective based in Nationalist west Belfast, and the company's main aim is to create theatre that challenges the oppressive structures within their community. The company held strong socialist convictions which prompted them to create plays that were deliberately provocative and challenged all forms of societal injustice or oppression.

In my final chapter, I explore how Frank McGuinness in his play *Carthaginians* (1988) uses queerness in his construction of Dido, his central character, and how his queer presence and non-conformity breaks the stagnation of the Derry graveyard in which the play is set. At the heart of McGuinness's play is an examination of collective grief. First performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, *Carthaginians* takes place sixteen years after Blood Sunday, when thirteen civil rights protesters were gunned down and killed by British paratroopers. The fact that Mc Guinness has queerness at the centre of a play dealing with Bloody Sunday is in itself remarkably bold. Bloody Sunday is considered to be one of the most devastating

in Kilkenny in Southern Ireland. Therefore, the play and the playwright are both geographical and temporal misfits to my examination.

³⁷ BCT, *Ecce Homo*, p.9.

atrocities to have occurred in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. The emotional and political ramifications of Bloody Sunday are still present to this day. McGuinness uses Dido's interaction with the residents of the Derry graveyard to force them to view their lives in a different way. This, in turn, enables them to move on from their tragic pasts and irresolvable grief. In *Carthaginians* McGuinness is using the construction of his queer character as a weapon or a device with which to provoke change. His motives for placing Dido in the play are similar to Friel's in that he is not in the first instance interested in advocating for greater understanding of the LGBT+ community, although by his placing of such a character in his play he is by default familiarising his audience with non-heterosexual identities. But unlike Friel, McGuinness is himself gay. This is the rationale for taking a rather longer view in this chapter: I probe deeper into his writing as a gay playwright to consider his journey in constructing non-heteronormative identities within his work. I then look back at his first play *Factory Girls*, and the tentative queer subtexts in the female characters' interaction with each other, and move on to examine his formation of queer identities in his later plays *Innocence* and *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. During my research at the Frank McGuinness archives in University College Dublin, I uncovered drafts of an early unpublished play by Frank McGuinness entitled *Friends*. This unpublished play, written in 1984, is of great significance to my study as it is a clear prototype for *Carthaginians*, written four years later.

McGuinness asserted that *Friends*' failure to be produced was due to the overt homosexual relationship between the two main characters that lies at the heart of the play. He believed that homophobia was rife within Irish theatre, and the play suffered because of that. In my analysis of *Friends* I look at the various drafts and map McGuinness's construction and placing of the queer characters across the drafts, and question the relationship of his shaping of his queer narrative and characters and his own sexuality as an openly gay playwright, and his vested interest in the raising of queer visibility on the Irish stage. What is most interesting about McGuinness's writing of *Friends* is that his focus shifts from writing a political play about Derry and the Provisional IRA in the 1980s, to writing a play about a gay love affair between two childhood friends. The shift in focus is as much to do with McGuinness's own personal journey around his own sexuality as it is with the changing attitudes to LGBT+ issues within Ireland. It is worth noting that out of the four playwrights in my study McGuinness is the only one who is gay: Belfast Community Theatre's play *Ecce Homo*, although devised by the company which included two gay men, was in fact written by Joe Reid, who is not gay himself. *The Gentle Island* and *Crack Up* are written by Brian Friel and Martin Lynch, both of them heterosexual men. Each of the authors had a different relationship with queerness and therefore a different agenda in terms of how they manipulated the queer characters in their plays, and I will discuss this in detail in each chapter. It is also worth adding that there is significantly more critical literature available on Frank McGuinness' plays than on the others. This explains a slightly different, more wide-ranging approach in the chapter devoted to him, whereas to study the other plays I have undertaken a closer reading of the scripts, to unearth the author's intentions and overall construction of the queer identities in their plays.

Of course, the placing and construction of the queer characters has as much to do with the changing climate in Northern Ireland as it has with the playwrights' vision. From its creation in 1921 through to the Good Friday agreement in 1998 that marked the end of the Troubles,

Northern Ireland has come a long way both politically and in terms of LGBT+ rights. Its political trajectory has been punctuated with significant moments in which the LGBT+ community have achieved a viable presence, helping their quest for equal rights. At the start of the Troubles in 1969 gay men in Northern Ireland lagged behind their English and Welsh contemporaries, with the British Government under pressure from the Unionist parliament, refusing to extend the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 to the province. The nineteen eighties saw the tide beginning to turn, with the British Government introducing the Homosexual Offences Order in 1982 which finally saw a decriminalisation of homosexuality in Northern Ireland. However, as I began writing this thesis in 2016, LGBT+ people living in Northern Ireland are faced again with different treatment from LGBT+ people living in the rest of the UK. UK equal marriage legislation has not been extended to Northern Ireland, with the DUP still holding an anti-gay rhetoric, blocking any attempts at reforming the law to allow same-sex couples to marry. However, new legislation extending equal marriage rights to Northern Ireland came into effect on 21 October 2019. The new legislation puts the House of Commons on track to legislate for marriage equality by January 2020.

The four plays in my study reflect the changing societal landscape regarding attitudes to the LGBT+ community in Ireland. Friel's 1971 play *The Gentle Island*, written early on in the Troubles, shows a cautious depiction of a gay couple, in that Friel for most of the play avoids naming the men's homosexuality, leaving a mainly ambiguous interpretation of their relationship. This is perhaps indicative of the author's tentative approach to a contentious issue in the whole of Ireland at that time. On the other hand, Frank McGuinness's handling of his openly gay character Dido shows greater confidence in the playwright's deliberate construction, in order to create a character that is both controversial and entertaining, and is placed within the drama as a positive force for change. McGuinness's approach is indicative of the changing attitudes in Northern Irish society towards the LGBT+ community and their growing awareness and support for equal rights. In each chapter, my focus is fixed on the playwright's construction of the queer character. The plays themselves provide a vehicle in which the queer character is placed at the centre of the drama, and it is their queerness that sets these apart from the vast catalogue of plays written and produced at the same time. The characters in question are Philly, Shane and Peter (*The Gentle Island*), Nipper (*Crack Up*), Emmanuel and Simon (*Ecce Homo*) and Dido (*Carthaginians*). I look at the plays in chronological order, beginning with *The Gentle Island* and ending with *Carthaginians*. Examining the plays in this way presents the thesis with a particular through line, which is the birth of Northern Irish queer theatre. What I have shown is how through several, interesting and innovative semi-failures, queer theatre was finally established in Northern Ireland through the staging of McGuinness's *Carthaginians*.

Chapter 1:

Queer Disruptions: A time of Reinvention. (*The Gentle Island*: Brian Friel 1971).

Patriarchal societies educate men to think and act in a masculine way and women to think and act in a feminine way, punishing anyone who dares cross those boundaries [...] Qualities considered masculine are more valued than those considered feminine, and members of society who personify the feminine ideal get less than those who exemplify the masculine ideal. (Yuval Noah Harari).³⁸

Brian Friel is frequently described as the most important contemporary Irish playwright, (North and South), in terms of his dramatic achievements and his cultural significance. Other Irish playwrights have gained fame in their own country, but Friel's achievements are celebrated throughout the world.³⁹ Born in Omagh, Co Tyrone, Northern Ireland in 1929, his family moved to Derry / Londonderry in 1939. Derry is no more than a few miles from Donegal, situated across the Irish border in the Irish Free State. Donegal, renowned for its natural beauty, is where Friel spent his childhood summers, staying with his mother's family in the Glenties. And Donegal was where Friel placed many of his stage plays in the fictional town of *Ballybeg*.

The Gentle Island was first performed at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin on 30 November 1971 and ran until 18 December. Set on the island of Inishkeen, off the west coast of Donegal, the play centres on Manus Sweeney and his grown-up family of two sons, Philly and Joe, and daughter-in-law Sarah, wife of Philly. They are the last inhabitants of the island, and Sarah the only woman. When two men, gay couple Peter and Shane, visit the island from Dublin, frustrations come to a head, with one of the Dubliners being shot and seriously injured. The play ends with the gay couple and Joe, the younger of the sons, gone, leaving the others to find some sort of peace within their fragmented lives.

The Gentle Island introduces three queer characters, and my question here is to what end is Friel using these characters in his play? Does he directly use their non-conformity as mere dramatic fodder? Or, is he using homosexuality to symbolise modernity's threat to the traditional Irish family as well as the demise of the structured society on Inishkeen and of Ireland as a whole? Peter and Shane are Dubliners and have come to the island to holiday. The couple's urbanism, as well as their homosexuality, compounds their place as outsiders, which in turn intensifies the threat they pose to the Island's fragile patriarchal structure. Graham Price, in his blog, writes about Frank McGuinness's analysis of *The Gentle Island*, saying that McGuinness's analysis

³⁸ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens, A Brief History of Humankind*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2011) p.171.

³⁹ Anthony Roach, in Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*, edited by Anthony Roache, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.1.

offers a queering of heteronormative futures by giving us a world that is dominated by supremely masculine, straight men, but which is also dying out.⁴⁰

This description of the play as a queering of heteronormative futures is something that I would like to explore further. The term “queering of heteronormative futures” not only excavates the conflict actuating the drama in *The Gentle Island*; it also suggests that Friel uses sexual nonconformities as a levering device to reveal the Islanders’ heterosexual dysfunction. At the play’s crux he explores sexual frustrations and the malcontent that is buried inside the restrictive family relationships of the Islanders. Friel is also looking at societal dysfunctions in that the present hetero-patriarchal paradigm has failed, and by introducing the gay couple he is opening up alternative pathways.

The Gentle Island is of great significance in my endeavour to outline the tracing of queer identities in Northern Irish drama. It was the first modern Irish play to deal with an openly gay couple, and the subject of queer sexuality is neither tokenised nor delegated to the confines of a subplot or comedic representation: Friel places it at the heart of the play’s dramatic energy. For these reasons alone the play is a natural starting point for my inquiry. Furthermore, same sex desire is a crucial part of the play’s dramaturgical structure as well as a device for Friel’s exploration of a modern Irish society and its futures.

Inniskeen: A Hopeless State of Dysfunction

As the theatrical curtain rises on the world of *The Gentle Island* Friel’s audience are confronted with Innishkeen’s societal demise. The quest for survival pervades the opening scenes as we witness a dying world, crippled with the pressure to continue within the chrononormativity imposed upon it. Elizabeth Freeman defines chrononormativity as a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts.⁴¹ It is a useful term within the context of Innishkeen’s changing times as it clearly explains the failings of the island and its traditional ways of living, and it is the reason why the inhabitants have chosen to abandon their homes in a bid to configure an alternative economic means to live.

MANUS Fifty years ago there were two hundred people on this island; our own school, our own church, our own doctor. No one ever wanted.

JOE Scrabbling a mouthful of spuds from the sand --- d’you call that living?

MANUS And by God there’ll be life here again.⁴²

The abandoned island of Innishkeen faces an uncertain future and it is this uncertainty that Friel means to exploit in his drama. The binding structures that once served the Island community and enabled it to function both economically and socially have frayed and

⁴⁰ Graham Price, ‘Habit is a Great Deadener. Gender, Sexuality and Futurity in Brian Friel’s *The Gentle Island*’, *Breac: A Digital Journal of Irish Studies*, July 2017, Last visited 21/10/2018.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer temporalities, Queer Histories*, (Durham; Duke University Press, 2010), p.3.

⁴² Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.18.

broken down. The Islanders are abandoning both their homes and the last remaining family on the Island, the Sweeneys, leaving them to fend for themselves.

That, then, is the set-up. But what of the opening of the play?

(MANUS is sitting in an airplane seat in the kitchen, his back to the audience, staring resolutely into the fire.)⁴³

The symbolic introduction of Manus, the patriarch sitting in an airplane seat, can be viewed in a number of ways. His back to the audience is a clear indication of his avoidance in acknowledging the events taking place around him, his focus fixed on the interior, in particular the fireplace, the heart of his home. He is the custodian of the old ways and traditions that the Islanders have collectively rejected. He symbolises the old world. Tony Coult, in writing about Friel's play, notes:

The Gentle Island is not a play about the North, but its evocation of an Irish society deeply riven by anger, frustration and intolerance, perhaps coincidentally locked into the immediate civil war situation stirring in the North.⁴⁴

With these words in mind, this image of Manus places him rigidly, allegorically resisting an impending change that is necessary for Ireland's progression. The old ways maintain his identity by securing his position in society. The fact that he is sitting in an old airplane seat, an item scavenged from the sea some years earlier, adds an extra layer of meaning to this opening. The airplane seat connotes movement, in particular travel, and yet Manus is stuck in his ways, refusing to move. By placing him in the airplane seat Friel seems to state that Manus, although averse to travelling, has a longing to escape the inevitability of an abandoned island and is acknowledging an awareness that movement or change is an inevitability. It is a way of staging from the first some of the unconscious desires, tensions and resistances which the play will go on to dramatize. These tensions are more than simply personal or psychological: in Manus, Friel has constructed a character who encapsulates the ideologies of both Nationalist and Unionist cultures in Ireland, which refuse to move away from the past and embrace an uncertain future.

When Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island* premiered at Dublin's Olympia theatre, a young Frank McGuinness was in the audience for this early production and found the play's performance to be inspirational.

I think it was ahead of its time and perhaps deliberately ahead of its time, because then it was a prophetic play, prophetic in that it diagnosed the problems that were going to afflict Ireland over the next twenty years – the hypocrisy of the South, the violence of the North, and he brings the two together on this Gentle Island and exposes them mercilessly.⁴⁵

⁴³ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.11.

⁴⁴ Tony Coult, *About Friel: the Playwright and the work* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p.47.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p46.

In order to avoid writing directly about Ireland and in particular the Troubles in the North, Friel has chosen to distance his audience from the events that are occurring around them. He explains this when he said:

People often urge me to write 'about the Trouble[s] in the North'. You have the dramatic situation, they tell me; you have the conflict; you know the scene. So if this is what writing is about – take the do-it-yourself kit up to your study and assemble the pieces accordingly to the enclosed leaflet.⁴⁶

So rather than write directly about the Troubles Friel writes about Inishkeen, this remote fictional Irish island that is facing human abandonment, allowing nature to reclaim it.

So, how does the island's predicament reflect the Ireland of 1971? Since the potato famine (1845-1852) the Irish diaspora has been a consistent drain of the nation's youth and human resources, and has kept Ireland in a constant state of flux, reinforcing the island's state of discontent and unrest, and instilling a cultural narrative of escape.⁴⁷ The exodus of the islanders in the opening scene of *The Gentle Island* clearly reflects this. Manus Sweeney and his family represent the Irish citizens and their efforts to remain and to prosper in a world that at that time presented challenges, those challenges being the introduction of birth control, feminism and gay rights. The minority Nationalist community in the North faced extra pressures from consistent oppression and violence from both Loyalists and the State forcing them to conform and surrender their Irish identity. Friel has addressed all of these challenges in the play in their various forms.

The translation of Inishkeen, according to Sarah, is Gentle Island,⁴⁸ and on first impressions, it seems idyllic, but as the story unfolds a treasure trove of hidden associations with violence is unearthed. In a scene towards the end of the play Manus recounts to Shane in gruesome detail a cruel and harrowing story about a stranger who comes to the island and steals from an elderly couple.

MANUS They harnessed him by a long rope to an old donkey. Then they pumped linseed oil down into the donkey's ears. And for a full day, sir, until it dropped dead, the mad donkey dragged that nigger-man across the length and breadth of this island. Then they rowed the nigger-man out to the

⁴⁶ Christopher Murray, *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries, Interviews 1964- 1999* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1999), p.46.

⁴⁷ By 1900 the population of Ireland was about half of its 1840 high and continued to fall. In the twentieth century mass emigration reached levels similar to the 1850s, in the aftermath of the Great Famine. For a more comprehensive insight look at: Pat Coogan, *Wherever Green is Worn: The story of the Irish Diaspora*, (Arrow Books, London, 2002). Donald MacRaild, *British and Irish Diasporas: Societies, Cultures and Ideologies*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

⁴⁸ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.28.

mainland and dumped him there. And them that dumped him said all he was fit to do was inch away from them on all fours, sideways like a crab.⁴⁹

Violence is a strong presence throughout the play; the stories that the Sweeneys recount to their Dublin guests have violence at their core and are often used as a warning that reinforces conformity and punishes deviance. The violence is also there to comment on the deteriorating political and social situation that was happening in the North of Ireland and the increase in violence both at the hands of the security forces and the paramilitaries on both sides:

The Gentle Island brings together many of the factors that have contributed to the Troubles, but does not seek to impose an analysis, or to proffer a remedy, for 'dramatists have no solutions. Furthermore, it is not their function to give answers' (Friel, 'Theatre of Hope').⁵⁰

The island that Friel depicts is far from gentle: he draws on nature and in particular the natural order of things to heighten his rendition of the brutality of the island's unrelenting landscape. He conveys the ruthlessness and the lack of sentimentality of the islanders when it comes to their own survival. It is during the final exchanges from the Islanders that Friel sketches in further aspects of their callousness. When Sarah's mother Mary arrives with her husband she tells her:

MARY I'm at the fool of a father of yours for the past month to throw the dog into the tide but he has to leave it to the last minute. And then what happens? The rope breaks and the dog bites his hand and he falls into the water himself and destroys his Sunday shoes. **(To Joe)** He's bound to come looking for food. Put a shot in him, will you Joe?⁵¹

The island's inhabitants, as depicted through the stories told by the Sweeneys, are robust and unsentimental. It is through his references to animals and the Islanders' treatment of them that he paints their cruelty and their intolerance of anyone not viewed as useful or productive. When Joe jovially describes how the young men at the leaving party tied two cats together and chased them throughout the house, throwing hot water over them just because they were bored,⁵² there is no sense of wrongdoing or cruelty involved. This cruelty has the effect of positioning the islanders in a less than civilised state, making them savage in their indifference to, and at times partaking in, cruel acts, thereby destroying any romanticism around this backward community. And the reason Friel has done this is to illustrate the need for change, for progress; it is time that Inishkeen found an alternative way in which to live.

⁴⁹ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.66.

⁵⁰ Michael Parker, 'Telling Tales: Narratives of Politics and Sexuality in The Gentle Island', in *Brian Friel's Dramatic Artistry 'The Work Has Value'*, by Donald E. Morse, Csilla Bertha, and Maria Kurdi, Eds., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), p.143.

⁵¹ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.15.

⁵² *ibid*, p.22.

We can begin to trace here a connection between Friel's characterisation of the islanders and his exploration of sexual politics in the play. The idea of survival at any cost is what Friel is exploring, and in terms of island culture, the biological aspect of the question is bound up with his play's treatment of procreation, and so of heteronormativity. When Mary asks Sarah if she has any news to tell her sister in Scotland, it is an indirect way of asking Sarah if she is pregnant. Sarah pretends she does not understand what her mother means; by doing this she underplays how important pregnancy is to her, but her actions reveal the opposite to the audience and intensify the pressure between her and Philly that is already beginning to grow.

SARAH: What sort of news?

MARY: You're not throwing up your food or putting on weight, are you?

(Sarah turns aside.)

MARY: All in good time. Although when I was your length married I had Josephine talking and Christy crawling and Paddy in the cradle and I was six months gone with you.

Friel is emphasising the islanders' expectations of procreation and reminding us that any alternative to heteronormative models provided by the islanders not only represents a failing but is also a threat to survival. Mary's departing words to her daughter may appear to offer encouragement to the childless Sarah but on closer inspection they intensify the already pressurised dynamics within the barren marriage.

MARY: By the time I get back you'll have your hands full. I left the cradle in the room down.

With this exchange Friel unveils the expectations that exist in this patriarchal structure, a structure that is intolerant of a barren woman who fails to continue the patriarchal order.

In the opening scene of the play Friel therefore lays the world of the island out before us, the sources of conflict and tension are present and already beginning to build. From the moment the departing islanders converse with the Sweeney family to when the two visitors from Dublin city, Peter and Shane, show up, Friel has presented us with a world teetering on the edge of obsolescence. The family continuance is facing many threats. Kathryn Conrad in her book, *Locked in the Family Cell*, states:

The centrality of the family cell to social, economic, and political organization defines and limits not only acceptable sexuality but also the contours of the private sphere, the public sphere, and the nation itself.⁵³

⁵³ Kathryn A. Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell. Gender, Sexuality and Political Agency in Irish National Discourse*, (England: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p.4.

Conrad's explanation of how the family cell defines the society in which it exists and how it shapes acceptable sexualities are useful in my investigation of Inishkeen and its social structuring. According to Conrad the family cell is central to the healthy functioning of society. If we look at the Sweeney family as a microcosm of the traditional Irish family then Friel has presented us with a family whose bloodline is soon to run out. It is on the verge of extinction, facing threats from the sons' lack of procreation and non-conventional sexualities and lifestyles. Conrad adds to this by saying:

If the cell is stable, so too are the social institutions built upon it, and one can present to the world one's capacity to rule.⁵⁴

The idea of a stable family cell is particularly significant in Friel's play as he is using Inishkeen allegorically to examine the state of the Irish nation as a whole. So by placing the Sweeney family in such a hopeless state of dysfunction he is expressing concerns for the traditional Irish family, and therefore the overall stability of Ireland. Conrad adds that,

Instabilities must therefore be constructed and treated as foreign – not only to the Family, not only to one's political position, but also to the nation as a whole.⁵⁵

Significantly, Friel chooses to have his characters Peter and Shane as outsiders, two Dubliners, foreigners to this rural landscape: the threat to the family cell and to the island is both an urban one as well as a sexual one. Conrad expands her thinking on the homosexual and its place within the larger society thus:

Homosexuals and homosexual unions challenge the inevitability and security of the notion of the family cell as the only "natural" and fundamental unit group of society. Consequently, the discourse of both Irish and Ulster nationalism, until very recently, have excluded homosexuality; when homosexuality does enter these discourses, it does so as a sign of foreign corruption and disintegration.⁵⁶

What Conrad has to say regarding society's view of homosexuality is particularly fitting to Friel's placing of the gay couple in his play. The couple are initially accepted into the family, with their homosexuality being either unseen or deliberately ignored by Manus Sweeney and the others. However, when Sarah reveals the truth and claims to have seen Shane and Philly having sex in the boathouse, homosexuality is fully addressed, and its presence on the island is every bit the threat that Conrad suggests. If there is any hope for procreation and the continuance of the Sweeneys then the homosexual threat must (at least according to the ideas of the islanders) be eradicated, and heteronormative sexualities need to be reinforced. We find in the earlier works of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud a similar conception of homosexuality and its relationship with the family. It is worth bearing in mind that it is within this intellectual climate that Friel is placed during the time of writing *The Gentle Island*. Freud's words explain why the survival of the family cell is dependent on maintaining societal structures.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p.10.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.10.

⁵⁶ Kathryn A. Conrad, p.10.

If we remove this inequality and allow total sexual freedom – thus doing away with the family, the germ-cell of civilization – it will admittedly be impossible to foresee on what new paths the development of civilization may strike out.⁵⁷

I would propose that it is along this line of thought that Friel wants his audience to venture. By bringing a gay couple and their homosexuality into the island Friel is suggesting that there are alternatives to the prescribed heteronormative structure that has gone before – ‘new paths’, as Freud puts it.

Sexual energy and frustrations are present in every back story and are the main driving force for the characters to reach out and take risks that will help them escape the impending entrapment that is inexorably moving in on them. In his chapter ‘The penalties of retrospect: continuities in Brian Friel’ Neil Corcoran writes:

The Gentle Island is a play whose psychological and social themes are ultimately located in sexuality.⁵⁸

Returning to the idea of ‘the queering of heteronormative futures’, let me question the possibilities that this term presents. So, what might we suppose are the possible *heteronormative futures* for the remaining inhabitants of Inishkeen? There are several futures on offer, the first being that Joe will manage to entice Anna, the island girl that he has romantic notions of, to return home and become his wife, providing an opportunity for the much-desired sustaining extension of the Sweeney line. The second possible heteronormative future might be a chance that somehow, despite this being unlikely as it has not happened yet, Sarah is impregnated by Philly and an offspring is at long last produced. In fact, both of these possible futures could come to pass or neither of them, leaving the third possible future to be that of eventual death and extinction, and the uninhabited island being returned to nature. As McGuinness has stated, Friel does not seriously engage with these possibilities. No sooner has the last boat of migrating islanders left the island than Peter and Shane appear, presenting a possible indiscernible future, a future opening up various possible avenues for the family. However, as soon as there is any sense of these possibilities taking root and manifesting they are hastily expunged, obliterating any possibility of a queer futurity for Inishkeen. I will explore the islanders’ treatment of the gay couple later in the chapter, examining the ritualistic connotations of their punishment and expulsion from the island. First, we must focus on Friel’s characterisation in the play at large, and on his treatment of gender in this characterisation.

A Queering of the Heteronormative.

It is within Friel’s construction of his characters that he presents us with the real obstacles to any viable future alternatives. If Manus represents a traditional, straight patriarch, then the movement of the play is to queer the heteronormative future to which he looks forward. In order to understand how this queer futurity emerges in the play, we need to

⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.64.

⁵⁸ Alan Peacock, *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993), p.24.

explore how Friel initially describes his main characters, and consider how through the construction of his characters he was laying the foundations of this queer futurity. The first point to make here is that his descriptions suggest a predisposition on what determines masculinity. Friel describes Manus Sweeney, a man in his sixties, as **'well made'** and **'powerful'**, a description which complements the choice of name: Manus is an Irish name and means 'great', though of course it also contains the English word 'man'. As this is a play that directly addresses patriarchal traditions, and has gender and sexual energy as its source of conflict, Friel's naming of this character and his description of him succinctly informs the reader or audience of the ideologies that permeate this island. Meanwhile, the first image that Friel gives us of Sarah is that she is **'sewing at the kitchen table'**, again placing her in the matriarchal role as a home maker. However, she is described as wearing **'men's boots, long skirt and coarse knitted jumper'**. This in itself is not enough to suggest a queering of roles, but I believe by placing it within the opening lines of the play, Friel hints that things, in terms of gender and sexualities, are not as firmly fixed as we may expect. Joe, Manus's younger son is also described as having a **'big physique'**⁵⁹ once again likening him to Manus and to the stereotypical concept of desired masculinity: the physical descriptions of the two men are important in that they reaffirm masculinity, linking it with physical strength, power and confidence.

So, we have a set of gender codes at work in the play from the start. But it is in the description of Philly, Manus's older son and husband to Sarah, that things become interesting. When Friel finally brings Philly into the play he is described as wearing thigh boots which he uses for fishing, and although his attire is purely functional and in keeping with his work as a fisherman,⁶⁰ I think we can suggest that this supplies him with a certain eroticism and separates him from the other males. This implicit separation is carried through in the descriptions of his physical being: lightly built, unlike his father and brother and unlike the rest of the islanders that we have met, he is also described as quietly spoken, again suggesting a lacking of manly strength and confidence and a strong suggestion of effeminacy.⁶¹ From these descriptions, it is clear that Friel has placed Philly as the outsider, a misfit within this community. As we find out more about Philly and his relationship with Sarah, the sense that he is not just an outsider but is also 'faulty goods' is reinforced, with all the problems of their marriage hanging on Philly. But it is the naming of the character that is the most telling: the name Philly is more commonly used as a name for a girl, it is also the name given to a young female horse (Filly). It is no accident that Friel has chosen this particular name. He has set Philly apart from the other male members of the island community and has placed him in an effeminate space. Brian Ponger's critique of the construction of masculine identities is particularly illuminating at this point, when he states that, in our culture, male homosexuality is a violation of masculinity, a denigration of the mythic power of men⁶². Keeping these words in mind, I would like to consider how Friel's marked deployment of gendered physical attributes and names are carried through in the play's treatment of the heteronormative (and homosocial) culture of the island. Even before

⁵⁹ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.11.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p.19.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p.19.

⁶² Brian Ponger, *The Arena of Masculinity*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990), p.2

we meet him, Friel gives us a sense of Philly's ostensible failings as a heterosexual man. A clear example is in Joe's interactions with the young departing bachelors of the Island. One of them, Bosco, proudly declares, 'Get the knickers off, all you, Glasgow women! The Inishkeen stallion is coming'. Bosco's virility and unquenchable sexual appetite are unashamedly proclaimed and all the more significant when Bosco goes on to say 'It's a buck like me Sarah should have got, Jaysus. I'd never rise out of the bed except to eat'.⁶³ This declaration makes it clear that the problems within the marriage are not hidden, they are something that the other Islanders are aware of. Also, buried within his declaration is the suggestion that virility is given greater value above that of hard work, for as suggested early on, and as we discover more and more throughout the play, Philly is devoted to his work, spending most nights out at sea in his boat salmon fishing, providing for his family. On the one hand, the sentiment of hard work is greatly respected by certain characters, but on the other hand, it is met with resentment from Sarah and viewed as Philly failing in his matrimonial duties. The latter view is of course due to the need for the islanders to procreate so that they will go on and so that their traditions may continue.

From the first moment Friel brings Sarah and Philly together on stage there is tension between them. Philly's focus is on his work and making money, Sarah wants to address the problem that lies between them, the issue that stands between them and their lovemaking.

PHILLY: Any hard cash that comes into this house comes from the sea, not from his footering about the scraps of fields. And as long as I make money from it I'll fish it.

SARAH: Maybe if you spent less time on it we might be better off.

PHILLY: Farming? Here?

SARAH: You and me.

(Pause.)

PHILLY: I'm tired.

SARAH: You're always tired when you're at home.

PHILLY: I was up all night, woman. When you and the rest of them were away drinking and dancing I was working.

SARAH: So you were.

(He looks at her, uncertain what she means. He opens his mouth to say something more, decides against it, goes into the bedroom.)⁶⁴

In the stage directions at the end of the couple's exchange Friel reveals more about Philly's anguish surrounding his lack of virility and avoidance of the marital bed. By his hesitation to speak Friel is suggesting that Philly is troubled and has a need to open up to Sarah, but in the end changes his mind and retreats to the bedroom. Sarah's childlessness is threatening to the patriarchal framework, and it is the merging of this and Philly's questionable sexuality

⁶³ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.12.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p.25.

that is instrumental in bringing the tensions of the play to an explosive and violent conclusion.

Queer Constructions

It is important to point out that by today's standards Friel's stereotypical construction of the homosexual characters would be viewed as negatively reductive, cultivating homophobia and doing nothing to enhance the advancement for gay equality rights in Ireland at this time. But, they do none the less dramatize and make visible queer identities and acknowledge their existence in society at a time in which non-heterosexual lifestyles were concealed within the mainstream. Perhaps the negativity that surrounds Friel's representations is caused by his attempts to placate societal condemnation as much as by the fact that these identities are viewed by many at this time, perhaps by Friel himself, as non-productive, inferior, lacking in traditional masculine traits and potentially destructive of a healthy functioning societal framework. In his creation of Philly, Friel is presenting us with a weaker, effeminate male, one who is the source of great frustration and unhappiness for his wife, and one who threatens the end of the Sweeney line and their family traditions. However, one may argue that through this queer construction Friel is also addressing homophobic attitudes embedded within the Irish culture of the period. In 1971, male homosexuality was still a criminal offence on both sides of the Irish border, and the majority of the population in Ireland north and south held negative views of same sex relationships. The prevailing understanding and categorisation of homosexuality amongst medics, social theorists and sexologists during this period would have been a collective one, framing it as abnormal, perverse, a malfunction, and a sexuality that has been corrupted, damaged, not complete. Writing in 1971, the same year Friel wrote *The Gentle Island*, Australian gay rights activist and author Dennis Altman says:

To be viewed as ill rather than evil is not much consolation, for it represents an attempt to destroy an individual's identity that is as brutal in a subtle way as imprisonment.⁶⁵

Altman represents the progressive view. In his writings, he is pressing for a greater understanding of homosexuality, with his ultimate aim for homosexual inclusion on an equal footing as that of heterosexuals. He is quite optimistic in the progression of gay rights. He continues:

It is my impression that today there is a decline in the extent to which homosexuality is viewed as an illness, and growing acceptance of the more sophisticated version that sees it as pathology (...) Our model is no longer the witch or the invalid, but rather the crippled and disturbed. – "He's gay you know," they whisper about us and, as to the blind, offer us pity.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Dennis Altman, *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p.66.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 66-67.

According to Altman, in 1971 attitudes towards homosexuality have shifted from hatred, to illness and now to pity. In an interview for *The Guardian* newspaper, human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, talking about the 1967 Sexual Offences Act and referring to the MPs who supported the decriminalisation of homosexuality, states that ‘no one mentioned equality or love. The consistent position was that homosexuals were pitiful and in need of Christian compassion’.⁶⁷ Freud viewed the homosexual as a pervert (in psychoanalytical terms). He saw homosexuality occurring when normal and natural heterosexual development has failed, as the result of a negative Oedipal outcome, where in the case of male homosexuality the male child identifies with the mother and directs his libidinal cathexis onto the father.⁶⁸ It is unclear whether Freud understands ‘normal’ development to be simply a cultural norm rather than a natural one. He describes the child as originally ‘queer’ or perverse: he talks about the baby’s desires as ‘polymorphously perverse’, so he sees ‘development’ as the shutting down of original perverse, queer, plural possibilities. Freud had an ambivalent status with homosexuality; he is remembered for having referred to homosexuality as a form of ‘arrested development’, a notion that conversion therapists use to pathologise homosexuality to this day.⁶⁹ Friel suggests these heteronormative ideas around homosexuality throughout the play, but it is in Act Two, Scene One, when Manus, Peter and Sarah are alone in the cottage, that he says it most forcibly. Manus has told Peter that he lost his arm in a mining accident in Butte, Montana. Sarah is enraged and demands that Manus tell Peter the truth; he ignores her, so she proceeds to unmask him and tell Peter how it was Manus’s late wife Rosie Dubh’s two uncles who cut it off with the knives they used to gut herrings.

SARAH When he came back from America he had his two arms.

[...]

SARAH And at the back of the hill there was a gentle young girl called Rosie Dubh – Rosie Duffy – living with two aul uncles that never spoke and never washed and never lit a fire.

[...]

SARAH And when the buck came home from the states he went smelling about the back hill. Oh they say he was a smart buck, able with the tongue. And he got Rosie Dubh pregnant.

[...]

SARAH And as soon as she told him, off he skited to England. [...] And after twelve months - God knows why - maybe he was running away from some English girl. And the night he arrived down at the harbour there, the two uncles were

⁶⁷ Geraldine Bedell, ‘Coming out of the dark ages’, *The Guardian*, 24/06/2007.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/jun/24/communities.gayrights>), Last visited 05/12/2018.

⁶⁸ For more information on Freud’s Oedipus Complex refer to Saul McGeod’s on line article *Oedipal Complex*, (<https://www.simplypsychology.org/oedipal-complex.html>, Published 2018), Last visited 21/10/2018.

⁶⁹ <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-30/october/freudian-motivation-behind-1967s-sexual-offences-act>. Last visited 05/12/2018 12:52.

waiting for him with knives they use here for gutting herring. And that's how the arm was lost – in that fight.⁷⁰

Sarah adds that after her second son, Joe, was born Rosie Dubh went for a walk along the cliffs and was never seen since.⁷¹ Manus does not deny Sarah's version of the story, instead he attempts to quieten her by saying she has a foul mouth. But it is Sarah's parting comment that carries what many at the time most likely thought about homosexuality and sexual deviances.

SARAH: Joe doesn't know the truth. But Philly does. And he'll never forgive you for it. And if he can't father a family, you're the cause of it.⁷²

There are three important conclusions to draw from Sarah's words, the first being that Philly is being described as damaged, unable to function as a normal heterosexual male; the second is that Sarah openly acknowledges this and reveals it to the others; and the third is that the cause of Philly's malfunction is down to his relationship with his father, therefore echoing the sentiment of Freud's Oedipus complex. Manus's missing arm can also be read as symbolising Freud's theories on castration, in which the emerging male child's sexuality is stifled by the connection of amputation/castration and association with the father and sex.⁷³ So, there are sufficient clues in the play to offer a 'Freudian' reading of its treatment of Philly's homosexuality. But other theoretical insights might be brought to bear to help us to contextualise or historicise this more fully. The French social theorist Michel Foucault writes extensively about sexual deviances and how they are constructed at different historical periods in his seminal book *The History Of Sexuality: 1*. In his book Foucault says:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.⁷⁴

Foucault wrote this several years after *The Gentle Island*, but what is significant about what Foucault says is that it is only a recent occurrence that homosexuality has been extracted from normal human sexual practice. Foucault claims that the homosexual as a species was born in 1870.⁷⁵ But in his construction of Philly, Friel has not created a homosexual male, he has in fact created a character whose sexuality is never claimed as anything definite. Friel's lack of commitment regarding Philly's sexuality may be viewed negatively as an avoidance of addressing repressed homosexuality, but considering the patriarchal social structure of

⁷⁰ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.56

⁷¹ *ibid*, p.57

⁷² *ibid*, p.57.

⁷³ For further reading on Freud's castration complex refer to

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/castration-complex>. Last visited 12/12/2018.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault: *The Will to Knowledge: The history of sexuality: 1*. (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p.43.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.43.

Inishkeen it is, I consider, a realistic depiction of a man living in what is essentially a post-feudal environment: an environment far removed from the liberal thinkers of the time. It is also worth mentioning that in meeting the two Dubliners, it is most likely the first time Philly has met an openly gay man, someone whose sexuality forms part of his acknowledged identity, and therefore his first opportunity to explore his sexuality. With these points in mind, it is important to remember that Friel was embarking on something controversial, something that no other Irish playwright had attempted to do before. This helps explain what we might today read as a borderline homophobic treatment of queerness: his starting point must be one of inclusion, where his audience is not pushed too far, but presented with something familiar, something recognisable. As the play progresses and he introduces Shane and Peter his depictions of queerness develop and vary, breaking away from the familiar stereotypical effeminising of gay men.

Before proceeding any further with Friel's handling of homosexual identities I feel it is important to explore the homosocial presence which complies with the homosexual, and which exists between the male characters in Friel's play. Scott Boltwood explains this further:

Although the homosocial and the homosexual may share limited social practices and tactics, unleashed homosexual drives threaten to disrupt the patriarchal imperatives that sustain the homosocial through procreative heterosexuality.⁷⁶

The homosocial that Boltwood refers to is at the core of patriarchal society and Inishkeen is no exception, in fact, the homosocial is even more pronounced, with male characters greatly outnumbering female ones, with Friel placing maleness at the centre of his dramaturgical exploration. Homosociality refers to explicitly non-sexual relationships between men, male bonds of friendship, kinship or hierarchy. In the play homosociality is on show from the first, in the bragging of the departing young bachelors, and in particular is evident in the relationship that develops between Peter, the Dublin city dweller and Manus, the uncrowned King of Inishkeen.

Friel is not only using the Dublin couple's homosexuality as a threat to Manus' continuance on the island, he is also using it to expose alternative, non-traditional living structures and relationships and to ignite the sexual tensions that already exist. Therefore, it is surprising that Manus is so welcoming to the couple and that he develops a bond with Peter, a strong homosocial relationship, and the couple's homosexual relationship is never an issue. Scott Boltwood comments:

Manus' "self-contained community" proves sufficiently elastic to incorporate Peter and Shane because their homosexuality is easily subsumed into the island's dominant homosocial structure.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Scott Boltwood, *Brian Friel, Ireland, and the North*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.116.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.116.

Although Peter and Shane's homosexuality is never openly discussed in the play, it becomes apparent towards the end of the play that Manus is fully aware that they are homosexuals; in the final scene of the play he says, '*It's them – them queers! I should have killed the two of them when I had them! What we had wasn't much but what there was was decent and wholesome*'⁷⁸. Manus's words expose a truth: he was prepared to ignore and to tolerate the couple's homosexuality in the hope that they would embrace Inishkeen, and perhaps come to live there. Peter's love for the Island gave Manus hope and helped him believe in a more promising future. But as Dennis Altman writes, 'The difference between tolerance and acceptance is very considerable, for tolerance is a gift extended by superior to the inferior'.⁷⁹ Neil Corcoran observes that:

If the Sweeneys are the last of what Inishkeen, the 'gentle' western island, has been, then Peter and Shane, the urban tourists, are presumably what it is to become, if it is to become anything other than a desert. The island is caught, therefore, at its moment of transition: from an agricultural and piscine economy worked by indigenous peasantry (on the verge of becoming the unskilled labour force of the industrial Britain of the early 1970s) to the tourist economy of the urban middle classes. Retrospect and prospect are therefore brought into confrontation.⁸⁰

It is my belief that Friel introduces the two Dubliners at this particular moment in the play not just as a foreshadowing device as Corcoran states, but as a device to expose and then to undermine the island's traditional foundations. If we are to accept that sexuality is the driving force in the play, then the arrival of these two homosexuals opens up a much needed and longed for an alternative to the prescribed patriarchal pathway enforced by generations of islanders. On the surface, the alternative pathway not only offers a breaking away from the old, but it also presents an overwhelming threat to the Islanders' lifestyle that is much greater than the economic failures that have forced the other islanders to leave. However, as we shall see shortly, this relationship itself is not represented in an unequivocal light. It is Sarah who draws out the details about the structure of obligation and economic dependency which link Peter and Shane together. As the only female character in the play, it is her need for the truth that drives the action of the play forward, thereby placing her in the central role. It is Sarah who takes decisive action to initiate change; when she is alone with Shane at the cottage fixing the gramophone, Sarah, whom Friel describes as **more attractively dressed**⁸¹, propositions him. What follows is interesting as it presents several possible routes that the play might take. From Friel's description of Sarah's physical appearance and her mood – **she sings as she works** – we see that a shift of sorts has taken place, we can see that she is interested in Shane. After asking him a series of questions regarding his life Sarah, referring to Peter, asks '*Do you know him for long?*', which prompts Shane to reveal the fact that he was an orphan and that Peter was his teacher who helped him get a job.

⁷⁸ Friel, *The Gentle Island* p.72.

⁷⁹ Dennis Altman, p.59.

⁸⁰ Neil Corcoran, The Penalties of Retrospective: Continuities in Brian, in *The achievement of Brian Friel*, Alan Peacock, Ed., (Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1993), p.24.

⁸¹ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.34.

SHANE: ... he took an interest in me. Bought me raincoats and fur-lined boots and leather helmets ... [...] And for these endless and tireless kindnesses I have always been grateful, most grateful, to Peter.

And when a few moments later Sarah asks him what might be keeping him in Dublin, Shane replies:

SHANE: A spook called obligation, sired by the duty out of Liability.⁸²

This moment in which Friel explains Shane's attachment to Peter elucidates the psychological as well as societal complexities surrounding same sex partnerships. There are several ways in which to interpret Shane's account of his relationship with Peter, laden with ambiguous pederasty suggestiveness. His explanation may be a carefully rehearsed script that he is accustomed to use in order to publicly frame his relationship with Peter as that of guardian and ward. In Ireland in 1971 homosexual relations between men were still illegal, so despite their middle-class urban environment Peter and Shane were still at risk of criminalisation. There is also a sense in his words of Shane portraying himself as a victim of circumstances, that it was never his intention to be partnered to Peter and that he played a passive role in the formation of the attachment. The psychotherapist and sex researcher C.A.Tripp describes such a relationship as "the special friendship umbrella", writing

A professor, for instance, may have what is actually a full-fledged homosexual relationship with a colleague or a student; both partners may see it more as a special friendship than as anything sexual, let alone homosexual. Their interpretation may be correct as far as it goes; they may indeed, be placing much more emphasis on their intellectual and social interactions than on sex.⁸³

I believe that Tripp's "special friendship umbrella" is a reliable descriptor for how Friel presents Shane's view of his relationship with Peter. His deliberate evasion of his homosexuality to Sarah would certainly reinforce this, although a little later when Peter returns the couple have words.

PETER: I'm not looking for a commitment. I've never asked you for a commitment, have I? Just a reasonable expectation.

SHANE: The ledgers say we've had ten years. That's quite a stretch. When are obligations fully satisfied?

PETER: Don't make me grovel, Shane.

SHANE: I couldn't stop you.

(...)

⁸² Ibid, pp.36-37.

⁸³ C.A.Tripp, *The Homosexual Matrix*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1987), p.130.

- PETER: All I have invested in you – everything – for the best years of my life. There must be some return. It's not extravagant to expect something.
- SHANE: It is.
- PETER: Not from someone who is as callous as you! But then your affections have always been as uncertain as your origins.⁸⁴

While excavating the buried tensions and resentments within Peter and Shane's partnership Friel exposes the binary power dynamic that holds the couple together. As the much older partner Peter has looked after Shane and now expects Shane's love and companionship in return for his years of devotion. Shane is entrapped through his obligation to Peter. Sarah and Philly's union is also rooted in obligation and duty. In his placing of Peter and Shane in the play Friel has constructed a dysfunctional homosexual relationship based on power and obligation. Once again this may be viewed as a missed opportunity to enlighten a conservative Irish audience and to advance the campaign for decriminalisation of homosexuality on both sides of the border. But the function of queer men in *The Gentle Island* was never intended to be one to advance any liberal crusade. I would argue that Friel's placement of queer characters in his play serves to represent the threat of diversity to a stagnant traditional Irish culture. This is highlighted in the fact that Shane, as the homosexual man, offers sexual opportunities to both Sarah and Philly individually, and with these opportunities comes danger and the risk of death.

- SARAH: When you're not about the house here, when you're down below in the tent, I do watch you all the time through the French binoculars.

Pause.

Peter goes for a walk at ten o'clock every night along the white strand. When he goes out tonight I'll go down to the tent to you.

- SHANE: Sorry. Rotary meeting tonight, luv.⁸⁵

This is an interesting moment in the play as it is the moment when societal taboos and restrictions are willingly rejected in favour of human longing. Whether Sarah's longing for Shane is purely sexual or a means to procreate is never revealed, but what is important is the fact that this woman living in a traditional patriarchal society is not only prepared to abandon her marriage vows, but that she is the initiator of the sexual proposition. Friel is showing us that human nature with its animalistic desires is stronger than the structures a society imposes upon its subjects. When Shane deliberately evades her proposition, she is forced to be direct.

- SARAH: I want to lie with you, engineer.

He stops working.

⁸⁴ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.42.

⁸⁵ *ibid*, p.38.

SHANE: I snore in my sleep and my elbows are like daggers.
 SARAH: Will you lie with me?
 SHANE: Philly?
 SARAH: He's no good to me.

And here lies the nub of Sarah's frustration: Philly does not have sex with her. This is a point that we have suspected since our first meeting of the couple, but now Sarah has confirmed it, and by offering herself to Shane she is not only acknowledging the futility of her marriage but she is also abandoning any hope of change.

SHANE: He's your husband.
 SARAH: Will you lie with me?
 SHANE: No, Sarah.
 SARAH: Why not? Tell me why not.⁸⁶

At this pivotal point Peter enters and Sarah, now doubly rejected first by her husband and now by Shane, is left without a reason for the Dubliner's refusal to have sex with her. This moment is a major turning point in the play. Sarah is a woman scorned, and without an answer to her question, she is left to work it out for herself. The tensions that Friel has unleashed at the start of the play are mounting and brewing close to the surface. Sarah's mood has darkened, and Peter and Shane have had words.

PETER You owe it to me, Shane.
 SHANE Owe it to *you*?
 PETER You do. You know you do
 [...]
 I don't mean money – material things – but in loyalty, devotion,
 dedication, concern, kindness –
 SHANE Love?
 PETER Goddamnit, yes! Love, Shane, love, love – all I have is invested in you –
 Everything – for the best years of my life. There must be some return. It's
 not
 Extravagant to expect something.
 SHANE It is.
 PETER Not from someone who isn't as callous as you. But then your affections
 have always been as uncertain as your origins!

What follows is dramaturgically inventive. Instead of following an anticipated route of emotional outbursts Friel has Shane play a record on the gramophone he has just repaired and perform a song and dance routine as a reaction to his altercation with Peter.

(He dances across to Peter, holds out his hands in invitation.)

SHANE Sir Peter?
 JOE Ya- hoooooooooooo!

⁸⁶ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, pp.38-39.

SHANE - the sun so hot I froze to death, Susanna, don't you cry.

(Hands to Joe)

JOE You're doing great by yourself.

SHANE Oh! Susanna,
Don't you cry for me,
I come from Alabama
With a banjo on my knee.'

(As the band plays a link passage between verses SHANE catches PHILLY'S hand. Philly releases his hand.)

PHILLY Go to hell!

(SARAH enters right as the second verse begins. Shane sings and dances.

[...]

When she enters Shane dances across to her, catches her and swings her round. She slaps his face viciously – howls of laughter from JOE and PHILLY.

[...]

As he pretends to follow her into the kitchen PHILLY trips him at the door. He falls. The laughter rises. He gets up – without breaking his song – and pretends to stagger after her. PHILLY shoves him roughly back. He falls against JOE. JOE pushes him away. He falls against PETER. PETER shies away from him and looks around in rising panic. He lurches towards PHILLY. PHILLY punches him. He falls heavily. He makes no effort to rise. He just lies there, singing. PHILLY punches him again and again.)

PHILLY Dance, you bastard! Dance! Dance!

JOE Yip-eeeeeeeeeee!

(PETER can endure no more. He goes to the gramophone, stops it, takes off the record. Silence.)⁸⁷

In doing this Friel has publicly aired the underlying tensions amongst the group and has also drawn attention to a connection between Philly and Shane. By having Philly punch Shane in such an uncontrolled and animalistic manner Friel is exposing the tension that exists inside Philly towards Shane, a tension that has not been apparent until this moment. I agree with Graham Price's conclusion that the tension is latent homoeroticism.

The playful fight that erupts between Shane and Philly during the dancing scene in Act 2 Scene 2 of *The Gentle Island* is a disturbing representation of a male

⁸⁷ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, pp. 44-45.

homosociality that is predicated on violence and which can barely contain the latent homoeroticism that is waiting to erupt later on in the drama.⁸⁸

I propose that coupled with this latent homoeroticism are Philly's insecurities related to Shane's homosexuality. Dennis Altman's words strengthen this argument:

The argument that men fight each other because they are unable to love each other is a version of Marcuse's formulation that aggression results from a failure to give sexuality free rein. (...) Violence seems on the whole remarkably absent among self-accepting homosexuals, while particularly prevalent among those who have strong homosexual desires that they seek to repress.⁸⁹

Although Friel has evaded labelling Peter and Shane as homosexuals, Philly is fully aware of the Dubliners' sexual pairing.

SARAH: Is that the dog that's yelping?
 PHILLY: Did you think it was the bucks below in the tent? Your friends?
 SARAH: No friends of mine.⁹⁰

In this brief exchange between Sarah and Philly, Friel prises open the latent homophobia that exists amongst the islanders. It seems that Sarah is now fully aware of Peter and Shane's sexual relationship, Shane's rejection has perhaps confirmed what she may have already suspected and her reaction would indicate hostility. Not only is Philly aware of the sexual relationship, but Friel has him go much further and draw attention to homosexual intercourse. This is interesting as Philly up until this point has shown discomfort around any discussions of sex, as shown by his evasion of Sarah's attempts to confront their sexual inadequacies. Shane's song and dance routine and Philly's violent reaction to it is a cathartic ritual in which insecurities and tensions have been ceremoniously unleashed, and by doing so Philly is able to make some sort of connection to his sexuality and his feelings towards Shane. With this in mind Philly's earlier invitation to Shane to go fishing with him later that night is all the more loaded.

PHILLY: What are you doing this evening?
 PETER: We're going –
 PHILLY: Shane.
 SHANE: What?
 PHILLY: I'll be shooting lobster-pots on the east side later on. Come out for the run.
 I'll show you the caves the aul' fella was telling you about.
 PETER: We're going for a swim this afternoon.
 PHILLY: **(To Shane)** About five o'clock. As soon as we finish in the bog.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Graham Price, 'Habit is a Great Deadener: Gender, Sexuality and futurity in Brian Friel's The Gentle Island and Frank McGuinness's Dolly West's Kitchen.' (*Breac, a digital Journal of Irish Studies*, 17/07/2017, last visited 4/12/2018).

⁸⁹ Dennis Altman, p.98.

⁹⁰ Friel, p.49.

⁹¹ *ibid*, p.46.

Buried within Philly's invitation to Shane is a proposition of sex, made all the more obvious by his deliberate exclusion of Peter. In his address to Shane, Philly appears forthright and confident, perhaps fuelled by a new-found sexual prowess, something he lacks when he is alone with Sarah. Sarah's unease is evident when later in the evening she questions the accuracy of Shane's earlier conversation with her.

PETER: I gave up the clean, indoor, pensionable job years ago.
 SARAH: The engineer's a liar then!
 PETER: Shane?
 SARAH: He said you taught in the same school as him.
 PETER: I did. For a while. Then the principal and I had a row –
 SARAH: About the engineer?
 PETER: And I haven't taught in a school since.
 SARAH: Why couldn't you get into another school? Why?⁹²

The humiliation from Shane's rebuff compounds the consistent rejection within her marriage, and by questioning Peter on why he lost his teaching post we see her attempt to make sense of her situation, also confirming Peter and Shane's homosexuality. Having now put the missing pieces of the puzzle together Sarah leaves the cottage; when she returns she is fuelled by rage.

SARAH: Would you like to have a look at your son? Would you like to see the bull that's going to sire your grandchildren and bring back life to this graveyard?⁹³

In Sarah's address to Manus, Friel encapsulates the concerns that are at the heart of this play. Sexuality, in particular sexual desire, is being misdirected, tempted to stray from its natural course into a vacuous place of perversion that is preventing procreation in the legitimate couple's union. Michel Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality: 1* discusses discourses around sexuality; he states:

For was this transformation of sex into discourse not governed by the endeavour to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction.⁹⁴

If we return and look closely at the language Sarah uses when she first returns from the boathouse, by describing Philly as '*the bull*', and using the word '*sire*', she evokes animalistic imagery as well as reducing his sexual drive to that of a savage beast. But what is most revealing is how Friel has implanted very strong ideas within Sarah's words. Not only has she reduced Philly's sexual interaction with Shane down to a shameful, uncivilised act but she opens up into the public domain the future possibilities for them. If Philly were to conform and have normal relations with her, performing his husbandly duties, he could produce '*life*' and '*grandchildren*', instead through his perverse actions he has condemned

⁹² Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.54.

⁹³ Ibid, p.61.

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: 1*. (London, Penguin Books, 1998), p.36.

this island to being that of a *'graveyard'*. In having Sarah declare these things Friel is exposing the homophobic thinking that exists in this environment at this time. It is somewhat complicated and difficult to determine whether Friel himself gets caught up in the very same homophobic thinking that he is exposing, for his central message around non-heteronormative sexualities and lifestyles suggest that he is stating that Inishkeen, as well as Ireland, risk a certain death if its citizens do not conform and contribute to their community's long-term future. Foucault sums up what is at the core of society's categorization of sexualities.

All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?⁹⁵

Through Sarah's allegations of Philly's homosexual intercourse with Shane, Friel is endorsing an argument that homosexuality is not economically or socially 'productive'. It is in some sense him staging this argument as one pole in a debate, but either explicitly or implicitly offering a counter-argument too. It is difficult to separate the homophobia that Friel expresses through his characters from the playwright himself. It is not only what the characters say, but how Friel positions the homosexual characters as outsiders and as a potential threat to the heteronormative futures, where Friel's play can be considered negative or at best critical of a non-heteronormative life style.

If Sarah's accusation about Philly and Shane is to be believed, then Philly has acted upon his sexual desire and disregarded the societal codes of conduct that are in place to contain the family cell and to protect the society's heteronormative future. In his construction of Philly, Friel has created a man who possesses admirable qualities, one who is an upstanding citizen, working hard providing for his family. Tripp's comments on homosexual choice reinforce my point that Philly's actions with Shane are conscious and deliberate.

For most people in our society, the heterosexual / homosexual alternative amounts to a fork in the road where the routes soon diverge too far apart for a person to jump from one to the other – let alone travel them both. (...) It is a choice that stems from what will later be shown to be each individual's elaborately evolved sexual value system.⁹⁶

Despite his homosexuality Philly conforms, on the surface, to societal expectations. His sexual desire for other men does not detract from his contribution and profitability, and without him the Sweeney family could not survive. These attributes are not to be ignored; in creating Philly, Friel is presenting to his audience a man whom society would consider stoic. By doing this Friel is encouraging his audience to separate homosexuality from human identity, in other words people are not their sexualities, sexualities are merely one aspect of the person's being. In Sarah, Friel presents his counter argument.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.36.

