

Mimesis, Diegesis, and Narrative Frames: Gregory, Beckett, McGuinness

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Location always matters – especially in Irish drama. Drawing on the spatial theories of Michael Issacharoff, H el ene Lalibert e and Ruth Ronen, the article investigates the unique interplay between dramatic space and the thematic concept of the universal in three Irish plays: Augusta Gregory’s *The Workhouse Ward* (1908), Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953/55) and Frank McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985). I trace a special line of influence between these plays through the lens of spatial theory, and further the discussion of the geographies of Irish drama as examined in Chris Morash and Shaun Richard’s *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (2013).



Introduction

Michael Issacharoff has developed a theory of mimetic and diegetic dramatic spaces that is based on Gérard Genette's theories of 'showing' and 'telling' in fictional narratives (Issacharoff, 1981: 211). Issacharoff renames 'setting' as 'mimetic dramatic space', one communicated visually and transmitted directly to the audience (1981: 215). 'Diegetic dramatic spaces', on the other hand, are spaces evoked in the dialogue of the characters, or mentioned in stage directions (Issacharoff, 1981: 215). Hélène Laliberté gathers Issacharoff's mimetic and diegetic dramatic spaces under her own category, '*l'espace physique*', one that includes '*l'espace off*', the space off stage (1998: 136, 135). She agrees with Issacharoff that 'theatre space' (i.e. the building and the auditorium) and 'stage space' (i.e. set design) should be treated separately from dramatic space or the 'story-space' textually referenced in a play (Issacharoff, 1981: 212; Laliberté, 1998: 135). Ruth Ronen also draws on Issacharoff's ideas on spatial arrangements, grouping his categories for dramatic spaces under 'scenic space' and 'extrascenic space', the latter close to Laliberté's notions of *l'espace off* (1986: 423). As a critic of narrative fiction, Ronen engages with Issacharoff's theory of drama (1986: 423) when proposing a new theory, that of 'frames', for understanding spatial arrangements. Ronen devises a framework of multiple frames: 'first frame(s)' (i.e. setting), 'secondary frames', 'inaccessible frames', 'spatio-temporally distant frames' and, lastly, 'generalised space' (1986: 425–428). She identifies these frames through their immediacy to the storyline, or 'story-space' that she sees as the 'global organization of a story' (Ronen, 1986: 427).

What follows is an analysis of dramatic spaces in three twentieth-century Irish plays within the frameworks proposed by Issacharoff, Laliberté and Ronen, indebted as they all are to the narrative theories of Gérard Genette. Adapting their approaches, I consider Augusta Gregory's reference to small towns and townlands in Galway's Kiltartan area in her play *The Workhouse Ward*, and her unlikely mention of the Kamchatka Peninsula on the eastern shore of imperial Russia. I further examine Samuel Beckett's references to various locations in France and in Connemara, County Galway, in the French and English versions of *Waiting for Godot*, from the early 1950s, in the light of references to locality in *The Workhouse Ward*. Finally, this article addresses Frank McGuinness's 'framing' of Ulster and the trenches of the river Somme in northern France, while also drawing attention to the city of Strasbourg, home to the European Court of Human Rights that was established in the aftermath of the Second World War. Besides the significance of the specific locations and localities to which characters refer in all three plays, the article also investigates the ways in which universal human themes play out in these locations: whether they be in Ireland, continental Europe or the Far East. In

consideration of the ways in which the three plays under discussion give expression to issues of universal human value, I draw upon Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's notion of literary works as expressing 'universal habits of human thinking and feeling' (1958: xi). Finally, the article discusses the ways in which the three dramatic works under discussion engage with one another, establishing a line of continuity within twentieth-century Irish drama from the period of the Irish Literary Revival in the 1900s to that of the Northern Ireland Troubles during the 1980s.

Lady Gregory's Kamchatkan Kiltartan

Gregory's most acclaimed rural comedies of the west of Ireland are set in the fictional place of Cloon, modelled on Gort, a small town near her estate in Coole Park, County Galway. Ann Saddlemyer has observed the universal nature of this particular location: Cloon is 'Gort, and nowhere; Ireland and everywhere; it is the boundless country of comedy' (1966: 31). Cloon, the diegetic dramatic space, is a location in Gregory's 'imaginative geography', to use the phrase of Christopher Morash and Shaun Richards (2013: 50); a *lieu de mémoire* from Pierre Nora's concept of geographical imagination (Nora, 1989: 7; Morash and Richards, 2013: 42). Cloon is, in fact, an amalgamation of real places: Gort and various other 'Cloon' around Ireland (in Connemara and in counties Clare, Leitrim and Wicklow). As James Pethica suggests, it is equally an imaginary location, where inhabitants can turn 'a single minor incident into fast-paced, extravagant farce' (2004: 71). Cloon itself may be a fictional place, but there are many other, *real* place names mentioned in Gregory's drama, not mentioned in critical discussion of Gregory's work hitherto. What follows is a mapping out of the diegetic dramatic space to which she refers in her plays and its relevance for the thematic universality towards which she aimed in her work for the Abbey Theatre.

Based on Gregory's rural comedies, misleadingly huddled under the umbrella term 'peasant plays', Cloon has everything that rural Irish townlands would have had at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cloon has a market place, a post office, a butcher's shop, a general shop, a police station, a newspaper's office, churches, and even a train station outside the town. The one location that is noticeably missing from Gregory's rural plays, whatever their geographic location, is the local Irish pub, which otherwise serves as the setting, for instance, in John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and in Act Two of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). Morash and Richards point out that, according to the manuscript, the opening scene of Synge's most famous play, originally entitled 'The Murderer (A Farce)', was initially to take place in a potato garden rather than Michael James Flaherty's pub (Morash and Richards, 2013: 36). Gregory herself comes close to using a public house as a mimetic space for

one of her plays on one occasion only: in *The White Cockade*, a historical tragicomedy based on events of the Battle of the Boyne (1690), set in the mimetic space of an inn kitchen in Duncannon (Gregory, 1970b: 219). *The White Cockade* is one of her historical plays, a story of the mixed loyalties of the Kelleher family at the time when Patrick Sarsfield and King James were fighting the forces of King William of Orange. Other than this one instance, the pub, as a place where locals gather to gossip, is missing from Gregory's plays. This absence stands in notable contrast to the pub scenes in Synge and O'Casey's famous plays that caused so much uproar when they were first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1907 and 1926.

