<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Acting is believing: ritual, memory, and performance in the plays of Enda Walsh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Barre, Nelson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication Date</td>
<td>2016-10-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item record</td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/6069">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/6069</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acting Is Believing:
Ritual, Memory, and Performance in the Plays of Enda Walsh

Nelson Barre
Supervisor: Prof. Patrick Lonergan
Drama, Theatre, and Performance, National University of Ireland, Galway
4 October, 2016
**Table of Contents**

**Introduction**

**Chapter 1 – Memory**

*Disco Pigs*: Reconfigured Histories and Rejections of Past  
Re-membering through Storytelling and *bedbound*  
*How These Desperate Men Talk* and the Impossible Task of Remembering Correctly  
Sharing Fractured Memories in *The Small Things*

**Chapter 2 – Ritual**

*The New Electric Ballroom* as Secularised Ritual  
The Ritual of World-Making in *misterman*

**Chapter 3 – Performance**

‘What are we if not our stories?’: *The Walworth Farce* as Idealised Past  
*Penelope’s* Performance of Myths Both Ancient and Contemporary

**Chapter 4 – Production**

The Enda Walsh Project: Methodology and Preparation  
Proto-Performance, Performance, and Aftermath in *The Enda Walsh Project*  
Finding Memorial Rituals in Practice

**Conclusion**

*Ballyturk* and beyond

**Appendix**
Introduction

People rely on memorized rituals to construct versions of identity through performative embodiment of self. These performances require learned behavior that is repeated so often that the actions and words are enacted without even thinking. In theatre, some mainstream actors use rehearsal to find an idealized version of the character they will play onstage and refine this performance over time. Acting awards are given to people who fully commit to the reality that is created within the world of the play. But what happens when an actor must enact a memory from the character’s past that directly refutes what the character knows to be true? Or put another way, does the repeated performance of a false story lead to belief in a false reality? Does the layering complicate the identity of the character, the actor, or both? What happens when a character performs as a different version of self in a play-within-a-play? Can the performance of a re-membered ritual reshape a memory, or is history a static social structure?

To answer these questions, I consider theories of memory and forgetting from Paul Ricoeur, re-membered histories as posited by Suzan-Lori Parks, and Pierre Nora’s concept of lieux de mémoire, among others. Then I build on these concepts with examinations of secular and sacred rituals as constructions of cultural belief systems. I ground my discussion of repeated revisions of personal and communal history using Catherine Bell’s theory of ritual as an enactment of concerns from a particular era and Charles Taylor’s claims that global society is moving toward a secular age. These considerations of ritual and memory resonate with issues of performed truth. I use Richard Schechner’s broad conception that everything can be studied as performance alongside Judith Butler’s theories of performance of identity through repetition and Diana Taylor’s definition of the ‘archive’ and the ‘repertoire’ for how performance creates and revises history. I use these theoretical frameworks to discuss the
Introduction

ways in which particular examples within theatre and performance depict memorialized rituals of performed identity and world-making.

This dissertation argues that Enda Walsh’s plays use performance not only as a theatrical event but also as performative re-memberings that connect to rituals, memory, and performativity in everyday life. The characters he depicts re-enact personal and communal histories to revise narratives about the past. In short, Walsh’s works demonstrate theories of repeated action that connect to the theatrical process generally as well as the performance of identity in society at large. These issues of malleable identity represent themes at the core of Walsh’s plays, but the ideas resonate with the broader issue of performance as a memory-making ritual – a subject that has been the focus of intense and lengthy debate by theatre and performance scholars. The outward embodiment of self which appears in a production of a play requires a revisionist process of repeated acts to clarify and crystallize a character or narrative. However, as I will demonstrate, the creation of identity in general never stops and consistently refers back to what is being performed.

The themes of ritual, memory, and performance are pervasive not only in the works of Enda Walsh but also in theatre at large. Performances of ritualized memory appear across theatre, from ancient to contemporary, in Eastern and Western traditions, and in dramatic as well as postdramatic productions. While this dissertation will not attempt to cover the form of theatre as a whole, I will instead use Walsh’s plays as case studies to exemplify performativity, re-membering and repetitions of belief. In short, my research confronts broad questions about the ways in which identity is ritualistically, repetitively constructed as part of a cyclical process of daily performance. These aspects appear in every theatre production, from first reading through final performance and beyond. This study specifically examines the ways in which plays represent and highlight the identity-making process. I use Walsh’s works because they demonstrate particularly nuanced examples of characters enacting
repertoires of self within the dramatic (re)creation of identity. His characters actively assess and revise their notions of self and story in an attempt, much like a theatre production, to create an idealized version of ‘reality.’

Walsh is arguably one of the least critically-considered contemporary Irish playwrights. Lisa Fitzpatrick argues that “Walsh’s work has not been staged at the major Irish and London theatres because it does not easily fit within the contemporary Irish repertoire or the scholarly narratives of contemporary Irish theatre” (451). Instead, he has situated himself as an outsider, someone who has not only premiered work in non-English speaking countries but accepts the more experimental styles of theatre that take place in Germany, Italy and Portugal. Walsh’s stylistic rejection of traditional Irish forms, however, requires some qualification. His work often seems to portray a recognizable version of theatre to an Irish audience with plays such as The Walworth Farce (Irish immigrants’ story) or misterman (monologue play), but then dismantle these expectations by deviating from normal storytelling modes as well as the usual Irish rules of theatre.

As will be discussed below, many scholars have focused on issues of memory in recent Irish theatre. In Contemporary Irish Drama, Anthony Roche limits his discussion to only four representative playwrights from the 1990s and 2000s: Conor McPherson, Sebastian Barry, Martin McDonagh, and Marina Carr. He characterizes the playwrights’ works as those which “continue to raise troubling issues at a time when the culture would prefer amnesia in relation to its historical legacy of poverty and failure” (221). Roche goes on to note issues of memory that continually play a part in these works, saying that “[ghosts] are a dramatic means of dramatising the persistence of the past in the present, a particularly if not exclusively Irish obsession” (250). This claim that the Irish are obsessed with memorial revision (or at least re-membering) resonates strongly with Walsh’s works, though Roche never mentions him or his work. Plays such as bedbound, The Walworth Farce, The New
Electric Ballroom could easily be used to demonstrate these aspects of selective memory-making in Irish culture. Walsh’s omission here, whether intentional or not, reflects the issues Roche argues regarding cultural amnesia; in a sense, Walsh represents the history that people would prefer to forget.

Within the Irish tradition, Walsh’s work is situated within a few of his contemporaries. Often, Walsh is noted for creating work that uses monologue and storytelling like McPherson and Mark O’Rowe. Other times Walsh is connected to McDonagh for his inclusion of violence and dark humor in situations that push the boundaries of reality. As Patrick Lonergan notes in Theatre and Globalization, Walsh can be linked to McPherson and O’Rowe along with a host of other Irish predecessors who used monologues to create a sense of community (176-77). These playwrights create worlds that are necessarily subjective because of the unreliability of the narrator who performs onstage. This style creates the opportunity to metaphorically compress time and travel with descriptions of events rather than their portrayal onstage. But to reduce Walsh solely to the label of monologue playwright denies him the more expansive experimentation that Fitzpatrick describes above. As I will argue below, his work requires a physical embodiment that goes beyond the basic expectations of a monologue play. But because he does not fit neatly into a particular style, he is often associated with those who began writing when he did.

The associations to playwrights such as McDonagh, McPherson, O’Rowe and Carr are warranted. Arguably the most popular of his contemporaries, Martin McDonagh is sometimes described as “a typical postmodern writer, using a pastiche of styles to undermine the differences between high and low art” (Lonergan xiv). But commentary on his plays rejects this simplification of his work. As Patrick Lonergan puts it: “the meanings of McDonagh’s plays and films are only created when audiences engage imaginatively with what they see” (xvii). I would argue this connects McDonagh to Walsh because of the distinct
theatricality in which both engage. Reading the plays of either writer does not give the
experience meant for a viewing audience. Similarly, McPherson describes theatre-making,
which often relies on the strength of monologue storytelling, saying “the dynamic changes
every time you get a new group of people together to do it; even if it’s the same group of
people sometimes” (Keating). This statement shows a self-recognition of theatre as a process
in which people consistently re-create the same stories over and over. The quote is used to
explain his love for being in rehearsal, which is echoed by Walsh, but it speaks to theatre as a
revisionist process always searching for the right version of performance. McDonagh and
McPherson, like Walsh, know that theatre is meant to be performed and that even if the play
is told through exploding cats (as in Lieutenant of Inishmore) or monologues by
disenfranchised Dublin men (like Port Authority), there is a need to stage these events.

Marina Carr and Mark O’Rowe are distinctive in their own rights as playwrights, but
both connect to Walsh through content and style. All three playwrights use violent imagery
and epic storytelling to portray the stage worlds of their plays. Scholarship and reception of
Carr often focuses on her adaptations of Greek myths (By the Bog of Cats…, Ariel, Phaedra
Backwards) and the rejection of theatrical norms pushing toward examinations of
existentialism in theatre (Low in the Dark, Woman and Scarecrow). Walsh has experience in
adaptation, situating Penelope in an Irish context like Carr does with Medea, and his rejection
of traditional theatrical style has led to a rejection of Realism in favor of heightened versions
of reality that borders on Absurdism. O’Rowe, on the other hand, writes taboo-laden stories
of violence interlaced with language games (such as Crestfall, Terminus, Our Few and Evil
Days). While these examples are specific to O’Rowe, the monologue format he often follows
is seen in Walsh’s works (Disco Pigs, bedbound, misterman, for example). O’Rowe’s
preoccupation with violence relates to what Miriam Haughton calls “the performance of
power [that] is more complex than attempts to identify a single motive for the sheer quantity
of terror and trauma” (153). Violence also plays a part in Walsh’s plays, often in less overt ways, but these instances of trauma are used to define the parameters of performance. *bedbound*, for example, relies on the threat of violence that Dad embodies in his storytelling; or as Ondřej Pilný claims, *The Walworth Farce*, *The New Electric Ballroom*, and *Penelope* all depict grotesque events which constrain the characters as they cannot attain liberation (223). These examples of violence further connect Walsh’s work to McDonagh, the monologues to McPherson, and Absurdist experimentation with Carr.

Beyond thematic connections with his Irish contemporaries, many scholars have noted the connections with Walsh’s work and its apparent citation of other writers. Notably, Kay Martinovich’s examination of *bedbound* opens with a reference to the play *Bailegangaire* by Tom Murphy, showing the central character Mommo endlessly telling a story that she never finishes, which is quite like the characters in *bedbound* (65). Mary P. Caulfield references two Brian Friel plays in her analysis of *Once the Musical*, noting the use of words spoken in English that are understood to be a different language which was used in *Translations* (170) and the outbursts of cultural dancing undertaken by the Czech characters is reminiscent of *Dancing at Lughnasa* (171). Pilný’s article on the grotesque references the “dramatic antecedent” of to *The New Electric Ballroom* is also *Dancing at Lughnasa*, in its depiction of cloistered women in a small Irish town (220). Similarly, Ian Walsh’s article on *The Ginger Ale Boy* likens Bobby’s double act with Barney, his dummy, to Gar Public and Gar Private in *Philadelphia Here I Come!* by Brian Friel. In an interview with Sean O’Hagan ahead of the London premiere of *Misterman*, Cillian Murphy called *Krapp’s Last Tape* “definitely a distant cousin” (O’Hagan), and also referring to Samuel Beckett, Michelle C. Paull alludes to the similarities between the set sealed room of *Ballyturk* and *Endgame* (180) as well as the appearance of a marigold in their space and the growth of a leaf on the tree in *Waiting for Godot* (190). The thematic influences of the above named playwrights are
unmistakable in Walsh’s works. Mommo in *Bailegangaire* and the Carneys in *A Whistle in the Dark* connect to two specific Walsh plays (*bedbound* and *The Walworth Farce*, respectively), but Murphy’s contestations of identity in crisis also resonate with Walsh’s other plays. Beckettian repetition, Absurdist situations and the frequent use of recording devices show a clear connection between Walsh and Beckett. For Friel, the concerns with language and memory throughout the playwright’s works reflect an integral focus of Walsh’s dramaturgy whereby all of his plays consider re-membering and revision.

The larger context of Irish memory, ritual, and performance fits into Emilie Pine’s claim that “Irish remembrance culture is characterised by distinct patterns and strategies of representing and framing past traumas” (4). These ‘strategies’ include various modes of history-making through repeated storytelling and artifacts such as photographs and memorials that remember the past in a specific way. However, Richard Kearney suggests that “storytelling may be said to humanise time by transforming it from an impersonal passing of fragmented moments into a pattern, a plot, a mythos” (4). This argument relates back to the instability of memory and the process of re-membering that accompanies a memorialization of the past. The way people tell stories cannot be removed from their personal place in society. But what about the instances of overtly omitted histories and narratives? Oona Frawley confronts this problem in the Irish context; she argues that “there is a strong sense in which the Irish past has come to be perceived not as an etched-stone memorial without change, but as a shifting subject that depends on present positioning and, to a large degree, on the revelation of and subsequent lightening of trauma” (xv). Combining Frawley, Pine, and Kearney’s claims provide the basis for my examination of memory, ritual and performance. Remembrance requires representation through subjective embodied storytelling. The fact that certain narratives are privileged and others hidden is part of the process. By providing the
opportunity to share versions of history, those who enact memories can move beyond the grand narratives contained in normal modes of remembering.

With these kinds of contested histories at play in the ‘real’ world, why bother discussing plays? Nicholas Grene argues in *The Politics of Irish Drama* that “Ireland requires not only interpretation, but reinterpretation to escape from the misconceptions of the past and indeed the present” (48). This statement can be connected directly to Walsh’s theatre. The narratives performed by the characters in Walsh’s plays are re-membered ritualistically for a micro-community. The search for ‘truth’ is presented as an attempt to depict a version of the past that most closely resembles the characters’ memory of events. However, as noted above, there is no universal ‘truth.’ Instead, the individuals who have created the rules of their storytelling repeat and revise the same story they want to believe in hopes that one time the lie will become true. But this attempt at personal vindication relates back to Grene’s point: there is a need to ‘escape from misconceptions about the past’ in Irish theatre. Pine’s references to selectively forgotten histories make a clear case that Ireland needs to be reminded of the past, even if it is bleak. She writes: “the post-Ryan Report artistic and theatrical responses highlight the need for audiences in the present to pay full attention to, and also to respond to, the Report by not allowing the subject – and the implications for Irish society past and present – to be forgotten” (20). The Ryan Report, coupled with the history of Magdalene Laundries, present a history of abuse that had been ‘forgotten’ for decades. Since 2009’s release of the Ryan Report, there have been performances such as *Laundry* (2011), *No Escape* (2010) and *James X* (2010), which all confronted issues of abuse by the Catholic Church in Ireland.

These productions attempt to show the ways in which history has been written and can be revised through performed re-membering. Theatre uses structures of play reality where a world is constructed and the audience can view the illusion of reality onstage. But
many contemporary works do not depict a simple story and instead create a world with unstable rules for what is included and excluded. According to Eamonn Jordan, contemporary Irish theatre has frequently attacked carefully crafted narratives of the past. In his *Dissident Dramaturgies*, he argues that “we can link play and performance to notions of confronting oppression, destabilizing politics and to the challenging of authority, with an alertness to instability, incompleteness and unrepresentability” (76-77). Jordan’s claim here is based on an analysis of *Translations* (1980), *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), and *Double Cross* (1986), but it has larger implications. In these plays, characters demonstrate their authority over the past by trying to master it in performance through mimicry and meta-theatrical reference. By showing the audience how precisely the characters can re-member, they also demonstrate the opposite. Or as Jordan argues: “Play has therefore been central to the discovery of limitations and to the meshing of identities, and has been a way of generating ruptures and discontinuities” (45). Characters strive to represent themselves with as close a resemblance to the past as possible, but in doing so they discover the impossibility of achieving that perfect version of the story. They can choose to be truthful and re-member every aspect of the narrative, or they can carefully curate what is performed and what is not.

Enda Walsh’s plays do not confront these types of political issues directly but instead highlight thematic connections between memory and the performance of belief in theatre. Walsh contests performed versions of ‘truth’ by highlighting the subjectivity of personal experience. In his plays, characters try to recreate the past by using props, costumes, verbatim repetition among a host of other strategies to re-member personal history. As I will discuss throughout, the good intention often is diluted with the need to create a preferred or idealized narrative about the past. The characters enact memory as, what Barbara A. Misztal calls, “being removed from sources of historical truth because, like myth, it provides stories that
members of a group share and that inform people of social and moral responsibilities” (7). Theatre in general depicts a collaborative creation of reality, a shared social version of truth on stage. In Walsh’s plays, storytelling obscures a single narrative because it is constantly repeated and revised, both in the play and each night of performance. The shared experiences, therefore, privileges memories and beliefs that are selectively foregrounded. The rehearsal and performance process reflects this constant retelling of scripted narratives, and they are accepted as indicative of ‘truth’ even if we subconsciously know the performance is subjective.

In my examination of repetition and revisionist modes of performance, I will explore the processes and changes of ritual and memory over time as inherently theatrical and performative. Theatrical productions represent memorized rituals of repetition and variation. In other words, depictions of re-membered events create the foundation on which characters build a malleable performance of self within a community. This study examines the ways in which these layers unfold and manifest onstage in Walsh’s works. To clarify these claims, I will provide an overview of key terms that are essential to the study of memory, ritual, and performance. In particular, this introductory section will define reality and truth as socially constructed subjectivities of identity. It will draw on Suzan-Lori Parks’s ‘Rep&Rev,’ will discuss ritual in both the sacred and secular sense, and will explore re-membering as a reconstruction of parts, before concluding with a discussion of performance’s ubiquity in both private and social interactions.

Walsh’s Plays, Irish Theatre, and Critical Reception

I separate Walsh’s plays into three equally prolific eras of writing across his career. In the 1990s, he moved to Cork and began working with various theatre groups there – most notably Corcadorca, with which he would achieve his first notable productions. After touring
the world with his first hit, *Disco Pigs* (1996), Walsh moved to London but also spent significant portions of his time in mainland Europe, travelling between Milan and Berlin for the Italian and German premieres of his new works, or sometimes writing something new to be produced in a language he does not speak. This experimental period developed his understanding of postdramatic style and led to his later adaptations and plays which he described as being “about setting” (Barre). During this time, Walsh’s international reputation has led to grander stages and opportunities for collaboration with major companies and artists. At the time of writing, he has completed the book to a musical – *Lazarus* (2015) – with David Bowie, based on the novel and film *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (by Nicholas Roeg and Walter Tevis, respectively): a sign of his growing international prominence and prestige.

The early Cork and Dublin plays established Walsh as a new voice in Irish theatre, placing him alongside his slightly older contemporaries, Marina Carr, Martin McDonagh, and Conor McPherson. But his work began with experiments in language and staging more than the popular Irish playwrights whose work would be shown on main stages in London and New York. His first three plays – *Fishy Tales* (1993), *A Christmas Carol* (1994), and *The Ginger Ale Boy* (1995) marked his work as being situated far outside the traditional modes of Irish storytelling on stage. The first is a piece of children’s theatre which uses puppets (and was performed in part by Walsh himself), the second was a promenade revision of Charles Dickens’s story set in the Cork City Gaol, and the third was an experiment in style and content relying largely on the ensemble Corcadorca provided. But beginning with *Disco Pigs* (1996), Walsh’s voice as a creator of re-membered worlds crystallized in this deconstruction of language and theatrical form. Characters in *Sucking Dublin* (1997), *misterman* (1999), and *bedbound* (2000) reject normal conceptions of society and instead substitute their own ideas. Thematicaly, these early plays represent Walsh’s first attempts at stretching his creative
boundaries. In the 1990s, Walsh worked with a children’s theatre company (Graffiti), a site-specific ensemble (Corcadorca), the Abbey Theatre (Ireland’s national theatre) and the Dublin Theatre Festival (a large annual showcase of Irish and international work) on projects that showed him the hierarchies of theatre-making and the limits of Irish theatre. His attention, even in the earliest plays, seems pointed toward the ways in which memory and rituals can be revised through performance and production.

While many of his works were acclaimed, international hits (*Disco Pigs* being the foremost example), his work is still rarely professionally revived in Ireland. However, theatre-makers in Germany were interested in Walsh’s works, which led to a collaboration with Thomas Ostermeier, who had just become Artistic Director of Schaubühne Theatre in Berlin (Barre). The international success of *Disco Pigs* (which had been translated into 18 languages by 2000) led to broader interest in his other plays. He was invited to direct an Italian-language premiere of *bedbound* in Milan in 2000, and then an Ostermeier-produced, German-language version of that play appeared in Berlin in 2001. Walsh does not speak Italian or German but found the forms and energies of the performances essential to the plays than the actual words (Walsh 2010, ix). These experiences led Walsh to write plays such as *The New Electric Ballroom* (2004, German language premiere), *Fraternity* (2004, German language premiere, later renamed *How These Desperate Men Talk*), and *Lynndie’s Gotta Gun* (2005, Portuguese language premiere), which he describes as “exercises in form and atmosphere more than anything else” (*ibid.*). These experimental styles in mainland Europe filtered into his English-language plays – *The Small Things* (2005), *Pondlife Angels* (2005), *Chatroom* (2006), *The Walworth Farce* (2006), and *Gentrification* (2008). These plays all respond to Walsh’s ‘exercises’ in formal and linguistic postdramatic theatre even as they were produced by relatively well known theatre companies (National Theatre of London, Druid Theatre, Paines Plough). In particular, *The Walworth Farce* and the English-language
The premiere of *The New Electric Ballroom* (2008), both by Druid Theatre, led to a resurgence of popularity for Walsh as these two plays went on world tours, winning awards in locations from Edinburgh to Sydney.

This increase in visibility, however, did not deter Walsh’s stylistic experimentation. If anything, his works pushed further beyond the bounds of what might traditionally be considered, popular theatre. And yet, he was asked to collaborate with major artists and companies with projects such as *Delirium* (2008), co-produced with Theatre O and the Abbey, and *Penelope* (2009), with Theater Oberhausen and Druid in German and English productions, respectively. For *Once* (2011) he collaborated with John Tiffany and workshop productions began at American Repertory Theatre before transferring to New York Theatre Workshop and then Broadway in 2012. His work in the Galway International Arts Festival includes a revision of *Misterman* with Cillian Murphy (2011), in addition to *Ballyturk* (2014) with Stephen Rea, Cillian Murphy, and Mikel Murfi, which have only further cemented his non-traditional style as something that will garner attention and funding. These opportunities have led to installment style performances (*Room 303* and *A Girl’s Bedroom*, 2014 and 2015 respectively, with another to be produced in 2016), children’s theatre (*The Man in the Moon* and *The Twits*, 2009 and 2015 respectively), and an opera (*The Last Hotel*, 2015). Even as his opportunities have evolved, his attention to the themes of memory, ritual and performance remain. The changing styles and experimental production models reinforce his exploration of revision through performative, memorial experience. The characters in *Fishy Tales* attempt to reconfigure their understanding of the past by replaying stories in a similar way to that in which the characters in *Lazarus* try to re-member their personal histories within a confined apartment space.