⁹⁶ C. A. Tripp, p.19.

SARAH: That he's down in the boat house at the far slip, your Philly, my husband. That he's down there with that Dublin tramp, Shane. That they're stripped naked. That he's doing for the tramp what he couldn't do for me. That's what I'm trying to say. And that if you're the great king of Inishkeen, you'll kill them both – that's what I'm saying.⁹⁷

Perhaps Friel is showing us that in Sarah here lies the real consequence of sexual practices being identified and categorised. Simultaneously there is justification in Sarah's anger at what she has uncovered. As a married woman who has failed to procreate she is viewed as dysfunctional, her body has failed to do its job and she is therefore considered lacking. But now armed with the knowledge of Philly's homosexuality, Sarah's shame is expunged

The higher the taboo on homosexuality, the higher the illusion of heterosexual universality and the more incomprehensible homosexuality becomes as anything other than some sort of impaired masculinity⁹⁸.

The nub of Friel's play is the failure of Sarah and Philly's union to deliver a new generation of Sweeneys to the island and its sexual vacancy. It is the dissatisfaction from this union that fuels both Philly's attraction to Shane and Sarah's drive to expose the truth of her husband's impotency.

I would suggest that by using sexual desire as his main driving force Friel is stripping away the layers of human evolution and exposing his characters' animalistic instincts and need for survival. It is this brutish instinct that Frank McGuinness identifies when he said about the play:

More than any other play of Brian Friel's up to 1971 *The Gentle Island* was the most threatening, the most perplexing, the most far-sighted of all. Its power lies in revelation, relentless, painful. It hears the beating of a savage heart.⁹⁹

In conclusion

As we have seen, then, Friel presents an island where the old traditions are dying out, and where the response to this seems to be a violent or anxious enforcement of stereotypical ideals of masculinity, femininity and heterosexual reproduction. Building on this idea of shedding the old to make way for the new I would like to refer to *The Fear of Freedom*, in which Erich Fromm states:

Men cannot live without some sort of co-operation with others. In any conceivable kind of culture man needs to co-operate with others if he wants to survive, whether

⁹⁷ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.61.

⁹⁸ C. A. Tripp, p.160.

⁹⁹ Frank McGuinness, 'Surviving the 1960s: three plays by Brian Friel 1968-1971, in *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*, by Anthony Roche, Ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.27.

for the purpose of defending himself against enemies or dangers of nature, or in order that he may be able to work and produce.¹⁰⁰

Regardless of what new society emerges, the inhabitants of the island must learn to work together. Fromm also states: ‘Why then is it that freedom is for many a cherished goal and for others a threat?’¹⁰¹ In his writing of *The Gentle Island* Friel has shown us a community that is broken and deeply flawed, a community where societal structures and expectations take precedence over personal fulfilment and happiness. The Sweeney family, just like Ireland, have an opportunity to reinvent their island community, they have a chance to reject the collective structures that have oppressed them into conformity. Although homosexuality during this period is not considered the natural inclination for humans, Friel is acknowledging its existence and presents same sex relationships as equally flawed and as equally dependent as those of heteronormative ones. I would argue that in his construction of this play Friel is suggesting that a fragmented society such as Ireland needs to abandon its entrenched traditions and cultural structures in order to regenerate and bring into being a society in which all its occupations are valued, and where a diverse range of alternative beliefs and lifestyles can be accommodated. But what is depressing is that Friel abandons hope of such a society ever being formed, and as he shows in *The Gentle Island*, fear of the unknown will conquer and force its civilians back into conformity. This echoes the sentiment of Sigmund Freud.

It is almost as though the creation of a great human community would be most successful if there were no need for concern with individual happiness.¹⁰²

Many of these ideas and arguments about how Friel is using queerness, and his queer characters, are crystallised in the end of the play and in his treatment of Peter and Shane there. Shane’s sexuality is used to ignite Sarah’s dormant fury at her sexless marriage and how punishment is administered, in order to avenge what Sarah sees as a wrongdoing inflicted not just on her but upon the family, by Shane and his sexual interaction with Philly in the boathouse. Philly is saved from any blame and is let off the hook. The theologian and cultural theorist Rene Girard’s writings on the scapegoat are particularly useful in understanding what is taking place at this point in the play. According to Girard, a person is singled out as the cause of some problem or trouble that the community is experiencing and is then subsequently killed or expelled by the group¹⁰³. Shane is singled out by Sarah because of his homosexuality and his attachment to Philly. What is interesting about the “scapegoat” hypothesis is that after the scapegoat has been dealt with social order is restored, allowing the community to believe that they have solved the cause of their trouble. This is true in *The Gentle Island*, as in the final moments of the play when Philly returns home, neither Manus nor Sarah mention what took place the night before, and Philly is led to believe that Peter and Shane have left suddenly, catching the boat with Joe to

¹⁰⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, (Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2005), p.16.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.4.

¹⁰² Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p.99.

¹⁰³ Simon J Taylor, *Imitation and Scapegoats: Pastoral Insights from the Work of Rene Girard* (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2016), p.13.

the mainland. Life continues as it did before, as this exchange between Sarah and Philly illustrates.

Sarah comes in with an armful of turf.

PHILLY: He tells me the young brother's away.
 SARAH: So.
 PHILLY: The best I've heard yet. Whoever he works to is getting a real bull. Not that he'll stick it long.
 SARAH: He'll stick it.
 PHILLY: Joe? Three weeks'll do him and he'll come creeping back. Joe couldn't live anywhere else but here. I know Joe. And the strangers are gone, too. A real red out.
 SARAH: Will you eat now or sleep first?
 PHILLY: I'll eat.¹⁰⁴

During this simple exchange, much has been settled and put to rest within the community, which has been reduced to three. The strangers are gone, the culprits and scapegoats are no longer among them. The threat that they represented has been removed and the Sweeneys can continue as before, only this time they face a future lacking in options. Sarah's question to Philly '*Will you eat now?*' is the same question that she asks him when Friel first brings the couple together, therefore signalling to us that order has been restored to the island community and things will continue as before. But what is apparent is that Sarah is prepared to settle for a life without children. In her final line in the play '*We'll get used to it*' Friel tells us that she is prepared to get on with the business of survival and her confrontations with Philly will happen no more, there is an acceptance to co-exist.

Perhaps a resolution of co-existing is what Friel is offering to the complex issues within Irish society at this time. His play may not end well but it ends with the Sweeney family remaining in place, having fought off a queering of heteronormative futures that threatened to eradicate the family cell and the traditional structures. The treatment of queerness, while on Friel's part not wholly hostile, is far from sympathetic. It was the first play written by a Northern Irish playwright to be staged in Northern Ireland, and it would be another fifteen years before this would happen again. The progression of gay rights during this time, together with a thawing of societal attitudes towards the LGBT+ community, may have helped to create a climate in which the queer identity could be given a voice in order to speak to its audience.

Here we have *The Gentle Island*, a forgotten but significant Friel play, and within it is this overlooked dimension, the latent queer agenda. With this queering of the agenda, which places Friel as a prisoner of homophobic discourse, I would argue he is at the same time advancing a really interesting critique of heteronormative discourse through his gay characters. At first glance you may see it as a part of the history of homophobic Irish play writing, however, upon closer inspection, those binaries break down, because the whole play is infused with sexuality in all its complicated and conflicted forms. So, while there are

¹⁰⁴ Friel, *The Gentle Island*, p.76.

tropes in the play that are familiar from other forms of representations of gay characters, on the other hand, Friel has by no means taken heterosexuality for granted or as a norm. In a sense the whole concept of sexuality, as it connects both with individual identities and with society at large, is explored in this play in a way that is like a laboratory.

Chapter 2.

Belfast and the Queer Experience.

If you were going into town to a gay club you weren't going into the nice places. Gay places were very isolated so that felt dangerous as well as exciting. But what was really satisfying about it was going into those places and the sectarianism was gone. (Tony Flynn 2019)¹⁰⁵

1980s Belfast has been described as experiencing the darkest days of the Troubles. The decade began with the IRA hunger strike resulting in the deaths of ten IRA prisoners, which increased tensions in the province and caused an even greater divide between the two fractured communities. It is in this volatile terrain that the heart of my study lies. The two plays that I am looking at in this chapter, *Crack Up* by Martin Lynch (1983) and *Ecce Homo* by Belfast Community Theatre (1988), written more than twelve years after Friel's *The Gentle Island*, are plays that explore gay men's experience of living in Belfast in the 1980s. The plays explore similar territories: both contain clearly defined gay characters, they are set in the same period, both situated in Belfast, both address homophobia in Northern Irish society. Moreover, both are sympathetic and supportive of the gay community's quest for equal rights. These plays have a different agenda from that of *The Gentle Island*. Whereas Friel was using homosexuality in his play to open up discussion around alternative lifestyles, and to speak symbolically about an impasse in Irish society and culture, both *Crack Up* and *Ecce Homo* have a strong desire to present sympathetic queer characters to their audiences and to challenge the bigotry and homophobia that had been so prevalent within Northern Irish society in the build-up to the decriminalization of homosexuality. Both plays attempt to pave a more tolerant path for the LGBT+ community in Northern Ireland.

Therefore, my interrogation of these two plays will not be focused on the playwrights' intention in having gay characters in their plays, but rather on the construction of the gay characters themselves and what they represent during this epoch. Looking back almost forty years, we can learn a lot about public perceptions and attitudes towards the LGBT+ community through the placing of the gay characters in these plays. It must be said that both of these plays are at least semi-failures in the quest to establish queer Northern Irish Theatre. *Crack Up*, although containing a definitive queer character and constructed by the playwright to challenge homophobic perceptions, only ran for one week, and its play script was never published. *Ecce Homo*, created with a strong desire to enlighten its audience about the LGBT+ struggle, is successful in its boldness and its authentic depictions of gay men's experiences, however the play failed to be performed and therefore never reached an audience. But what of the work of the plays themselves?

***Crack Up*. Queer in the Family**

The Belfast-born playwright Martin Lynch began his writing career in 1976. His plays have been performed throughout Ireland and in the UK, Europe and the USA. Lynch has a

¹⁰⁵ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author, 03,04/2019.

reputation for being an outspoken political playwright, being described as one of the most important dramatists to emerge from the political and cultural ferment of the last thirty years in the north of Ireland.¹⁰⁶ His 1981 play *Dockers* was an exploration of the realities facing working-class Belfast in the 1960s. It dealt with sectarianism in the Docks and exposed the injustices of the working-class Dockers. Lynch's play *Crack Up* is set in Patsy and Joe Donaghy's housing executive home somewhere in Belfast. The play centres around the couple hosting a party for Joe's family, the Donaghys. What makes the play so significant for my study is the fact that it was the first play to put on stage an openly gay Ulster character in the form of Joe's younger brother Nipper. In his construction of Nipper, Lynch is also exposing the discrimination and ignorance that the gay community in Northern Ireland were subjected to.

The play was first performed at Belfast's Group Theatre by the Stage 80 theatre company in 1983, in the aftermath of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Northern Ireland and Ian Paisley's 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' campaign. It was a bold attempt by the playwright to address LGBT+ rights and to confront the homophobia that still existed in Northern Irish society, despite decriminalization. *Crack Up*, a domestic realist play performed for a short time at the Group Theatre, a small theatre venue in Belfast, confronts the widespread homophobic attitudes in Northern Ireland. The gay character in *Crack Up* is intentionally placed there as a vehicle for the playwright to address the conservatism around the gay community in Northern Ireland and to educate the audience on the experience of being gay. It has been argued that the Troubles in Northern Ireland created a culture in which the people of the country were more prejudiced against gay men and Lesbians than the rest of the United Kingdom, and that people quickly rejected those who were different to them.¹⁰⁷ Together with *Ecce Homo*, the other play that I will discuss later in the chapter, these two plays are specific examples of attempts to address that situation.

The Group Theatre in Belfast where *Crack Up* was staged had a reputation for smaller, local plays, often used by amateur theatre companies. But most significantly the Group Theatre is where the Belfast actor and comedian James Young performed his *Saturday Night* show, which was televised on UTV throughout the whole of Northern Ireland. Young was a household name in Northern Ireland and was referred to as 'Our Jimmy'.¹⁰⁸ It is suggested that Young singlehandedly kept the Group Theatre going through the dark days of the 1970s. James Young also performed in many of Sam Cree's plays. Cree is thought of by many as the typical Northern Irish dramatist, and specifically as a dramatist devoted to portraying the everyday life of the region: his plays were a prominent feature of life in the Belfast theatre of the 1960s.¹⁰⁹ Although Lynch's play is not a comedy—he is aiming for a more

¹⁰⁶ Martin Lynch, *Dockers*, (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1981) blurb, back cover.

¹⁰⁷ Jessica Toops, p.58.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/film/james-young>, last visited 18/03/2019

¹⁰⁹ Richard York, 'Sam Cree: Sex, Sects, and Comedy.' *Irish University Review*, Vol. 37, no. 2, 2007, pp. 352–365.

earnest tone in his drama—it does rely on some familiar stereotypical gender representations in the same way that Cree’s do. In Cree’s plays men, in short, are hen-pecked and women neglected. The reason I am referring to Sam Cree is simply to draw attention to the fact that the audience watching *Crack Up* in 1983 would be familiar with the domestic structure of Sam Cree’s plays, and to an extent Lynch is using this familiar territory to bring the audience on his side.

Crack Up follows a traditional five-point structure, devised by German playwright Gustav Freytag.¹¹⁰ Point one is the exposition or set up, where Patsy is alone on stage preparing for the party. In this scene the playwright establishes the setting of the play, the characters’ socioeconomic situation, and the main source of conflict is introduced with Patsy’s frustration towards her husband. Point two, referred to as the rising action, begins with Joe arriving home late, having left all the preparation for the party up to Patsy; an argument between the couple ensues. Point three is the climax, when Nipper comes out as gay to his brother Des and sister-in-law Marilyn; this lies at the heart of the play. Point four is the falling action, when the family discuss Nipper’s situation and their varying attitudes and views on his sexuality. Point Five is the denouement or resolution: in this we see Joe lose control and attack Marilyn. The ending of the play does not offer a resolution as such; it is more of a final statement or sentiment of the playwright’s frustrations with Northern Irish society. Lynch is using his play as a multi-layered platform to represent these frustrations. A recurring frustration in the play relates to toxic masculinity and the gender inequalities. As we will see later, Lynch’s thinking of identity is intersectional. For that reason, I am going to begin by exploring the main determinants of identity in Lynch’s play, masculinity and class, before then homing in on his treatment of queerness.

Masculinity and the Family

A very strong theme throughout the piece is the relationship between the three brothers, Joe, Desmond and Nipper. Joe as the eldest son accepts Nipper’s homosexuality and has been a consistent support to him throughout his life. Desmond’s initial reaction to Nipper’s “coming out” is one of rejection, then questioning, but by the end, he accepts his brother’s homosexuality. By having the brothers come to terms with Nipper’s homosexuality Lynch again subverts the audience’s expectations, showing that heterosexual men are not necessarily the ones most opposed to homosexuality, whereas Marilyn maintains her homophobic tenacity towards Nipper; her final words are ‘*You won’t make me dance with a ... with a bloody queer*’¹¹¹. Marilyn’s pernicious rejection of Nipper can be explained first of all by Lynch’s desire to construct Marilyn as a social anathema which lasts throughout the play and beyond. Lynch describes Marilyn as the ‘villain of the piece’¹¹². Lynch makes Marilyn overtly homophobic in order to make the deliberate statement that those citizens

¹¹⁰ In 1863 Gustav Freytag set out what was to become known as the ‘dramatic arc’ – exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement. He created a pyramid to illustrate this now referred to as the Freytag Pyramid.

¹¹¹ Lynch *Crack Up*, p.89a.

¹¹² Martin Lynch in an interview with the author 01/04/2019.

within society who seek fairness and equality for all citizens do not discriminate against minority groups, in this case the gay and lesbian community. By Lynch's positioning of Marilyn's rejection at the end of the play he is telling his audience that these strong homophobic attitudes are very much alive within the society of the day.

Models of masculinity are of course often paternal and Nipper refers to his father several times throughout the play. Although the father does not appear on stage, his presence provides an undercurrent of patriarchal disapproval which prevents Nipper coming out sooner. An example of Nipper's relationship with his father is when he says to Patsy:

Nipper remember I was tellin ye about the row with m'daddy last week. Well – told me not to come back. Honest to God Patsy. He hates me, hates m'guts [...] from I was a wee kid, he's never give me five minutes of his time. [...] Even as a nipper, he still hated me.¹¹³

Lynch resists elaborating on what exactly is at the root of the father's dislike of Nipper, but the negativity that Nipper feels from his father is something he has been aware of most of his life. Lynch's inclusion of the father's hostility does not directly contribute to the play's dramatic arc, but it is an aspect that reveals astute observation on the part of the playwright, as a large percentage of gay men witness to experiencing detachment or indeed hostility from their fathers while growing up. The psychotherapist Richard A Isay has written extensively on this matter, and based on his work with gay men he states that 'The majority of gay men, unlike heterosexual men who come for treatment, report their fathers were distant during their childhood and they lacked any attachment to them'¹¹⁴. Isay goes on to explain why this detachment may occur:

Fathers usually perceive such a child as being "different" from other boys in the family, from themselves, or from their son's peers. [...] This may lead both to the father's withdrawal and to his favoring older or younger male siblings who appear more sociable, more conventional, more masculine.¹¹⁵

When Lynch flashes back to Patsy and Joe's wedding day he includes a moment in which Nipper is drunk and the tensions with his father are again revealed.

NIPPER I wanna dance, I wanna dance.
 (Marilyn takes hold of him.)
 MARILYN Alright c'mon, I'll dance with ye, okay? I'll dance with ye.
 NIPPER I just wanna dance.
 As long as I don't have to be near m'Da I'm alright.
 JOE What's wrong
 PATSY Whataya think, he's drunk.
 (Marilyn, Desmond and Nipper exit at the other side)
 JOE He's drunk? I didn't even know he drank.

¹¹³ Lynch *Crack Up*, pp.22-23.

¹¹⁴ Richard A Isay M.D, *Being Homosexual*, (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1989), p.32.

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, p.34.

[...]

JOE

What happened to Nipper, Patsy, how did he get into that state?

PATSY

He was like that when we found him on the stairs.

He was complainin about your father. Said he was never off his back. Anyway, he's alright nigh.¹¹⁶

Although he does not develop this strand any further, Lynch identifies this father and gay son trope, and is tapping into this aspect of the gay experience in order to bring not only authenticity to Nipper's family experience, but also to represent the ubiquitous rejection that is part of the gay experience.

Lynch comments about *Crack Up*, 'I wanted to write a play about relationships in families'.¹¹⁷ In all the plays that I have included in my study, except *Carthaginians*, the family unit is used by the playwrights as the emotional landscape for the gay character's closeting. In these plays the structure of the family cell is severely threatened or readjusted as a consequence of the queer emergence, as is masculinity. For example, in *Crack Up* the issues around the gay character's coming out are aired in public and discussed openly amongst the family members, allowing the gay character to respond to negative homophobic comments, thereby making it a more balanced discussion which results in differing opinions being expressed. At the same time, this openness creates a rift that may well split the family up.

In *Ecce Homo*, the main gay character's coming out happens in stages: first he opens up to his mother, who spends most of the play deliberating on her son's sexuality and its inevitable impact on all their lives, but ultimately she decides that her love for her son is stronger than her religious faith, thus keeping the family bonds intact. However, when the son comes out to his father, the patriarch, he is met with rejection: there is no wavering on the father's part, his son's homosexuality represents the decimation of the family. The characters' non-heterosexuality in Friel's *The Gentle Island* is handled in a very different manner. The naming of the characters' homosexuality is avoided throughout the play; it is only when Sarah, Philly's wife, returns to the family cottage with allegations of sexual goings-on in the boathouse between her husband and the Dublin visitor Shane, that homosexuality, although never named as such, is openly talked about. The threat to the marriage and therefore the family cell is of such great magnitude that it is no sooner mentioned that it is quickly buried and never talked of again. *The Gentle Island* ends with the marriage and the traditional family cell, although bruised and shaken, remaining intact; whereas in *Crack Up* and *Ecce Homo* the family cell has been altered and perhaps destroyed as a direct consequence of the gay character coming out.

Social Class Through a Queer Lens

Lynch is scathing about the motives and the attitudes of the aspiring middle class. His construction of Desmond and Marilyn, Joe's nouveau riche brother and his wife, exposes their fragile respectability and conservatism and shows them to be motivated by blatant

¹¹⁶ Lynch *Crack Up*, p.40.

¹¹⁷ Martin Lynch, in an interview with the author, 01/04/2019.

self-advancement and with little regard or concern for societal inequalities. Lynch comments on the character of Marilyn, 'The villain in the piece is the sister-in-law Marilyn, she was a social climber'¹¹⁸. Once embarking on the quest to address the gross gender imbalances and prejudice that lie at the core of mainstream society, Lynch unearths a plethora of wrongs.

Unlike Marilyn, Patsy is frank and plain speaking. She loathes pretentiousness, but at the same time is smart and seeks self-fulfilment through her work. According to Joe, Patsy is brighter than him and her life has been wasted because she is married to him¹¹⁹.

JOE What am I going to do for a clean shirt Patsy?

PATSY There's clean shirts in the hot press, they only need ironed.

JOE Iron us one, will ye?

PATSY Where do you think this is? The Europa Hotel. Iron one yourself.

(He exits. Patsy shouts after him.)

PASTY An iron's the thing you plug into the wall!¹²⁰

Patsy is a woman who sticks by her family despite the frustrations and limitations imposed upon her. These are qualities that the majority of Lynch's Belfast audience would recognise and support, because Patsy and Joe are identifiable to this audience and their moral compass is one the audience have learnt to trust. Lynch here uses his craftsmanship to manipulate his audience. Patsy and Joe are supportive of Nipper, which immediately makes the audience more likely to be accepting of him and his homosexuality.

Meanwhile, Desmond and Marilyn, representing the conservative side of Northern Ireland, are an upwardly mobile couple. Both grew up in the working-class area where Patsy and Joe still live, but moved out in order to "better themselves". Desmond has his own business, they can afford for Marilyn to stay at home and look after their children. They live in a middle-class area, drive a nice car, take holidays abroad several times a year. Marilyn is consistently condescending, drinks Southern Comfort as opposed to Patsy's homebrew, and has aspirational ideas. These qualities that Lynch has given to the character of Marilyn distance her from a Belfast audience. Lynch commented 'My anger at the time was around class. At that time I was very much driven by socialism. I was annoyed at people who denied their roots and where they come from'.¹²¹ He has constructed the characters of Marilyn and Desmond as vehicles to express this anger.

Social class is a predominant source of tension within the play. Patsy and Joe have stayed in the working-class community where they both grew up, whereas Joe's siblings have all moved out to what are considered nicer, more affluent areas of the city. Patsy says to Nipper:

PATSY: Do you think that's really why they aren't comin'? Because of where we live?

¹¹⁸ Martin Lynch in an interview with the author 01/04/2019.

¹¹⁹ Lynch, *Crack Up*, p.62.

¹²⁰ *ibid*, p.18.

¹²¹ Martin Lynch in an interview with the author, 01/04/2019.

NIPPER: Of course it is.

PATSY: But the Donaghys were reared round here.¹²²

Having established this potentially volatile dynamic Lynch pushes his characters further by using Nipper's "coming out" as another distancing device against Marilyn and Desmond. Interestingly when Marilyn does voice her objections to Nipper's homosexuality they are not the views that have been frequently voiced by the religiously motivated DUP, views the Northern Irish audience would have repeatedly heard in the media. Lynch is using the characters of Marilyn and Patsy to voice a polemic against social class and homosexuality.

By using this working-class domestic setting, Lynch is able to explore a multitude of social issues. He has endeavoured to unpack and challenge the various degrees of privilege that exist in society. Lynch fails to categorise Nipper as belonging to any social class. Unlike the other characters, his occupation is never stated and the area in which he now lives is never mentioned. It would therefore appear that he views Nipper's homosexuality as a quality that excludes him from the constraints of social class. Or perhaps it is rather that, as a single gay man, Nipper's social class is never considered since he has removed himself from the heteronormative social paradigm.

Queerness within.

Let us return now to the dramatic set-up in the play in order to see how queerness features inside it. Joe and Patsy have just discussed the guests whom they have invited to the party, all of whom are Joe's siblings and their partners: Roisin and Gerry, Jimmy and Norma, Liam and Geraldine, Desmond and Marilyn and Nipper. What is interesting is how the heterosexuals are paired off, with Nipper unattached and straggling as the odd one out. This instantly creates separation and draws attention to Nipper's single status. At this point in the play Nipper's sexuality has not been discussed. The audience are unaware that he is gay, but by isolating him from the heteronormative pairings Lynch is already employing signifiers of Nipper's queerness. Lynch, like Friel in *The Gentle Island*, gives his character a name that creates further separation from the other characters in the play, who are all called by their first names. This tactic once again signifies difference to the audience, creating a focus that marks the character to be unlike the others in the group (family). They are viewed as 'Other'. Before Lynch brings Nipper on stage he has Patsy comment to her husband, 'you can't depend on Nipper'¹²³; this along with the other signifiers indicates a lack of reliability, a difference and an unstableness which once again removes the character from the regimented patriarchal structure that we know to be in place. However, in a move to heighten Nipper's unpredictability Lynch has him arrive before the other guests. He arrives bursting, drunkenly, into song, singing the theme song to Perry Como's television show *Catch a Falling Star*.¹²⁴ This moment is Lynch's construction of Nipper's campiness, queerness. As a consequence, Nipper's entry into the play is heavy-handed and clunky. It feels on a first reading of the script that the playwright's use of queer signifiers is at points overstated and clichéd. This may be considered clumsy craftsmanship on Lynch's part: there

¹²² Lynch, *Crack Up*, p.16.

¹²³ *ibid*, p.9.

¹²⁴ *ibid*, p.14.

are multiple ways in which he could have first presented this character. Lynch has resorted to employing stereotypical tropes to signify Nipper's otherness and ultimately his homosexuality. His inclusion of Nipper as a gay man is in itself admirable, especially at a time when there was a lot of ignorance around homosexuality causing it to be viewed with great negativity, but one might argue that by introducing Nipper in this manner, Lynch reinforces the audience's pejorative perception of gay men. Lynch is employing similar descriptive devices as Friel in *The Gentle Island*. Friel described Philly as lightly built and softly spoken, which separated him from the other masculine males on the Island, and also effeminised him and signified his status as 'other'. Lynch in his construction of Nipper as a gay character is also using signifiers to effeminise and separate him from the other males. The constant presence of an acceptable masculinity that I referred to earlier in this chapter is used by Lynch to heighten the sense of Nipper's otherness, and by doing so reaffirms the negative rhetoric around the gay men being lesser than their heterosexual masculine counterparts.

So, one could accuse the playwright of inadvertently perpetuating homophobic attitudes. The counter argument to this is that Lynch, aware of the negative stereotyping, is using it to take his audience one step at a time, starting with the familiar, to a place where the gay character can win them over and earn a sympathetic ear, breaking down the wall of prejudice that existed in Northern Ireland at this time. When reflecting on his creation of Nipper, Lynch says:

I wanted to show a gay character as a human being, as somebody who had to get by in life like everyone else. And I wanted to make him a good singer. I believe that in doing that you get the audience behind him. I have a load of philosophical notions of music and songs in plays. So I was using this in a positive way.¹²⁵

It is clear that Lynch's intention from the outset of the play is to move the audience in a supportive direction, empathizing with the gay character's quest to be accepted as an equal by society and to live a normal life. Although aware of the decriminalisation of homosexuality a year earlier and the latent homophobia that still existed in Northern Irish society, these were not Lynch's main motives for his inclusion of a queer character in his play. The impetus to include a gay character at this particular period of time was based on Lynch's own personal experience.

My motivation would have been that my sister, Sinead, announced to the family that she was gay. Later on another sister came out as gay. So that was my motivation. My sister in 1982/3 told us at a wedding that she was bisexual and I remember crying.¹²⁶

It was his concern for his sister's future welfare that prompted a desire to challenge the mainstream negativity around gay representations at that time, by creating a gay character

¹²⁵ Martin Lynch in an interview with the author 01/04/2019.

¹²⁶ Martin Lynch in an interview with the author 01/04/2019

who was perceived as normal, down to earth and was constructed to be sympathetic to the mainstream audience.¹²⁷

Lynch is tackling what he views as societal inequalities, and in order for him to deliver his message he has employed five main characters to draw out and deliver his argument to the audience. He has set up two conflicting sides to the argument, with Nipper placed in the middle. By setting up this dramatic paradigm Lynch has generated a polemic around societal attitudes and acceptance of non-conventional sexualities. Director Peter Hall reaffirms that 'Theatre remains any society's sharpest way to hold a live debate with itself'.¹²⁸

By introducing Nipper into the play and signifying his 'otherness' Lynch is providing a dramatic platform for the visibility of queer identity. In the first half of the play he establishes the family dynamics, placing Nipper in a positionality of 'other' within the heteronormative environment. After a series of flashback scenes which build the family tensions the play moves into Act Two and it is here where Lynch goes to the heart of the play, giving voice to the gay experience. Nipper, who has not come out to his middle brother Desmond and his wife Marilyn, chooses to tell them that he is gay.

DESMOND Found a woman at last, have ye?

NIPPER: He's called Paul.

DESMOND: **(Laughing)** Kinky enough.

NIPPER: The song reminds me of my ex-boyfriend Paul. We split up recently.

(There is an embarrassed silence.)

DESMOND: **(Quietly)** What are you talking about?

NIPPER: Whadaya think?

DESMOND: I don't know ... you're a queer.

NIPPER: Gay.

MARILYN: Tony Donaghy.

NIPPER: What's wrong is there something wrong? Has horns just popped up outta my head?¹²⁹

In the first part of the play Lynch sets up two distinct polarities that reflect attitudes towards homosexuality in Northern Ireland. The views expressed by the character Marilyn represent those held by Ian Paisley and his DUP party, whereas Patsy voices the views of the more liberal side of Northern Irish society. It is at quite a late stage in the play, just past the mid-point, that Lynch brings in the "coming out" moment, and as a consequence of Nipper's revelation a stream of dramatic effects ensue, causing conflict among the characters. Lynch has taken his time to build up to this moment in the play, he has established the characters surely and built on the already existing family tensions.

¹²⁷ Martin Lynch in an interview with the author 01/04/2019.

¹²⁸ Peter Hall, *The Necessary Theatre*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 1999), p.5.

¹²⁹ Lynch, *Crack Up*, p.53.

MARILYN: It's alright for you Patsy, but what's Desmond's business friends going to say when they hear he has a brother who's queer?¹³⁰

Lynch is linking the homophobia to peer pressure and middle-class aspirations. Judith Butler's thoughts on the event of "coming out" are helpful here:

The discourse of "coming out" has clearly served its purposes, but what are its risks? [...] Is the "subject" who is "out" free of its subjection and finally in the clear? Or could it be that the subjection that subjectivates the gay or lesbian subject in some ways oppresses most insidiously, once "outness" is claimed?¹³¹

This is true in Nipper's case, his "coming out" moment has been met with hostility not only from Desmond and Marilyn, with Desmond leaving the room, but also from Joe and Patsy. Joe tells Nipper that he should not have done that, he did not have to do it that way, and Patsy joins her husband by saying '*You said you didn't want Desmond to know*'.¹³² Instead of Nipper being supported by the others he is accused of being insensitive and unnecessarily upsetting Desmond. Nipper's feelings are negated in this moment, with the focus of concern being placed on the recipients of the news. Nipper follows Desmond into the kitchen, where once again the responsibility to make amends is placed on him. Lynch intensifies the moment when he has Desmond say to Nipper '*Why the hell didn't you tell me before this?*'. This moment is significant as it shows from Lynch's point of view how the person "coming out" is often put in a position of interrogation and accusations. It is also the point at which he begins to unpack what it means to be a gay man in Northern Ireland during this period, articulating the stereotypical reactions to a person's "coming out". For example, Desmond's main concern is around who else knows about Nipper being gay. He also comments on the fact that Nipper does not appear to be any '*different*', different meaning queer. Desmond goes on to remind Nipper that '*I remember you runnin' about with wee girls*'.¹³³ The gay person is immediately placed in a position of doubt, questioned in their authenticity, and very often it is the person receiving the news who places themselves as the injured party.

I would like to expand on this point by looking at the Gay Liberation Front, which came into being in the autumn of 1971. It was on the side of all oppressed people and its manifesto included the following:

The oppression of gay people starts in the most basic unit of society, the family, consisting of the man in charge, a slave as his wife, and their children on whom they force themselves as the ideal models. The very form of the family works against homosexuality. [...] The fact that gay people notice they are different from other men and women in the family situation, causes them to feel ashamed, guilty and failures. How many of us have really dared be honest with our parents? How many of us have been thrown out of home? How many of us have been pressured into

¹³⁰ *ibid*, p.57.

¹³¹ Judith Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination, inside/out* edited by Diana Fuss, (New York: Routledge, 1991), p.15.

¹³² Lynch, *Crack Up*, p.54.

¹³³ *ibid*, p.55.

marriage, sent to psychiatrists, frightened into sexual inertia, ostracized, banned, emotionally destroyed—all by our parents?¹³⁴

Much of what Lynch is unearthing in *Crack Up* is at the heart of the GLF's ethos. Alongside tackling homophobic attitudes, he strongly challenges the institutionalized oppression of women within the family. Jonathan Dollimore reaffirms this point when he writes,

It is often observed that misogyny and homophobia go together. One reason is that this conflation of binaries enables a merging of misogyny and homophobia, each of which then potentially expresses the violence of the other.¹³⁵

Desmond and his wife Marilyn are constructed as anti-gay and are used to express the homophobic views of the conservative Northern Irish residents. As I have illustrated throughout this chapter, Lynch, like Friel, is putting the most predominant areas of society – class and masculinity—under the microscope, and is examining the elements of the patriarchal society that creates opposition and hostility towards non-conforming lifestyles. By doing this both playwrights embrace intersectionality and explore the idea that oppressions and discriminations work through a nexus of different power positions such as class, ethnicity, gender and orientation. I would argue that Marilyn's objection to Nipper's homosexuality would be substantially lessened if Nipper were to belong to a higher social class.

So, what is it about the family that Lynch is using to draw out his message? Nicola Field notes 'that for the individual, there is really no escape from the family. [...] Even those of us who have grown up outside families, in institutions and 'alternative' lifestyles, cannot fail to be affected by the overwhelming social message that families are 'good' and 'normal'.¹³⁶

Desmond, after having the talk with Nipper, softens his initial homophobic stance and becomes significantly more accepting of his brother's homosexuality. The brothers have their talk in the kitchen, away from the others. Lynch uses this moment in the play to give Nipper a voice in which to speak clearly and concisely about his sexuality and the fact that it is natural for him, something that he has not chosen for himself.

NIPPER: That's what I'm trying to tell ye. Nobody made me the way I am. I've really always felt this way. Deso, I didn't get my feelings, nobody handed them to me, I didn't buy them in a shop or read about them in a book, they were inside me, they were always there.

That's all I want you to understand.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Gay Liberation Front: *Manifesto* London, 1971, revised 1978, (<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/pwh/glf-london.asp>), Last visited 14/02/2019).

¹³⁵ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.236.

¹³⁶ Nicola Field, *Over the Rainbow: Money, Class and Homophobia*, (Connecticut: Pluto Press, 1995), p.9.

¹³⁷ Lynch *Crack Up*, p.56

This moment in the play when Nipper articulates the queer, non-conformist stance is at the core of what Lynch is trying to unearth and to elucidate. Lynch uses the theatrical form to break down homophobic assumptions. Nipper's words regarding his feelings of being "they were inside me, they were always there", expose a vulnerability of character that Lynch has until this moment withheld. Nipper is arguing that his sexuality is inner, natural and not cultural. The simplicity of his words elucidate the naturalness of Nipper's feelings and subsequently create an analogous conjunction with the considered norm of heterosexuality.

In constructing the character of Marilyn, Lynch introduces his counter argument to the naturalness of homosexuality. A short time after Nipper talks to Desmond about his innate homosexuality, Lynch jumps to a scene in the next room in which Marilyn is also discussing Nipper's "coming out" with Patsy and Joe.

MARILYN: That's what he chose to do. Why couldn't he have contented himself with a nice girlfriend like anybody else?

PATSY: He can't

MARILYN: Now that's nonsense Patsy, you know as well as I do that half of them people made themselves the way they are.¹³⁸

Marilyn's comment that '*half of them people made themselves the way they are*' positions her as a behaviourist, one who believes that all behaviours are acquired through conditioning. She thinks that Nipper's homosexuality is something that did not emerge instinctively, but has been shaped by his own life experiences, something he has control over. This view also merges with the ecclesiastical standpoint, which was a huge component of the 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' campaign, and the major argument against the decriminalization of homosexuality in Northern Ireland. Lynch lays the arguments out and has his characters battle it out amongst themselves, making a theoretical debate about nature vs behaviourism into a properly dramatic scenario. Patsy takes Nipper's side and says to Marilyn, '*How many do you know?*', to which Marilyn replies '*None, thank God*', which bolsters Patsy's position, allowing her to gain the higher ground when she comes back to Marilyn with, '*Then how can you know anything about any of them if you've never even talked to one about it?*'. Lynch not only gives Patsy the stronger argument, he also articulates on stage homophobic opinions that lack reason and any intellectual substance.

Perhaps if Lynch had not experienced his sister identifying as a lesbian his inclination to construct and dramatize a queer man would not have been so strong. His intention was to address the hegemonic structures in society and to contribute to the understanding of alternative sexualities. By constructing Nipper as an ordinary man and a key member of a traditional Northern Irish family, Lynch is attempting to normalise the outcast and to break down dominant assumptions. He uses his position as an established playwright living in Northern Ireland to eradicate ignorance and misconceived perceptions around LGBT people. Lynch is using the theatrical space to enlighten and inform. He took his audience to an unfamiliar place, and by humanising the queer experience, attempted to initiate change in

¹³⁸ Lynch, *Crack Up*, p.58.

societal attitudes. He has used his skills as a playwright at earlier points in his career to stimulate public debate and arouse social awareness.

Unlike Philly in *The Gentle Island* Nipper knows who he is sexually, and the play is not focussed on his struggle, but rather on the prejudice and lack of understanding that surrounds him. Lynch, unlike Friel, is using his queer character as a tool to highlight homophobia. Where Desmond is prepared to talk to his brother and to set his homosexuality aside his wife Marilyn is not. When Nipper asks her to dance she refuses,

NIPPER May I have this dance madam?

(Marilyn pulls away)

MARILYN No Nipper, no, I don't wanna dance.

[...]

NIPPER Why bloody not? Is there something wrong with me?

MARILYN Since you've asked, yes there is. You're a homosexual and I'm not letting a ... queer put his arms round me.

(The music stops. There is a profound silence.)¹³⁹

Although it is not discussed openly, in this scene there is a sense that Marilyn's rejection of Nipper and her unwillingness to have him touch her has as much to do with the alarmist reactions to AIDS that were rife in the early 1980s when this play was first performed. The common belief at the time was that all gay men were or were going to be HIV positive, and that HIV was a 'gay plague'. The writer Simon Watney provides a useful insight when he writes in 1987. 'There is thus no possibility in Britain for the framing of AIDS as anything other than a "gay plague"'.¹⁴⁰ And Jonathan Dollimore writes,

Homophobia enforces the heterosexual norm by policing its boundaries:

'Homophobia is only incidentally directed against homosexuals – its more common use is against 49% of the population which is male ... The taunt "What are you, a fag?" is used in many ways to encourage certain types of male behavior and to define the limits of "acceptable" masculinity.'¹⁴¹

Dollimore encapsulates the complexities surrounding the acceptance and assimilation of queer identities into the mainstream. He opens up a discussion around homosexuality and its positionality with heterosexuality, and how the two assist in the definition of the other. In *Crack Up*, Lynch embraced these complexities and used the resistance and prejudice in them to create his family drama. At this point what Peter Hall says about theatre comes to mind:

¹³⁹ Lynch, *Crack Up*, p.89.

¹⁴⁰ Simon Watney, *Policing Desire*, (London: Methuen, 1987) p.12.

¹⁴¹ G.K. Lehne, cited in John Marshall, 'Pansies, Perverts and Macho Men', in Plummer (ed.), *The making of the modern Homosexual*, (London: Hutchinson Publishing, 1981), pp.153-4.

Theatre [...] asks too many awkward question. It is an instrument of change; it does not normally preserve the status quo. It frequently produces live debate that frees the imagination and provokes the public to ask questions.¹⁴²

In *Crack Up* Lynch is stimulating social awareness, and certainly represents an advance on the representations of queerness we saw in *Gentle Island*. But if viewed alongside more recent queer dramas Lynch's delivery of the gay argument in *Crack Up* feels crude and overstated. However, at the time in Northern Irish theatre no other playwright had attempted to give a voice to queer narrative within the Northern Irish Troubles experience, so for a largely conservative Belfast audience to hear Nipper, an openly gay Belfast man, explain the naturalness of sexuality would have been a highly dramatic event, and for many it would have been the first time they would have experienced hearing these views articulated with such clarity and authenticity. The form in which Lynch chooses to express these views is through debate and confrontation, rather than dramatically embodying and enacting them in the script. Lynch's construction of Nipper in *Crack Up* was his attempt to produce alternative narratives about reality. The theatre critic Lynda Henderson, when reviewing the play, wrote the following about Nipper's coming out:

It is clear from the didacticism of the writing that the character's inclusion is intended to challenge the audience to greater tolerance. But the fact is that the declaration of homosexuality is written as a music hall joke and the audience receive it with howls of laughter. Sadly the play largely confirms rather than erodes that prejudice.¹⁴³

The howls of laughter from the audience that Henderson refers to may not have been induced by perceived comedy, in fact, laughter can indicate a moment of great discomfort or a moment of surprise. Although it is not possible to determine the exact reason behind their laughter, I feel safe in saying that for the audience of that time seeing a gay man dramatized in this naturalistic, non-comedic role would have assisted in the normalisation of non-heterosexual identities.

Ecce Homo: The Emergence of Gay Sexuality in 1980s Belfast

*This text should be seen and performed for what it is: a learning play based on the experience of working- class people in Belfast, Ireland. Wherever possible no opportunity to involve the audience should be missed, and at all times no illusion allowed to create.*¹⁴⁴

In 1988 Belfast Community Theatre (BCT), a Nationalist theatre company based in Conway Mill in West Belfast, began to work on a production of a play called *Ecce Homo*. The company's focus in creating the play was to draw attention to the marginalization and

¹⁴² Peter Hall, p.11.

¹⁴³ Lynda Henderson, 'Crack-Up': *Theatre Ireland*, Dec/Mar 1984, p.99.

¹⁴⁴ BCT, *Ecce Homo*, 1988.

discrimination of the LGBT community and to campaign for their civil rights. Issues around gay rights were alien to the company and not something they would normally have addressed. The company's rhetoric had been focussed on the Nationalist struggle against British occupancy of the six counties of Northern Ireland. The shift in exploring LGBT issues evolved from several members of the company coming out as gay and feeling a need to have their stories told. Their personal coming out experiences fed directly into the company's political core, which was to raise awareness of abuse and discrimination within their community, and to challenge any form of oppression through theatre. As Jessica Toops quite rightly points out, the Troubles distracted the government and people of Northern Ireland, so issues of gay and lesbian equality were pushed to the social and political periphery.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, BCT felt it was their responsibility to confront the issue of gay equality and to raise awareness of prejudice, abuse and discrimination and to campaign for change. In an interview with Tony Flynn, one of the members of BCT said,

Previous to *Ecce Homo* we did a play called *Sign on The Dotted Line*. It was a seminal work for Belfast Community Theatre and through this play we met with John Goodchild and Bill McDonnell of Theatre Works in Sheffield. John was a tireless gay activist and if it wasn't for John Goodchild *Ecce Homo* wouldn't have happened. It was because when *SOTDL* happened there was me, Gerard and a couple of others who were directly involved in the theatre company BCT or with Spring Hill community centre (four of us in total), we were all on the verge of coming out. That was in 1987. [...] John was so gently encouraging to us all, he didn't force anything, he became a mentor for me. So, he helped us on our way in coming out.¹⁴⁶

Ecce Homo began life as a series of improvisations around members' experiences which they talked about to the rest of the company; stories and experiences that they felt needed to be told, which were then taken by Joe Reid, one of the founder members of BCT, and written up. The company would then read the scripts. Tony and Gerard, the actors who played Simon and Emmanuel, wrote their own scenes, which were mainly the domestic scenes, Joe Reid then reworked the scenes ready for performance.¹⁴⁷ The theatre company drew on the European tradition of socialist theatre exemplified by the Workers' Theatre Movement, Piscator, Brecht and Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. Their theatre was about radical educational practice and cultural activism.¹⁴⁸ The resulting play tells the story of Emmanuel, a young gay man, living in a Nationalist area of Belfast. He wants to move out of his parents' home to live with his lover Simon. The action begins with Emmanuel telling his mother that he is planning to move into a flat with his friend Veronica. For reasons never fully explained in the play the mother immediately assumes that Veronica is his girlfriend and that the reason they want to live together is because she is pregnant. Similarly to *Crack Up*, theatrical form is used to extract the inner thoughts and feelings of the central gay characters and to give them a platform to articulate their feelings about being gay. Similar

¹⁴⁵ Jessica Toops, 'Living Lives of Quiet Desperation: Accounts of Gay Men and Lesbians During the Troubles', *Western Illinois Historical Review*, Vol: VI, (2014), p.38, last visited 1/02/2019.

¹⁴⁶ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author 03/04/2019.

¹⁴⁷ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author 03/04/2019.

¹⁴⁸ Bill McDonnell, p.5.

to Lynch when he has Nipper talk to his brother Des about the naturalness of his homosexuality, Joe Reid has Emmanuel speak directly to the audience and describes to them his experience living as a gay man.

From ever I can remember I've had these feelings ... feelings I was told that I wasn't supposed to have. I felt ab ... abnormal, a freak, as if I had some sort of defect ... everything from school to religion from advertising to ... to fucking John Wayne movies conspired to make me feel like some sort of horrible side show.¹⁴⁹

Addressing the homophobic prejudices that a lot of the conservative audience would hold, BCT are having the character of Emmanuel speak to them directly, using the Brechtian device of direct address. This is a powerful theatrical technique to employ and is used sporadically throughout the play. Emmanuel ends his address to the audience with the words '*But if you can't cope, that's your problem*'¹⁵⁰. This is particularly powerful with the character shifting the responsibility of negative feelings around his sexuality onto the audience. In this *Ecce Homo* has gone further than Lynch's *Crack Up*: it is intentionally confrontational, placing the audience in a position of responsibility and forcing it to recognise its complicity, either active or in acquiescence, that is perpetuating the homophobic prejudice and discrimination against LGBT+ people. This gesture empowers the gay voice.

Ecce Homo, as with *Crack Up*, looks beyond the individual and extends to the gay character's family members, and in particular their reactions to the character's sexuality and coming out. As with Marilyn in *Crack Up*, Emmanuel's mother takes a negative, pejorative view of her son being gay, saying to him, '*But you'd make some wee girl very happy ... if only you'd, you'd push your feelings way down*'¹⁵¹. Once again, we see the gay person's feelings being viewed by the family as something that is "other" and destructive, something the gay person has control over, and their homosexuality is of their own choosing. Emmanuel's mother says to him '*it's not natural ... you don't dress up in women's clothes ... you don't do you?*'¹⁵², once again this is present in the play in order to illustrate the ignorance and lack of understanding that is embedded within the heteronormative narrative around gay people, and how this nascent perception of gay men in particular perpetuates the negative ideology around LGBT culture.

Close to the end of the play Emmanuel comes out to his father, telling him directly that he is gay. The father's immediate reaction is '*No son of mine is going to be called a poof ...*'. The Narrator is employed as a device at this point to connect directly with the audience, saying to them,

¹⁴⁹ BCT, *Ecce Homo*, p.9.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.9.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, p9.

¹⁵² *ibid*, p9.

'And Emmanuel's spirit was sad. If it be possible let this cup pass away from me' he cried. But prejudice, fear and oppression ensured that he would not be spared this pain'.¹⁵³

This is a quote from the scriptures, when Jesus Christ is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane.¹⁵⁴ The cup Jesus is referring to is the suffering that awaits him at the hands of the Romans. The Narrator is making an analogous link with Emmanuel's own suffering as a gay man in an environment hostile to homosexuals, and his rejection by his father is compared to the suffering that was inflicted on Christ. The father tells Emmanuel to leave his house and tells him that he'll *'never be able to hold his head up again'*, and like the character of Marilyn in *Crack Up*, the father goes on to say, "Have you no thought for anyone, only your fucking self". Both the father and Marilyn accuse the gay character of lacking in thought for others, and place him in a position of selfishness. Both characters maintain this position and do not succumb to the protestations of others. Emmanuel's final words of appeal to his father are *'I'm a human being, father; that gives me the right to love'*. This is a powerful moment in the play, juxtaposed with the Narrator's words from Christ spoken to God, his Father. Both the fathers in question forsake their son's request for mercy and do nothing to prevent the pain that awaits them. In this analogous harshness from both fathers BCT are exposing the brutality that lies at the core of Christianity, and in turn the concept of the family cell. Through these comparisons BCT are drawing out the Church's hypocrisy. *Ecce Homo* means in Latin 'Behold the man';¹⁵⁵ significantly, these are the words that Pontius Pilate used as he presented Jesus Christ to the crowd before his crucifixion.

Bill McDonnell says that *Ecce Homo* is both a provocation, to the Roman Catholic Church and the community's conservative members, and a celebration, of sexual diversity¹⁵⁶. In one part of the play Emmanuel controversially compares an injured gay man whom he saw in the street to Christ.

I saw the crucified Christ three days ago.
 He did not hang from a cross,
 But lay instead on a Belfast street.
 There were no nails in His limbs,
 No crown of thorns, no open wounds.
 The Queer-bashers had left nothing.
 But a gaping gash upon His head.
 And he did not cry: 'Forgive them, Lord,'
 But only lay there, gazing at the rain filled sky.¹⁵⁷

This speech, loaded with what a Catholic might see as blasphemy, takes place during a scene in which Emmanuel's mother is speaking to the Priest. By comparing the beaten gay man to Christ the company are laying the responsibility of this hate crime at the feet of the Catholic

¹⁵³ Ibid, p.23.

¹⁵⁴ Holy Bible, Matthew 26:39.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, John19.5.

¹⁵⁶ McDonnell, *Theatres of The Troubles*, p.88.

¹⁵⁷ BCT, *Ecce Homo*, p.10.

Church. Just as Pontius Pilate was responsible for the execution of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church is responsible for their consistent anti-homosexual rhetoric, which has given justification to a range of negative attitudes towards the LGBT+ community in Northern Ireland and in turn leads to hate crimes against them, including queer bashing. The Priest tells the mother *'you must prevail upon your son to turn from his evil and sinful ways'*.¹⁵⁸ With these words the Priest is placing the LGBT+ community at fault. Tony Flynn describes the Priest as insidious, he says that unlike the Protestant preachers' outspoken abhorrence of homosexuality, the Catholic Priests of the time were more covert in their condemnation, and appeared more compassionate, but the reality was that both churches were equally opposed to same sex relationships.¹⁵⁹

The most striking component of the script that binds it to the church is that the principal characters are given Biblical names. Emmanuel is another name for Jesus, the son of God. Emmanuel's parents are Joe and Mary. His boyfriend is called Simon, and according to the scriptures Simon of Cyrene is the name of the man who was compelled by the Romans to carry Jesus of Nazareth's cross as he walked to his crucifixion. Veronica is the name of Emmanuel's best friend in the play, and in the story of the crucifixion Veronica was the name of the woman who upon seeing Jesus struggling with his cross gave him her veil to wipe his face with. Emmanuel's two work mates are called Thomas and Peter, the names of two of Jesus's disciples. My question here is why has BCT made such a strong link between the struggles of gay rights in Belfast and Christianity? Is it to do with persecution and repression? Is it laying the root cause of homophobic discrimination at the feet of the Christian religion? Is it challenging the Church's teachings? I think the script is doing all of these things. But mostly the company are striking at the heart of their own community and provoking the people to question the power the Church holds over them. Although for the two gay actors in the company their main focus was to tell a story about gay men's experiences of coming out in Belfast at that time, 'I just wanted to put my story on stage. We were just so full of that first flush of coming out. We were so relieved that we had done it. There's no more hiding. There's no more sneaking'.¹⁶⁰ So, for Flynn the process of creating the play *Ecce Homo* was more than an artistic one, the process of reconstructing the journey of a gay man's coming out held cathartic value and at the same time extended his own coming out experience, providing him with a more expansive platform in which to claim his authenticity. The fact that the play failed to be performed is irrelevant, as the devising of the play and the sharing of experiences provided the young actors with a supportive space, permitting them a voice to tell their truth.

Through their inclusion of the Catholic Church and the Priest instructing Emmanuel's mother to tell her son to turn away from his evil ways, BCT confronted the struggle that exists between the LGBT community and the larger Catholic community they are part of. The mother ignores the Priest's instruction, instead she says to Emmanuel *'even though I don't fully understand I'll try son [...] you'll have to give me time ... but I do love you.'*¹⁶¹ These words from the mother not only send out a powerful message of hope but also act as words

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.11.

¹⁵⁹ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author 03/04/2019.

¹⁶⁰ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author on 03/04/2019.

¹⁶¹ BCT, *Ecce Homo*, p.10.

of admonition to the audience to step aside and reject the Church's rhetoric on homosexuality. She has pulled away and rejected the Church's advice because her love for her son is stronger, and her desire for him to be happy is of greater importance to her than the Church's doctrine and the Priest's instructions.

As with Lynch's character Patsy in *Crack up*, Emmanuel's mother is the character who is placed in the drama as a representation of the ordinary person in the audience, the person who encompasses traditional, working-class values entrenched within her community, a person alien to LGBT culture. The positioning of the mother in this role is a deliberate device to bridge the chasm between traditional heteronormativity and the obfuscated queer world that exists on the periphery of everyday societal structures. The mother's words expressing her lack of understanding are plain words that BCT's working-class audience can identify with. In both plays, the drama is rooted in Catholic working-class communities, which throws into question the motives surrounding this decision. Homophobic attitudes were also prevalent in the Protestant middle classes during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, with many Unionist MPs frequently echoing anti-gay sentiment, therefore each play could easily have fit into a Protestant middle-class premise. The most obvious reason for the plays having a Catholic working-class setting is because both Lynch and Belfast Community Theatre were entrenched in Catholic working-class communities. The world of the Belfast Catholic working class was a world they knew extremely well.

Ecce Homo goes beyond the homophobic rhetoric of the Catholic Church and that of the family cell, reaching into other areas of the gay man's life. We see Emmanuel with his two work mates Peter and Thomas and get to experience their misogyny and homophobia first hand as they leer and objectify a topless Page Three model. When Emmanuel challenges their degrading comments Thomas says to him 'What ails you? Are you a bit funny or something?' and Peter then asks him 'You're not bent or queer?'¹⁶² This scene is immediately followed by Emmanuel meeting up with his boyfriend Simon for a drink in a pub; they are later harassed by a UDR soldier as they make their way home. Initially the harassment from the UDR soldier comes from the fact that the men are Catholic and both live in Nationalist areas of the city, an experience the audience would immediately identify with; this is another device used by BCT to create empathy towards the gay characters. Once the soldier finds out that they have come from The Four Pipers, a known gay pub, the abuse is cranked up: 'The Queers rest, you're a pair of fucking fruit merchants aren't you? Two fucking queers!', the insults continue with the soldier referring to Emmanuel and Simon as 'turd punchers', 'scum', 'bum chums' and 'Nancy boys'.¹⁶³ The derogatory language used by the soldier is language familiar to the members of the audience, and insults they may have also used towards gay people. Therefore, by putting on stage the licensed abuse of the two gay men by the UDR soldier, BCT's intention is to once again show up the audience's complicity in the gay men's degradation. Tony Flynn admits that the UDR scene is not biographical but based on anecdotes.