Characteristically, Cloon townsfolk seem to be place-bound, feeling no urge to leave the dramatic space assigned to them. Therefore, in order to create a plotline, Gregory adopted the habit of involving a stranger who arrives from out of town to disturb the stillness of small-town life. Nicholas Grene traces this dramatic device to Henrik Ibsen's work, greeted at first with denunciation and dismissal in London during the 1880s and 1890s before grudging acceptance (Grene, 2003: 51–52). Ibsen's influence was certainly noticeable in some of the early plays of the Irish Revival but the influence of European drama on Gregory's work ran deeper than Ibsen's Scandinavian naturalism. In the autumn of 1908, some months after the first performance of *The Workhouse Ward*, Gregory delivered a lecture at an event organized by the Irish-language revival organisation, Gaelic League. This lecture offers a good illustration of Gregory's easy familiarity with the history of European drama. She discussed the history of setting, characterisation, and dramatic construction employed by a wide variety of European playwrights from the Greeks, Shakespeare, and Molière to Racine, Goethe, Schiller, and her own contemporaries (Firín, 'Lady Gregory on Drama', 1908: MS 1731; 'Drama', 1908).¹ A piece in the local newspaper commented that Gregory's was a 'thought-provoking' lecture, concluding that it 'gave us a sense of world-culture which some of us seem to lack just now' (Firín, 'Lady Gregory on Drama', 1908: MS 1731). What the reporter found most impressive was the skill with which Gregory discussed the evolution of the dramatic form from ancient times to the late-nineteenth century (Firín, 'Lady Gregory on Drama', 1908: MS 1731). James Little discusses in detail the debate between Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League, and Lady Gregory over *The Poorhouse* (1903), an earlier version of *The Workhouse Ward* (1908), for which Gregory provided the scenario and Hyde the dialogue (Little, 2023). In light of this debate, it is significant that she presented herself at a Gaelic League event as someone who was

¹ The official journal of the Gaelic League, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, also published a report on Lady Gregory's lecture given at the Headquarters (Ard Chraobh) of the Gaelic League in Dublin on Monday 16 November 1908 ('Drama', 1908).

familiar with the European dramatic tradition stretching back to the antiquity, putting her own knowledge of drama *en par* with, if not actually above, that of Douglas Hyde.

Gregory's knowledge of European drama derived from the many theatre performances that she had attended throughout the continent, from Paris to Venice. When it came to writing her own trademark one-act plays, however, she relied on what she knew best, drawing inspiration from her locality around Coole Park near the village of Gort in South County Galway. On occasion, she broadened the diegetic dramatic space of her plays to the greater Galway area and further to the province of Connacht and west-Munster (with references to Limerick and Cork). *Twenty-Five* (1903) makes reference to Kilbecanty and Kilcogan; *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906) to Esker and the Kiltartan Cross; *The Rising of the Moon* (1907) to Ennis; *Damer's Gold* (1912) to Knockbarron and Lough Cutra; *On the Racecourse* (published in 1926) to Barna, Ballinderreen and Kilcolgan; *McDonough's Wife* (1912) to Galway, Connemara and the river Corrib; and *The Image* (1909) to Galway, Ennis, Oranmore, Duras and Ballinderreen.² As mentioned, several of her early comedies were set in the diegetic space of Cloon (Cloonmara), the fictional east-Galway town land that she modelled on Gort: *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906), *The Jackdaw* (1907), *The Workhouse Ward* (1908), *The Full Moon* (1910), and *Coats* (1910). Gregory's most popular play, *Spreading the News* (1904) lacks any reference to a specific Irish locality. However, Brenna Katz Clarke observes that, when it was performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the stage was richly decorated with market bills from around Gort, lending a very specific local colouring to the rural Irish market scene in which the story unfolds (1982: 58).

Adding a further splash of local colour to her genre pictures of Cloon, Gregory had her characters talk in a stage version of an east-Galway dialect, which she named after the parish of Kiltartan. Gregory created a dialect for the specific purpose of writing plays and for writing up the folklore material collected in the local district. Mary Lou Kohfeldt explains that, while gathering folklore, Gregory would take note of phrases and grammar formulae that local inhabitants would use when speaking in the Irish language. She then translated these phrases and grammatical structures into English, thereby creating her own version of east-Galway Hiberno-English (Kohfeldt 1985: 131, 139). Christopher Murray argues that, for this reason, Gregory's English dialogues abound in linguistic structures that were unique to the Irish language, such as circumlocution, emphatic word preference, and the use of the Kiltartan infinitive (1997: 45–46). Ann Saddlemeier saw the frequent employment of these structures create a certain semantic 'neatness' in Gregory's writing, allowing her to control the

² Throughout the article, in the case of plays, dates refer to year of first performance, unless indicated otherwise.

dialogues with almost ‘classical precision’ (1966: 19). She would use these linguistic structures also in her collections of Celtic legends, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902), and *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904), as well as in her two collections of Galway folklore, *The Kiltartan History Book* (1909) and *The Kiltartan Wonder Book* (1910).

Gregory’s effortless control of dialogue is evident in *The Workhouse Ward*, a re-writing of her (semi-)collaboration with Douglas Hyde, *The Poorhouse* (1903). The setting, or mimetic space, of the play is the ward of the workhouse in Cloon, long-term home of protagonists Mike McInerney and Michael Miskell. The story takes place on the feast day of a local saint, Saint Colman, born in the sixth century to Kiltartan chieftain Duac and Queen Rhinagh (*Riognach*) (‘Kilmacduagh’, n.d.). Although the two bed-ridden paupers were reared in Skehanagh (*An Sceachánach*) in County Offaly, they have picked up the local south-east-Galway dialect of Kiltartan. Mike and Michael’s banter drives the story forward until the catharsis of the play: the arrival of Mike McInerney’s sister, Mrs Donohue, in what Nicholas Grene would call an ‘Ibsenite manner’. She invites her brother to come and live with her in Curranroe, in the Burren, County Clare, following the death of her husband, John Donohue. Mike was willing to leave the ward, on one condition: he would depart with his workhouse mate, Michael. Remembering their childhood shenanigans, his sister refuses to welcome Michael Miskell to her home, eventually leaving the two paupers in Cloon. They do not seem to mind the outcome and resume their bickering with one another. Éadaoin Ní Mhuirheartaigh (2016: 39) and James Little (2023: 1028) note that this behaviour is reminiscent of the comical tradition of a twosome dialogue: *agallamh beirte*. Gregory herself was familiar with this poetic tradition of ‘performance dialogues requiring intricate and witty repartee’ (Blake, 1999: 147). Ní Mhuirheartaigh notes how Lady Gregory worked with Douglas Hyde in the composition of plays in both English and Irish during the early 1900s, when Hyde was President of the Irish-language revival organization, the Gaelic League and highlights the interest of both Gregory and Hyde in the *agallamh* style of Irish dramatic dialogue (Ní Mhuirheartaigh, 2016: 38–40).³ Minimising the plot of *The Poorhouse*, Gregory manages to bring the new, re-written version of the play closer to a native Irish poetic tradition, rooting it firmly in the locale of east-Galway. As for the expanded diegetic space of the play, when Mike and Michael resume their arguing, they mention several place names where they had dwelled before: their *lieux des mémoires* are Ardrahan, Turlough, Duras, Newtown Lynch and Lisheen Cranagh. James Little (2023: 1027) notes that Gregory was careful in choosing these place names, suggesting