Given this extensive list of productions and collaborations at all levels of theatre globally, it is surprising that there is no full-length study of Enda Walsh’s oeuvre. I do not
Introduction

wish to decry the lack of scholarship on Walsh, but there is only one publication (*The Theatre of Enda Walsh*, 2015) and roughly two dozen citations across monographs and journal articles. These responses to Walsh often focus on a single play or at most two or three examples that fit a narrative about his thematic interests, usually privileging the text. As Lisa Fitzpatrick has suggested, few scholars write about Walsh because his work is not staged at the major venues in Ireland or abroad. Fitzpatrick writes: “Walsh’s work was staged in relatively small venues in Ireland, or overseas and in translation […] In contrast, the work of Carr, McPherson and McDonagh premieres at the Abbey and the Gate in Dublin, and the Royal Court and the National in London” (451). Walsh’s recent productions, such as *Once the Musical* (2011) on Broadway and the West End, *The Twits* (2015) at the Royal Court, *Lazarus* (2015) at New York Theatre Workshop, and his forthcoming production of *Pinocchio* at the The National Theatre in London, demonstrate a growing market for his work.

Similarly, academic and critical response has often ignored the larger contexts for his writing and the ways in which he reflects on Irish sensibilities as well as larger concerns regarding memory, ritual, and performance. There has been very little published on Walsh compared to many of his contemporaries such as Martin McDonagh and Marina Carr. In general, these critical considerations examine his work in one of three ways: Irish identity politics, postdramatic interpretations, and examinations of reality in performance. These scholarly foci are important in the narrative around Walsh’s work as it clearly shows a predilection for a select few plays. The most commonly examined of his works are *Disco Pigs* and *The Walworth Farce*. The other Walsh plays often only have one article dedicated to them (mostly in the *Theatre of Enda Walsh* collection), showing a clear preference for the particular themes mentioned above. These analyses, however, provide the critical basis from which my research expands and deviates.
Many articles and references in monographs focus on Walsh’s interrogations of Irish identity politics. In particular, Eamonn Jordan’s *Dissident Dramaturgies* (2010) and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones’s *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity* (2002) both broadly discuss Walsh’s dramaturgy as both deviations from traditional Irish plays but also fitting into the notion of post-colonial bodies performing. Jordan only discusses *The Walworth Farce* in the conclusion in relation to ‘dark play’ and Walsh’s efforts to ‘explode’ the play that “every Irish playwright has to write… and bring it somewhere else” (244). But these brief mentions are less important than the larger reflections each author brings. Jordan and Llewellyn-Jones both discuss memory in their monographs for entire chapters and yet never mention Walsh’s work. Jordan begins his chapter on memory saying that many plays “emphasize the complex relationship between memory, history, sometimes myth and metatheatre” (40). Then he limits his discussion only to plays that are set in the past rather than those set in the present but commenting on the past. This limitation excludes Walsh even though his works fit Jordan’s claim that “fixed and immutable structures [are] destabilized by the concept of contestational play” (76). Similarly, Llewellyn-Jones claims, “Grand narratives and dominant ideologies, which tend to be associated with notions of unified subjectivity and realism, seem to be constantly interrogated by the split subjectivities and fragmenting techniques of many contemporary Irish dramas” (66). This argument broadly omits Walsh’s *bedbound* or *misterman*, both of which demonstrate her point. Instead, she foregrounds national identity politics and post-colonial analytical views.

In this vein, there are several articles which focus only partially on Walsh, splitting analysis with multiple playwrights. For example, Christian Schmitt-Kilb’s articles “Lifestyle Anarchism and its Discontents: Mark Ravenhill, Enda Walsh and the Politics of Contemporary Drama” and “The End(s) of Language in Brian Friel’s *Translations* and Enda Walsh’s *Disco Pigs* and *misterman*” both split focus between authors who use language and
violence in plays to disrupt seemingly normal modes of storytelling. The first article’s argument focuses on the ‘revolutionary’ style in which Walsh’s plays can be interpreted, specifically the more experimental, avant-garde aspects of his language and theatrical aesthetic. The latter article specifically examines the language games and issues of understanding speech in Friel’s play and Walsh’s plays. Here, Schmitt-Kilb confronts the issues of “both language as a means of communication which sometimes works and more often does not, and language as one of the touchstones of a culture and as the main medium of a society’s internal negotiations about identity” (2009, 68). Discussing gender and identity in Ireland, Mark Schreiber’s “Bedbound Beauty Queens: Negotiating Space and Gender in Contemporary Irish Drama” appears to have a broad scope, but it focuses largely on The Beauty Queen of Leenane by Martin McDonagh alongside bedbound by Enda Walsh – again splitting focus. Schreiber argues that McDonagh and Walsh, as contemporary playwrights whose works “problematis[e] violence, familial and generational conflicts […] placing characters in escapable spaces […] creatively mixing past and present” (Schreiber). In short, these two plays represent critiques of contemporary Ireland through an exploration of gendered spaces and the reconfiguration of identity in the modern world. The authors’ analyses intertwine with my own understanding of language as something which creates worlds (or destroys them). Similarly, my research focuses on ritual as a repeated enactment of codified social identity, memory in its liquid and ever-changing manipulability, and performed versions of self as both conscious and unconscious depiction of self.

Patrick Lonergan has written about Walsh’s work in his Theatre and Globalization (2009) and Theatre & Social Media (2015) in which he focuses on the different types of branding and social engagement that takes place with contemporary theatrical productions. Lonergan analyzes Disco Pigs in relation to other monologue plays that poeticized language into a type of inarticulacy (178-79). The next section discusses Catalpa as a monologue play
that requires the performer to embody the language and inspire the audience’s imaginative engagement without physical mimesis of a story. The connection is made by proximity rather than explicit analysis. Then in his later publication, Lonergan focuses on *Once the Musical* and its social engagement in performance and on Twitter. The analysis considers the affectionate language used to describe Dublin even after the economic downturn (69). Then Lonergan explains how the musical connected with its audiences in performance with an onstage pub where viewers could buy drinks before the show and at the interval as well as through active online identities (71). In general, these discussions of Walsh’s plays as global performances of Irishness foreground the works’ inherent connection to Ireland; it also reflects on the digital creation of identity which is seen in other writing such as “Through a Glass Darkly: Identity, Language and Performance in Enda Walsh’s *Chatroom*” by Kevin Wallace. In this article, he examines the idea of a shared identity across digital media. Similar to Lonergan’s claim, the main argument can be summarized as follows: “While on the surface these plays are all radically different what unites them is their obsession with the continual construction and reconstruction of the self, the notion of individuality or subjectivity as an incomplete and incompletable process” (Wallace 86). In a sense, identity is always mediated not only by the Internet but by the external forces of society and culture. These claims connect thematically with revisionist re-memberings of identity and belief that I foreground in my own research.

In “For Once and For All: Empathy and Mimesis in Enda Walsh’s Musical ‘for the people of the world,’” Mary P. Caulfield characterizes *Once* as “a revisionary national narrative not in terms of the political but rather as a reflection and soundtrack for the newly opened and integrated Ireland” (161). Similar to Lonergan’s discussion of the musical, Caulfield highlights the need to depict Dublin in a positive manner. She notes the use of mirrors to “reflect our own lives’ dramas. These mirrors reflect the characters, the audience,
and thus the nation” (162). In short, the play presented a positive atmosphere in which the audience and the production revel and perform. On the other hand, Michelle C. Paull’s article “Ballyturk: Theatre and Event” discusses the disconnections felt by critics after the premiere productions (178). She points out similar meta-theatrical elements but there are many interpretations of the 2014 play. Paull argues the following: “If the play is about friendship, identity and death it is also about our inability to capture, define or express these experiences as well as a rejection of the need to define in any absolute form, style or language” (192). These discussions of identity politics are reflected still in other essays that consider postmodern and postdramatic applications of theory to Walsh’s plays.

In “FIERCE WORDS / BRUTAL DEEDS: Abjection and Redemption in Enda Walsh’s bedbound,” Kay Martinovich approaches one of Walsh’s plays from the perspective of Julia Kristeva’s theories of psychoanalytic abjection and the reminder of life’s transitory nature. She uses bedbound not only to refer to the play’s ‘Beckettian landscape’ but also to explain that “By repeating and reconstructing the past, Daughter and Dad try to make sense of their own and each other’s traumatic past in the in-between space of abjection and the bed” (Martinovich 74-75). In a sense, the characters must explore their identity through the act of re-membering. Continuing with questions of abjection and terror onstage, Ondřej Pilný’s article “The Grotesque in the Plays of Enda Walsh” examines The New Electric Ballroom, The Walworth Farce, and Penelope using Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser’s interpretations of the grotesque. Pilný argues that “Walsh thus ultimately offers […] inimitable parables that touch upon the ethics of human interaction” by forcing the audience to view and perhaps even commiserate with despicable characters (221). Pilný proposes that Walsh’s worlds disintegrate due to the ‘confusion’ and ‘terror’ caused by the shows of physical and verbal violence; my interpretation takes this assumption and goes in a different direction. The destruction of language and seemingly solid boundaries, in fact, demonstrates
the characters’ attempts to hold onto their world-making and to constantly reassert their ability to do so – even to their own (repeated) end. Pilný’s allusions to intertextuality and citationality (especially regarding Beckettian elements in Walsh’s plays) show that the themes are actually something recognisable, if terrifying, which points again to the various ways in which Walsh can be linked to other playwrights.

Taking a different focus, Ian Walsh considers the dramaturgy of variety shows in “Entertainment and Dystopia in Enda Walsh’s The Ginger Ale Boy.” In the article, Walsh argues that “Throughout Walsh’s work we see this dummy/vent ‘illusion of abnegated autonomy’ or ‘orchestrated lack of control’ staged as a means to interrogate the power of performance to order behaviour (the ritual, routine and script) but also submit to disorder and chaos (the unpredictable reality of other people and the unruliness of live performance)” (32). This claim connects with my claim that Enda Walsh presents characters who attempt to control memory and history through carefully coded performances, but as Ian Walsh notes it is impossible to escape the ‘unruliness of live performance.’ Finian O’Gorman’s article “The Small Things: A Postdramatic Analysis” begins with an anecdote that portrays this unpredictable reality; Dan Rebellato saw a production of The Small Things where a drunk man kept interrupting the performance which led the actors to stop and request he be removed, much to the rest of the audience’s delight (89). These moments when the ‘real’ world and the fictional world of the stage collide refers to what O’Gorman calls a ‘holistic experience’ in which both aspects of theatre are visible (90). He goes on to argue that The Small Things embodies the aspect of postdramatic performance which “challenge those conventions, in turn fracturing attempts to form an enclosed world on stage that is separate from the audience” (93). Ian Walsh’s article also confronts these notions of overt performed reality as juxtaposed with the outside world. Both O’Gorman and Walsh highlight Enda Walsh’s “blending of conventional Irish drama and the postdramatic, Walsh’s plays are a
meeting point between these polarities” (102). These articles resonate with my own research by foregrounding issues of reality in performance. While I do not examine Walsh’s plays from a postdramatic or variety show perspective, the discussions of music, time, and repetition connect to considerations of memorialized rituals of performed reality.

These applications of particular theoretical frameworks to Walsh’s dramaturgy are useful in demonstrating the breadth of critical engagement that can be applied to his work. However, they only partially refer to the reality created onstage in performance. Jordan’s other publications on The Walworth Farce (two separate articles\(^1\) in addition to the discussion of The Walworth Farce in his monograph) focus on the play’s impact as a work of globalization. His article “‘Stuff from Back Home:’ Enda Walsh’s The Walworth Farce” focuses largely on the play’s plot and its touring, offering a nuanced analysis of the text. Jordan also includes some discussion of meta-theatricality that he references in his monograph, discussing the performed reality. In particular, he calls the flat a ‘cocooned world’ that is beyond the reality of life in London. He argues that, “the play has no real connection to reality, even if space and time connects them or locates them in relation to London” (334-35). In other words, Walsh does not concern himself with Realism but instead in the construction of realities that characters believe through embodiment of these rituals. Lisa Fitzpatrick’s article “The Representation of Vulnerability in Enda Walsh’s Sucking Dublin and Lynndie’s Gotta Gun” presents a similar argument when she writes: “While Walsh’s more acclaimed works explore these issues in their complexity, these minor works illustrate his curious approaches to the issue at different stages in his career, and the insistence in his mid-career work on characters who define themselves in and through the stories they tell themselves and others” (63). This claim emphasizes the creation of

---

\(^1\) Eamonn Jordan has published two separate articles on The Walworth Farce. “‘Stuff From Back Home:’ Enda Walsh’s The Walworth Farce” (2010) is the longest of the three and provides the basis for the other two. His writing in Dissident Dramaturgies and the article “‘It Would Never Happen on The Waltons’: Enda Walsh’s The Walworth Farce” (2012) repeat many of the first article’s arguments verbatim.
performances as life-sustaining activities. Fitzpatrick demonstrates through depictions of violence that characters create stories that give meaning and sense to worlds that are otherwise oppressive. Fitzpatrick’s and Jordan’s articles, like Walsh and O’Gorman’s, examine the varying levels of reality and belief that exist in Enda Walsh’s plays.

This discussion of performed reality resonates with several other articles on Walsh’s work such as Rosana Herrero Martin’s article “Language Performativity in Donal O’Kelly’s Catalpa (1995) and Enda Walsh’s Disco Pigs (1996): Two Radical Theatre Proposals” and Tanya Dean’s “Real Versus Illusory in Enda Walsh’s The Walworth Farce and The New Electric Ballroom.” Both articles present a discussion of two plays where characters use words to enact performative stories. Herrero Martin argues that in Disco Pigs “we come across language making the world anew, becoming a real tool of action, rather than a mechanism of referential knowledge” (231). From there, she explores the use of language as a tool for three-dimensional world-making, an aspect of Walsh’s work that continues throughout his career. Dean considers the delineation of the ‘Real’ and ‘Illusory’ as necessarily theatrical notions. She argues that “Walsh employs these notions of the Real and the Illusory to create the hermetic playworlds and emotionally-stunted characters” (119-20). I argue that this world-making is seen in all of Walsh’s works. The characters reject the version of reality that exists beyond the limits of their performance because it is preferable to perform the illusion of a revised memory. On the other hand, Martin claims that the language-made world destroys itself but the benefit of this deterioration outweighs the devastation to the relationship the two characters formerly had. In short, Martin’s and Dean’s discussions on ‘narrative discourse’ and ‘Real’ and ‘Illusory’ imply the larger arguments I make regarding the creation of a ‘revisionist’ performed reality which supplants a supposedly dangerous outside world. Dean and Martin’s articles present arguments which focuses on Walsh’s plays as examples of revisionist forms of production.
Much of the critical consideration focuses specifically on Walsh as writer and the plays that he has produced in his career. However, Jesse Weaver’s “Enda Walsh and Space: The Evolution of a Playwright and Practitioner” takes the notion of change over time and relates it directly to Walsh as a theatre-maker. Weaver argues that “The form that Walsh’s writing takes [with] the use of the performer’s body to channel a host of characters, and an unconventional approach to narrative structure, demands a close collaboration between director and actors, and points to a process that centralizes the actor’s body as the prime carrier of meaning” (18). This point is made more clearly by the fact that Walsh himself served as a co-director for Disco Pigs and he originated the role of Thomas in misterman. Weaver goes on to demonstrate how in the productions of misterman (1999) and Misterman (2011) “Rather than Thomas exerting control over both the scenic an dramatic spaces of the 1999 version… the scenic and dramatic spaces of the 2011 version appear to control and create the world within which Thomas functions” (24). I build on this point in my second chapter where I discuss Walsh as author of the words as well as the mise-en-scène through his explicit use of stage directions. This engagement with Walsh’s plays in production is integral to a discussion of his work both thematically and theatrically.

Some articles specifically refer to the plays in production, which offer useful methodologies for my own practical work. Nursen Gömceli’s “We Laugh A Lot When Mum’s Away: The Production and Reception of The Walworth Farce in Turkey,” Anne Étienne’s “De Pond Life à Angels: les jeux d’écriture d’Enda Walsh,” and Fiona Fearon’s “Decoding the Audience: Enda Walsh’s Chatroom” all examine various productions of Walsh’s work. Gömceli’s essay examines the ways in which Walsh’s play was translated to a Turkish theatre. Gömceli contextualizes the production, which had changed its name to We Laugh A Lot When Mum’s Away, as an outlier when compared to other non-English productions. The advertising highlighted the play’s Irishness and the use of known comedic
actors, which differed from the reaction audiences had after the production. Critics and audience members lauded the play for the strong performance capacity inherent in the production but also noted that the audience “should undergo training first” (211).

Anne Étienne’s essay\(^2\) firmly establishes the author’s own revision of previous works. In the article, Étienne documents the playwright’s relationship with Cork city over time and the changing feelings from his youth until 2001 (with the writing of *Pond Life*) to a more matured self (with the revision and production of *Pondlife Angels* in 2005). Étienne implies that this approach greatly enhanced the process for this one project, and I expand on that with discussion of Walsh’s development of various scripts over time and his own approach to directing his own work. In a similar way, Fiona Fearon uses an ethnographic lens to examine Calipo Theatre Company’s 2008 production of *Chatroom*. Fearon discusses audience response and (in)ability to find a ‘meaning’ in the play, and she proposes several possible shortcomings ranging from failed expectations of those who had never attended live theatre to the misreading of a character as a ‘terrorist.’ Essentially, Fearon notes that a production team can make choices that they believe tell one story, but there is a necessarily reciprocal nature to performance and the ways in which critical analysis and observation can occur (or not) among audiences of varying social background. She is quick to note that this is neither a shortcoming for the audience nor the theatre-makers, and the issue of a ‘real audience’ who responds in an unexpected, unique way is a valuable viewpoint when engaging viewers. In considering Fearon, Gömceli and Étienne’s writings, these responses to production reflect acceptance of revision and considerations beyond the expected outcomes of performance. Although they never explicitly state it, all three analyses imply that theatre is a process of remembering a text to be performed and revised over time based on audience consumption.

\(^2\) The article first appeared in French in *L’adaptation théâtrale en Irlande de 1970 à 2007* (published in 2010). The original title translates to “From *Pond Life* to *Angels*: The writing games of Enda Walsh” whereas the translated version was published as “*Pond Life and Angels*: Enda Walsh’s Adaptations to Cork” in 2012, which implies a slightly different meaning.
These examinations of specific productions are not always taken from the critic’s perspective. In some cases, it is the artists who respond and critically consider their experiences with Walsh’s work. In particular, Mikel Murfi’s “On Directing and Performing the Theatre of Enda Walsh” and Sabine Dargent’s interview with Siobhan O’Gorman – “Sculpting the Spaces of Enda Walsh’s Theatre” – offer particularly vivid accounts of each artist’s approach to theatre-making. Murfi lauds Walsh for his “radical […] approach to form, technique and text” (195). Murfi stresses the fact that “the work as proposed will undoubtedly produce a theatre experience” (195). This claim is essential to Walsh’s dramaturgy as he conceives of his works as theatrical creations, things that are meant to be staged, rehearsed, revised, and made accessible for an audience. Dargent similarly notes that Walsh’s plays are layered pieces of theatre – there is ‘the world of the play… and the theatre story in it… Enda’s work is very visual” (217). Dargent’s interview continually refers back to the performance elements in Walsh’s work, but she also notes that audiences “might have an idealized image of Ireland, which these plays challenge” (223). In this way, she recognizes what Murfi notes in his essay: Walsh presents versions of these worlds and critiques them through repetition and revision. By directing and designing these productions, both Murfi and Dargent represent the physical process of making and refiguring Walsh’s theatrical creations.

In relation to the original touring production of *The Walworth Farce* (Druid Theatre Company – 2009), Kim Solga’s article “Realism/Terrorism: *The Walworth Farce*” provides a critical response to the play’s re-enactment of trauma. Solga writes: “It’s a play about the fickle performatics of memory; about the ways in which theatre both enables and disables the drive to remember” (89). This review notes the importance of memorial re-inscription and

---

3 Mikel Murfi originated the English-language role of Patsy in *The New Electric Ballroom*, the English-language role of Man in *Lynndie’s Gotta Gun* and the role of 2 in *Ballyturk*. He also directed the premieres of *The Walworth Farce* and *Penelope* for Druid Theatre. Additionally, he served as movement director for the 2011 production of *Misterman* starring Cillian Murphy, directed by Walsh.

4 Sabine Dargent designed the Druid Theatre productions of *The Walworth Farce*, *The New Electric Ballroom*, and *Penelope*. 
Introduction

myth-making that occurs in performance generally but also in Walsh specifically. Much of her engagement relies on critical considerations of trauma and terrorism. She claims that these all-consuming performances of memory abuse an audience’s expectations for a positive outcome. The ending of the play depicts Sean staying; “Theatre is his sentence, not his salvation.” (91). This statement reduces the importance of finding a purpose, even in a seemingly terrifying re-experiencing of a falsified past. I argue that all performance is a re-visions of one’s identity, a hope to create something that is worth repeating on a daily basis. Solga engages with the hope that theatre will uncover institutional and, in some way, rectify it. But she indicates that Walsh’s play presents a step backward. I will discuss this notion of performed salvation and entrapment at length in my third chapter.

I do not intend to claim that all critical engagement with Walsh’s work only examines issues of Irish identity, postdramatic style, and performance practices. These themes appear repeatedly for a reason: Walsh presents a distinctive style with his plays’ characters, and this style critiques the social acceptability of outsiders in identity creation practices. Scholars discuss Walsh in the context of his origin as an Irish playwright and his plays as part of experimental, non-linear performance. I do not use reviews from newspapers and academic journals extensively to situate my discussions. These articles are used to supplement rather than serve as a basis. My research engages largely with the plays themselves and the ways in which they can be performed. These aspects are necessary to any examination of Walsh’s work. However, my dissertation expands on the critical considerations to include discussions of identity as a ritualized practice, re-membering as a type of performance practice, and the production of plays as essential to any theatrical study. Irish identity, postdramatic theory, and performance analysis are interesting in their connections to Walsh, and the above examinations influence my own research, but I also intend to more broadly apply theoretical claims not only to Walsh but also to theatre generally.
Ritual, Memory, and Performance

All three aspects of this study are necessarily interlinked. As such, much of the description of each aspect will rely on studies of ritual by theatre scholars, or claims about memory by ritual scholars, or performance as a medium for creating and/or reworking memory and ritual. As such, this section provides an overview of several key thinkers and their relationship to my research. I begin with a discussion of Paul Ricoeur, who claims a ‘duty to remember’ and the need for historians to recognize the subjectivity of what stories are told and which are omitted. I link these claims to aspects of meaning-making through ritual performance, as theorized by Victor Turner. Then I link those claims to mnemonic considerations and acts of memory in ritual by Richard Schechner, which further connects with Catherine Bell’s explorations of ritual. I then take Bell’s definitions of ritual and return to performance as a necessary aspect of ritualized memory.