The homophobic abuse from the UDR soldiers in the play is based on anecdotes. We wanted to give people the extreme of the homophobia. My

¹⁶² BCT, *Ecce Homo*, unpublished play, 1988, p.11.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.16.

abiding memory of going into town at that time was it was very exciting, nobody from the west went into town.¹⁶⁴

As I have already noted in this chapter, both *Ecce Homo* and *Crack Up* differ from the other two plays in my study in that they are plays in which their authors have a deliberate motive to stimulate social awareness around LGBT+ identities and issues. But they are not equal in their content and delivery. *Crack Up* has a deliberately constructed openly gay character at the centre of its drama, but the drama is about much more than LGBT+ issues. *Ecce Homo* has two self-identifying gay characters, and the dramatic arch of the play is on one of the characters, Emmanuel's coming out story.

The two gay characters in *Ecce Homo*, Emmanuel and Simon, are given a stronger, more coherent voice than that of Nipper. A clear example of this is when Emmanuel, in explaining his love for Simon to his mother, says '*but you know what it is like to be in love don't you?*'. This question is not only directed at Emmanuel's mother but also to the audience, and in asking the question it helps normalise Emmanuel and Simon's same sex relationship. The relationship between the two men is one of positivity, elucidating the love and support a same sex coupling can encompass, emulating the vigorousness of society's view of an impeccable heterosexual marriage. A reason why *Ecce Homo* is able to encompass more of the gay experience and the feelings of same sex love is perhaps due to the fact that the main actors assisting in the devising of the play are gay, whereas Lynch is a straight man and his depiction and articulation of the gay experience is somewhat limited. The purpose of BCT's play is to raise the antennae of people's social and political consciousness. Tony Flynn says that by creating a play about young gay men's experiences they wanted 'to educate. And to appeal to their humanity. And to put it to them that we are just like everyone else. To break down the homophobia'.¹⁶⁵

The issues surrounding inequality and discrimination, not only regarding the LGBT community but across various groups in society, are brought to a sententious conclusion in the play's closing. In the final scene, Emmanuel reads directly to the audience from the *Sun* newspaper, 'Black family costing Council £1500 a week to keep in high-class hotel because they wrecked their council house'. The Narrator interjects with more of the *Sun*'s illiberal reportage lambasting the black family and their wanton abuse of the benefits system. Emmanuel's workmates Peter and Thomas dismiss Emmanuel and the Narrator's attempts to condemn the story, saying, '*Ach nobody pays any heed. It's not serious*', '*Whatever happened to getting a laugh*' and '*You take it all too serious ...*'. His work mate's comments provoke Emmanuel, prompting him to challenge them: '*You can't laugh at people being led to hate other people ... there's nothing funny about it ... [...] I'm an Irishman, or have you forgotten what that can mean? I'm also a Gay Man ... A Queer ... A Fruit*'.¹⁶⁶ Emmanuel's coming out to his work mates is a huge act of defiance, he is a lone man standing up to the ingrained societal bigotry. Rejected by his father, his coming out risks further rejection and persecution at his work place, where he needs to remain in order to earn money, in order to survive. This is a powerful moment which places the gay man in a position as a crusader,

¹⁶⁴ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author 03/04/2019.

¹⁶⁵ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author 03/04/2019.

¹⁶⁶ BCT, *Ecce Homo*, p.24.

rebel, freedom fighter, hero; and a voice for the silenced. Playing this moment to a Nationalist audience, to an audience who champion the under-dog and acts of rebellion, would have valorised the character's heroics. Fighting for a voice and challenging their oppressors, the Nationalist community in Belfast would have supported Emmanuel's stance; his call for equality would have had a powerful social resonance.

EMMANUEL: A faggot is a small piece of wood tied to a bundle and placed at the foot of a bonfire. You light the faggot first to get the bonfire going.

NARRATOR: In the Dark Ages when they burnt witches – the majority of whom were lesbians – they put the women at the top of the bonfire. Then they rounded up all the gay men.

EMMANUEL: Tied them together, put them at the foot of the bonfire and burnt them first. I'm a faggot, I'm gay; who wants to burn me?

[...]

EMMANUEL: When the bonfires are burning it is going to be no defence to say "Well I didn't strike the match".

(Emmanuel throws a box of matches to the audience.)¹⁶⁷

This scene, referred to as *The Faggot Scene*, was given to the company by John Goodchild, who created the piece with Theatreworks many years before. It is a scene that he had created and performed in clubs and venues around the north of England.¹⁶⁸ The ending of the play forces the audience to come face to face with their complicity in the sufferings and inequalities of the gay community. Following the tradition of socialist theatre, the play ensures that the audience are made aware of their responsibility and power, both collectively and individually. Out of all the four plays in my study this ending is by far the most provocative, not only in its deliberate framing of the community's responsibility to question the religious power structures, but also to reconsider their attitudes towards queer identities within their own societies. BCT's progressive theatrical style and Brechtian devices enable the company to step beyond the constrictive perimeters of naturalism and to delve into the body of the audience, which amplifies the whole visceral performance experience.

Disappointingly, *Ecce Homo* was never staged. Niall Rea explains the reasons:

There were two main reasons for the lack of a final performance. Firstly Reid and McKnight both felt that the non-naturalistic format was problematic and needed more work before a successful staging. [...] Secondly, Tony Flynn, one of the main performers, got a professional acting job in Dublin and Reid felt

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p.25.

¹⁶⁸ From an interview with Tony Flynn with the author 03/04/2019.

strongly that the play could not have been recast, but had to be performed by the original company on whose lived experience the script was based.¹⁶⁹

However, Tony Flynn explains 'it didn't go on because of what is officially said, it didn't go on because the community wouldn't be ready for it, the general consensus was that it might be a step too far for West Belfast in 1988'.¹⁷⁰ It's unclear what is meant by a step too far; I would argue that this was not the case. Although *Ecce Homo* is the one play out of all the plays in my study that deals directly with LGBT+ rights in Northern Ireland, it is not a sexually explicit play in terms of what it shows or what it says. *Gentle Island*, written seventeen years earlier, does confront sexual relations between two men. In 1978 the theatre company Gay Sweat Shop brought their play *Iceberg* to Queens University in Belfast, this was met with protests from the Democratic Unionist party.¹⁷¹ *Carthaginians*, a play I will look at in my next chapter, was written in 1988, the same year as *Ecce Homo*. It has consistent references to Dido, the gay character's same sex attraction to British soldiers. Therefore, the play's failure to reach performance is most likely to do with the fact that at this time the theatre community lost their focus and the play lost its momentum. It is disappointing that *Ecce Homo* was not produced, but as Niall Rea quite rightly says,

The fact that in the end *Ecce Homo* was never staged is perhaps less important than the fact that the company decided to work on it at all; researching the ability to hold multiple identities and promoting the rights of a doubly marginalized sub-group.¹⁷²

Picking up on Rea's phrase 'a doubly marginalized sub-group', it seems there is a recurring theme throughout my study, alongside that of non-conforming sexualities, of the marginalization and the oppression of working-class Catholics. In all four of the plays in my corpus the working-class Catholic/Nationalist communities are in the back drop to the central drama, with the socio-political issues of the territory permeating the script.

At this point it would be useful to pause and to reflect on how the playwrights that I have looked at so far have used queer identities to prize open an enquiry into the malcontents who lie buried within the heteronormative structures of a patriarchal society. As we have seen, Friel in *The Gentle Island* used the threat of male homosexuality to dislodge the traditional family values of the island. He framed the gay Dublin couple as outsiders and used their non-conforming sexualities to suggest an alternative to the diminishing family unit that is struggling to exist on the island. As I stated in Chapter One, Friel used the queer interjection to disrupt and break open the silent seal of toxic marriages and a community facing extinction. The same can be said of Lynch in *Crack Up*, he uses Nipper's homosexuality to draw out the growing tensions within the extended family, and through his construction of the queer character presents to his audience a human experience.

¹⁶⁹ Niall Rea, 'Queering Segregated Space', in *Deviant Acts Essays on Queer Performance*, David Cregan, Ed., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), p.127.

¹⁷⁰ Tony Flynn in an interview with the author 03/04/2019.

¹⁷¹ <http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/history/companies/gay-sweatshop/iceberg/>

¹⁷² Niall Rea, 'Queering Segregated Space', p.127.

Lynch's intention in his play, unlike Friel's, is to challenge the prejudices around the LGBT community at the time. But the most progressive of the plays so far is *Ecce Homo*: the gay characters are at the centre of the drama, it is their struggles and their journey as young gay men that the play focuses on. This is the first of its kind, and although the play was never performed, the fact that a theatre company invested the time and effort to produce a play that portrayed gay men in a positive light is significant, showing the growing confidence of both the LGBT community and also the changing societal attitudes of the time. So, it is upon this shifting landscape that we reflect on the journey of queer identity, and move our attention to look at what lies ahead.

Chapter Three

Queer Confusions in Frank McGuinness's *Carthaginians*.

When you are writing a character and you are rewriting and rewriting you have to wait for the information that they choose to divulge. I mean that's my method of hearing what's happening. And when they choose to tell me or if they choose not to tell me I have to respect the speed at which they give me that information. Normally they come fully formed. But sometimes they can shock you. I have a lot less fear now about stating a character's sexuality from the word go. (Frank McGuinness).¹⁷³

The Irish playwright who has most frequently placed queer and non-conventional sexualities at the forefront of his plays is Frank McGuinness. It would not be possible to explore queer drama and identities in Northern Ireland without examining and recognising McGuinness's queer constructions and the propulsion of queer recognition within contemporary Northern Irish drama. Frank McGuinness was born in Buncrana on the Inishowen peninsula, Ireland's most northerly area, in County Donegal. Buncrana is close to the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. For many of the people living in Buncrana, Derry/Londonderry, a city positioned sixteen miles away in Northern Ireland, is a natural capital, to which they would commute for work and shopping, crossing the border daily. It is therefore unsurprising that several of McGuinness's plays are set in Northern Ireland. The playwright's relationship with the North, and in particular Derry/Londonderry, will become more significant as I discuss later in the chapter his writing of the play *Carthaginians*. Although born in what is termed Southern Ireland, McGuinness is often referred to as a Northern writer. In an interview with Carolyne Pollard in 1987 he clarified his position when he said:

I think that sectarianism of any kind is stupid and I feel then, to go around describing myself as a Northern or Southern writer is stupid. I'm both, actually. I was born in the North, which is politically classified as the South, so I've got that lovely confusion – I like confusion a lot.¹⁷⁴

Confusion is not restricted to its political aspects. This 'lovely confusion' McGuinness refers to is a persistent thread skillfully woven throughout his work, which particularly resonates in relation to questions of sexual orientation. This chapter will explore this 'lovely confusion' by touching upon a number of his plays, but with particular focus on his play *Carthaginians* (1988).

Alongside its political and sexual connotations, 'confusion' is also linked to questions of character development. In the introduction to his book *Celebrating Confusion* the writer Kenneth McNally elaborates on McGuinness's confusions:

¹⁷³ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin 11/06/2018.

¹⁷⁴ Carolyne Pollard, 'An Ulster Son Observed: An interview with Frank McGuinness', (*Quarto*, Winter 1987/88, Literary Society of the University of Ulster).

The phrase 'a lovely confusion' is an unusual concept but one that is typical of McGuinness's contrary theatre in that as well as suggesting the turmoil of the individual mind it celebrates ambiguity and denigrates the simplicity of essentialist order. His plays both develop this confusion through stage craft and structure and personify it in characters so as to challenge the monolithic notions of gender, sexuality, and culture which he has railed so consistently against.¹⁷⁵

It is McGuinness's challenge to monolithic notions of gender, sexuality and culture that sets him apart from other Irish playwrights of his time. Despite the fact that he has used his writing to push against and dislodge the ingrained heteronormative structures, McGuinness resists the title of "gay playwright", and is insistent that although his plays contain multi-dimensional gay characters he is writing simply 'for whoever wanted to come and see the plays'. When asked if he felt any responsibility towards his gay audience he states indomitably, 'I didn't feel any responsibility, I am quite reckless; once the head gets going it gets going, you are not speaking for a cause but you are speaking for individual souls'.¹⁷⁶ The characters in his plays are undoubtedly individual souls. McGuinness is not a playwright who wishes to hold a mirror up to his audience in order for them to see a coherent image of themselves reflected, but rather his mirror casts an altered image that is at the same time familiar but also different, which creates the individuality he seeks to construct. Interestingly McGuinness has said 'I have a lot less fear now about stating a character's sexuality from the word go.'¹⁷⁷ I believe this to be particularly meaningful in the journey of his construction and deployment of gay characters, and I intend to keep these words in mind as I contemplate the progression of his non-conventional characters in his plays.

Before discussing *Carthaginians* and considering its position in the composite of dramatic queer identities in Northern Irish theatre, it is important that I first of all give a short summary of McGuinness's early work and the play's progenitors: *The Factory Girls* (1982), *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) and *Innocence* (1986). In order to appraise McGuinness's queer constructions I will provide a brief overview of each of these plays, surveying their significance in McGuinness's queer dramatic trajectory. At this point in my discussion I will make a closer examination of *Carthaginians*, deciphering the elements that place this theatrical piece as a distinct and significant voice for queer identities during the period of the Northern Irish Troubles. I will then return to McGuinness's early plays in which I will scrutinise the signifiers, codes and overall construct of the queer identities, assessing their positionality and teleology within their own dramatic terrains, identifying a queer typography.

The Emergence of the Queer

The Factory Girls, McGuinness's first play, set in a shirt factory in his home town of Buncrana, explores the issues faced by a group of female factory workers. Even at this beginning stage of his career McGuinness's play is littered throughout with sexual

¹⁷⁵ Kenneth McNally, *Celebrating Confusions: The theatre of Frank McGuinness*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), p.2.

¹⁷⁶ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin 11/06/2018.

¹⁷⁷ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin 11/06/2018.

ambiguities, and although he deliberately avoids overtly labelling any of the women gay or queer he weaves his codes throughout the script for the audience to unpick and decipher. In an interview carried out for the purpose of this thesis, McGuinness said ‘with all gay culture you have to follow a code, you have to read the code. Our culture has been so rich in the establishment of codes and of the depths of coding’.¹⁷⁸ It is understandable that in writing *The Factory Girls* in the early nineteen eighties McGuinness would have been tentative in constructing explicit gay characters in his play; he is of course reading the times and following the code that he has spoken of.

In *The Factory Girls* two characters, Rebecca and Rosemary, are strong examples of how McGuinness uses codes to indicate a character’s queerness. With lines such as ‘*I don’t think Rebecca’s the marrying kind*’ and ‘*she says no man is good enough for her*’ there is little doubt that McGuinness is creating confusion around the women’s sexualities, and his intention at this point is to bury the clues inside the script and to leave his audience questioning. He embeds the sexual confusions further when he has Rosemary, who has already stated regarding Rebecca ‘*she’s great. I’m wild about her*’, say to Rebecca ‘*I’d rather have a horse than get married*’.¹⁷⁹ McGuinness’s construction of Rebecca and Rosemary as lesbians is so ambiguous and coded that audiences and critics of the time were able to ignore the question of same sex attraction and read the women’s lack of interest in men as a feminist stance and a refusal to partake in the patriarchy that entrapped the other factory women.

McGuinness’s second play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), is a play that depicts a group of eight Northern Irish soldiers from the 36th Battalion preparing and coming to terms with events leading up to the Battle of the Somme in France in 1916. The men are young Protestant volunteers from different parts of Northern Ireland. *Observe the Sons* is the play that launched McGuinness’s career as a playwright: the play earned him the London Evening Standard Award for most promising playwright. Typical of McGuinness’s plays, *Observe the Sons* encompasses societal multiplicity, and the themes embedded in the play’s narrative explore institutionalisation, homosexuality, class structure and Northern Irish Protestantism. The over-arching narrative is supported by McGuinness’s questioning and exploration of the homosocial dynamics that operate in this group of Ulster men.

His starting point is not through gay culture, but the tragedy of the millions of young lives lost and a whole generation of young men decimated. McGuinness’s decision to side-step overt homosexual representations and subject matter would undoubtedly have been influenced by societal attitudes to homosexuality at the time. As he said himself

If you are a gay man of a certain generation you have trained yourself to be an outsider, or to regard yourself as an outsider. And that is what you are: you must.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin on 11/06/2018.

¹⁷⁹ Frank McGuinness, *Frank McGuinness Plays: 1*, (London: Faber and Faber London 1996), p.17.

¹⁸⁰ Mick Heaney, ‘Fear and Loathing in Buncrana’, *The Irish Times*, 05/10/2013, (<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/fear-and-loathing-in-buncrana-1.1549333>), last viewed 24/08/2019.

McGuinness wrote *Observe the Sons* while teaching at a university in Coleraine in Northern Ireland. Inspired by the war memorials in the town that commemorated the men who had died in the Somme, McGuinness says 'I made a kind of link between the names on the monuments and the young fellas I was teaching.'¹⁸¹ At the core of *Observe the Sons* is the gay relationship between Pyper and Craig, but this wasn't McGuinness's only motivation in writing the play. At the time of writing *Observe the Sons* in 1986 the AIDS epidemic was at its height; 'my generation were being wiped out' says McGuinness,¹⁸² he goes on to explain why he felt moved to write about the loss of so many young lives in the First World War.

I know it's the First World War but why do you think I have such sympathy for the loss of young lives in the First World War? It was because of my own time and my own people.¹⁸³

Although the link with the AIDS epidemic is not an obvious one, it is of course a typically perspicacious approach of McGuinness in addressing a conspicuous issue that has gathered polarizing viewpoints among the mainstream. The connections and themes of death and loss on a major scale are embedded everywhere within the play. McGuinness sheds further light on his writing of the play when he says:

Men are so reluctant to admit that they love other men, all men, straight, gay, all men. But we're also so reluctant about how we need to lament them when we lose them and I felt it was a vital part of me as a writer.¹⁸⁴

Observe the Sons is McGuinness's lament for his generation of gay men who were wiped out by AIDS. However, rather than writing directly about the epidemic as other gay playwrights did, like Larry Kramer in *The Normal Heart* written in 1985, McGuinness approaches the subject more obliquely. Typical of McGuinness, the world of his play is situated as far away from 1980s gay culture as it can be, and yet at the same time encompasses at its core the very essence of what McGuinness wants to explore, same sex love and the devastating cruelty of a youth cut off in its prime.

However audiences and critics writing about *Observe the Sons* could and very often did ignore Pyper's homosexuality. This is due to the fact that Pyper's homosexuality is to a large extent suggested through innuendo. In an interview for the *Irish Times* newspaper, McGuinness said about *Observe the Sons*' first production at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin:

We didn't shy away from [exploring homosexuality] in the production, but the funny thing was that it didn't cause any controversy: it was just simply not seen. Then

¹⁸¹ David Roy, 'Back to the Front', *The Irish Times*, 07/07/2016.

¹⁸² Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author in Dublin on 11/06/2018.

¹⁸³ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author in Dublin on 11/06/2018.

¹⁸⁴ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author in Dublin on 11/06/2018.

there were productions afterwards and they ignored it entirely. It wasn't merely a case of prejudice, then; it was a case of invisibility.¹⁸⁵

David Cregan goes further in explaining how the initial performances of *Observe the Sons* played down the homosexual relationship when he says:

The moment of the kiss between Pyper and Craig in the 1985 production is hurried and awkward, followed immediately by a brisk blackout. On the other hand, the 1994 production lingers on the growing intimacy and escalating sexual attraction between Pyper and Craig; allowing them to slowly touch and seductively draw each other in with controlled intensity before ending with a kiss which builds from a certain tentativeness to outright passion. The lights remain up until we see Pyper drop to his knees in front of Craig, suggesting that the kiss was leading to something deeper.¹⁸⁶

It is hardly surprising that the theatre of the nineties was more embracing of the queer representations and pushed the characters' sexualities to the forefront. Societal attitudes as well as legislation had moved forward and were more accepting and inclusive of queer sexualities; this ties in with McGuinness's current state of having no fear of stating a character's sexuality from the word go. I will come back to this point later in the chapter.

Innocence, McGuinness's third play written in 1986, has a perfect example in the central character Caravaggio of the 'turmoil of the individual's mind', as McNally puts it. In *Innocence* McGuinness depicts the painter Caravaggio as a self-destructive, violent homosexual who lives with a prostitute Lena, picking up rent boys to satisfy the sexual desires of his patron, a cardinal. Caravaggio is a configuration of extreme confusions, of darkness and light, pureness and vulgarity, an artist and a crook, a lover and a killer. His violence and sexual promiscuity contrasts with the artist's tender creativity as a painter, a seeker of truth. So here too we have examples of the confusions McNally is referring to and through these confusions we can see the dark and light complexities of character. McGuinness's queer construction of Caravaggio is not an exclusive one. Caravaggio's tumultuous and colourful life is well documented by many, from Italian film maker Pier Paolo Pasolini's cinematic depictions to the art historian Simon Schama's *Power of Art* 2006 BBC documentary¹⁸⁷. In a timely coincidence, Derek Jarman's art house film *Caravaggio* premiered in April 1986, seven months before McGuinness's first performance of

¹⁸⁵ Sara Keating, 'Observing a Son of Ulster', *The Irish Times* 14/09/2009. (<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/observing-a-son-of-ulster-1.737580>), Last viewed 26/08/2019.

¹⁸⁶ David Cregan: 'There's something queer here: modern Ireland and the plays of Frank McGuinness'. (*Australasian drama studies St Lucia QLD: University of Queensland, Vol. 43, 2003*), p.74.

¹⁸⁷ For further information go to <https://cosmolearning.org/documentaries/simon-schamas-power-of-art-1218/1/>. Last visited 15/09/2017. And <https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/calendar/film/pdfs/notes/ngafilm-pasolini-notes.pdf>. Last visited 06/08/2019.

*Innocence*¹⁸⁸. So, building on this fertile landscape, it is imperative that McGuinness's dramatization does not negate or depreciate the artist's promiscuity, and that he is more explicit and more confident in overt signalling of the gay characters in this play. In *Innocence* McGuinness can flaunt his characters' sexual activities, no longer can he leave his audience confused and questioning. During my interview with McGuinness, he said about his writing of *Innocence*:

I didn't so much as come out of the closet but blew it up and that was a particular method of the time. Dublin didn't know what fucking hit it and I'm quite proud of that.¹⁸⁹

In nineteen eighty-six, the year in which he wrote *Innocence*, McGuinness came out to his mother.

When my mother and father died, in '96 and '97, within 10 months of each other, it was shattering and I just thought, This is a nonsense, denying who I am, I had told my mother, when I was around 30, but not my father. Then again, I never really talked to my father. We didn't have the best of relationships.¹⁹⁰

I believe that this momentous step in his personal life liberated McGuinness and fuelled his confidence in the writing of *Innocence* unleashing a boldness that made this play his most controversial to date. In an interview in the Guardian newspaper McGuinness goes on to say.

The man who wrote *Innocence* was a very troubled individual," he says. "It came from some terrible knowledge that I was not going to have children. I was 33 when I wrote it and I think I was in mourning - and I transferred that to Caravaggio."¹⁹¹

If we are looking for a progressive trajectory of overtly queer characters in McGuinness's plays it might well be argued that he peaked in his earlier play *Innocence*. Undoubtedly *Innocence* was bolder with homosexual sex acts discussed more openly and explicitly making it much more controversial in its depiction of gay characters and their sexual encounters than that of *Carthaginians*. The fact that in *Innocence* McGuinness has placed two other gay men Antonio and Lucio both described as 'rough trade', rent boys reinforces this argument and I would agree that in these depictions McGuinness is even more audacious, having Antonio proudly declare

¹⁸⁸ Frank McGuinness wrote a poem titled 'A poem for St Derek' when Derek Jarman died in February 1994. The poem laments Jarman's dying and the disappointment at the pair never meeting.

¹⁸⁹ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin 11/06/2018.

¹⁹⁰ Joe Jackson, 'The Healing Touch,' *Sunday Independent* 21/04/2002.

¹⁹¹ Charlotte Higgins, 'Frank McGuinness I'm not entirely respectable. I couldn't be', *The Guardian*, 18/10/2008, last viewed 26/08/2019

I like men, I like their arses. I like biting them. That's what's really wrong with me. My mouth always has to be doing something, 'I'm bent as a nail.'¹⁹²

And with Caravaggio McGuinness has him say to his brother 'I would remind you that I have been up the arses of more priests'¹⁹³. When the play was performed at the Gate Theatre in Dublin the actors spoke with an Irish dialect, placing the play closer to home and making it all the more powerful for an audience at this time, particularly a conservative Irish audience to hear characters on stage speak these words in an Irish theatre would have been shocking. However, there are two major factors in the play that would have shielded the audience from the violation, the distance of time and location. *Innocence* is a historical play set in the year 1606 and located in Rome. An important aspect to highlight at this point is that McGuinness's depiction of Caravaggio is not his own invention, the character already existed, he is a much documented and dramatized historical figure, therefore McGuinness is not creating his queerness and his sexual promiscuity, he is merely dramatizing it for the stage. So, although shocking to an Irish audience at the time aspects of Caravaggio's life would already have been known to many of them.

There are four gay characters in *Innocence*, Antonio and Lucio are male prostitutes that Caravaggio picks up in the streets of Rome for Cardinal Francesco del Monte's pleasure, a service that Caravaggio carries out on a regular basis. What is of particular interest amongst these men is the sexual dynamics and hierarchy that McGuinness brings out amongst them. The Cardinal is Caravaggio's patron, he sits in a powerful position in terms of authority and control, he is wealthy and supports Caravaggio financially. Caravaggio is indebted to him, and when the Cardinal arrives Caravaggio, who up until this point we have seen as an abrupt and outspoken man immediately becomes submissive and subservient to the cardinal.

CARAVAGGIO Do not honour me as friend, eminence. I am your humble servant. (He lifts both boys.) Receive my gift, cardinal. Caravaggio presents his offerings before his master, most high prince of the church.¹⁹⁴

Interplayed amongst this is Caravaggio's treatment of the two young prostitutes. Before the cardinal arrives he feeds them, degrades them with the tone he uses towards them and plays games with them and on the whole treats them with disdainfulness. McGuinness has dramatized a power structure that is based upon the men's sexuality and social positioning. The prostitutes use their sexuality in order to live and are subjected to various degrees of denigration. McGuinness is exploring the sexual currency that is embedded within male gay culture and is exposing the exploitation and abuse that gay men have endured throughout history.

¹⁹² McGuinness, *Plays 1*, p.220.

¹⁹³ *ibid*, p.247.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, p237.

Carthaginians

In McGuinness's fourth play *Carthaginians*, written in 1987 and set in a Derry graveyard, we see a significant development in his dramaturgical construction of a gay character. *Carthaginians* is described as the companion piece to *Observe the Sons*. *Observe the Sons* is often referred to as the Protestant Loyalist play. The writer and drama scholar, Eamonn Jordan writes about *Observe the Sons*:

The play is equally about paramilitaries in the 1980s, both loyalist and republican, who were perversely and delusionally re-enacting the same sacrifice imperatives of the Somme and of the Easter Rising.¹⁹⁵

Set in a Derry graveyard *Carthaginians* deals with the trauma and ramifications of Bloody Sunday, an occasion in 1972 on which British paratroopers shot dead thirteen citizens taking part in a Civil Rights march on the streets of Derry.¹⁹⁶ The play takes place in the nineteen eighties, more than a decade after Bloody Sunday, it centres around a group of women who have gathered in the grave yard hoping to witness the dead rise. The male characters have different attachments to the same space. Each of the characters have had to face individual horrors and each has to connect back into the world of the living. The author Hiroko Mikami succinctly describes McGuinness's position when she says.

His writing is always poised between the polarities of Ireland, between north and south, Protestantism and Catholicism, Nationalism and Unionism, England and Ireland. And he addresses wider issues of human polarity, particularly in the area of gender, masculinity and femininity.¹⁹⁷

The writer and theatre scholar Helen Lojek adds to the discussion when she says about McGuinness.

He is not a political activist in the sense that he has campaigned (either in his plays or in the press) for specific reforms, but there is little doubt that the large number of powerful and appealing gay characters with which he has peopled the Irish stage has contributed to general debate.¹⁹⁸

In *Carthaginians* McGuinness creates Dido. Dido is a young gay man who is remarkably different from any of the gay characters in McGuinness's previous plays: arguably he is

¹⁹⁵ Jordan Eamonn, *The Methuen Drama Guide To Contemporary Irish playwrights*, (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p.238.

¹⁹⁶ For further information on Bloody Sunday refer to the following publications: Eamonn McCann, *Bloody Sunday in Derry: what really happened*, Peter Pringle and Peter Jackson, *Those are Real Bullets: Bloody Sunday, Derry 1972*, Richard Norton-Taylor, *Bloody Sunday: Scenes from the Saville Inquiry*.

¹⁹⁷ Hiroko Mikami, *Frank McGuinness and His Theatre of Paradox*, (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 2002), pp.3-4.

¹⁹⁸ Helen Lojek, *Contexts for Frank McGuinness's Drama*, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004) p.160.

McGuinness's most flamboyant and queerest gay protagonist to date. Dido, with his pram, non-conventional clothes and camp characteristics, visits the Derry graveyard each day, providing the three women and three men, who wait for the dead to rise, with food and supplies. It is upon this queer character of Dido that I wish to settle and place my study. I believe that McGuinness's Dido shows a confident, more playful construction of the queer, sexually ambiguous character and marks a new era of McGuinness's gay characters not only embracing their non-conventional sexualities but also of them being part of a more homogenous community where their queerness is not directly at odds with everyone else.

(Dido enters in drag. He wears a long, flowing skirt, a loose blouse, thick-rimmed glasses, boots and a beret. The pram is crammed with objects).

DIDO: Hi

MAELA: Sacred heart of the crucified Jesus.

DIDO: Do you like the new me?

MAELA: You walked through Derry looking like that?

DIDO: Yea, I got three wolf-whistles too. All from women.¹⁹⁹

The other remarkable component of *Carthaginians* is McGuinness's placing of Dido in this emotionally volatile setting around 'Bloody Sunday' a tragic event, marked as a major turning point in the Northern Irish Troubles and lodged at the very heart of Irish Nationalism. McGuinness has done something other playwrights had so far failed to do and few have done since; he has created a queer presence, a gay footprint, within the story of 'The Troubles'. Although McGuinness had included gay characters in his earlier plays, his creation of Dido is more daring, more robust and is without a doubt a queer. McGuinness, in his description of Dido ensures right from the moment Dido appears that his queerness is highlighted: *'Dido enters, pushing a battered pram, wearing pale blue Doc Marten boots, an "Arm the Unemployed" T-shirt and a long pink scarf'*.²⁰⁰ In this description of Dido McGuinness has planted several signifiers as to Dido's unconventionality and his queerness. The visual coding of a *'long pink scarf'*, the choice of the colour alone would have informed the Derry audience of Dido's queerness. The *'pale blue Doc Martin boots'* are a queering of both the skinhead and punk rocker, sub cultures that were prominent from the late nineteen seventies up to the mid-eighties in Northern Ireland, which was the last UK bastion for Punk Rockers.²⁰¹ Doc Martens boots were staple foot wear for both groups. Together with the militant anti-establishment reading of Dido's T-shirt, this image subverts the effeminate portrayal of gays that an Irish audience would have been more familiar with. Once again, McGuinness is mixing up image and predictable expectations with his confusing dress codes and signifiers.

¹⁹⁹ Frank McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) p.33.

²⁰⁰ *ibid*, p.10.

²⁰¹ For an in-depth reading of the Punk Rock movement in Northern Ireland in the 1970s-1980s read Timothy Heron, 'Alternative Ulster: how Punk took on the Troubles', *The Irish Times*, 02/12/2016, (<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/alternative-ulster-how-punk-took-on-the-troubles-1.2890644>) Last viewed 26/08/2019.

Helen Lojek notes that by McGuinness's placing of carefully crafted gay characters in his plays he 'encouraged an awareness and dialogue that might not otherwise have taken place',²⁰² and this seems to me true. David Cregan builds on this idea of Lojek's that by including gay characters in his plays McGuinness is initiating a much overdue discussion on gay identity within mainstream society; in his essay in the *Irish University Review* he writes:

McGuinness's plays represent a unique discursive practice within the literary dramatic tradition of modern Ireland: a practice which reconfigures the historical memory central to the formation of *past* Renaissance identity, while simultaneously giving voice to the otherwise silent or silenced queer voices of Irish identity.²⁰³

Cregan extends this point further when he says about McGuinness:

His plays are not confrontational protests about gay rights, or even theatrical glimpses of the homosexual world of either underground experience or erotic fetish. Instead his work is contextulised within the larger experience of human identity and has an overall tone of reconciliation rather than just conflict.²⁰⁴

It is McGuinness's placing of the openly gay Dido within 'the larger experience of human identity' that gives his dramaturgy a boldness and distinctiveness. However, in *Dido* McGuinness has constructed a strong self-identifying gay man, who as well as speaking openly about his same sex attractions subverts the heteronormative stereotypical depictions of gay equating to a passive victim role. In his opening exchange with Maela and Greta, Dido describes his interaction with British soldiers earlier that day.

DIDO: I had to fight my way to this graveyard through three army checkpoints. There could have been an assault. I could have been detained.

MAELA: What did they threaten to do to you Dido?

DIDO: It was more what I threatened to do to them. No luck though. No score. I think they were on to me as a health hazard. One of them was nice. Blond. From Newcastle. Interested in football.

GRETA: How can you chat up Brits?

DIDO: Greta, you know my ambition in life is to corrupt every member of Her Majesty's forces serving in Northern Ireland.

GRETA: Jesus, that should be difficult.

²⁰² Lojek, *Contexts for Frank McGuinness's Drama*, p.163.

²⁰³ David Cregan, 'Coming Out: McGuinness's Dramaturgy and Queer Resistance' *Irish University Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, p. 46, (2010)

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.46.

DIDO: Mock on. It's my bit for the cause of Ireland's freedom. When the happy day of withdrawal comes, I'll be venerated as a national hero. They'll build a statue to me. I'm going to insist it's in the nude with a blue plaque in front of my balls. **(Holds an imaginary plaque before himself)**. This has been erected to the war effort of Dido Martin, patriot and poof.²⁰⁵

What at first appears as a camp witty exchange develops into something more critical that subverts the gay stereotype of gay equating to victim. It also ruptures the dominant perception of the British military's subjugation of the Nationalist community. When the British army first arrived in Northern Ireland in 1969 the initial reception was one of welcoming by both sides. The troops were viewed as protectors against sectarian attacks. However, after Bloody Sunday, when soldiers in the paratrooper regiment shot and killed thirteen Nationalist protestors, many on the Nationalist side viewed the British army as oppressors and supporters of unionist rule. Relations between the security forces and the Catholic Nationalists were often tense, with many Nationalists reporting cases of intimidation, harassment and even violence from security forces often taking place at check points.²⁰⁶ Therefore, by McGuinness having Dido, this openly gay Catholic man, describe his encounter at a check point with the soldiers, McGuinness subverts the expected dramatized paradigm of military oppression; and by giving Dido an agenda of his own '*It was more what I threatened to do to them*' and '*you know my ambition in life is to corrupt every member of her Majesty's forces*', he is immediately placed in a position of power, giving him control. Societal expectations around the military and Catholic civilians are debunked. The tone of the exchange is neither heavy-handed nor didactic: it is playful. McGuinness knows humour is a tool of empowerment, he uses it at particular points to highlight issues that are often complicated or not easily discussed in a public forum. *Carthaginians* is a play about Bloody Sunday, but as with *Observe the Sons*, *Carthaginians* avoids dealing directly with the event itself. McGuinness confronts the issues that have so firmly rooted it within the history of the Troubles: the abuse of power, unresolved grief and a community abandoned in a limbo world, awaiting an acknowledgment or admittance of guilt from the perpetrators in order for them to move on. It took over thirty-eight years before the British Government made an official apology, acknowledging their responsibility in the deaths of the thirteen demonstrators who were gunned down.²⁰⁷

At the centre of blame for Bloody Sunday is the British army and their abuse of power. The soldiers' actions on that day drove an impenetrable wedge through an already strained relationship between the Nationalists and the security forces, reinforcing the British dominance and oppression over the Catholic community of Northern Ireland. In this exchange with Dido, McGuinness is approaching this volatile relationship lightly, and by

²⁰⁵ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, p.11.

²⁰⁶ For more detailed information on this refer to Raymond Murray, *State of Violence*, (Cork: Mercier Press, 1998).

²⁰⁷ To read David Cameron's statement on the Saville report go to <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10322295>

using Dido's campiness and sexual innuendos he is poking fun and challenging the audience's congenial perceptions and expectations of them. He is also humanizing the soldiers, turning them into objects of sexual desire as opposed to symbols of subjugation and fear, which is an act of queering the stereotype. Also, and perhaps more indicative of McGuinness's writing as a gay man, is how the gay community view soldiers and military as emblems of supreme masculinity. Soldiers and their uniforms have been fetishized and held up as icons of sexual desire and queer men's fantasy, so how much of this account is Dido's invention and how much of it is true is of little importance, the fact being that McGuinness is using Dido's queerness to expose a side to the British army that the audience would never have contemplated otherwise. By resisting the route of predictability and by adding sexual innuendo to Dido's interaction with the military, McGuinness lacerates the audience's complacency within this well-trodden political arena. Following on from this, Greta's ironic response of *'that should be difficult'* returns the audience to a more familiar footing, where their inherent suspicions and *troops out* attitude is reinstated. McGuinness continues to build on this moment, by having Dido declare *'when the day of withdrawal comes'*. He is placing Dido once again in a position of power, declaring to his audience both in the graveyard and in the theatre that British occupation will come to an end and that he will have played a part in bringing it about. McGuinness is deliberately playing on the word *'withdrawal'*: loaded with its sexual connotations it lightens the moment, it also conjures up sex and its valid currency in war zones and military occupied communities. Another significant strand to the exchange is Dido's wish to have a commemorative blue plaque placed over his balls. I believe that by raising the idea of commemoration McGuinness is recognising Ireland's past freedom fighters, and in particular the homosexual Nationalists Roger Casement and Pádraig Pearse. Casement's homosexuality was used by the British government to discredit him amongst the Nationalist supporters and to prevent the Catholic Church from giving him any recognition and support. Pádraig Pearse's homosexuality has never been fully confirmed, but the poetry that he wrote is laden with same sex love and homoerotic imagery.²⁰⁸ Roger Casement's position as a national hero was destroyed due to his homosexuality, and Irish Nationalists have chosen to overlook suggestions of Pearse's same sex attractions.

McGuinness's delivery of Dido is all the more compelling when we consider that in 1987 homosexuality had only been decriminalised in Northern Ireland five years earlier, and it was still a criminal offence in Southern Ireland.²⁰⁹ Unlike his previous plays, McGuinness does not ease his gay character Dido into the script, he has Dido explode onto the stage and grab the audience's attention from the very moment he appears. Throughout the play the spotlight on Dido remains undiluted and his sexuality is unambiguous, with him talking confidently and unapologetically about his attraction to other men. This is significant in Northern Irish theatre, as this was the first time a playwright had written a play about

²⁰⁸ For a more comprehensive insight into both Casement and Pearse see: <http://www.universityobserver.ie/comment/forgotten-voices-of-1916-remembering-the-gay-leaders-of-the-rising/>

²⁰⁹ Same-sex sexual activity was decriminalised in the Irish Republic in 1993. This was the result of a campaign by [Senator David Norris](#) and the [Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform](#) which led to a ruling in 1988 that Irish laws prohibiting male homosexual activities were in contravention of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#).

Northern Ireland and placed such an openly gay character in the central role. The shift from McGuinness's depiction of Pyper as a gay man in *Observe the Sons* is quite a momentous one. A short time after Dido enters we are introduced to Hark, Dido's love interest. McGuinness makes it apparent from the very second Hark appears that Dido is in love with him.

DIDO: I got you something to eat in case you were hungry. A few sandwiches. I hope you don't mind.²¹⁰

Not only has McGuinness put on stage an audacious gay man, unapologetic in his sexual pursuit of other men, but within minutes he delivers on stage a "love interest" for Dido to pursue. Already a whole new dramatic terrain has opened up, which McGuinness continues to push further. In response to Dido looking after him McGuinness has Hark reject his offerings.

HARK: You are known as a queer in this town. I do not like being seen with queers. I do not like queers. I do not like you. Fuck off.²¹¹

Hark's words are deliberately harsh, intending to wound Dido and annihilate any bonds between them. Hark's reaction to Dido would have been familiar to the Irish audience at this time and indeed may even have been upheld as that of a natural heterosexual male. By creating this toxic dynamic between the gay Dido and his straight, unattainable love interest, McGuinness is exposing a crippling affliction of the deviant and at the same time is confronting not just Hark's disdain of the queer but also that of his audience. However, it is not McGuinness's intention for Dido to be portrayed as a languid love struck victim; Hark exits, and Dido, completely unfazed, says to the others '*I still say there's hope*'. This sharp riposte to Hark's brutal rejection successfully deflects any suggestion of Dido being passive or victimized. By adding this humorous rebuff McGuinness places Dido in control. Interestingly David Cregan states that in McGuinness's plays:

More often than not, the conflict of the homosexual character is internal rather than simply external, disrupting a victim-like mentality that can oftentimes be representative of the narrative of marginalized identity.²¹²

By constructing the character of Dido, McGuinness has placed on the Irish stage a neoteric gay man who, although burdened with all-too-common strands of the stereotypical self-destruction, a familiar trope of queer characterisation, can and will not only stand up for himself, forging his own path, he will fight back with fortitude. McGuinness says that:

Dido is a classic nineteen eighties queen who goes for the man who doesn't want him because he has that element of self-punishment. But he grows out of that in the

²¹⁰ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, p.13.

²¹¹ *ibid*, p.13.

²¹² David Cregan, 'Coming Out: McGuinness's Dramaturgy and Queer Resistance'. *Irish University Review*, Vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 47, JSTOR, (www.jstor.org/stable/20720431), 2010.

course of the play and he grows in confidence himself and he realises he's worth more.²¹³

McGuinness's presentation of Dido as a stereotypical gay man is an intentional construct that enables him to draw his audience into what they recognise as familiar tropes of queer or non-conformist identities. Dido with his witticisms and campiness brings colour and diversity to the stage, and at crucial moments delivers much-needed light relief to what is a catatonic situation for the graveyard residents. McGuinness wants more from his gay character, he capitalises on Dido's stereotypical traits to build identification with his audience. As the play progresses Hark's abuse of Dido escalates. In the second scene of the play Dido returns to the graveyard and asks Hark 'Why did you insult me today?' Hark is unapologetic in his response: 'Because you deserved it', he replies, thus reinforcing McGuinness's view of Dido being self-punishing. Hark's repudiation of Dido takes on a darker, menacing tone as he takes on the role of interrogator, perhaps re-enacting a past experience at the hands of the security forces.

HARK: Have you ever been picked up, Dido? Picked up by the army or police? Will I pick you up? Will I show you how to pick someone up? **(Hark touches Dido on the face).**²¹⁴

McGuinness is playing with the ambiguity of the phrase '*Picked up*'. Hark starts using the phrase in terms of the security forces, a term that is locked into the political psyche of the time, and one that the audience would have been only too familiar with. Hark's tone shifts to that of seduction, where he uses the phrase '*picked up*' playing on the phrase's ambiguity with a casual sexual encounter, such encounters as we may suppose Dido, an openly gay man, would have partaken in. He then '*kisses Dido*', giving Dido what he wants. However, Hark's seduction quickly takes on a darker turn.

HARK: Does it turn you on? Answer to your wildest dreams? Me, Dido. **(Hark caresses Dido's face again.)** Answer me. Tell me the truth. Tell me who you are involved with. Give me names, Harkin. Give me addresses. Just names and addresses. That's all we're looking for. You can walk out of here if you just give me one name and address.²¹⁵

What begins as a seduction morphs into Hark re-enacting a past trauma at the hands of the security forces, which gives us a rare insight into his back story, but also exposes the damage that has been inflicted upon him. Could Hark have been picked up by security forces and interrogated over his own homosexual indiscretions? Jessica Toops writes about the harassment many gay people endured at the hands of the security forces. In her account of gay men and lesbians during the Troubles, she says that:

²¹³ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin, 11/06/2018.

²¹⁴ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, p.19.

²¹⁵ *ibid*, p314.

The RUC sent a clear message to gay men and lesbians of Northern Ireland: they knew who was gay, and they could use that information to harass and possibly arrest these people if they felt the need. The threat was always looming.²¹⁶

McGuinness says about Hark 'he is deeply buried in his closet and damaged by his own heterosexuality'.²¹⁷ In his construction of Hark as a closeted homosexual buried in his own denial McGuinness is exposing the toxicity and damage that is generated from the repression of one's own natural feelings. The toxicity of Hark's conspicuous heterosexuality is his need to function performatively as a stereotypical male within the Derry culture of the time, therefore taking up arms and joining the paramilitaries. The damage of his own heterosexuality is also his own denial and rejection of his same sex attraction which has created this inner tension and struggle, and which manifests in his open repulsion and abuse of Dido. Michael Cadden comments on McGuinness's gay characters.

Frank McGuinness, Ireland's best-known gay playwright, complicates the usual representation of "the Troubles" as a spectacle of fighting men and suffering women by homosexualizing his male protagonists. At the center of each play stands a gay man grappling with multiple identities formed in relation to Northern Irish political realities.²¹⁸

Cadden's words are particularly fitting to Hark, for he is one of McGuinness's gay men 'grappling with multiple identities'. By subjugating his sexuality he now takes on a performative hetero cis role, in which his masculine traits are contorted to the extreme at times, as is shown when he takes on the role of interrogator. However, Hark's line of interrogation digs deeper into his own conflicting psyche, exposing his inner sexual struggle and fears.

HARK: Tell me what's between your legs. Is there anything between your legs? Is there one between your legs? **(Hark grabs Dido's groin).**²¹⁹

By having Hark grab Dido's groin McGuinness is going straight to the point of Hark's unrest, male genitalia, for this is at the core of sexuality and masculinity, both of which Hark is in constant battle with.

HARK: What happens when cocks unite? Disease, boy, disease.²²⁰

What is happening in this exchange with Hark and Dido is both simple and complex. On the surface the audience are witnessing Hark's physical and verbal abuse of Dido and may simply pass it over as Hark's repulsion and rejection of Dido's sexual advances. However, I believe the abuse stems from a darker inarticulate place, it is a manifestation of Hark's

²¹⁶ Toops, 'Living Lives of Quiet Desperation', p.57.

²¹⁷ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin, 11/06/2018.

²¹⁸ Michael Cadden, 'Homosexualizing the Troubles. A short Query into two Derry Plays by Frank McGuinness', *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, Vol. 68 (Winter 2007), p.560.

²¹⁹ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, p.19.

²²⁰ *ibid*, p.19.

internalised homophobia and his terror of AIDS. McGuinness's placing of the word 'disease' alongside 'cocks unite' is an intentional act and is used to draw attention to the AIDS panic and epidemic which had already ravaged and decimated the gay community, with over thirty-eight thousand cases of AIDS reported to the World Health Organisation. In nineteen eighty-six, when McGuinness wrote *Carthaginians*, the AIDS epidemic was at its worst and had cast a heavy cloud over gay male culture, besmirching it with the stigma of contamination. AIDS in the nineteen-eighties was often referred to in the mainstream media as '*the gay plague*'. It didn't seem possible for dominant culture to detach gay men from the disease that was AIDS. The words of writer and academic Simon Watney written in 1987 illustrate this point clearly.

How do non-gays perceive homosexuality at a time when the word "gay" is already at least half-way to becoming a euphemism for "deadly", and the older metaphors of sickness and contagion have been all but replaced by a discourse of fatality, with AIDS widely regarded as a syndrome of voluntary, deserved collective self-annihilation – the long awaited and oft prophesised spectacle of the degenerates finally burning themselves out.²²¹

These words, written at the time when an AIDS diagnosis was considered a death sentence, illustrate the public perception of the nineteen-eighties around gay culture. This AIDS panic, which was perpetuated by both governments and main stream media, is the undercurrent behind Hark's lashing out and brutalisation of Dido: his actions are fuelled by sheer terror. McGuinness explains this further when he says.

Hark, so unmanned by his own heterosexuality, will be terrified by Dido's vigour and indeed virility, is petrified of the illness and of cocks erect, let alone touching, hence the scale of his violent reaction to Dido's infatuation.²²²

The assault from Hark elicits an impetuous conversion in Dido's attitude, expelling any suggestion of the underdog, with him taking a stand and turning the tables on Hark.

DIDO: I know how to use what's between my legs because it's mine. Can you say the same? Some people here fuck with a bullet and the rest fuck with a Bible, but I belong to neither, so I'm off to where I belong. My bed. On my own. My sweet own.

Helen Lojek views Dido in a different light when she says:

It is possible to argue, as critics have argued of figures in Brendan Behan's 'The Hostage', that Dido is a stereotype, and that his presence on the Irish stage, however entertaining, does nothing to expand understanding of gay men. Since Hark, the immediate object of Dido's affections, returns to Sarah, leaving Dido alone, the play does to some degree reinforce the image of gays as perpetual outsiders whose

²²¹ Watney, *Policing Desire*, p.21.

²²² Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin, 11/06/2018.

unstable personal relationships lead to multiple sex partners. On the other hand, it is Dido, the “spectator” other we so often envy and wish to emulate, who energizes the play and who both speaks for and chooses life, rejecting any connections between gay sexuality and death.²²³

What saves Dido from becoming a victim is the fact that McGuinness did not leave Dido to flounder in the wake of Hark’s callous rejection of him. Instead, his reaction dispels any sense that he has been damaged or broken by Hark’s brutality, and there is a clear sense that the experience has strengthened him and allowed him to see his own individuality and his strength in being himself. The emphasis on him being his own person and going home to his own bed shows a new-found assertiveness. But this is merely the start of Dido taking a stand. It is from this point on that we see McGuinness dispense with the self-punishing gay trope that is so present in queer representations of the period. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford reinforces this point when she says:

His Dido, although rejected by Hark, a homophobic former member of the IRA, is not a suicidal victim but a resourceful and creative gay man who openly defies the Catholic proscription of homosexuality, as McGuinness has done through his own outspoken work.²²⁴

Later in Scene Three Dido returns to the graveyard. He enters wearing a football kit, a stark contrast to the clothes he was wearing when he first made his entrance. The wearing of the football kit can be interpreted in more than one way: it is a signifier of Dido’s taking a stance and asserting his masculinity, the football kit is semiotic of membership in male heterosexuality. Dido’s previous exchange with Hark had left him humiliated, bruised and degraded, now he has made a purposeful return in his heterosexual uniform, invigorated to make his stand to requite Hark’s callous renunciation of him. McGuinness has Dido enter as Hark is in mid-speech to the others.

HARK: Let us wander forth into the wilderness of bigotry and let us spread more bigotry. Let us create a nation fit for assholes to live in. For as assholes are we known to each other and like the asshole let us forever remain apart.

(Dido enters, pushing the pram, dressed in football gear.)

Hello Dido. What kept you? Have they changed the visiting hours? Were you strip-searched? Did you enjoy that? Have you brought me something nice? Books, comics, clothes change of socks, shirts, underwear? Did you bring me underwear, Dido? Why have you brought me nothing, Dido? Do you not love me? Am I a shite? Am I a fucker? Am I sorry?²²⁵

²²³ Lojek, *Contexts for Frank McGuinness’s Drama*, p.179.

²²⁴ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Ireland’s Others. Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*, (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2001), p.120.

²²⁵ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, p.27.

There are several ways in which to read this moment in the play. Firstly, I would say that McGuinness has consciously orchestrated Dido's entrance to coincide with Hark's reference to ass-holes, purposely drawing the audience's attention to what is at the very core of homophobia, a heterosexual aversion to anal sex.

Due to the events of the period this aversion was escalated. The nineteen eighties saw a climate in which there was a transposing of societal acceptance in matters concerning LGBT rights. In Northern Ireland, the DUP led by the Rev Ian Paisley launched their *Save Ulster from Sodomy* campaign, which ran from 1977 to the early nineteen eighties.²²⁶ In nineteen eighty-eight the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher introduced Section 28,²²⁷ an amendment to the Local Government Act of 1986 which banned local authorities and schools from promoting homosexuality. Anal sex was prominently cited in all mainstream publicity as the highest risk activity to cause HIV contamination, further demonizing it amongst the straight "civilised" society who were already distancing themselves from seedier queer sexualisation. Secondly, I believe that by having Dido enter the stage at this precise point McGuinness is utilizing the moment to its full effect, provoking a response from the audience, adding a touch of light-hearted humour. By making the audience laugh at Dido, McGuinness is manipulating them, drawing them into the larger circle of Hark's abuse. Their laughter inadvertently makes them complicit in Dido's humiliation. Hark, free of any regret at his earlier treatment of Dido, persists in belittling him, rubbing salt into the wound as he asks him '*Do you not love me?*' And his final question '*Am I sorry?*' tells us clearly that he is intent on further destruction of him. However, Dido appears to be unmoved by any of this, he stands still and producing a string of sausages from behind his back, he asks Hark to choose one. This moment builds on the previous scene. McGuinness is showing us Dido's inner strength, his fighting spirit, the spirit of gay men who battle forward and refuse to be victims. It is at the precise moment that we see Dido begin to grow in stature.

DIDO: Pick a sausage, any sausage.

Dido is holding court, he has turned the tables and is in control, he is the one calling the shots. Hark obliges and points to a sausage, Dido proceeds to open Hark's shirt and smears the sausage meat into Hark's naked chest.

DIDO: Is this your sausage? Then have it.

²²⁶ The DUP, the largest political party in Northern Ireland led by the Rev Ian Paisley, launched a campaign from the late nineteen seventies to the early eighties called *Save Ulster from Sodomy* to challenge Jeffrey Dudgeon's attempts to have homosexuality decriminalised in Northern Ireland. The *Save Ulster from Sodomy* campaign was given a further boost when decriminalization was extended to Scotland in 1980. The campaign was based on his belief that the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin, which should therefore not be legally acceptable in a state founded on Christian principles.

²²⁷ For more information on Section 28 look at *Pink News*: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/24/what-was-section-28-homophobic-legislation-30-years-thatcher/> Last visited 20/10/2019

(Dido flattens the sausage into Hark's face, rubbing the meat in vigorously. Silence. Sarah laughs.)²²⁸

This is a pivotal moment in the play. It is also a turning point for Dido, it is the point where he openly rejects Hark and reasserts his own dignity. The use of a sausage, with its phallic overtones, is an intentional act on the part of McGuinness as it symbolises Dido's rejection of Hark sexually and romantically. It is pivotal to the play, as I believe the action of smearing the sausage meat into Hark's chest and face symbolises not only Dido's rejection of Hark but also McGuinness's contempt for the toxic masculinity that Hark has so brazenly exhibited.

McGuinness also mocks the social construction of masculinity through the comic destruction of the phallus. As a cigar it is smoked, as a banana it is devoured, as a sausage it is pulped, as a plastic water pistol it is chewed up.²²⁹

McGuinness's construct of Dido in *Carthaginians* is his attempt to nullify the 'social construction of masculinity' that Cullingford refers to. It is not McGuinness's intention to portray Dido as a stereotypical, homosexual victim: this is the Dido that McGuinness wants his audience to see as an example of a gay man, a man who will stand and fight back and be all the stronger for it.

McGuinness not only innovates as a dramatist however, but also puts drama and the figure of the (queer) dramatist on the stage. In turn, this allows for a conscious, meta-dramatic reflection on the whole question as to how to stage queerness and non-normative identities. From the moment when Dido strikes back at Hark we see a shift in the character. It is at this point he becomes empowered and takes it upon himself to write the play *The Burning Balacava* and take on the persona of Fionnula McGonigle,²³⁰ a self-construction of an eccentric bohemian female playwright. In McGuinness giving Dido the role of Fionnula McGonigle he is giving him an alter ego in which to really explode onto the stage. Wearing **a black miniskirt, black tights, high heels and beret** McGuinness puts Dido in drag. Dido asks the others '*Do you like the new me?*'

Fionnula McGonigle has authored a new play entitled *The Burning Balacava*, which is also directed by Fionnula McGonigle using the graveyard inhabitants as actors. An interesting insight into McGuinness's inclusion of Dido's play-within-the-play is that *Carthaginians* was originally commissioned by Field Day Theatre Company, although McGuinness later withdrew the play from Field Day, and co-founder Stephen Rea evidently provided the inspiration for McGuinness's parodic play-within-the-play when he told McGuinness that he was very, very tired of balacava drama.²³¹

²²⁸ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, p.27.