³ I thank Dr Éadaoin Ní Mhuirheartaigh for kindly making her article available, titled ‘Drámaíocht Dhúchasach? An tAgallamh Fileata ar Ardán na hAthbheochana’.

that her intention was not only to add further splash of local colour to *The Workhouse Ward*, but also to re-claim the original scenario from Douglas Hyde, a year after it was produced in English at the Abbey Theatre in April 1907.

Gregory had chosen what H el ene Lalibert e calls ‘*l’espace physique*’ of her plays to be specific to the Irish Midlands and East Galway, rooting her plays clearly in rural Ireland. Simultaneously, she also sought universal appeal. She elaborated on this issue in the notes to her 1914 political comedy, *The Wrens*:

Sometimes in making a plan for a play I set the scene in another country that I may be sure the emotion displayed is not bounded by any neighbourhood but is a *universal* one. (Gregory, 1970a: 266; emphasis added)

Saddlemyer (1966: 33) calls this method a ‘process of deliberate “endistancement”’, a type of *geographical distancing* being an integral part of Gregory’s playwriting method. This method of ‘endistancing’ the subject material from the *espace physique* allowed the dramatist to achieve a more thorough engagement with what Brooks and Warren (1958: xl) describe as ‘universal habits of human thinking and feeling’. Several of her plays of rural Ireland dealt with universal themes, such as the loss of a loved one (*Donough’s Wife*, 1912; *The Gaol Gate*, 1906), anxieties over finances and debt (*Twenty-Five*, 1903; *The Jackdaw*, 1907; *Coats*, 1910), anxieties over false pretences (*Hyacinth Halvey*, 1906), fear of leaving home (*Twenty-Five*, 1903), gossip (*Spreading the News*, 1904), and the belief in the magic of nature (*The Full Moon*, 1910). Gregory reiterates her habit of ‘endistancing’ in another lecture from the 1910s, ‘Making a Play’, claiming to have used it so that she was sure that her characters’ emotions were universally relevant (Gregory, n.d.).

In ‘Making a Play’, Gregory remarked that when writing a scenario for a play, she would ask the following questions regarding location and historical period:

If all this happened in Kamschatka [sic] would it be interesting?

Would it interest in other periods of time? (Gregory, n.d.)

This allusion to Kamchatka is intriguing as the location carried literary, historical and political associations during the first few decades of the twentieth century when Gregory began her career as dramatist and theatre director at the Abbey. Since the publication of Sydney Owenson’s classic *The Wild Irish Girl* in 1806, the adjective ‘Kamchatkan’ became a synonym in Ireland and Britain through the nineteenth century

for ‘remote’ or ‘located in the middle of nowhere’.⁴ Gregory wanted to make sure that her characters’ conversations, ‘minutely articulated’, as she put it in her lecture, would be meaningful in places/countries far removed from Ireland (Gregory, n.d.). She herself had travelled far and wide, from Ceylon and India to the Ottoman Empire, from Egypt and Sudan to Spain and Portugal, from France and Italy to Britain and the United States. Wherever she travelled, she always took note of local ways of life, and the efforts made to alleviate the poverty of those living off the land (Rempfort, 2018: 97). The mimetic dramatic space of *The Workhouse Ward* obviously referred to Irish poverty and to the devastation of the Great Famine of the 1840s, but the theme of loyalty and betrayal within a family was long-enduring, carrying universal relevance. It had appeared as a prominent thematic thread in European drama from the ancient Greeks to the works of Ibsen. In ‘Making a Play’, she addresses all the main aspects of playwriting: ‘us[ing] every situation to the full’, ‘let[ing] every conversation climax’ and ‘every event grow out of character’, ‘giv[ing] twists’ and providing ‘changes of moods’ filled with ‘passion’ (Gregory, n.d.). She was adamant that ‘without a strong, rich emotion’ a play would feel ‘cold’ (Gregory, n.d.). The play needed to articulate the feelings of characters within it convincingly, regardless of whether the *espace physique* was the far away land of Kamchatka or Gregory’s local parish of Kiltartan.

Samuel Beckett and his Resistance Connacht

Critics have enumerated the various ways in which Beckett’s theatre related to the literature of the Irish Revival (Harrington, 1991; Bair, 1993; Knowlson, 1997; Morin, 2009; McAteer, 2010a). Katherine Worth (1978), Gregory Dobbins (2009) and Ronald McDonald (2002) have traced a strong line of influence from the works of Revival writers, such as John Millington Synge, William Butler Yeats and Sean O’Casey. Emilie Morin (2009), Michael McAteer (2010a), and Morash and Richards (2013) have investigated the resemblance between Yeats’s and Beckett’s drama, especially that between *Waiting for Godot* and Yeats’s *Purgatory* (1939). Further observations have been made of the parallels between Beckett’s absurdist tragicomedies and Gregory’s short one-act comedies of Cloon, amongst them *The Workhouse Ward* and *Coats* (1910) (Morin, 2009; Rempfort, 2004; Roche, 2004). Beckett himself may have ignored Gregory in his writings on Ireland, but he mentioned *The Workhouse Ward* as a play of interest for him, in a letter dated 25 January 1931 (Morin, 2009: 104). Morin asserts that Beckett had always shown an interest in the theatre scene in Dublin, despite his several and extended

⁴ My thanks to Professor Claire Connolly for drawing my attention to the reference to Kamchatka in Sydney Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806).

absences from Ireland (Morin, 2017: 21–24). One particularly active period of Beckett as a theatre-goer was the 1930s, when he frequented the Gate, the Queen’s, the Gaiety, and the Royal in Dublin, as well as the plays of Dublin Drama League at the Peacock (Morin, 2017: 21–22). Morin notes that Beckett was particularly keen to see Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* at the Gate and *The Wild Duck* at the Abbey Theatre (Morin, 2009: 22, 24). Back in Paris, he was a member of the ‘Irish’ circle of the École Normale Supérieure and Sylvia Beach’s bookshop, ‘Shakespeare & Company’, as his contemporary Samuel Putnam has noted (1947: 96–97). James Joyce, Thomas MacGreevy, George Reavey and Beckett moved among intellectuals of Paris’s Latin Quarter, interested in literary developments in Ireland, England and continental Europe (Putnam, 1947: 96–97).