Ricoeur’s arguments often stem from a need to uncover forgotten or marginalized narratives. He posits that historians have a ‘duty to remember’ and to “enlarge the sphere of the archives; that is, the conscientious historian must open up the archive by retrieving traces which dominant ideological forces attempted to suppress” (1999: 16). In his seminal work, *Time and Narrative*, he further argues that “We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated” (1984: 75). Together, these two concepts present the necessity of exploring what has been forgotten and neglected as part of the history of culture. Enda Walsh’s plays are not necessarily about unearthing forgotten histories, but they are about people who historicize their own lives. The characters in these plays are always at odds with their own memories and what could be deemed correct or incorrect about their stories. The important aspect, however, is that they are in a constant process of trying to remember. A person may not be aware of it, but there is a constant social process of consideration where an
individual creates an identity that shows outwardly that may or may not be the same as what is held as an inward manifestation of the ‘true’ self.

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur continues his examination of the ways in which memory is a process of cultivating past narratives. He states: “memory begins deliberately with an analysis turned toward the object of memory… it then passes through the stage of the search for a given memory… we then move from memory as it is given and exercised to reflective memory, to memory of oneself” (xvi). This claim is essential to a consideration of Walsh’s work as well as to theatre generally. For Walsh, his characters are deliberate myth-makers and storytellers, figures whose entire purpose revolves around their ability to remember their personal stories. A similar claim can be made for the theatre actor, who must remember his/her lines on a daily basis in an effort to achieve the correct version of a performance. While I do not claim that actors generally or Walsh in particular are always thinking of these concepts, Ricoeur’s theories do bring to light the idea that a memory is a process, something that takes effort to maintain and something that can change over time.

Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner wrote extensively on ritual and its sociological import, but it is his understanding of performance and meaning-making that provide the most useful insights for this study. In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Turner defines ritual as “a synchronization of many performative genres, and is often ordered by dramatic structure, a plot, frequently involving an act of sacrifice or self-sacrifice, which energizes and gives emotional coloring to the interdependent communicative codes which express in manifold ways the meaning inherent in the dramatic leitmotiv” (81, original emphasis). His analysis of ritual recognizes and foregrounds performance structures as essential to the ways in which people remember these rituals. He clarifies this need to return to these histories when he says, “an experience is never truly completed until it is ‘expressed,’ that is until it is communicated in terms intelligible to others, linguistic or otherwise” (14). These needs to express meaning
Introduction

through ritual point to a human need to be remembered, as Ricoeur argued. An individual consolidates the meaning and subjective experience of self through these social interactions. The dramatic construction of a ritual highlights the expression of meaning into a consumable way that depicts personal and communal belief systems.

These rituals must be remembered in a particular way in order to present the appropriate set of beliefs to a community. As such, the need to organize and stipulate the specific actions and words associated with particular meanings, a certain form of what is correct in the memory is needed. As Richard Schechner posits in *The Future of Ritual*, “Rituals, and the behavior arts associated with them, are overdetermined, full of redundancy, repetition, and exaggeration” (230). Or as Schechner says in *Between Theater and Anthropology*, people use “mnemonic devices [to insure] that the performances were ‘right’” (36). This overly specific and repetitive form of ritual storytelling purports to get the details right. This type of dedication to what is correct appears in all of Walsh’s plays as characters attempt to make a connection with the past. The onstage figures seem to be stuck in an endless cycle of ritualized return to a specific time in the past that defines who they are. That is, they must perform a highly structured ritual in order to achieve the correct version of the past that tells the characters who they are. Therefore, they need to enact certain gestures and pronounce specific words, or else their identity will be mangled and lost.

Catherine Bell’s concepts of ritual stipulate a similar respect for the performed ritual. In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell examines a multitude of definitions for what makes a ritual a re-membered performance of identity in a particular community or culture. The main point she makes stems from the fact that “ritual involves the integration of thought and action” (26). Theatre, therefore, holds a specifically ritualistic place in its attempts at repetition and correctly retelling stories. The need to rehearse certain actions and then connect those to a socially constructed belief system is essential to her definitions of ritual.
Like Schechner, she holds to the fact that a ritual is an attempt to correctly repeat codified gestures and words to engender a particular meaning. But she takes it one step further, differentiating between a successful or unsuccessful ritual, explaining that “an unsuccessful ritual effects change, then a successful one maintains stasis or no change” (34). This claim is essential to my understanding not only of ritual but of the ways in which it connects to Enda Walsh’s plays. The characters in Walsh’s works all attempt to rigorously and faithfully retell and re-member a certain story that helps create a curated identity of self. As such, they all strive for stasis. However, due to issues in performance, memory, or the ritual itself, none of the characters ever achieves this exact replication of ritual.

The foundational argument of this dissertation relies on these interlinked concepts of ritual, memory, and performance as it relates to Walsh’s plays. I argue that in his plays, Walsh depicts characters who are personal historians dedicated to reproducing a version of their identity for personal and communal consumption. Whether it is the seemingly individual story of Thomas in misterman or the shared dreaming of the suitors in Penelope, these characters attempt to perform a specific version of self that depict their past and present identity in the most positive light. A character such as Dinny in The Walworth Farce is consumed by the need to set the record straight on his final day in Cork. Even if he knows that the version he tells is not true it has been made true to him through its perpetuation and repetition over the years since the actual event occurred. Or in Disco Pigs, Pig and Runt create a ritual of falsified public affection that leads to an expectation that these performed identities are real, and Pig takes it as such while Runt tries to escape from it. Walsh’s plays are filled with characters who enact these attempts at telling marginalized stories using detailed performances of identity they attempt to make ‘correct’ through repetition. Often, the characters use these rituals to vindicate a past aggression or failure, but they always do so with the expectation that the version of the story they are telling is true.
Introduction

This section reflects the larger methodological underpinnings of my research as a whole. This dissertation argues that Walsh depicts theatrical events as performative re-memberings that connect to rituals, memory, and performativity in everyday life. Therefore, I use the plays and characters in them to discuss the ways in which ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ are socially constructed and malleable in the performance of these ritualized versions of memory. In particular, I aim to use discussions of memory and re-membering as the foundation of what drives the characters in Walsh’s plays. By examining memory, I will situate the discussion of performed memories within larger considerations of identity. Then, ritual performance and its effects as a reiteration of social belief systems will be unpacked. Doing this, Walsh’s plays represent a specific engagement with the ways in which identity is formed for an individual and a community, as seen in *mistmerman* and *The New Electric Ballroom* respectively. The interweaving of memory and ritual theories with performance and its transitory nature provide insight into all of Walsh’s plays. These concepts of performed memory and ritual cannot be separated as each aspect requires the other in order to examine the plays. The use of rituals to enact these memories as an attempt to codify the past into a repeatable, memorized performance is made evident throughout these plays with reference to Ricoeur, Turner, Schechner, and Bell. Therefore, the purpose of the dissertation is not simply to give several varied responses to Walsh’s plays but an examination of the ways in which they all connect and reflect theatrical and non-theatrical conventions of identity formation and meaning-making.

Definitions

The term ‘truth’ is used throughout my research to indicate not a set, socially-accepted, overarching version of what everyone believes to be true. Instead, I take multiple approaches to reach my definition. I consider Michel Foucault’s claims that “‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution,
circulation and operation of statements” (131). Foucault’s link of truth to power structures indicates a relationship between what society deems true and what an individual might experience. However, these two are inevitably linked as a person is a social being and cannot extricate him/herself from the social order into which they have been born. Continuing in a slightly different conception of truth, Jean Baudrillard argues that truth is an illusion. “The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (166). This concept implies larger repercussions of social order, but I am most interested in the notion of ‘truth’ as something that is constructed. A community that believes in a certain hierarchical structure of power, as Foucault would suggest, believes in a singular version of truth. For Baudrillard, that truth obscures the fact that all experiences within a social order are constructed around the malleability of what is true. For this study, I define truth as a subjective version of what is considered real and correct based on the endless repetitions and revisions that go into the creation of personal identity. This definition applies to Walsh’s characters, who engage in these attempts to find what is true based on their versions of re-membered, revised reality, which I define below.

I utilize Judith Butler’s concepts of reality as the basis for my discussions throughout the research. Her work focuses on the performance of gender and sex, but I extrapolate this concept of performativity to the construction of social reality. Reality, according to Butler, is “constituted by the performance itself” (1990: 272). That is to say, an individual’s subjective experiences are the foundation on which a person’s reality is constructed. Judith Butler also critiques phenomenology – the study of acts, semantic meanings, and perceived experience – by saying that “social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic sign” (270). In other words, reality is a social process by which a person is defined and yet that person’s performance of identity is inherently individual. Butler places the active meaning-making on constructs that came before the individual – language, gesture,
and symbolic signs. Instead of personal responsibility and choice, reality is made by the social *zeitgeist* into which a person is born. While culture necessarily influences a person’s perception of reality, there is no way to measure subjectivity in a traditionally learned way. Gilbert Ryle writes that “[it is] quite possible for a boy [sic] to learn chess without even hearing or reading the rules at all… We learn how by practice, schooled by criticism and example, but often quite unaided by any lessons in the theory” (41). In this way, actions can create beliefs without a person understanding the complex structures that make up ritual or memorialized performance. This definition is perhaps too passive, but I rely on the subjectivity of experience in order to highlight communal shifts in belief. In Walsh’s worlds, the characters attempt to solidify their version of reality through repetition. These onstage figures, however, are also affected by their place within the micro-community in which they perform and cannot help but be defined by what has already occurred. Therefore, I define reality as a social process that represents a confluence of both immediate circumstance and also a function of personal appropriation within that social order. When I use the term ‘reality,’ I intend to convey the sense of these multiple aspects because it is entirely subjective yet culturally defined by social processes.

In a similar vein, the process of making and re-making a social reality in Walsh’s plays relates to Suzan-Lori Parks’s use of “Rep&Rev.” Parks in “Elements of Style,” defines Rep(etition)&Rev(ision) as a process whereby “characters refigure their words and through a refiguring of language show us that they are experiencing their situation anew” (9). Characters enact the same material over and over until it changes and depicts a new version of what is supposedly the same story. This idea relates to Walsh’s use of ritualized repetition in his plays whereby his characters attempt to subvert painful histories or to keep a micro-community under control. In her essay “Possession,” Parks further explains theatre as a revisionist medium: “A play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history...
through the medium of literature. Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre, for me, is the perfect place to ‘make’ history” (4). Given this, the text offers a place where memory becomes the subject of analysis and the changeability of memory is shown as an active process of re-membering. Rep&Rev, therefore, refers to the dual unearthing and obscuring of personalized histories. In Walsh’s case, the recovery of these lost memories represents a return to a traumatic past for the characters who would otherwise try to deny its existence or circumvent the pain of remembering. As such, Parks’s Rep&Rev and Walsh’s repeated and revised rituals are equally about exposing, creating, and returning to past experience through ritual repetition.

As described by Roy A. Rappaport in *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, “Ritual tends to be stylized, repetitive, stereotyped, often but not always decorous, and they also tend to occur at special places and at times fixed by the clock, calendar, or specified circumstances” (175-76). Within a more sociological context, Catherine Bell describes ritual in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* as “activities [that] effectively sacralize things, people, or events […] ritual was reinforced as both a central sociological concept and a universal category of social life” (15). These definitions offer a suitable starting point for the consideration of ritual as that which can (and should be) precisely repeated in the hope of perpetuating a particular meaning for a community’s consumption. I will contest the status of ritual as either religious or secular in more detail below while also exploring the expectation that a ritual can supposedly be enacted exactly the same way twice. Considering Walsh’s plays, I will draw on the work of scholars such as Victor Turner, Emile Durkheim, and Richard Schechner to substantiate my claim that ritual has moved beyond either/or definitions that refute its malleability in the contemporary moment. I reference Bell and Rappaport’s claims when I define ritual as a social, Rep&Rev reality based on actions, speech-acts, or presence where an individual or community creates meaning and identity over and over. This assertion relies on
Introduction

my definitions of reality as both a personal and social construction as well as Rep&Rev, and it also foregrounds the as yet unacknowledged process of memory in meaning-making.

The term ‘re-membering’ comes from Toni Morrison’s use of the term ‘rememory’ in her novel *Beloved*, along with Suzan-Lori Parks’s use of ‘re-membering’ from her essays. In Morrison’s work, she references the past as something that is forgotten but can be returned to the present by a sound, smell or other bodily encounter with an aspect of that memory.\(^5\) A person does not need to have even experienced the memory, but he or she can still experience the rememory simply by being present in a place where an event occurred. For example, Jill Matus argues in her book *Toni Morrison* that the novel *Beloved* “may provoke readers to the vicarious experiences of trauma and act as a means of transmission” (3). In this case, rememory becomes a shared experience for readers who could not have any personal recollection of slavery due to its abolition more than 100 years earlier than the novel’s publication. Similarly, Suzan-Lori Parks uses the term ‘re-membering’ as an assembly of parts – literally re-assembling pieces of a body or past to create a whole. Parks differentiates this active revision of the past with the idealized conception that the past can be written, recorded, and recalled in one singularly constructed way (4-5). Parks conceives of this process as a figurative rebuilding of personal and cultural history. She writes plays in which the past is malleable and present on stage; the fluidity of narrative serves as the impetus for revision as much as the need to convey a story that has not been told in precisely this way. Walsh’s characters never use the word ‘re-member’ yet their lives are driven by the need to encounter the past again and put things right. In many cases, these characters establish themselves as authorities over the past, able to bend memory to their will. In this way,

\(^5\) In *Beloved*, the protagonist – Sethe – explains ‘rememory’ as the following: “Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory… The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there – you never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you” (Morrison 1987, 35-6).
Walsh’s plays present re-membering as an active attempt to unearth an individual or communal history. This process requires enactment and embodiment of a past that is both unattainable and ever-present.

Regarding performance, many scholars have endeavored to define Performance Studies, but Richard Schechner synthesizes the various attempts when he suggests that, “anything and everything can be studied ‘as’ performance” (1). The critical considerations of Performance Studies can be applied to any subject or object and every act of the past, present, and future. This notion recognizes the discipline’s expansion since the mid-twentieth century to include the minutiae of everyday life as well as the political speeches of world leaders, and everything in between. I accept Schechner’s broad definition of performance, but do so with the added provisions of Diana Taylor’s notion of the ‘archive’ and the ‘repertoire.’ Taylor notes that while history is often recorded in documents and writing (the archive) the performances of memory and daily life (the repertoire) provide an equally important commentary on history.6 Taylor’s argument adds nuance to Schechner’s claim that everything can be considered as performance by inserting a recognition that the archive performs alongside the repertoire. A performance is an action embodied by either a living entity or inanimate object; both have the capacity to perform. Performance, therefore, represents an inscribed meaning that relates to the reality of the individual in a ritual, re-membering, or repetition.

The terms above are not the only ones I will use throughout the study, but they form the basis upon which I form my argument that personal and communal narratives are revised through ritual repetition and performance. My research focuses on the human proclivity toward performance and ritual in the rehearsal, repetition, recollection, and re-membering of

---

6 In The Archive and the Repertoire Taylor argues that “The rift… does not lie between the written and spoken word, but between the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (19).
Introduction

history. Walsh’s plays depict performances in these multi-layered states in which an actor
plays a character who is also playing a character. The characters bring attention to the
ubiquity of performance by always needing to show a particular aspect of identity, either to
themselves or to others onstage. In all cases, there is an audience, even if the viewership is
limited to self-reflection. These themes are present in all of Walsh’s works, which I will
briefly demonstrate below (aiming to develop this argument in greater detail throughout the
dissertation). This discussion of Walsh and the trajectory of his career aims not to provide an
exhaustive analysis of each play and its thematic importance to my argument. Rather, I
group his plays into three distinct categories which reflect his stylistic evolution. Each section
reflects on the use of memory, ritual and performance in a broad sense, and I leave the
detailed investigation for the individual chapters.

Methodology, Scope, and Justification

My study will provide a basis for examining Walsh’s plays beyond these three main
strands of scholarship. This research will instead explore Walsh’s oeuvre as a whole, using
specific examples from his plays in production and on the page to highlight his formal and
thematic focus on memory, ritual, and performance. By examining Walsh’s work in this
context, I will also demonstrate the ways in which a study of memory reflects issues of
ritualized performance. To do this, my theoretical work includes a Practice-as-Research
project whereby I directed three Walsh plays and documented the rehearsal and production
process. Theatre is a practiced art and to consider only the texts as sites for theoretical
discussions would omit Walsh’s dramaturgical focus. Everything he writes implies
performance, just as they also depict revisions of memory and sacred, secular rituals of
world-making.

See the Appendix for a detailed plot description of all Enda Walsh’s plays.
Introduction

Rather than organize the study chronologically, I have chosen to present the argument in relation to the thematic issues at play in Walsh’s works. This methodology uses each aspect as a building block for the next topic so a narrative can be constructed which highlights the interconnected nature of these aspects. Each chapter will begin with an outline not only of the actions within the plays but an examination of the original production, followed by a methodological overview of the chapter’s theoretical framework. Then I will provide close readings of the texts to propose and support my arguments regarding each theme: memory, ritual, performance, and production. In the conclusion of each chapter, the study will expand the claims to consider application to theatre generally, noting the influences the claims would have in other contexts beyond Walsh’s plays. I include the groundwork and reasoning for my methodological choices below to provide an explicit statement about the organization of my arguments. However, much of the theoretical work will be examined within the chapters themselves alongside the plays rather than foregrounding the discussions here. It is essential to clarify, especially given the larger implications of theatre production generally, that each chapter is not only necessary for the following one but for the overall conclusion I will put forward here – which is that theatrical production reflects larger claims about Ritual, Memory, and Performance Studies.

The first chapter analyzes memory and re-memory within four early plays by Walsh. I use the work of theorists such as Henri Bergson, Astrid Erll, Andreas Huyssen, and Maurice Halbwachs, among others, to situate my claims. The plays are used as examples of the unstable structures of memory alongside the human desire to codify the reality of what is remembered. The exploration begins with a consideration of Disco Pigs as one of Walsh’s first, formative experiences as a theatre-maker. The characters Pig and Runt come to represent the re-enactors of their own stories as a way to escape from an otherwise oppressive world in Cork City. Walsh’s trajectory is then traced to his use of re-membering and
storytelling in *bedbound*, which examines the relationship between memory and imagined creation. The conditions of the repeated performance in this play present another example of the repeated trope of characters physically and mentally trapped within their own version of reality. This examination leads to the consideration of confinement within memory in *How These Desperate Men Talk*. As an experiment in memorized performance, this play’s story puts an insurmountable strain on not only the relationship of the characters to each other but on their connection to world outside their room. The two characters cannot escape the memory of the past, but they cannot precisely recall it either, leaving a middle ground where they must continue to survive but cannot ever end their struggle. Similarly, *The Small Things* presents two characters who repeat a story over and over to the ticking of a clock. They have rehearsed the memories and timed them to perfection, but this re-membering does not provide the escape they desire. If anything, their memories continue to splinter and become less clear. But because the statements are often uncontested, the two characters, like the others in the plays from this chapter, cannot and will not entirely free themselves from the bonds that memory has over their repeated rituals.

These obsessions with the past and the correct interpretation of these worlds require the physical bodies and presence of the characters. The structures of memory on which the four early plays rely demand that the onstage entities attempt to re-live the moments from their past. Continuing that notion, the second chapter examines the ways in which rituals reinforce memories even as they perpetuate an obsession with revising the present understanding of the past. Theories from Catherine Bell, Charles Taylor, Erving Goffman and Victor Turner introduce considerations of secular rites and sacred performance in everyday life. To make this case, I use Walsh’s *misterman* (1999) and the later revision to *Misterman* (2011) as examples of world-making with ritual. A ritual is a repeated, structured process that creates meaning and presents it for the consumption of a community to fulfill their
understanding of the world and its structures. Therefore, the play’s protagonist Thomas Magill represents an attempt to remake his belief system and support it with evidence of his re-membered experiences. More broadly, ritual implies a sacred adulation of actions and precise reconstitution of past events, which are only presented through the medium of the ritual itself. For the characters in *The New Electric Ballroom*, the didactic nature of their re-performance reflects the need to convey a particular world-view so much that even the inclusion of an outside character, Patsy the fishmonger, is changed from a happy revelation to a devastation of any hope for escape from the ritual. The repeated telling of the story takes on an aesthetic reminiscent of the Catholic Mass – knowledgeable participants present a privileged knowledge using props and costumes as a fulfillment of the memory’s reality in the present. In this way, *The New Electric Ballroom* and *misterman* exemplify the connections between what is remembered and what is re-membered in the enactment of a ritual. The performance of these pasts requires a specific structure and even when the players change, the end result reinforces old views.

These performances of ritualized memory necessarily require the characters to embody and invest in the play within the play structure. But even with the most precise attention to detail, the story becomes altered over time because performance and the present are ephemeral even if they live on in re-enactment and ritual. Richard Schechner, Rebecca Schneider, and Jon McKenzie are put into dialogue with the plays of this chapter to discuss the ways in which all things can be analyzed as performance. *The Walworth Farce* demonstrates the complex layering of these issues within a performance context. Walsh uses a highly stylized form – farce – to confront the thematic importance of fractured memories and their perpetuation through repeated rituals of storytelling. In this way, the memory that is performed (Dinny’s) lives on in the physical realm even as Sean refuses to subscribe to that reality because his memory clings to what he saw on his father’s last day in Cork. The play
introduces questions about belief and reality within the world of the story, the lives of the three men in the room, and the larger context of isolated communities in a major city. The idealized past that the men perform reflects these issues and the confluence of memory, ritual, and performance, but it stays firmly in recent memory as a complex web of (mis)information transmitted in this daily re-enactment. In a different kind of revision, Walsh revises Homer’s *Odyssey* with his own version – *Penelope*. Part social commentary on the Irish Banking Crisis, part existential exploration of love and performed illusions, *Penelope* exists in multiple realms of thematic importance because of its textual presence and original production in Germany and English-language premiere in Ireland. The dual nature of a published play as something that requires performance comes especially to the fore in this story in which characters muse on the past while also inventing ways of conveying their adoration for an idealized memory of the woman they desire. Political commentary appears simultaneously with existential considerations of how one performs identity, what the reality of selfhood is, and the layers of performativity as social and individual constructions.