²²⁹ Cullingford, *Ireland's Others*, p.125.

²³⁰ The name Fionnula McGonigle is McGuinness poking fun at himself, as the initials are the same as his own.

²³¹ Michael Cadden 'Homosexualizing the Troubles': A short Query into Two Derry Airs by Frank McGuinness', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, Vol. 68 no-1-2 (2007), p.566.

Dido as Fionnula casts all the women in men's roles and the men in women's roles; it is a transgendered play-within-a-play. Through his transgendered alter ego Dido has taken control and is using his new-found authority to manipulate the other characters to bring about disruption and change. By having the characters take on gendered roles different to their own he is putting them in the shoes of other people, forcing them to look at life from a different "queered" perspective. Niall Rea in his PhD thesis on queer performance in Northern Ireland says that:

The semiotic dance of drag in 'The Burning Balaclava,' while hilarious to watch, is deadly serious. The heteronormative masculinities undermined (from both sides of the community) become signifiers in the hopeful process of finding different ways of living together.²³²

I would also like to add that Dido's motivation is not purely in finding different ways of living together posited by Rea; I believe that in the casting of Hark in the role of a woman, the heroine Mrs Doherty, Dido is carrying out his final act of revenge. By casting Hark as the matriarchal Mrs Doherty he places Hark centre stage, deliberately challenging Hark's fragile masculinity. This is all the more intensified when Hark asks Dido why he has cast him as Mrs Doherty: Dido replies '*You have the looks for it*', thus reinforcing his intentions to destabilise Hark and to play provocateur to Hark's toxic masculinity.

Eamonn Jordan states that the *Burning Balaclava* is carnivalistic in its delivery, and the purpose of carnival is used in order that the characters may be set free of the memories that haunt them.²³³ Michael D. Bristol's description of Carnival is useful in exploring this idea further.

Theatre and carnival are neighbouring institutions with similar logics of representation and similar orientations to social reality as a whole. In both settings, the language of the day to day productive life and the interaction among disparate linguistic communities come into familiar contact with the "ennobled language" of official ideology, official religion, and high literature. The genres of drama become carnivalised.²³⁴

The Burning Balaclava is viewed by many as a parodic staging of the canon of Irish Dramas concerning the Troubles, in particular Sean O'Casey's work, with comparisons made between Doreen O'Doherty and O'Casey's Juno, with many of the lines that Mrs O'Doherty speaks being misquotes from his play *Juno and the Paycock*. It is also a parodic deconstruction of Irish archetypal genders, with the females cast as male and vice versa. By orchestrating this Dido is unsettling fixed canonical identities, which suggests a possible approach in the rewriting of a script in which they are all entrapped.

²³² Rea, 'Queer Identity in Performance in Northern Ireland', p.41.

²³³ Eamonn Jordan, *Feast of Famine. The Plays of Frank McGuinness*. (Berne: Peter Lang, European Academic Publishers, 1997), p.82.

²³⁴ Michael D. Bristol, 'Carnival and the Institution of Theatre in Elizabethan England', *ELH* Vol 50, No4 Winter, (1983), p.637.

Moving on from these interpretations, my own interest in *The Burning BalACLava* is centred on how McGuinness has used this moment in *Carthaginians* to empower his queer protagonist Dido, and how in his self-defined role as the transgendered playwright Fionnula McGonigle, Dido helps the graveyard residents move on. *The Burning BalACLava* is a cardinal moment in the play and for Dido. It marks a point of no return for the graveyard residents in which through Dido they are united in coming together to perform Fionnula McGonigle's play, and although they later declare the play as *shite*, their cross-gendered enactment of a farcical "Troubles play" is a cathartic experience, giving them the opportunity to stand in someone else's shoes and to look at the political situation from a fresh, albeit farcical perspective.

Dido's self-promotion within the graveyard group shows a progressive departure from his earlier state of stereotypical self-punishing gay man to a man of vision and wisdom who has risen to a celestial position. By Dido providing the others with the opportunity to act out the *Burning BalACLava* he has supplied a platform that enables them to explore their fixed Nationalistic identities as well as gender and sexual identities. By partaking in this process, the graveyard residents have shifted and been able to shed the psychological and emotional shackles that kept them in their individual imprisonments. By the end of the play each of them is able to recount their own personal journeys that had brought them to the graveyard, and McGuinness's final touch in which to unleash the years of unresolved grief is to have the names, addresses and ages of the dead from Bloody Sunday read out. The ritualization is significant in that it acknowledges the victims, placing each of them in the audiences' consciousness and grounding them in reality. It is an interesting moment in that just before Paul reads out the names of the dead, McGuinness pulls the spot light away from Dido, placing him in the background. Moments before the ritual, the group read lines from the poem "*The Listeners*" by Walter de la Mare. They all contribute, but Dido has only one line. After the reading of the poem there is an interesting exchange between the male characters around the poem which leads to Hark saying '*You would have only been a kid, Dido,*' to which Dido replies '*There were no kids after Bloody Sunday*'. This line of Dido's is potent, it is at the core of McGuinness's relationship with Bloody Sunday, a clear indication of the status McGuinness has given to his gay protagonist. Therefore, it seems at odds with Dido's newly elevated status that he is not the one to read out the names of the dead.

Paul, an ex IRA man who is building a pyramid from discarded rubbish, is the one that McGuinness has selected for the role. He says early on in the play '*I am building a pyramid, when the dead rise, I'll walk into the pyramid with them*'²³⁵. So, it is perhaps for this reason that he has earned McGuinness's selection. Dido, not having been old enough to fully experience Bloody Sunday, has not earned his place in the reading of the names. After the naming the others speak in turn, assuming the role of a Greek chorus, repeating lines about death and the dead.

HARK: Perpetual light shine upon you. Rest in Peace.

SEPH: Bloody Sunday.

²³⁵ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, p.15.

SARAH: Sunday.

GRETA: Sunday.

SARAH: Sunday.

GRETA: Wash the dead.

PAUL: Sunday.

MAELA: Bury the dead.

SEPH: Sunday.

SARAH: Raise the dead.

HARK: Sunday.

DIDO: Do you see the dead?

GRETA: The dead beside you.

SEPH: Sunday

MAELA: The dead behind you.

PAUL: Sunday.

SARAH: The dead before you.

SEPH: Change.

PAUL: Changed.

GRETA: Forgive the dead.

MAELA: Forgive the dying.

SARAH: Forgive the living.

GRETA: Forgive yourself.

HARK: Forgive yourself.

MAELA: Forgive the earth.

SARAH: Forgive the sun.

GRETA: Forgive the moon.

HARK: Forgive yourself

MAELA: Bury the dead.

GRETA: Raise the dying.

SARAH: Wash the living.

(Light begins to break through the graveyard's standing stones. At first its beam is narrow, golden and strange, like a meeting of the sun and moon. Bird song begins. The light increases in power, illuminating them all. The bird song builds to a crescendo. Looking at each other, they listen in their light.)²³⁶

The symbolism of light and bird song tells us that the residents have broken free, the dead of Bloody Sunday have risen and in doing so have released each of them from their prisons of grief and trauma. The next morning Dido is not amongst them as they sleep. He is awake and alone. His job is complete. While the others lie sleeping, preparing for their newly awakened lives, Dido laments, he says to himself '*What do I believe? I believe it is time to leave Derry.*' Dido's departure has been interpreted in many ways, some seeing it as a positive empowerment of the queer man, others say it highlights his separateness, reinforcing his 'otherness' and his solitary, isolated existence. I agree with Helen Lojek's interpretation. She says,

Dido has by a large extent been absorbed in what is the domestic community of (admittedly outsider) watchers in the cemetery. He has not, however, been assimilated by this community, which neither modifies nor tries to modify his behaviour. Moreover, his absorption is temporary, and his real liberation comes not when he is absorbed but when he leaves.²³⁷

By placing Dido outside the group of watchers and having him leave the graveyard at the end of the play McGuinness is positively affirming Dido's queerness, he has avoided compromising his central queer character's positioning in the play and raises his status alongside perceptions of queerness, not only within the context of the play but within his audience.

When mapping the journey of queer identity in Northern Irish theatre there is a temptation to seek out a progressive linear narrative where one playwright's queer constructions pave the way for the next and where, with each new queer identity being staged, a stronger, perhaps bolder identity is constructed, each time raising greater awareness for LGBT+ issues. This narrative is certainly to a great extent evident in my study, and in many ways it

²³⁶ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, pp.68-69.

²³⁷ Lojek, *Contexts For Frank McGuinness's Drama*, p.183.

maps on to the growing acceptance of queer rights in the period in question. But what I would also like to emphasise is the motivation behind each playwright's placing of queer identities in their plays. Looking back to how Friel in his writing of *The Gentle Island* used his non-heterosexual characters to dislodge the traditional patriarchal structures and to offer up an alternative pathway, the queer identities in his play were used as a device to explore the whole sense of human sexuality, with no intention of offering up a clearer understanding of homosexuality. A contemporary reading of Friel's reliance on stereotypical tropes as queer signifiers is indicative of the entrenched societal homophobia of the time. What is interesting is that the homophobia of the nineteen seventies is still a constant presence in nineteen eighties Ireland, north and south, when Martin Lynch wrote *Crack Up*. Although Lynch's representation of a gay man in the form of Nipper still falls into the stereotypical trappings, his intention of raising awareness of the LGBT struggle is what sets his play apart from *The Gentle Island*, it shows progression and a genuine desire to enlighten and to normalise non-heterosexual identities.

What has emerged from my study is that the playwrights who produced the strongest and most challenging queer identities are those who are themselves gay. *Ecce Homo*, written by Joe Reid and devised by gay members of BCT, is a clear example of a play that unapologetically dramatizes the LGBT struggle in Northern Ireland and directly places the blame for perpetuating homophobia in the hands of the Catholic church. Its agenda in wanting to eradicate homophobia in Northern Ireland is a clear one. When McGuinness comes to write *Carthaginians* his construction of a queer character in Dido is not motivated by a need to raise awareness of LGBT issues or to challenge societal homophobia. In fact, he appears to have moved beyond that. His construction and his placing of Dido in the play is confident and playful. In seeking out a progressive evolution of the queer identity on the Northern Irish stage there is somewhat of a leap from Emmanuel and Simon in *Ecce Homo* and Nipper in *Crack Up* to this self-assured, unapologetic construction of Dido. It seems that there is a missing stage of queer evolution. So, where is it? During my research, I uncovered an unproduced early play that McGuinness wrote several years before *Carthaginians*. Upon closer inspection what became apparent is the queer construction of Dido that McGuinness shows us in *Carthaginians* emerged over several years, with its foundations rooted in this unproduced abandoned play. McGuinness's first attempt at dramatizing a fully formed queer identity in a play was a naturalistic depiction of closeted gay men living in Northern Ireland in the nineteen eighties. In this abandoned play script McGuinness sets out to dramatize the struggle of being gay at a time when homosexuality was an anathema within straight society. It is interesting to look at this early play of McGuinness' from the viewpoint that it was a first attempt for him to expel his need to dramatize the gay struggle, and in his writing of the play he was able to move beyond this need and create a queer character who has arrived at a place of self-acceptance, who is neither seeking societal approval nor playing the role of victim.

Friends: The Abandoned Play

In 1983 McGuinness wrote a play entitled *Friends*. McGuinness confirms that this early play *Friends* was a prototype for *Carthaginians*. He says:

There was a prototype for the play called 'Friends', which was submitted to various theatres after 'The Factory Girls'. It went to the Abbey, it went to the Lyric and it went to the Royal Court, and I could get no interest in it which is shattering really after 'The Factory Girls' being such a big success.²³⁸

As with *Carthaginians* he sets the play in Derry and draws forth a story around the friendship of five young men. Act One, entitled Youth, takes place in the nineteen seventies, set in waste ground a short time after Bloody Sunday. Act Two, entitled Age, takes place a decade later in the nineteen eighties, set in a living room, showing how the friendships have developed and shifted through a series of life changing events. Despite McGuinness's efforts and his tireless redrafting of the script the play was never produced. McGuinness blames the play's failure on the overt gay relationship between two of the male characters.

I hadn't really twigged that possibly a lot of these theatres with all their lip service to liberalism and for all their lip service to sexual equality were in fact quite homophobic. And even the gay people within those organisations couldn't fight every corner going for them.²³⁹

This unproduced play script *Friends* is particularly significant to my study as it is the foundation for *Carthaginians*. It is McGuinness's first attempt to construct fully formed gay characters and to present them on stage as men capable of falling in love and holding together a stable relationship, things that had never been done before in Irish theatre. Comparing the drafts of *Friends* with the published *Carthaginians* adds to the historical and developmental narrative we can tell about McGuinness's progressive coding of queerness.

What I find particularly interesting in *Friends* is that unlike McGuinness's later plays, the characters' homosexuality is significant in that it forms part of the narrative. In *Friends* the closeted gay relationship is pivotal to the play's story, it is used to create division and tension within the friendship group. Unlike his other plays, McGuinness uses the complexities of this gay, unconventional love affair as a plot device, which when revealed in the final section of the play, causes the friendships to rupture and irreversibly change. Both *Friends* and *Carthaginians*, although different in story or narrative, share many similarities. Both deal with Bloody Sunday, sexuality and Catholicism, and as Helen Lojek says 'have a strong sense of Derry as a divided society, and of the challenging alternatives confronted by Derry youth'²⁴⁰. In a BBC interview McGuinness said that Bloody Sunday was a day that ended his childhood, he was an undergraduate at University College Dublin and like many people was devastated by the events in Derry on 30 January 1972.²⁴¹

Both plays have gay men as their protagonists. Whereas in *Friends* the gay men, Hark and Dido, are secretive and closeted, in *Carthaginians* Dido is flamboyant and talks openly about his sexuality. McGuinness wrote *Friends* in 1984, and *Carthaginians* four years later in 1988. It is important to state that during these four intervening years a series of significant events

²³⁸ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin, 11/06/2018.

²³⁹ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin, 11/06/2018.

²⁴⁰ Lojek, *Contexts for Frank McGuinness's Drama*, p.248.

²⁴¹ Kaleidoscope: Frank McGuinness Special, BBC Radio 4, 01/05/1987.

took place on both sides of the Irish border that projected gay rights into the mainstream, building momentum and support. Ireland's first Pride festival, known as the Gay Rights Protest March, was held in Dublin in 1983²⁴² with a reported two hundred people taking part; this was to grow significantly in subsequent years. Senator David Norris and the campaign for homosexual reform were successful in 1988, with a ruling that stated the Irish laws prohibiting male homosexual activities were in contravention of the European convention on human rights; this eventually resulted in homosexuality being decriminalised in 1993²⁴³. In Northern Ireland homosexuality was decriminalised in 1982,²⁴⁴ bringing it in line with the rest of the United Kingdom and eventually putting an end to Ian Paisley's Save Ulster from Sodomy campaign, which had been running ferociously for several years to counteract the growth of the Northern Irish Gay Rights Association (NIAGRA). Alongside these events, McGuinness's second published play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* gained great success, receiving prestigious critical acclaim and winning several prominent awards; McGuinness himself was awarded the *Evening Standard* prize for most promising playwright.²⁴⁵ So, with attitudes towards the gay community becoming more tolerant in both the Republic and Northern Ireland, alongside McGuinness's own growing self-confidence both as a gay man and a playwright, this places him on a more solid footing with which to approach his new plays.

Moving on from the aforementioned subject matter and location of both *Friends* and *Carthaginians*, there are other striking comparisons to be explored. McGuinness has used the same character names in both plays: three of the characters in *Friends*, Hark, Seph and Dido, have the same names as three out of the four male characters in *Carthaginians*. Perhaps there is nothing more to it than McGuinness having a liking for these names; however, the connection between the plays is strengthened when we consider that Hark and Dido in *Friends* are the closeted gay lovers and in *Carthaginians* Dido and Hark have had, at some point in the past, a sexual relationship, therefore the naming of these characters becomes more purposeful. My intention in this study is to establish that *Friends* is not only a significant early play of McGuinness's in which he made a bold attempt to dramatize the lives of gay men living in Ireland at a time when their sexuality was rarely acknowledged and was considered ignominious, but it is also a play in which he first explored constructing a strong self-confident gay man, a gay man who does not ask for pity from his audience, who is not a victim and whose sexuality is at the core of who he is. McGuinness included a track by the punk rock Derry band, *The Undertones*,²⁴⁶ in *Friends*; its

²⁴² Una Mullally, 'Three decades of Pride', *The Irish Times*, (22/06/2010), <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/three-decades-of-pride-1.1438646>, Last viewed 26/08/2019.

²⁴³ Seanad Éirean debate- 29/09/1993, *Criminal law (Sexual Offences) Bill, 1993: Second stage*. (<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/seanad/1993-06-29/5/>).

²⁴⁴ <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1982/oct/26/homosexual-offences-northern-ireland>

²⁴⁵ <https://www.westendtheatre.com/11671/awards-data/evening-standard-theatre-awards---most-promising-playwright-winners-1956-to-present/>

²⁴⁶ For more detailed information on 'The Undertones' go to http://theundertones.com/_/Home.html

title is *Beautiful Friend*, and it inspired the title of the play. McGuinness spoke about the band's influence and their connection to the character of Dido.

They were a vital presence burning through the writing and I was listening to them a lot. And I wanted Dido to encapsulate the sheer defiant spirit of that generation and of that place that by rights should go under, Carthage should be destroyed, but Dido will not go under and his Carthage will be destroyed.²⁴⁷

McGuinness's reference to the Undertones provides an insight into what he wanted to communicate to his audience about being a gay man in nineteen eighties Derry. The Undertones were the most successful band to come out of Northern Ireland. Their rawness and un-manicured look added to their appeal. They were the voice of the young people from Derry, a voice that was very seldom heard. They were not advocating machoism or violence, but were expressing teenage angst at a time when civil war was tearing up their home town and making their future look bleak. From McGuinness's statement, we can read that he finds hope and a defiant spirit in the band. He saw them as a way forward and he encapsulates this spirit in *Friends* through his construction of Dido.

A strong example of this is in the first scene of *Friends* when Dido enters and attacks Hark, wrestling him to the ground. He bursts on to the stage and shows the defiant spirit McGuinness speaks about. Alongside Dido's entrance is McGuinness's choice of place for the play. The place sets a definite tone. The first act in *Friends* opens in a waste ground somewhere in Derry: the description in the play script reads **(Debris, a concrete slab, tins, rusted objects. Two long poles, painted green, white and gold.)** Meanwhile *Carthaginians* opens in a graveyard somewhere in Derry, and the description reads: **(A burial ground. The outline of a row of graves. Three plastic benders. A large pyramid should be already near completion)**²⁴⁸. So, in both, the stage is a kind of wasteland, or a "no man's land", an in-between place or space. In creating these two spaces McGuinness's plays are imbued with a sense of desolation that lingers throughout the play. Both *Friends* and *Carthaginians* begin in a space that is outside, a space that is public, where others can come and go and where the characters' vulnerability is heightened, a space that is politically neutral due to the lack of tribal paraphernalia, but interestingly, also reeks of social disorder.

In order to understand the relationship between *Friends* and *Carthaginians* it is essential that I have a closer reading of the two plays, in particular to examine McGuinness's construction of the central gay characters and to compare how these constructions serve each of the plays, and how McGuinness uses the characters' sexuality as a tool to drive the play's drama and also as a means to pass comment on gay experience in the broader society in which he is living at the time.

In *Friends* Hark is the first character to come on stage. Interestingly McGuinness presents this character in isolation, he has him speak his thoughts aloud for five minutes before another character appears. By having this time alone with the character the audience are given an uninterrupted insight into Hark's inner struggle.

²⁴⁷ Frank McGuinness in an interview with the author, Dublin, 11/06/2018.

²⁴⁸ McGuinness, *Carthaginians*, p.4.

HARK: Take an interest in the girls, Johnny. Keep up appearances.²⁴⁹

McGuinness, fully aware of an Irish audience's reaction to a homosexual male character at this time, wastes little time in setting up the play's dramatic tension. Building on this McGuinness brings Dido, Hark's friend and secret lover into the space.

HARK: I'm not back here that often. I hardly see you on your own when I do.

DIDO: I just want something to do. Something physical.

HARK: I can think of plenty of physical things to do without –

DIDO: Go easy, Johnny, for Christ's sake.

(Pause.)

DIDO: You rush things. You rush people. Go easy. Remember where you are. It's not the middle of nowhere. It's home. Eyes and ears everywhere. Cool it a bit.

(Pause.)

DIDO: I'm sorry.

HARK: Ok.

DIDO: I'm worried.

HARK: Have I been that obvious?

DIDO: No, not that.

HARK: Then what?

DIDO: How much longer do you have to study in Dublin?

HARK: Two more years, this is my fourth year.

DIDO: Will you come back to Derry to practise?

HARK: You know I won't, Dido.

DIDO: What about me?

²⁴⁹ Frank McGuinness, *Friends*, unpublished script, Frank McGuinness Archive at UCD, Dublin.

HARK: I want you to leave Derry. I'd like you to leave now.²⁵⁰

McGuinness's dialogue is expositional, it gives us back story, but more importantly with Dido's cautionary words 'eyes and ears are everywhere' creates jeopardy. An Irish audience at this time would be only too aware of what was at stake for the lovers if their relationship were to be discovered. From this brief introduction, it is clear that McGuinness regards the characters' homosexuality as a threat to their well-being, something they need to guard and keep secret. In contrast Dido's entrance in *Carthaginians* is celebratory of his unconventionality, McGuinness is completely upfront about Dido's sexuality, he has constructed a gay character whose sexuality is merely one aspect of his identity. Dido in *Carthaginians* speaks openly about his homosexuality.

The Dido that McGuinness created in *Friends* is not stereotypical at all. McGuinness has attributed to him qualities we have come to associate with heterosexual masculinities, for example his love of sports, the clothes that he wears, being at the centre of the male friendship group, challenging them throughout, he has an ability to fight and to stand up for himself, all attributes akin to straight males. Bearing in mind that McGuinness wrote *Friends* prior to his successes with *Observe the Sons* and *Innocence*, and although Brian Friel's play *The Gentle Island* 1971 and Thomas Kilroy's *The Death and Resurrection of Mr Roache* in 1968 were plays that contained gay characters, no other playwright had put on the Irish stage such fully formed gay characters who are not victimised by their queerness.

During my time spent researching Frank McGuinness's archives at University College Dublin, I had the opportunity to study the multiple drafts of *Friends*. For the purpose of this thesis I concentrate on only three of the drafts, Draft 1, Draft 4 and the final draft, Draft 6. My reason for focusing on these three drafts is that it is here that the most significant shifts take place in McGuinness's construction of this early play. I have included my close analysis of these three drafts in the Appendix. The unproduced and unpublished play scripts of *Friends* play a significant part in the journey of queer identity on the Northern Irish stage as my analysis shows how McGuinness's focus shifts from dramatizing a story of male friendship in Draft 1 to slowly placing greater emphasis on the two gay characters. In each draft we see the gay relationship evolving into the central focus of the play; alongside this McGuinness's construction of the two gay characters grows in confidence. In these drafts of *Friends* we find the missing stages of the queer identity on the Northern Irish stage.

I will explain briefly the main points of each of the three drafts, discuss the shift McGuinness made in each of the drafts and my conclusions as to why these shifts occurred. In the first draft of *Friends* McGuinness was writing a play focussed on the IRA's presence in Derry; the politics and Troubles of the time were at the forefront, with the gay love affair between Hark and Dido pushed into the back ground. McGuinness changes his focus by Draft 4, Hark and Dido's relationship is more prominent and provides the dramatic arch for the story, with McGuinness abandoning scenes around an IRA funeral. I believe this happens as McGuinness is more confident about his two gay characters, and on a personal level has a desire to promote a positive story about queer love. In Draft 1 there is a subplot

²⁵⁰ McGuinness, *Friends*.

regarding Master French, the boys' old school teacher and the father of Terry, one of the friends. The subplot strongly suggests that Master French was gay and had sexual relations with Hark. McGuinness loses this subplot after Draft 1 and I would suggest his reason for this is due to the fact that such a story would strengthen negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality, as at this time many made comparisons between homosexuality and paedophilia, once again showing that McGuinness's motivation was to present gay men in a positive light. In Draft 1 there were two female characters; McGuinness loses these two women in subsequent drafts, which creates a stronger focus on male relationships, in particular the complexities surrounding homosociality and homophobia. The final significant shift in the drafts is the relationship that McGuinness creates between Terry and Hark. Draft 1 ends with Terry, although initially resistant to the revelation of Hark and Dido's relationship, being somewhat supportive, giving a strong sense that the friendship will continue. By Draft 6 McGuinness has made a significant shift, having Terry express his disgust at the relationship and being overtly homophobic to both Hark and Dido. Draft 6 ends with a clear indication that the friendship is over with little hope of any reconciliation. I believe McGuinness chose this ending as it was a more realistic outcome that reflected societal attitudes at this time; it also creates greater sympathy for Hark and Dido, illustrating the harshness and the obstacles they face in order to be their authentic selves. Despite the negativity around the ending of the friendship the play has a positive ending overall, with Hark and Dido's relationship remaining strong, and their decision to leave Derry and set up a new life together in Dublin. By Draft 6 McGuinness has pushed the queer identity of the two main characters to the forefront of his play by making them more vocal about their feelings for each other and also adding a lot more physical contact between them.

If he had not written *Friends* McGuinness's construction of Dido in *Carthaginians* would not have been so forthright and confident around his sexuality. By writing *Friends* McGuinness was able to construct two gay men living in Derry and to dramatize the queer of that time. By the time he came to write *Carthaginians* McGuinness himself had grown both as a playwright and a gay man, and therefore so had his queer construction of Dido. The character of Dido needed to say something different. It is as if the Dido in *Carthaginians* is the older, more confident, Dido from *Friends*.

Carthaginians is the most daring of McGuinness's early plays. I say this not just because of the subject matter and his placing of Dido in the central role, but because it is the play that is very close to home. I believe it is the play he most wanted to write. In this play he combines two subjects that are close to his heart, being a gay man in Northern Ireland/Ireland and the effects of Bloody Sunday on Ireland's people. In his earlier plays he has used codes and signifiers to convey his depiction of queerness. In his first play, he uses his mother and aunts' experiences of working in a Bunrana shirt factory to explore female solidarity, but buries the same sex attractions and love, relying on the audience to read his codes and to unpick the truth for themselves. He has used the experience of young soldiers in the First World War to explore his grief and anger around a whole generation of gay men, his contemporaries, destroyed by the AIDS epidemic. And in *Innocence* he has used history again and explored an iconic gay figure, whose sexuality is already established, to reveal male homosexuality and to graphically depict the promiscuous interactions of an earlier gay culture. But in his writing of *Carthaginians* McGuinness has disregarded his protective armour and by doing so comes out of the closet. He places his play in a graveyard, in Derry,

a city close to where he grew up, a city close to home. And he places an openly gay Derry man who talks unapologetically about his sexual exploits and experiences in the play's central role. Dido's overt queerness and his talk of same sex attraction is a lived experience for the audiences, making it unavoidably real and unsettling. *Friends* is an aborted play, but vital in McGuinness's trajectory and his construction of Dido in *Carthaginians*, it is a missing piece of the puzzle that explains how he came to give voice to the gay identities of the Northern Irish Troubles.

Conclusion

I became interested in exploring queer identities in plays written during the Troubles in Northern Ireland as I grew up during this period and came out as gay. Being a playwright I had developed a strong connection to the theatre, and although there were films and books depicting the gay experience at that time I never found anything similar on stage. When I began writing plays I inadvertently wrote about the queer experience in Northern Ireland, as if somehow trying to fill a void, as if writing for my younger self. Despite my own experience of never having seen a gay northern Irish play, I still somehow expected that they were there, that playwrights had written about gay experience in Northern Ireland. But as I embarked on my study and began to examine the construction of queer identities in plays written during the Troubles it became very clear that there was indeed a lack of queer identities in Northern Irish plays written during this period. As my research progressed the reasons behind this lack of queer representation became clear, from the Unionist government at Stormont's lack of openness to progressive theatre to the pressure that Northern Irish theatres were under to be commercial and at the same time avoid alienating their conservative audiences, to the widespread homophobia that existed in mainstream Northern Irish society at this time.

Each of the plays, by using queer identities, created dramas that were provocative and gave visibility to the existence of non-heteronormative people within society. Although not all the playwrights placed queer identities in their plays as a means to raise awareness of gay experience, none the less this is what occurred.

The journey of my thesis began by looking at Brian Friel's *The Gentle Island*, written in 1971; the gay characters in this play were not clearly stated and were included by Friel as a device to disrupt the heteronormative paradigm of a failing Island community on the brink of extinction. By placing the dysfunctional marriage of Sarah and Philly at the play's core Friel questioned the rigidity of the patriarchal structure upholding Irish society. Friel's motivation when placing non-heteronormative identities in his play was a device to suggest alternatives to the traditional structures in place. The queer identities that Friel placed in his play were constructed in a manner to fit with public perceptions of gay men at that time; these constructions would not be viewed positively today, but Friel was doing something that most Irish playwrights of the time avoided at the time, and this in itself merits praise. *The Gentle Island* was the first play that Frank McGuinness saw in Dublin and it had a long-lasting effect on him: he directed a production of *The Gentle Island* ten years later and perhaps it sparked the conception of his own inclusion of queer identities within his own work.

The two Belfast plays *Crack Up* and *Ecce Homo* were written more than a decade after *The Gentle Island* and deal with queer identity in a much more open way: the queer characters are claimed by the playwrights and the agenda is to raise awareness of the gay experience at this time. *Ecce Homo* in particular went to the heart of the gay experience in Northern Ireland during the nineteen eighties, with clear articulation of the homophobia and prejudice that existed at the time as well as the harassment from security forces. *Ecce Homo* spoke directly to its audience, making them aware of their own complicity in the challenges facing the gay community in Northern Ireland.

Frank McGuinness's play *Carthaginians* demonstrated a different version of queer identity, one that is unapologetic, one that has evolved and is confident in its non-heterosexuality. This is due to McGuinness's involvement as a gay man and Ireland's changing, more liberal attitudes towards gay men. In *Carthaginians*, the queer man is empowered and has not been placed there in order to further gay rights, but is used as a representative of positive and healing change.

The main thing that has emerged for me is how each of the playwrights have recognised the power within queer identity. Each playwright placed the queer identities in their play to provoke, to raise debate and to dislodge or at least shift the status quo in the audience.

As I conclude my discussion on queer identities during the Troubles in Northern Ireland I would like to focus on the changes that have occurred in this troubled and fractured province. As I write this conclusion in January 2020, same sex marriage has just been legalised in Northern Ireland, a momentous moment for Northern Ireland and for gay rights. This sees an end to the DUP's persistent block on equal marriage legislation in the Northern Irish assembly at Stormont, which placed Northern Irish gay men and lesbians on an unequal footing with the rest of the United Kingdom. As discussed throughout this study, the journey of gay rights in Northern Ireland has been consistently hampered by religious opposition, ingrained societal homophobia and reporting from a conservative press and media.

It is safe to say that since its formation in 1921 things have significantly changed in Northern Ireland: at the time of writing this thesis in 2019 and 2020 there appears to be a new appetite for dramatic representations of Northern Ireland's queer past. Recently there have been a number of theatre projects that have resurrected the queer narrative and provided a contemporary platform for the occluded queer voices of the Troubles. As a playwright myself, originally from Belfast, I have found myself returning to Northern Ireland's buried queer past to write plays that place the queer narrative at the centre of the drama, and to re-examine the experience of forging an identity amidst a community that was for the most part broken and shattered, but found a brittle unity in their abhorrence of all things queer. Others have done the same. In March 2019 the Kabosh Theatre Company in Belfast produced the play *A Queer Ceilí at the Marty Forsythe*. The play, written by Dominic Montague, is set in Belfast in 1983 and recounts the story of the first ever National Union of Students Lesbian and Gay conference to be held at Queens University in Belfast. When the members arrived at Queens they were met by one hundred and fifty of the Rev Ian Paisley's Save Ulster from Sodomy campaigners waving placards and blocking their way. The conference delegates were offered an alternative venue by the Nationalist community at

the Martin Forsythe social club situated in the strong Republican stronghold of Turf Lodge. This is a forgotten story of the past, and one that Dominic Montague and the Kabosh Theatre Company felt needed to be told. Montague believes that a lot of queer history is deliberately forgotten. When I talked to him about this he said:

I think we forget them because it's easier not to have a lot of queer history knocking around and running alongside the accepted story of the place. The story of Belfast is a very male, a very heteronormative story, i.e. the dock yards and those stories are important too but there are other stories within them.²⁵¹

A Queer Ceilí at the Marty Forsythe is not the first play by Montague to address Belfast's queer history: his play *Quarter*, performed at the Imagine Belfast festival in 2017, looked back at Belfast's queer venues and the changing landscape of the gay scene in Belfast in recent years. Meanwhile, and also in March 2019, Accidental Theatre company in Belfast hosted a one-man play entitled *DUPED*. This play focussed on the Rev Ian Paisley's anti-gay sentiments, in particular his Save Ulster from Sodomy campaign of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The campaign was inspired by the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Associations (NIGRA) attempts to force the British Government to extend the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 to Northern Ireland and in effect decriminalise homosexuality. Dominic Montague believes that one of the reasons why there is a recent appetite for queer Northern Irish stories from the nineteen eighties is due to the fact that the LGBT+ community in Northern Ireland find themselves in the same state of inequality that existed in the early nineteen eighties.

Northern Ireland is in this weird pocket as in we have dual identity with the UK and Ireland but yet the LGBT residents of Northern Ireland do not have access to rights as either of those two places, it has a sense of living within a cocooned space.²⁵²

But what of Northern Irish theatre post the Good Friday Agreement? Do queer identities have a stronger presence in the plays written after the Troubles? In 2010 Tinderbox Theatre Company produced *God's Own Country* written by Colin Bell. The play was part of Tinderbox's True North series of plays that explored contemporary Northern Ireland. The play's focus is on the homophobia that is common amongst conservative Christians. Bell wrote the play to explore how far (or not) Northern Ireland had come in its treatment of LGBT people. The play is up front about the homophobia that exists within a political party such as the DUP, and addresses societal prejudices against the LGBT community. It goes further than both *Crack Up* and *Ecce Homo* as it engages in a direct conversation about the damage and disrespect for human rights and challenges the homophobia generated towards the LGBT community in contemporary Northern Ireland. One significant and encouraging shift is that Belfast's Annual Outburst Queer Arts Festival is in its thirteenth year. The festival throughout this time has produced plays that are overtly queer, with LGBT+ identities and issues at their forefront. Programmed for the 2019 festival is *Abomination: A DUP Opera*, once again using theatre as a means to challenge the ingrained homophobia that has silenced the queer voice in Northern Ireland for so long. Outburst is a platform for Northern Irish queer artists which attracts audiences from around the world.

²⁵¹ Dominic Montague, in an interview with the author, 06/04/2019.

²⁵² Dominic Montague, in an interview with the author, 06/04/2019.

This progress is of course encouraging, however, I feel that in many ways the homophobia within the conservative Christian movement and the DUP are a constant theme of the plays produced in Northern Ireland. Where are the ordinary day-to-day queer experience plays? This is where my contribution is significant. As a Northern Irish queer man, playwright and researcher I have drawn on autobiographical experience as well as stories I unearthed during the research for this study and have used them to craft my own three plays. These plays are deliberately set within the darkest days of the Troubles and focus on ordinary queer experience in order to give voice to the queer narrative that has been over looked, ignored and for the most part silenced.

Appendix

DRAFT 1:

The first draft, which is hand written in a note book, began life as a screenplay.

The most obvious notable point in this draft is that the focus of McGuinness's play at this early stage was not so much on the closeted gay affair between best friends Dido and Hark, but on the presence of the IRA within the Derry community where the play is set.

Terry French, one of the four friends, is preparing for his father's funeral, which is to be an IRA military funeral. Terry's father Master French, a prominent and well respected teacher in Derry, was a member of the IRA. Master French taught Dido, Hark, Terry and the fourth friend Liam. McGuinness's first draft of *Friends* is very much focused on the IRA and Hark's rejection of them, and his quest for a life in Dublin away from his home town of Derry.

The first draft is very much rooted in the politics of the time; the closeted gay relationship between Hark and Dido is not at the centre of this draft. Buried, not too deeply, within this first draft is a strong suggestion that Master French may have been a closeted gay man and that he had sexual dealings with Hark. This is never fully stated, so the degree of French's advances on Hark are not certain. In a scene towards the end of the play Terry asks Hark 'Was my Da queer?', to which Hark replies 'Yes, I think so', Terry then asks, 'Is that why you avoided him?', to which Hark says 'Partly'. McGuinness gives a strong suggestion that Master French may have acted inappropriately with Hark, through Hark's overt negativity towards Master French and his refusal to visit him. There are two female characters in this first draft, Mrs French, Terry's mother and Sally, Liam's wife. In subsequent drafts McGuinness drops them and concentrates on the male characters and their relationship with each other. The friendship between Terry and Hark is much more pronounced in the first draft. Terry is aware that Hark is gay and when it is openly discussed at the end of the screenplay Terry's reaction is, on the whole, a positive one. Liam is less accepting of his friend's being gay and being together, but he leaves the play with a sense that the friendship between them is still strong and will remain so. This first draft ends with Hark raising his glass and toasting his friends, the others respond by doing the same.

Draft 4 written as a stage play opens in darkness, *Beautiful Friend* by the Undertones plays. This is the first noticeable shift between these two drafts, as in Draft 1 the script began with boys' voices reciting the *Our Father*, which embeds the play in Catholicism and sets a very different, sombre tone to the piece which places a particular emphasis on the Nationalist culture of Derry City. In McGuinness's first draft his story is heavily laden with the Nationalist culture and the politics surrounding Northern Irish Catholics living in this city in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday. The fact that there is a shift in tone by Draft 4 is clearly signified by McGuinness's choice of music. Draft 4 is less concerned about the cultural politics of the time, with the emphasis now being placed on the individual relationships amongst the friends, McGuinness's choice of opening music *Beautiful Friend* clearly sets this up early in the story, exploring events that took place before Draft 1.

Scene One of Draft 4 takes place in the waste ground with Hark waiting for Dido to show up; the waste ground is also the setting in Draft 1 where Hark and Dido first meet up.

There is a much stronger focus on Hark and Dido as a couple. There is a clearer sense that Hark wants Dido to leave Derry and to come and live with him in Dublin. The couple discuss the secrecy around their relationship to a greater degree. In the first scene Dido's younger brother Seph shows up; McGuinness has added Seph to this draft of the play as his presence is significant to the new story strand that McGuinness has grafted into this draft. In Draft 4 the waste ground has a much greater presence, it is where Dido and his friends congregate to play basketball, something that does not happen in Draft 1. Dido is the captain of the team and has arranged a game with another team from the town Buncrana, which is across the Irish / Northern Irish border.

The boys are down a man, therefore disadvantaged before they begin, and Liam is severely hung over. From the moment when the friends meet in the waste ground there is friction between Terry and Dido about the game, with Terry threatening not to play. Dido stands his ground, raising his status amongst the group. The dynamics among the friends is juvenile, with frustrations and frictions being at the forefront of their interactions with each other. The first scene ends with Hark and Dido alone again in the waste ground. Hark approaches Dido and kisses him on the cheek saying *'I love you when you're cross'*, Dido replies *'Piss off I meant what I said'*. The additions that McGuinness has made to the later draft add complexities to Hark and Dido's relationship, while adding greater depth and authenticity to the gay affair also marks the growth in McGuinness's desire to push the characters' homosexuality to the fore front and to show the intricacies of a gay love affair.

The second scene of the play in Draft 4 takes place on a bus as the friends return from their defeat in Buncrana. This is where McGuinness significantly deviates from his first draft. The tensions and argument mount amongst the group and spirits are low. Terry brings up the fact that Hark is illegitimate, which prompts Dido to come to his defence. Throughout these moments of tension Dido and Hark defend each other, cementing the secret bond that exists between them. When a young British soldier gets on the bus at the border the boys goad him, insult him and project their bitterness around the military occupation and the events of Bloody Sunday onto the soldier. Seph says about the soldier, *'He hasn't a big enough crowd to fire into'*, a reference to the paratroopers shooting at Bloody Sunday. When the soldier targets Seph, telling him to stand up to be searched, the friends' goading intensifies. Seph instead of standing makes a statement by kneeling down in front of the soldier as if surrendering himself to the soldier's authority. As the tension mounts the scene ends on a blackout and the sound of gun fire.

Act Two takes place some years later. A lot has happened in the intervening years, most noticeably Dido has spent time in prison for a terrorist act, setting fire to a warehouse. Hark is now a qualified doctor and living in Dublin. Liam is married, unemployed and a heavy drinker. Terry's father, Master French, has died and it is the evening of his funeral. Hark has returned from Dublin to attend the funeral. Seph is now blind as a result of the shooting on the bus. The friends are living with the various consequences of the event on the bus. The whole of Act Two takes place in Dido and Seph's family home. In this draft there is a shift in Terry's attitude to Hark, he is more aggressive and confrontational than in Draft 1.

The tensions and buried resentments that were present in Act One between Terry and Hark come to a head in the second part of this draft. McGuinness has upped the stakes in this draft by making Terry decidedly anti-gay, he outs Hark saying to him, *'It's not a bastard you are, Johnny, it's a queer'*. A short time later Dido outs himself *'Hark's not the only queer here. I'm his lover. I have been for years'*. Terry blames Hark for making Dido gay. Dido denies this, he tells a story about his time in prison when a visiting teacher was attacked by the prisoners and stripped of his clothes so one of them could dress up in them in order to escape. Dido describes how he looked at the unclothed man lying tied up on the floor and all he could feel was attraction to his naked body. There is a clear divide in the friendship group, with Terry opposed to Hark with Liam supporting him, and Dido and Seph supporting Hark. Liam cannot believe that his two friends are gays. *'A queer's love nest. Two slimy whores screwing the arse off each other, with a wee brother looking on clapping, you have let yourself down Dido'*. Despite his anti-gay rhetoric and aggression towards Hark, Terry leaves with a fraction of hope for the future by saying *'We look after our own'*, the implication being that he will always look after Hark and Dido despite his homophobia. At the end of this draft Dido and Hark decide to leave Derry and set up home in Dublin. Despite the friction and anti-gay sentiment expressed by Liam and Terry, this draft ends positively as Dido and Hark's relationship has been strengthened and they decide to face a new future together.

DRAFT 6:

In Draft 6 of *Friends* McGuinness has made several significant changes to the script. The most notable change between Draft 6 and Draft 4 is the fact that the whole of Act One takes place in the Waste Ground, giving this place greater significance in the play. I would suggest that by the time McGuinness comes to writing *Carthaginians* he has progressed from using the waste ground as his setting to using the Derry graveyard as his liminal space, with its heightened symbolism of death, religion and rebirth.

Draft 6 begins in the same way as Draft 4, with Hark alone in the waste ground waiting for Dido to turn up. McGuinness uses this opportunity to bring out the intimacy between Hark and Dido. There is a playfulness in how they interact with each other, their witty exchanges are unlike the interactions they have with the other men in the play.

HARK: I might be fooled into thinking you're a girl by your exquisite sense of dress.
 DIDO: You get great bargains in the sales.
 HARK: Despite your grasp of fashion your strong face betrays you. You are male and therefore not eligible for any virginal seat, all men being dirty animals, thank Jesus.

The witticisms that McGuinness uses in these exchanges are camp, they are Ortonesque in their irreverence and audaciousness. They are early signifiers of the men's non-conventionality and their queerness. They make more sexual innuendos to each other.

DIDO: I want something to do something physical.
 HARK: I can think of plenty of physical things to do.

They talk about their relationship and being together, which is indicative of McGuinness's confidence in his construction of this same sex love affair, focusing on the emotional dynamics between the two lovers. Dido wants Hark to come back to Derry and Hark wants Dido to leave Derry and to come to Dublin with him. Hark says to Dido, '*Derry is going to tear you apart my love*'. Hark calling Dido my love is once again a signifier of their close relationship with each other and their separateness from the other men. In both Draft 4 and Draft 6 McGuinness puts the gay relationship to the fore with the political issues as a back drop.

The most significant shift from Draft 4 to Draft 6 is McGuinness's scrapping of the bus scene in Scene Two. Instead of showing us the friends on the bus returning from their failed basket-ball match McGuinness has decided to return to the waste ground where Terry and Liam carry out their annihilation of Dido as captain of the team. This is a shift from Draft 4 which heightens the antagonism that exists between the friends and highlights the fact that there are significant divisions within the friendship group. Hark and Seph, as in Draft 4, at times step in and come to Dido's defence. The British soldier enters the waste ground, in Draft 6 the soldier is now a black man and does not speak. The men as in Draft 4 goad and provoke him, their hostility transforms into racist comments.

SEPH Is he a witch doctor?
 TERRY Nigger.
 Whose dirty work are you doing now Sambo.
 LIAM Let him run, tail between his legs back to the jungle.

I would suggest that McGuinness has made these additions in order to expose the bigotry and prejudice that exists in Derry, despite the fact that the Nationalist community have suffered discrimination and have protested to British Government about inequality there is an absence of regard for other oppressed minority groups. Of course, McGuinness is showing us that these men would be equally as disparaging of gay people if they ever encountered them. As a result of these changes McGuinness has heightened the tensions within the group. Act One in Draft 6 ends as it did in Draft 4 with the soldier firing his gun, the difference in Draft 6 is that it is the single black soldier who fires, whereas in Draft 4 it was the soldiers outside the bus who fired. Another significant difference between the two drafts is that Hark and Dido leave the scene before the soldier enters, therefore they have not witnessed the shooting or the men's abuse of the soldier prior to this happening.

Act Two in Draft 6 begins as it did in Draft 4 on the evening of Master French's funeral. The antagonism between Terry and Hark is much more pronounced in this section of Draft 6. Hark accuses Terry of being responsible for the soldier shooting Seph and blinding him, and therefore responsible for Dido getting involved in terrorism and going to prison for his crimes. Terry in his anger at Hark, and as a way of taking the focus away from himself, accuses Hark of saying all this as he wants revenge, he is out to blacken the name of any man not like his own sweet self, and this, as in Draft 4, is when Terry outs Hark by calling him a queer. McGuinness has got to this point by a different means and by creating this new story thread it makes Terry and Hark's confrontation more powerful and much more damaging to the

friendship. This change in the script also makes it more realistic that Dido would come to Hark's support and also come out, as Hark's accusation would have made him angry at Terry. Liam is a lot more damning and vicious of Hark and Dido.

LIAM: The two of yous are worth nothing now. I care what happens in my country. You care what happens in your bed [...] Don't either of you call yourself my mate again. And don't come near my kids.

The final two sentences from Liam set a very different tone to this draft. McGuinness has extinguished any hope that the friendship between the men can survive. It is clear in Draft 6 that Hark and Dido are no longer accepted and that this is the price they have paid for their homosexuality and their relationship. It is a powerful end to the play and it is McGuinness's attempt to expose the pain and sacrifice that many gay men faced at this time.

Draft 6 as in Draft 4 ends with Dido and Hark alone together. Their love for each other remains intact and their commitment to each other is stronger.

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Bible.

Holy Bible, Matthew 26:39.

Pet Shop Boy.

By Joseph Grant Corr.

CHARACTERS:

Charlie Straw:	<i>16yr old part-time shop assistant.</i>
Val Fitzpatrick:	<i>Shop owner, 60s.</i>
Linda Mooney:	<i>18yr old part-time shop assistant.</i>
Noreen Lemon:	<i>18yr old best mate of Linda.</i>
Paul McVey:	<i>19yr old nephew of Val.</i>
Mrs Mulholland:	<i>Local resident and customer 60s.</i>

East Belfast, 1980. The interior of a Pet Shop.

Scene One.

Three stacks of wire cages of various sizes, piled on top of each-other. The set should not look naturalistic. Around the edges of the stacks is darkness placing greater focus on the centre of the stage.

4 hand-made placards with 'Save Ulster From Sodomy' written on them lie on the floor.

Charlie Straw dances to 'Night Music' by the Bee Gees.

VAL: Head up. Come on now strut. Strutt!

Charlie struts.

VAL: Frig sake Charlieeee, you're supposed to be a bloody ladies man not having a friggin seizure.

Charlie tries to dance sexier.

VAL: Girls are wantin you, you know it, now show it to us!

He kind of gets it right.

VAL: Come on mister sex in your pants.

Charlie carries on dancing, loses himself.

VAL: And strut two three and turn, arms Arms Charlie! What are ya doing with them arms, no danglin of the arms! Jesus

Val gives up and turns the cassette player off. She takes vodka from a cage and pours it into a cup.

CHARLIE: So Val, am I like ... improving or what?

Val drinks from the mug.

CHARLIE: I must be getting better... a bit anyway ... Am I?

VAL: Quit lamenting would ya. My head's busting.

CHARLIE: I don't even need to be brilliant, I just need to be able to do it.

VAL: Why?

CHARLIE: Just do.

VAL: So, you want to be John, friggin, Travolta? Ha?

He laughs.

VAL: A randy stud, a womanizer?

CHARLIE: They'll be laughing on the other side of their faces when they can see I can dance good.

VAL: So, where exactly are you going to do this?

Charlie shrugs.

VAL: Ya going to strut down the Woodstock road like it's Saturday night fever?

She ruffles his hair.

CHARLIE: Here listen Val. I need to be away.

VAL: Ack come on, sure I'm only coddling with you. Take a joke wee lad.

CHARLIE: Nah, I need ta go.

VAL: I'm just not in the mood the day, ask me about your dancin tomorrow.

CHARLIE: I've to get up the road to the meeting.

VAL: Have a wee one with me?

CHARLIE: I don't even drink.

VAL: Well listen here John Travolta you need to start sometime, it smooths away the rough edges.

She pours another vodka into a cup.

VAL: Only a wee one. Come on.

CHARLIE: I can't go into the meeting stinking of drink. Could ya picture all their faces.

VAL: I'm not feeling the best the night. My nerves are all over the shop.

Charlie looks at her.

CHARLIE: Tonight's important. They're making plans for the big rally at the City hall. We need to be well prepared. Newspapers and the TV cameras'll be there.

A police siren sounds outside. Val goes to the window stares anxiously into the road.

CHARLIE: You're as safe as anything in here.

VAL: Am I?

CHARLIE: No one's any reason to do anything to you.

VAL: And what reason had they got to do what they did to that young girl?

CHARLIE: She shouldn't have come into this area.

VAL: Jesus Christ!

CHARLIE: If it was the other way around, I wouldn't go off with a group of Fenians that I'd just met in a bar somewhere, I wouldn't trust them not for a second.

VAL: She was naïve, too bloody trusting of people.

CHARLIE: She sounds mental, from what they said on the news, always getting drunk, going missing and getting into all sorts.

VAL: Imagine getting news that your daughter's body has been found in some stinking, dirty, back entry, beaten to death! Beaten! Jesus. And her throat Jesus Christ, I can't think about it anymore.

Val puts her hand over her mouth at the thought.

CHARLIE: It happens on the other side as well.

VAL: It shouldn't bloody well happen at all.

Beat.

CHARLIE: *(Hesitant)* Val, I'm sorry, I really need to get going.

She knocks back another mouthful of vodka.

VAL: Well my boy, you've still them cages to feed.

CHARLIE: Ack what? It's way past my time.

VAL: Aye and I've been stood here giving you dancing lessons. Free lessons.

Charlie starts to fill up the feed trays. His actions show resentment. She watches him before she approaches the cages and looks in.

VAL: Just remind me again, which one of these birds is Frida?

Charlie carries on working.

VAL: Ya know, the one you like from Abba.

CHARLIE: Look I'm in a hurry. Mrs Mulholland said I'd to be there at eight. She hates late comers. It winds her up.

VAL: Well. I'll just be remembering that the next time you ask me to give you a dance lesson. When you ask me if you can finish work five minutes early to get home and help your mummy. Or, whenever you want to have a wee chat about stuff that's on your mind. I'll remember sonny Jim, mark my words. I'll remember.

She walks away.

CHARLIE: Frida's the one with the reddiest, feathers, obviously...

She comes back and looks into the cage.

VAL: She's a pretty wee thing isn't she. She's been here a while. I'm surprised I haven't sold her yet. She's the makings of a good laying hen.

CHARLIE: Ya know it's not fair. Agnetha's the one that gets all the attention. Just because she's blonde and the one with the sexiest bum.

He points to a cage above.

That's Agnetha in there.

VAL: I know, you've showed me before.

CHARLIE: If I'd a choice I'd be Frida, she has this look about her. She's got a nice smile.

VAL: Ya know, it might look like everyone loves the show offs and the big mouths, but in truth it's the ones with the nice smiles that win the hearts. I learnt that from my dancing days.

CHARLIE: I don't have a nice smile.

VAL: Ack away on with ya wee lad. You've a lovely smile. Let's see it ... come on ..

He can't help but smile and laugh. She laughs.

VAL: You're a very special wee bud Charlie. You're a friggin fruit and nut case sometimes but sure that's what makes you you.

She wraps her arm around his neck and pulls in for a quick hug. She opens a cage at the end and takes out a beautiful white pigeon and holds her.

CHARLIE: Oh my God who's this?

VAL: Isn't she a beauty. She came in yesterday.

CHARLIE: She's gorgeous. She's like a wee angel.

VAL: She is.

CHARLIE: Let me think of a name.

VAL: I've already got a name for her.

CHARLIE: What?

VAL: Well....wait for it. She is ... dah nah ...the one and only.... Miss Dusty Springfield.

Charlie studies the bird, then smiles.

CHARLIE: Aye ok.

VAL: Oh well thank you very much mister Charlie Straw sir, you're too kind, I'm very privileged.

CHARLIE: Ya know something Val? She looks like you.

VAL: Ack away on with ya.....

CHARLIE: She does.

VAL: D'ya really think so?

CHARLIE: Aye I do.

VAL: You know maybe you're right, maybe this here girl is like me.

CHARLIE: You can't sell her.

VAL: This is a pet shop. It's how I earn my living.

CHARLIE: It's kinda wrong.

VAL: What? Selling the birds and animals.

CHARLIE: Aye. Maybe.

VAL: Now don't tell me this is the latest with ya? You're wanting to set them all free?

CHARLIE: These birds, they're racing pigeons they're born to fly up in the sky, not be stuck in wee cages.

VAL: When they get sold a pigeon man'll buy them and he'll let them out to fly about.

CHARLIE: Some of them have been in there for months.

VAL: What do you want me to do Charlie? Let them all go? If I did that you know what would happen they'd end up in the streets hoking for scraps of dirty old food, they wouldn't last long on their own. It's just the way it is.

CHARLIE: I think you should keep Dusty, it's like she's a pigeon version of you.

Val laughs.

VAL: You are wired to the moon wee fella.

She looks closely at Dusty and kisses her head, she puts Dusty back in her cage. Charlie takes a rabbit out of a cage and dances around.

CHARLIE: And this wee one here is wee Tina Charles.

Disco lights come on and backing music comes on.

(Sings) Oh I love to love
 But my baby just loves to dance
 He wants to dance, he loves to dance
 He's got to dance
 Oh I love to love.
 But my baby just loves to dance.
 Oh I love to love
 But there's time for our romance, no, no, nooo

The minute the band begins to swing it
 He's on his feet to dig and dance the
 night away.

He grabs Val and spins her round.

Stop, I'm spinning like a top.
 We'll dance until we drop
 But if I had my way.

Oh I love to love
 But my baby just loves to dance
 He wants to dance.

The music stops.

VAL: Oh my God Charlie! That's the song you should be dancing to son.
 Forget that Frigging full of himself John Travolta fella.

CHARLIE: No it's not. It's not, ok!

VAL: You'll be great at this one. Fantastic. Believe me I've got intuition on these things.

CAHRLIE: I'm not Tina Charles, I want ta be John Travolta.

As he speaks the shop door opens. Paul walks in, he stands deadly still, his face is bruised and blood stained. He stares at Val.

Val walks towards him and stops.

VAL: Jesus.

Charlie comes and stands by Val.

VAL: Right Charlie, off you go son.

CHARLIE: I can stay.

VAL: No need. You can't be getting on the wrong side of Mrs Mulholland.

Charlie stares at Paul.

CHARLIE: Who's he?

Val hesitates.

VAL: It's ok. I'll see you the morrow. Away you go.

Charlie gathers up the placards and leaves. Val locks the door behind him.