MacGreevy and Jack B. Yeats, whom Beckett had befriended, knew Gregory well, both as a dramatist and as the aunt of art collector Sir Hugh Lane. Gregory’s death in May 1932 did not go unnoticed in Beckett’s literary circles. Travelling the part of Ireland that she knew so well, Beckett and his brother, Frank, set out on a three-week walking tour of Connemara, Co. Galway, in August 1931 (Bair, 1993: 131), the same year in which he was to see Gregory’s *The Workhouse Ward* at the Abbey (Morin, 2009: 104). Mary Junker suggests that some of the diegetic space of *Waiting for Godot*, ‘mediated through the discourse of the characters’, could be linked to specific geographical locations in Connemara: its capital, Clifden (*An Clochán*); the mountain range of the Twelve Bens (*Beanna Beola*); the stony surroundings of Recess (*Sraith Saileach*), and the Glen Inagh (*Gleann Eidhneach*) (Junker, 1995: 48–49; Issacharoff, 1981: 215).⁵ Junker considers the recurring references to stone, mountainy land, and the ‘skull in Connemara’ in Lucky’s lengthy soliloquy, as references to the ‘[g]ranite, a plutonic rock, [that] underlies the lowlands of the region’ and the ‘[q]artzite, a metamorphic rock, form the conical peaks of the Twelve Bens’ (Junker, 1995: 48). In these instances, Connemara becomes for Lucky’s character a *lieu des mémoires*, a ‘place of memories’. Connemara was also a personal *lieu des mémoires* for Beckett himself, not only for his tour of the west of Ireland. Vladimir and Estragon’s references to boots and sore feet in *Waiting for Godot* recall the walking tour of the Beckett brothers, as Mary Junker observes, strengthening the case for the *espace physique* of *Waiting for Godot* as a remote part of Ireland (Junker, 1995: 51).

Beckett’s manuscript versions of *Waiting for Godot* disclose a distinct Hibernicising tendency in his first translation(s) of *En attendant Godot* (published in 1952) (van Hulle and Verhulst, 2017: 302–308). The Hibernicising tendency is apparent, despite Beckett’s

⁵ Thereafter, in order to simplify matters, the French-language title of the play, *En attendant Godot*, will be used to refer to the French version of the play, first performed in Paris in 1953, and the English-language title, *Waiting for Godot*, will be used to refer to the English-language version of the play, first performed in London in 1955.

claims to the contrary (van Hulle and Verhulst, 2017: 303). When it comes to locations, ‘Connemara’ replaces ‘Normandy’ in Lucky’s soliloquy; France’s La Planche region is referred to as the ‘bog’ in the English translation; and instead of the reference to French writer and philosopher, Voltaire, there is now a reference to Ireland’s Bishop Berkeley (Beckett, 1952: 122 and 61). Beckett alters the diegetic dramatic space of the play’s original *espace physique* in the English version in multiple ways: first, the references to Paris (the Eiffel Tower) are omitted, as are references to the Île-de-France (Seine-et-Marne), the Loire region (La Planche) and the Pyrenees (L’Ariège), the small town of Roussillon and the farm of the Bonnelys. Second, Beckett substitutes the Vaucluse region in southern France with the ‘Macon country’, which Estragon satirically calls ‘Cackon country’ (Beckett, 1965: 62). Geographically, Mâcon and Saône-et-Loire are located in Burgundy, a famous vine region in eastern France. Beckett’s choice of region in the English version is noteworthy in sustaining the connection to the famous wine-growing tradition of Vaucluse. Furthermore, he retains the ingenious Vaucluse-Merdecluse *jeu de mots* in the Macon-Cackon word play, ‘Merdre!’ being a syntactic equivalent of the four-letter swear word in English.

Emilie Morin asserts that the English versions of Beckett’s work should really be considered as ‘textual reworkings’, rather than literal translations, due to the amount of changes the playwright had administered during the ‘translation process’ (Morin, 2009: 79). She further claims that Beckett’s practice may be likened to Gregory’s own translations/adaptations of French dramatist Molière’s seventeenth-century comedies to her local Kiltartanese dialect (Morin, 2009: 79–80). Gregory’s translations were published in *The Kiltartan Molière* in 1911, joining her two previous collections, *The Kiltartan History Book* (1909) and *The Kiltartan Wonder Book* (1910). Beckett habitually revised *Waiting for Godot*, adding and deleting details, which resulted in various typescripts and manuscripts (see the Genetic Map in van Hulle and Verhulst, 2017: 166). One of the ‘Irishisms’ added in the English version was the word ‘blathering’ used in Vladimir and Estragon’s dialogue, a term that van Hulle and Verhulst (2017: 306) describe as ‘fitting the play’s general atmosphere of negativity and purposelessness’. Yet ‘blathering’ also recalls Gregory’s paupers at the workhouse ward who pass their time in idle chat. Gregory herself wrote that, no matter where her two Michaels may be, it was still ‘better [for them] to be quarrelling than to be lonesome’ (Gregory, 1970a: 260). Further exploring the characters’ ‘interconnectedness’, Anthony Roche (2004: 181) points out that the protagonists of Gregory and Beckett’s respective plays seem to be ‘one composite personality’, as if two sides of the same coin. Beckett’s lectures at Trinity College Dublin from the early 1930s reveal the influence of Racine’s drama: Racine was known for attaching ‘confidants’ to his main characters, ‘serving as