These issues are all considered within the larger understanding that plays are produced and performed for an audience. Even in the earliest stages of rehearsal, performance rituals and re-membering of the previous attempts at a scene resonate. I argue that Performance-as-Research methodologies, such as those put forth by Robin Nelson and Anna Pakes, are ideal examining claims of re-membered performance. To assess these claims, I directed a production titled *The Enda Walsh Project* at National University of Ireland, Galway in March 2015. The project included three plays – *How These Desperate Men Talk*, *My Friend Duplicity*, and *The Small Things* – which were performed in one sitting without an interval. The production offered a practical application of the theoretical claims I make in the dissertation. I kept notes on the process, from the earliest design meetings to the middle of rehearsals to final reflections after the performance. Additionally, the production
team and actors reflected on the act of making theatre and its ephemeral quality. I did not prompt the production team or actors to speak about memory, ritual, or performance, but in the keeping of journals and reflection on theatre, they came to see the similarity between Walsh’s works and the undertaking of a production. Designs change over time as the production comes to its public performances just as much as an actor’s role gains nuance in the rehearsal and performance process. The fourth chapter examines these issues and the ways in which the memory of a previous meeting or rehearsal can influence the final product. The post-show reflections take on another aspect; the re-membered experiences foreground how the actors’ performances changed on each night, based on their mood, the audience, or the pacing of the other actors. I examine these responses to the process as a practical synthesis of the previous chapters’ theoretical claims.

The study finishes with an examination of a recent Walsh play. In the conclusion, I assess the applicability of my argument to *Ballyturk* (2015) and consider theatre production as a process of re-membered rituals of performance. I demonstrate the similarities between *Ballyturk*’s characters 1 and 2 as makers of a forgotten world on the one hand and Dad and Daughter in *bedbound* on the other. I also draw connections between the cuckoo clock calling 1 and 2 to action and Ada, Breda and Clara’s endless need to repeat the story of *The New Electric Ballroom*. We can also show that the performance of an idealized past world that only exists in 1 and 2’s minds can be similar to *The Walworth Farce*’s performed story.

I assert that this study represents the first full-length examination of Enda Walsh’s works and their importance to the Irish theatre canon. This research also expands on claims made by performance theorists such as Judith Butler, Marvin Carlson, and Diana Taylor, among others, while also introducing new avenues for studying theatre in performance and providing a model for testing theoretical claims in practical applications. These performance studies analyses are expanded when taken in consideration with conceptions of memory by
Introduction

scholars such as Paul Ricoeur, Emilie Pine, Pierre Nora, and Suzan-Lori Parks. Memory and performance are linked within the field of ritual studies as well. Catherine Bell, Charles Taylor, and Victor Turner’s key studies in the socio-cultural constructs of belief systems cannot be disassociated from the performance and revision of memory. This dissertation cross-references these connected forms of criticism to eventually influence the ways in which a theatre-maker can use theory to affect practice. Practice-as-Research techniques are not new, but the implementation of ritual, memory, and performance theories in production is. These themes are especially pertinent to contemporary theatre practice in which process and performance are both viewed as part of the impact for any particular production.
Works Cited


Introduction

London: Oberon, 2011. 515-520.


Chapter One: Memory

This chapter explores the place of memory in Enda Walsh’s works, referring to four of his shorter plays – *Disco Pigs* (1996), *bedbound* (1999), *How These Desperate Men Talk* (2004), and *The Small Things* (2005). By exploring these works, I aim to examine the ways in which memory reconfigures the past in the present and the ways in which re-membering actively repeats and revises what are supposedly stable definitions of reality. The chapter opens with a discussion of key theoretical concepts by Suzan-Lori Parks, Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Connerton and Pierre Nora, among others. These concepts are used to introduce memory as a socially constructed process built upon ‘lieux de memoire’ (places of memory) alongside the act of re-membering and Rep&Rev. Then the chapter examines each play in relation to these claims, moving chronologically from each play’s first production. I structure the argument around the plays to demonstrate each work’s successively more complex consideration of memory as a fluid, malleable process. In the end, I consider the broader questions of re-membering in theatre and culture. I do not intend to make grandiose claims that speak to all culture globally; instead, the conclusion will point to theatre as a ritual of memory-making and revision and explore the ways in which this theme can be seen in human experiences more generally.

Memory and the Mind as Lieux de Memoire

The phrase ‘try to remember’ necessarily engenders discussions of the fallibility and inconsistency of memory. As the phrase notes, however, this act takes effort and is subject to the limitations of cognition. In a similar way, Enda Walsh’s plays depict characters at work within spaces of memory. Characters in *bedbound*, for example, are trapped in a world that requires words, and the only words they have come from memories of what came before; therefore, the entire world of *bedbound* is a space of re-membering. The emphasis of analysis should be placed on the process of creating memory. As with ritual, the ways in which people
remember often rely on a repeated action or attempt to revive the past. In many of his plays, but especially the shorter plays included here, Walsh’s characters engage in the process of remembering and re-membering (terms I will differentiate and define below). In the preface to his first collection of plays, Walsh describes the shorter plays in the collection as “exercises in form and atmosphere more than anything else” (Walsh 2011, ix). This statement highlights the extent to which stylistic experimentation characterizes much of Walsh’s early plays. That is to say, these plays explore ideas of repetition and memory revision without the trappings of realism. The playwright’s works disrupt notions of truth and reality as objective creations; or rather ideas are knowingly constructed as a means of vindicating the past and validating a certain version of history through repetition and revision.

Before moving on, it is necessary to differentiate my use of the terms “remember” and “re-member,” for many of my claims are linked to one term or the other, and sometimes to both. As noted in the introduction, re-membering is an active attempt to unearth an individual or communal history. This process requires enactment and embodiment of a past that is both unattainable and ever-present. The characters in Disco Pigs, bedbound, How These Desperate Men Talk, and The Small Things, in particular, physically enact memories in an attempt to curate versions of the past as real experiences, even if the memory is imagined. On the other hand, these plays also depict characters who are obsessed with remembering correctly. That is to say, these onstage figures use traces and fragments of the past in their minds to create versions of a story that reflect the mental images they believe. As an example of each, the character John in How These Desperate Men Talk covers his eyes as he speaks about a memory that he tries to cling to as real and believable, even though he has admitted he does not know if it is true; that is remembering. As an example of re-membering, in Disco Pigs, Pig and Runt have created a world based on their shared memories of exclusion as children and thus use a language that was invented during this time, constantly reinscribing a version
of history that fits their current experience and worldview. The terms are also used below to
demonstrate the malleability of memory, whether in the imagination or in a physicalized
attempt at reality. Walsh’s characters utilize both extensively, and the revisionist tendencies
infect their tendencies toward re-making their own versions of history.

Although the ideas are inextricably linked, for simplicity’s sake “remembering” will
be used to describe a mental activity, and “re-membering” will be used to represent a physical
embodiment of a memory. To put it more explicitly, as Frederic Bartlett writes in
Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology, “Remembering is not the re-
excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative
reconstruction, or construction” (213). Here we see that, although taking place in the
imagination, remembering is still an active building of the world – it is a vision of history,
personally interpreted. Bartlett uses the words ‘construction’ within an imagined space to
assert that, while not literally tangible, the memories created in a person’s mind represent a
world into which that person can (imaginatively) retreat. To speak about the past or tell a
story is an act of remembering and recreating which can provide a version of reality imagined
into existence.

This understanding of remembering can be further explicated through reference to
Maurice Halbwachs’s seminal study On Collective Memory. Halbwachs asserts that a person
recalling a past event to his or her mind is enacting a ritual of embodied memory within the
community (Halbwachs 38 and 84). But this argument does not recognize the agency of the
individual as active creator of the past in the present (even if it is only within the mind).
Instead, Paul Connerton’s How Societies Remember highlights both the effectiveness of the
subjective experience of remembered past and the apparently objective (society-wide) view
of history. He argues that “physical, social, and interactional participation in social events
and rituals… creates ‘mental spaces’ in which memory is reinforced, recontextualized, and so
reconstructed” (37). Again, there is a direct call for action and participation. Without the consent of the person remembering, society’s larger construction cannot take hold. Memory is best served as a ritual, a physical connection to the past through enacted re-membering. The act, therefore, becomes a site of memory by virtue of its ability physically to reinvent through memory.

On the other hand, once the story becomes a physical reconstitution of previous voices or acts, that enacted story is re-membering. In “Possession,” Suzan-Lori Parks succinctly argues that to “re-member [is] putting the body back together” (Parks 5). The literal and figurative meanings of this statement are integral to my use of the term. By re-membering, Walsh’s characters are in fact playing the bodies of the past (reviving them, in a sense), physically placing them into a new order, and creating a new understanding of a given memory. In a similar way to the people in Parks’s works, Walsh’s characters “are not moving from A → B but rather, for example, from A → A → A → B → A. Through such movement we refigure A. And if we continue to call this movement FORWARD PROGRESSION… then we refigure the idea of forward progression” (Parks 9-10). Both Parks and Walsh write characters who inhabit physical worlds in which re-membering takes place, but their characters also have the ability and agency to remember. Because of this link between forward progression and a return to what is already experienced/known, the idea of what evolution comprises is itself transformed.

Pierre Nora’s term lieux de memoire (places of memory) is instructive when discussing the way in which societies and people work to actively transform ways of remembering and re-membering the past. These places of memory help reconstitute the past by means of memorial markers and symbolic reinscription of what was known. Nora defines the lieux de memoire as places “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself… where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn”
Chapter 1 - Memory

(1989, 7). The tear has separated that which we remember, which is a function of human understanding, and the place itself, which is constantly overlaid with meaning and memory but deteriorates in precise meaning because of the layering. Nora differentiates between the term *milieux de memoire* (sites of memory) because of the slow disappearance of these locations where memory ‘actually’ occurred. These *milieux* are not the opposite of *lieux*; rather they are tangential to what occurred simply because of the separation from the original space and event now re-membered elsewhere or even in the cultural/personal memory. This distance is integral to understanding the function of memory. As noted previously, the past can never be recreated precisely as it was, even in highly structured ritual repetitions. Rituals represent memories in action; they are the embodied version of a cognitive structure. But these actions are necessarily *lieux de memoire* (not *milieux*) due to the transitory nature of experience.

In *Disco Pigs* (1996), Pig and Runt have constructed an imaginary version of Cork City, a version in which they are the king and queen, reveling in their invented language from their childhood imagination. It is only when the protagonists are confronted with the consequences of the reality that exists beyond their self-made world that they recognize the severity of their delusions. Walsh’s *bedbound* (2000) similarly depicts the confrontation of idealized memory of self versus harsh realities. Dad literally built walls around the greatest shame of his past – Daughter, whom he hid from the world because of polio while trying to gain fame and fortune as a furniture salesman. *How These Desperate Men Talk* (2004) and *The Small Things* (2005) both depart from these literal physical settings of memory toward a mentally created, remembered version of the past. The former follows two men who use the threat of a gun to try to recount the events concerning a murder that one of them might have committed. The plot is deliberately vague to build tension around an illusion of responsibility for something of which they have only invented memories. Similarly, Man and Woman in
The Small Things have built a precisely timed and calibrated storytelling routine which they use in order to try to recall their shared experiences. The pair are isolated from the town in which the events originally took place, but now they have created lieux de memoire to replace what was once a physical reality. In this way, each of these plays explores personal history as re-membered in the present because the past is only able to be experienced through its revivification.

While Nora’s assumption that places of memory have disappeared entirely is problematic, his theory provides a good starting point for discussion of social/communal remembering. The differences between the types of remembering, noted above, may seem to indicate that Walsh’s works confirm Nora’s claims, but I will argue that they take the lieux de memoire to a level at which they become the actual places of memory. That is, mentally remembered versions of personal narrative become so physically engrained into a person’s being that there is often very little distinction between the ritualized experience and what is considered the original reality as it was lived in the past. Obviously, the implications of an unstable memory will complicate claims of absolute truth or reality, but the cognitive drive of each character’s mind provides the subjective (individual) belief in an apparently objective (communal) reality. These are complex terms, but they need to be discussed in this way because the characters (serving as metonyms for people who are pushed to an extreme) define their world based on these complex belief systems.

Various fields of ‘hard science’ have long attempted to explain the workings of memory. However, fields such as neuroscience recognize the current inability to define explicitly the workings of the brain – especially regarding memory. As noted in the opening

---

8 I will not go into detail of neuroscience, psychology or behavioral science papers and studies that have been conducted. However, a brief search of the terms “memory” and “neuroscience” of Science journals brings up more than 3,000 peer-reviewed articles since 1945 regarding the ways in which people and animals recall memories, ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder’s effects on memory to influencing memory responses in zebrafish.
to this section, breakthroughs and new findings push the scientific understanding of human consciousness forward in a literal sense, but it does not work in the same way as artistic (and theatrical) engagement with the way people remember. The attempt to use facts and evidence as the groundwork for academic proof is the same between areas of research; every claim must be sufficiently supported by ‘proof’ or it will be easily refuted. The same is true of people who construct memories who use citational methods to assert authority over the past. If we take Nora’s assertion that “Memory is an absolute, while history is always relative” (1989, 3), then it should be possible to ‘prove’ what is real or not regarding a person’s memory; or rather, a person (individual) remembers what should represent a ‘true’ version of reality even without scientific backing.

However, difficulties arise when making the assertion that subjective experience can be extrapolated to include an objective narrative. Derrida, among other postmodern scholars, has argued that all texts are constructions based upon language, which is required to communicate. His famous quote “il n’y a pas de hors-text” translates to “there is no outside-text” – meaning that every aspect of society is based on its reference to another word of an equally constructed nature (158-59). The idea of language as something which is made through use and revision proves useful in a discussion of Walsh. In fact, it is essential to recognize that constructed nature and limits of language and the extents to which someone will go to make words and memories fit their worldview. Narrative, like language, is a construct; stories are part of the socially made order in that they represent a constructed, subjective version of the past. Given this, the communal experience of remembering always includes the narrative structure taught by experience with others. Since a person is necessarily subject to experience within a community, it is impossible to extricate oneself from these limitations of language, history, and society. Granted, these claims become overly

---

9 Mark Turner argues that all conscious thought is filtered through the brain’s desire to craft a coherent story: “Narrative imagining – story – is the fundamental instrument of thought” (4).
theoretical if the need is to make a very simple claim that has been repeated throughout history: humans are social beings. As Barbara Misztal explains, “While it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than a personal act; memory exists through its relation with what has been shared with others” (Misztal 5). This argument relates to the next chapter on ritual as well as the present section on memory (and will then influence the chapter on performance). While it is overly reductive to go along with Derrida’s theory that everything is a construction (although this view is accurate, to a point), the study of Walsh’s work is better served using Misztal’s consideration of memory as a social act.

The apparent construction/transformation, however, requires another critique of the social process that is ritual and memory. Even if an individual is able to revisit and revise a specific moment repeatedly, is this act not also socially inflected to include cultural constructs? By constantly remembering, does that person ever form a consciousness of his or her own existence in the present? To answer this kind of question, Connerton asserts that “we may say that our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order” (3). That said, this claim may lead to a cynical view that there is no such thing as the present or the future, but such an interpretation misses the larger point. People remember to situate their current experience against what has gone before. In Walsh’s plays, this resituating becomes the social imperative according to which the characters always act and re-member. Without their constructed memories, they are directionless, unable to understand and configure their actions or identity for a meaning or purpose. Through these personal encounters with history, characters in Walsh’s works construct opinions about society and themselves.

Remembering (as is also true for re-membering), as an act of willful creation, demonstrates the ability of micro-communities to invent histories just as powerful as larger societies or states. Walsh’s onstage worlds depict characters in microcosms that have been
tightly constructed to include only a sliver of experience, often an experience of a very personal nature. Emilie Pine connects this type of remembering to the genre of memoir. She writes that: “Memoir is founded on the assumption that memory is the storehouse of identity, and that in memoir that identity can not only be recalled, but also retrospectively shaped” (56). The worldview and identity can be presented in the way that an individual wishes. This claim also demonstrates a specific level of social engagement based on the ways in which the author writes about himself or herself as opposed to others within the narrative. Although it might seem slightly incongruous to suggest that Walsh’s characters are writers of their own memoirs onstage, similar aspects of strategic creative process appear in Walsh’s plays. Many of the characters rely on physical implements (Diana Taylor’s concept of ‘the archive’) to prove the veracity of the reality they wish to construct from the past. For example, John’s hands are covered in dried blood in How These Desperate Men Talk, which is proof enough that he murdered someone even though he has no memory of the event (136). In The Small Things, the children’s shoes force Man to remember the past (163). In both Disco Pigs and bedbound, the voices and bodies of the characters onstage depict the memory simply by their existence: Pig and Runt embody their shared child’s play in speech and physical storytelling (45), Dad and Daughter similarly re-enact Dad’s history by taking on roles of characters in both body and voice (102-03). These physical archiving tasks manifest in each of the four plays in this section as an embodied re-membering. Taylor’s concept of the archive and repertoire provides the basis for many of these claims of revisionist memorialization in Walsh’s plays. The fact that these performed memoirs exist for the characters highlights what their memories depict is somehow sacred, even if only on a personal level.

By connecting the literary and theoretical act of remembering to the performative realm of re-membering, Walsh’s plays instigate a more direct and powerful commentary on what it means to relive the past. Once again referring to Emilie Pine’s work, she argues that
Performing remembrance begins as a process of constructing a version of the past, and the version that is presented is necessarily selective and shaped for consumption, so that... culture presents the past in ways that are accessible and salient to the audience with no direct or lived experience of the past which is being represented. Performance is also an ongoing process, being re-shaped constantly, so that it is iterated and reiterated, a process of repetition that creates a ritual of performance. (3-4)

The need for connection and translatability to an audience is integral to performance, especially in theatre. Given the performative nature of memory, the ability to enact or embody the past becomes the most readable way of translating what has remained important across time. The delineations between what actually occurred or not become less important to the remembering community (or individual) because what is ritualistically revived creates a world that is apparently real. The subjectivity of experience relies on memory and its repeated presentation in everyday life. When the stories create this re-membered world, the embodied version of history crystallizes, making that repetition the one against which others are measured on a daily basis.

The world-making aspects of remembering create complex narratives about a community and its belief systems. Similarly to my discussions on ritual, the exploration of memory relies on an unstable foundation that is both communally and individually constructed. This malleability derives from the fact that both the community and individual influence the other. As Jeffrey K Olick and Daniel Levy explain in their writings on collective memory, “[memory is] located in a contested terrain on which mythical and rational images of the past sometimes work together and sometimes do battle, but [which] always shape identity and its transformation” (934). Because the characters within Walsh’s works are active (re)creators of history, they are in constant battle with themselves about the truth which they purport to follow. The onstage figures enact what is (often) a subconscious memorialization of the past — whether through the recounting of a story or habitual action. These conflicts of what a person chooses to remember are the contested territory in which
Walsh makes his work. The memory of a certain place, time, or reality becomes the world in which these characters reside. If the events in a memory or ritual do not subscribe to a community’s way of thinking, the objects, people, and surroundings are pressed into service against their will to revise and re-make the narrative. The agency of the remembering figure onstage becomes both a generative act and a destructive one. And it is through these fictional characters that an audience is led to question various versions of memory as something consciously constructed.

The ability to tell and re-tell stories and memories becomes an act of personal repetition and revision in Walsh’s plays. In Disco Pigs, bedbound, How These Desperate Men Talk, and The Small Things, the narratives all point to versions of the past that have marked the ways in which the characters understand the world. However, the onstage figures recognize the process that will keep them safe from the outside world as they all remain in their imagined worlds (even the ones who seem to escape their repeated cycles, such as those of Runt in Disco Pigs and Woman in The Small Things). The performance of these re-membered events demonstrates the qualities that necessarily construct the worlds of each character – whether it is the boxed bed in bedbound or the imagined Cork of Disco Pigs. The characters take what they remember and put it into action in an attempt to embody what they cannot physically create beyond words and associated actions.

This section’s consideration of memory as an active process of world-making, whether imagined or embodied, continues into the following discussion of performance. In the following sections, I examine the ways in which Walsh depicts memory as an active process of re-membering through repetition and revision.
Chapter 1 - Memory

_Disco Pigs: Reconfigured Histories and Rejections of the Past_

From the outset, _Disco Pigs_ distinguishes itself as a representation of a memorially constructed world crafted by two teenagers with a clear bias in their storytelling. The question of authenticity in memory provides ample opportunity for debate and reconsideration within imagined worlds. However, by simplifying that discussion one does not allow the necessary complexities of human memory to come under scrutiny. Instead, it is useful to consider what Samuel Beckett, in his essay “Proust,” describes as “extreme cases [of] memory… so closely related to habit that its word takes flesh, and is not merely available in cases of urgency, but habitually enforced” (521). While this phrase could potentially be applied to most of Enda Walsh’s work, his first major success – _Disco Pigs_ – provides a particularly vivid example of words made flesh through repetition. The play demonstrates the power of words and routines, both of which act as implements for creating imagined “realities” that are separate from the reality that is perceived by the larger society. The extremity, as Beckett describes it, not only begins the process of world-making but also reinscribes it, doing so with the nonchalance associated with daily ritual. In this way, the sites of memory in which a person exists can be shaped through the act of submission to a process of perpetual revision. The ghosting, therefore, asserts a renewed power over what currently exists because the imagined reality of the past can no longer be separated from the present due to a person’s enactment of the constructed narrative.

In brief, _Disco Pigs_ follows the narrative of Pig and Runt, a boy and girl born minutes apart in the same hospital in Cork City, as they navigate the city on their seventeenth birthday. They are the only two characters who appear onstage, and the entirety of the performance rests on their ability to reconstruct their adventures in an empty space. To assert the creation (and continuation) of their individualized identities, Pig and Runt have invented a language and a world in which they are the protagonists. Runt describes it as follows:
An peeplah call me Sinead an call Pig Darren but one day we war playin in da playroom be-an animols on da farm an Darren play da Pig an I play da Runt! An dat wuz it!... So we grow up a bit at a dime an all dat dime we silen when odders roun. No word or no-ting. An wen ten arrive we squeak diffren way den odders… an we make a whirl where Pig an Runt jar king and queen!... But we make a whirl dat no one can live sept us two.

(15)

This excerpt gives a brief introduction to the style of speech and the way in which the characters interact on-stage. Pig and Runt are best friends because of their self-perpetuated exclusion from the world around them. When they are alone, they are in fact the king and queen whom Runt imagines, but in ‘Pork Sity,’ as they call it, the two outcasts imagine themselves as animals who are separated from the rest of humanity. For them, that imaginary role-playing has become the only version of reality that they understand.

Fig.1 – Pig and Runt perform their simultaneous birth. Photo: The Irish Times.