PAUL: I couldn't think of any other safe place to go.

VAL: Who knows you're here?

PAUL: No one.

VAL: This isn't the best place for you to be right now.

PAUL: Can I stay?

VAL: What?

PAUL: I can't stay in the house.

VAL: What's happened?

PAUL: Him. He'd have killed me if I hadn't got out.

VAL: Look. Things are tense around here and I don't need trouble.

PAUL: I'll lie low. No one'll know I'm even here.

VAL: And what happens when they come looking for you?

PAUL: They won't.

Val grabs her cup and knocks back the rest of the vodka.

PAUL: I promise there'll be no trouble.

Beat.

VAL: Go up the stairs, out of the way before anyone sees you standing there.

He hesitates.

VAL: Do as I tell ya.

Val pulls open a doorway leading to the stairs. Paul heads through the door and away. Val goes to the shop window and stares out into the road. She rests her back hard against the door.

VAL: Mother of God in heaven protect us this night.

Black out.

Scene Two.

Lights rise on:

Noreen holding Charlie down in a chair, while Linda heats the tip of a safety pin over the flame of her lighter. When its red hot she approaches Charlie, just as she's about to stab Charlie's right ear with the pin he jerks his head back.

CHARLIE: (Screams) Vodka.

LINDA: You don't even drink you friggin header!

CHARLIE: I'm going to start! I'm starting now.

Noreen pours vodka into a mug, she hands it to him, he knocks it back. He splutters at the shock of it. Linda makes another attempt to stick the safety pin into his ear lob, he pulls away again.

LINDA: Fuck sake wee lad! Stay still will ya!

Charlie closes his eyes as tight as he can, Linda stabs the safety pin right into his ear lob. Charlie screams out in pain. He leaps from the chair and runs about the shop.

CHARLIE: Fuck, fuck, fuck! Mummy, mummy, mummy, oh fuck me, fuck me. (Screams at Linda) That was so sore!

Noreen chases after him with the mug of vodka, he takes another mouthful.

LINDA: I friggin told ya, if I had them ice cubes it wouldn't have hurt ya.

CHARLIE: You stabbed me, you big evil cow.

Noreen grabs him to look at his ear. She stares at it.

NOREEN: It's fucking weaker. Isn't it Linda?

CHARLIE: Quick get me a mirror.

Noreen brings out a hand mirror, Charlie grabs it of her.

CHARLIE: Is my Ma going to notice?

NOREEN: Mmm.. She just might.

CHARLIE: Shit. Really?

LINDA: It's your frigging ear, not hers.

CHARLIE: She thinks she owns me.

LINDA: Wha?

CHARLIE: She made me, ya know in her body, so like sort of half of me anyway.

LINDA: Yer Ma's not the fucking housing Executive, it's not like co ownership.

NOREEN: Sure, it's only the one ear you got pierced, so just tell her that it's your ear you got done, her ear is still ok. You know what I mean?

Linda opens one of the cages and brings out a crumpled up magazine.

LINDA: I found this in our back entry.

She holds up a porn mag.

NOREEN: Shit, is that a dirty book?

They laugh. Noreen and Charlie gather round Linda and look at the mag.

LINDA: *(Charlie)* Don't you be sayin anything to Val.

CHARLIE: Aye right, like as if I would.

LINDA: You friggin would, you're her wee lick so you are.

NOREEN: My God Linda what if your Da found that on ya? He'd beat the shite out of ya.

LINDA: Just shut up. It's a goodon an all, it's got loads of fellas in it. Wait til ya see their dicks swear ta fuck Noreen... it's magic.

Noreen squeals with laughs as she points at a picture.

NOREEN: Oh friggin holy shit, mummy daddy, look at his one.

LINDA: *(Laughs)* Here don't you be getting your hopes up, they're not all like that ya know.

CHARLIE: How'd you know what they're like?

LINDA: If you don't shut up I'm not going to let you see anymore!

NOREEN: Oh baby Jesus look at what she's doing to him!

LINDA: She's only sucking it. It's called a blow job.

NOREEN: Oh boke.... How can she put her mouth on that?

Linda laughs.

NOREEN: Here Charlie would you want a wee girl doing that to you?

CHARLIE: Nooo.... clear off.

LINDA: You'd like a fella doing it, wouldn't ya?

The girls explode laughing.

CHARLIE: Don't be disgusting.

LINDA: I'm only messing with ya.

NOREEN: Sure Charlie's in with all the holy Joes at the church.

CHARLIE: No I'm not all in with them, they're just nice that's all.

LINDA: So why were you making all them placards for them?

CHARLIE: For the Save Ulster from Sodomy rally on Saturday.

LINDA: I can't believe yer woman has roped you into that.

CHARLIE: She didn't rope me into it, I wanted to do it.

LINDA: Why? Why would ya want to go up to that church and be in amongst all them ones going on about God and sin and all that shite they preach.

NOREEN: Me and my Ma signed their petition. My Ma says it's a good thing. Them queers need to be stopped. They're trying ta take over.

CHARLIE: It is a good thing.

LINDA: They're a bunch of weirdos, standing singing hymns and handing out their leaflets in town. Is that what you're going to be doing? Handing out leaflets and saying save us all from the homosexuals?

CHARLIE: No it's not. I'm just going to the rally with the placards and being supportive.

LINDA: Why do you even give a fuck?

CHARLIE: Because it's protecting us all.

LINDA: What, you think the gays are going to attack us?

NOREEN: Ha ha, they'd beat us to death with their handbags.

CHARLIE: The save Ulster from sodomy campaign is about stopping this country from falling into a cess pit of evil. If they get their way then the flood gates will open and all sorts of bad stuff will happen.

LINDA: You're even starting to sound like them.

CHARLIE: It's the truth.

LINDA: Do you even know what sodomy means wee lad?

CHARLIE: Course I do.

LINDA: What?

CHARLIE: It's what the queers do to each other isn't it.

LINDA: Aye but what is it? Describe it to us.

CHARLIE: Sex.

LINDA: Aye but what kind of sex? You wee dick.

CHARLIE: I don't want to talk about it, it's disgusting.

LINDA: You don't even know do you.

CHARLIE: Shut up Linda.

LINDA: Does Mrs Mulholland even know what it is?

NOREEN: My Da says the queers should have their bollocks cut off and flushed down the bog. Swear to God that's what he says.

LINDA: Do you even know any?

NOREEN: No, thank fuck. They're freaks. Why do they all want to be women? That's just wired up.

LINDA: They don't want to be women.

NOREEN: Well they all get on like women, the way they talk and walk about the place. That's why people don't like them, they're weirdos. It's not natural.

LINDA: I think them Christian Bible bashers are weirdos. Look at them with all their sour faces and boring clothes and preaching all the time.

NOREEN: God forgive you Linda that's a sin what you're saying. Them ones are good people.

LINDA: It's not a sin. I can say what I want, it's a free country.

CHARLIE: If you went to one of the meetings and heard them talking you wouldn't think that way. They're all dead nice and welcoming. It's like a big family.

NOREEN: Do you get free buns and biscuits and cups of tea when ya go?

CHARLIE: Aye you do.

NOREEN: I love all that stuff.

CHARLIE: You should come some time.

LINDA: Look you (*Noreen*) Are we going out the night or what?

NOREEN: Aye, I'm ready.

LINDA: Then knock back your drink and come on then.

NOREEN: (*Charlie*) Want to come with us?

CHARLIE: Where you's going?

LINDA: Coachmans, it's for over eighteens so you won't get it.

NOREEN: Aye he will. If he's with us.

CHARLIE: Is there dancing?

NOREEN: Course, it's a disco.

CHARLIE: Ok, I'll get my coat from the back. Wait for me.

Charlie races off.

LINDA: What the fuck Noreen?

NOREEN: I feel sorry for him.

LINDA: Do you fancy him or something?

NOREEN: Nooo, wise the bap would ya.

LINDA: He's a fucking melter.

NOREEN: I like him, he's ok.

LINDA: He'll not get in and he might stop us from getting in, so come on and leave him.

Linda leaves, Noreen follows her. Charlie comes back to the empty shop. He looks crushed. He spots the magazine lying open, he picks it up and looks at it. He doesn't hear as Paul comes down from upstairs. He walks over and takes the mag out of Charlie's hand.

PAUL: Jesus, he's a big fella.

CHARLIE: I wasn't looking at it.

Paul laughs.

CHARLIE: It's not even mine.

PAUL: Who gives a fuck?

Charlie stuffs the magazine back into the cage and races out of the shop.

Val comes downstairs. She walks to the shop door and locks it.

VAL: You shouldn't be down here. I've told you.

PAUL: I needed a change of scene.

VAL: What if they see you?

PAUL: There's no one here.

VAL: Anyone could have walked through that door.

PAUL: Why are you so uptight?

VAL: Do exactly what I tell you otherwise you can't come here.

PAUL: Tell them the truth. Tell them I'm your nephew.

VAL: Then the question'll start. Where you from? What area? Why haven't we seen ya before?

I know what they're like round here, nosey crowd and they won't stop til they know it all.

PAUL: I'll say ta them North Belfast, Antrim road, it's all mixed round there with Fenians and Prods even a few Jews.

VAL: No. You'll not be saying anything of the sort. Too risky.

PAUL: You got away with it.

VAL: I married a Prod, born and bred in these streets, he was one of their own. My religion was very soon buried, never talked about, and that suited everyone. I've been here that long that they don't even think about it anymore.

PAUL: You sure bout that?

VAL: You can't stay here Paul. It's not safe.

PAUL: There's nowhere else ...

VAL: What exactly is going on?

PAUL: I've already told you.

VAL: I mean all of it. The whole story.

PAUL: I got picked up by the Brits.

VAL: Don't be calling them Brits. Not round here.

PAUL: Ok. The army. The peelers.

VAL: I want to know why your Da went mental on you.

PAUL: He'd been drinking.

VAL: He's always drinking.
Did you tell them something? About your da? The peelers? Did ya?

PAUL: I'm not that thick.

VAL: Why did they lift you in the first place?

PAUL: Told ya, no reason, me and my mate were on our way home.

VAL: From town?

Paul nods.

VAL: Where were you coming from?

PAUL: Just a bar.

VAL: In the city centre? At night? You right in the head?

Paul nods.

VAL: What kind of bar is it that takes you into there at night. It's a ghost town after six, nobody goes down there. The ones going down there are the alchos and them punk rockers.

PAUL: We like it so we do.

VAL: A republican bar? Is that where you were?

PAUL: No. I'm not into that, I've told you.

VAL: Listen Paul, wait til I tell ya son, if you're wanting to come here, stay under my roof, I need to know the full story. No half-truths. The full bloody story. So come on tell me ...

PAUL: It's just a bar I go to sometimes. We know the ones that go there, it's somewhere different, good music and craic.

VAL: Somewhere different?

PAUL: Aye. Different.

VAL: And the peelers picked you up because you were coming out of this bar?

PAUL: Aye.

VAL: What did they say to you?

PAUL: Just shit, ya know what they're like. Just gave us a load of abuse.

VAL: Like what exactly?

Paul shakes his head.

VAL: It can't be that bad?

PAUL: They called us names because of the bar we'd been in.

VAL: Right.... I see...
So it was that kind of a bar?

Paul nods.

VAL: And you told your da all this?

Paul nods.

VAL: Well, that was a bloody stupid thing for you to do.

PAUL: The Brits were going to do it, they said they were, better me telling him something before ...

VAL: You can make something up, like you didn't realise what type of bar it was .. Just give him a day or two, then call him, tell him that he got the wrong end of the stick about what you were saying....

PAUL: I knew what type of a bar it is, I've been going for over a year.

VAL: You don't need to tell him that.

PAUL: I don't like lies. Not anymore.

VAL: Sometimes it's easier to live with a lie than live with the truth.... You need a roof over your head. Be sensible will ya.

PAUL: You've the spare room.

VAL: I've told ya, it's not safe, not at the minute.

PAUL: I'll help you out in the shop.

VAL: Linda and Charlie help out.

PAUL: You wouldn't know I was even here.

VAL: You can't stay Paul. It's not that I don't want ya, it's just it's not safe, if anyone was to twig on

Beat.

PAUL: Ya know, the night me and my Ma came down to your house and it was in Complete blackness. She knocked on the door for ages, she went round the back, looked in all the windows. We waited outside for hours, I'm not even lying. But you never came back. It was the weirdest feeling just sitting there,

waiting, just waiting and waiting and wondering. I don't even know what age I was then but I remembered dead clear

Beat.

VAL: Seven. That's how old you were.

He nods.

PAUL: I was too frightened to ask what happened, cause I knew it was bad. It was three years before our Ciara told me that you'd got married, that's why you left your house. Why you never came back again.

VAL: I was entitled to a life of my own.

PAUL: You were always there and dead good to us. Dead good to me. You took me everywhere with ya, ya spoilt me rotten.

VAL: Sure don't I bloody well know it.

PAUL: You bought me whatever I wanted and you were always coming round and looking after us and carrying on. And then, nothing, you weren't there anymore.

VAL: I didn't abandon you. I came over and visited whenever I could but it wasn't easy for me. I couldn't risk anyone round here getting wind and bringing it all to their attention.
And then when your da got put away, that was it, I just had to cut my ties. No choice. A matter of survival and it doesn't stop. It's still going on.

Beat.

PAUL: I get it. I do.

VAL: Do you?

PAUL: Aye course I do. I'm trying to do what you did.... I'm trying to make a life of my own. Trying to survive. I can't do it if I stay there. This is my chance. I need you to help me. You're the only one auntie Val.

Val looks at him as she contemplates.

PAUL: I swear to you it'll be ok. I'll blend in. I won't cause any suspicion. I'll do whatever you say.

Beat.

VAL: Look I'm hearing you but you coming here could cause more trouble for both of us.

Beat.

VAL: I'm sorry love.

PAUL: Nah, you're not sorry. You're not sorry at all auntie Val. You just don't give a fuck about anyone else but yourself.

He storms out of the shop.

Val stands for a moment goes to the cassette player and plays 'Am I the same Girl', by Dusty Springfield. She takes out her vodka and drinks. Dancers emerge from the darkness and dance around her. She goes to the cage and takes out the white pigeon, she strokes its body.

Lights fade.

Scene Three.

Saturday night.

Noreen and Linda pour vodka in cups.

VAL: (sings) I'll tell me ma when I get home,
The boys won't leave the girls alone;
They pulled me hair and they stole me comb
But that's all right till I get home.

Linda attempts to Irish dance. She waves for Noreen to join in.

NOREEN: Nah, I'm not doing that Fenian dancing.

LINDA: It's not Fenian dancing, it's Irish dancing you friggin melter.

VAL: It's just bloody dancing, if you're going to do it, just do it right.

Linda grabs Noreen and they dance around.

VAL: She is handsome, she is pretty
She is the Belle of Belfast City
She is courting, one, two three
Please won't you tell me who is she?

The girls throw themselves into it while Val shouts instructions, and corrects their positioning.

VAL: Albert Maloney says he loves her
 All the boys are fightin' for her. (*She points
 at Linda*).
 They rap on her door and ring on the bell.
 Will she come out? Who can tell?

They all join in.

She is handsome, she is pretty,
 She is the Belle of Belfast City.
 She is courting, one, two three.
 Please won't you tell me who is she?

Paul comes from the back of the shop, he stands and watches.

VAL: Out she comes white as snow,
 rings on her fingers and bells on her toes.
 Old Jenny Murray says she will die
 if she doesn't get the fella with a roving eye.

All sing. Paul joins them in the dance, he's really good at it. Val isn't happy.

She is handsome, she is pretty
 She is the Belle of Belfast City.

Linda stops dancing, Noreen carries on.

She is courting
 One, two three. Please won't you tell me who is she?

LINDA: Jesus Christ ... Who's this here?

PAUL: (*English accent*) I'm Paul.

NOREEN: Paul?

They look at Val.

VAL: He's my nephew, my sister's lad.

LINDA: Jesus you've kept him a secret.

NOREEN: You English?

Paul nods, he catches Val's eye.

VAL: How did you get in here?

PAUL: I came through the back, the door wasn't locked.

VAL: Here girls do me a favour and go down and bolt the back door.

Linda nods and heads off.

VAL: (To Noreen) Go with her.

NOREEN: It doesn't take the two of us.

VAL: Do as you're told love.

Noreen sighs and follows Linda.

VAL: What the hell are you doin'?

PAUL: I came back to apologise.

VAL: Are you wise in the head wee lad? After what I said to ya.

PAUL: I didn't know they'd be here. I came in the back way so no one would see.

VAL: The dancing? And the frigging English accent? You're drawing attention.

PAUL: Stops them asking awkward questions, look I'm thinking ahead.

VAL: Are you? Are ya really?

The girls come racing back.

NOREEN: Whereabouts are you from in England?

PAUL: Ah ... London.

NOREEN: No way. Jesus London.

LINDA: Are you frigging serious? London?

NOREEN: Oh my God I'd love to go there.

LINDA: Me too.

VAL: Paul why don't ya go up stairs I'll come up in a minute.

LINDA: Ack leave him alone Val, we wanna talk to him.

- PAUL: I'm ok for a minute.
- LINDA: We never get people from England coming over here, they're all too scared.
- PAUL: What's there to be scared of?
- NOREEN: Nothing! Only a few wee bombs and killings and the IRA.
- VAL: Can we not talk about these things, please!
- PAUL: So, what's going on here then?
- NOREEN: It's our wee Saturday night party, we do it every week in here.
- LINDA: When Val closes up the shop Noreen comes round and Val gives us some vodka and we do a bit of dancing. It's good craic.
- NOREEN: It's a gegg so it is.
- VAL: Not every Saturday night girls.
- LINDA: Near a'nuff.
- VAL: Sure isn't it better you do it here than out around the streets. Least I can keep an eye on the two of ya.
- LINDA: More like us keeping an eye on you. Your auntie's a wild one ya know.
- PAUL: She's a dark horse.
- LINDA: Oh my God I love your accent say something else...
- PAUL: Like what?

Linda and Noreen giggle with excitement.

- LINDA: Isn't it just great, his voice.
- NOREEN: What did ya think of us doing that fenian Irish dancing?
- LINDA: Noreen stop calling it that you sound like a total melter so you do.
- NOREEN: Well it is, all the fenians do it in their schools.
- LINDA: Fuck sake wee girl would ya just shut up.

VAL: I used to teach in the Church of Ireland hall up the road and I had full classes every week. They all loved it.

Charlie and Mrs Mulholland with their 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' placards come into the shop.

VAL: Oh dear Christ can it get any worse.

MRS MUL: Mrs Fitzpatrick I just had to come and tell you that today was a Total triumph.

VAL: Ah now I'm very pleased to hear it Mrs Mulholland. We're just closing things up here

MRS MUL: The Lord was amongst us, shining his light bright and wide throughout that city centre the day, like a beautiful beacon. The spirit was mighty.

Charlie spots Paul, their eyes meet.

The City Hall was crowded with God fearing Christian people defending our Christian values. We will triumph, we will, we'll put a stop to this terrible threat facing us all.

NOREEN: Ack I wish I'd been there to see it.

Linda mouths the word 'Lick' to Noreen. Noreen gives her the fingers when Mrs Mul isn't looking.

MRS MUL: (*Charlie*) This here young fella was the total star the day, he was waving that Placard high up in the air and shouting out at the top of his voice above the crowd. He was a pure Jewel to behold. Today is the day that this young fella here became a man. He gives me hope for the future.

She takes hold of Charlie's hands, holds them tight. Mrs Mulholland notices Paul.

MRS MUL: You got a new worker?

VAL: This is my nephew Paul, he's just visiting.

LINDA: He's English, from London.

MRS MUL: London?

Mrs Mulholland eyes Paul up.

PAUL: Yes that's right.

MRS MUL: Some place that London. Full of all kinds.

PAUL: Full of mad people like me.

Paul jumps around acting mad, he grabs Val around the waist and dances with her. The girls find this hilarious. Val pushes him away.

VAL: Stop your coddling around.

MRS MUL: My brother went over there to live, supposed to be for six months, he never came back. Never seen him since.

NOREEN: You could go and visit him.

MRS MUL: Indeed I could not. It's a filthy place.
The only thing I'd like to go to London for is to see Buckingham Palace where our Majesty lives, it's supposed to be magnificent. *(Paul)* What part of London?

Paul hesitates.

MRS MUL: What part of London do you live in?

VAL: South East he lives. Greenwich.

MRS MUL: It's a dangerous place, full of sin and temptation.

LINDA: Is it really, now I definitely want to go.

VAL: *(Laughing)* Behave yourself.

Mrs Mulholland spots the bottle of vodka and the cups.

MRS MUL: Isn't it a bit late for you all to still be here, you close at five.

VAL: We were just having a chat.

NOREEN: And doin Irish dancing. Val was teaching us it.

MRS MUL: Irish dancing?

VAL: Traditional dancing.

MRS MUL: Dancing and drinking? Sounds more like a party.

VAL: Sure it keeps them off the streets and out of trouble.

MRS MUL: Trouble comes in all sorts of ways.

CHARLIE: Tell them about the petition.

Mrs Mulholland waves her placard high in the air.

MRS MUL: Seventy thousand people have signed our petition to make sure the British Government don't cave in and allow the homosexuals to have a foot hold in our country.

VAL: I'm quite sure it'll never happen Mrs Mullholland.

MRS MUL: I hope you're right, but I lie at night thinking they've abandoned God's law in the rest of Britain, no longer do they consider it wrong for men to lie with men, they even have marches celebrating it. Marches! Can you imagine that, out on the streets flaunting their sinful lives in the face of God.

While Mrs Mullholland speaks Paul picks up a placard and waves it behind her back, Linda and Noreen struggle not to laugh. Val eventually grabs it off him.

MRS MUL: It could happen here too. This place could be forced to turn away from God's law and to allow homosexuality to become part of our society. I mean what would Jesus Christ think if he comes back and he sees that no one has respected his teachings. This is our last chance to hold on to what is good and to build on it.
If the homosexuals win their case then it's a slippery, slippery slope. If we allow this to happen then we are conspirators of evil ways.

PAUL: Sure isn't it legal to be gay everywhere else in Britain. Shouldn't we have the same rights for people over here?

VAL: Paul. Enough.

MRS MUL: It's not about individual people's rights young man. It's about following the rules that God wants us to follow. The rules that he has clearly laid out for us all, rules that are there so that everyone, each and every one of us, can have a good and prosperous life. If your law is God's law then the whole community will prosper.

PAUL: Here here for everyone prospering. I'm on your side Missus.

MRS MUL: Then maybe you'd like to come to our next meeting?

PAUL: Maybe I will.

VAL: Don't be paying any heed to him Mrs Mulholland.

MRS MUL: No no, he's perfectly ok Mrs Fitzpatrick. He's right to ask the questions. We need to ask these questions. In fact I wish more people, especially the young ones, would discuss this and think about it before it's all too late.

Charlie claps, Noreen joins him.

PAUL: *(Sings)* Imagine there's no country
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace

Linda claps, Val stops her. Mrs Mulholland sizes Paul up.

MRS MUL: Funny, never heard you mentioning any family from London?

VAL: Ah sure who wants to hear about me.

PAUL: That's just typical of auntie Val, never one to steal the show. Cares more about other people, than herself.

LINDA: And sure that's why we love coming here cause we can talk to her and ya know she's not going to spread it about, not like some here *(Noreen)*.

NOREEN: That wasn't me that told everyone about you seeing that fenian fella.

CHARLIE: What? You were seeing a fenian? I never knew that.

LINDA: Jesus Noreen you've just done it again!

NOREEN: I thought everyone knew about it.

MRS MUL: I'm very sorry but I need go and put my husband's tea on the table and I've Mrs McCreedy from number twenty four to go and see to. Poor old critter she's not able to get out of her bed these days.

VAL: Right then off you go Mrs Mulholland and well done for taking Charlie with ya today.

MRS MUL: My pleasure Mrs Fitzpatrick, I think it's important to guide our young on a solid and worthy path. I'm not so sure that this environment and all this kind of talk is good for him, maybe he should come on home now.

VAL: If he wants to go I'm sure he can make up his own mind.

Mrs Mulholland looks at Charlie.

CHARLIE: I'm ok for another wee bit, I'll leave soon, I won't stay.

Mrs Mulholland throws him a nod and leaves.

LINDA: Jesus that woman gets on like she's your Ma.

CHARLIE: She looks out for me.

PAUL: She's Ian Paisley in drag. I thought for a minute she was going to start singing Lena Martell's One day at a time Sweet Jesus ... that's all I'm asking from you

...
NOREEN: There's nothing wrong in her liking Jesus. My granny's born again.

LINDA: I think she's wired up, it's because she hasn't any kids of her own.

VAL: She no doubt regrets getting you a job in here with me. She'll think I'm corrupting ya.

CHARLIE: She's got a good heart.

VAL: Listen you're right son, she has.

LINDA: So, tell us golden boy, what was it really like down there today.

CHARLIE: It was like a battle.

Linda laughs.

PAUL: So who were youse fighting? Satan or the queers?

CHARLIE: It wasn't actually a fight. But you could feel that we were all on the same side and we were all standing up and defending something really important. Defending God's law.

PAUL: So God's on your side?

NOREEN: Course he is, God's always on the side of good and what's right.

VAL: Let Charlie speak would yous.

CHARLIE: All our lot had gathered outside the City Hall listening to the speakers talking. And when Ian Paisley got up to speak it was like God himself talking to us. The crowd just stood there and listened to every single word and the passion and strength in his voice just blew me away. 'We will never be defeated, the Bible condemns homosexuality and we will defend God's word to the end!' And there was this great roar from the crowd, it was just amazing.

The others are mesmerised by the power in Charlie's voice.

PAUL: That was kind of scary.

LINDA: My God you're really in there aren't ya.

CHARLIE: But hey something dead funny happened when I was at the rally.

VAL: Oh come on and give us all a laugh son, we could do with it.

CHARLIE: Ok, so I needed to use the bog so I went and used the public toilets at the City Hall. I was in the cubicle and then suddenly this hand, I swear to God, I'm not messing or nothing. It was a real fella's hand, came from under the next cubicle. I near shit myself.

They laugh in disbelief.

LINDA: At least you were in the right place.

CHARLIE: I just sat there staring at it, my heart was going like ninety and I was thinking what the hell is that hand wanting?

NOREEN: Maybe he'd run out of bog roll?

LINDA: And this here happened while the save Ulster from sodomy ones were preaching up above?

CHARLIE: The rally had just finished.

NOREEN: And what was the hand wanting?

LINDA: What do you think you numb skull? It wanted Charlie's dick.

More laughs.

VAL: Linda! Watch what you're saying would ya.

LINDA: I'm only saying the truth.

NOREEN: Dirty frigging perverts.

LINDA: Why do these things happen to you Charlie, you're a real wee melter sometimes.

VAL: Right I've heard enough of all this, I've stuff to be doing up the stairs.

LINDA: Ack Val its just getting good and you know you love it.

VAL: No, the party's over. You lot clear everything up before you go.

She heads to go upstairs.

VAL: Paul, you coming upstairs?

PAUL: Aye, in a minute, I'll help them clear up.

She hesitates about leaving then gives him a reluctant nod, she leaves.

NOREEN: Here listen my wee mate's having a party in her house in Reid Street who's coming? It'll be a geg.

LINDA: Me!

NOREEN: What about you two? Yas wanna come too?

CHARLIE: Can't, have to get home.

LINDA: Ack wee Charlie, is your mummy waiting for you?

CHARLIE: No she's not. I'm going out with my mates so I am.

LINDA: Ha, liar, you don't have any mates wee lad, everyone knows you don't.

NOREEN: Ack wise up Linda, leave him alone would ya.

LINDA: It's frigging true, sure do you remember the other day all them wee fellas From down the road came after him and spat on him, ying all over him.

Linda laughs.

LINDA: Sorry for laughing but it was just so frigging mental.

Charlie gives her the fingers.

NOREEN: Frigging disgusting bastards.

LINDA: *(Paul)* Well What about you?
Do you fancy coming with us or what?

PAUL: Nah, have to keep the auntie company.

LINDA: Ha, it's your loss Mister London.

Linda locks eyes with him. Paul laughs. Noreen grabs her by the hand.

NOREEN: Right come on quick, before the offie closes.

Linda and Noreen race to the door.

LINDA: Just make sure you two faders clear up in here.

The girls leave.

Paul's eyes are fixed on Charlie.

CHARLIE: It's ok, you go up to Val, I'll clear up by myself.

Paul's eyes remain on Charlie.

CHARLIE: What?

PAUL: Do you actually believe in all that shit?

CHARLIE: What shit are ya talkin about?

PAUL: Save Ulster from sodomy bollocks.

CHARLIE: It's not bollocks.

PAUL: So, you think that if they legalise homosexuality in this country, it's going to destroy everyone's life.

CHARLIE: I don't think it's right. I think we should keep everything respectable.

Paul laughs.

CHARLIE: It's not a joke.

PAUL: You're the joke.

Beat.

PAUL: I don't think you were all that shocked about that hand coming under your toilet cubicle.

CHARLIE: What?

PAUL: You must have sat there long enough for the fella next door to think you were interested.

CHARLIE: I was reading stuff on the walls.

PAUL: Aye, I bet you were. All the dirty stories and drawings....

CHARLIE: I know that you're not English.

PAUL: Admit it. You enjoyed seeing that fella's hand coming from underneath, it gave you a big thrill. You loved it. You wanted to have the courage to kneel down and put your dick in his hand but you couldn't, you were just too scared.

CHARLIE: That's so disgusting. Really, really disgusting.

PAUL: Is it?

CHARLIE: Course it is, everyone knows that queers are perverts.

PAUL: I don't.

CHARLIE: Then you're some sort of a freak cause they are. You should have seen what they'd drawn on them toilet walls.

Paul laughs.

CHARLIE: Why are you pretending to be from London?

PAUL: I'll tell you the truth, if you tell me the truth.

CHARLIE: About what?

PAUL: About you. No bullshit. No lies.

CHARLIE: I need to get home.

PAUL: To your mates?

CHARLIE: Are you a Catholic?

PAUL: Are you a Gay?

CHARLIE: Wise up would ya.

PAUL: It's a straight forward question.

CHARLIE: No, I'm not, ok.

PAUL: You see, I think you are and you're trying hard not to be.

CHARLIE: If I was to go out there and tell people that you're a fenian they'd come in here and beat the fuck out of you. You wouldn't last two seconds. Do you know what they did to a girl, a fenian the other night? They beat her to death and they cut her head half off with a wire. That's how much the ones round here hate Catholics.

PAUL: And what would they do to you if I told them you were a gay boy. I bet they hate gay boys just as much as Catholics.

CHARLIE: I'm not a gay boy.

PAUL: It'll always be there, it won't ever go away no matter how hard you try and push it down.

CHARLIE: Why are talking all this shit to me?

Charlie heads to leave.

CHARLIE: I'm going home.

PAUL: I'm a gay boy.

Charlie stops, he's lost for words.

PAUL: I'm one of the boys you and your mates are wanting to put in jail.

CHARLIE: No you're not.

PAUL: Why would I say it if it wasn't true?

CHARLIE: To trick me.

PAUL: It's not all about you.

CHARLIE: They're not wanting to put anyone in jail, they just don't want it to be legal.

PAUL: Sounds like the same thing to me. Don't be who you really are cause it makes us feel uncomfortable and if you do we'll get the law onto you.

Paul drinks from Val's vodka cup, he offers it to Charlie. Charlie refuses.

CHARLIE: I don't believe you're gay. You're just winding me up.

PAUL: Val'll tell ya the truth.

CHARLIE: She knows?

Paul nods.

CHARLIE: Nah. You don't look like one.

PAUL: Funny, neither do you.

Charlie leaves.

Lights Fade.

Scene Four.

Linda is clearing out the cages. Val is hovering close by, she gives Linda a tray bake.

LINDA: Does he go to university?

VAL: Not yet.

LINDA: Has he a girlfriend?

VAL: There's more to life than all that.

LINDA: You bein serious?

VAL: Concentrate on getting good grades and get yourself off university.

LINDA: *(The tray bake)* Oh my God this is sooo nice.

VAL: Mrs Mulholland left them, said to give them to you all. Left over from the meeting. Probably thinking if you eat these you'll not drink the vodka.

LINDA: Shit, that surprises me.

VAL: Why?

LINDA: The way she goes on about the Church and the Bible and condemns everyone.

VAL: She's not doing it to be against anyone. She's doing it because she believes it to be true. She believes that by following God's ways then everyone will benefit.

LINDA: Wired up.

VAL: No it's not really.

LINDA: You agree with her?

- VAL: No I don't agree exactly, but I know that she's doing it for the right reasons, she's doin it to make this world a better place.
- LINDA: Do you think it's right to be against gay people and to say that they're criminals and sinners and evil?
- VAL: No, I don't think it's right and in actual fact Mrs Mullholland doesn't dislike them as people, she's against them because it says it's a sin in the Bible.
- LINDA: Here get her to bring these buns in again I could eat the whole frigging tray.
- VAL: When I first came to live here she'd come over near enough every day and we'd have a chat and there were days she'd bring me over pots of stew and soup to give Samuel for his tea that night. She'd say you're a working woman you've no time to cook.
- LINDA: Likely wanting to find out your business.
- VAL: Maybe, but at least she was kind about it. (*Laughs*).
- LINDA: Are you tellin me that you never ran after any fellas when you were young?
- VAL: I didn't.
- LINDA: A fella like your Paul's bound to have a girl.
- VAL: You have to apply to university soon if you want to go next year. Time is ticking.
- LINDA: If he was to stay on here maybe me and him could ...
- VAL: You've the world at your feet.
- LINDA: I don't think I've got what it takes to go to university. I'm not like that.
- VAL: Do you want me to give ya a good slap wee girl?
- LINDA: Our school took us on a visit to Queens and the ones there weren't like us. They were all snobs so they were.
- VAL: Ack away you and jump.
- LINDA: I took one look at them and I could tell, the way they were dressed, the way they were all talking and getting on, all full of themselves.
- VAL: You're as good as any of them.

LINDA: If I went there none of them would speak to me, they'd all think I was stupid.

VAL: And are you stupid?

LINDA: Don't think so, I get good enough grades.

VAL: When I was your age I couldn't wait to get away. All I could think about was my dancing.

LINDA: You needed fellas to dance with.

VAL: It was all about the dancing. We went everywhere. Took me to Scotland and England, down South. I lived in England for about four years in the end. Getting away from here was the best thing that happened to me, opened my mind, showed me there's more to life.

LINDA: Then why'd ya come back?

VAL: My mother wasn't well and cause I was single it fell on me to take care of her. After she died it felt too much of an effort to go back, I was older. Then I met Samuel, we got married and I moved into this place.

LINDA: Sure it all turned out well in the end.

VAL: I'm not dead yet.

LINDA: Ack ya know what I mean it's ok living round here.

VAL: There's more to life than ok.

LINDA: Jesus Val ya sound like you're sorry you ever came here.

VAL: I'm not sorry no, but I gave up a lot.

LINDA: And sure you're one of us, can't imagine this area without you and this shop.

Linda opens up a newspaper to line one of the cages. She stares at the front page.

LINDA: Although when you see these pictures of yer woman it makes you feel sick living round here.

VAL: I'm trying to put it out of my head.

LINDA: Thing is everyone knows who done it. I mean it doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to work out who the mad bastards are in Tildarg Street.

VAL: If that's true why haven't they gone to the Police and told them.

LINDA: Talk sense would ya no one's going to put their neck on the line like that.

VAL: An innocent young woman has been murdered.

LINDA: It happens all the time, two policemen were blown up in their car the other day.

VAL: This girl wasn't in the security forces, she wasn't a terrorist. She was an ordinary girl, like you or Noreen and how people can stand back and not say anything is beyond me.

Charlie comes from the back.

VAL: All I can say is them murderers in Tildarg Street need dug out otherwise their disease will spread all around and kill everything that's decent.

LINDA: Disease? Jesus Val that's scary stuff you're saying.

VAL: (*Charlie*) Are you finished tidying up that store?

Charlie nods.

VAL: It better be done right this time, if not you'll be back down there tidying til midnight.

Charlie ignores her and helps to feed the birds in the cages.

LINDA: Here what's happened to your ear ring?

CHARLIE: Got infected, my ear swolled away up like a balloon.

Linda laughs.

CHARLIE: My Ma said I could have lost my whole ear.

LINDA: Bollocks.

CHARLIE: You didn't do it right.

LINDA: Yes I did, you just didn't clean it.

CHARLIE: I did and it was full of puss, it's still aching.

LINDA: You're not much of a punk are you? I mean could you imagine Sid Vicious

Saying (*camp voice*) Ah I don't think I'll wear any piercing any more cause they're infected and my mammy doesn't like them.

CHARLIE: Shut your big fat ugly mouth.

LINDA: Oh Jesus ...

VAL: Right that's enough you two! It's a shop I'm running here not a youth club.

LINDA: Here saying that Val, can we have a wee party in here on Saturday night?

VAL: Sure isn't every Saturday night a party in here with you lot.

LINDA: No I know but this time can we put on our own music and stay a wee bit longer, we'll bring our own drink.

VAL: Am I invited to this party?

LINDA: You can come if you like.

VAL: That sounds like a no Val I'd rather you stayed up stairs.

LINDA: I don't think you'd like it.

VAL: What are you up to wee lady?

LINDA: Not up to anything, just feel like letting my hair down that's all.

VAL: I'll think about it.

LINDA: That means yes.

VAL: No it doesn't. I'll think about it, now get on with what you're doing.

Mrs Mulholland comes in.

MRS MUL: Right Charlie son are you ready to go?

VAL: Another meeting tonight?

MRS MUL: Oh yes indeed and it's a very important one. Them ones at the European court are going to be giving their verdict soon and we need to be ready for it.

LINDA: What verdict?

MRS MUL: What verdict she asks? Where have you been daughter? Your face stuck in some glossy magazine filling your head full of beauty tips and pop songs no doubt.

CHARLIE: It's the verdict to see if homosexuality is decriminalised over here.

VAL: So here, tell me this Mrs Mulholland if the court rules that the Government has been unfair to the homosexuals what'll happen then?

MRS MUL: It'll mean that they'll have a license to do whatever they want and no one will be able to stop them. They'll be running rampant round our streets, our children won't be safe I'm telling you.

CHARLIE: Do you want gay people to go to jail?

MRS MUL: Jail wouldn't stop them they're a disease on our society.

LINDA: That's what you said Val about the ones in Tildarg Street, they're a disease and they need to be put away, at this rate there'll be nobody left round here.

Mrs Mulholland looks at Val.

MRS MUL: The two things are hardly the same Mrs Fitzpatrick.

VAL: You're right, they're not the same at all. The ones that murdered that girl deserve to be put away in jail, there's no doubt about it.

MRS MUL: Well the Lord will pass judgement and he will punish the sinners Mrs Fitzpatrick, all the sinners, mark my words he will. Right young Charlie we need to go.

VAL: I haven't said he can leave, he's still working, we're not closed yet.

Mrs Mulholland looks at her watch.

MRS MUL: It's fine, I'll wait.

CHARLIE: It's ok. I'm not going to go tonight.

MRS MUL: What do you mean not go? You can't not go. You're a beacon of hope.

CHARLIE: I just don't feel like it.

MRS MUL: That's not good enough.

VAL: In his defence, he hasn't been himself all day.

MRS MUL: A good strong cup of tea at the meeting hall will soon sort you out.

CHARLIE: I don't want to go tonight.

MRS MUL: Well I'm very disappointed in you son. I'll not lie I am. But, I can't force you to come. I'll let you off the hook this time so long as you're there with us tomorrow, standing beside us, working for the good of this here community.

Charlie nods.

MRS MUL: It's not just me and everyone else at the meeting that you'll be letting down, it's God himself and I tell you this for nothing, that's not a very good thing to do. God doesn't like being let down. Let him down at your peril.

Charlie nods.

MRS MUL: Right then, I'll see you tomorrow young Charlie.

She leaves.

LINDA: Oh my God! You are so going to hell now. You've let God down and Mrs Mulholland.

Linda laughs.

LINDA: Goodie two shoes has pissed the fuck out of Bible bashing Mulholland. Wait til the Gays get set loose they'll be coming after you.

CHARLIE: Shut your mouth would ya.

Charlie grabs Linda and pushes her up against the wall, it looks like he's going to hit her.

VAL: Oi! Stop that right now!

Val grabs Charlie and pulls him away. Linda catches her breath, she's shaken.

VAL: Linda away up the stairs and sort yourself out.

Linda runs off.

VAL: What has gotten into you?

Charlie is seething with anger.

VAL: You've been in a mood all day. It's not like you.

CHARLIE: It's her, she's always winding me up.

VAL: Why is today any different?

CHARLIE: I'm sick of it. I'm sick of people thinking they can just say what they want to me.

VAL: Do I do that?

Charlie shakes his head.

VAL: It's just Linda. She enjoys teasing you.

She pulls Charlie to her, hugs him.

CHARLIE: How long's he going to be staying here?

VAL: You mean ... Paul?

Charlie nods.

VAL: Not long.

CHARLIE: Why is he pretending to be English?

VAL: Ah Charlie son ... I'm not going into it just now, it's nothing for you to worry about.

CHARLIE: I don't like him.

VAL: You barely know him.

CHARLIE: I know him enough.

Val composes herself.

VAL: Ok. Well just promise me that you won't say anything to anyone about Paul.

Charlie doesn't respond.

VAL: These are not good times around here. All sorts are going on and I don't want to draw attention. Do you understand?

CHARLIE: It's ok, course I won't say anything. I'm not stupid.

VAL: Good. You're a good fella Charlie.

CHARLIE: You must have a good reason for letting him be here?

VAL: Yes, I do.

CHARLIE: Why's he never been here before?

VAL: Ah families. I haven't seen my sister, his mother, in years. We grew apart. That's all.

CHARLIE: He told me something.

VAL: What? What did he tell you?

CHARLIE: He told me he was gay.

Val composes herself.

CHARLIE: Is he? Is he telling the truth?

Beat.

He said you knew. Is that why he's here?

VAL: The thing about our Paul is ... he likes attention. He likes to stand out, he likes to create these wee dramas. All his life he's had something to get worked up about and now it's this, he's telling himself he's gay.

CHARLIE: You don't believe him?

VAL: It's not what I believe love, it's what he believes about himself.

CHARLIE: He said that I was gay too.

VAL: Did he now?

Charlie nods.

VAL: Ok. So, now I'm getting the picture here.

CHARLIE: What picture?

VAL: You dropping out of the meeting tonight.

CHARLIE: I didn't say I was dropping out.

VAL: You didn't seem that keen.

CHARLIE: I never really thought that gays were real.

Val laughs.

CHARLIE: Ya know what I mean, like UFOs or Werewolves. They were just something people talked about but I'd never actually met a real live living one before.

VAL: Listen, I'm laughing but there's truth in what you're saying son. When I was a wee girl, growing up here, we didn't have them at all. I mean you never heard about them, never saw any and then after the sixties suddenly they start appearing, popping up like nobody's business. It was like it was giving people ideas. To be honest I think that's what happened to our Paul....

CHARLIE: You think it's only in people's heads?

VAL: You see he was obsessed with Top of the Pops and all them music programmes, I used to say to his mother I'd watch him if I was you he's soaking all that stuff in. Then he started to like that David Bowie fella. From day one I never liked him, just something about him. Sneaky look on his face. And to be honest I heard somewhere that he's a bit ya know, bent, that wouldn't surprise me one bit. And now I might be wrong but I'm sure this information got stuck in our Paul's head and he's convinced himself that in order to be trendy or to get noticed you have to be a bit queer. I'm not joking you that's the way it works, I'm tellin ya. Mark my words on it.

CHARLIE: So they just do it to be different?

VAL: I'm not exactly an expert on it, but I just think it's very strange that suddenly you're hearing more and more of it, ya know more young ones saying they're gay. It's like it's a good way to be different, to get attention. Maybe some of them are ya know, that way inclined, gay but I just think it's all gone mad. God only knows where it'll end.

CHARLIE: Ones in school have called me queer and even Linda ...

VAL: Not Linda again?

CHARLIE: It's like they can see it.

VAL: You know something? Do what feels right for you, I mean really right. Don't try and be something you're not, if it feels ... wrong then it's not for you. That's all I can say.

Charlie ponders this for a moment.

CHARLIE: I still don't know why he has to put on an English accent.

VAL: I thought we were done with that.

CHARLIE: I just need to know. If you don't want me sayin anything then I should know what's going on.

Beat.

VAL: Ok. I didn't want ones round here asking him too many questions. Like where are you from and stuff. My family are from the other side of town, North Belfast. You probably already know this, it wasn't a kept secret and I know the way ones talk. I married a Protestant and moved over this side. I belong here now. I'm the same as everyone else round here and I don't want anyone thinking differently about me.

CHARLIE: No one round here cares, not about you.

VAL: All the same it's best not to rock any boats.

Charlie nods he goes back to the cages.

VAL: But just remember son, I know you can't always talk to your mother about these things, but you can always talk to me any time, you know that don't you.

Charlie nods.

VAL: Right well I'll go up and see if her majesty's ok and when I come down I want you to apologise to her.

CHARLIE: Me? It was her who started it all.

VAL: Enough. You'll say sorry and that's the end of it.

Val leaves. Charlie goes to the tape player and turns it on. Night Fever comes on. He dances to it. Paul in a vest and track suit bottoms comes into the shop. He watches Charlie dance before he joins him. They stop dancing.

CHARLIE: Where have you been?

PAUL: Boxing.

Paul flexs his biceps.

PAUL: Feel that, it's rock hard.

Charlie hesitates.

PAUL: Go on, feel it, once in a lifetime offer.

Charlie feels Paul's bicep. His hand stays there.

PAUL: Feels good doesn't it.

Charlie takes his hand away. Paul goes upstairs.

Black out.

Scene Five:

Lights snap up on ...

Charlie holding Noreen's hand.

NOREEN: Wise up, you're just wanting to take the piss out of me.

CHARLIE: I'm not. My granny showed me how to do it.

NOREEN: I've never had it done before. You're not going to say anything bad?

Charlie shakes his head and takes her hand and looks at her palm.

CHARLIE: I can see some stuff here.

NOREEN: Really?

CHARLIE: You've an older brother.

NOREEN: You knew that already.

CHARLIE: And a wee sister.

NOREEN: I haven't. She's dead.

CHARLIE: But she's still your wee sister.

NOREEN: She died when she was a wee baby. That's why my Da's so over protective with me.

CHARLIE: She'd be about fourteen now.

NOREEN: Linda's likely told you all that stuff.

CHARLIE: No she didn't, I can see it.

- NOREEN: Can you see if I'm going to get married?
- CHARLIE: Aye you are, look that line there says it.
- NOREEN: Thank fuck. Here, am I going to have children?
- CHARLIE: Not sure about that.
- NOREEN: What? Wise you up, I am, course I am.
- CHARLIE: Why are you saying that?
- NOREEN: I've always wanted a baby, I don't care about anything else just as long as I have a baby. More than one, three at least.
- CHARLIE: That's all you want?
- NOREEN: Yes.
- CHARLIE: Do you not want to have a nice house and move away from here?
- NOREEN: No, all my mates are round here.
- CHARLIE: I don't want to stay here for the rest of my life.
- NOREEN: The first thing I'm going to do when I get married is leave my job in the shirt factory. I'm going to get pregnant right away.
- CHARLIE: Get a different job, a better job, go to college like Linda and do your A'levels.
- NOREEN: I don't want to do A'levels. I just want to stay at home and look after my wee ones. Sure, what's so wrong with that, it's what my Ma did.

Charlie shrugs, gives her smiles.

- CHARLIE: Nah but look here, I can seriously see something. You're going to meet a fella.
- NOREEN: Where?

She looks at her palm.

- CHARLIE: Just there.

He kisses her, she pulls away.

NOREEN: Oh my God.

CHARLIE: Sorry....

NOREEN: You're a bit of a fast mover.

CHARLIE: Sorry, I just ...

NOREEN: Stop saying sorry.

She grabs him and snogs him with passion, he finally breaks away.

NOREEN: What's wrong?

CHARLIE: Nothing, I just needed some air.

She grabs him again and kisses him, he wriggles free.

NOREEN: Have you ever snogged a wee girl before?

CHARLIE: Aye.

LINDA: Linda says you're clueless when it comes to girls.

CHARLIE: Linda doesn't know anything.

NOREEN: I'm going to tell her you said that and she'll kill you.

CHARLIE: No don't she hates me enough already.

NOREEN: So, do you want to see me or what?

He looks at her.

CHARLIE: Aye, maybe

NOREEN: Jesus, don't be too enthusiastic or nothing.

CHARLIE: Ok. I meant to say ok.

She grabs him and kisses him. Paul comes in. Charlie breaks away from Noreen. There is a moment of awkwardness.

NOREEN: Charlie's been telling me my fortune.

PAUL: A fella with hidden talents.

NOREEN: He's dead good at it. I'm going to get married.

CHARLIE: I can only do it a bit.

NOREEN: You should let him do yours.

PAUL: Why?

NOREEN: So you can find out what's going to happen to you. See if you're going to get married an all.

PAUL: You reckon he could tell me that?

NOREEN: Maybe.

PAUL: Could you Charlie? Could you tell me if I'm going to get married?

CHARLIE: Not sure.

PAUL: I'm not into all that, it's up to us to make our own lives.

NOREEN: *(Laughs)* You say really funny stuff.

PAUL: I'm full of funny stuff.

NOREEN: So, where are you going?

PAUL: Out.

NOREEN: Ah that's dead good, you've made mates already have ya?

PAUL: No, but maybe I will.

NOREEN: God I'd never go out anywhere on my own.

PAUL: You don't try anything different then you never experience anything new.

NOREEN: *(Laughs)* I don't have a friggin notion about what you're saying, do all English people talk like you?

PAUL: You could come with me Charlie, I'll take you out on the town.

CHARLIE: Nah, you're ok.

PAUL: Why not?

NOREEN: Hey leave him alone! He's going to walk me home.

CHARLIE: Am I?

NOREEN: Aye you are, and we need to go now, my da goes mental if I'm out too late.

PAUL: Ah I meant to say to you, Val was looking ya, she said she needed you to help her with something upstairs.

CHARLIE: I'm not working, I've finished.

PAUL: Just telling you what she said.

NOREEN: Never bother, come on we'll just go.

CHARLIE: Nah, I'd better go and see what it is.

NOREEN: It's near half past, my da'll go ape shit if I'm late.

Charlie heads for the stairs.

CHARLIE: I'll be two seconds.

He goes.

PAUL: To be honest, I wouldn't bother waiting, he'll be a while up there.

NOREEN: I'll wait for another minute.

PAUL: Jesus you're really wanting to get your claws into him aren't ya.

NOREEN: No I'm not. I'm not like that.

PAUL: That's how it looks.

Noreen stands up, faces Paul.

NOREEN: Your accent's funny. Sometimes you don't sound all that English.

PAUL: That's because my parents are from here, I grew up listening to the accent when I come back to here I sometimes slip into it.

NOREEN: I was tellin my ma and da about you staying here with Val and my Da says you're most likely a catholic.

PAUL: Why'd he say that?

NOREEN: Val used to be one, before she got married and came here.

PAUL: We don't care about that kind of stuff.

NOREEN: The ones round here do.

PAUL: I'm an atheist. I don't believe in religion, so you can tell your Da that.

Noreen nods.

NOREEN: Do you have a girlfriend?

PAUL: No.

NOREEN: Why not?

PAUL: Don't want one.

NOREEN: My mate Linda likes you.

PAUL: She doesn't know me.

NOREEN: She likes the look of ya.... do you like the look of her?

PAUL: She looks ok.

NOREEN: You're a bit full of yourself aren't ya?

PAUL: If you need to get home you should go, you don't want Charlie thinking you're desperate.

NOREEN: You wanting rid of me?

PAUL: Don't want you getting into trouble with your dad.

NOREEN: Aye I'm sure you don't.

She grabs her bag and heads to the door.

NOREEN: It's true what they say about the English they're stuck up so they are.

She gives him a wave as she leaves. Paul smirks as he watches her go. Charlie comes back.

CHARLIE: What were you talking about? She didn't want me at all.

PAUL: I was sure she said she did.

CHARLIE: Where's Noreen?

PAUL: Is she your girlfriend?

CHARLIE: No.

PAUL: Looked like it.

CHARLIE: She might be.

Paul laughs.

CHARLIE: What ya laughing at?

Paul smiles and shakes his head.

CHARLIE: You think it's funny me having a girlfriend?

PAUL: Did you enjoy kissing her?

CHARLIE: Aye.

PAUL: Looked like she was the one doing all the kissing. Looked like you were shitting yourself.

Paul goes behind the cages. He comes back with one of Charlie's placards, he has changed it to say 'Save Sodomy from Ulster'. Paul shows it to Charlie he laughs.

PAUL: Do you get it?

Beat.

PAUL: You don't do you?

Beat.

PAUL: It means the opposite of the sign you had.

Paul hands it to him, Charlie takes it.

CHARLIE: Thanks.

Paul keeps a hold of the placard, he locks eyes with Charlie. Charlie lets go and backs away.

PAUL: I'm going down into town, I'm going to a bar, it's a gay bar, do you want

ta come?

Beat.

PAUL: Might do you good.

CHARLIE: I don't think it would.

Charlie heads to the door.

PAUL: You away running after your wee girlfriend?

CHARLIE: I'm not running after her.

PAUL: Nah but you're running aren't ya. Running scared.

CHARLIE: Why are you always having a go at me?

PAUL: I'm only talking to ya.

Charlie hesitates before he pulls open the door, he looks back at Paul.

PAUL: Come down to the bar. You don't like it you never have to go back.

Charlie rests his back against the shop door, he's tempted.

PAUL: You going to come?

Charlie nods.

Lights fade.

Scene Six:

Charlie sits on top of the shop counter. Val stands behind him.

CHARLIE: We were upstairs, that's where the dance floor is, and there were like fellas dancing with other fellas, none of them caring and fellas kissing other fellas, I swear to God I'm not even lying and nobody blinked a friggin eyelid. I wanted to laugh, that's what I'd have done if I'd been in school or anywhere round here. I never even imagined that anywhere like that existed. Paul got me a drink and I started to feel ok, more relaxed.

VAL: So, Paul took you to this place?

CHARLIE: Aha. I didn't even want to go at first but he talked me into it.

- VAL: Talked you into it? Right.
- CHARLIE: The music was great, like really really great. Before I knew it we'd been in there like two hours. Paul took me onto the dance floor and we danced, I was dancin dead good. I didn't feel stupid or weird. I'd all these butterflies in my stomach, like good kind of butterflies. I can't stop thinking about it. I want to go again, but what if any of the ones round here found out that I went there?
- VAL: He'd no business taking you there.
- CHARLIE: Ah now don't be saying nothing to him.
- VAL: Ya see that's the trouble with my sister and her family they don't know how to exist without causing trouble. It's why I couldn't go near them. Always over stepping over the line, always doing stuff they shouldn't be doing.
- CHARLIE: I'm glad he took me there. Really really glad, it was good for me.
- VAL: Was it?
- CHARLIE: For the first time I felt like I was part of it, I wasn't worried that someone was going to say something to me or make fun of me. It's like something just clicked.
- VAL: Charlie son, you're sixteen how the hell do you know what's going to be good for you at sixteen?
- CHARLIE: You started to train as a dancer when you were sixteen.
- VAL: This is a different thing entirely. This will determine your life forever, it's not something you can just jump into and then six months later walk away from.
- CHARLIE: For as long as I can remember I've felt like a misfit. I've tried to be like everyone else and do what they're all doing. I thought being part of the church and the campaign would make me feel happier. But it didn't. This does. Meeting Paul and going to the bar just made me feel normal.
- VAL: In my dancing days I've worked with all sorts and I don't care how different other people are, but I'd have concerns about you and how you'd ever cope in a world like that.
- CHARLIE: I'm just saying I liked being there, that's all.
- VAL: It's that, that worries me son.
- CHARLIE: Why should it worry you?

VAL: Don't be so quick to tie yourself into a life style that could well bring you misery.

CHARLIE: I kissed Noreen Lemon the other night.

VAL: Jesus what has gotten into you this weather?

CHARLIE: I hated it. I mean really hated it. I wish I hadn't done it.

VAL: You're not going to like every girl you kiss.

CHARLIE: She's the only girl I've kissed.