sounding boards to reveal the protagonists' divided consciousness', turning dialogues practically into monologues (van Hulle and Verhulst, 2017: 171). It is certainly possible to find a common ground between Gregory and Beckett's theatre through their shared interest in the drama of the Grand Siècle and through Racine's use of the character of the 'confidant', whose main dramatic purpose is to reveal the protagonist's 'divided consciousness'. However, *The Workhouse Ward* may have been a direct influence in itself on *En attendant Godot /Waiting for Godot*, given the prominent standing of Gregory's play during the early decades of the Abbey Theatre. Further similarities between the two plays are the plotline and circular dramatic structure, and the preference for minimisation in characterisation (Remport, 2004: 69–73). Developing the plotline of a play to the climax with as few characters as possible was one of Gregory's playwriting maxims, mentioned in her lecture, 'Making a Play' (Gregory, n.d.). Beckett was undoubtedly averse to the nationalist, patriarchal and parochial character of Irish drama of the early-twentieth century, but he still aligned his work to a certain kind of minimalist drama of the Revival, such as we encounter it in plays by Synge, Yeats, and Gregory.

Issacharoff (1981: 215) claims that dramatic tension in a play 'can often arise from the interplay between the mimetic and diegetic space' and that this tension 'is often contingent on the antimony between visible space represented and invisible space described (Issacharoff, 1981: 211). *Waiting for Godot* seems to be the case in point: the mimetic dramatic space is that of the road, the tree and the mound, first seen when the curtain rises on the opening Act; the diegetic dramatic space is that of Ireland (in the English version) and France (in the original, French version). In the first instance, the diegetic space is construed through references to various locations in France, as detailed above, seemingly the characters' *lieux des mémoires* (Rousillon and Vaucluse). In the second instance, the diegetic space also contains a location that can be termed as a '*lieu de non-mémoire*': the location of Godot's dwelling place. Vladimir and Estragon do not know the whereabouts of this place, nor the way to find it; all they know is that a messenger from Godot comes from time to time to remind them to wait. In the play, the dramatic tension lies in the denial of any meaningful connection between the mimetic place, where Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot's arrival, and the *espace off*, the space off stage, where Godot seems to dwell. Like *The Workhouse Ward*, in *Godot* the protagonists do not establish a physical connection with Godot's space off stage, thereby emphasising the meaninglessness of their situation. What Issacharoff (1981: 216) calls the 'non-visible diegetic space', the *espace off*, remains invisible throughout Beckett's play. Issacharoff (1981: 215) remarks that 'emphasis on diegesis', on the non-visible, was a characteristic of the drama of Racine and Corneille, two of the greats of the Grand Siècle who Gregory and Beckett read.

Further to Beckett's experience of French history and culture as they relate to the mimetic and diegetic dramatic space in *Waiting for Godot*: in *Negative Dialectics* (1973: 380), Adorno stipulated that Beckett 'has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps' and the devastating consequences of the Second World War. Adorno was aware of the extent to which elements of *En attendant Godot* related directly to the ordeals of Beckett and his partner, Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, during the German occupation of France between 1941 and 1945 (Knowlson, 1997: 303). While in Paris, Beckett worked for the Resistance cell 'Gloria SMH', which he left for the small town of Roussillon, his and Suzanne's place of refuge from the Gestapo. Roussillon receives the most prominent treatment in *En attendant Godot*, its red sand and rocks referenced as *espace physique* and *lieu de memoire*, in addition to the harvest Beckett had attended in a small town nearby (Beckett, 1952: 86). Beckett worked at the Bonnellys vineyard in return for grain, potatoes and wine for himself and Suzanne, at a time when food was scarce in the south of France (Knowlson, 1997: 323–324). Knowlson argues that Beckett's regular visits to the Bonnellys, and to Aude's farm in Clavaillan, also offered Beckett relief from the claustrophobia of village life (Knowlson, 1997: 331). Oliver Hirsh has recently reiterated a reading of Beckett's play that relates to the playwright's wartime experiences: according to Hirsch, the protagonists of *En attendant Godot* were two Jewish men who, fleeing the Gestapo, were waiting for their contact person, a man called Godot, at France's border with Switzerland (Hirsh, 2020: 181). In this context, *En attendant Godot* is a work filled with biographical references to the war: while he was in Paris, Beckett's Jewish friends were being arrested and transported to concentration camps in Germany, or were trying to flee the Gestapo (Knowlson, 1997: 314–315). Some critical readings of *Godot* from the post-war period—that of Theodore Adorno, for instance—stemmed from these 'inescapable' textual allusions to the Second World War (Knowlson, 1997: 380).

Widening the scope of interpretation, S. E. Gontarski considered the nature of *universal* human suffering and the *futility of human existence* as two key concepts in Beckett's play (Gontarski, 1983: 9, see also Hirsch, 2020: 178). According to such an interpretation, *Godot* takes place in a '*non lieu*', a non-place, one that is simultaneously *nowhere* and *everywhere*; where two characters are waiting endlessly, for someone that they do not know, at a time that is never identified. Saddlemyer's reading of Gregory's Cloon comedies ring true for Beckett's *Godot*: the setting is 'nowhere, Ireland and everywhere' (1966: 31), with France added in the mix for *Godot*. Also relevant to *Godot* is Saddlemyer's characterisation of location in Gregory's plays as a 'boundless country' of tragedy (Saddlemyer, 1966: 31). Such a location serves the expression of Brooks and Warren's 'universal habits of human thinking and feeling' (1958: xl). In *The Theatre of*

the Absurd (1961), Martin Esslin linked the ‘sense of metaphysical anguish’ looming over the playwright’s early work, including *Godot*, to the ‘absurdity of the human condition’ (Esslin, 1961: xix), at a time when the general feeling was that of ‘despair at being unable to find a meaning in existence’ (12). Further to this, the *espace physique* of the ‘desolate landscapes’ and ‘depleted universe’ of *Godot* should be understood, argues Morin (2009: 96), as ‘existentialist documents of the human condition’. Beckett himself had looked for confirmation of these feelings and thoughts in the works of his French contemporaries: Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (*L’Être et le néant*) and Albert Camus’s *The Outsider* (*L’Étranger*) influenced his contemplation of the value and meaning of human existence (Rabaté, 2016: 43). The playwright’s personal experiences obviously impacted upon the composition of *Godot*, including: his walks in the Mâcon country (Saône-et-Loire) and in Connacht (Connemara) in the summer of 1931; his bickering with his brother Frank over family and Ireland during that time; his interest in the works of Jack B. Yeats (especially *Two Travellers*, 1942) and Caspar David Friedrich (especially *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, 1925–30); and Beckett and his friends’ struggle for survival during the Second World War. Yet during the long re-writing and translating process that van Hulle and Verhulst (2017) detail in their manuscript analysis, Beckett also succeeded in creating a dramatic piece which ‘enddistanced’ the playwright’s own personal experiences of hardship of the 1930s and early-1940s, masterfully addressing *universal* human suffering, and the seemingly futile nature of human existence.