The pair has formed their identities as something shared between them but enacted for the rest of the world. They cannot physically extricate themselves from their existence in Cork, so they continue repeating the same actions that they have carried out for years. At the start of the play, Pig and Runt begin their narrative, “They mimic the sound of an ambulance like a child would... They also mimic the sound a pregnant woman in labour makes” (3). This opening description sets the tone for the entire piece because the characters are immediately
Chapter 1 - Memory

portrayed as children playing pretend; this is the lens through which audience can view their performance. Walsh sets up this dynamic so that their shortcomings in social development are both understandable and, perhaps, more tragic: in a sense, Pig and Runt perform as grown-up versions of their childhood selves. They have aged physically, but have not developed into social beings beyond their invented language and playtime. Instead of playing in their backyards, they have made the entire city their imagined playing area.

This ‘playing’ has led to a rejection of social norms in favor of that which can be performed to safely uphold their version of reality and its standards. Pig and Runt recount instances in which they experienced verbal and physical abuse, but when they add other people’s voices to the world, the narratives that they tell do not always match each other. The pair use these imagined moments of survival as emblems of pride; they project their value-system into the larger world rather than fitting into the conventions that are deemed acceptable by society at large. When they see kids around the city, making their way to school, they react as follows:

Runt: I look a deez students yeah, I tink a all da learnin das goin in ta dem, I tink a da books dey do read all stack tall inside dem oblong heads, I tink a da exam an all, all dat A B C plus an minus F an all… an Pig…
Pig: Wad now ol girl?
Runt: Wad do dey wanna be?
Pig: Dey wanna be der mams an dads a course!
Runt: Wadda we wanna be, Pig?
Pig: Leff alone, Righ pal!
Runt: Righ, Pig.
(12-13)

More than anything, they celebrate their rejection of society at large. They imagine a world where escape is possible, and in which they can reject what others want and instead insert their own meaning. Arjun Appadurai argues, “In dreams… individuals even in the most simple societies have found the space to refigure their social lives, live out proscribed emotional states and sensations, and see things that have then spilled over into their sense of
ordinary life” (5). While it might be a stretch to call Pig and Runt’s version of ‘Pork Sity’ a society, their micro-community does inflect the ways in which the everyday intersects with their imagined world. Similar to Appadurai’s claim, Pig and Runt build a world in which they revel in their outsider status, and the childish games instead becomes the norm by which they judge others. The rebellious teens have become so deeply entrenched in their identities as Pig and Runt that, even when pretending to take part in relatively normal social interactions, they have difficulty removing their skewed perspective from their outside experiences.

It is imperative to recognize that Pig and Runt’s ‘skewed perspective’ is simply the individualization of memory insofar as the subjective nature of reality allows certain beliefs about a person’s world. But to put this viewpoint into a more practical application, Pig and Runt simply invent a world where they have control even though it is situated within a larger realm of others. Nicholas Miller, in his book Modernism, Ireland, and the Erotics of Memory, describes “the forging of Ireland’s cultural and political identity in relation to its past has always been rooted in other, foreign technologies and languages of memory” (11). While Miller uses the political landscape of an entire country, I contend that Pig and Runt exemplify a similar experience. The pair exploit the possibilities of memory in the manipulation and construction of their imagined reality through the creation of a new language and identity structure. But because it is entrenched within the larger social structures, Pig and Runt still fall victim to its influences.

As the play progresses, there are minor breaches of their reality which can be associated with maturation. The faith in which they place most of their remembered reality begins to fade against the harsh experiences of the present. Pig and Runt habitually go to a disco to play a game of faux-couple, whereby Runt tempts a man into kissing her and then Pig swoops in and retaliates for the duped man’s unintentional offense. The game often leads to violence enacted by Pig upon an unsuspecting would-be wooer, which Runt encourages by
playing along as the girlfriend. They have performed these roles many times, a pastime they both seemed to enjoy. On this day, however, Pig tries to kiss Runt to reinforce the reality of their imagined relationship, and she rejects his advances. She struggles and pushes him away, and tries to keep their boyfriend-girlfriend act as a pretense, but Pig does not accept this dismissal. In performance, this represents the first schism between the pair (20). Shortly after that scene, Runt broods while Pig imagines in great detail what it would be like to have sex with her, believing that it would be the cementing of their relationship. In this day-dream, he uses the past tense as if the consummation of their relationship has already occurred. In this way, Pig supersedes the construction of their world to include a remembered event that he wishes into existence, much like the perpetuation of their childhood selves.

A world where control is asserted through pasts that are imagined but never existed involves a conscious selection of memories. The pair formerly knew the boundaries of their imagined playtime, but now they have diverged as their games come closer to reality. When confronted with the fact that Runt does not subscribe completely to the illusion they had created, Pig redoubles his belief in the power of their shared past. He tries to salvage the connection they shared by reasserting the fiction that formerly constructed their world. He says:

I wanna a huge space ship rocket la, take it up to da cosmos shiny stars all twinkle twinkle an I shit in my saucer an have a good look down on da big big blue. Dere be a button named Lazer dat blast all da shitty bits dat ya’d see, yeah. I press dat button an Lazer would fireball all below an den back down I fly to Crossheaven happy day all das left a Pork Sity is my roam and your roam an da Palace Disco cause das all dat matters, Runt… ress is jus weekday stuff.

(18)

Pig wants to restrict possible intrusions into this shared reality, and does so by telling Runt about a world that features just the two of them. He has imagined the end of existence, and that is what he wants. His version of memory soon becomes the only way for him to understand the past, and Runt slowly moves away from those imagined versions of reality.
When she finds a man at the Palace Disco who flirts with her, Pig can only see the previous games they have played. Runt’s attempt to leave Pig through forming a brief connection with another man reinforces Pig’s idea that Runt will be his. He protects the memory of what never happened, hoping that he can return to the imagined version they spent seventeen years constructing.

After Pig destroys Runt’s hope for a normal relationship (and actually murders the man who tries to kiss her at the Palace Disco), she delivers a monologue while Pig stands apart from her. She has left ‘Pork Sity’ and created a new world. Runt says, “No mo all dis play an pain! So so-long to all dat pox! … I wan fur sumthin else! Sumthin differen! Sumthin differen! Fucking freedom!” (29). It is only once she has the illusion destroyed that it becomes clear that she had been suffocated by Pig’s will and need for her. Runt rejects the ‘play and pain’ as something that is not part of who she wants to be. She rejects the idealized version of their past selves. As Emilie Pine notes, “anti-nostalgia’s vision frames the past as inherently unstable and traumatic, encouraging audiences to be grateful that they have escaped. Anti-nostalgic memory thus enables audiences to maintain a traditional form of cultural identity, one that is defined by its relationship to the past” (8). This anti-nostalgia constructs Runt as an outside viewer of her own past and gives her the ability to look back and see the stagnation of her social development because of Pig’s influence. Because she repeatedly idolized the dream of otherness, Runt never wanted to be part of the world around her. But when the pair finally gain acceptance into a valued place in society – the Palace Disco – she must confront the brutality of these false memories and the imagined world the pair created.

During the final few sentences, Runt becomes Sinead. The newly invented persona is re-membered in the present from the imagined identity she wished she had. In performance, she transforms vocally and physically when she says,
The dawn of a new day provides the impetus for the female protagonist’s evolution. She literally must re-learn the ways in which she speaks and acts. Sinead sees past the veneer and begins to wonder, much like adolescents coming into their own, where life will lead her now that she has been forced to move beyond what was comfortable and safe for so long. Emilie Pine’s notion of anti-nostalgia places Sinead in the role of the audience, seeing her own past from the present, where she can judge and question what has come before and what is still to come.

It is at this moment that Walsh’s dramatic re-construction of memory takes place: characters and audience alike recognize the problem of revised versions of the past, and yet they are perpetuated out of habit for fear of the unknown. *Disco Pigs* was one of Walsh’s first critical successes and provides a suitable starting place for my consideration of these memorial revisions. As noted above, Pig and Runt only explicitly recount the past through imagined performances of events, such as their births or Pig’s sexual fantasy with Runt. Walsh’s later plays, however, depict characters who more fully embrace the revisionist mode of memory-making. *Disco Pigs* began an obsession with the theme of memory that future plays would push toward more explicitly performative versions of narrative manipulation.

**Re-membering through Storytelling and *bedbound***

Enda Walsh’s *bedbound*, originally produced at the 2000 Dublin Theatre Festival, served as an important marker in the development of his aesthetic. The play opens on a literal boxed set: “There is a large box in the centre of the stage made out of plasterboard. Suddenly the wall facing the audience crashes to the ground. A light comes up on a small child’s bed
inside the box… With the upstage (sic) wall on the ground the bed is now surrounded on three sides by plasterboard” (101). While this form may seem to be a repetition of Thomas Kilroy’s *Talbot’s Box*¹⁰ (which was noted for the stage being encased almost entirely in a large box), Walsh’s exploration of characters trapped within the confines of their memory deviates from the revision of a larger, national narrative (as Kilroy’s play did) in favor of a more personal, intimate, and unforgiving history.

The intent and focus Walsh uses to construct his staged worlds relies on theatricality and the performativity of space. Judith Butler’s notion of performativity as “a stylized repetition of acts” is particularly instructive and helpful in expanding on the idea that not only action but spaces are able to perform (270). The history associated with certain rituals and *milieux* dictates the memories that form and are sustained across time because of its connection to enactments of the past. If we return to Derrida and Richard Schechner’s notions that every action is a citation of what has come before, and is, therefore, a performance of memory, then Walsh’s use of a boxed bed as the staging area for remembering the past becomes critical to its storytelling. To see the play performed inscribes a different layering of meaning because an audience is forced to view the battling narratives through the frame of the set piece itself, which further highlights the structured nature of the two figures encased by the box. The performativity of the space tells a story about the type of play the audience will see even before the performance begins. The characters enact the memorialization of their existence simply by existing in the bed – which, in some productions, is surrounded by layers of plasterboard that have encroached upon the living space.

¹⁰ First performed at the Abbey Theatre in October 1977, *Talbot’s Box* by Thomas Kilroy explored the life and death of Matt Talbot, a working-class Dublin man who eschewed public performances of piety for his own private asceticism. The set begins encased in a large box with the front wall falling at the beginning of the play to expose the inner workings of the play and Talbot’s life (11).
Olan Wrynn’s set design (above) for Asylum Productions’ 2003 performance of *bedbound* depicts the layers of boxes that have been built to contain the characters, the bed, and their stories. In this way, the production focused the gaze of the audience onto a specific part of the stage, and by doing so attempted to heighten the recognition that these stories are performers whose memories serve a designed purpose. Walsh’s stage directions, therefore, dictate a space that enacts the palimpsestuous nature of memory and re-membered pasts.

The words used by the two onstage characters – Dad and Daughter – only further complicate the history because the audience sees the layers within the storytelling alongside the set’s indicated levels. In brief, the play follows Dad (also called Maxwell) and Daughter, a pair whose speech works together to recall the rise and fall of Max’s Cork-based furniture business – with Dad playing himself and Daughter doing the voices for all the other roles. But occasionally remembering becomes too much for Max, and he panics and falls back to the bed unable to continue (104, 113, 117), and Daughter must make up for the gap he leaves, inserting her own interpretations while also using the words he has given her. As the duo re-tells these stories of the past, the audience discovers that Dad built the box in his house to contain Daughter once she became polio-stricken. Over ten years, he made the box smaller and smaller by installing new walls, a sort of collapsing confinement to connect with the world closing in on the truth of his past. Maxwell has been forced into the bed because his
Chapter 1 - Memory

wife (Daughter’s former co-prisoner) died one week before the events of the play, and he is now the only one who can care for Daughter. But this is part of the past that he has been forced to confront rather than something he willingly recalls. Instead, Max prefers to reminisce on the moments of his glory, and only when Daughter is left to construct her version of the past does Dad contend with the painful events that led to the pair’s confinement.

The literal and figurative captivity presented onstage represents the lengths to which a person will go (in an extreme case) to remember the past in a certain way. Throughout the play, whenever Dad is ‘on’, he must speak his story. One of the first stage directions that punctuate Dad’s opening monologue reads as follows: “Dad explodes and performs a story from his childhood” (101). The storytelling process is a kind of outburst where the memory cannot be contained, and the only version of the past he can tell is the one he has rehearsed time and again in an effort to bolster his reputation. This involuntary remembering appears to cause Dad angst, leading to his falling back to the bed in a panic several times. His desire to escape the unveiling of the past builds in intensity until the third time this happens when Max tries to hide under the duvet. But after Daughter’s coaxing, he is unable to control himself and Dad continues with a distinct purpose. Paul Ricoeur argues that “the duty to remember consists not only in having a deep concern for the past, but in transmitting the meaning of past events to the next generation” (1999, 9). In a way, the subconscious reason for retelling the story is to instill a certain belief system in Daughter so that she will hear it enough times that she eventually believes it as truth. However, each iteration of his story moves further away from the original and into a realm of idealism. Ricoeur’s statement emphasizes the need to select details to make a history as a way of transmitting importance and identity. Because of this, the process of remembering the past is endlessly mediated through repetition.
Daughter, on the other hand, can only participate as a part of the world-making. In fact, she is complicit in the re-telling of half-truths about the past: the story that led to Maxwell’s rise from stock-room worker to owner of a furniture enterprise. Dad’s dedication to his version of the past has become so powerful that there is no other way that Daughter knows than his story. In her first major monologue, she says:

but I fill the silence and let him talk and I act out this Dan Dan and Sparkey and all the men/for what am I if I’m not my words?/I’m empty space is what I am” (105)

This statement, which comes after Dad’s first failure to continue, shows both her dependence on the storytelling (as the way in which she has formed her own identity) and also the fact that she cannot abide the silences that do not contain a story, even if it is the history Dad has constructed. His words define and confine her as much as the walls do, and empty space is the ultimate enemy when you have nothing but your talk and memories to create a world. Daughter’s identity hinges on a layering of characters that she has never met but which she believes are real. When she performs, it is in service of the story and always to take on roles that are “not Dad.” To claim the role Dad occupies would be tantamount to the destruction of his history and the creation of a new narrative. But she has been conditioned so that she can only conceive of herself within the given roles of Dan Dan and Sparkey – halfwit underlings in Max’s furniture business who constantly shower their boss with praise. Each time Dad breaks down in a panic, she sees an opportunity to enact the story correctly, a void that must be filled beyond Dad’s words.

During Max’s prolonged periods of panic, however, Daughter longs for something apart from what she has been given to perform. She seeks something like Nora’s *milieux de memoire*, but she can only repeat certain phrases and memories because of the limited agency she is granted in constructing the performance. The confinement to the story has been built on the relationship Maxwell forced on Daughter and his wife, the recently deceased mother who
Chapter 1 - Memory

is never seen but only referenced in passing. Daughter and her mother spent ten years in the
bed as Dad built the walls ever closer, closing them into a world he could control. The mother
would read books to Daughter, hoping that her imagination would be enough to give a sense
of freedom, but it has only served to incarcerate the young woman. Daughter says:

I watched my mam die so I must now read alone/can I read this story as she did/?my
big question is can I read the story as Mam did/?and fear won’t let me try/’cause
maybe I can’t… but I must… to break free/to get free/to be free as she and me did/to
be out/to be outside of this/to not have to think/but to allow a story of love to take me
up/to set me free/of this/of him/of me.
(105)

The constructed nature of memory has granted Daughter an idealized remembrance of her
mother. But what Daughter remembers is an embodiment of perfection that is in direct
opposition to her current experience. She can never truly encapsulate the imagined version of
her mother reading the story; to try to recreate it creates a rift between the memory and her
perceived lack of embodiment. She has thus become confined to the story that Dad has
constructed around her (which is endlessly reinscribed): that she is something shameful, and
that to remember anything but his version of the story would be an abomination. But
Daughter does not feel the need to criticize her performance in Dad’s narrative. She takes part
in the recreation of the past in hopes that something will set her free.

In the sections where Dad breaks down, it becomes clear that he needs her to maintain
his own sense of self and pride against the onslaught of the outside world. Dad and Daughter
are not simply bound to their need to re-constitute the past but also to a painful, symbiotic
relationship. The characters compel each other to spew out the history he has created. Neither
Dad nor Daughter wants to revive these memories, but they know no other way of existing.

Dad: You’ve got the words bubbling up from inside and making me spit out and talk,
ya little puke! Now I’ve started I can’t stop!
Daughter: We both can’t stop! That’s all part of it!
Dad: ‘It’? What the fuck is ‘it’?
Daughter (giggling): Me, you, the bed, time!
(Walsh 107)
This passage demonstrates the need for talk to generate meaning. Time cannot be stopped, and seemingly neither can the storytelling. They are bound to the story, the bed, and time itself. Daughter recognizes this need and revels in the repetition; she has been in the bed for more than ten years and knows she will never leave and so she takes solace in a world where she is at least partially responsible for the construction of its boundaries. Dad rejects this view – hence his panic attacks and the need for Daughter to continue the story.

Daughter’s unwavering continuation of speaking implies a dichotomy of interests between the two characters. She seems at ease and in control of the past, having spent far longer in the bed than Dad. He has yet to come to terms with the inability to leave. Try as he might to be silent and move on from the fear of his past, he does not recognize that memory is ingrained in his very being. The memory and his identity are inseparable; or as Philip Auslander has argued: “The live can exist only within an economy of reproduction” (53-4). Auslander’s claim specifically refers to the dual nature of something that is recorded ‘live’ – for example, a recording of a concert that was taken in real time but can be replayed. This idea of ‘liveness’ relates to bedbound in the sense that characters are both representations of past selves and also currently living versions of a performed persona. When Daughter plays Dan Dan, she reflects a re-membered experience by reproducing the details as closely as possible. That is to say, embodied performance and re-membering of the past is necessary and inextricably linked to memory – the most human of pastimes. These characters enact versions of their own personal histories whether they like it or not. This way of memorializing the past, while apparently terrifying, is in fact a form of unbidden nostalgia which creates a sense of safety and comfort through repetition.

Dad’s fractured but often idealized account of the past leads to these questions about nostalgia. Instead of Fredric Jameson’s notion of “nostalgia for the present,” an ever-vanishing now that cannot be grasped but for which people perpetually long, I would contend
that *bedbound* represents a nostalgia for what never was (279). Rather than focusing on ephemerality, Walsh’s play seems to hinge on Samuel Raphael’s argument that “Nostalgia… is famously not about the past but about felt absences or ‘lack’ in the present” (356). People look back at a moment and wish it was a certain way so many times (as Dad and Daughter have done in their own disparate ways), and those narratives become reality in their respective minds even though they have very little basis in the world beyond the walls of their confinement. The characters have invented a vision of life based on this longing for something that is missing now rather than what was. So they both create (in the present tense) fantasies of the past because they cannot change the actual events. They are in fact bound to the constructions that led them to their current cramped state.

Walsh’s play demonstrates the human modus operandi of looking backward as a mediation of the present and future through the past. Characters make memories and continue to re-member their histories as an act of identity creation in the now. In this way, it is not only impossible to ignore the past, but rather something that people, consciously or not, reject. There is safety in the confines of a known past. This is why repeated rituals provide such an important part of human identity. Rebecca Schneider refers to the human need for “ritual, in which, through performance, we are asked, again, to (re)found ourselves – to find ourselves in repetition” (105). The important issue here is the necessity of action, the ritual in the re-performative act. By physically and vocally creating, the past is inscribed in the body and cannot be denied. Hence, Dad’s attempts to convey the past toward an idealized version of himself leads him to painful panic attacks when the truth is confronted, which gives Daughter brief opportunities to inject the storytelling and past that she has remembered and lived. The denial of the past leads to pain while the uncovering of truth provides relief. But it

---

1 Jameson’s notion of ‘nostalgia for the present’ requires a certain type of production value in a performance that sets it in the present but uses reference points to a time period in the past. For example, Walsh’s *The New Electric Ballroom* or *The Walworth Farce* depict characters who wear clothing from 20-40 years prior and furnish their living spaces with items of those periods, longing for the past yet decidedly living in the now.
is this adoration of narrative that leads to Daughter’s positive view of the past when she was confined with her mother as opposed to the terrible situation that brought her there, to experience Dad’s cruelty.

Walsh’s *bedbound* provides a way of viewing not just the theatrical characters’ inability to escape the narratives into which they have been written but also the human desire for the molding of one’s own personal history. People generally prefer to skew events for their own personal benefit, but outside voices threaten to disrupt preferred narratives created for this type of identity and safety. But even with other versions of a communal history, it is impossible to discount the individual account as untrue, no matter how far from what apparently objective views might imply. Walsh’s play demonstrates that there is no such thing as an objective history. This is especially pertinent in discussions of memory and what is remembered beyond the individual. Adam Gopnik’s argument provides a useful way to consider these issues: “The past is so often unknowable not because it is befogged now but because it was befogged then, too, back when it was still present” (142). In this way, as Daughter says at the play’s beginning and end, “All that’s left is to start over” and to continue re-making identity in the present as a product of the undeniable past that is the human experience.

Where *Disco Pigs* presented characters stuck in the comfort and safety of child’s play, *bedbound* places characters in direct opposition to safety by forcing them to confront the horrors of their past. Dad and Daughter cannot (or will not) escape their confinement and instead choose to re-member their personal histories in a way that simultaneously obscures and reveals the painful truth of Dad’s abuse and Daughter’s polio. The characters use memory to live through the reproduction of these stories. *bedbound*, therefore, reflects a need to vindicate one’s place by crafting a modified narrative. In Walsh’s other plays, we see the need to create these identities magnified. Some characters, in searching for a preferred
version of memory, actively deny their memory and attempt to subvert its revelation. This obfuscation of self then produces an obsession with what is ‘true’ – a concept that strives for objectivity in a necessarily subjective world.

**How These Desperate Men Talk and the Task of Remembering Correctly**

Humanity finds salvation in perpetually recounting the past, an act which provides a sense of relief and purpose. But the characters in Walsh’s *How These Desperate Men Talk* must work harder to find the meaning behind their repetitions. Instead of a set memory that relies on objects and an attempt to regain the *milieux de memoire* from their personal *lieux*, the two men onstage instead revel in the expository nature of mind-made worlds. There is nothing in the room apart from two chairs, a table, and a gun. The fear of death provides the necessary catalyst to remember correctly, but neither character has the wherewithal to claim one version of the story’s truth over another. Instead, the process of remembering imbues the past-made-present with pathos and importance. The narrative is relevant and necessary because it gives them purpose, a reason for being. Irish memory theorist Barbara Misztal asserts that “Memory is used strategically; not merely to explain the group past but also to transform it into a reliable identity source for the group present” (3). The past for these two men is nebulous and fluid, leading to different tactics being used in an attempt to achieve an apparent truth. The memory must be repeated with precision to inspire a revelation of what really happened. The characters believe that by finding this stable version of the past they can be free of its weight. This play demonstrates the human ability (and proclivity) to seek truth even when it comes from an unknown (and unknowable) past that may or may not be entirely fictionalized.