VAL: Well there you go, you can't base everything on one kiss with one girl.

CHARLIE: But it didn't feel right and you said that I shouldn't do anything that didn't feel right to me.

VAL: I'm just saying that you need time to work it all out.

CHARLIE: Everyone seems to know what they like and what they want and no one says anything to them. No one's worried about them.

VAL: You're the sensitive type. And sensitive types always struggle to work their lives out, you'll get there son. You will. Trust me.

Mrs Mulholland barges in.

MRS MUL: Well it's all kicked off now! There's going to be trouble round here.

VAL: What's happened?

MRS MUL: Yon wee lady they found up the back entry in Tildarg Street.

VAL: I hadn't the radio on this morning.

MRS MUL: They've arrested young Andrew Morgan and a couple of young girls from the bottom of the road.

VAL: He's the one that did it? He did that awful thing? Dear God in Heaven.

MRS MUL: That's what they're saying and they're saying someone informed on him. someone grassed him up.

VAL: Well if he did it, then he deserves to rot in jail for the rest of his days.

- MRS MUL: He's part of this community and as much as I despise what happened we have to stick together, otherwise we'll crumble into nothing.
- VAL: I remember him coming in here as a wee fella, butter wouldn't have melted. I can see his front door from my upstairs back window.
- MRS MUL: People came out of their houses and they were shouting all sorts of abuse at the police, they're saying it's a set-up, due to the outcry from the other side about it. That's not how people treat the security forces round here.
- VAL: Well I just hope there's no more trouble and we can go back to normal.
- MRS MUL: The IRA can blow the place to blazes and kill and lame hundreds and nothing's said about it, but the minute one of theirs gets it all hell is set loose, demanding justice and all sorts. I'm tellin ya people round here won't be taking it. Not a young fella like Andrew Morgan. Both his aunts go to my church, lovely decent people.
- VAL: All I can say is, it's a terrible affair from all sides.
- MRS MUL: Always the peace maker Mrs Fitzpatrick.
- Beat.*
- MRS MUL: (*Charlie*) Well you feeling any better?
- CHARLIE: I'm ok.
- MRS MUL: Good, cause we'll be in need of you tonight to go out leafleting. I have a fire in my soul that is blazing out of control and I am determined we'll get our message out. Something good needs to happen.
- CHARLIE: I don't think I can come, not tonight.
- MRS MUL: We're counting on you. The face of the young. Do you know how powerful it is having you amongst us? It's the young people who can really help this campaign. You can stop this evil from being set loose amongst us all.
- CHARLIE: I've stuff to do tonight.
- MRS MUL: Stuff to do? What can be more important than saving our country from sin and sodomy?
- CHARLIE: Homework, I've got loads to do and like I'm really struggling with it, I'm falling behind.

VAL: Sure maybe you can go along another day?

CHARLIE: Aye, maybe

MRS MUL: I'm sorry but I'm not one bit happy about this. I have to say ...

VAL: It's only today ...

MRS MUL: Let me speak.

I'm disappointed in you Charlie. Disappointed indeed. It was me that came to your house and sat with your mother when your father walked out on you all. It was me that took your mother to the doctors, who made sure you were all taken care of. It was me who came in here and asked Mrs Fitzpatrick to give you the part-time job.

VAL: Mrs Mulholland....

MRS MUL: That's twice you've let us down and it's not just me and the campaign you're letting down but the Lord as well, and you know only too well what he has done for you and how he looks after you.

CHARLIE: I don't want to go.

MRS MUL: You'll be there next time that's what matters.

VAL: Was there anything else you wanted Mrs Mulholland?

MRS MUL: Actually yes, I need to buy some corn for Tommy's pigeons, he's ran out.

Val goes to the get the corn.

MRS MUL: So just enough to get him to the end of the week.

CHARLIE: I'm not going another day Mrs Mulholland. I'm not going back.

MRS MUL: What?

CHARLIE: It doesn't feel right for me to be doing it.

MRS MUL: What are you talking about?

CHARLIE: I've been thinking about it, properly thinking, I never really did before and ... I don't think I agree

VAL: What he means is he's over worked with school and coming in here, it's

too much for him at the minute.

MRS MUL: Turning away from us in our hour of need. Oh, you're not the first to do that and you won't be the last. The lord has seen your sort before. One's he grew to trust who turned away from him.

CHARLIE: I don't think it's right, the campaign. I think you should stop it and leave the gays alone.

MRS MUL: What has gotten into you?

CHARLIE: I don't think gay people are evil. I think the campaign is evil and I don't think it's got anything to do with God or being good.

MRS MUL: Who's been twisting your mind? Your being taken down a very dark path. You coming to work in this here shop has ruined you. It's led you astray.

VAL: Now Mrs Mulholland come on that's a bit much saying all that, if he doesn't want to do it, then let it be.

Mrs MUL: Let it be? I don't think so. You know something Mrs Fitzpatrick I've never really trusted you. After all these years coming in here buying the corn for the pigeons and food for the dog I've always found you ...removed. I wouldn't be surprised if you put him up to this. If you turned him against us.

VAL: And why would you think that?

MRS MUL: You never say too much. You're always sitting on the fence, holding back. At least that's the face you like to show. Truth is no one in this country sits on the fence behind closed doors. You're either with us or you're on the other side....
As a matter of fact I'll leave the corn for today. I'll go down to McVeigh's pet shop in the morning, in fact maybe I'll start going there from now on.

Mrs Mulholland leaves the shop. Val watches her go. Charlie looks at her.

CHARLIE: I'm sorry but I just can't go to those meetings anymore.

VAL: You did right being upfront with her and telling her the truth.

CHARLIE: Maybe, but you need to talk to her, you don't want to get on the wrong side of Mrs Mulholland. You haven't done anything wrong.

Paul comes from upstairs.

PAUL: Any chance of some food auntie Val?

VAL: I want a word with you, (*Charlie*) Away down the back and tidy up the store.

CHARLIE: I did it the other day.

VAL: Can you just do what you're told!

Charlie goes off.

PAUL: What?

VAL: I told you one bit of trouble and you'll have to go.

PAUL: What have I done?

VAL: Have you any sense?

Beat.

VAL: You took a sixteen year old to a gay pub.

PAUL: I was trying to do him a favour.

VAL: You've made him more confused if anything. His head is all over the show.

PAUL: No one else was ever going to bring him there and he'd never have went on his own.

VAL: Oh really? Mister big man are ya? Who put you in charge of looking after him?

PAUL: If he's left on his own round here he'll never be ready. He'll stay stuck.

VAL: Look after yourself son. You've enough of your own shit to worry about.

PAUL: Ok, I'll step back.

VAL: You need to stop coming here.

PAUL: I'll leave him alone.

VAL: You need to make it up with your father and go home. You belong there, not here.

PAUL: Crawl back with my tail between my legs and deny everything.

Val locks the shop door.

PAUL: Pretend to be someone else. Live in fear in case any one finds out the truth about who I am.

VAL: People don't need to know your business. You can still be yourself, they just don't need to know all the ins and outs.

PAUL: That's not the life I want to live.

VAL: One things for sure, you can't live the life you want here. You don't belong here. And I'm feeling very uneasy. People are asking questions and sooner or later it'll all come out.

PAUL: You know something. I thought you were stronger than this. What happened to the auntie Val I remember. You took no shit. You and my da never got on cause you were always calling him out on things he got involved in. You always spoke your mind no matter what.

VAL: You live and you learn, sometimes it's just not worth sticking your neck out.

PAUL: Nah, you're wrong and you know it. You have to be yourself and not some card board cut out.

VAL: All them years of you growing up and listening to your provo da and his cronies has twisted your head wee lad.

PAUL: Why have you gone on staying here?

VAL: Why wouldn't I?

PAUL: You don't belong here either, any idiot can see that. These aren't your people. You stand in here and you bury who you really are, I can see it. You could move back to where you came from. Back to your own community.

VAL: I turned my back on that community when I married Samuel. I made my choice and I came to live over this side, I knew the price I was paying and I was more than happy to pay it.

PAUL: Are you still happy to pay it?

VAL: You make a choice and you live with it.

PAUL: My ma would welcome you with open arms.

VAL: It's not your ma that concerns me. It's the rest of them.

PAUL: No one would say a word to you, you're one of us.

VAL: My home is here, my business is here, I'm fine.

PAUL: You're not fine. You're hiding who you really are. For what? So you can keep in with yer woman Mrs Mulholland and her Bible thumping?

VAL: I like keeping myself to myself.

PAUL: I want to help you.

VAL: Paul love I don't need anybody's help. Ok. Just sort yourself out.

PAUL: You're going to end up by yourself, dying up them stairs on your own, no family around ya.

VAL: Look! What is it you want from me?

PAUL: I don't know.

Beat.

PAUL: I want the auntie Val that I remember to come back again.

VAL: I've a friend who lives in London. I've given it some thought and you could go and stay with him for a bit. I've already made enquiries and he's said yes if you want to.

PAUL: London?

Paul thinks it over, he walks to the window and stares out into the street.

PAUL: What would I do in London?

VAL: You'll find your way. It won't take ya long. It'll be a new start.

Police sirens rages outside. Val races to the window.

VAL: I'm going to call him.

PAUL: Look at you, you're a bundle of nerves.

VAL: I'll tell him you're coming. I'll pay your fare.

Val goes upstairs.

Charlie comes in from the back. He watches Paul at the window.

CHARLIE: Thanks for taking me to the bar last night.

PAUL: You'd no need to tell Val about it.

CHARLIE: I didn't think there'd be any harm, I thought she knew.

PAUL: She thinks I'm a bad influence on you.

CHARLIE: Can we go again?

PAUL: Nah.

CHARLIE: I'll not say anything to Val.

PAUL: I'm going to London.

CHARLIE: What?

PAUL: Val's arranged it.

CHARLIE: Why?

PAUL: She doesn't want me here and I don't want to go crawling back to my da.

CHARLIE: Sure you've only been here a few days.

PAUL: Long enough to know that I don't fit in.

CHARLIE: I don't fit in either.

PAUL: You're still one of them.

CHARLIE: Don't go, not yet.

PAUL: Why? Why do you give a shit?

CHARLIE: I'm just getting to know you. I like you being around.

Charlie puts his arms around Paul and holds onto him.

Bowie's 'Boys Keep Swinging' plays carries into next scene.

Scene Seven:

Saturday Night.

Noreen and Charlie dance. Linda hands Paul a drink.

LINDA: I like Rock and Ska, ya know, the Specials, the Beat, the Clash, all that kind of stuff. I used to want to be a punk, I kinda still do.

Paul changes the tape, plays Rudi 'Big time'.

PAUL: If you wannabe Punks then you need to listen to these ones.

Paul starts to pogo and dance around to the music.

NOREEN: I love this song ... but my ma would go ape shit if I turned up looking like a punk.

Linda pours vodka into two mugs. She hands a mug to Paul.

NOREEN: Where's ours?

LINDA: There's only two clean mugs, we'll share so we will.

Noreen takes the mug out of her hand, drinks and hands it to Charlie.

Charlie knocks back the remainder of the vodka. The mugs of vodka get filled up and passed around the group.

NOREEN: Do youones not think there's something funny about Paul. Like sometimes you sound more Belfast than any of us.

PAUL: (*West Belfast*) What are ya tryin ta say wee girl?

NOREEN: And an other friggin thing, that song you're playing it's by Rudi, they're a Belfast punk band, no one in London would ever have heard of them.

PAUL: Think you're a smart wee fuck don't ya. Fucking Noreen Christie.

Charlie laughs.

LINDA: What's funny?

CHARLIE: Can we have more vodka?

LINDA: You've had way too much already.

CHARLIE: Who are you? My ma.

LINDA: I'd love that auld Mrs Mulholland to see you now, she'd soon change her tune

about you. She'd be throwing her Bibles at you ...

CHARLIE: I don't give a fuck what Mrs Mulholland thinks, I don't give a fuck what anyone thinks, that's why I told her to stick her placards up her arse.

The girls laugh.

NOREEN: Jesus you are plastered.

Paul turns the music up, they do silly dancing and clowning around. Noreen grabs Charlie and snogs him passionately. Linda slips her arm around Paul's waist and snogs him. Charlie pulls Paul away from her.

CHARLIE: What are you doing?

LINDA: Charlie fuck off would ya.

Noreen grabs Charlie's hand and drags him down the back of the shop out of sight.

LINDA: He gets on my fucking tits sometimes.

PAUL: He's ok.

Linda moves in to kiss Paul again, he moves away.

LINDA: I'm not like some desperate wee millie you know.

PAUL: I know that.

LINDA: I'm doin A'levels and I might be going to University, I've got plans to better myself.

PAUL: Good.

He knocks back his vodka.

LINDA: So what's your problem?

PAUL: I haven't got one.

LINDA: Do you not like me?

PAUL: You seem dead on.

LINDA: I'm very choosy about the fellas I go for. You should be flattered.

Charlie comes racing back followed by Noreen.

CHARLIE: Maybe he just doesn't fancy you Linda.

LINDA: Will you just fuck off before I beat the shit out of you.

Charlie knocks back more vodka. Noreen grabs him pins him up against the wall snogs him, her hands are all over him.

PAUL: You should go to university.

LINDA: Aye whatever.

Noreen turns the lights out. After a moment Charlie turns the light back on, revealing Paul and Linda snogging, he looks at them, not pleased. Noreen grabs him and turns the light off again. After a moment Charlie turns the light back on.

NOREEN: What are you doing?

CHARLIE: Keep the light on.

She turns the light out again. After a few minutes Charlie turns the light back on.

NOREEN: Frig sake wee lad what's your problem?

CHARLIE: Nothing.

NOREEN: I'm not being funny but there's two girls and two fellas in here, it's normal ok, we've the place to ourselves. So, what are you worried about?

CHARLIE: Linda leave him alone would ya.

LINDA: Clear off Charlie! Go home to your ma.

CHARLIE: He doesn't want to see ya.

LINDA: I mean it I'm going to batter you wee lad.

CHARLIE: Tell her Paul.

PAUL: There's nothing to tell.

LINDA: Stop being a wee melter.

CHARLIE: He's fucking going off to London.

PAUL: Charlie, enough.

CHARLIE: He's going because he thinks he doesn't fit in here, he thinks none of you like him. Tell him you like him. tell him to stay.

Val comes downstairs.

VAL: There's something happening out on the road.

She races to the shop window and looks out.

VAL: Turn that bloody music down and stop attracting attention in here.

Paul turns the cassette machine off. There are sounds of a riotous crowd outside. Paul takes Charlie aside.

PAUL: Keep your fucking mouth shut.

LINDA: Jesus it sounds like a riot.

NOREEN: It's to do with them ones that got lifted.

VAL: I can't see anything from here.

LINDA: Are the Police there?

PAUL: I'll go out and see what's happening.

VAL: Indeed you will not, you'll be staying in here well out of sight.

NOREEN: Sure he's got nothing to worry about, he's English he's on our side.

VAL: I'll go and see what's going on.

LINDA: Don't be stupid Val. It's too dangerous.

VAL: I'll be ok, I can see there's a lot of ones coming out to look.

Val opens the door.

LINDA: Well I'm coming with you.

Linda runs off out of the after Val.

NOREEN: Oh my God this is dead exciting, I love to see a good riot.

Noreen follows Linda.

CHARLIE: Why were you kissing her if you're gay?

PAUL: Why did you let Noreen kiss you?

CHARLIE: I couldn't stop her.

PAUL: You could have just said I'm not interested.

CHARLIE: Not to Noreen Lemon I couldn't.

PAUL: Look I'm going to London tomorrow.

CHARLIE: What? You can't.

PAUL: Val's wanting me to go as soon as I can.

CHARLIE: No way, not tomorrow.

PAUL: What difference does it make if tomorrow or next week?

CHARLIE: You've made me think about stuff. I want to go back to that bar again. I want to talk to you about loads of things. There's no one else I can talk to.

PAUL: Go on your own.

CHARLIE: I can't, not without you.

PAUL: Course you can.

CHARLIE: I don't want you to go. It's different this place now that you're here.

PAUL: It's Val's decision. This is what she wants.

CHARLIE: I'll talk to her. I'll tell her you need to stay.

PAUL: I want to go, it's a good chance for me.

CHARLIE: What about me?

PAUL: What about you?

Charlie kisses him, it is a long passionate snog. Paul breaks away, catches his breath. Charlie stares at him.

PAUL: Shit ...

CHARLIE: I don't want you to go.

PAUL: Drop it will you.

CHARLIE: No I won't.

They kiss again. The girls come back. They freeze at the sight of Paul and Charlie kissing.

LINDA: Oh my Fucking God.

The boys break away.

LINDA: Youse are queers?

NOREEN: Charlie what the fuck are you doing?

PAUL: Take it easy will yas.

NOREEN: *(Paul)* This is you! You jumped on him the first chance you got. I haven't trusted you since day one.

PAUL: Believe what you want, but the truth is I didn't jump anyone, not my style.

NOREEN: Charlie's not a gay.

Paul looks at Charlie.

CHARLIE: I've made my mind up, I've tried both and I know which one I prefer.

LINDA: *(Laughs)* Holy fucking shit. This is magic....

NOREEN: It's not magic it's disgusting and wait til everyone hears about this! You'll be fucking dead so you will.

She heads to the front door,

NOREEN: Come on Charlie, we'll go to my house and sort this out.

Charlie hesitates. She looks back.

CHARLIE: No. I'm staying here.

Beat.

NOREEN: Why are you doing this?

CHARLIE: I'm not ...

NOREEN: Are you trying to make a cunt out of me? Are you.

CHARLIE: No, I'm not, it's just what's happened.

NOREEN: I thought you were decent.

CHARLIE: I'm sorry.

NOREEN: There's a riot going on out there, the fenians from Short Strand have come up and are fighting with our lot and the peelers, do you want me to go out there and tell them about you. Ya know this (*Paul*) I know you're not one of us, I don't care if you say you're from London or whatever I know you're one of them, Val's one of them too, everyone knows it so you must be too.

She storms off. She stops at the door.

NOREEN: I hate ya Charlie. You're a fucking wee Bastard! Queero!

She leaves.

LINDA: Jesus Charlie, I'll better go and calm her down before she says anything.

Linda leaves.

Paul and Charlie stare at the front door for what feels like a long time.

PAUL: You've done it. You've crossed it.

Charlie looks at him.

PAUL: The invisible line that separates you from all the normal people. You'll never be part of them again. From now on you'll be standing on the outside looking in at everyone else's life.

Charlie reaches out and takes Paul's hand. Paul looks at his hand in Charlie's.

CHARLIE: I don't give a shit, not anymore.

Paul breaks away from him.

CHARLIE: You know why?

Beat.

CHARLIE: You're here and you've given me ... I don't know strength to be my real self.

PAUL: Listen. You need to wise up. I'm leaving and I'm not coming back here.

Charlie stares at him.

PAUL: You're on your own now. Up to you to sort yourself out.

CHARLIE: I'll go with you.

Paul laughs. Charlie stares at him, he stops laughing.

PAUL: Nah ya won't.

CHARLIE: I mean it. I'll leave with ya. I'll quit school, leave my ma. I want to, once the ones round here find out about me they're goin ta be after me.

PAUL: Fuck sake before I walked in here you were parading with the DUP trying to save Ulster from sodomy. You've shit to sort.

CHARLIE: I know exactly what I want. I don't want to hang about here anymore. I wat to go to bars with you and dance and have a laugh.

PAUL: I'm going to be off in London doing my own thing. You and me ... it's not going to happen.

CHARLIE: The first time I saw you, that night you came in here I knew there was Something, like a connection. At first I didn't like it, the feeling you gave me but then I kept thinking about you. I think about you all the time.

PAUL: You're still a kid. I don't need the hassle from you.

CHARLIE: I feel like I've known you all my life. In fact my life up until I knew you meant nothing, it was like everything was black and white and now it's exciting, it's full of colour.

PAUL: Look, listen here. I wanted to see how far I could go with you. To see if I could push you, that's all it was with me. So wise up and just get on with it.

CHARLIE: I'm glad, really really glad.

PAUL: Charlie you're not listening. You and me, that's not going to happen, never going to happen. I was fucking messing with you ok.

CHARLIE: But tonight

PAUL: I was pist. Blocked. I got carried away. It's was a bit of craic for me, that's all.

CHARLIE: You led me on?

PAUL: You need to get over yourself it was a bit of messing about.

CHARLIE: You don't really know me yet, you'll see how mature I can be. If we go away you'll get to see who I really am.

Paul takes Charlie by the shoulders and looks him in the face.

PAUL: Look piss off would ya. I'm not into ya. I'm not interested.

Charlie finally takes this in.

CHARLIE: Fuck you..... Fuck you, you fenian queer bastard!

There is a sudden bang at the shop window, the glass smashes. A crowd has gathered outside the shop, shouting sectarian abuse 'Kill the queers... Fenians out come out fenian bastards etc

Paul and Charlie freeze, then race for cover behind the cages....

Val comes racing into the shop.

VAL: All Hell has broken loose out there. The cops can't control them.

Val races to the till and takes all the cash out.

VAL: *(Paul)* Get up them stairs, do ya hear me, go! If they get a hold of ye they'll murder ya...

PAUL: I'm not leaving you here on your own!

VAL: Go! And get your bag, you need to leave here now.

Paul goes.

Another bottle hits the window. Val screams, Charlie pulls her back into the shop.

VAL: Why are they doing this to my shop?

Mrs Mulholland comes in through the front door. She shouts back at the crowd to move away from the shop.

VAL: Why are they coming here? Why are they targeting my shop? I've not done anything.

MRS MUL: It's just got out of hand the whole thing. They're protesting about the arrests and now these hoodlams have hijacked it, just looking trouble, any excuse to cause mayhem.

VAL: But why are they attacking this shop.

MRS MUL: Doesn't take much for ones to start pointing the finger.

VAL: What are you talking about?

MRS MUL: Mrs Fitzpatrick you of all people should have known better.

VAL: About what?

MRS MUL: Just because they never say anything to you doesn't mean they don't know. People round here know who you are, it's never been a problem for us, but things come up at a time like this and I heard ones mentioning your name.

VAL: What were they saying?

MRS MUL: Saying it was very suspicious you having a stranger staying here and then somebody informs to the peelers. No one round here would ever inform, no one that was born and bred in these streets. We stick to our own.

VAL: Paul being here has nothing to do with any of this.

MRS MUL: Maybe so, but try explaining that to them, they want a scapegoat Mrs Fitzpatrick, they want someone to blame for all this.

VAL: Well tell them it's not me or anyone else in here. You know me, you've known me years. They'll listen to you. Go out there and tell them. Please.

MRS MUL: That wee lady, Noreen Lemon came running up to them shouting that there are queers in here on top of everything else, and that, Mrs Fitzpatrick hasn't helped one bit. They're wound up ready for anything.

VAL: Jesus Christ!

MRS MUL: Taking the Lord's name in vain isn't going to help you.

More jeers and shouts from outside.

MRS MUL: I would be very alarmed Mrs Fitzpatrick if what she said was true that you were harbouring homosexuals under your roof, catholic ones at that I may add. After everything I've been working for.

VAL: I'm harbouring no such thing in here.

MRS MUL: It would all fit in with you talking young Charlie out of carrying on with our campaign. It all makes sense to me.

VAL: I didn't talk him out of it. It was his own choice.

MRS MUL: I've no issue with going straight out there and telling them to their faces that there's no sodomites in here and no catholic informers. I will, I'll do that. No problem. But I'll only do it if I know it's the truth. I'm a woman of good standing and I will not stand out there and tell a shame faced lie.

VAL: Well please ... away you go quick before they do any more damage to this place, bloody hallions.

MRS MUL: That nephew of yours, Paul is it? I mean he looked right and shifty to me, now, I imagine he's the one young Noreen might be talking about. That wouldn't surprise me. If he is, then say and we can leave the crowd to deal with him and him alone.

VAL: Not at all Mrs Mulholland she's making the whole thing up. Paul's a decent young fella. There's nothing untoward about him.

MRS MUL: Then why would she do that? Why would she go screaming to the crowd?

VAL: You know these young ones full of drink, off their heads always squabbling. God knows.

MRS MUL: Charlie? You'd know the ins and outs of it all I'm sure, and I know you'd tell me the truth, I know ya would, cause you stood next to me listening to the Reverend Ian, there's good strong protestant blood in them veins of yours. You come from good stock and you've known me all your life. You wouldn't harbour no undesirables in here, I know ya wouldn't.

Val and Mrs Mulholland stare at Charlie.

MRS MUL: Tell me this son, and the honest to God truth now, and what you say I will completely believe. Is he, this Paul fella, the homosexual that Noreen was talking about?

Charlie looks at Val, then back at Mrs Mulholland.

MRS MUL: Be honest, be true to yourself and nothing but good will follow. Trust me son.

He slowly nods.

CHARLIE: Yes.... Yes he.

She goes to leave. Val stares at Charlie he can't look at her.

VAL: Don't be going out there and telling them Mrs Mulholland. Don't be doing that, I'm asking ya now do not do that ...please. In the name of God ... please.

Mrs Mulholland stops.

MRS MUL: It's dangerous times we're living in Mrs Fitzpatrick, dangerous times, I have a responsibility to up hold the Christian values of this community and look after my own. We might lose our battle to keep Northern Ireland pure from these sinners but I'll do whatever I can to follow God's law.

She leaves the shop. Val stares at Charlie in disbelief he races out of the shop.

Another bottle hits the window, glass smashes.

Bowie's 'Boys Keep swinging' blasts as we see flashes of light mixed with lots of shouting and screeching police sirens. Val cries out.

Lights fade, music continues as

Linda, Mrs Mulholland, Charlie, Paul and Noreen come in and open the cage doors, the birds fly off.

Val stands in the middle of the shop, looks around. She goes to the cage and takes out the white pigeon 'Dusty Springfield'. She holds the bird in her hand, strokes its body, then twists its neck and pulls its head off, blood everywhere. She drops the body on the ground and cries out.

Scene Eight:

Lights rise.

Early Sunday Morning.

Charlie sits on the floor. After a while Linda comes in. She stands looking around the room. She picks up the dead pigeon, stares at it for ages then holds it against her. Charlie watches her. He gets up and takes the dead bird from her, he strokes her head.

LINDA: I stood across the road and watched them leave, all she had was a suitcase and the coat on her back, all these years living and working in this here shop and that's the way it ends

CHARLIE: I tried to tell them I was lying but it was too late ... they were just out for trouble ... at least they got out alive .. at least they're safe.... at least it's all still standing...

LINDA: Where's she gone?

CHARLIE: Back across town I think, where she came from.

LINDA: I wish ta fuck it was you that was gone and not her. I swear to God I do. I really really do Charlie.....

Beat.

CHARLIE: So do I..... That's why

LINDA: What?

CHARLIE: I'm going to go where no one knows me, where there aren't any bastarding eyes on me all the time, where bastards don't fill your hair with ying, where dick heads don't mess about with ya and where there's no save Ulster from sodomy ones to tell me I'm going to hell.

LINDA: How you going to do that?

CHARLIE: Don't know.

LINDA: You know something it's not always going to be this bad. Things'll change

CHARLIE: I don't think so.

LINDA: I saw this programme on the TV about gays and there's places where they can go to, places where there's loads of them and they dance together. Some of them have like relationships like proper relationships where they're in love.

CHARLIE: Where was this?

LINDA: Think it was America.

CHARLIE: Ok so I'll go there then.

Beat.

CHARLIE: Eventually.

Linda smiles.

CHARLIE: What music were they playing?

LINDA: When?

CHARLIE: In this programme you saw.

LINDA: Disco, I think, why?

CHARLIE: It's important I want to imagine it, to really see it in my head.

LINDA: Maybe I've got you all wrong, maybe you have got some balls .. maybe you are a brave wee bastard.

CHARLIE: If I was brave I wouldn't have done what I did to Val.

Beat.

LINDA: So, have you found out what sodomy means yet?

Charlie shrugs.

LINDA: Well here you'd better if you're going to go and join them, I mean otherwise you'll look a right dick, wont ya?

She laughs.

LINDA: I hate the thought of this shop lying empty.

CHARLIE: Me too.

LINDA: What'll happen to it now?

Beat.

LINDA: Maybe me and you could run it. Keep it going for Val in case she comes back.

Charlie nods.

LINDA: Or maybe I'll just run it by myself while you run off and start being a gay somewhere.

They laugh. She leans in and kisses him affectionately on the lips.

Tina Charles '93 remix of I love to Love' plays. Charlie dances to the song. Linda is impressed at how he can dance..

LINDA: Oh my God look at you.... look at you disco fucking Diva.

He takes Linda by the hand and she joins him dancing.

The Lights fade.

The End....

Quarry.

by Joseph Grant Corr.

Quarry.**Character List:**

Chick: 21 year old Loyalist paramilitary.

Eddie Johnston. 18 year old student.

Johnto: 45 yr old UDA Brigadier.

Pope. 45 year UDA man.

Wilkie: 20s UDA man.

Dermot McManus. 20 year old Student.

Fishy: 20s Loyalist paramilitary.

Quarry.**Scene One:**

The grey monolithic stone walls of the Quarry are a presence throughout the play.

A young man, CHICK, gun in his hand stands opposite two men POPE and EDDIE, he could shoot either of them. The gun wavers in his hand, he looks distraught, his breathing is heavy.

CHICK: Oh my God... Oh my Jesus fucking Christ.

Eddie buries his head into his arms and crouches down, he lets out an agonising moan.

POPE: Do it ... DO IT ...

As the sound of young people's voices, laughter, shouts and pop music fills the night air, the image of these three men fades slowly into the darkness.

Scene Two:

Waste land, full of rubble and discarded rubbish. It is some months earlier. Chick, tartan scarf around his wrist, turned up jeans and long DM boots sits on a smashed up wooden crate. Pope hovers beside him. Empty cider bottles and lager cans lie on the ground.

POPE: The Lord didn't just fly over Belfast one night and drop down some looney gas and suddenly one morning we all woke up killers.

Pope takes a long drink from his can.

POPE: Know wha I mean?
Do ye?
We didn't go ta bed one night ordinary family men and wake up the next day pumpin bullets into people's brains...
Things happened here... things happened that made us do stuff we shouldn't have done.
I'm not denying what I've done kid ... not denying anything ...
but, I'm not taking responsibility for the things that happened, the things that turned us into them people.
Do ya know wha I mean.

Chick raises his bottle of cider.

POPE: Our one and only crime, may God forgive us this night, is that we love bein British. We're prepared to die for that right. A hundred fuckin times if need be....

Chick throws a fist in the air.

CHICK: Yo! God save our Queen and Ulster....

POPE: We were raised each and every one of us on the sound of the flute and the drum...

Chick bangs on the crate and whistles the Sash.

POPE: They pump through our Protestant blood. Ya can't take them away from us, they're in our DNA.

He suddenly pulls out a gun. Chick stops drumming.

POPE: See this here gun.

He holds it up.

POPE: When you look at it, what d'ya see?

Chick stares at the gun, thinks.

CHICK: A gun?

POPE: It's a friend. My best mate. My right fuckin arm.

He gives a laugh.

POPE: When I first looked at it, I was like you, all I saw was a hand gun. Didn't like it. To be honest, made me a bit ... fuck I don't know ... uneasy. But, you change. Things happen ta ya...

He belches.

POPE: Need a slash.

Pope staggers into the darkness a few feet away. Pope sings a Loyalist song as he pisses.

Chick picks up the gun, examines it, holds it in his hand, feels it. He stands up and aims the gun in various directions. He stares straight at it, presses it to his lips, holds it there, then slowly opens his mouth, closes his eyes and stands as if meditating. Pope comes back. He stares at Chick.

POPE: Fuck!

Chick drops the gun.

CHICK: I was just ... looking ... Just playing around....

Pope picks the gun up of the ground. He looks at it for a moment.

POPE: I thought you'd the makings of something... But ... I mean, if that's the way you get on ... Fuck...

CHICK: Nah... I wasn't I was just messin. Swear ta fuck ...

Pope looks at him, sizing him up good and hard.

POPE: A gun needs respect. Total and utter respect. D'ya understand me? Do ya?
DO YA?

CHICK: Aye, hundred fuckin per cent... I just wanted ta... ya know, feel it, that's all.... just ta ... I've never held one before, not properly... It felt good, holding it... powerful, gave me this feeling right here.

He holds his stomach. Pope stares at him.

POPE: D'ya know who Big Johnto is?

CHICK: Aye... Of course I know who Big Johnto is.

POPE: He wants to see ya.

CHICK: Johnto?

Beat.

CHICK: Big Johnto?

Pope nods.

CHICK: Fuck. *(Laughs)* Ya bein serious?

POPE: Johnto's only as big as the fellas he has round him ... you hang on ta that thought son.

CHICK: The night?

POPE: Look, what ya expectin? He's not goin ta let any fuckin waizic in, now is he? Needs to check ya out... make sure.

Beat.

POPE: It's ok ... I've towl him you've the makings.

CHICK: Makings?

POPE: Of a fuckin mad cunt.

They laugh.

POPE: Good with your fists, ya can handle yourself. More than handle yerself. Given a right few Fenians a beating, I've seen ya kid and.... and I heard about the rest. Heard loads. Too much ...

Beat.

POPE: If he gives the nod that's it. Just so ya know.

CHICK: The nod?

POPE: They'll swear ya in. The night. No backin out after that... Once yer in, yer in... ya know.

Chick thinks about it, then nods.

POPE: You still want it? Do ya?

CHICK: Aye.... I do. Aye, definitely.

Scene Three:

The King William bar. Loretta Lynn's 'You're not woman enough' plays.

Chick walks in. People stand about, drinks in one hand, cigarette in the other, they stare at Chick with suspicion. The atmosphere is tense. A man, FISHY, approaches Chick, he doesn't speak, just weighs him up.

After a while, Pope walks in with JOHNTO who is wearing combat trousers, boots and black t-shirt. Johnto touches Chick's scarf.

JOHNTO: One of them are ya?

Tense beat.

JOHNTO: Shankill Tartan boys.

Chick nods. The others laugh.

- JOHNTO: You Tartan boys are doin a good job down at Unity flats.
- WILKIE: Dirty scum bag Fenian Bastards down there.
- POPE: That's what I was tellin ya Johnto. Ya should see yer man here in action.
- CHICK: They burnt the Union Jack. The one's in Unity flats. You can't do that and expect to get away with it. That's why we went down there to them.
- WILKIE: You went to Ballygo school didn't ya.
- CHICK: Aye I did.
- WILKIE: You punched the lights out yer big man Smicker, I member that *(He laughs)*

Chick laughs too.

- CHICK: He was screaming like a wee girl.
- WILKIE: Any fuckin wonder.... You knocked his front teeth down his throat you mad fucking melter. Right fucking down. Blood all over the place.
- CHICK: *(Laughs)* Big thick gobs of blood, the stains where dried into the concrete, was there for years so they were.....
- WILKIE: Mad bollocks of a cunt. Always lookin ta use your fists.
- CHICK: Know wha that fucker did to make me do that to him?

Wilkie shakes his head, still laughing.

- CHICK: He squashed up my wee clay soldier that I'd made in the art class, fucking big goofy bastard. Know how long I spent making that wee soldier? Do ya? Wasn't fucking funny, I'm tellin ya...

Wilkie continues to piss himself laughing.

- CHICK: It was a soldier from the Somme, one of the Shankill boys.
- JOHNTO: Ah, the Shankill Boys.

WILKIE: (Chants) Shankill boys! Shankill boys! Shankill boys.

CHICK: My Granda was a real Shankill boy, fought for this country in the war, and them bastards go and burn the flag in our faces. That's just fucking evil. No call for it.

JOHNTON: I was there when that no warning bomb went off down the road. I saw the two wee babies. Mashed to fuck! Their wee bodies. They carried them out covered in sheets, sheets bright red dripping with their blood, soaked right through. Like slabs of awl meat.

The men groan in despair, shaking of heads, muttered words of disgust.

CHICK: That's why! That's why I went and joined the Tartans because of them IRA murdering bastards, we need to fight back, ta stand up for ourselves and protect our own. I fuckin hate them.

FISHY: I thought you were wearing the tartan cause of them Bay City Roller fellas, thought ya liked them, thought ya were a fan..

WILKIE: (Laughs) He thought you were a fruity cunt. He did.

Throughout this John to has kept his eye on Chick.

CHICK: Nah, we wear the tartan in support of the wee Scottish soldiers murdered by the IRA.. Fuck the Rollers.. I'm no Fruity boy.

POPE: The wee Scottish soldiers.

Pope raises his pint. Wilkie, Fishy and Chick sing to the tune of T'Rex's 'Children of the Revolution'.

SING: We are the children of the Shankill Road ...
Oh yes and we are the children of the Shankill Road ...

Wilkie gives Chick a pat on the back.

WILKIE: Best fighter in our year, weren't ya Chick. Iron man fists we used ta call you, member. Bionic man had nothing on you kid. Knock any fucker into next week so he did.

The men break into a chorus of the Billy Boys.

Hello, hello

We are the Billy Boys
 Hello, Hello
 You'll know us by our noise
 We're up to our necks in Fenian blood
 Surrender or you'll die.
 For we are
 The Shankill Billy Boys.

JOHNTON: Somethin about ye.

He stares at Chick. Chick grows uneasy.

JOHNTON: Can't put my finger on it. *(To Pope)* Can you?

POPE: Wha?

JOHNTON: Him. Somethin about him's like my Eddie ... reminds me.

POPE: *(Surprised)* Your Eddie?

Johnton doesn't like Pope's attitude.

POPE: Aye, well, maybe somethin, maybe it's the hair...

JOHNTON: The hair? The fuckin hair?

Pope nods.

JOHNTON: Nothin ta do with the fuckin hair ... just something ta do with him... reminds me that's all.

WILKIE: Wise up, there's no fuckin way mate nat your Eddie...

The men all stare at Wilkie, they wait.

WILKIE: I'm just sayin like ... no offence or nothing.

Johnton nods.

JOHNTON: *(Chick)* Young fella like you, you're wasted in the Tartans.

CHICK: Thought you liked the Tartans.

JOHNTON: Aye, for the wee lads...

Johnton locks eyes with Chick. They hold the gaze for a moment.

FISHY: Take the oath.

The four men turn their backs and put on masks. Fishy produces a Bible, Johnto produces a Union Jack flag, Pope produces a gun. Fishy takes the Bible and the gun. Wilkie places Chick's hand on the Bible and his other hand on the gun.

FISHY: Repeat after me. I Charles Thompson am a Protestant by birth.

CHICK: I Charles Thompson am a Protestant by birth.

WILKIE: And, being convinced of a fiendish plot by republican paramilitaries to destroy my heritage, do swear to defend my comrades and my country, by any and all means.

CHICK: And, being convinced of a fiendish plot by republican paramilitaries to destroy my heritage, do swear to defend my comrades and my country, by any and all means.

POPE: I further swear that I will never divulge any information about my comrades to anyone and I am fully aware that the penalty for such an act of treason is death.

CHICK: I further swear that I will never divulge any information about my comrades to anyone and I am fully aware that the penalty for such an act of treason is death.

POPE: I swear on the Holy Bible.

CHICK: I swear on the Holy Bible.

Johnto shakes Chick's hand. They raise their pints and drink.

Scene Four:

Waste ground.

One day passes.

CHICK: I'm up for it.

POPE: Nah, too soon.

CHICK: Not for me, I'm ready for it.

Beat.

CHICK: More than ready.

POPE: Not this one. Maybe next one.

CHICK: Nah. I'm tellin ya this one. I'm ready.

Pope stares at him.

POPE: Ever done a knee capping?

Chick shakes his head.

POPE: Ever seen one?

Chick shakes his head.

POPE: Gun pressed behind the knee cap, right against the bone, dead tight, pull the trigger and fire. Blows the fucking knee cap ta kingdom come, splintered into a million wee bits mixed with blood and skin, tissue and shit...

Chick doesn't flinch.

POPE: Think ya could handle it?

Chick nods.

POPE: Ok.

Chick smiles.

POPE: My first one I had to throw a bomb into a bar.

CHICK: *(Laughs)* Fuck ...

POPE: Killed five men and blew an awl woman's arms off. Got onto the head line news. Gave me a buzz so it did. My first one and I was like put up there, full total respect, everyone in the bar knew who I was. Buying me pints all round. No feeling like it.

Beat.

POPE: This fella got picked up a while back by the peelers, taken ta Castlereagh. Stupid fuck head gave them names. Thought it was innocent enough. What are they goin to do with names. Point is ya give them nothing. Names leads them somewhere and then that somewhere leads them somewhere else and

before ya know it bang, one of our boys has a bullet in the skull or they're banged up.

CHICK: Who is it?

Beat.

POPE: Wilkie boy.

CHICK: Jesus fuck, Wilkie, yer man from my school?

POPE: Aye, he's the fucking stupid bollocks. Shit for fuckin brains.

Beat.

POPE: Ya still wanna do it?

Beat.

Chick nods.

Scene Five:

Back entry.

Wilkie wearing a dress suit and a red carnation in his lapel stands in front of Pope and Chick.

WILKIE: I've already towl them, I didn't say nothing. Swear ta fuck mate I didn't. It's a misunderstanding so it is.

POPE: Not interested. Save your breath. Just following orders.

Wilkie jumps in front of Pope, he's in his face.

WILKIE: I'm beggin ya don't shoot me, it's my big sister's wedding the day and if you kill me it'll ruin her day forever, every anniversary will be ruined her thinkin bout me an all.

Wilkie turns on the water works.

POPE: We're not going to fucking brain ya.

Wilkie is instantly relieved.

WILKIE: Ah thank Fuck for that.

He goes to shake Pope's hand. Pope pushes him away.

POPE: Get on the ground, face down.

WILKIE: Look mate I bought this suit last week, Burtons and I don't wanna ruin it, I got it on a store card an all, haven't even started paying it off like.

POPE: Are you fucking bein serious?

WILKIE: Aye.

POPE: It'll get fucking ruined anyway.

WILKIE: Nah it won't.

POPE: When we put a bullet through your knee caps...

WILKIE: I'll roll the legs up?

POPE: (*Agitated*) Aye, ok, fuck, go on a head. But hurry up would ye...

Wilkie rolls the legs of his trousers up. lies face down. Pope hands the gun to Chick.

POPE: Right, big lad, away you go.

Beat.

POPE: Do it.

Chick presses the gun against the back of Wilkie's knee cap. Pope holds Wilkie down.

WILKIE: (*Shouts*) Just do it ... stop stalling.

Chick closes his eyes.

POPE: Both knees.

WILKIE: (*Shouts*) No..

Black out as Wilkie screams out in agony.

Scene Six:

Johnto's house.

Shirley Bassey's 'Gold Finger' plays, drowning out the screams. EDDIE, 18, shorts and vest lip syncs with actions comes on. Chick stares at Eddie in full swing. Eddie suddenly seeing him

stops. Their eyes lock. Chick raises his hand, a static, friendly wave. Eddie turns the music off.

EDDIE: Who ... Who let you in?

CHICK: Someone buzzed me in, at the front gate. But here, this back door wasn't locked though, so I just came on in.

EDDIE: *(Shouts upstairs)* Daddy! There's someone here for you.

JOHNTON: *(O/S)* Who's it.

EDDIE: Don't know ... just some fella ..

Eddie eyes Chick up, smirks.

EDDIE: He's a wanna be Marc Bolan.

Chick smirks.

EDDIE: Don't try and deny it.

CHICK: Chick .. Tell him, it's Chick. You're expectin me aren't ya?

Eddie gives a reluctant nod.

JOHNTON: *(O/S)* I'm coming now.

CHICK: By the way, Marc Bolan models himself on me, just so you know.

Beat.

CHICK: Have you done anything like this before?

Eddie shrugs.

CHICK: You'll be dead on.

Eddie rolls his eyes.

EDDIE: Aye whatever.

CHICK: I'll make a champ out of ya.

EDDIE: (laughs) Your name, Chick, it rhymes with Slick and Dic....

Johnto comes in, dressed in a white vest, tattoos on his arms, beer belly.

JOHNTO: You started workin on him already have ya?

CHICK: Aye, just tellin him he'll be a champ in no time.

JOHNTO: D'ya think?

CHICK: Aye.

Johnto slaps Chick's back.

CHICK: Your kitchen door here wasn't locked ... I just came on in, I'm just saying like .. I could be

Johnto looks at Eddie, he's furious.

JOHNTO: What the fuck have I told you!

EDDIE: The front gate's locked, you can't get through it unless you buzz them in. And Shelly just buzzed him without checking and you're not giving off to her, she shouldn't have done that, you're always saying.

JOHNTO: All the doors need to be locked and bolted at all times. How many fucking times do I have to say?

EDDIE: Ok, sorry, keep your hair on would ya.

JOHNTO: That door's ta be double locked every time. And where's the fuckin dog?

EDDIE: Up lying on our Shelley's bed.

JOHNTO: Fuck me! (To Chick) Lying on the bed! He's a fuckin Rottweiler, a guard dog, trained to rip the fuckin bollocks of any cunt that sets a foot over that gate and they have him up the stairs in their beds.

EDDIE: Not me, our Shelley and our Carla.

JOHNTO: Stuffing the dog's face with jaffa cakes and crisps.

EDDIE: Fairy cakes actually. Wee pink ones, our Carla baked in school and they are truly frigging mingin so they are.

CHICK: What's his name? The dog.

JOHNT0: Cassius ... big black fucker.

CHICK: Like the boxer ?

EDDIE: We call him Cassy, but daddy hates it, don't you Daddy?

JOHNT0: Right you, enough. Away you go and get yourself ready.

EDDIE: No.... I'm not going.

JOHNT0: I'm telling you to do something, now away you go.

EDDIE: I've said to my mummy and she says I don't have to if I don't want to so ...

JOHNT0: Get the fuck up them stairs before I give you a dig round the ear lugs.

Eddie rolls his eyes at Johnto.

JOHNT0: Away ya go.

Johnto pretends to box him, Eddie puts his hands up, blocking Johnto. He goes off.

JOHNT0: Fucking Kids do your bap in so they do.

CHICK: Seems a right character.

Johnto is puzzled, not sure what Chick is getting at.

JOHNT0: You went a few wee runs last week?

CHICK: It was dead on so it was.

JOHNT0: Over the Falls in the car doing a dummy run.

CHICK: Aye.

JOHNT0: What did ya think?

CHICK: I think yer man Fishy, the driver ... I think he's as thick as shit, can't fuckin drive either.

Johnnto keeps his eyes on him, finally he laughs.

JOHNTO: Didn't freak ya out when the car got stopped by the army?

CHICK: Nah... all the fellas kept their cool.

JOHNTO: Right. So, what if the soldiers found something? What would you have done then?

CHICK: Like a gun ya mean?

JOHNTO: Aye, or explosives.

CHICK: And I was stuck in the back seat like?

Johnnto nods.

CHICK: Don't know... get out of the car and run like fuck.

JOHNTO: Ya'd run?

Chick nods.

JOHNTO: And leave the other boys standin there?

CHICK: *(He nods)* They could run too.

Johnnto stares at him, seeking Chick out.

JOHNTO: *(Nods)* Right answer.
No point in ya all getting done. The less of ya that they have to interrogate the better.

Chick gives a self-satisfied smile.

JOHNTO: Always keep your cool, even when the shite is running down your legs.

Beat.

JOHNTO: Ya did a good job with that wee fucker Wilkie.

CHICK: Aye.

JOHNT0: Ya done him good.

CHICK: Fuckin wild noise he made.

JOHNT0: Can believe that ok.

CHICK: How's he doin'?

Johnto looks at him as if to say 'Why do you care'.

JOHNT0: Not goin ta walk again. Not, properly. Not without crutches, knee caps are well fucked.

The smile leaves Chick's face.

JOHNT0: Ya did the job well.

Johnto lights up.

JOHNT0: (*Eddie*)I'm expecting results from ya, with the young fella, hoping a bit of you'll rub off onto him.

CHICK: No probs.

JOHNT0: He needs to learn how ta use his fists.

CHICK: Specially round here.

JOHNT0: Round here's not the problem.

Beat.

JOHNT0: He's started at Queens.

CHICK: Brain box is he?

JOHNT0: His brains got him there but Fuck knows who'll he run inta, ya know what I mean. It's full of all sorts.

CHICK: Mad bastards, we run inta them coming back from the matches. Had the best diggings over there.

JOHNT0: Do you even know where Queens is?

CHICK: Aye, course I do it's over the other side of the town.

JOHNTO: I'm nat interested in the fuckin holigans you run into. I'm talking about the Queens, the University... It's is riddled with Fenians, all called Seamus and Declan or Cormac and names like that ya know what I mean, and that's just the frigging teachers.

CHICK: What's he going away over there for?

JOHNTO: Ya might not think it ta look at him but he's an ambitious pup so he is... he says Queens is the best that's why he applied.

Beat.

JOHNTO: Now to be honest my choice for him was Jordanstown. But, he knows better.

Beat.

JOHNTO: He's one of a kind, our Eddie. You need to stick with him.

CHICK: I'll do what I can, but some fellas just aren't/

JOHNTO: Naw, you're not hearin me. You're goin ta teach our Eddie ta fight. He's goin ta be able to use his fists.

Johnto stares Chick straight in the eye. Chick gives a nod. Eddie bounces into the room wearing track suit bottoms and sweat top.

EDDIE: *(To Chick)* Does this look alright?

JOHNTO: It's a boxing club he's takin ya to, not a fucking fashion parade.

Johnto and Chick laugh.

JOHNTO: *(Lightly)* Chick take him away out of my sight before he says anything else...

Eddie leaves.

JOHNTO: Member, no half measures.

Scene Seven:

Boxing club.

The men emerge and help Chick change into his boxing gear. Pope puts the boxing gloves on.

A punch bag swings from the ceiling. Chick dances around it, ferociously laying into it. His face full of rage. Eddie, boxing gloves on, arms folded, watches unimpressed. Chick stops.

CHICK: Right. Your turn.

EDDIE: Um, I don't actually think so.

CHICK: Give the bag a good digging.

EDDIE: Looks like I've something wrong with me, big swollen hands, ginormous balloon hands disease, like an ape.

Eddie walks around dragging his gloved hands along the ground. Chick starts to dance in front of him.

CHICK: Ok, punch me, go on.

Eddie swings the punch-bag trying to hit Chick. Chick becomes more and more frustrated. Eddie leaps into the air makes weird over the top monkey noises. He finds this hilarious. Chick flies after him and brings him down. He raises his fist as to punch him, but stops.

EDDIE: Get off me.

Chick shakes his head.

EDDIE: Get fucking off me! I mean it.

Chick shakes his head again.

CHICK: Not until you stop acting the maggot.

EDDIE: Fine. Ok.

Chick gets off him.

EDDIE: Dirty fucking scum bag.

CHICK: What did you just call me?

Eddie picks himself up.

CHICK: Say it again wee lad and I will fucking floor ya, I don't care who your da is.

EDDIE: You're a dirty, fucking, low life SCUM BAG!

Eddie races away. Chick chases him. Eddie grabs the punch bag. Chick grabs him.

EDDIE: Get off me stop it, fucking stop it!

Eddie starts to kick him and punch back. Chick eventually grabs his hands.

CHICK: Right! Enough.

Eddie continues to kick.

CHICK: (*Shouts*) Enough! Fucking enough. Ok.

Eddie stops.

CHICK: Your Da asked me to teach you how to fight, so I have to teach you whether you like it or not. Ok?

Eddie doesn't answer.

CHICK: Ok?

Beat.

EDDIE: Do you perm your hair?

CHICK: What?

EDDIE: Those curls don't look that natural.

CHICK: Is there something fucking wrong with you wee lad?

EDDIE: Actually, it's a straight forward question. Yes or no.

CHICK: No. No I don't.

EDDIE: I don't believe you ... you go to the hairdressers and you get them to perm it for you.
Or, you get your girlfriend to do it because you don't want anyone knowing about it.

Beat.

EDDIE: You sit there and she puts the curlers in one at a time, into your hair and then she puts the perming lotion. It stinks, perming lotion.

Eddie laughs.

EDDIE: Actually, I bet you don't have a girl. She's non-existent, the invisible girlfriend. The pretend girlfriend.

CHICK: What the fuck?

Beat.

EDDIE: I could ask our Shelly if she'd see ya, if you're looking a girl. She's not bad looking, when she puts her make up on and does herself up a bit.

CHICK: Nah, you're ok.

EDDIE: She's around your age. She'd suit you.

CHICK: I can find my own girls ok. I'm not fucking desperate.

EDDIE: Didn't say you were.

Chick grabs Eddie from behind and sculpts his body into a boxing pose.

EDDIE: (*Disgusted*) You stink of oil and cars. No wonder you haven't got a girl.

CHICK: You stink of an awl whore's handbag.

EDDIE: How dare you! It's Yardley actually, from my Mum's Avon book. Has essence of oak and ginger spice in it. Meant to send women wild... making them lose their minds and rip off all their clothes so they can have sex with me ...

Chick laughs.

CHICK: Right, will you shut up and start boxing.

Chick grabs the punch bag and holds it tight.

CHICK: Come on Eds start digging.

Eddie starts to punch it.

CHICK: Come on harder, that's the boy, harder. Just imagine you're punching some ugly big bastard ya really hate. Right in the kisser, knock his teeth down his throat, bust his nose ta fuck.

Eddie stops punching.

CHICK: Come on keep going.

EDDIE: I don't hate anyone.

CHICK: Ok, then imagine it's a dirty Fenian you're punching the fuck out of.

Chick starts digging.

CHICK: First get them hard in the guts, their face hard as you hit them, bust their face ta fuck.

Eddie stares as Chick's punches get harder and harder reflecting his rage.

EDDIE: I'm done.
I'm going home.

CHICK: You can't. Not yet.

Eddie stares at him.

EDDIE: Look, I don't need to fight.

CHICK: Everyone needs ta fight.

EDDIE: I don't.

CHICK: What? You some sort of super hero?

Eddie pulls a face.

EDDIE: You think you're funny don't you.

CHICK: Is it a flying turd? Is it a mangy dog? No its Brain Boy, he'll save you by boring the fuck right out of everyone.

Eddie gives Chick a deadening stare.

EDDIE: When I was just a wee lad I went up the Glen Cairn by myself.
I wasn't allowed to go there, but I went anyway.
I went to the fourth river. I was standing there looking at the current flowing really fast, it had this white foam on the top and this really disgusting smell of sulphur, it was stinking.

CHICK: Aye, know it. Wee fella in my class drowned in there.

EDDIE: There were these huge green umbrella leaves around me like a forest of them and they had this bitter smell that stung my nostrils.
I was getting dead scared and thinking I could easily fall in to the river and get swallowed up, no one would ever know what happened to me. I shouldn't have come here.
Then out of nowhere these big lads came. Four of them. One of them grabbed me and said they were going to throw me in the river, I swear I was like really crapping myself no messing.

Chick: Sounds like shit I'd have done. Probably was me ya know.

EDDIE: Nah, it definitely wasn't you.
One of the other ones asked me what religion I was and I just said I didn't know. For I knew if I said the wrong one I was dead.
They pissed themselves laughing at this, me not knowing my religion.
And then this other one asked me my name and I said Eddie Johnstone, he asked me where I lived and I said Agnes Street. And then he said to me, are you Big Johnto's wee fella? And I said yes and his face changed right there on the spot. He told the rest of them ta leave me alone and then they went, and as they were disappearing into the big green umbrella leaves I heard him saying to them all, his da is big Johnto, you do anything on him and you're a dead man.
That was the minute I knew that I didn't have to fight, no one was ever going to touch me.

Chick takes off the boxing gloves.

CHICK: Here, do us a favour. Tell your Da I showed ya how to fight.

Eddie watches Chick walk away.

EDDIE: Chick! Know what I think? I think you could easily have a girlfriend if you really, really, wanted one.

Chick looks at him then leaves. Eddie smiles, smells his t-shirt and then leaves.

Scene Eight:

Garage.

Pope standing at the garage doors, smokes a cigarette. Chick comes out cleaning his hands on an old rag. Pope hands him a cigarette, he lights up.

POPE: Not a trace not a single drop anywhere. Not a/

CHICK: I know all that. The back seats had a good wash down, twice. And then I went over it all again with fucking Mr Sheen, sprayed loads to make it smell nice. Been here since eight, did it before any of the rest of them where in.

POPE: Ya have ta get right down in between all the creases, coz that's where it gets trapped. The first place the Peelers will look. Needs ta be a hundred per cent clear, a hundred per cent.