Frank McGuinness and his Strasbourg Boa Island

Frank McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) contains several mimetic dramatic spaces, from army barracks and various sites in Ulster to the battle field of the Somme in Northern France during the First World War. The play is testament to the evolution of Irish drama during the twentieth century and is more complex in its texture and more overtly political in its message than *The Workhouse Ward* or *Waiting for Godot*. The nature of McGuinness’s play points to a connection between Issacharoff’s theory of dramatic space, as discussed previously, and Ruth Ronen’s theory of fictional narrative space. Issacharoff differentiates between mimesis and diegesis, understood in spatial terms with regard to visibility or non-visibility on the theatre stage. Ronen (1986: 423) classifies Issacharoff’s dramatic spaces as *scenic space* and *extrascenic space*, the latter corresponding in some degree to Hélène Laliberté’s notion of *l’espace off*. Ronen’s theory of frames provides a useful alternative to traditional notions of dramatic space, permitting more spatial transgression. According to Ronen, the story-space can change as the plotline itself

changes; mimetic spaces can become diegetic in a short timespan (Ronen, 1986: 431, 426–427). For this reason, Ronen suggests the use of ‘frames’, their classification determined by their spatial immediacy to the plotline (Ronen, 1986: 425–428). As for the plotline of McGuinness’s *Sons of Ulster*: it has many spatial and temporal changes and it resembles plots in narrative fiction, amenable to Ronen’s narrative spatial theory. Ronen’s theory is also illuminating when considering the association between the local and the universal in *Sons of Ulster*.

McGuinness’s play commemorates the young men of the 36th ‘Ulster’ Division, who had fought in the Battle of the Somme in northern France in what was the longest and bloodiest battle of the First World War, lasting from July until November 1916. Nuala C. Johnson observes that ‘during the first two days of the offensive the Ulster Division lost 5,500 (killed, missing or wounded) from the total of 15,000 soldiers’, although numbers are difficult to estimate due to missing service personnel (Johnson, 2007: 71). Declan Kiberd contends that the loss was even greater within local communities of Ulster as ‘entire streets of Belfast, and small communities of Antrim were left without young men because the authorities had made a point of bonding new recruits with neighbours from their own communities’ (Kiberd, 2005: 279). *Sons of Ulster* remembers these young men who enlisted in the British army under Edward Carson’s guardianship, giving centre stage to eight fictional soldiers: Kenneth Pyper, Craig David, George Anderson, Nat McIlwaine, Christopher Roulston, Martin Crawford, William Moore and John Millen. In their mapping of Irish dramatic spaces, Morash and Richards (2013: 91) remark that these eight young men, and, more broadly, Ulster loyalists, treat the ‘army camps and battlefields’ of the Somme as *lieux de mémoires* following the battle that started on 1 July 1916.

Sons of Ulster is a memory play in which Older Kenneth Pyper remembers the horrors of the war and the futility of the blood sacrifice that the British Government and the leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party asked Ulster’s Protestant young men to make. In addressing themes related to the universality of human suffering, McGuinness’s play recalls Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. *Sons of Ulster* contains a number of significant mimetic spaces, ranging from the battle fields of the Somme to various locations in Northern Ireland. Depending on the scene in question, these locations also serve as each other’s diegetic counterpart, or even *espaces off* (i.e. spaces located off stage). The closing scene is that of the trenches, what Ronen would call a ‘first frame’ as the most ‘immediately relevant frame’ to the ‘story-space’ (Ronen, 1986: 425 and 424). ‘Secondary frame’ in the last scene is the battlefield of the Somme, in which the trench is located, separated from the ‘first frame’ only ‘by a perspective’ (Ronen, 1986: 426). It can be ‘partially penetrated and become a continuation of the setting’ (Ronen, 1986:

426) when the young men leave their trenches. In this spatial setup of the scene, Ronen's 'inaccessible frame' is that of Ulster, as all actions of the young men are governed by their loyalty to this location, the name of which Younger and Older Pyper call out multiple times as Younger Pyper awaits the beginning of Battle of the Somme. The plot generates a 'spatio-temporally distant frame' (Ronen, 1986: 427) when it returns to Older Pyper's framework of memories. On the one hand, the 'story-space' of the memory is the primary frame of the play, as all other actions take place within it. Nonetheless, the frame of Older Pyper's memories does not fulfil the requirement of 'remaining the topological (spatial) focus of the narrative', a strict requirement for 'first frames' identified by Ronen (1986: 427).

'Part 3: Pairing' in *Sons of Ulster* is another instance of how McGuinness's play bears out Ronen's theory of narrative frames. After five months of service and amid war preparations, the eight young Ulstermen are sent back home for a short period of rehabilitation. The plot of Part 3 takes place in at least four mimetic spaces, or 'first frames', as the eight men are divided into four pairs, each spending their last peaceful moments in a different part of Northern Ireland (Ronen, 1986: 38). One pair, Craig and (Younger) Pyper, appear on Boa Island, near Enniskillen in County Fermanagh, washing the blood of the war off their feet and discussing their chances of survival. Boa Island (*Inis Badhbha*), in Co. Fermanagh, is a fitting location for such a conversation, as the location bears the name of an Irish war goddess. In her Kiltartan collection of Irish legends, *Gods and Fighting Men*, Gregory wrote that Badb was a 'battle goddess' of the Tuatha Dé Danaan, who used magical enchantments against the native inhabitants of Ireland, the Firbolgs, residing at that mythical time in *Teamhair* (Tara) (Gregory, 1970c: 27, 29). Pyper admires some ancient stone sculptures that date back to the megalithic period of Irish history, long before the spread of Christianity in Ireland and the denominational division between Catholics and Protestants that had emerged in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation in England. A sculptor himself, Pyper admires the beauty of the ancient statues which, in their artistic significance, resemble the Turoe Stone in Connemara that Mary Junker identifies as an art object in Lucky's speech in *Waiting for Godot* (Junker, 1995: 49).