Arguably one of Walsh’s more experimental pieces, *How These Desperate Men Talk* (originally premiered in German under the title *Fraternity*) presents a pair of men who re-tell
a scripted confession of murder and the reasons behind the violence. The play repeats the framework of one man controlling another by forcing him to recall a memory. But there is a twist in the plot: the men have been playing this game for a long time now and continually replay the scene as a process of individual and communal (re)discovery. The eponymous characters, Dave and John, are “two middle-aged men of similar appearance… [T]hey are men from suburbia” (131). The common names of Dave and John do little to differentiate them from any other middle-class men stuck in a daily routine. The main tension of the scene stems from the fact that John is holding a gun firmly against Dave’s head, forcing him to perform and remember. This threat drives the pair’s desire for truth; that is, the men have created this scenario in the hope that they will remember better if their lives depend on it. The audience is intended to catch up with the story as the play moves along; the narrative starts with references to an anniversary and to the stalking of a young woman, a story that eventually shifts into a narrative of detestation for John’s mother (a subject that changes with each retelling of the story). The only relief from the threat of violence comes when the men drop out of the scene so they can comment upon the developments and the level of truth in Dave’s confession.

In the process of developing their memory, the men recognize the malleability of their experiences. At the end of each version, John says that “In doing what I did I’ve erased the images of my mother from my past… In the morning I will wake up and start a new life” (136). John explains the purpose of their remembering: it is to escape the past and begin again. In an attempt to break away from the memories, the men can think of no better way to avoid the past than through endless repetition and revision. They know that each version will provide minor adjustments in an attempt to approach the truth, and they use that as the

---

12 When I say ‘experimental’ I do not mean it in the sense that he pushed boundaries of avant-garde/postdramatic theatre but rather in the literal sense: he used these plays to test the boundaries of form and structure. Walsh has said his shorter plays from 2000-2006 “seem like exercises in form and atmosphere more than anything else” (ix).
driving force of their re-membering of a remembered event that they may never achieve. Malcolm Sen describes the cyclical nature and socio-political underpinnings of memorial (re)construction when he writes that, “memory creators… propose a strategic use of memory that is transhistorical and sacred, [and] the acknowledgment of the ideology is an important part of the politicization of such methodologies” (104). The object of memory is always self-reflexive, perpetually in a state of being used in the present while co-opting thematic strategies from the past. These tactics give John and Dave the opportunity not only to achieve their aims through memory, the men are also granted the ability to question what was real and decide which version is closest to the truth for their own purposes.

During these breaks from the story, the men constantly ask whether a certain version of their story is ‘true’. As the play progresses, however, we discover that they do not actually remember the events that transpired. Instead, they repeat the same scripted dialogue (with minor adjustments) as a means of discovering their culpability in relation to the past and its consequences. Walsh then replaces the physical threat of death with the metaphysical deconstruction of the characters’ psyches. The men fear not knowing the truth. In response, they recreate the circumstances of interrogator and detainee out of a need to find what is real in their memory and the purpose of their lives. The objective of their retelling is to find the ‘truth,’ no matter how many times it takes. Dan Sperber explains, “In the process of transmission, representations are transformed. This occurs not in a random fashion, but in the direction of contents that require lesser mental effort and provide greater cognitive effects” (53). Dave wants to finish the story truthfully because that will allow him to avoid being shot, as he is always the one under the gun. John wants to inspire Dave to perform and remember correctly. The roles are never reversed, leading to a clear power dynamic in which the one who decides whether they have found the ‘truth’ is the person under the least amount of pressure. This inequity leads to discrepancies in what is ‘true’ in the story.
Although the men have created many versions of the story, the first version the audience encounters included an attack on John’s mother and explains his hatred for her. The two men differ in their apparent purpose for performing the scene. Dave seems to be in favor of finding a satisfactory ending and John prefers the process of searching for the elusive truth. The performance tires Dave each time due to the intensity required in order to recall the words at gunpoint. He protests: “I can’t be doing this indefinitely, you know!” to which John replies: “What are you talking about! I’ve got a gun! Of course you can!” (137). Dave’s dedication seems to waver, but even in a world of play, there is something gravely serious at work here. The pair have created a script of sorts around which they know something must happen, and they try repeatedly to inject different options and reasons for the murder that (perhaps) happened. Dave’s tiredness offends John because the latter enjoys exploring different options within the story. Although he is the one who is eventually blamed (if culpability can be assigned in a play such as this), John continues searching for truth that would incriminate him. The constructed framework of the memory drives John, even when he recognizes his uncertainty about the origins of that memory. John is certain of one thing: they must continue to remember the story. And because he has the gun, he is in a position to say when and if they go on with the performance.

In response to John’s enforcement of strict repetition, Dave exhibits the behavior of a child being caught and punished for a transgression. John plays the parent, occasionally prompting Dave to constantly improve on the scene and its truthfulness. John scolds Dave for his dalliance in focus and intent; John becomes the director, demanding an actor to perform to his potential while in the scene.

Dave: Have you started to fantasise about the time when we eventually reach the truth?
John: What?
Dave: I have.
John: When do you find the time to do that?
Dave: During.
John: What?
Dave: As we’re…
John: As we’re telling the story?!
Dave: Only sometimes!
John: You’re thinking about a moment of peace while we’re supposed to be busy searching for what might get us there?!
Dave: Is that wrong?
John: Well, it’s not very diligent, Dave! A strict man would say that it’s shoddy work practice! Shouldn’t you be concentrating wholly?
Dave: The brain wanders.
John: Well, is it any wonder it’s taking us all this time when you’ve got your sights on the prize! Stick to the details, Dave. Isn’t that the problem with people?! They have no concern for ‘the now.’

(138)

This quotation indicates Dave’s attempts to achieve a satisfactory ending. This desire for emotional fulfillment (in this case, the finding of truth) creates the need to remember the story a certain way. Without the specific details of the narrative, the pair can never experience the reality they seek to recreate through their mental efforts. The amount of exertion, however, is what Dave tries to avoid, and he is reprimanded for it. John’s enjoyment of the truth-finding process clearly outweighs Dave’s dissatisfaction at his inability to find the truth.

As noted, John places the importance on the progression of the narrative rather than its end product. Only by fully giving over to the reality of the scene will Dave and John ever achieve a realization of the ‘truth.’ The characters need to find truth through the ritualized reliving of collective memory, but this desire runs against John’s obsession with living in the ‘now’ because of the perpetual attention given to the past. The men search the past to respond correctly in the present. They believe that finding the truth will lead to a reprieve in the future. But the men cannot see the fallacy inherent in their performance. No matter how many times they explore the same events, the men are “getting closer to the truth” but can never confirm this fact because they are actually getting farther away (137). The metaphysical exploration is entirely process-based, but the illusion is maintained that they could achieve
such an ending if only they tried hard enough. This view of repetition illuminates Emilie Pine’s claim that “We are not who we thought we were, or put another way, we remember ourselves differently now. The consequence of this revisiting of the past is that it creates new narratives” (3). By adhering to the precise recollection of their scripted text with only minor alterations, the pair in fact remake the entirety of their memory each time they revisit it. The relentless creation of new histories weighs down the men’s experience so that even if they could remember what actually happened, they would not be able to re-member it truthfully because of the changes across time.

The realization that the men in How These Desperate Men Talk will endlessly retell this story with varying details may seem dismal, but the re-membering process is a way of surviving. Stories transform along with the needs of the person doing the telling. As Joseph Roach notes, “Improvised narratives of authenticity and priority may congeal into full-blown myths of legitimacy and origin” (3). The acts of remembering and improvising become the history itself, no matter the ‘real’ source. These men must create a world wherein they can approach truth rather than achieve it. These two men create all the possibilities in the world through their variations of the story. Truth is the highest calling, and Walsh has created a world in which that fact influences the timbre of performance. The fractured nature of the storytelling sets its own tone, pointing to the fact that these men are playing games with each other, but these games are of the utmost importance and significance. The men have created their own sense of being and necessity from a story that is (in all probability) completely fictitious and intended to endow meaning in an otherwise repetitive life. The final stage direction provides the most instructive note for these characters: “We watch Dave continue. John then takes his hand away and Dave is left holding the gun against his own head as he talks frantically. John just sits back and looks at him for a moment. Nowhere to go, John takes the gun back off Dave and keeps it pointed at Dave’s head” (143-4). John looks for an
escape and realizes he has no choice but to continue. He is complicit not by choice but by necessity. Recognizable rituals provide a stable sense of ‘reality,’ comfort and safety in which the outside world represents the unknown and, what is more terrifying, other people who have constructed their own versions of history.

Diana Taylor’s insight into repeated enactment can be used to confirm the eponymous men’s greatest fears: “This ritual proves the opposite of confession, the opposite of testifying. It forces clients to enact painful stories that don’t belong to them, rather than try to process their own pain or trauma” (118). The stories the men tell themselves do not necessarily correlate with a lived history but rather with something imagined; even if they had experienced these remembered events, it would be distanced by their need to recall it from memory. Each character brings past experience into their performance and expectations of the present; they dutifully serve their memory, even with its faults. In the same sense, encounters with another person’s story cannot be avoided. This fact leads the men in How These Desperate Men Talk to repeat their storytelling infinitely. The body and mind have come together to create the illusion that they will find truth and safety in their incessant recounting of these events. The legitimacy of their myth has been proven through the idea that performance begets truth – but in fact, the opposite is the case. By re-enacting this history hundreds of times, the men have created a fantasy which, in their eyes, is simultaneously legitimate and purely self-constructed.

Over time, Walsh’s manipulations of memory in his characters are tested more and more. This section focused on the changes that occur even during an attempt to precisely re-tell a story. However, the men prove that after enough repetitions the searching becomes its own purpose rather than finding ‘truth.’ Identities in bedbound and Disco Pigs become more malleable as the characters re-member a specific version of memory. In How These Desperate Men Talk, however, Dave and John simply overwrite any previous version of self
with a newer, ‘closer’ attempt at correctly repeating the past. In this way, the metatheatricality of the previous two plays seems to ignore the fact that the performers constantly remake themselves into new characters with each repetition. If John and Dave represent a heightened version of memorial reinscription, then Man and Woman in *The Small Things* concentrate that same need for scripted precision in an effort to find a purpose in correctly repeating memories.

**Sharing Fractured Memories in *The Small Things***

But what does it mean to start over and relive history in a place that was not the original site of memory? Does distance from a story’s origin create an impasse where the past cannot be accessed fully and therefore is viewed as imperfect? Walsh’s *The Small Things* examines these questions within a setting that is both ghosted by the past and also in the process of ghosting itself. The play highlights Marvin Carlson’s idea of haunted performance in the present. Carlson writes, “The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations with these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the process of recycling and recollection” (2). Over the course of his book, Carlson examines various aspects of ghosting and memory that include the text, physical embodiment onstage, and cultural referents. While each of these aspects is important in thinking of theatre as a ‘memory machine,’ I will focus mostly on the ghosts in performance and in the text for this play. Walsh’s works are often layered in a way that demonstrates the complexity of memory and its machinations as these are seen through performance. Specifically, *The Small Things* depicts the ways in which people use objects to incite memorial encounters and the creation of worlds through words and re-membered actions. But it goes beyond the realm of ritual into a layering of memory as identity (re)creation.
In brief, *The Small Things* follows the daily repetition of Man and Woman’s shared and individual histories. They both lived in a small village in an unnamed place where they had lives dictated by what they term “chit-chat” and other forms of local pleasantries. But when a chip-shop man in the town murders his son and begins cutting the tongues out of various local individuals, the narrative takes a much darker turn. Woman recollects that she and her brother were given a strict timetable by their father with chores and daily activities and a stopwatch. If they were behind schedule, her father would yell until the children broke down crying (and until he did too). Inspired by this project, the chip-shop man recruited Woman’s father to help bring order to the village, cutting out tongues and giving the Silent Ones (as the people who have been mutilated are called) timetables and stopwatches for their daily tasks. Man, who had an interest in engineering when he was a boy, was also enlisted to help in the creation of a road that would connect the town outward and toward a Promised Land, spreading the good news of order and silence by means of timetables and removed tongues. Through the course of the play, we find that Man and Woman escaped this trudge but were influenced by the repetition of specific, timed tasks. And so, as their lives continue in this small room, the pair may try to reject the violence and pain of their past but they always fall back into the patterns that direct them each day.

In the play, these patterns have a physical and metaphorical meaning. For example, the space that Man and Woman inhabit is itself similar to the characters in that it can be seen as a palimpsestuous entity. While apparently inanimate, the room and its contents represent a life that each character’s experiences have helped to shape. As Jeanette R. Malkin argues in *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama*, “the objects on stage had the multiple task of reflecting their ‘original’ meaning, as well as all the meanings with which memory and subsequent use had imbued them” (200). While this statement broadly refers to props both within and outside of a specific production, it applies directly to this play because Walsh uses
a performance within the performance. The play magnifies this fact by using various props and set pieces for each character – most notably an alarm clock which dictates the pace and timing of their performance.

Man: It’s been raining for the past two weeks which would account for the dampness. Not that I could remember. How could I remember. Impossible to remember!
(149)

In this excerpt, we see that Man uses the physical object and its prompt as a means of remembering the past. Man has inserted the need to perform and revive the past by means of the clock. As such, the object itself takes on the weight of the entire memory as Man constantly looks to it as a source of inspiration. He visibly counts the seconds as he awaits his turn in the storytelling and almost physically jumps at the opportunity to get back into his routine. But even that is not always enough for him to recall the past, even though he has memorized the schedule.

Woman, on the other hand, uses the window, her dozen ceramic animals, and a tape recorder with a song on it to help her remembering. She does not openly reject the alarm clock – she has one too, but it is “immaculate” from lack of use (149) – but it seems she prefers what she thinks of as more lively markers of the past. She animates the knick-knacks, speaking to them as if they were alive; she looks out her window, and imagines seeing another person in the window of a distant house; she listens to the recording of Man as a twelve-year-old boy singing and asking Woman when she was younger to learn the song with him. These markers add nuance and depth to the layering of the story, but this adherence to the timetable also demonstrates the reality which has been created for each of them. Woman relies heavily on these escapes from the room itself. One could argue that this is because of the torment of her father and his timetables during her childhood, which is in opposition to Man who liked order so much as a child that he wanted to be an engineer. This arrangement
crystallizes the difference in storytelling and history-making that the characters use. The pair are able to return each day to their routine because it is all they know, but they relate to this ghosting in very different ways, based on the tactics with which each of them thinks about memory versus history.

The project of recreating a memory proves the worth and value of individual and communal past. Man and Woman are a micro-community, but they are still able to conjure examples of a larger collective memory. Similar to the way in which the pair uses physical markers to note the importance of their memorial acts, Holly Maples explains that “Commemoration acts to bind communities together through the imagined past. These imaginings are created through social rituals and a resulting collective memory that reinforces our understanding of ourselves and our communities. It is through collective imaginings that our world takes on solid, concrete form” (182). The script of Man and Woman’s routine includes precise timing that uses the two voices in a sort of anti-dialogue. This process represents the creation of a symbiotic identity. Both characters have experienced the violence required of order, and they bear the marks of the past through their retellings, but they still reconstitute the past like clockwork as a means of defining themselves. And by exploring the same routine each day, occasionally interjecting with small commentaries, the pair achieves what Woman describes as part of the daily routine: “I close my eyes and listen to those words returned. I tell him to make the small talk and just listen to the ebb and flow of those smaller words as he talks of the small things. And I talk too and our words entwine and with each word passed our old world is rebuilt somehow” (177). The routine gives meaning and purpose because they are able to take control of the one thing they know – the past – even as it slips into and out of focus with each retelling.

13 Their stories run parallel and are linked, but the pair rarely interacts. However, the strategy used here is different from Sebastian Barry’s The Pride of Parnell Street where the two characters seem to inhabit two distinct spaces.
Extending this notion of agency to include the idea of “performing remains,” Rebecca Schneider argues that “the archival document, given as evidence of a singular event in time, already contains the palimpsestuous reality effect of faux upon faux that gives us, so promisingly, the transitivity of the real, which is to say its mutability, its availability for and as change” (177). So, where Woman prefers the physical references to the past because they seem stable, these markers are in fact just as susceptible to change as Man’s apparently extemporaneous recollection of his experiences and feelings. An example of this comes when Man begins crying because of his reenactment of his childhood self in tears: “I had cried in [the] car but forgotten I was upset. But in crying now I remember the tears of before and remember that this day’s primary feelings are fear, you see. Fear. Each salty tear a reminder, each clammy hand putting me in my place” (150). This moment shows the fragile and elusive nature of memory; and it also demonstrates a deep-seated acceptance of place and order because of memory. The performance of re-membering provokes the return to another instant in time, not to show the truth of the moment but rather to highlight memory’s malleability, especially when emotional trauma unearths forgotten events.

In this way, the act of re-membering history represents an elastic part of human routines. One cannot awake and entirely invent a new self each day, but identity can be stretched to include new things while apparently staying true to the old. An example of this occurs early in the tyrannical reign of the chip-shop man when he and Woman’s father begin giving out timetables and tasks to various members of the village. Man recalls the scene:

And we talk about those ten people who’ve been silenced already. We watch them walk about the village with clipboards and stopwatches. They walk in little trenches the chip-shop man dug. Like train tracks the trenches are and stuck in patterns… An alarm sounds and I see a woman made to count her breaths in a single day making that number of breaths her marker for all of her days. (165)
Chapter 1 - Memory

The violence of the scene stems not only from the impossibility of escape from the trenches, which act as guidance for the Silent Ones’ lives, but it also restricts the animation of self to an act of brutal time-keeping. The woman counting her breaths must re-enact her breathing precisely each day, which gives purpose to a silent life formerly filled with chit-chat. The restriction also provides routine and order, a literal and figurative enslavement to the process of living. Due to life’s citationality, a person’s previous version of oneself will indelibly mark him or her and will dictate the rest of his or her life. The task of counting breath has merely codified the past as something which gives purpose to the present and following days.

As opposed to this thoroughly monotonous routine, Man and Woman exist as apparently better-off versions of the Silent Ones. They have order and are forced to follow the routine of telling the story, but Man and Woman have the agency to ask questions of each other, requesting confirmation of their existence – “Are you listening to me?” (159 and 175, for Man and Woman respectively). When the other character responds in the affirmative, it grants a kind of empowerment to the speaker, allowing each one to trick himself or herself into believing that their re-membering will salvage the pain of the past and imbue their memories with importance. But the terrible truth of their situation becomes clear as Woman describes her process of polishing the ceramic animals, “You can’t move forward lest you stop now and again, can ya? Take stock. Otherwise it’s just moving willy-nilly. Take these little fellas. A constant polish just wears them out. Better to let dust settle” (161). She vocalizes the fear that the pair constantly work against – that they will become worn out and faceless entities of a forgotten history with enough repetition. However, they metaphorically embody these knick-knacks, over-polished and worn out through endless repetition. The unrelenting clocks keep them on task, and they accept this fate, rather than attempting the ‘willy-nilly’ that might distract them from the constant re-membering of their past. In short, they want to survive, and the way they have learned to do that successfully is through
repetition. The dedication to this order of telling is all-consuming and allows a kind of communion with the past.

The play’s final moments demonstrate a deep skepticism about the nature of death and its finality. On his feet, Man wears black children’s shoes with red laces, which were taken from a fellow child whose tongue he cut out. The chip-shop man made Man wear the shoes as a symbol of his betrayal – of his childhood and the people who would entrust him with their secrets. The shoes no longer fit, however, which depicts a physical embodiment that his understanding of the world and the past has evolved while the way in which the storytelling is clothed has remained the same; Man still wears them as a reminder that he cannot escape his role in the creation of a community built to silence otherness and celebrate order. So while the boy died that day, his memory and past live on because of the retelling and the physical incarnation of his existence, not a written archive but a performed repertoire understood to be connected. As such, the shoes and the associated memory, which physically represents and constrains Man’s recollections, now ghosts the story.

It is not until the final moments of the play that the characters reveal that they have not in fact been sharing the house, but rather that Man was sharing an imagined memory with a fractured version of his past. The performance depicts Man as he laments his companion’s death years ago. Woman disappears, but he continues speaking as he had been the entire time, waiting for her responses. This revelation disrupts the notion of reliability in remembering, but at the same time, the markers I have discussed – clocks, window, ceramic animals, tape recorder – all situate the memory in something that is apparently real. The memory of Woman and their shared history has been encoded in Man’s daily experience, and he perpetuates it simply by living. Rebecca Schneider argues that “The idea that flesh memory
might remain challenges conventional notions of the archive. By this reading, the scandal of performance relative to the archive is not that it disappears… but that it remains in ways that resist archontic ‘house arrest’ and ‘domiciliation’” (104-5). Memory is a process that does not disappear simply because the original storyteller and experience are gone. Rather, the versions of the past are functions of a growing dialogue with the past as it is embodied in the present and influences the future. The layering does not crush other interpretations; instead, it helps build upon divergent pasts which appear because of ritualized and embodied accounts of memory. As Man says in the final lines of the play, “I’m alone here in my house… though never alone, hey love? I’ll sleep and in the morning, as always, I’ll continue… and I will speak… and we will live a life” (180).

These four plays demonstrate the ways in which characters embody revisionist memories as a means of creating a specific version of reality. Sometimes, as with How These Desperate Men Talk and bedbound, the characters re-member the past to manipulate their personal narrative. These attempts often lead to breakdowns between the memory and the intended revision, such as Dad revealing the imprisonment of his wife and daughter or Dave and John failing to conclude the story with a satisfactory scapegoat. In The Small Things and Disco Pigs, however, the memorial reinscription becomes a subconscious act – something that is part of the characters without them actively choosing it. Runt’s final monologue where she fights to overcome the invented language – “an I watch… da liddle quack quacks… I look… at the ducks” (72) – shows that the repetition of this child’s play requires an active rejection to avoid it. Man and Woman cannot break the rhythm required by the clocks and the scripted story they tell every day. These two modes of memory-making highlight issues of malleability for memory and identity. What constitutes a true version of the past and the lengths to which a person will go to achieve it are reflected in the actions of all the characters in these four plays. But these themes imply a confrontation with each character’s chosen
narrative and the underlying question of whether they believe in this version of themselves. In the final section, I explore the ways in which truth is revised due to the subjectivity of experience and the imprecise nature of memory.