CHICK: And right down all the sides and the carpets and under the front seats... I know the fuckin score mate, know it inside out.

POPE: One drop would get ya. Even a hair of his head. That's all it takes and they have ya good and fuckin hard by the balls.

CHICK: It was some fucking mess, near made me throw my guts when I looked at it, blood and shit all over the place.

POPE: *(Laughs)* The fellas were very enthusiastic, got a bit carried away last night. Fucking pliers and a big bastard of a bread knife. The slimy fucker still didn't squeal.

CHICK: There's been nothin on the news.

POPE: Still early so it is.

CHICK: Why'd ya nat ask me?

Beat.

CHICK: Ta be there like. I mean, them fuckers didn't know what they were doin.

POPE: Not my call mate, I'd no say.

Chick isn't sure if he believes him.

CHICK: Where'd ya dump him?

POPE: The quarry.
Never anyone up there first thing.

Wilkie on crutches approaches, he looks in a lot discomfort and pain. Pope and Chick stare at him. He stares back. After a while he gives them a nod.

CHICK: About ya?

POPE: How ya doin? Ok?

Wilkie doesn't answer, he looks at the ground for a bit before he speaks.

WILKIE: Doin fuckin great so I am, sure can ya not tell fellas. Thinkin of takin up football, maybe the blues'll have me.

Pope and Chick don't speak. Wilkie stares right at them.

WILKIE: Getting my Ma a loaf from the shap, she can't get out of her bed these days, not well so she's not. Still, sure we have ta keep goin, what can ya do, just keep goin so we do. Still keep goin ...

Wilkie hobbles off.

POPE: He's one ungrateful wee cunt of a bastard. He doesn't know how lucky he is. The order was to give him a brain job. Johnto talked them round so he did. Did Johnto no favours I can tell ya, no favours at all.

Pope drops his fag butt and stamps it out.

POPE: I tell ya if it had of been up ta me I'd have fuckin done it. Cunts like him don't appreciate mercy, they see it as weakness. D'ya see the way he looked at me an all, slimy wee bastard, I'm tellin ya. See when I'm up there, up with the big lads that wee cunt's a goner.

CHICK: Ya know, maybe he'd rather be dead. I mean look at him, hobbling about like some crippled awl fuckin dog, who the fuck wants that... it's just shit, ya know shit! Really fuckin sad, no one wants to look at

it....

Pope looks at him, says nothing for a while.

POPE: Ya got yourself a girl?

CHICK: No... Not at the minute.

POPE: Right.

Beat.

POPE: When I did my first bombing, in the bar, they were queuing up for me. No fuckin joking. Had my pick so I had, I mean ta fuck! Talk about a wee lad in a sweet shop... Jesus Christ, gives me a hard on just thinkin about it naw.

CHICK: I don't need any special favours.

POPE: A good ride would soon sort ya.... It's what ya need kid. I'm tellin ya.

CHICK: There's nothing wrong with me.

POPE: Would sort ya out, relax ya.

Beat.

POPE: All ya have ta do is give me the word, we'll have ya sorted. Good quality stuff ... I'm tellin ya ... just fuckin, ya know, say the word.

Wilkie comes back carrying a loaf of bread in his hand while trying to walk on the crutches, as he gets to Pope and Chick he drops the loaf on the ground, he struggles to pick it up. Pope and Chick hesitate to help, they watch as he struggles, drops his crutch and almost falls. Chick goes to grab the loaf. Wilkie sticks his crutch into the loaf.

WILKIE: I can get it myself.

He manages to pick it up and hobble away. Pope and Chick watch him go.

Scene Nine:

Garage.

The next day. Johnto at the garage is standing opposite Chick.

CHICK: I never go that side of the town.

JOHNT0: You'll be going this weekend.

CHICK: I've work.

JOHNT0: (*Firmly*) It's at night.

CHICK: Ya know, he's tougher than ya think, he's not a fool.

Johnto stares at him.

CHICK: He's able ta hold his own.

JOHNT0: Ah, and you know that for sure do ya?

CHICK: He'll sort himself out...

Beat.

CHICK: Ya know, when he knows himself that he has to look after number one.

JOHNT0: Do ya see when I make the time ta come to see you and to tell you to do something, nah, let me rephrase that. When I give you a fuckin order then I expect you ta just nod nicely and say no problem Johnto. And then I expect ya ta just fuckin get on with it and do it. Do you understand me?

Chick nods.

JOHNT0: So, he's goin out socialising over there Saturday night and you're goin ta be there too, watching him, keepin an eye on him. Like a big brother.

Beat.

JOHNT0: Is that goin ta be a problem to you?

CHICK: No Johnto.

JOHNT0: Good lad.

Johnto gives Chick a playful slap on the face.

JOHNT0: And remember, keep it all ta yourself. Ok.

Johnto leaves.

Scene Ten:

Disco at Queens

O'Jays 'Love train' plays. Several men stand about, drinking, chatting. Eddie stands on his own.

One of the men, DERMOT, clocks Eddie. They stand at opposite sides of the room, occasionally exchanging glances. After a while he walks across and stands close to Eddie. They lock eyes. Smile. Nod.

Dermot approaches, offers Eddie a cigarette, he takes it, they light up, smoke. They chat and laugh together. The other men dance.

Chick steps forward. He watches.

Dermot moves in and kisses Eddie. Eddie breaks away.

Eddie and Dermot leave.

Scene Eleven:

The King William bar.

Background music, voices. Chick, drunk, is standing with Pope and Fishy.

CHICK: Two of them in a corner, mouth to fucking mouth, eatin the Fuckin face of each other.

POPE: Ah fuck away off with ya. That's disgustin.

FISHY: Dirty.. fucking, bastards.

POPE: I don't care about queers ... I don't. I fuckin don't.
But they need ta keep it ta themselves, know wha I mean?

CHICK: I couldn't take me fuckin eyes of them. Swear ta ya.

FISHY: Nah ya see, if I'd have seen that I'd have fucking pulverised the pair of them into next week. Tellin ya, beat them all ta fuck so I would have...

Pope and Chick laugh.

FISHY: I'd put them in a boat and sail it out to sea, that's what I'd do. I would. Soon stamp it out so it would. Get rid of it once and for all. That's what the government needs ta do. I'm tellin ya.

POPE: They'd be having orgies day and night, bangin away round the fuckin clock. Bunch of dirty bastards so they are.

CHICK: Here mate you need to go over to that disco at Queens and start reading them the riot act.

FISHY: It would be a fucking blood bath if I was let loose/

On the other side of the stage Dermot and Eddie are up against the wall, they kiss and grope each-others' bodies. Dermot goes down on Eddie. The sex between them carries on throughout the next piece.

CHICK: This here queer comes up to me.

FISHY: Up to you?

Pope laughs.

CHICK: Swear to almighty fuck, and he's like giving me the eye an all. Swear no messin...

POPE: Ha .. Fuck me.

Chick stands with a limp wrist and his other hand on his hip as he impersonates a gay man.

CHICK: I just looked at him and I said to him fuck away off out of my sight, go and fruit up some other queer bastard you sick ugly cunt.

Fishy and Pope laugh. Chick joins them.

FISHY: Tell me this Chick, what the fuck where you doing in there?

CHICK: What?

FISHY: There's not too many of them places about, I mean ya'd have to make a point of goin. Wouldn't ya?

CHICK: Told ya, didn't I. Went in by mistake.

FISHY: Aye, but you fucking didn't leave too quick.

Fishy laughs.

CHICK: Took me a while to figure out what the fuck was goin on.

Eddie is reading a book that he snatches from Dermot's back pocket.

EDDIE: In some societies, male homosexuality was universal. For instance, in the Siwans, a small North African tribe, who lived by raising crops and domestic animals, expected all men and boys to engage in homosexual sodomy, and thought a man peculiar if he did not have both male and female affairs.

Eddie laughs.

DERMOT: Stop reading that rubbish.

Eddie looks at the inside cover.

EDDIE: Shit. You actually stole this?

DERMOT: No.

EDDIE: It says on the inside cover property of Belfast Library.

DERMOT: My friend, she stole it. She took it, she works there.

EDDIE: A librarian that steals books.

DERMOT: She doesn't usually, just this ...

EDDIE: Just books on homosexuality?

DERMOT: Yeah. It's like her special specialism actually.

EDDIE: Why?

DERMOT: What?

EDDIE: Why did she steal the book? I mean, this particular book?

DERMOT: To help me feel better about being ... ya know ... into boys and that, Help me sort my feelings out.

EDDIE: Great friend.

DERMOT: She's in love with me.

EDDIE: You're a homo?

DERMOT: Yeah but that's just a minor set-back. You see, she's more into dancing than sex.

EDDIE: You've lost me.

DERMOT: It's just not her thing.

Eddie laughs.

DERMOT: It's not a joke. Dancing's her real passion... Seriously. Irene, my friend.

EDDIE: Wow. I bet she moves like a snake on heat.

DERMOT: We've been dance partners for years, since teenagers.

EDDIE: What? Hold on. You dance? I mean you really, properly actually fucking dance?

DERMOT: We even got into the finals for Come dancing.

EDDIE: *(Excited)* What!

Chick is losing the plot.

CHICK: Nah, what the fuck are ya sayin?

FISHY: I don't know why you'd wanna be hanging about places like that ... not unless you liked it.

CHICK: Do you know who the fuck I am, Who I belong to?

POPE: Right Chick, enough, reign it in lad, he was only sayin/

FISHY: *(Laughs)* Touchy fucker aren't ya?

Classical music plays/

Chick grabs Fishy by the hair, head butts him, then punches him hard in the face. Fishy flies across the bar, Chick lays into him kicking him in the ribs and face.

Dermot takes Eddie's hands and they waltz. Eddie is clunky at first but gets into the rhythm of it. As this happens it is underscored with Shostakovich's second waltz.

Ten minutes pass.

POPE: He was making a fair enough point though ...

Chick looks at him.

POPE: I mean, what the fuck where ya doin in a queer disco.

Chick is ready to lash out again.

POPE: I'm just askin... just sayin.

CHICK: Doin a job.

POPE: Wasn't a job for us?

CHICK: For Johnto. I was doin it for Big Johnto. He asked me.

POPE: Johnto?

CHICK: On the QT, checking something out.

POPE: Johnto asked you personally? On the QT?

Chick nods. Pope takes it in.

POPE: Right.
Very cosy.
You like his new mate or something?

Beat.

POPE: Big fuckin Johnto. You know, he's not the organisation.
There's like six divisions around the country, each one has a brigadier
like Big Johnto running them. They're not the big
boys. They're not Gods.

CHICK: Wasn't nothing ta do with UDA or anything, just his stuff, ya know.
Personal stuff.

POPE: Personal stuff?

Chick nods.

POPE: What kind of personal stuff?

Chick shakes his head.

POPE: Ack now wise the Fuck. It's me you're talkin to here.

CHICK: Nah, it's nothing worth knowing.

POPE: Everything's worth knowing. Nothing is ever wasted.

Chick stays quiet.

POPE: Me and Johnto go way back, I'm like his right hand man. Right hand man, everyone knows that. Everyone. Sure we've been mates for years.

Pope waits but Chick says something.

POPE: I worry about him. Johnto....
He's not in good favour ... rocky fuckin times mate.
I try and keep him clear but ...
I'm sure you've heard stuff yourself.

Beat.

POPE: All I'm sayin is, watch where you're putting your allegiance,
Johnto's a sinkin ship. Fuckin Titanic ...
You and me need to stick together. Dangerous times. I'll keep ya right.

Pope looks at Chick, drinks his pint.

CHICK: It's just, he wants me to keep an eye on his young fella, Eddie.

Pope takes this in.

CHICK: I was there, in that gay disco because of him.

POPE: Thought as much.

Beat.

POPE: I knew he was a fuckin queer so I did, you're not tellin me anything new.

CHICK: You can't say anything about it, ok. Nat ta no one.

POPE: Ya know if I was Johnto, I'd fuckin cut that wee lads dick right off. That stuck up wee cunt will bring nothing but trouble to him. Mark my fuckin words... fuckin trouble .../

Chick looks across and watches as Dermot and Eddie kiss. Chick slowly approaches them.

EDDIE: By the way, I forgot to ask, what's your name?

DERMOT: Dermot.

Eddie smiles. They kiss again. Chick puts on his boxing gloves.

Scene Twelve:

boxing club.

Chick begins to lay in, hard and heavy, to the punch bag. Eddie arrives. He watches Chick boxing for a moment.

CHICK: Look, if you don't want ta do this, don't waste my fucking time.

Beat.

EDDIE: I do want to do it.

Eddie takes off the top, he wears a yellow vest underneath, obviously new. Chick stares at it.

CHICK: That's fucking bright.

EDDIE: Wanted to look the part.

Chick tries not to smile.

EDDIE: I'll not mess about this time, promise.

Chick throws him a pair of boxing gloves.

EDDIE: Are these actually essential?

CHICK: Look, I'm warning ya.

EDDIE: Ok. I'm putting them on.

Eddie puts them on. He starts to dance around and throws a few punches. Chick grabs hold of the punch bag. Eddie punches it, he makes several feeble attempts at punching the bag. Chick stands behind him.

EDDIE: It's really hurting my wrists doing this.

CHICK: Just keep doin it.

EDDIE: I think I'm doing it wrong.

CHICK: You're doin ok.

EDDIE: What way am I meant to be standing again, I can't remember.

CHICK: Just bend your back a bit, and raise your elbows up.

Eddie bends too low. Chick reluctantly sculpts Eddie's body into the right posture.

CHICK: Jesus! Are ya wearing the whole bottle of after shave?

EDDIE: I like to smell nice.

CHICK: Ok, just focus on your punching technique.

EDDIE: You're not the same as the rest of them UDA fellas.

Beat.

EDDIE: You're different.

CHICK: I don't think so.

EDDIE: No seriously, trust me, you are. They come to our house for meetings and they all sit round our kitchen table smoking and talking. They look like they're out of the Anthill mob out of Wacky races. Me and my sisters give them all nick names.

Chick laughs.

EDDIE: Yer man Pope we call him Barney Rubble out of the Flintstones.

They laugh.

EDDIE: Come on now admit it, he does look like him doesn't he. If he'd any hair I mean. A Shankill road version....

CHICK: I'm sayin nothing.

EDDIE: We even have a name for you.

CHICK: Me?

EDDIE: Aha, we do.

CHICK: What? What is it?

EDDIE: I can't say.

CHICK: You'd better.

EDDIE: No way our Shelly would go mental and kill me. She really really would.

He lights a cigarette.

CHICK: And I'm going to have to tell your Da about it all.

EDDIE: Wise up.

CHICK: No. I am. He needs to know about you lot taking the piss out of his men, brings down morale.

They share a laugh.

EDDIE: Ok. Movie Star.

Chick thinks about this, he's not sure how to take it.

EDDIE: Our Carla came up with it, it suits you though.

CHICK: Movie star? You havin me on?

Eddie shakes his head.

CHICK: What the fuck like? Movie Star?

EDDIE: Well Carla said that you think you're a movie star the way you walk about the place an all.

CHICK: Fuck away off. She sayin I'm like full of myself?

EDDIE: I don't think it, neither does our Shelly. We just like the name.

CHICK: *(Laughing)* Movie Star? Seriously.

EDDIE: I remember you.

CHICK: From where?

EDDIE: You used to be in that Tartan gang, the ones that marched beside the orange bands on the twelfth, with your tartan scarves and big boots.

CHICK: Aye, bout two years ago.

EDDIE: Probably was.

CHICK: We used to cause some mad trouble, rioting with the Fenians from the Falls and singing God save the Queen outside Unity flats, fucking bastards we were.

He laughs. Eddie doesn't.

CHICK: Aye, but that was like before.... before this... I've got my act together now.

Beat.

EDDIE: It's based on the song. Movie Star. You know the one.... Harpo sings... Movie star?

Beat.

EDDIE: Our Carla bought it, she loves it, plays it all the time so she does. *(Sings)* You feel like Steve McQueen when you're driving in your car, and you think you look like James Bond when you're smoking your cigar.

Eddie moves around a bit.

It's so bizarre, you think you are, a new kind of, James Dean but the only thing I've ever seen was your commercial spot on the screen. Movie Star oh Movie Star you think you are a Movie star

CHICK: *(Pissing himself)* You are an absolute hundred per cent melter!

EDDIE: When you were in the Tartans, marching. I always noticed you. I looked out for you, always, looked for you marching.

They share a laugh.

EDDIE: I recognised you that first day you came in to our house.

CHICK: Good memory on ya.

Their eyes meet. Eddie doesn't flinch. Chick is the first to break eye contact.

EDDIE: Yeah, for things I like.

Beat.

EDDIE: By the way, I believe you.

Beat.

EDDIE: I don't think you perm your hair.

Eddie reaches out and touches Chick hair.

EDDIE: It feels dead natural.

Eddie caresses Chick's neck. Chick pushes him away.

CHICK: What the fuck!

Chick grabs Eddie by the throat throws him up against the wall.

CHICK: Do you think I'm a queer? Do ya?

Chick stares at Eddie, he wants to lash out but he can't.

CHICK: I'm fucking not, ok, I'm not! You are, you're a queer but I'm not...

Beat.

CHICK: I've fuckin damaged cunts for doin less... D'ya hear me ... Do ya?

Chick slowly comes to his senses, lets Eddie go.

Eddie doesn't move, he stays still, catches his breath. Chick stares at him. Eddie stares back. He reaches out and touches Eddie's chest. Eddie puts his hands inside Chick's track suit bottoms.

Scene Thirteen:

The empty back bar King William pub.

Johnto with two pints in his hand walks towards Chick. Chick takes a pint from him.

JOHNTO: When I met ya, there was something... I detected. Something ... different. Picked it up right away.

CHICK: Right.

JOHNTO: Do you know what I mean kid?

Chick nods nervously.

JOHNTO: I saw something, and thought ta myself you're just what I'm ...

Johnto keeps his eyes on him. He lights a cigarette.

JOHNTO: Just a feeling ... but wait til I tell ya, them feelings have served me well.

Johnto's eyes still fixed on Chick.

JOHNTO: I thought you'd connect.

He laughs.... Chick cracks a smile, tries to laugh along with him.

JOHNTO: You've got him interested, ya have, never thought that would happen.

CHICK: Right.

JOHNTO: You and him....

CHICK: *(nervous laugh)* What about it?

Johnto nods, then a smile. He takes a deep draw from his cigarette, blows out the smoke.

JOHNTO: You've got the same sort of ... that's what I was picking up... I don't know ... the same ...

They both laugh.

CHICK: Ya think?

JOHNTO: Definitely.

CHICK: *(Slight relief)* Right.

JOHNTO: I don't mean you're looking like each other.

CHICK: Fuck no way ... he's like a good looking young fella I'm like ...

JOHNTO: Good looking? Ya think our Eddie's good looking?

CHICK: Aye ... I mean ... I can appreciate he is an all that.

JOHNTO: Then I got it ... Bang ...

Johnto stares at Chick. Chick can only keep the smile up for so long.

CHICK: Bang?

JOHNTO: Intelligence.

CHICK: *(Laughs)* Intelligence?

JOHNTO: Intelligence and insight.

CHICK: I'm not smart, not smart like your fucking Eddie.

JOHNT0: Listen, you're not like the rest of them shit for brains, couldn't string a sentence together if their lives depended on it. I'd go a long way round here to find someone, anyone, who'd connect with our Eddie.

He takes a long draw from his cigarette.

JOHNT0: You've social intelligence so you have. You have. You've it goin on up the stairs. That's why our Eddie likes ya.

Chick laughs.

CHICK: Suppose things could be worse, I could be as thick as them other dirt bags, the bloody anthill mob that you have hanging about ya.

Johnto laughs.

JOHNT0: Ha the Anthill Mob, that's exactly what they're like. Ya see, you've got it going on up the stairs... I like that.... says a lot to me.

Chick nods.

JOHNT0: Ok, I'm gonna bring you in.

Beat.

JOHNT0: Taking a leap of faith here, following my gut.

He stares at Chick.

JOHNT0: Need to know I can trust ya.... Am I able to?

CHICK: Ya know you are.

Beat.

JOHNT0: I'm just going to just spit it out to you.

Beat.

JOHNT0: Our Eddie's ... the thing is ... he's not typical.

Johnto looks at Chick.

JOHNT0: You've probably worked that one out for yourself.

Chick nods.

JOHNTO: Thing is he says he doesn't like girls.... he says he likes fellas.

Johnto gives a small uneasy laugh.

JOHNTO: What do ya think of that?

Chick shrugs, drinks his beer.

CHICK: I already know.

JOHNTO: People round here talk, I know what they're like and our Eddie was never shy about coming forward if you know what I mean.

CHICK: I seen him at the disco ... the one you asked me to go ta. He was with this other fella.

Beat.

JOHNTO: You knew?

Chick nods.

JOHNTO: And ya didn't think ta say anything?

CHICK: Look Johnto I don't think I want to get involved ...

JOHNTO: You were asked ta do a job...

CHICK: It's nothing ta do with me, or you, it's his life, ya know what I mean?

Beat.

JOHNTO: His life?

CHICK: He's eighteen, he should be allowed ta ...

JOHNTO: It'll nat be his life when he ends up with a bullet in his skull, when them fuckers at Queens find out who he is, who he's connected ta, where he's from.

CHICK: Look, I'm sorry but this isn't what I signed up for.

JOHNTO: Our Eddie is a bonfire in a fireworks factory waiting ta happen.

Beat.

JOHNT0 Ok, here's the scoop. I'm worried what the fellas up the stairs'll say if they get wind of it? I mean can ya imagine that? Can ya imagine what they'd have ta say? Can ya imagine what would happen ta me? Eh? Curtains, that's what.

CHICK: I don't know much about it all but I reckon you're over thinkin it...

Johnto looks at him.

CHICK: Maybe, he won't go off with any fellas from Queens.

Johnto thinks about this.

JOHNT0: What makes ya say that?

CHICK: Don't know ... Just think he's smarter than that. I think he'll not stray too far away.

JOHNT0: Nah, I've made my mind up.

Johnto lights another cigarette.

JOHNT0: I want you to keep a close eye on him, on a regular basis. Monitor where he goes, who he sees.

CHICK: When you say monitor Johnto what exactly do ya mean?

JOHNT0: Go over there, to Queens. Watch him. Regularly. See who his mates are, any fellas he's getting close to. Follow them, find out who they are, where they're from, who they hang about with, anything you can get.

CHICK: Listen Johnto, I'll kick the fuck out of some bastard for ya or throw a few awl petrol bombs at the Fenians or I'll hijack a bus and torch it. Even do another knee capping. But I'm not sure I could carry this kinda shit off, ya know, fuckin inch high, private fuckin eye stuff. It's not what I'm into.

JOHNT0: This isn't the boys brigade you joined, this is fucking real. You're in my battalion, one of my men, so when I tell ya ta do something, you don't fuckin try and wriggle out of it.

They lock eyes. Chick submits and gives a nod.

JOHNT0: I picked you specially for this ... right from the start I had you ear marked ... When I saw I thought you two would fit.

CHICK: Fit?

JOHNT0: He's needs someone older than him, someone he can turn to, like a big brother.

CHICK: Brother?

Johnto nods.

CHICK: I don't think he wants a brother Johnto.

JOHNT0: He doesn't know what he wants.

Beat.

JOHNT0: Remember ya do this well and I'll look after ya, put ya under my wing. That's what I do, I look after the ones that do good for me.

Johnto raises his pint. He clinks his pint glass against Chick's pint glass. They knock back their beers. The sound of howling can be heard.

Scene Fourteen:

The Quarry.

Eddie howls like a wolf as he runs to the edge and stares out over the city. Chick comes flying after him and grabs him, pulls him back.

CHICK: Shut the fuck ...

EDDIE: You said no one ever comes up here?

CHICK: Not usually, but your screamin'll bring all the fuckin nut jobs'll up here.

Chick laughs, rubs Eddie's head.

CHICK: Where did ya tell your Da you were going?

EDDIE: I am allowed to go out on my own ya know.

Beat.

EDDIE: The boxing club, with you. That was the original plan wasn't it.

CHICK: I'm glad we came up here. Away from it, there's eyes everywhere watchin.

EDDIE: Do you think it's haunted?

CHICK: Fuck. Aye probably. So many killings and bodies dumped up here, if anywhere is goin ta be haunted it'll be this fuckin place.

Eddie jumps and screams. Chick gives him a playful push.

CHICK: It's good, just the two of us.

EDDIE: Don't forget about the ghosts...

Eddie starts to run about waving his arms in the air, messing around.

CHICK: Fuck me wee lad! What do I have ta do ta talk ta ya properly like?

Chick grabs him.

EDDIE: You want to talk to me?

CHICK: Yes I do!

EDDIE: Thought you just brought me up here so we could do stuff in your car.

CHICK: My head is bustin with shit. I can't stap thinkin about stuff. I can't fuckin sleep ...

Chick stares at Eddie. Eddie starts to laugh.

CHICK: I'm bein fucking serious about this.

EDDIE: I know you are.

CHICK: I don't see easy solutions here.

EDDIE: Just chill.

CHICK: What if your da finds out? What if some bastard sees us and puts it together and what if ...

Eddie stops him. He points down into the City below them.

EDDIE: Just take a look at all them lights shining down there. Car lights, street lights, lights in people's living rooms, their bedrooms. Thousands of lights, sparkling away and thousands of people down there worrying their heads off about stuff, all sorts of stuff, rubbish.

Eddie looks up at the sky.

EDDIE: And then if you look up at all the stars twinkling away up there above us suddenly we're all tiny miniscule wee insignificant specks. Meaningless. Our worries are meaningless in the big big scheme of the universe they're nothing.

Chick stares at Eddie, he laughs.

CHICK: How the fuck did you just think all that? I looked down there and all I saw was lights in amongst all the blackness, none of them thoughts came into my head.

EDDIE: All I ever do is think shit like that. My head's crammed with it.

CHICK: You know this? All I ever think about is fighting. Nothing else has ever really mattered to me. First thing I thought about when I woke up every day was right what's happening the night, who are we goin ta fight. I'd plan every Saturday so that I'd be at the match and be able to get into a fight with the Fenians on the way home or a riot or something.

Beat.

CHICK: But now. Now all I'm thinkin about is this. Bout you and about how the fuck are we goin ta work this all out. I mean how the fuck can we make sure?

EDDIE: Do you think you're the first?

CHICK: What?

EDDIE: I done it before ya know.... with a UDA man. He used to come to the house on a Monday when everyone was out and we'd do it in my Mum and Dad's bed.

Eddie laughs at the memory.

EDDIE: I was only sixteen. One of my Dad's mates. He used to know when I'd be on my own and he'd be round.

Beat.

EDDIE: No one ever found out about it. Not my Da, none of his mates, not even his wife.

CHICK: Wife?

Eddie nods.

CHICK: Fuck me.

EDDIE: You can come and see me when I get my own place over at Queens.

CHICK: You're goin ta move away?

EDDIE: Of course.

CHICK: Does your Da know?

EDDIE: Why are you so obsessed about my Da?

CHICK: Not obsessed, just thinkin he's not goin ta like it.

EDDIE: He's not going to like a lot of things, like me doing this, but I'll do it anyway.

Eddie undoes Chick's trousers and puts his hands inside.

CHICK: Did you not get enough in the car?

EDDIE: Can't keep my hands off you.

CHICK: Many fellas have you had?

EDDIE: A few, not many. About six, maybe eight if you count the odd wank. What about you?

CHICK: I'm not a gay.

EDDIE: Oh right, you just like sucking cocks?

- CHICK: You're the only fella I've ever done anything with.
- EDDIE: Aye, but you've wanted to?
- CHICK: I've had girls. When I joined the Tartans they were there every night, hangin about, they'd do anything.
I was seeing this wee girl Mandy. for about a year or so.
- EDDIE: Ya still seeing her?
- CHICK: Nah. I chucked her a few months ago. She let this UDA fella fuck her in the back entry when I was in the bar drinkin.
- EDDIE: Was she nice?
- CHICK: Aye, big tits and long hair.
- EDDIE: Sounds like a beauty, maybe I'll grow my hair long.

Eddie pulls out his top creating breasts.

- CHICK: Do you ever take anything serious?
- EDDIE: Is that a serious question?
- CHICK: I want ta keep on seeing you.

Eddie nods.

- CHICK: I like bein around ya. I don't even feel like fighting and shit ... swear I don't get worked up the way I used to. Even my Ma's noticed, she says the other night what's wrong with you these days and I says what ya mean she says you're laughing and smiling a lot, I'm getting worried about ya....

Eddie smiles, then laughs.

- EDDIE: You're a bit serious sometimes, but that's ok.

Eddie moves in to kiss Chick, he moves away.

- EDDIE: Why don't you never want to kiss?

Chick shrugs.

- EDDIE: Do you think if I kiss ya it'll make you more gay mister Movie Star?

Chick gives Eddie a playful slap. Eddie pushes him back. Eddie runs away.

EDDIE: (Sings) It's so bizarre, you think you are,
a new kind of, James Dean but the only thing I've ever seen
was your commercial spot on the screen.
UDA Man, oh UDA Man you think you're a big hard UDA
Man...

Chick grabs Eddie and holds him close.

CHICK: We just need to watch what we do.

EDDIE: I grew up triple locking, triple checking doors, windows, under
cars, everything. Bullet proof glass on our windows. I've eyes
in the back of my head. Watching myself is second nature.

CHICK: You're the apple of Big Johnto's eye.

EDDIE: Not anymore.
I'm just a series of let downs for him. One disappointment
after the other.

Beat.

EDDIE: I loved the fact that everyone was afraid of him.

CHICK: You're lucky my Da's as weak as piss. He just exists. Lived in
the same house for twenty years and he's like a stranger.

EDDIE: When we were wee my Da used to come home from his night
shift at the factory, about seven in the morning, he'd be dying
of sleep but he made us our breakfast, then got us ready, I
used to watch his big fingers tying my shoe laces, it made me
feel protected, like nothing could ever harm me. He'd walk us
up the road to school, he was like Superman.

CHICK: You know that they think he's not ruthless enough.

Eddie scoffs at this.

EDDIE: Saying my Da isn't ruthless is a joke.

Beat.

EDDIE: One night late on, when I was only a kid. I walked into the
living room still half sleeping. There was this fella tied to a

chair, his white vest covered in blood and my Da beating the fuck out of his face and these other ones standing about watching. He stopped when he saw me and he sent one of his cronies to get me some water and when I was standing there waiting, the fella in the chair just stared straight at me like he was pleading with me to do something to make my Da stop, but I couldn't, I couldn't do anything I was eight years old. When I went back to bed I lay there in the dark seeing his face over and over and in the morning, I thought I dreamt it all. And for years I kept on telling myself that I had dreamt it. Then I found an old shoe box at the back of his wardrobe with all the newspaper clippings of the killings he was involved in. I recognised the fellas face immediately. After I'd gone to bed they took him away somewhere. Could even have been up here. And they put a couple of bullets in his brain. I couldn't go on pretending anymore. I know who my father is.

Scene Fifteen:

Lights snap up on

The Bar.

Wilkie lies on the floor, blood squirting out of his neck, his body is in spasm, he is howling. His crutches are at his side. Johnto stands with a gun pointed down at him. Pope and Fishy watch. Johnto fires another bullet into Wilkie's body. The spasms continue. Pope lifts a crutch and stabs it into Wilkie's head repeatedly. He stops moving. Pope is out of breath. They both stand staring at the body.

POPE: That should have been straight forward and quick.

JOHNTO: Straight forward? What's straight forward about killing one of your own? This wasn't what I wanted. If it was up ta me ...

POPE: It's better his dead bollocks than yours or mine. He was fucking spouting to the cops ... twisted wee cunt.

JOHNTO: Dump him in the car, get him out of here. Quick!

Fishy drags Wilkie's body away.

JOHNTO: *(To Pope)* We'll not say nothing, make them think it's the IRA did it.

POPE: Whatever you say Boss.

Eddie and Chick walk through the scene.

EDDIE: Have you ever heard of the Dubliners, James Joyce?

Chick shakes his head.

EDDIE: We're reading it at Queens.

CHICK: Is it a Fenian book?

EDDIE: Probably.

CHICK: What the fuck are they making you read that shit for.

EDDIE: The last story in it is called The Dead.

CHICK: Sounds fuckin shit.

EDDIE: It's not, it's so completely amazing. It's about this woman called Gretta and about how when she was a young girl staying in Galway with her granny this young fella came out on the coldest night of the year to say good bye to her, he wasn't well, really ill and he shouldn't have been out of his bed, but he just had to see her. He loved her so much. When she got back home to Dublin she found out he'd died and she was heart broken, he'd died for her.

CHICK: You should be reading books about Northern Ireland, or England, your own country not about the Feninas down south.

EDDIE: I think it's dead romantic. Imagine someone actually dying for you? That's the ultimate gesture of gestures.

CHICK: There's fuck all romantic about dying. Death is shit.

Chick looks across at John to and Pope still standing, staring ahead, not speaking.

EDDIE: The first chance, I'm getting as far away from here as I can.

CHICK: What? You'd fuck off without me?

Eddie looks at him and nods.

EDDIE: Yeah...
You're a part of it.

CHICK: Nah, not really. I mean, I don't have to be.

EDDIE: You've blood on your hands.

CHICK: I haven't done anything, not anything that bad.

EDDIE: Not yet. But you will.

They stare out at the city below.

JOHNTON: For a cunt with no knee caps he could fairly fuckin move. D'ya see the hammers of him tryin ta get away.

A moment of silence, then they both laugh.

POPE: They're havin a meeting about ya, the marra night.

Johnton looks at him.

POPE: If you were ta step aside now, yourself like, you'd be able ta walk away ... no questions asked.

Beat.

JOHNTON: They put ya up ta this?

POPE: I'm yer mate. I've your back.

Johnton, straight face nods.

POPE: How's the young fella, Eddie. How's he getting on over at Queens?

JOHNTON: Keep him out of this.

POPE: He's not helping your situation. In fact, he's of major concern.

Beat.

POPE: I'm only tellin ya this for your own good. If he carries on/

Johnton moves in on Pope, points a finger into his face.

JOHNTON: I've delivered the sacrificial lamb. I've done what was asked, So, move the fuck on.

Johnton leaves. Pope watches him go, he gives John to a mock salute.

Scene Sixteen:

The garage.

Pope is outside the garage.

POPE: These queer boys can't control their dicks if their fucking lives depended on it. They don't help themselves.

Chick focuses on smoking his fag.

POPE: What's he been up to?

CHICK: Who's that?

POPE: How many queers do we know round here?

Chick shrugs.

CHICK: Haven't been watchin him lately.

Pope isn't buying it. Chick suddenly remembers something, he goes back into the garage. He comes out carrying Wilkie's crutches. He hands them to Pope.

CHICK: These were left in the back of that car I just cleaned for ya.

Pope takes them from him, he looks at them.

POPE: Maybe I'll go round and present them to his Ma, put a bow on them, a wee keep sake for her. Here Mrs Wilkinson please take these crutches to commemorate your son's efforts in being an RUC mouth piece and a pain in the fucking hole.

Pope laughs.

POPE: Or maybe we'll hang them up on the wall in the bar as a wee reminder to any cunts who don't behave themselves.

He nods.

POPE: Aye, I like that idea. A wee reminder. People need reminding from time to time that they're own needs come second to that of the organisation.

Pope locks eyes with Chick. He suddenly cracks a smile.

POPE: Here, Wilkie got fair wear out of that grey suit didn't he.

Chick looks at him.

POPE: Fuckin buried him in it. That's a wedding and a funeral, not bad goin .. and its still not paid off.

Chick and Pope share a laugh.

POPE: These fellas that the queer boy picked up, any of them Fenians?

CHICK: Do us a favour mate, forget I ever opened my mouth to ya.

Pope shakes his head.

POPE: Nah, no can do my friend, no can do.

Pope holds up a crutch.

POPE: You're on the right side kid, the right fuckin side. Just make sure you stay there.

CHICK: Look, he's alright ya know, Eddie. Once ya get ta know him.

POPE: So, you've gotten ta know him?

CHICK: Aye, a wee bit, I have.

POPE: And nigh he's like your best mate an all?

CHICK: Wise the fuck, nat my best mate.

POPE: You're talkin about him sif he is.

CHICK: I just think he's ok that's all.

POPE: Do you think he thinks you're ok?

CHICK: Dunno. Aye, maybe he does.

POPE: D'ya know this, yer man Eddie thinks you're a piece of shit.

Beat.

POPE: He thinks we're all pieces of shit. I see the way he looks at us all when we're in his house. So, you need ta fuckin wise up.

Pope lifts the crutch as if it's a rifle.

If I'd my way this is what I'd do to that stuck up wee queer.

Pope fires the imaginary rifle. Chick and Pope lock eyes.

Scene Seventeen:

Johnto's house.

Eddie is ironing clothes in his kitchen. He's folding them, piling them into a holdall. Chick watches.

CHICK: Stuck up, that's what you are and ya don't know when you're well off.

Beat.

CHICK: You've yer Ma looking after ya, free lodgings, free food. You can come and go when you like.

EDDIE: *(Laughs)* My Ma looking after me?

Beat.

EDDIE: You don't know what you're talking about.

CHICK: I know enough.

EDDIE: If you knew enough you'd see that my Ma is doped twenty-four hours a day, out of her head, on pills, takes them as if they're smarties. Just like all the other women who are married to men like Johnto.

Eddie carries on ironing.

CHICK: The one's you're sharing with could be anyone.

EDDIE: They're doing the same course.

CHICK: Where they from?

EDDIE: Different places.

CHICK: Fenians?

Eddie laughs to himself.

CHICK: They are, aren't they?

EDDIE: Two of them, the other one's a prod. Anyway, that sort of shit doesn't matter to me.

CHICK: Bollocks.... Don't tell me it's not the first thing ya think about when you first meet anyone.

EDDIE: You're a bigot.

CHICK: Fenians live and breathe religion, everything about them is religion, they're fucking obsessed with it.

EDDIE: Oh and how many have you actually met?

CHICK: What? Fenians? In real life like?

EDDIE: Yeah, real life. The thing that happens outside the Shankill road. I mean, actually met and spoke to, had a pint with.

CHICK: A pint with?

Chick laughs at the absurdness.

EDDIE: Spent proper time with them, got to know them.

CHICK: Nigh, why the fuck would I want ta spend proper time with some fucking Fenian?

Eddie looks at him.

CHICK: You're playing with a fucking time bomb, if you don't watch what you're doing ... *(Claps his hands hard)*
Bang!

Eddie is suddenly very uncomfortable.

CHICK: I don't want anything bad happening.

EDDIE: Why would anything bad happen to me?

CHICK: Any of the fellas living in the house gay boys?

EDDIE: Gay boys?

CHICK: Are they?

Beat.

CHICK: Just askin.

EDDIE: One of them.

CHICK: How'd ya know him?

EDDIE: What?

CHICK: The gay boy? How'd ya know him?

EDDIE: Why?

CHICK: Someone you met at one of the gay discos in Queens?

EDDIE: How do you know about the discos at Queens?

Chick's eyes stay on Eddie, he doesn't answer.

CHICK: You've been living in this protective bubble.

EDDIE: Protective? What, you think I don't get hassle?

CHICK: Nothing to what you'd get if Johnto wasn't your Da.

EDDIE: If Johnto wasn't my Da I wouldn't be living here.

CHICK: So what? Ya think there's no other gays live round here?

EDDIE: If they've got any sense they'll get out.

CHICK: Easy for you ta say, brainy boy, you've got your ticket.

EDDIE: Any one can leave if they really want to.

Eddie concentrates on ironing. Chick watches him, he reaches out and caresses Eddie's shoulder.

CHICK: I'm sayin all this coz I want ta protect ya.

Eddie shrugs him off.

CHICK: It's Monday.

Eddie nods.

CHICK: Everyone's out?

Chick nods to upstairs.

CHICK: We go up the stairs?

Beat.

CHICK: just five minutes up the stairs.

EDDIE: Taxi's coming soon, I've loads more to do.

CHICK: I'd have driven ya.

EDDIE: Nah you're ok.

CHICK: Save you the money.

EDDIE: It's ok.

Chick moves closer to Eddie. Eddie continues to iron and fold.

CHICK: If anyone had ever told me that I'd be getting on like this, with you, I mean, I'd have fucking decked them....
(Laughs).

EDDIE: Chick you know ... maybe you should try and think about who ..

Chick grabs Eddie and kisses him. Eddie breaks away. He takes a minute to catch his breath.

EDDIE: Suddenly you like kissing?

CHICK: Come up the stairs.

EDDIE: My Da'll be back soon.

CHICK: We'll be quick.

Chick tries to kiss him again, Eddie pushes him away.

EDDIE: I don't want to.

CHICK: What?

EDDIE: I don't want to do anything.... Sorry....

CHICK: I'm not like this with anyone else, it's just you.

EDDIE: I've been thinking. It's better we knock it on the head.
Now ... it's a good time with me moving/

CHICK: Don't! Don't be getting on like that.

EDDIE: I'm serious. I don't want to see you anymore.

CHICK: You're wrong.

EDDIE: Look I have to get on.

CHICK: For me, come upstairs, come on. I need to be with ya.

Eddie shakes his head.

CHICK: I've been looking forward to seeing ya.

EDDIE: Sorry.

CHICK: When ya get sorted in yer new place, I'll come over.

EDDIE: What about the Fenians? My friends?

CHICK: I don't care about that shit, I was just ...

EDDIE: I think it would be good to have a clean break... for a while ... see how it goes.

CHICK: Why?

EDDIE: We're coming from different places.

He moves in on Eddie. Eddie stops him.

CHICK: Why are ya making a big deal?

EDDIE: I've already told you, I don't want to do anything.

CHICK: Is it because of yer man?

EDDIE: What?

CHICK: The one you went off with in the disco at Queens.

EDDIE: Seriously, how do you even know that?

Chick grabs Eddie, pulls him against him, Eddie can't get away. He puts his hand inside Eddie's t-shirt caressing him. Eddie struggles. Chick pulls down Eddie's track suit bottoms grabs him, turns him round, sticks his hand into Eddie's arse. Eddie screams out. Chick carries on assaulting him. Eddie reaches out and tries to grab the iron, he gets hold of it, smacks it against Chick's head. Eddie breaks free, he still holds onto the iron. Chick stares at him.

CHICK: I'm sorry ... Seriously ... I didn't mean ta ...

EDDIE: Get the fuck out of here Chick.

Chick begins to sob.

EDDIE: If you don't get the fuck out of here I'm going to burn your fucking face off with this iron! And once I've done that I'm going to tell my da about you. I'll tell him all about you fucking me in his bed.

CHICK: Eddie, for fuck sake

EDDIE: If he knew any of that shit, you know what would happen to you, you'd be taken out and you'd be blown away, your body would end up in some fucking ditch covered in shit.

CHICK: You'd never do that.

Eddie stares at Chick.

EDDIE: I don't want to see you again.

Beat.

EDDIE: Now go.

Chick hesitates.

EDDIE: (Screams) Go!

Music to T Rex's 'Children of the Revolution' plays.

Scene Eighteen:

The back room of the King William. Chick sings 'The Children of the Shankill', he's drunk. Pope stands close by smokes a cigarette.

CHICK: He was in the Shankill boys, my Granda, that's what they called them cause most of them where from here.

POPE: Aye, my Uncle Alec too.

CHICK: On the first day of the Somme some of them wore these orange ribbons, like orange sashes. When they came charging out of the trenches to fight the Germans they shouted at the top of their Shankill Road voices 'No surrender' and 'Remember 1690' Seven hundred strong that first day.... only seventy survived.

POPE: Your Granda and my Uncle would turn in their graves if they knew what was being done to the Protestant people today. If they could get away with it the British would sell us out the morrow. No doubt about it.

CHICK: They were men of honour, decent men. What's happened? What's made us like this?

He starts to cry. Pope stares at him.

POPE: Wee word of advice ta ya kid.

Beat.

POPE: Get a fuckin grip of yourself.

Beat.

POPE: There's men dying on these streets and you're stood there crying like a wee girl.

CHICK: I feel like shit. I don't know who I am ...

Chick tries to pull himself together.

POPE: Don't know what's goin on with ya lately, but you're losing it, you've fucked up more than once this last week or so and it's been noticed. Noticed, do ya hear me?

CHICK: I know I've fucked up, but ya see Pope sometimes ... sometimes it's just a pile of bollocks.

Pope looks at him.

- POPE: You were supposed to be waitin at the corner of Glenwood Street for the boys who were robbin the insurance company! Remember that wee incident do ya? And you drove off before they got there... drove fuckin off and left the bastards standin.
- CHICK: I heard alarms going off and the cop car's siren.
- POPE: They near got caught coz of you. Are you aware of that? Are ya?
Near went down and if that had happened we'd be having a very different conversation... in fact there wouldn't be a conversation at all you'd just be a goner.
- CHICK: I waited and I couldn't see them... they took too long. I waited ages. I swear it was like too long, too long for nothing to be wrong and then when I heard the alarms and the sirens.... No point in us all getting done. Getting taken in ta Castlereagh.
- POPE: What about the gun?
- CHICK: I didn't lose it. I didn't.
- POPE: Fishy swears he handed it to ya and you put it in your coat. We all fuck up kid, we all lose things but a fuckin gun, you can't lose, there's consequences, big fuckin consequences. A gun is like big business.
- CHICK: Like what? What consequences?
- POPE: They said you needed knee capping. Only the one knee coz it was like your first major fuck up.
- CHICK: What?
- POPE: Aye they were all ready to do it. It was goin ta happen. I was supposed to have ordered it and be over seeing it right now.
- CHICK: Who said?
- POPE: The big lads in the inner council.
- CHICK: What did Johnto say?
- POPE: Johnto?
- CHICK: He wouldn't let them do that to me. He wouldn't. Does Johnto even know about it.

POPE: Johnto has his own worries to deal with right now.

Beat.

CHICK: I've nat been myself Pope. I've got shit goin on in my head. I can't think straight. I'm nat sleepin or eatin. I need to speak to Johnto.

POPE: Johnto's on his way out mate wouldn't matter what he had ta say...

Beat.

POPE: Ya can relax. It's nat goin ta happen.

Chick is relieved.

POPE: I talked them out of it. I saved your fuckin bacon.

Beat.

POPE: If it had been left to Johnto you'd be done. He'd have let them have ya, sure look at Wilkie...
I told them you were sound, I told them you'd make it up to us. I told them you'd come good.

CHICK: I will, I will come good I swear ta ya...

POPE: Sure I know you will. A hundred per cent ya will. You owe me kid.

CHICK: No probs Pope, anything.

POPE: You're goin ta make it up ta us with yer man Eddie.

CHICK: Eddie?

POPE: What can ya tell us?

CHICK: Nothin.

Pope isn't impressed.

POPE: Ya see that's not the right answer. All I have ta do is give the go ahead and bang them knee caps are gone. Blasted ta fuck!

Beat.

POPE: Any loyalty you have ta wee cunt or ta Johnto it has ta go.

Chick stares at him.

POPE: Is that clear?

Chick nods.

POPE: You're goin to go and find out where he is and you're goin to watch him good and close. This time you're doin it for me, for the organisation, not Big Johnto.

Beat.

POPE: Ok?

Chick leaves. Pope takes the gun out of his pocket and looks at it while the Music for 'Kevin Barry' plays. He leaves.

Scene Eighteen:

Nationalist Bar.

Eddie stands watching Dermot sing.

DERMOT: In Mountjoy jail one Monday morning
High upon the gallows tree
Kevin Barry gave his young life
For the cause of liberty
But a lad of eighteen summers
Yet no one can deny
As he walked to death that morning
He proudly held his head on high

Just before he faced the hangman
In his dreary prison cell
British soldiers tortured Barry
Just because he would not tell
The names of his brave companions
And other things they wished to know
"Turn informer or we'll kill you"
Kevin Barry answered, "no"

Chick steps out of the shadows and watches both Dermot and Eddie.

Another martyr for old Ireland
 Another murder for the crown
 Whose brutal laws may kill the Irish
 But can't keep their spirit down
 Lads like Barry are no cowards
 From the foe they will not fly
 Lads like Barry will free Ireland
 For her cause they'll live and die.

Eddie hands Dermot a Guinness, embraces him.

DERMOT: Jesus Christ if I didn't know better I'd say you were a raving Republican rebel. A total turn coat.

EDDIE: How come your side get all the best songs.

DERMOT: God save the Queen by the Sex Pistols sure that's one of yours.

EDDIE: You've got the gift of the gab.

DERMOT: That comes from snogging the face of too many Leprechauns.

EDDIE: Ya see you've got all the best shit on your side rebel songs, leprechauns and Banshees oh and Nuns.

DERMOT: Nuns? How the fuck are nuns a good thing?

EDDIE: I love nuns, always have. I mean Nuns are the ultimate gay icon.

DERMOT: Don't be basing them on the Sound of Music, coz there's none of them like Julie Andrews I'll tell ya that. Hags that's what they are.

EDDIE: All them black gowns and the head scarfs, and that don't fuck with me attitude, so fuckin dramatically gay.

DERMOT: You're definitely pissed now.

EDDIE: Maybe I could dress up as a Nun... I've always wanted to be a Nun. Sister Sorcha McCrack ...

DERMOT: It's definitely got a certain ring to it alright.

They laugh.

Chick approaches them. Eddie freezes at the sight of him.

CHICK: How ya doin Eddie?

Beat.

EDDIE: *(Suddenly sober)*

CHICK: I'm taking your advice, I'm getting out and about and meeting different types of people. Even havin a pint like ya said. Who's yer mate?

EDDIE: D.

CHICK: Just D? That's his name is it?

EDDIE: Yes.

Chick sticks out his hand to Dermot. Dermot shakes it.

CHICK: Nat too bad in here so it's nat.

Eddie stares at him.

CHICK: Still rather have the King William though.

EDDIE: *(To Dermot)* Come on, let's go.

They turn to walk away. Chick grabs Eddie by the shoulder.

CHICK: Quick word.

Eddie stops. He looks at Dermot. Dermot goes off.

CHICK: You need ta be careful.

EDDIE: Why are you in here?

CHICK: Listen ta me! I'm only tellin ya this for your own good.

EDDIE: Has my Dad put you up to this? To watch me?

CHICK: You've more to worry about than your Da.

EDDIE: Is that a threat?

CHICK: It's a warning.

Eddie goes to leave, Chick pulls him back.

CHICK: Get the fuck back home and ditch yer Fenian mates.

Dermot comes back. Chick stands not speaking, just looking at both Dermot and Eddie.

DERMOT: You ready?

CHICK: See ya round Eddie.

Chick walks away.

DERMOT: Whose yer man?

Eddie shakes his head.

EDDIE: Can we just go now?

DERMOT: Yeah, if you want.

EDDIE: We'll get a taxi.

They go. Chick steps out of the shadows, his eyes follow them as they leave.

Scene Nineteen:

The back room in the King William.

Johnto and Pope sit at a table. Chick stands.

POPE: He's a liability.

JOHNTO: All he cares about is music and books and acting the ejit. Ask him (*Chick*) Ask him. Chick tell him would ya.

Pope and Johnto look at Chick.

CHICK: I didn't know him that well.

Johnto's eyes stay on Chick.

CHICK: I'm just tellin it as it is mate.

Johnto stands up.

JOHNTON: You're one fuckin slimy bastard, do you know that. I trusted you implicitly. I fucking trusted you and this.... this is what you go and do. You're a back stabbin wee cunt.

POPE: You can't speak to one of our volunteers like that.

JOHNTON: I can speak ta that spineless fucker whatever way I want.

POPE: Nah, ya can't. You see, I'm here the night to issue you with instructions.

JOHNTON: You? You're issuing me?

POPE: With the backing and full authority of the inner council.

JOHNTON: Now just hold on a minute here.

POPE: They're ordering you to sort him out.

Beat.

POPE: By midnight.

JOHNTON: Sort him out?

Pope nods.

JOHNTON: If they seriously think that I'm going to lay a hand on my son... on my own flesh and blood ...

POPE: If it's nat you, it'll be someone else.

Pope looks directly at Chick.

JOHNTON: No cunt is goin anywhere near him! D'ya hear me. If you or him lay a hand on our Eddie, I swear to God you're a dead man.

POPE: Can I just remind you that as our battalion leader it is your duty to protect your men and the people of this community. When you took that oath of leadership you agreed to put your personal life to one side.

JOHNTON: This is more than personal stuff!

POPE: The inner Council have issued an order and it will be carried out.

JOHNT0: You've been waitin to get your claws in there. Ta take control.

POPE: These are dangerous times.

JOHNT0: Dangerous times are made by cunts like you.

Johnto punches Pope in the face knocking him across the room.

Scene Twenty:

Johnto's house.

Johnto and Eddie are standing face to face in the living room. Chick stands in the background watching.

EDDIE: *(Lightly)* Dangerous times?

JOHNT0: *(Shouts)* For once in your life will ya just do what I'm askin ya ta do.

EDDIE: I'm here. I came over when you called me.

Johnto hands him a large brown envelope. Eddie looks inside it.

EDDIE: How much is in here?

JOHNT0: Enough for ya ta live on for a while.

Johnto hands him a ticket.

JOHNT0: And here's your plane ticket.

EDDIE: It's for tonight.

JOHNT0: I'll order ya a taxi, ya can go straight to the airport from here.

Eddie stares at the ticket, shakes his head.

EDDIE: I know what you've been doing.

Beat.

EDDIE: Chick. You've had him watch me.

- JOHNTO: Will ya just forget about him ... he's nat important.
- EDDIE: I'm not going to just disappear, because I'm some sort of embarrassment...
- JOHNTO: The one thing I'm askin of you to do is to get on that plane and get out of here.
- EDDIE: You think you can control everything Mister Brigadier, I'm not one of your men ya know.
- JOHNTO: I'm nat arguing with ya son.
- EDDIE: You need to know that I am my own person now, I don't live here under your roof. I have the right to decide what I do with my life.
- JOHNTO: Every night I get down on my knees and the very first thing that I pray for is for you and your sisters' well-being. I ask God ta keep you safe. To protect ya all from harm. Trust me when I say ta ya that anything I'm doing for ya or asking ya ta do is for your own good. Your good alone.
- Beat.*
- EDDIE: It's time you let go.
- JOHNTO: I will once you're on that plane!
- Eddie laughs.*
- EDDIE: You never give up do ya.
- JOHNTO: No, no I don't and I'm not giving up on you.
- Beat.*
- EDDIE: What else do you ask God for?
- JOHNTO: That's between me and him.
- EDDIE: Are you praying for him to forgive your sins? Or are you striking up some sort of deal with him? Like a pack?
- JOHNTO: Don't you worry. I'm in a good place with my conscience.

John to walks to the window looks through the blinds to see outside. He lights a cigarette..

JOHNTO: I'm sorry.
I wish I'd been different.

Beat.

JOHNTO: if I'd have been smarter, better educated, came from a better back ground ...

Beat.

JOHNTO: When ya told me and your mother about ya ... ya know being .. a gay and that.... I know I mucked up, I didn't handle it well.

EDDIE: I thought you'd be mad angry.

Beat.

EDDIE: I was kind of gutted that you weren't. I had myself all built up for this big show down and it didn't happen. You didn't say much.

They exchange a laugh.

JOHNTO: I just wanted to make sure it wasn't some phase or something.

EDDIE: That's why you asked me if I'd had sex with a girl.

John to nods.

EDDIE: It was embarrassing enough without you asking me that.

JOHNTO: I just needed to know that you'd explored all the options.

EDDIE: Sometimes Dad you just need to trust.

JOHNTO: The whole gay thing threw me, I mean not because I was angry or disappointed it's just I was out of my depth, ya know what ta say ta ya what ta do. Before I'd always think to myself well, what would my Da do in this situation or your Uncle Bobby how would he handle this, but with this gay thing, I don't know, it was alien territory. We'd never had a gay in the family before. You were the only one.

Eddie laughs.

EDDIE: I was the first to go to University too but you couldn't wait to tell all your mates, you told everyone. Funny how somethings get celebrated and other things get hidden away.

JOHNTON: I didn't mean it to all come out that way.

EDDIE: You did ok.

JOHNTON: Ok's better than making a total fuck up.

EDDIE: It definitely is.

JOHNTON: I thought leave him to it, let him sort it out himself, he seems to know what he's doing.