Emilie Pine (2010: 61) and Hiroko Mikami (2002: 25) mention the Boa statues in their critical readings of McGuinness's play but do not remark on the fact that they are located in a graveyard. It is significant that the 'first frame' of the 'pairing' scene is that of Caldragh Cemetery; and Boa Island, the location of this place of the dead, is 'only' the 'secondary frame'. Janus-faced as they are, the sculptures located in this mimetic space are reminders of Craig and Pyper's emotional state: one face of the statue looks eastward, the other west. Within the actual extra-theatrical location of

the Boa statues in County Fermanagh, these alternative directions reflect the opposite directions in which the people of Northern Ireland look: one group towards Belfast and Protestant Britain, the other towards Donegal and Catholic Ireland. There is a further symbolic level governing this double vision: those who look west from Ulster towards the battlefields of continental Europe, and those Ulstermen in the trenches who look back to their homeland in the ancient province.

Ronen does not specifically identify a 'tertiary frame'. If there was such a category, McGuinness's Ulster would belong to it, as it is physically related to the 'first' and 'secondary frames' but is not visualised on stage. The characters' birthplaces also mark the place of Ulster: Belfast, Derry, Coleraine, Enniskillen, and Sion Mills (Mikami, 2002: 25). Ulster in this sense is not an 'inaccessible frame' because the characters come from the province. Ronen's spatial theory, however, allows for changes and transitions between the frames (Ronen, 1986: 431, 426–27), movements that Issacharoff's notions of mimetic and diegetic theatrical spaces do not accommodate so flexibly. Ronen calls one of the frames a 'spatio-temporally distant frame', which is 'constructed by the text beyond the spatial or temporal boundaries of the story-space or the story-time' (1986: 427). In 'Part 3: Pairing', the location of the Somme functions as 'spatio-temporally distant frame'. It is "'physically" restrained from becoming immediate surroundings' of the story-space, 'belonging to another spatial continuum', that of northern France (Ronen, 1986: 427).

Besides Boa Island, there are three other 'first frames', or mimetic spaces, in the 'Pairing' section: Roulston's parish church; a rope bridge (presumably, that in Carrick-a-Rede, in County Antrim); and the Field (Belfast's Finaghy Field, destination of the main Protestant Unionist march on the Twelfth of July) (Ronen, 1986: 38). Ronen would classify these frames as 'open' because the service men who appear in them can 'go beyond the borders of a frame', evidenced in the final sections of Part 3. Here, Older Pyper's memories dissolve the previously well-established boundaries of story-frames, as characters start to appear in frames other than their own. Conversations, too, become more fluid between the pairings, revealing the characters' thoughts on faith, Protestantism, marches, war and Ulster. *Sons of Ulster* undoubtedly illustrates a community's 'devotion to a place', as Lionel Pilkington notes, the narrative concerned with the Protestant loyalist community's devotion to Ulster (Pilkington, 2001: 222). McGuinness's play directly addresses issues around the religious and political divide in Northern Ireland, particularly during the period of the Troubles. The eight, predominantly Protestant, characters are likened to the Catholic young men of Easter 1916, who fought against British rule in Ireland just months before the Battle of the Somme. In an attempt to bridge the cross-community divide within Northern Ireland,

McGuinness gives his eight characters, particularly Pyper, lines that echo those of Patrick Pearse, leader of the rebellion in Dublin. In 'Part 1: Remembrance', Pyper notes how similar he and Pearse were in the fervour of their sentiments. This is so, despite the obvious difference in their political goals. Pearse and the revolutionary organisations mentioned in the Proclamation of the Irish Republic fought for Ireland's independence from the British Crown. Pyper and his fellow-Ulstermen, many from the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), fought to maintain Ireland's position as part of the United Kingdom.

As much as it is rooted in an Irish dramatic tradition that is informed by the plays of Gregory and Beckett, *Sons of Ulster* also transcends the boundaries of Ireland to draw attention to issues of universal human rights. Relating the play to Brooks and Warren's ideas on universality (1958: xl): it addresses some of the 'feelings and thinking' of the gay community north and south of the Irish border, as testified in two famous court cases before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) during the composition of the play.⁶ The discussion of these cases connects with McGuinness's allusion to what Ronen called 'generalised space', 'one that has no concrete location in the fictional space' (Ronen, 1986: 428). *Sons of Ulster* advocates the need for cross-community communication between Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants; it was written at the time of the New Ireland Forum and the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference that paved the way for the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.⁷ However, *Sons of Ulster* also engages with contemporary debates north and south of the border in the 1980s about the need to respect one's private and family life, as well as sexual orientation. The geographical horizon of debates widened when two court cases—*Dudgeon v. Northern Ireland* and *Norris v. Ireland*—were brought before the European Court of Human Rights.⁸ Amid what Brian Singleton described as 'the pandemic that was HIV'

⁶ David Cregan (2010) and Helen Heusner Lojek (2016) do not connect *Sons of Ulster* to these legal cases. Brian Singleton (2011) mentions the change in legislation regarding same-sex relationships in Ireland only in passing, with no reference to Jeffrey Dudgeon's or Senator David Norris's court cases at the ECHR in Strasbourg.

⁷ Lionel Pilkington writes that, 'in the wake of hostile unionist reaction to the New Ireland Forum' of the 1980s and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, the play was 'an attempt to engage positively with the loyalist ideology of Ulster Protestantism' (Pilkington, 2001: 221). Since the early-1980s, especially after the Hunger Strikes of Catholic internees in Belfast's Maze Prison in 1981, members of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, as well as Ulster's Protestant and Catholic communities, had been involved in negotiating the terms of a possible resolution to the political situation in Northern Ireland.

⁸ On 22 May 1976, Jeffrey Dudgeon of Belfast lodged an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights to rule against the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern under Article 25 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (*Dudgeon v. United Kingdom*, 1981). On 5 October 1983, human rights campaigner and sexual equality activist David Norris appealed to the ECHR to request the declaration that criminal prosecution of Irish citizens for homosexual acts were unlawful under the Constitution since 'sections 61 and 62 of the 1861 Act and section 11 of the 1885 Act were not continued in force since the enactment of the Constitution of Ireland' (*Norris v.*

in the 1980s and the ‘contingent scaremongering and homophobia prompted by AIDS’ (Singleton, 2011: 120), these court cases advanced the cause of sexual equality on the island of Ireland on an unprecedented level. The Court’s decisions in favour of Dudgeon and Norris derived from a legal formulation of universal human rights as regulated in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950). Given this background to the conception of the play, the ECHR in Strasbourg, near France’s border with Germany, becomes the play’s ‘generalised space’, a space that is evoked emotionally by the story of the play but has no concrete *physical* connection to the story-space (Ronen, 1986: 428). Strasbourg and the debate about universal human rights form the last and largest ‘frame’ of *Sons of Ulster*, built around all the other smaller frames (or, in Issacharoff’s terms, mimetic or diegetic dramatic spaces).