**Good Memory, Re(-)membering, and Enda Walsh**

The four plays analyzed above may seem disparate in their uses of memory, but each piece supports a part of Walsh’s creative world-making. Like the characters in his plays, Walsh makes narratives that come to life through remembering and re-membering. I have made a case that each of these plays utilizes a type of remembering – whether it is Dad and Daughter telling the story of Maxwell the furniture tycoon or John and Dave trying to recall the events of an event they may never have experienced – where the memory is not a constant but instead a subjective attempt to construct the identity of the present. This act becomes explicitly about the embodiment of the past in cases such as Pig and Runt’s constant reliving of their childhood games or Man and Woman’s object-based remembrance of their shared history, but each of these works also demonstrates Walsh’s obsession with the physical self as part of the memory-making apparatus. Through this function, the presence of a character revives the past each instant because of the palimpsestuous nature of living referents. The constant repetition and revision leads to the reconsideration not only of the past but also of the way in which people think about the process of remembering.

The theatrical medium is particularly suited to the creation of these types of worlds in which the layering of references and performance suits the storytelling that occurs in both the physical and psychological narrative. Marvin Carlson describes theatre as “almost obsessed with citation, with gestural, physical, and textual material consciously recycled, often almost like pieces of collage, into new combinations with little attempt to hide the fragmentary and ‘quoted’ natured of these pieces” (14). While he considers all contemporary performance to
be a constant recycling of ideas, Carlson also indicates the importance of individual creative interaction with the past through ghosted referents. Looking at Man’s red-laced shoes or the walls which encase Dad and Daughter, one can understand the ways in which history impresses its existence upon Walsh’s characters’ surroundings.

Using this lens of memorial citation and bodily inscription, I contend that Walsh’s plays enact the idea of retold histories made into reality through repetition and revision. The rituals that surround the performances within Walsh’s works depict what Lorraine Ryan describes as a trend where “the dominance of the national narrative is diminishing and the individual is accorded more agency” (209). We see this in onstage characters who embody this notion of personal creative power alongside Carlson’s citational theatricality. In Disco Pigs, Pig and Runt’s fantasy world exhibits these qualities because the pair constantly refer to others as followers of a certain caste system, but by doing this they bring attention to their own regimented performance of roles. The same is true of How These Desperate Men Talk in which the running commentary encourages constant reconsideration of how and why certain versions of history remain and what they reference through embodied perpetuation. bedbound and The Small Things demonstrate the agency of creating a moderated world within which only specific narratives are possible, similar to the rituals from The New Electric Ballroom and misterman. For all of these characters, a reinscription of the past exists as a sort of agency, but it always comes from the ideas that have been locally supported across time. Even when there are multiple versions of history, the verity of the narrative consistently rests upon the ability of one person to assert its reality through repetition.

In Walsh’s plays, remembrance motivates people to tell stories in the proper way, but because it is always a subjective process, the truth is never wholly confirmed. However, the narrative’s power is often measured against the emotional effects it produces. So when Walsh’s characters construct these worlds, they make history meaningful in their own
personal way; whether or not history tells the “truth” is irrelevant because the reality comes from a place of pure emotional truth and therefore cannot be denied. Put another way, Colm Tóibín compares Irish writing to French fiction, noting the difference as one of scale. He says “the critical moments in Irish history seem more like a nineteenth-century novel in which the individual, tragic hero is burdened by the society he lives in… we have personal sacrifice as a metaphor for general sacrifice” (ix). The idea that by subscribing to a certain tradition of memory and storytelling is beneficial to society is deeply entrenched in the national narrative due to its function on the individual level. The reason for this attitude, especially in regards to memory, connects with the themes Walsh explores in his work. Tóibín’s claim provides a depiction of a solitary figure rebelling against the structures of power and society. All four plays discussed in this chapter stage an individual’s narrative in comparison to the ravages of society at large.

Even within the localized reality of a micro-community, issues of memory are politicized by their constant existence in the public and private sphere. If anything, the apparently national narratives are more unstable because of the agency afforded to those who individually invent their own identities in re-membering history. Returning to Nora’s lieux de memoire, these versions of memory exist locally first – entirely constructed within the mind of a single person – before they expand. Through repetition and dedication to a certain mode of memory, however, the mind-made world becomes manifest in the physical reality of the individual. If we believe what Richard Schechner, Diana Taylor, and Rebecca Schneider argue,15 the lieux becomes a milieux as the memory becomes engrained in the present. What was remembered as a memory transforms, through repetition, into a new narrative for the current individual. From there, the past is embodied and performed for the benefit of a micro-community. This process immediately complicates the narrative process because of the

15 These three performance theorists consistently explore the idea that ‘present’ physical existence and action is a performance inherently inscribed by past events. In this way, the past is a constant in the present.
reception by those beyond the original generator of the memory. For Walsh, the characters in his plays exhibit these tendencies to an extreme level; but he depicts these figures as if they might also inhabit a certain version of reality which is not too far removed from his audience. He explores and exploits the discomfort that people prefer not to relive the worst parts of their lives and instead revise or ignore what happened when re-membering as a survival mechanism.

Because of this tendency, memory cannot be contained with subjective terms such as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but still it is instructive to discuss the topic when considering Walsh’s plays. One could argue that the characters he depicts simply have bad memories of events that have taken place in their pasts, or they have been traumatized and experience an aversion to certain details of their past, or they are actively choosing to help the other characters deal with the pains of the past. While these are possibilities, the simplicity of these explanations denies the nuances that can be found in human experience. To recall a memory and tell one’s story is a process of remembering and re-membering. It requires both the mental means to assemble thoughts and the outward expression to demonstrate the interior action. But this claim glazes over the fact that the memory is inherent in the physical self. While he was thinking of it in a literary and theoretical sense, Beckett’s discussion of memory in “Proust” is helpful in exploring this topic. Beckett writes: “The man with a good memory does not remember anything because he does not forget anything. His memory is… an instrument of reference instead of an instrument of discovery” (521). Beckett highlights an issue that Walsh explores in his works: people who claim to have good memories often recognize details and simply reference them to prove knowledge about the past. But this solution is flawed because all people are already imbued with certain attributes because of memory-made-flesh. That is to say, it is impossible to extricate one’s identity from the past because it constantly makes and re-makes a person through the performative aspects of their daily experience.
Using these revisionist strategies, characters become metonymic representations of human tendencies. That is, the onstage figures are not considered real people with memories and histories, but with careful analysis of the texts their assumed pasts depict thematic similarities to memorial reinscription that occurs in daily life. The repetition and revision Dad forces upon Daughter in *bedbound* becomes the reason for their living, to avoid the silence of forgotten memories, which perpetuates their existence in the present. In *Disco Pigs*, Pig remembers an event that never happened to insert his idealized version of reality into the motion and truth of vocalized re-membering; Runt re-members herself into a new experience at the end as an escape from the pains of the past. John and Dave, from *How These Desperate Men Talk*, change various aspects of their memory mid-remembering, and this constitutes an effective exploration of truth to the men. *The Small Things* may seem like a direct repetition of routine, but even within the timetables and alarm clocks, there are opportunities to ask whether or not someone is even listening, whether the memorial process has an effect. All of the characters in these plays re-member the past in a physicalized form. The subjective experience necessarily implicates a constantly changing version of the past as it is constantly being made with each passing moment. To this end, author Ralph Ellison wrote, “That which we do is what we are. That which we remember is, more often than not, that which we would like to have been; or that which we hope to be. Thus our memory and identity are ever at odds; our history ever a tall tale told by inattentive idealists” (105). The creation of identity in Walsh’s plays acts to depict the same assertion: to perform the past supports its continued existence; you make yourself and the world around you by perpetuating a certain version of history. The process is active and constant, always subject to the inspiration of a daily experience. The purpose of memory stems both from these revisions and from the desire for an idealized past and identity.
Chapter 1 - Memory

Throughout time, the disparity between perceived reality and imagined history have come under intense scrutiny from many different perspectives. Historians consider the past something that is constantly being written, and the scope is necessarily dependent on the author of that narrative. Neurologists argue that the functions of the human mind are dictated by the brain’s (in)ability to process and retain the information it deems necessary for survival. Artists exploit the inconsistency of memory to examine the nature of experience and the expectations associated with believing in a fiction created not just for satisfaction of the self but also for others’ entertainment or edification. I argue that each of these approaches provide an aspect of how memory functions, not just in Enda Walsh’s plays but in performance generally. Subjective reality is tantamount to human existence; that is, there is no way to fully assume another person’s (much less an entire culture’s) perception of identity. And yet, collective memories and performances of shared histories perpetuate certain narratives that are held to be true, or at least a reality worthy of repetition. These memorial acts need not be the grandiose performances in honor of fallen soldiers or even the social celebration of a person’s birthday; rather the act of memory is already instilled within each person’s existence. There is no question of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ memory in Walsh’s work because that is not what is at stake. Characters in Walsh’s plays, like many people, concern themselves with the agency of performative reality and the way in which each moment is not simply a remembering of the past but a life infused with reverberation and revision across time.

As shown above, the lives of Walsh’s characters demonstrate the active quality of memory and its associated rituals. The imagined worlds call attention to the performance of identity by depicting figures who cannot claim their existence except through constant recall and ritual remembering. But this conception stops short of the larger implications that Walsh foregrounds with his plays. The idea of the onstage life becomes a necessary meta-narrative within the construction and consideration of storytelling and performance. Where Disco Pigs,
bedbound, How These Desperate Men Talk, and The Small Things highlighted the process of remembering as distinctly human. The New Electric Ballroom and misterman distill those conceptions to show memory and ghosting as inherently ritualistic. I have argued that memory is a performance-based project of the human mind and body, but the four shorter plays of this chapter still focus on the characters as active creators of their own identity. The New Electric Ballroom confronts questions of belief and memory, but it does so to examine a person re-membering as a performer within the frame of an embodied past. Similarly, misterman depicts the malleability of truth and ritual in the performative realm, but the play also complicates the formation of narrative in the context of a past that must be re-membered through ritual repetition. Questions of memory and truth continue in these plays with a shift in focus from the individual identity to a communal belief system.
Chapter 1 - Memory

Works Cited


Chapter 1 - Memory


Chapter 1 - Memory


Chapter Two: Ritual

In this chapter, I examine ritual in two Enda Walsh plays, *misterman* (1999/2011) and *The New Electric Ballroom* (2004). These works offer particularly interesting case studies in ritualized repetition. The plays depict characters who enact the same actions and words repeatedly in an effort to transform their personal stories and inflect them with meaning that exonerates the performers. Both *misterman* and *The New Electric Ballroom* show the ways in which repeated rituals create versions of personal history that can be (and are) revised over time. In another example of the changes that inevitably accompany ritual, *misterman*’s original production and text were later revised and directed by Walsh; *The New Electric Ballroom* was originally produced in German before being staged in English and revised for a major touring production. By exploring these plays and their production, I consider not only the ways in which the texts represent characters stuck in a pattern of daily ritual but also the playwright’s meta-theatrical process of revision after having written and experienced the original productions. The chapter opens with a discussion of ritual as a set of actions and/or speech-acts whereby an individual or community creates meaning and identity through repetition. I confront issues of secular and religious ritual and dismiss the binary between those two as being unhelpful to the larger discussion of ritual in theatre. I use theoretical concepts from Michel de Certeau, Catherine Bell, Charles Taylor, and Victor Turner, among others, to develop this argument. In particular, I return to the definition from the introduction: a ritual is a social, Rep&Rev performance based on actions, speech-acts, or presence where an individual or community creates meaning and identity over and over. These events are often transformative and represent a type of personal myth-making that can and is repeated and passed on over time. I examine each play and the ways in which they depict characters as world-makers; the characters construct their own versions of reality through precise repetition. To conclude, my specific references to *misterman* and *The New Electric Ballroom*
provide the basis on which I make arguments about daily, personal rituals of identity formation. The expectation that a person would be stuck in an infinite cycle is replaced by the recognition that rituals are a process by which change occurs and new meanings are made.

**Ritualized Storytelling and Storytelling as Ritual**

Walsh’s plays depict rituals of belief within micro-communities. By looking closely at *The New Electric Ballroom* and *misterman*, this chapter shows that the use of repeated enactments as a means of myth-making can be used to exemplify ritual as a repeated and revised performance. Rituals, like memories, cannot remain static. Walsh’s works portray characters who repeat a similar story or action over and over again. These reenactments represent something more than idiosyncratic gestures and an attempt to fix the story and personal past; the repetition becomes a performance of codified belief. These narratives become ritualized through repetition and strict adherence to the supposed truth in performance. Daily encounters with/in memory often appear as rituals, consciously constructed or not, where behaviors and narratives undergo a process of gradual transformation. As theorized by performance scholars such as Catherine Bell, Michel de Certeau, Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, rituals and repeated performances simultaneously support and deny dominant narratives and power structures within a society. Even in constructed events of remembrance and adulation, an artist can utilize these strictures to subvert hierarchies. Communities rely upon their unwritten rituals to perpetuate the histories which serve the expected social order and accepted narrative. People seek comfort in the recognizable acts and repetitions which collectively make up the daily process of living. These routines demonstrate more than the simple reenactment of locally-wrought narratives. Grand narratives exist on a miniature scale when placed within the confines of a specific social setting; these performed acts are rituals of the expected and well-rehearsed ideologies of people past and present. These repeated enactments exemplify what Richard Schechner
calls the performance of ritual a “twice-behaved behavior” which can be “worked on” using “mnemonic devices [to insure] that the performances were ‘right’” (1985, 36). This conception of ritual as something that can be supposedly done with such precision that it is exactly the same each time will be questioned throughout the rest of the dissertation.

This discussion of ‘twice-behaved behavior’ will not focus on the existential condition of meaningless repetition but rather on the notion of sacredness in repeated activities. I fuse a literary study with a performance studies approach to examine Enda Walsh’s plays. Because of the necessary overlap between ritual, memory, and performance, the chapter will often make use of all three lenses as an interwoven narrative surrounding each play and the ways in which they interact to create worlds built on repetition as a means of identity formation. Using theories of ritual and performance, I argue that words coalesce with actions not only in specifically religious spaces but in the everyday experience of the ordinary. An expanded definition of ritual enhances the exploration of Walsh’s works as a whole, which allows close examination of the permutations associated with secularized ritual between 1993 and 2014. This section will consider The New Electric Ballroom and Misterman as examples of sacred-secular ritual whereby the characters in each play maintain their adulation of repeated experience in the hope of transcending painful human experience. To do this, these figures enact what J.L. Austin describes as ‘performative’ language alongside carefully planned action. This argument examines and furthers claims made by ritual studies scholars such as Ronald L. Grimes, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Stanley J. Tambiah, and it also relies on the work of performance scholars such as Joseph Roach, Diana Taylor, and Rebecca Schneider, among others.
In brief, *The New Electric Ballroom* (2004, English version in 2008\(^{16}\)) and *misterman* (1999, revised 2011\(^{17}\)) dramatize the importance and ubiquity of ritual within the lives of the characters onstage. The former depicts a micro-community in the process of didactic re-enactment, and the latter goes one step further to display a self-perpetuated chorus of voices and experiences that are not the protagonist’s own. The performances display the need for communities as locations of identity formation. This is not to say that all people rigorously and obsessively recreate narratives of the past as a means of ritualistic world-making, but rather that these extreme cases of dependency upon ritual evoke similarities to the ways in which daily repetition crystallizes certain world-views as functions of a safe and known history. The characters in *The New Electric Ballroom* repeat the memories of a specific day forty years before the action takes place, only to realize that their imagined world can be unmade by the addition of a single piece of information that fractures their supposedly safe seclusion. Similarly, *misterman*’s Thomas uses recordings to reconstruct a single day in his past; the technologies he uses to achieve vindication are managed so that their narrative supports a specific meaning. However when the tape players malfunction, it leads to the breakdown of the ritual, and he must adapt the ritual he has created based on whatever information was accidentally revealed. In this way, these two plays highlight and problematize the status of ritual as a source of meaning, even within a constantly shifting mode of representation.

Various scholars, from Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner to Clifford Geertz and Claude Levi-Strauss, differentiate types of ritual along a strict binary: religious and secular. Rappaport and Bell’s definitions imply that any repeated act can be seen as a type of ritual,

\(^{16}\) *The New Electric Ballroom* was originally performed in German at the Müncher Kammerspiele on 30 September, 2004. It premiered in English at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival on 3 August, 2008. The text I use and reference throughout is the English-language version, published in 2009.

\(^{17}\) There are two versions of the play: it was first performed as *misterman* on 26 April, 1999 with Enda Walsh in the role of Thomas Magill. Walsh revised the script for a production which premiered at the Galway Arts Festival on 11 July, 2011 under the slightly changed title of *Misterman*. I will refer to both versions in my analysis.
whether it is daily prayers or brushing one’s teeth – both are culturally enforced as normal and worthy of repetition within a given group. These two types of rituals make up society as a whole; put another way, all action can be reduced to some kind of ritual that is either sacred or not. The ubiquity of ritual is similar to Schechner’s claim that everything can be studied as performance; that is to say, sacred and secular actions make up the fabric of a person’s identity because those repeated performances are actually rituals that inform the definition of that individual’s experience. According to these and other scholars, religious ceremonies and social dramas are clearly demarcated and separate. This is to say, a person undergoing a rite of passage (such as a Bar Mitzvah or First Holy Communion) would not undergo the associated rituals of the process in a public space but rather a sacred space for specifically religious functions. The same can be said for secular rituals (such as the singing of a national anthem before a sporting event or the telling of a bed-time story to a child), which are often discussed in a specifically non-sacred definition. But this binary presents more questions than it answers. Is an atheist somehow less of a socially acceptable being because he or she does not experience half of the rituals that could be experienced within society? Or is a religious figure-head (Imam, Priest, etc.) restricted only to the spiritual, holy routines? This section will consider the various definitions of ritual and will offer a more inclusive consideration of the term. The definition should serve to provide a foundation for discussion considering Walsh’s work, which often relies on the repetition, deconstruction, and re-membering of ritual as the basis for the action in his plays.

To answer the two questions above it is necessary to undertake a brief discussion of ritual as a term that has been used, abused, and repurposed for various critical considerations from sociological and religion studies to performance and Marxist theories. The religious-secular binary provides a limited view of ritual. Performance studies theorist Richard Schechner questions that bisection when he states that:
This neat division is spurious. Many state ceremonies approximate or include religious ritual, with the State playing the role of the transcendent… The Memorial Day observance at the US Arlington National Cemetery is a secular-sacred state ritual… A wedding, for example, is the performance of a state-sanctioned contract, a religious ceremony, and a gathering of family and friends. (2002, 53)

By looking at a few, potent images of the ways in which the two realms of religious and secular events overlap, Schechner demonstrates the dynamic inherent in ritual performance. He provides examples of events which might seem like specifically denominated rituals (Memorial Day observance and weddings) but actually represent a part of an interweaved enactment of repeated expectations. These events revolve around national myths as much as they do around personal myths of meaning-making; the example of a marriage, in particular, denotes a newly formed, transformative experience that bonds two people together. You are expected to act a certain way within these contexts by rules of the community. These are cultural performances elevated to the level of myth in the fact that people ascribe to a certain set of standards, speech acts, and expectations when approaching these events. There is a higher authority, but it is not necessarily something before which a person knowingly prostrates himself or herself. In this way, ritual becomes a site of simultaneously conflicting and enlivening aspects of social interaction. Enacted social performances such as these help to codify the idea of ritual as something more than solely a religious or secular event. But this expectation of broader purpose also requires a larger discussion of ritual and performance.

While Schechner’s study of ritual concerns itself specifically with the performed enactment of ritual, Catherine Bell explores the creation, scholarship, and social values ascribed to the term ‘ritual’ more generally. In exploring the array of possible interpretations, Bell exhibits dissatisfaction with many definitions. She tasks herself with enumerating each theoretical engagement with ritual and then dismantling it until she arrives at her larger assertion that “Ritualization will not work as a social control if it is perceived as not amenable to some degree of individual appropriation… Ultimately, the notion of ritual is
constructed in the image of the concerns of a particular cultural era” (222). While this assertion does not encapsulate the entirety of her argument, Bell’s definition becomes clear: ritual is a social process in which people of a certain time and place attempt to control the routine of their everyday existence by attributing significance to their current experience. Community is necessary for ritual; control over a group is essential but only insofar as there is the illusion of individual agency within the community. Without this social contract, ritual falters and becomes something else – a form of abject punishment and imprisonment. Bell’s assertion that rituals are detailed, repeated actions within a socio-cultural context illuminates the problems with rigid claims to the bifurcation of the religious and the secular. The deterioration of the divide between what is holy as opposed to secular leads to a breakdown of barriers between the two (apparently) separate functions within society.

To extend this argument of overlapping everyday and spiritual experiences, a brief exploration of daily routine helps to understand ritual’s function. As theorized by Erving Goffman and Michel de Certeau, the performance of everyday life is, by its nature, a ritualized enactment of comfort and stability. People do certain things because their actions have previously produced a specific, desired effect (or an effect that can be avoided in the future). Repeated actions dictate a person’s lifestyle and simultaneously display aspects of their worldview whether this is done consciously or not. But the experience cannot be maintained exactly as it was originally. For example, if a person works the same job, for one year or twenty years, he or she may develop similar schedules or habits over time, but more than likely there will be some kind of change (even a seemingly miniscule one), and this variation will affect the individual’s perception of routine, stability, and the ritual of everyday life. This is true of all codified actions. As mentioned in the introduction, a scripted performance/ritual, or even an unscripted one, evolves no matter how carefully one replicates the action. This fact also applies to individuals whose experience differs from day to day yet
who can feel as if it is the same once a pattern has been established. Apparent stasis feels safe; over time, the relative movement and shifting of the performance, and its meaning, also seem controlled and therefore easy to comprehend and accept. I will continue this discussion later in this chapter, but it is important to situate ritual within the same notions of repetition and routine because that is the source of both its power and weakness.

The discussion on everyday life and repetition requires further development, especially regarding the ways in which these changes reflect the sacred in secular settings. For example, the setting for both misterman and The New Electric Ballroom is the west of Ireland, and references to Catholicism are pervasive in the texts. I do not intend to make a claim that all Irish people are represented by the characters in the plays, but the expectation that most people have an understanding of the Catholic Church’s influence in Ireland is important when considering ritual. Charles Taylor argues in A Secular Age that recently there is “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (3). Taylor’s book analyses a distinct change in the ways in which people experience spirituality and the sacred in the West during the contemporary period. He links the rise of logic/reason to the dissolution of myths, but also recognizes individuals’ attempts to recreate similar social structures through personal experience. The power of reason and scientific thought has pushed religious doctrine to the fringes across parts of the world, yet people still cling to traditional ideas but in a mutated, individualist fashion in countries like Ireland.