EDDIE: You're right, and that's why I'm not running away. I've got nothing to be ashamed of. I'll go when I want to go no one's going to force me.

Johnton shakes his head in despair.

EDDIE: Dad you need to let me live my own life.

JOHNTON: I am letting you live your life, that's exactly what I want ya to do.

Beat.

JOHNTON: Sometimes I think I've lost you ... and I'm never going to get you back...

Beat.

JOHNTON: I know you won't believe this, but everything I've done, I've done for you and your sisters... and that is the God's honest truth.

Eddie goes to the radio and switches it on, he plays around with the dial passing by stations, Strauss's 'The Blue Danube' comes on, he leaves it. Eddie takes John's hands. He waltzes with John to the music. John is at first awkward. They dance around the room. Eddie twirls him around and they laugh together. John relaxes into the dance, he rests his head against Eddie's, they stay like that for a short while, listening to the music and each-others breaths.

The music continues to play.

Scene Twenty One.

The Quarry.

Chick is stood alone at the Quarry. He looks up at the sky. The music slowly fades.

Eddie steps forward, Fishy is right behind him with a gun aimed at his back. Pope follows them.

Chick turns around and faces Eddie.

EDDIE: Chick? What's goin on?

Pope takes the gun from Fishy and hands it to Chick.

EDDIE: Why am I here?
(*the gun*) What are you doing?

POPE: (*To Fishy*) You can go. We'll handle this one.

Fishy leaves.

POPE: Ok soldier, it's over to you. Deal with him.

Chick points the gun at Eddie.

CHICK: Get down on the ground ... Face down. Go on, do it.

EDDIE: Not until you tell me why am I here? Will ya just tell me... speak to me.

Pope keeps his eyes firmly on Chick throughout.

EDDIE: I'm not a problem for you... or them ... You know that I'm not. So why are you doing this? Why

CHICK: I told ya ta get down on the ground, naw do as I tell ya!

Eddie is shocked at the look on Chick's face. Chick takes a step towards him.

CHICK: Do what I'm tellin ya. I'm tellin ya, get fuckin down!

EDDIE: No... I'm not going to get down. I'm not going to let you do this to me... I haven't done anything. I haven't you know I haven't ...

POPE: We've reason to believe that you've been passing on information about our organisation to members, connected to, the Provisional IRA.

EDDIE: *(Shocked)* What?
That's shit. Chick for Christ sake you know that's shit! Tell him will you. Fuck sake tell him.

POPE: It comes from a reliable source.

EDDIE: You're making it up. You're making it all up just to justify bringing me here. Chick! You're smarter than this, you know ...

CHICK: Just get down. Do it!

Pope pushes Eddie, he falls down on the ground. Pope puts his foot on Eddie's neck, holding him down.

EDDIE: You two are going to be so dead. Dead, both of ya. When my da finds out about this.

POPE: Your Da? Big Johnto! What's he going ta be able ta do?

Pope laughs.

POPE: Your Da's finished. He's over, he's gone.

POPE: *(To Chick)* Do it.

Chick points the gun at the back of Eddie's knee cap. Pope grabs his wrist and points the gun at the back of Eddie's head.

POPE: Don't even think about it. Quick and easy.

Chick closes his eyes. His body is trembling. He crumbles.

EDDIE: Chick! Don't do anything. Don't. Please.

Pope kicks Eddie hard in the ribs with his other foot.

EDDIE: Chick, I love you ... help me ...

Silence. Chick stares at Eddie. Pope looks at Chick, he smirks.

POPE: *(To Chick)* It's ok.
I know.

I've been havin you watched too. I know all about it. I know what's been going on with you two.

CHICK: There's fuck all to know. He's talkin shite ...

POPE: That's right kid, once he's gone no one'll remember anything about it, it'll be ancient history all forgotten.

Chick composes himself, he raises the gun.

EDDIE: Chick please ...

Chick turns the gun on Pope.

POPE: Stop your messin about and just get on with it.

Eddie sensing something has happened looks up, sees Chick pointing the gun at Pope, he scrambles to his feet. Chick steps back and wavers the gun between the two of them.

POPE: Shoot the queer bastard. Get rid of him. Do it. That's a fucking order. Failure to carry out an order is court martial. A court martial carries a penalty of knee capping or execution, ya don't want either of them do ya Chick. D'ya wanna be a cripple or a dead man, do ya. Shoot, FUCKING SHOOT!

CHICK: Oh my God... Oh my Jesus fucking Christ. CHRIST!

Eddie buries his head into his arms and crouches down, he lets out an agonising moan.

POPE: Do it ... DO IT ...

Chick suddenly turns the gun on Pope, he pulls the trigger shooting Pope straight between the eyes. Pope immediately falls to ground dead. Chick is in total shock at what he has just done. Eddie climbs to his feet. The two stand in a stunned silence.

CHICK: Fuck ...

He stares at Pope's lifeless body.

CHICK: What the fuck?
Shit....

He looks at the gun in his hand.

CHICK: This fucker isn't your friend, it's nobody's friend, it's a bastard that's what it is, a pure evil bastard...

He looks at Eddie, they stare at each other.

EDDIE: Thanks.

CHICK: This wasn't supposed to happen. I wasn't supposed to do this.

He looks around, he paces.

CHICK: I'm a fighter, I use my fists, nat guns, nat fuckin guns This is fuckin insane. How did this happen? How the fuck did this ...

EDDIE: Just take a deep breath.

CHICK: Fuck you! Fuck you, you stuck up wee bastard ...

Chick is trembling. He races up to Eddie and grabs him. He pushes the gun into the side of Eddie's face.

CHICK: It's your fault if I hadn't met you, if your Da hadn't fuckin ...

EDDIE: I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

CHICK: You fucked with my head. That's what you've done, you've fucked me well and good ...

Chick pushes Eddie away from him, he bends over catching his breath.

CHICK: Who am I? I mean who the fuck am I now? Eh? I mean if I was a true Prod, a proper prod with the flute and drum running through my veins I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have fuckin killed one of my own.

He stands up and composes himself.

CHICK: You need ta get the fuck out of here... Go.

Eddie looks at Chick.

CHICK: (*Shouts*) Just get the fuck would ya.

EDDIE: They'll not let you get away with this.

Chick points the gun at Eddie.

CHICK: If you don't go now I'm goin ta use this on ya. I'm goin to do what I should have done. Go..

Chick stares at him.

EDDIE: Let me help you.

Chick shakes his head.

CHICK: I told ya everyone needs ta fight. I told ya that, didn't I. But you always knew better. You're the smart bastard. The brains.

Beat.

CHICK: Run the fuck, as fast as ya can. Go. Get out of this place.

Eddie goes. He is about to disappear out of sight, he stops, looks back at Chick.

EDDIE: Come with me. I've a plane ticket to London and I've money, enough for both of us. We'll be ok.

Chick shakes his head.

EDDIE: Please...

CHICK: Nah. If I do that, if I run what the fuck will that make me?

EDDIE: Who cares ... Think about yourself ... Think about ...

CHICK: You were right about something. I'm part of this ... now, I'm a big part of it, all it's shit and its stink and corruption. I've been poisoned. Contaminated. If I leave I'll just bring it with me. It's too late. Fuckin too late.

Beat.

CHICK: Get ta fuck ya queer boy.

Eddie goes.

POPE: (VO) Things happened here... things happened that made us do stuff we shouldn't have done.
Our one and only crime, may God forgive us this night, is that we love bein British. We're prepared to die for that right. A hundred fuckin times if need be....

Chick looks long and hard at the gun in his hand.

Black out.

The stars in the sky light up and shine brightly. Harpo's 'Movie Star' plays.

The End.

Club.

By Joseph Grant Corr.

Cast:

Russ. 45 years old.

Alfie: 18 years old.

The play is set in a gay club in Belfast.

The Club.

As the audience come in Russ and Alfie are dancing.

Sigala & Ella Eyre's 'Came here for Love' plays.

Russ and Alfie dance oblivious of each other's presence, occasionally they make eye contact. They get closer, building up to lips almost touching, Russ reaches out his hand, gently caresses the other younger man's chest.

Music ends as the lights snap up to bright. Russ looks at the audience.

RUSS: That exact moment. The moment, you step across. You step over a line. It's invisible but it's Ingrained, it's there. It fucking exists. And when you've crossed it .. Fuck me, that's all I can ... Just make sure you're ready for it, cause the bastards are going to nail you for it.

ALFIE: I don't do anything. I could stop it. I could walk away. I could do a lot of things. But I don't do anything. Maybe maybe I kind of like it

RUSS: Everyone knows it's there.
Everyone knows when it's been crossed.
And who the fuck gets to draw it?

ALFIE: I could look in his face and I could tell him. I could say right out loud, hey how ya doin? how's life? Remember me? Do you? Do you even remember?
Recognise this face at all?

RUSS: Crossing it, this invisible line, is saying fuck you, this is my life, my decisions, my right, my being here, my ownership of me, my choice, my need, my path, my life ... MY FUCKING LIFE.

ALFIE: I thought it would feel different. Like feel really good. Like I'd achieved something. I thought I'd laugh, really fuckin laugh. I thought I'd enjoy seeing him suffer.

RUSS: And what happens when what you want, what you desperately want and need is over that line? Do you stand there and watch it, aching for it? What do you do? I mean these lines they are all made up, someone at some time has decided And we all obey it. Like it's some eternal fucking truth. Facts of the world.

He stands still letting the words hang in the air. Lights snap up. Russ sits on a stool, takes a deep breath and sighs.

RUSS: I'm not out of control. Totally know what I'm doing. Nothing fucking weird about me ... nothing ...

Beat.

Ok so maybe when I was younger, maybe when I was a kid I did some weird shit.

Like, when I made those prank phone calls. *(Laughs)*

It wasn't that weird. Just stuff kids do, it's normal, right. Fucking normal kids' stuff.

I'd sit in our hall when everyone was out and I'd pick up the telephone and I'd ring these random telephone phone numbers, I made them up, like some magic code and these random numbers connected me with these people, voices, strangers from God only knows where.... *He laughs.*

I'd dial the number, and I'd sit there, I'd wait, I'd listen to the pulse of the other phone ringing, my heart beating fast.

ALFIE: Haaallo ...

RUSS: I listen to them, holding onto the moment for as long as I can.

ALFIE: Hello. Hello. Who's there? Who is this?

RUSS: Sometimes, I'd remember the number and I'd call them back, more than just once, sometimes it would be two or three calls in a day or over a few days, maybe even a week, giving them the silent treatment, seeing how far I could push it, how much they could take, their voices sounding more and more anxious each time I'd call.

ALFIE: Hello.... Hello Look whoever you are will you just go and fuck away off, you mental sick bastard. Sick bastard! Fuck off ...

Russ covers his mouth as he laughs.

RUSS: Eventually I'm bored doing this.

Laughs.

I moved onto people I knew. This was way, way more risky, and way, way more exciting. A real proper thrill. I'd ring up their house and put on a fake voice, sometimes American, sometimes English. I was good at putting on voices, pretending to be someone else. My favourite was pretending to be a DJ off the local radio station.

(American accent) Hello is that Mrs Cunningham?

ALFIE: Yes, Yes it is.

- RUSS: Hi Mrs Cunningham this is Johnny J from Downtown radio, how are you today?
- ALFIE: No frigging way! Seriously? Johnny J? Ack away on with ya. (*Screams*) Oh my God Tanya it's yer man Johnny J from the radio.
- RUSS: I'm calling you Mrs Cunningham as your name has been put forward for our afternoon challenge.
- ALFIE: The Afternoon Challenge? Me? Away on with ye. Jesus Tanya he wants me to do the afternoon challenge. Me! Frig I've always wanted to do this.
- RUSS: All you have to do is say the nursery Rhyme Ba Ba Black sheep in a Scottish accent.
- ALFIE: Is that it? Is that all?
- RUSS: Make it a drunk one.
- ALFIE: Ok, I'll try.
- RUSS: If you do it you win our Afternoon challenge big prize. So Mrs Cunningham are you up for it?
- ALFIE: Oh ... yes I'll give it a wee go for you.
- RUSS: Ok, off you go then.
- ALFIE: (*Terrible Scottish accent, drunk*) Ba ba Black sheep have you any wool, yes sir yes sir three bags full. One for the master ... oh and one for the dame and one for the little boy who lives down the lane.
- RUSS: Fantastic Mrs Cunningham. Now can you do it again this time standing on one leg and with a finger in your mouth.
- ALFIE: Ok, I'll try.
- RUSS: Great that's the spirit.
- ALFIE: Ba ba black sheep have you any wool, yes sir, yes sir three bags full. One for the master, one for the dame and one for the little boy who lives down the lane.
- RUSS: Ah that's brilliant Mrs Cunningham. You've won our big prize today.
- ALFIE: Ah really ack that's great. Jesus Tanya I've frigging won. What is it? What have I won?

RUSS: You've won the title of biggest stupid cunt of the week Mrs Cunningham. Bye Bye you fucking stupid Idiot!

Club lights - 'Nightmare' Haisey plays. Lights snap up to bright.

My Dad's building an extension at the back of our house. At weekends, me and my older brother give him a hand. This particular day, I push myself forward and decide I want to do some brick laying, I'm thinking if I can do that, I'll be really helping myself. It's not as easy as it looks but I try. My brother keeps on having a go at me.

ALFIE: Oh watch yourself Russell you might break a nail doing that. You sure your wrists are strong enough to carry all them bricks?

RUSS: He's saying it as a joke, not deliberately trying to be a horrible bastard, and my dad although he's laughing does tell him off. My attempt at the wall is a wild fucking disaster and my dad in his frustration says to me.

ALFIE: Away into the kitchen and help your ma make the tea.

RUSS: He's not meaning to hurt me but fuck sake, he so does. I drop everything and go off into the house. Thinking about it, I probably throw a hissy fit and mince off. Later I look out the bedroom window and see my dad has taken down my attempt at the wall, so I've totally failed and now he's play fighting with my brother in the garden, boys together. I can hear their macho banter as they grab each other and wrestle to the ground. It hits me full on that no matter how hard I try I'm not the same as them and they instinctively know it. Always act strong, act like a real man, otherwise no one's going to take you seriously.

Club lights. Who's Got Your Love Tonight by Cheat Codes & Daniel Blume. Russ stares across at Alfie. Alfie stares back at him.

Lights snap back to bright. Alfie approaches the audience.

ALFIE: How did I end up in this here situation. You see it's not that straight forward. You need to understand where I'm coming from. The sort of person I am. I'm not a spiteful wee bastard. I'm not out to cause trouble and wreck anyone's life. That's not my style.

Right so ... Where did it all kick off for me.... Ok.

There was this one time when my dad caught me trying on my mum's high heels and her new silky Zara top.

When I heard him coming up the stairs I made a run for it, into my bedroom, hid behind the door. My heart beating out of me. Then he walks straight into my room, and sees me hiding there. He doesn't speak, he just gives me this look. He can see I'm shitting my pants. And then he says.

RUSS: Why are you hiding behind the door?

ALFIE: I can't answer him. I'm so fucking cut to the bone.

RUSS: Listen son, never run away and hide, do you hear me, when you hide people think you've done something wrong, they think you're ashamed of who you are.

ALFIE: I still can't speak. I stick my fingers in my mouth like I'm some mental case. Then he turns and walks out of the room and shouts back at me,

RUSS: Here Alfie make sure you put your ma's clothes back in her wardrobe, she'll murder you if you ruin that new blouse on her.

Club lights.

Khia's 'My Neck, My Back' plays. Alfie, topless and wearing tight shorts, dances. He is over the top suggestive. He lip syncs to the song, his attention on Russ who watches him from the side.

Music stops, lights snap up to bright.

RUSS: Teacher training college, training to be a PE teacher. In the showers after a rugby match. Just me and this other fella. I'm showering away and I look over at him and I see his cock all covered in soap suds, he starts to rub the suds in all around it, all around his pubes and his balls. I can't take my eyes of him. I'm getting a hard on and so is he. He looks over at me, he's staring at my cock. I start rubbing it and it's getting harder. The other fellas come running in, oblivious, I turn away and the moments gone.

I see this ad in the paper for a Gay and Lesbian help line called Cara Friend. Takes me ages to pluck up the courage to ring them. A couple of nights after seeing the ad I walk down to the phone box at the corner of our street and call them. This fella answers. To be honest, he sounds a bit gay, not too gay, but he does a bit, and I keep thinking in my head he's gay and he sounds gay, I don't sound gay, so maybe I'm not gay, maybe I'm making it all up in my head. Maybe I'm delusional. Anyway, I tell him, this gay speaking fella that I think I might be gay and he says to me.

ALFIE: Ok.

RUSS: And that's it. He just listens to me talk and I don't know why, but after a bit of me just talking and explaining how I'm feeling, I start to cry, all this pent-up emotion that I've been burying for Christ knows how long just comes flying out of me, years of it gets set free, shit, I didn't know I've been carrying all that around ... and this gay speaking fella is dead dead nice to me and he says.

ALFIE: It's ok. Crying is a form of release, it's good to cry. So, go on, cry, cry your heart out, don't hold back.

RUSS: So, I do. I stand there in this call box blubbering like a wee child. And then this woman who's waiting outside the phone box knocks on the window and stares right at me, looking at her watch every two seconds and tutting really loudly and then she shouts.

ALFIE: Will you hurry up in there!

RUSS: I tell the gay sounding gay I have to go and he says.

ALFIE: Ok, but make sure you ring back again, we're always here for you, anytime you need to talk.

Beat.

RUSS: I did call back. But it isn't always the same gay sounding fella that I get talking to, it's different ones, but that was ok, they're all dead nice and supportive. I call back every week for months. The last time I call the line the fella I'm talking to says it's time I made a move in the right direction. The right direction! What do ya mean?

ALFIE: There's this disco, a gay disco, that happens on a Monday night down in town. It's great, you'll love it, really friendly just like any other disco only its totally gay.

RUSS: Nah, I'm not ready. What if somebody sees me?

ALFIE: like who?

RUSS: Like someone I know.

ALFIE: Then you're ok, cause if they're in the club they're gay too.

RUSS: But what if they're not? What if they're spies? What if they're going there just to look out for people like me.

ALFIE: And why would they do that?

RUSS: So they can tell everyone else about me.

ALFIE: You just have to take that risk I'm afraid.

RUSS: Right.

ALFIE: If you want to go I can arrange for someone from CARA Friend to meet you and bring you.

RUSS: Like a chaperone?

ALFIE: Like a friend.

RUSS: I don't ring Cara friend ever again. It's just a step too far.

Club lights come up. 'I wish you well' Sigala plays. Alfie dances. Russ steps forward and watches him.

Music ends as the lights snap up to bright.

ALFIE: I like most of the lessons at school except PE, the teacher, McMullan is a total one hundred per cent bastard. A real macho fucking homophobe.

Alfie looks across at Russ.

He says stuff like

RUSS: Kick that ball like a man, not a wee fairy.

ALFIE: He's always picking on me to do stuff, stuff he knows I'll mess up. Course this is like great entertainment for all the rest of the fellas in my class.

RUSS: Ah mate you're such a fucking failure my wee sister can kick a ball better than that.
Go and put on your tutu princess.
Where's your lipstick?

ALFIE: It was all of them against little old queer boy me. In the end I refuse to do it.

RUSS: Your problem Shaw is you need to toughen up. Do you want to be a man or a wee girl?

ALFIE: After games I'm feeling too intimidated to go into the showers with the other boys, what if something happens, I mean what if something pops up, what would I do? How can I hide it, everyone will see it, they'll all know. Today is one of those days so I quickly get out of my kit and start to change into my clothes. This other fella Smicker says.

RUSS: Oi Fruit merchant why you not taking a shower?'

ALFIE: I ignore him and carry on, then he starts shouting at the other fellas and someone says.

RUSS: He's not taking a shower cause he doesn't want us seeing his vagina.

ALFIE: The others laugh. Think it's so hilarious. Then McMullan comes in.

RUSS: Right Shaw you know the rules, get your kit off, into that shower now, stop your whining. School rules.

ALFIE: All the boys gather round to watch me strip off. I put my hand over my bits and run into the shower with them all laughing and jeering some shouting he's covering his fanny. McMullan doesn't say anything, he doesn't put an end to it. It's like he's enjoying watching my pain. What a fucking horrible bastard.

A few days later he walks past me in the corridor. I'm mucking about with my mate Cheryl and a few other girls, we're laughing at something and carrying on big time as per usual. He stops in his tracks and just stares right at me.

RUSS: Shaw, you need to seriously wise up. Man up would you, you're a bloody disgrace.

ALFIE: I feel like he's just kneed me in the stomach. I feel like shit.

I don't tell my parents any of this stuff. What's the point? What can they do about it, even if they want to go up to the school and make a big fuss, who is really going to take this seriously or even believe it. They're all probably thinking the same as he is. That boy needs to man up. They'll just accuse me of being overly sensitive. People are such cunts.

Club lights, 'One Kiss' (Valentino remix) by Calvin Harris & Dua Lipa plays.

Lights snap up to.

ALFIE: I know I'm gay although I've never actually sat down and told anyone everyone knows it too. Boys in school either ignored me or laugh at me. Most of the girls are cool. All my mates are girls and we have a good fun raking about and shit.

None of my mates have these issues. Their lives seemed dead normal all organised and planned out. They know where they're going and what they want. They can sit down and say stuff like ...

RUSS: When I'm twenty-five I want to be engaged and when I'm twenty-nine I want to have my first baby and two years I'll have another one.

ALFIE: They have a plan, the plan has been laid out for them, tried and tested, it's easy, they don't have to work it out.

ALFIE: And me, well I'm making it up as I go along. Dot to dot drawing out what my life is going to look like.

I start asking why me? Not in a feeling sorry for myself way, I'm just really trying to work it out. Why is it that I turned out different to everyone around me? Was I in the wrong womb at the wrong time?

How have I ended up like this?

RUSS: It's all because of the gay gene X928, it's to blame?

ALFIE: Does that gene really exist?

RUSS: It's in the paper and they're talking about it on Loose Women, so it must do!

ALFIE: Was I made gay in my mother's womb as a tiny helpless foetus all because I had older brothers?

RUSS: What a load of bollocks!

ALFIE: I'm not even kidding there's this research that says having older brothers increases the chances of a boy being gay.

RUSS: Ha.

ALFIE: Well maybe it was my mother's desperate desire to have a girl child that caused it?

RUSS: Or maybe you just spent too much time with your mother and not enough with my father.

Club lights. 'Justified and Ancient' People of K plays.

ALFIE: We had to do this research thing in PSHE. It was to do with civil rights. Touchy subject in Northern Ireland but an important one I think. Loads of people in my class looked at American Civil rights and some looked at here, the start of the troubles some woman called Bernadette Devlin and all that. I decide to look at gay rights. Because I'm not interested in all that other stuff. It's just

the same old shit. You know what I mean. Gay rights is my history and I need to know it.

No one in my class knows any of this stuff. Me included. I have to go and do research to find that out.

The gay rights association of Northern Ireland single handedly took on the British Government in the European court of human rights. I mean, Jesus fucking Christ, why didn't I know about this stuff? This is actually dead interesting. So relevant to our history. It was all about the decriminalisation of homosexual back in the day. In the rest of the UK, being gay was decriminalised back in ... 1967. But for some reason that didn't extend to Northern Ireland, even though we are part of the same country, supposedly. So, this guy who worked for the Northern Irish gay rights association, Jeff he was called, thought it was unfair for gays living in Northern Ireland so he put his money where his mouth was and he went to the European court and got them to change things and he won his fucking case. That is so awesome. The DUP tried to stop him. They had this campaign called Save Ulster from Sodomy and basically what it meant was that they wanted to keep Northern Ireland pure for when Jesus Christ came back to earth, so that at least one place on this planet was still holding up Christian values. I mean fuck sake, get real, no one comes to Northern Ireland, not ever, they go to fucking Dublin when they visit Ireland so like the DUP need to rethink that one big time. Did they really think Jesus Christ was going to jump on the Belfast express from Dublin and come here? Do a black taxi tour of all the trouble spots and look at the murals? Go to the Titanic or do a Game of Thrones tour? Anyway, they didn't win that time. Europe said they were out of order and they needed to do the right thing by the gays and bring things in line with the rest of the UK. How many people living in Northern Ireland actually know about that? Hardly any. No one in my class knew. Me included. I had to go and do research to find that out.

'Ain't Giving Up' Craig David & Sigala plays

Lights snap up to bright.

- RUSS: I come across these adverts in the Sunday paper, for telephone chat lines. You know, horoscopes, mediums, dating chat lines men wanting to talk to women and there's a gay one. A fucking gay one, my stomach does these wild somersaults when I read it. I call the number. This weird music starts to play.
- ALFIE: Welcome to man on man action stay on the line to hear hot guys telling all, you can hear my night with a male stripper, gang banged by the filth and all night fuckfest with the rugby team.
- RUSS: The adrenalin crashes through my body at athletic speed. My mouth goes dry and my cock gets like super fucking hard just thinking about it.

- ALFIE: Press one for true confessions or two for guys who want to connect with other guys.
- RUSS: I listen to them all. I spend ages on the phone. I call the number nearly every day. I can't help myself, it's just something I need to do.
- I just listen to the guys wanting to connect with other guys. Basically, they just say who they are and what sort of stuff they're into. It was straight forward enough, but I have never heard fellas talking so openly like this before. I desperately want to ring their number but I just haven't got the nerve. I fall in love with some of them just because I love their voices and I listen over and over. And then my Ma announces that her and my Da are going away for the weekend to stay at my aunties caravan up on the coast.
- ALFIE: Will you be ok staying in the house on your own?
- RUSS: Definitely.
I wait until nine o'clock on the Friday night just to make sure they've definitely gone, that they haven't forgotten something. I dial the number and I listen to guys' messages again. Drank some vodka to give me courage. I pick one guy's message and I put in the digits to get talking to him. The phone rings and he comes on the phone.
- ALFIE: Hello.
- RUSS: He's Scottish, lives in Glasgow so no chance of him popping around.
- ALFIE: How you doin'?
- RUSS: I'm dead on. What's your name.
- ALFIE: Davy.
- RUSS: Scottish Davy. Sounds so macho. I love it. And his voice is so ... it gives me goose bumps. My cock gets super hard again.
- ALFIE: I haven't told anyone I'm gay.
- RUSS: Me either.
- ALFIE: I know I should but I don't feel ready yet.
- RUSS: Maybe he could be my boyfriend. I could get the ferry over to Scotland every so often. All these thoughts race through my head and by the end of the call I've given him my address and he's going to write to me. My cock is still super hard.

ALFIE: Great chatting to you mate. I'll write that letter tonight. By the way I love your voice.

RUSS: I'm in love, deeply in love. We really click me and Scottish Davy. Fuck me I have got a Scottish boyfriend a Glaswegian. Imagine that. My heart is busting. I can't wait to meet him. I can't wait to be on my own with him. To touch him. To kiss him. To go to bed with him. I go to bed very happy. I can't sleep thinking about him. I wank about him imagining what he's going to feel like. I have butterflies in my stomach. Life is finally beginning. I can feel it all over my body and it's just so amazing, I fall asleep smiling.

Scottish Davy's letter arrives in the post. My Mother is of course in the hallway when the post man pushes it through the letter box.

ALFIE: Who's that from?

RUSS: Ah just some information from sport courses.
I lock myself in the bathroom. I can't wait to open the letter. My hands are actually shaking. I rip it open and the letter falls out onto the bath mat along with his two photographs. I pick them up and look at them. And there he is Scottish Davy the love of my life. I'm seeing him for the first time ever! And he's a fucking ugly dog. My cock is lifeless, dead as fucking Hector. Everything I've been feeling, every thought I've had about him completely and utterly dissolves on the spot. I sit on the toilet staring at him. Why? Why the fuck did he have to turn out to look like that? I might be desperate, I might be without a boyfriend, lonely but I can never, ever contemplate doing anything with this guy. He looks so fucking gay, a mincer, I can't take this fella seriously. What a bastard. I throw the letter in the bin and put Scottish Davy right out of my head and I don't reply to his letter.

The phone bill arrives and my mother of course goes ape shit.

This bill has trebled since the last one?

ALFIE: I'm not paying this. I'm not. I want answers!

I don't recognise any of these numbers they're all beginning with 0891?

RUSS: She looks straight at me and then at my Da.

ALFIE: Have either of you been calling these numbers?

RUSS: My brother comes into the room and sits down he takes the phone bill and looks at it.

ALFIE: Jesus there's a lot of these numbers someone's been busy.

I was reading that there's a whole big con going on at the minute, BT are charging people for these calls and they haven't made them

ALFIE: I'm getting to the bottom of this no one's going to con me.

RUSS: She picks up the phone and starts to dial the number and I know that within seconds she's going to hear a man's voice telling her about blow jobs, mutal wanking, a fella with a twelve inch dick and a gang bang in a Soho sauna.
Stop!

She freezes mid dial and stares at me.

It was me. I made those calls.

All eyes are now fixed on me. I can see a smile appear on my brother's face. And then I just spit it out.

They're numbers for ... horoscopes and a fortune teller, I lie through my fucking teeth.

ALFIE: A fortune teller?

RUSS: My brother shakes his head and buries his face in his hands, he's scundered for me and my Ma's not looking at all convinced.

I'm worried about next year about my exams.

There's a silence. My brother takes his hands away from his face and looks at me, I think he's beginning to actually believe this bullshit.

Pause.

ALFIE: Ok. So, what did they have to tell you?

RUSS: Oh ... lots of stuff. Really, really interesting stuff.

ALFIE: Are you going to be ok? You going to pass?

RUSS: Yes, I am. She nods, she looks sort of relieved. I'll pay for the calls.

ALFIE: Oh, indeed you will, indeed you bloody well will.

RUSS: She gets up and puts the phone back on the table in the hall and that was that. Then she says.

ALFIE: They didn't happen to say anything about me, did they?

RUSS: No.

My brother the sensitive soul of a bastard that he is mouths ass hole over to me, but I really don't care, I've scraped through this potential life changing disaster and that's all that matters.

Sound of Phone Chat line music:

- ALFIE: The first thing I did that made me officially gay was sign up for Grindr. I was fifteen. Twink for older ...
You should have seen the photos I get sent.
Cock shots, ass shots, guys getting fucked, guys sucking each other off, old men holding their dicks, cum shots, loads of guys wanking and then shooting their load. It was an education. Some of it was really gross, but some of it was so fucking horny. Some really good looking guys. Like guys I couldn't just couldn't believe looked like that and were actually gay. And some of the questions I got asked.
- RUSS: You hung?

What you into?

You like kink?

420?

Top or bottom?
- ALFIE: I don't know I've never had sex before, so how was I meant to answer them.
- RUSS: Water sports?

Poppers?

Pills?

H&H?

You want me to come in your ass?
- ALFIE: Thing is you don't want to sound like a kid so you say yeah, I'm totally into all that and then you carry on the conversation until it runs out of steam, kind of dies out and disappears, or, they suddenly say.
- RUSS: Meet?
- ALFIE: And then I'd like totally shit my pants.
- RUSS: I can accommodate, or travel.
- ALFIE: I'd make an excuse or I'd just go quiet and disappear.
But this one time I went through with it. I agreed to a meet. This guy thirty something, dead good looking, I mean handsome, daddy type. Though he looked nothing like my da, my da wishes. In my da's dreams.

RUSS: I'll meet you in my car.

ALFIE: It's a sports car! Not really a lot of room to do anything.

RUSS: You know anywhere else we can go?

ALFIE: No.

RUSS: I've got an idea. Get into the car.

ALFIE: I get in the car and he drives us to this skip. We climb into it. This empty skip/

RUSS: I spotted it on my way to meet you and I thought, that would be so fucking horny to have someone in here.

ALFIE: Not much happens. Just me sucking him off. It's taken him ages to come. He's groaning and moaning a lot. And then like seconds after he comes he sticks his dick back in his trousers and zips up.

RUSS: Ok see ya mate.

ALFIE: He climbs out. He takes a run at it and jumps out like fucking batman on acid. He's away and I'm left standing here the knees of my good jeans covered in cement and all sorts of shit. I think to myself would this happen to Miley Cyrus?

I try the running thing ... but that doesn't work I keep slipping. I'm wearing these rubbish shoes. I mean, in my defence I didn't know I'd end up in a skip when I put them on me. Eventually after a few gos I pull myself out.

I walk the couple of streets back home and I'm looking and feeling like shit. I have a light bulb moment!

Just because someone's on the same side as you, doesn't mean they're going to be *on your side*! I thought to myself at the heart of it all, People are Cunts!

RUSS: My best mate Janine takes me to this gay club. My first time ever. I can see the doorway looming up in front of us. It's dark and music is seeping out of it into the street. A couple of the doormen are standing inside it checking people coming in.

We walk into the doorway, my heart is in my actual mouth, my tongue is as dry as an auld nun's crack, my hand starts to shake with nerves. The doorman stops us.

ALFIE: Nah. You're not coming in.

- RUSS: What?
- ALFIE: Special night tonight.
- RUSS: I know what night it is. It's the gay night.
- ALFIE: You two are a couple, boy and girl couple.
- RUSS: I am gay.
- ALFIE: Look we get it all the time straight ones looking for a place to go when all the other pubs are shut.
- RUSS: It's totally not like that.
- ALFIE: If you really are gay you need someone from Cara Friend to bring you down, then we'll know you're legit. Janine went mad.
- RUSS: Mister are you fucking for real!
- ALFIE: Yip, now there's no way I can let you in, not tonight. So off you go and safe home.
- RUSS: I tried to plead with him, tell him about how much courage it has taken to get there, to actually walk through the door, and how if he doesn't let me in I mightn't have the courage to come here again and I might never come back, I might just die in my closet. I mean how can I communicate what it's like to be me to a straight door man, all the years of trying to feel ok about yourself, trying to connect and to live a life that you want. You just can't. I think about telling him how much I loved Charlie's Angels and Dallas and how Kylie was my favourite singer but before I have a chance, right out of no-where, an empty beer bottle comes flying towards me and it hits me right bang on the forehead. A perfect hit. And all hell breaks loose, the crowd in front aren't getting in either and one of them has thrown a beer bottle at the other bouncer, only it misses him and hits me instead. A huge big lump appears. The bouncers grab me and bring me inside. Janine being the nurse comes with us and screams that I need ice immediately so they take me behind the bar and give me ice and they're really concerned that I'm ok, that my skull isn't fractured or that I haven't got concussion. I'll be fine I say, and I hold the bag of ice against my forehead. After a bit we move away from the bar.
- Suddenly we're standing at the edge of the dancefloor and we realise ... we realise that we've done it, we're in, we got in, I'm in a fucking gay club!

Russ talks over the music.

The dance floor is packed and even though the massive cartoon Popeye lump on my head is throbbing and getting bigger by the second, I feel incredible, I feel like I've arrived somewhere that I belong. I'm home. I'm where I'm meant to be and it feels so so totally fucking amazing. And we dance.

Annie Lennox Sweet dreams plays. Club lights, Russ and Alfie dance.

Lights snap up to bright.

ALFIE: It's my first time going to gay pride. We're dressed head to toe in all the colours of the rainbow. I'm not even kidding. I've even sprayed my hair pink and Cheryl has sprayed hers purple. It's totally mad looking. We get on the bus and we have like a proper laugh with all the ones on it. They're raking us about our hair and stuff, in a good way. We've drank near a bottle of vodka between us, so we are pished. By the time we get off for the parade everyone on the bus is laughing and wishing us well. It's great. A buzz, like one big party. I love them all and so does Cheryl. We take loads of selfies and get over fifty likes on Instagram inside ten minutes.

I love it! It was just one big party and everyone is gay or pretending to be gay. I wish the ones from my school could all be here to experience it. I think schools should be made to go to it. There were these groups with placards protesting about equal rights and stuff, it kind of killed the vibe. It's a fucking party people! Come on chill the fuck would ya. I want them to shut up, just for today, just let everyone enjoy themselves, I mean there's enough shit about. I know it's important but sometimes you just want to forget about it all and have a good time with your mates.

'This is Real' by Jax & Ella Henderson plays.

Lights snap up to bright.

RUSS: There's no way that I can come out as being gay in school. Not at this time. I Would last a minute. Can you image it, the fuss? An openly gay PE teacher?

ALFIE: Hey Sir are you married?

RUSS: Right, enough of the questions, just get on with what you have to do.

ALFIE: Sir, I saw you in town on Saturday. Was that your wife you were with?

RUSS: Not that it's any of your business, but, no, that wasn't my wife, the girl I was with is a friend.

ALFIE: Woo ... friend?

RUSS: I'm good at dodging the questions. Where other teachers, my colleagues, can just casually drop stuff into whatever they're saying to their pupils, ya know things about their lives, normal facts. For instance, my daughter gets three times the homework you lot get, or I was out with my wife on Saturday night and ... or, my son is a big fan of the X factor... you get the idea. Just casual comments that are every now and again dropped into the conversations and the students love it getting wee snippets of info about their teachers' lives.

ALFIE: Mrs Gilmore has three children

RUSS: Or.

ALFIE: Mr Thompson's wife is a teacher over in the girls' school.

RUSS: Have to keep my guard up. Can't let anything slip. Have to censor my life, think twice before I say anything about myself to a class. None of the other teachers have to do that. It doesn't even occur to them to have to think that way.
Yeah and it's all very well saying I should come out and be a role model. Two of the school governors are DUP councillors so the thing is my days as a teacher in this school would be numbered and who's going to pay my mortgage then, Peter Thatchell? Yeah right.

Club lights 'Joys' Roberto Surace plays.

Lights snap up to bright.

ALFIE: It's my eighteen and Cheryl says we need to do something special. I'm happy going to a bar and getting wasted on shots.

RUSS: We can do that any Saturday night. We need a big night out. A night to remember. Just me and you. We should go into town, to that gay club the Kremlin. It's time you started acting like a proper gay best friend.

ALFIE: I know fine well that she's only using my birthday as an excuse, she's been dying to get to the Kremlin for ages. It sounds stupid, but I haven't the actual balls to go to a proper gay club. It's to do with it being in town and it being full of other gays. All them gays in one place. At least in Grindr it's just one other person you're talking to.

She eventually talks me into it. Getting ready takes forever. Nothing I put on looks right. Cheryl's ready in like fifteen minutes.

Club lights. Roberto Surace 'Joys' plays. Alfie dances.

From the second I walk into the place everything fits, the music, the way the place looks, the people, the men. Everyone is having an amazing time. I'm on

the dance floor within minutes and I look around and there's fellas kissing fellas, girls kissing girls and it's mind blowingly brilliant. For the first time in my life I'm not the odd one out. For the first time ever I feel normal. Cheryl takes some selfies of us on the dance floor and we get like loads of likes right away. My Insta is buzzing.

I'm having a really great time dancing, totally losing myself. In the middle of it all I look across the floor and I see him. Holy fuck.

He's there standing at the bar and I stop dancing, I can't actually believe my eyes. I move closer to get a better look.

There he is laughing, acting like a big camp Queen ... My PE teacher Mr Macho McMullan. I so want to walk up to him and say hey McMullan, man up, you're a disgrace.

Russ looks up and sees Alfie staring at him.

But I don't do that. Instead ... I just dance.

Alfie takes off his top and moves back to the dance floor and dances. Russ watches him.

Club lights, 'One Kiss' Calvin Harris and Dupa Lipa plays.

Lights snap up to bright.

RUSS: Now and again I'd get boys in my class who I'd know right away are gay. Sometimes they're not overly girly, sometimes it's just something I can see. I remember this boy Alfie. It was pretty clear from day one in first year that Alfie was a wee bit different, as the other teachers would put it. Soon as I met him it was, well blazingly obvious.

ALFIE: I hate football, I hate all sports, I detest them so I'm not doin them. They're boring, why can't we do dance lessons instead sir? I'm good at dancing.

RUSS: You can do dance for GCSE.

ALFIE: That's not fair. That's years away. Why is football more important than dance? If I could do dance I'd be top of the class every week. I would. You're denying me my education so you are.

RUSS: I'll be honest with you there was a part of me that wanted to take him aside and squash the gayness right out of him. I want to see it gone. For his own sake. If he'd try kicking a ball the boys would be ok with him. But if he keeps getting on the way that he is he's going to have a hard time. I recognised him, I identified with him, I could feel all the confusion and insecurities inside him, the feelings of hurt and rejection. There was one day when he refused to take off his clothes and get into the shower.

ALFIE: No way am I taking my clothes off. It's freezing for a start.

RUSS: You're just drawing more attention to yourself.

ALFIE: I've not even been sweating. I hardly did anything out there I just stood and watched. I don't need a shower! And I don't want to get my hair wet took me ages styling it this morning.

RUSS: It's the school rules. Health and safety. Now no more fuss just get on and do it. And the rest of you lot get on with your own business and hurry up for your next class.

RUSS: As I walked out I hear the other boys having a go at him. Just a bit of banter, the way young fellas do. I mean who can blame them he brought it all on himself.

ALFIE: Sir! They're picking on me! Sir!!!!

Club lights, 'Don't call me Up' by Mabel plays.

Lights snap up to.

RUSS: At thirty- four I meet Colin. I like him, he likes me, we get on as they say. Then I make a choice. I make a choice to fall in love with this fella. I could step back, pull away, I could have kept things casual, not everything has to be full on and serious. But I don't, I can't help myself, something inside me caves in to being like everyone else, it's like finally I can be the same. I can have all the things you have, all the things I thought I'd miss out on. So I go for it. I wrap myself up in a bubble of domestic bliss. It changes my life. He hates gay clubs and gay bars, hates fellas being too gay, hates the negative stereotype. Makes him feel insecure. We spend our Saturday nights having friends round for dinner. I collect all these recipes, Indian, Chinese, Italian I can make my own pasta and I bake cakes. We become hetrogays. We Buy a house, mortgage ourselves to the fucking hilt. We do it up beautifully, very tasteful, we are gay men so what do you expect. I make a choice to turn my back on the gay scene. It feels right. I reckon what I've got is a hundred times better than being some sad old queen staggering into a taxi on my own every Saturday night or leering after some lads that don't even notice that I exist.

Alfie carrying drinks bumps into a drunken Russ.

RUSS: Ah sorry mate.

Alfie gives him a look of disdain, knocks back one of the drinks and pushes past Russ as he dances off. Russ watches him go.

RUSS: I'm happy in my domestic hetero land. Going for walks on a Sunday. Cinema on a Thursday and a pizza after. Maybe a cheeky cocktail at the weekend. It's safe, predictable, no stress, it's nice.

Predictable.

One day I wake up and I have this ache, in my stomach. It stays there on and off all day. The next day it fades away, stays away for another week and then I wake in the middle of the night with it. That's when I realise it. I'm not actually happy. I've settled. I've settled for security over actually living. I need the passion back, before it's all over. I'm still young inside. I still have desires. I still want to feel stuff. Fuck sake it was hard enough to get here. I want something more than what I have. It's lovely it's very secure but I don't feel alive anymore. The thing is when I tell him all this all he says to me is.

ALFIE: Get a grip. You're having a mid-life crisis, get some pills from the GP.

RUSS Is this what's really happening to me? Is he right? Am I a fuck up?
I've spent weeks not sleeping properly.
I wake at three in the morning. I get up, pack a bag, I leave. I leave my house, our house and I go and I don't go back.
That's it. It's over. I'm gone. I've made a choice. I think to myself make this your paradise or your hell – your choice.

Club Lights. 'We found Love in a Hopeless place' Rhianna plays.

Lights snap up.

RUSS: I get that Grindr app on my phone then Scruff then Tinder. Bit late to the gay party but hey what a great fucking party. I write in my bio masculine guy looking for other masculine guys, dates, mates, fun NSA, no fems, no offence just not my type, beards and muscles go straight to the front of the queue. First week I get flooded with messages, photos, taps, woofs and matches, invites at 3am to have sex. These were from guys, hot, young, old, straight and married, trannies, weird as fuck, all sorts. I Have a few hook ups. Go on some dates. First time actually going on dates isn't that just mad, at my age. I have this dilemma do I shave my pubes or not I mean it seems to be a thing now, no pubes younger guys seem to like that. In the end, I settle for a bit of a trim. Then all attention slowly fizzles out. Same profiles every time I opened the app. Guys I've been chatting to suddenly go silent. I get a message once a week. It all dries up. I go back to not sleeping again. Have I left it all too late. Too late to the party time to go home. Am I over the hill?
So I decide I'll do the old fashioned thing and go back out on the gay scene. You know go back to the bars and the clubs that I used to go to before. But they've changed so much since I first started going out. I hardly recognised anyone, in fact it was mostly new faces everywhere I go. I haven't been going to the gay bars and clubs in town for nearly fifteen years. The thing that

strikes me the most is how mixed the crowd is now. There's a lot of young women in the clubs, drunk, off their heads, young women and a lot of them not gay, straight girls who like going to gay clubs and not just straight girls, but straight boys too going with their gay mates. It's so fluid now. Don't get me wrong, it's good to see it being opened up but for an old queer like me it's a bit ... confusing and I don't know, off putting. I feel like I'm the outsider. I'm the one that shouldn't be there.

ALFIE: Any one ever tell you that you look like that actor?

RUSS: Chris Hemsworth?

ALFIE: Nah Tom Hanks.

RUSS: Really?

ALFIE: Yeah just something about you, think it's the hair.

RUSS: I look nothing like him, completely different hair.

Alfie walks off.

RUSS: And he's like twenty years older than me.
Stupid little fuck.....

RUSS: The other big difference between now and the past is how much fitter the men looked these days. Jesus, everywhere I look there's guys with bulging biceps and chest and arses you could set a dinner plate on. To be honest it makes me ... well, it makes me kind of.... fucked off. I feel bitter. I'm angry at myself. I have allowed myself to get cheated. I bought into this fucking idea, I made a choice because it seemed right, I got sucked in and gave away my life for a life in suburbia.

The first time I walk into this club it takes me right back. It's a different club, a new one, but it takes me back to that first night. The night with the Popeye bump on my head and the bag of ice with Janine. Only this time now in my mid-forties I'm like invisible no one looks twice at me, I'm not eligible anymore, I'm over the hill, a novelty not part of the scene.

Club lights. Roberto Surace, 'Come on Everybody' plays.

RUSS: I'm stood close to the bar, bit worse for wear. I look over at the dance floor and I see him, right there in front of me, this guy, this young fella watching me, this fit gorgeous looking young man. Staring at me. There's something very familiar about him, he looks like someone, maybe I've chatted to him on Grindr.

He sees me, he actually notices me, suddenly I'm not invisible anymore. I give him a smile and he smiles back. A big smile. Jesus where has this come from?

Russ moves towards Alfie on the dance floor. Russ dances alongside Alfie, occasionally they make eye contact.

ALFIE: I really haven't thought it through, I don't know what I'm doing. I'm like testing the water, seeing how far I can take it. How far I can reel him in. How far he'll go. Will he recognise me? Does he even remember who I am? I don't think he does.

RUSS: It's bizarre, like I'm back in time. Like I'm being handed back my life, this guy this young beautiful guy is interested ... He's not looking away. He's looking at me, his eyes are on me.

They get closer, building up to lips almost touching.

ALFIE: I'm reeling him in, I have him right in the palm of my hand. To think I can do this, it's me in control. Fucking macho PE teacher McMullan being pulled into my web. I see the look in his eyes, he wants me, I've got this power over him, I've never had this before and it feels fucking amazing.

Russ reaches out his hand, gently caresses Alfie's chest.

RUSS: It's him, the gay boy from school. Alfie. Shit he's changed. Jesus fuck he's changed. Confident. Good looking. My head's fucked. What the fuck are you doing Russ. I mean what the fuck. Step back. You've got a choice. Your paradise or your hell. It definitely feels like paradise. There's something about the wrongness that makes me want it even more. Fuck predictable, fuck the right path. I want to cross this line so bad. So bad and I don't care if it's wrong. At this moment, it's right.

Russ kisses Alfie.

Alfie breaks away.

RUSS: When I finally come back up for air I look across the dance floor and I can see someone with their phone out. Like they're taking photos. Photos of me. I try to see who it is but I can't. She's off, disappeared into the crowd.

Lights snap out of the club, music stops.

RUSS: There's something strange going on as I drive into school on the Monday morning. It strikes me as soon as I come through the gates, I can see the kids look at my car in a certain way. Like they've never seen it before. I get out and walk up to the staff room I can feel all their eyes on me.

Emily, my second in department comes up to me.

ALFIE: Have you seen that photo that's going around the school? It's of you in the club.

RUSS: My heart takes a massive nose dive. It comes flooding back. She quickly takes her phone out of her pocket and shows me it!
Sure enough, there I am snogging the face of this young guy. This very young guy. Shit! Jesus Christ!
I go out into the corridor, none of the kids can look me straight in the face. A few of the cheeky lads smile and say.

ALFIE: Hi, morning Mr McMullan sir, how ya doing?
Good weekend Sir?

RUSS: I ignore them and head for my office.

My lessons that morning are all over the place, I'm not concentrating, the kids have other stuff on their mind, like me kissing Alfie Shaw. I see them all looking at me. Even when they're off working on their tasks. They look at me differently.

I get an email from the head asking to speak to me. I get cover for my last lesson and I head up to his office.
He's not alone, the deputy head's in there too.

ALFIE: Have you anything to say regarding this photo?

RUSS: No, not really.
I mean it's pretty self-explanatory, I'm kissing someone, another man.
What else does he want me to say.

ALFIE: Mister McMullan you realise the implications here.

RUSS: Yes. Yes, I do.
They all know I'm gay. The students all of them. It's not against the law.

ALFIE: The other person in the picture.

RUSS: He's young. I know, not good.

ALFIE: He's an ex-student.

RUSS: I feel weak all over. I knew this. I already knew this. What can I say.

ALFIE: You taught him. This doesn't look good.

- RUSS: I don't answer him.
The deputy butts in,
- ALFIE: We've had quite a few phone calls from parents, concerned parents, and some boys have come to see me saying they're not comfortable taking showers.
- RUSS: I nod. There's nothing I can say.
- ALFIE: Children's well-being is our top priority. We cannot afford any kind of slur.
- RUSS: I tell him I hadn't actually done anything wrong, I hadn't broken any laws. They both nod and look sheepish. They're not buying it. I know they're not.
- ALFIE: Only a matter of time before the press contact us.
- RUSS: Fuck. Then the Deputy chimes in
- ALFIE: Our concern is that a teacher of your standing has a responsibility. A certain standard of professionalism to uphold. I mean the whole school, even the younger years have seen this.
- RUSS: Then the Head says.
- ALFIE: Russell, Mr McMullan, this has got nothing to do with your ... sexuality, you know that we support you in this.
- RUSS: As he's saying this I'm thinking Bullshit! This has got everything to do with my sexuality. I'm kissing another man. Ok a younger man, a lot lot younger, and he's an ex-student. Ok, fair enough not good.
Fuck. I'm an idiot. A total fuck up of an idiot.
I think about apologising, of agreeing that I had acted irresponsibly, that I was carried away by the moment, by the atmosphere, by him! By him. But, I don't, I just look across the desk at these two men, in their suits and their ties, their polished shoes and the words of their minister's Sunday sermon flying around their heads. There is nothing, nothing, that I can say that is ever going to make them see things from my point of view, not now, not ever. How can I get them to understand that it's a gay club, a gay space, a safe place, things are different in there. The lines are blurred. The lines are not the same lines. They have a different view of the line. Their line is straight down the middle, clear and strong, no breaks, no curves, no room for anything else.
- ALFIE: You need to take some time off. We need to let things settle for a bit before we can think this through.
- RUSS: You're suspending me?

ALFIE: You don't want to be here in this school if the media get wind. Not good for you, not good for the pupils, not good at all.

RUSS: The deputy mumbles something about doing the right thing, following protocol. I look right at him, at his face, his whole body language, he's so deeply uncomfortable, he's squirming in his seat, can't make eye contact with me, like he's going to get contaminated. He's fucking pathetic. He's a disgrace, he shouldn't be in charge of educating children. And then it hits me. In that moment I realise it. These are the people whose rules I've been living with my whole fucking entire life. The people whose approval mattered to me. And the anger that's been a part of my life rises up and fills my body.

I storm out of the Head's office and I don't know who I'm the most angry with, me or them. I go straight to my office, put my stuff into a cardboard box and I walk through the school and out into the car park.

I stop dead in my tracks. My car has got FAGGOT written across the bonnet. My mouth falls open. So much for fucking progress! So much for everyone embracing the gays, for equality. There are kids looking at it, some are pointing and laughing, it's a great fucking joke to them all. Maybe I deserve this.

I climb into my car and I drive off, the word faggot still scrawled across the bonnet, kids point and laugh as I drive away, a few run after the car. It's my perfect exit from a life I borrowed and thought that I owned..

Club lights, "Promises" Calvin Harris plays. Lights snap up.

RUSS: As I drive I think back to the prank calls I made as a kid and I remember ringing the people who live across the road from us. The Woodburns. I know their eldest daughter Hanna, she's older than me. I found out that she'd just got accepted into the Police, the RUC as a trainee police officer. She had to sit a couple of exams and do a few interviews to get there, this is something she has set her heart on. She's so over joyed about it, a life's dream come true. I mean Hanna isn't the prettiest looking girl, ya know what I mean chubby face, piggy eyes, mousy hair, always eating crisps, cheese and onion breath. This is her big chance to be something more than porky Hanna. No one round our way knows anything about this. You don't speak about these things. Way too risky even in a loyalist area like ours. I only know about it because I was sitting in our kitchen with the door open and I overheard Hanna's mother telling my mother all about it.

(Fake Southern Irish accent) Hello, is that Hanna Woodburn.

ALFIE: Yes. Yes it is. Who's this?

RUSS: You don't know me Hanna, *(pause)* but I know you. I know all about you.

ALFIE: What?

RUSS: I'm ringing you to give you a warning. It's come to our attention that you are joining the RUC.

ALFIE: Who is this?

Pause.

Hello.

RUSS: We're watching you Hanna. You're a marked woman.

ALFIE: Mummy! (*Terrified*). Who is this? Who are you?

RUSS: You've been officially warned. So, listen or suffer the consequences.

Russ hangs up the phone.

RUSS: I had her in the palm of my hand. I have all this power over her. Me! I've never felt so important

I find out a few days later that Hanna has withdrawn her acceptance of the job.

Don't judge me, I was a kid, I didn't fully realise the consequences. But thinking about it now I think I did her favour. I mean she could have been killed. I most likely saved porky Hanna's miserable life.

As I'm sitting in my car years later I think to myself why was I such an angry wee boy? I never thought of it that way. Angry? I never thought I was like angry, I was just having a laugh, but now I know that I was. And the thing is I kept on being angry, over and over. And finally, I've worked it out, I know exactly why I was so fucking angry.

Russ leaves the stage.

ALFIE: Another thing I found out doing my school research is that in 1997 a police man, a young gay police man was shot dead at point blank range inside a gay club called The Parliament.

There's hundreds, maybe thousands of policemen in Northern Ireland so why single out a gay one? I couldn't find an answer to that. Did the IRA hate gays more than they hated the RUC? Yer man Jeff, the one who went to the European court said that the paramilitaries were particularly vicious to the gays they get an extra thrill from killing a gay. Jesus that's just sick in the head. Apparently, this murdered gay RUC fella had problems coming out, he got a lot of comfort and support from the gay scene. He felt safe and

supported there. Fuck me how wired up is that? I feel sorry for the fella, I do, but I can't help thinking he should have been more careful. I mean like the city centre is a melting pot of all religions someone was bound to do something about him being a peeler. The RUC told their police officers to stay away from city centre bars, but then again, he was gay where else was he going to go?

Things were dead different back then. It's like so hard to imagine it. But the thing is the DUP were around then and they're still around today, so maybe things aren't that much different? Not when you look at it closely.

'Good as Hell' by Lizzo plays. Alfie dances. Russ looks across at him, they hold the gaze. They dance.

RUSS: A week after all the shit I'm back in the club standing at the dance floor. This time for the first time in my life I know that this is my space, it was created for me, I fucking belong here. I've crossed the line and I'm saying fuck you. Fuck you.....

Sigala & Ella Eyre's 'Came here for Love' plays.

Alfie appears. He stares at Russ. There is a moment of tension. Russ nods and gives Alfie a smile. The music grows.

Russ and Alfie dance. They get closer, building up to lips almost touching, Russ reaches out his hand, gently caresses the other younger man's chest. This time Alfie doesn't break away, he pulls Russ closer to him.

The End.