This large, ‘generalised frame’, as Ronen would call it, relates also to the memory-space of Older Kenneth Pyper, who is the most Pearse-like character among the eight young men of Ulster. McGuinness ingeniously places Pyper and Pearse at the centre of the collective memory of their respective communities, who seem to worship them in real-life regardless of their sexual orientation. Pearse and the rebels of Easter 1916 were commemorated on a Republican mural on West-Belfast’s Republican Falls Road, as was the sacrifice of the 36th ‘Ulster’ Division on murals of the Loyalist Donegal Pass in South-Belfast. On the one hand, the play engages with sentiments articulated during Jeffrey Dudgeon’s case against the United Kingdom in the late 1970s (specifically concerning the prohibition on homosexual relations in Northern Ireland) and Senator David Norris’s case against Ireland during the 1980s, on the same grounds. On the other hand, *Sons of Ulster* bravely confronts the anti-homosexual campaign ‘Save Ulster from Sodomy’ that the prominent Ulster politician and religious leader Reverend Ian Paisley ran at the time. As detailed in the *Dudgeon v. United Kingdom* reports (1981), the campaign contributed to a social climate in Ulster that resulted in the assault of men in same-sex relationships being harassed and assaulted within their own communities, across communities, and by the local security forces in Northern Ireland. In Strasbourg, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favour of Jeffrey Dudgeon (1981) and Senator David Norris (1988), following which a number of legal changes were introduced

Ireland, 1988). Both court cases went on for years, during which period the applicants’ claims of fear, threat, violence, abuse and harassment were investigated, whilst the Court heard the standpoint of the legal representatives of Ireland and the United Kingdom. At the end, the ECHR ruled in favour of the applicants and declared that Irish and Northern Irish law was in breach of Article 8 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (CPHRFF) (*Dudgeon v. United Kingdom*, 1981; *Norris v. Ireland*, 1988). Article 8 ruled that ‘everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence’ (ECHR, 1950: 11). As a result of the ruling, new laws were passed in Ireland and Northern Ireland, respecting the privacy of the individual in accordance with the CPHRFF).

south and north of the Irish border. The Homosexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order of 1982 (No. 1536; N.I. 19) finally decriminalized homosexual acts between consenting male adults; and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill of 1993 was passed in the Irish Parliament to the same effect, signed into law by President Mary Robinson on 30 June 1993 (*Seanad Éireann* debate, 1993). First and foremost, McGuinness's *Sons of Ulster* is a *pièce de mémoire*, a play about location and memory. However, as with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, it is also a *pièce de résistance* on both a local and a 'global' scale, deliberately and daringly confronting issues of human freedom and human suffering.

Conclusion

The three plays under consideration in this article were written and first produced in markedly different historical locations and contexts. Gregory wrote *The Workhouse Ward* for the new Irish National Theatre in Dublin at the start of the twentieth century. *Waiting for Godot* was composed and performed in Paris in the aftermath of the Second World War. McGuinness wrote *Observe the Sons of Ulster* during the 1980s, in response to the ongoing violence of the Troubles in Northern Ireland that broke out in the late 1960s. Beckett and McGuinness's plays connect through their engagement with the two World Wars of the twentieth century, and behind Gregory's comedy lies the tragedy of the Great Famine, arguably Ireland's worst historical calamity. The themes of suffering and the seeming futility of human life link the three plays. This is obviously the case for *Godot* and *Sons of Ulster*, but is also observable in that of the bed-ridden characters dwelling in Cloon's workhouse. Gregory's two Michaels are able to make light of their situation, and Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon play word games while they wait for the enigmatic Mr. Godot. Awaiting battle near the Somme, McGuinness's Ulstermen also bicker with one another and joke about. Pyper and his comrades act out a fictional Battle of Scarva, the mock-version of the Battle of the Boyne, to brighten their spirits. As Emily Pine (2010: 62–63) notes, however, this comic meta-theatrical moment foreshadows the young men's tragic fate.

My aim in this article has been to show the significant connections between what appear to be three very different, though seminal, plays by Irish-born dramatists of the twentieth century. Each playwright engages with the European theatre tradition in their own way, especially so in Gregory and Beckett's interest in Racine's work from the Grand Siècle. Both adapt Racine's characteristic dialogue between a character and its confidant masterfully in *The Workhouse Ward* and *En attendant Godot /Waiting for Godot*. Through these Irish antecedents, this dialogue form appears again in *Sons of Ulster*. The interconnected lives of the main characters and the extent of their co-dependency is a further measure of the common patterns that are woven into these three Irish plays.

McGuinness's drama undoubtedly owes much to the Irish and German expressionist drama as found in plays by Sean O'Casey, William Butler Yeats and Ernst Toller (McAteer, 2010). *Sons of Ulster* also shares a debt to the French tradition of theatre that interested both Augusta Gregory and Samuel Beckett.

Beyond these affinities, all three plays display a curious interaction between their respective dramatic spaces that allows the foregrounding of human stories carrying universal value. This shared approach becomes evident when considering the plays through Michael Issacharoff and Ruth Ronen's theories of dramatic and narrative spatial arrangements. The geographical localities mentioned in the plays, located in Ireland and further abroad in France and Russia, illustrate Issacharoff and Ronen's ideas on mimesis, diegesis and narrative frames. Anne Saddlemyer's notion of geographical (en)distancing (1966: 33), through which she perceives Gregory's dramatic technique, further amplifies the operation of mimesis, diegesis and narrative frames in the plays. Saddlemyer's notion entails a playwright's deliberate creation of distance between the *setting* of a play and the human feelings, values and experiences that it expresses. Whether written during the Irish Revival, after the Second World War in Europe, or during the Ulster Troubles, the three plays discussed share vital common denominators in their treatment of locality and universality.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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