The transformation from strict religious practice to secular routines, recognized by Taylor, Bell, and Schechner, suggests a need for a new definition of ritual: one that fully encompasses the inter-related theories of the above scholars. Walsh’s works do not specifically confront the Irish move from the religious to the secular. However the
iconography and ritualized patterns within Walsh’s plays – in which his characters profess faith in their micro-communities and enact strictly-codified routines – should be discussed as a sort of evolution and example of the divergent definition of ritual in a secularizing Ireland. While personal identification of faith remains high, the low rate of attendance suggests that other, secular rites have replaced what was formerly religious. The characters in Walsh’s plays are deeply committed to the routine and the imagined world they create onstage, and this becomes a secular version of what was formerly religious. Ritual embodies both concepts of religiosity and secularism simultaneously because of the shift from a large, public profession of faith to a private, micro-community built on shared beliefs; and this understanding goes beyond what Bell asserts. Ritual therefore exists not in place of but in collusion with Catholic doctrine; or rather, the sacred is no longer limited to strictly religious events because people hold their own personal experiences to be worthy of ritual importance beyond what the state or an organized ecumenical community demands.

Charles Taylor alludes to this belief that ritual encompasses both religious and secular attitudes when he explores the purpose of faith in human experience. He states that:

We come to terms with the middle position [neither religious fullness nor exile from it], often through some stable, even routine order in life, in which we are doing things which have some meaning for us; for instance, which contribute to our ordinary happiness, or which are fulfilling in various ways, or which contribute to what we conceive of as good.

(6-7)

Trust in a recognized and accepted social order provides a way for people to maintain control over their lives. This quotation demonstrates the assumed agency underlying a community’s attempts to transcend human existence. In the past, this expectation was dictated by a fear of God and damnation, but access to information and the ability to question traditional modes of

---

18 According to the 2011 Central Statistics Office census, Roman Catholic population in Ireland was 84.2% of the population or roughly 4 million people (6). A Towers Watson report on Catholic Mass attendance, however, notes that in 2011 only about 170,000 people attended mass weekly which is roughly 4.25% of the 4 million who identify as Catholic (20).
thought have undermined the power of organized religion (though, as several critics have noted, that authority has increased in some non-Western countries and in parts of the US). The questioning of past ideals coupled with a new notion of the individual ‘pursuit of happiness’ has led to what some might consider a more ‘selfish’ vision of human experience. Instead of fostering the growth and support of a community, personal gratification takes precedence over a religion that is perceived by some to have betrayed those who put faith in it. However, in Walsh’s plays, characters shield themselves from criticism by constructing narratives which vindicate their personal experiences through repeated rituals of rightness. This complicated notion lends itself toward a ritualization of all human action and therefore a kind of sacralization of daily actions.

In Walsh’s works, the equivalence of personal experience with sacred importance becomes a vital distinction in my definition of ritual as compared to most ritual studies scholars. Walsh’s plays portray individuals who have created micro-communities within communities as a means of maintaining a safe distance from the dangers of the outside world. The characters create rituals which uphold their personal beliefs as a sort of surrogate for actual experience. Joseph Roach defines ‘surrogation’ as a process in which “culture reproduces and re-creates itself” through “memory, performance, and substitution” (2). As with ritual, surrogation is a repeated enactment that is highly codified and therefore remains constant even as the actors, jobs and intentions change over time. In The New Electric Ballroom and misterman, characters are trapped in a room with an unseen world beyond its walls, but it is their adulation to and reverence for the re-performance of surrogation that keeps them confined. However, this self-imposed incarceration provides safety through routine and the hope that through repetition and revision the performed story will vindicate their personal experiences. The characters’ attempts to console themselves leaves them in an endless routine of ritualized expectation; they seem to repeat their words and actions in the
Chapter 2 - Ritual

hope of learning something more than they have previously and/or to gain salvation. These figures attempt to move beyond their constructed confinement through words that they have learned by rote over several years. The characters know the importance of their rituals, but they rarely explicate their meaning and necessity. And yet, the characters’ obligation to ritual and tradition is written in their endless repetition; a person who devotedly and continually performs the same actions must find some solace and purpose in it. There is comfort in the process, even if it reminds characters of the pains of the past.

While I have been writing generally about ritual in relation to Enda Walsh and the Irish context, *The New Electric Ballroom* and *misterman* exemplify the connection and simultaneity of performances which are both religious and secular. The characters in these two plays demonstrate the necessity for comfort and stability in a secularizing age in which they cling to predictability for fear of being swept away by the world beyond the safe space of their rituals. Walsh’s plays demonstrate what Emilie Pine describes as

… a process of constructing a version of the past, and the version… presented is necessarily selective and shaped for consumption, so that [the performances present] the past in ways that are accessible and salient to the audience with no direct or lived experience of the past which is being represented. Performance is also an ongoing process, being re-shaped constantly, so that it is iterated and reiterated, a process of repetition that creates a ritual of performance.

(3-4)

*The New Electric Ballroom* and *misterman* replace the Catholic rites with the need to absolve painful memories. The characters still refer to religious symbology through the construction of their spaces and the need to follow a strict script, but this process only creates an illusion behind which each person slowly succumbs to the pressures of tradition. The characters encounter problems with these rituals not when they admit a fear that things might change but with the understanding that they already have.

The definition of ritual as a repeated, sacred enactment of precise words or movements within a certain timeframe refers to what might be considered a very specific set
Chapter 2 - Ritual

of parameters. However, given the above discussions from Bell and Rappaport to Schechner and Pine, the meaning and importance of a ritual can reflect a wide range of activities and experiences. For Thomas in *misterman*, the need to pursue his personal version of truth in exacting vengeance against the townspeople of Inishfree becomes a stylized ritual of repetition and revision. He actively selects the parts of the narrative to highlight or ignore, and that changes the performance from one iteration to the next. In *The New Electric Ballroom*, the characters frame their lives within the context of their re-told story of heartbreak multiple times each day; however they do this in an attempt to gain control over the past and its effects on them in the present. In both plays, the characters intend to reenact the events as they remember, but in doing so they encounter the issue of memory and the subjective view of the past.

**The Ritual of World-Making in *misterman***

Repeated memorialization of the past constructs a world to which people will adhere because of its revered position within their personal and assumed collective memory. This repetition ritualizes the daily performance of faith, which can be as simple as a single prayer or as elaborate as a re-enactment of mythologies surrounding organized religion. But this adherence to patterns and daily performance confines a person’s mind and existence to a set of strict boundaries where expectations provide the safety and comfort the outside world cannot. The world outside is sinful, but those within the faith are saved. Thomas Magill, in Enda Walsh’s play *misterman*, enacts this same type of patterned ritual *ad infinitum*. In this play, the protagonist has created a ritualized world where he alone replays the events of a single day from his past, using recordings and re-memberings of townsfolk, his mother, and even himself to reconstruct the story. Without this structure, his memory and identity could falter and become tainted due to outside influences. Thomas fears this corruption and he attempts to truthfully reconstruct the events of that day to counteract the possible introduction
of unholy vice. He wants to remember correctly, but he must also vindicate his memory and his actions. This absolution can only be achieved by ‘truthfully’ reliving the past, enacting the events ritualistically and repeatedly.

The production history and dramaturgical development of Enda Walsh’s only one-man play presents an interesting case study in conjunction with its implications for ritual inquiry. *misterman* (all lower-case) was originally produced in 1999 by Corcadorca Theatre Company with Walsh himself playing the role of Thomas. Twelve years later, Walsh revised the text as *Misterman* (with a capital M at the start of the word) when it was re-mounted with Cillian Murphy as Thomas. The later version features the same rough outline of events as in the original: Thomas replays the making of the world from Genesis and thereby creates one in which he will perform his memory of a single day. Within this world, he mimes and re-lives one day’s journey into the town of Inishfree and judges all the citizens as being unworthy of God’s love and grace. Thomas re-members all his encounters with the townspeople, mimicking their voices and mannerisms in addition to playing himself. But there is one ‘angel’ among the people, Edel, a young girl who goes with Thomas around town helping to save Inishfree from damnation (86, 33). However, when he discovers that Edel only spoke to him on a dare, Thomas reacts violently and kills her, recording the murder with the tape recorder he carries throughout while doing God’s work. The re-enacted performance of his memory seems to be an act of contrition, an attempt to revise the meaning of the murder so that it will seem vindicated and just. But his attempts to escape the past are in vain as he cannot (will not?) leave the world he has created.

The major differences between the two versions come from the early days of the small, Cork-based theatre company, Corcadorca, compared with the fame (and funding) that

---

19 For the discussion of *misterman* and *Misterman*, I will always include two page numbers if the same words are used in both scripts. Otherwise, I will note the version to which I am referring.
followed Enda Walsh and Cillian Murphy’s initial success with *Disco Pigs* (first produced by Corcadorca in 1996). Walsh’s first major success, *Disco Pigs*, went on to win awards, for both acting and writing, which led to future work and recognition. Three years later, the playwright wrote *misterman* and performed it himself under the direction of Corcadorca’s Artistic Director Pat Kiernan. Walsh and Murphy remained friends over the years but did not work together. The former molded his theatrical voice with a bevy of projects in Germany, Italy, and Portugal, while the latter went on to global fame by acting for the screen – most notably in the films *28 Days Later* (2002), *Intermission* (2003), *Inception* (2010), and the Dark Knight Trilogy (2005, 2008, 2012), among others. So when the actor/writer pair decided to collaborate on the new version of *Misterman* in 2011, they had developed enough cultural capital between them to command a larger budget for the elaborate design elements and an international tour that went beyond what the original production of *misterman* had achieved. The slight change in the title (*misterman* to *Misterman*) indicated a sort of capitalization of the two careers that had begun with a small production in Cork.

As with every creation myth, *Misterman* needs a beginning. The 2011 version of the play opens with Thomas preparing himself for the work at hand. He washes, cooks a small meal, and eventually goes to one of the miniature stages he has assembled around the
warehouse and greets the recordings “Hello, everyone,” he says as if they were actually present to help him in reconstructing the past (8). He then enters a methodical process of fast-forwarding and rewinding and listening to the recordings so that his re-enactment can begin correctly. Every task he undertakes is in service to a truthful retelling: hence, his self-evaluation after trying certain lines from the recording with various voices and intonations before he is satisfied. Thomas carefully sets each object in its place so he can achieve perfection from the start. He notes the location of each prop that is necessary for the performance, and then he is ready. This preparation resembles the rituals of an actor before a stage performance, one of Walsh’s most frequently repeated meta-theatrical devices. In this way, an audience can get a sense of the actor within the character.

In both versions of the play, “Thomas replays the making and the beginning of the Universe and mankind with much intensity” (77, 10-11). While this is not explicitly stated in the stage directions of the more recent version, the monologue that follows is repeated verbatim. As a ritual of performance, this opening monologue encloses the performance’s style into a specific re-membering not only of a momentous day in Thomas’s life but also in his current living situation. As Turner argues in From Ritual to Theatre, “Re-membering is not merely the restoration of some past intact, but setting it in living relationship to the present” (86). ‘In the beginning’ becomes not only the introduction to the narrative of the Bible but of all who exist. By situating himself within the larger context of God’s creation, Thomas deifies his world-making as something sacred and right. Turner’s claim invites the audience to consider the question of existence in relation to what has come before and what is happening in the present. The ‘living’ past requires the present as much as the present does the past. The mythological re-telling confirms this fact as Thomas cannot begin his performance until the stage has been set.

---

20 This stage direction is not explicitly used in the 2011 text, but the words that appear at the beginning of his world-making are exactly the same.
In his seminal work *Space and Place*, human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan says “Place is security, space is freedom” (3). This cannot be emphasized enough in the creation of personal myth and ritual. There is an expectation that safety accompanies a specific locale because of its familiarity, but that belief also has its limitations. When there is space, or rather an undefined or expansive environment such as Thomas’s warehouse, a person has the ability to say or do more, without the constraints of what is known and comfortable. The idea of space invites a lack of meticulous control over a situation that a place can provide. The precision required to recount Thomas’s personal history faithfully demands a structure in which to perform and construct his identity. By creating this place, he forms his vision of himself as a faithful servant to God against a town filled with sinners and heathens. The space of the outside world can only be controlled once it is contained within the place Thomas has constructed in the abandoned warehouse in which the play is set.

Walsh seems to draw on Tuan’s concept of space and place in this play. Throughout the play, however, Thomas forces the space to include his own versions of ‘safety’ and ‘freedom’ as forces which have dual meanings. Safety, to Thomas, means following a routine and knowing each cue and how it develops the story. The factory/depot that Thomas inhabits and the carefully calibrated moving parts – tape recorders, lights, and even a sprinkler system to indicate rain – re-represent the day inasmuch as Thomas performing all the voices does. Each action or statement is carefully timed, and when they go awry Thomas becomes concerned at the distortions and ripples this creates in the rest of the performance as he tries to write the narrative for his own salvation. With this safety of place, Thomas shuns the freedom associated with space. Yet, the world he has constructed (based on God’s handiwork) relies upon the vastness of creation and the grand scale and space in which he has built his ritual.
This complex duality defines the performance; several reviews of Cillian Murphy in *Misterman* hailed him for his ability to fill the space (*Irish Times*, *New York Times*, *The Guardian*) but also noted surprise because of the actor’s slender frame. These observations on the physical form as complementary and yet contrary to the thematic content displays an unsettling sense of space and place. The warehouse and the story simultaneously terrify and offer salvation to the comparatively miniscule Thomas, which is why he does all he can to master and fill the room.

By filling the location with his version of truth, Thomas moves through the world he has created and ritualizes the performance. In this way, he solemnizes the act and verifies it as a realistic performance of history, as opposed to memory. His daily re-enactments provide a way for him to seek exoneration from his horrific actions, proving that he has been driven to it by the sinful influences of those around him. But the power he wields exists in the fact that he is still master of the domain. He has designed the world to his own specifications:

---

21 Peter Crawley’s review for *The Irish Times* (July 13, 2011) praised Murphy for his “impressive physicality that fills the stage.” Ben Brantley’s review for the *New York Times* (Dec. 4, 2011) called Murphy “the sole slender actor” who “inhabit[s] every millimeter of the vast and cluttered wasteland.” Maddy Costa’s review in *The Guardian* (Apr. 19, 2012) also noted that “A solo performer could easily be dwarfed by the immense Lyttleton Stage, but within the first five minutes [...] Murphy has dauntlessly occupied it.”
Thomas turns back into the huge space he has created. A sudden power surge and the space is calling him back... Suddenly he walks up to the ‘street’ reel-to-reel and turns it on. Thomas’s demeanour, bright and excited now, as he opens those invisible locks in the invisible door.

This stage direction comes just before his second ‘entrance’ into town. Thomas has been emboldened by his denial of the forces that attempt to distract him from his godly work. He looks around him, and he has constructed a world in which Inishfree exists and ‘lives’ within this warehouse – even if it is only a ritualized memory. But the most telling description of his world is that of the ‘invisible doors and locks’ which contain him to this place. Thomas believes that by re-creating the experiences of that momentous day he has freed himself to make whatever truth he wants; he has control over what is included or not. But subconsciously, he has actually placed himself within a prison – a place where he must infinitely re-play the scenes of his own incrimination because he has recorded the sounds of the murder.

In a similar way, the protagonist’s ritual contains and exploits the town residents’ words; his recordings require extensive editing so that his daily re-enactment follows a precisely scripted course of action. So none of the town’s residents are free, as they are all enlisted in the performance through recordings and Thomas’s re-enactments on a daily basis. Ritual itself is, by its very nature, both ensconced in past interpretations and also an invitation for new consideration. This is what Thomas seeks – the ability to vilify those of his oppressors who refuse his sacred charge. In service to his mission, Thomas has constructed a temple of sorts within the derelict warehouse in which he re-enacts his final day dealing with the people of his hometown. Thomas serves God, trying to spread his good work to others. He keeps a notebook (in addition to the tape recorder) as a written record of each person’s sins, from profanity to a lack of cleanliness to impropriety, all of which he plans to use as evidence against them as he rises into Heaven on the day of judgment. In each townsperson
(of whom there are about ten whose voices enter the performance – either through recordings or enacted mimicry), Thomas finds a sinner who tries to tempt him from his faith and adherence to his work. Even Mr. O’Donnell’s dog, Roger, seems hell-bent on stopping his duty, barking and biting him (30). But Thomas persists after removing these distractions. Unfortunately his most common method for doing so is a resort to violence, such as mercilessly kicking and beating the dog to death. The justification is in his faith. Thomas has created himself as a man of God, and his strict devotion to the rules of his belief demand that he maintain this identity at all costs. And within the construction of this ritualized place, he is more than able to do this.

The act of Thomas killing Roger pushes the performed ritual beyond the figurative, re-membered past into the reality of the present. Instead of simply listening to the recording of the dog barking and his reaction, he re-enacts it and “freaks out with punching and kicking” (85, 30) to the point where he punches the ground in time with the recording of the act. This physical version of lip-synching demands that Thomas perform as if it were happening. As he flails and beats the memory of the dog, the reality comes into stark focus when the dog’s barking ends and Thomas notices his hands are bleeding. Granted, this type of blood-letting is hardly unique to an actor losing himself or herself in a particularly vivid emotional memory (an accusation often applied to ‘method’ actors), but the sight of blood brings the experience to the present reality. The violence is made sacred because of the zealotry with which Thomas pursue the true re-enactment of the ritual. His dedication to the process is terrifying when viewed from the outside, but from Thomas’s perspective, it is necessary.

As noted above, Thomas has ritualized every aspect of the performance, making deviation impossible, even when it causes him physical damage.
Thomas is struck on the face and falls to the ground. He splashes violently on the soaked ground, screaming like a child... Thomas lies crying loudly on the ground. He stands and roars at the town.... Thomas undresses out of his wet clothes to his underpants. His body is heavily bruised and scarred from where he’s been hurting himself.

(45-46)

This is Thomas’s attempt at getting to the reality and truth of the events. Similar to the sect of Christians who commit bodily harm to themselves as a reminder of Jesus’s sacrifice, Walsh’s protagonist must undergo his own suffering. To fully re-experience the passion (or at least physical suffering) like Christ, similar to historical re-enactors, is an attempt at touching the past and making it sacred through this re-membering. This part of the performance leaves Thomas literally scarred by his experiences of history. But it is all ostensibly in service of finding the path to enlightenment in a town of heathens. Thomas has pushed himself to the brink of faithful re-creation, by reliving not only the emotions of the day but also the physical abuses. When someone re-members an event of this sort, the tendency is to shy away from these types of personally destructive acts. But for someone whose faith is all-consuming, this is the only way to achieve what he believes is truth.

In a similar fashion, the story’s existence in physical form adds a certain level of credibility to the story. The recorded voices and characters with whom Thomas communes return him to the memory of that day in a way that he cannot deny. In Diana Taylor’s conception of the archive as opposed to the repertoire, these tape recorders create a reliable record of the past better than spoken words and re-lived memories could. Using the recordings as proof, the protagonist crafts a frame within which he does not merely seek truth and justice; he actively creates it. Joseph Roach argues that an “important strategy of performance... is to juxtapose living memory as restored behavior against a historical archive of scripted records” (11). Just as a lawyer might weave an argument to convince a jury of a certain claim, Thomas has meticulously edited and ordered the recordings so that they convey precisely the meaning he wants. In performance, the ritual should serve the purpose and
meaning stipulated by the record rather than the fluctuations which can occur within an individual’s subjective experience. Thomas depends on the predictability of his constructed ritual for safety, salvation, and vindication.

As mentioned earlier, however, sometimes the recordings surprise Thomas or distort into a cacophony of revelations and then reveal an embarrassing or unplanned aspect of the story. By creating a ritual or a story, a person can choose to include or omit as many details as he or she likes. The words and actions, which belie the false exterior of strictly regulated performance, break down when they do not match. The dilapidated warehouse indicates the reality against which Thomas fights as much as the revolt and breakdown of the recorded words and sounds. And yet, these archives are the ritualized performance upon which the protagonist relies for his recovery. Thomas believes himself to be God’s messenger and worker, and so he acts accordingly by editing the narrative to suit his (read: God’s) vision of himself. As Catherine Bell argues, “ritual is the means by which individual perception and behavior are socially appropriated or conditioned” (20). Bell’s point here is complicated by notions of Thomas’s performance. Ritual is a social process, but when that community is compressed and used by an individual, the meaning becomes skewed. However, as with any performance, the repetition of an action, no matter how precisely regulated, will eventually encounter a break/rupture. Then the underlying problems of a society and its narrative (hidden or otherwise) will come to light, just as it does with Thomas each time a recording plays out of turn or the performance refuses to cooperate and he attempts to mitigate the damage it does to his constructed narrative.

This conception of ritual as a living, evolving process is integral to understanding Enda Walsh’s dramaturgical focus on ritual, memory, and performance. *Misterman* provides a vivid example of this as Thomas must run from each ‘stage’ to follow the voices of the world he has created. Perhaps it would be better to describe these areas as altars, as Thomas
obsesses over meticulously placed actions, props, and words to convey specific meaning within his ritual. He recognizes that each voice has a specific space in which it is most appropriate. The protagonist has in fact scripted the events, but he still must work to create his ritual as if it were the celebration of the Liturgy. The etymology of the word ‘liturgy’ comes from the Ancient Greek λαός meaning ‘people’ and εργος meaning ‘that works’ (Oxford English Dictionary). This idea of ‘people that work’ in service to ritual provides Thomas with dogma to substantiate his need to record and then use citizens of Inishfree as part of his sacred rite. It is also through this etymology that Thomas can never finish his work. Liturgy includes the active verb ‘works’ as opposed to past or future tense. By constructing this ritual, the performance in Misterman will never fully exonerate the protagonist from his crime because it is always a work-in-progress. But because he has created a relatively safe place away from outside influence, he must constantly relive the events because his memory cannot live on otherwise.

Using Turner’s model for examining ritual and its creation, the methodologies and intricacies of the scripted performance create the environment for Thomas’s actions. While he is technically the only participant in his own personal religion, Walsh’s character has still undergone the typical ritualization process of his belief system as a means of world-making. Malcolm Lambert’s description of St. Francis of Assisi provides a striking similarity to the world created in Misterman. Lambert explains that “A sequence of thought for [St. Francis]… consists of leaping from one picture to the next… When, for instance, he wishes to explain his way of living… he turns his plea into a parable” (33). While this may seem tangential, the saint was noted for his demand for strict adherence to principles as a form of service to God’s glory, and he condensed these examples of faith into stories. Thomas experiences a similar sequencing as he has carefully plotted and re-membered his performance as he moves from one recording to another. To facilitate this retelling, Thomas,
like St. Francis, employs a story as an educational tool. The Catholic saint created an order which still exists because of these teachings. As in many of Walsh’s plays, characters obsessively follow specific doctrines of performance in hopes of finding a deeper truth. Thomas, however, is the only one who can claim to be a solitary believer and author of his own religion.

These arrangementscomplicate the idea of authorship. This type of enactment displays Roach’s theory of social performance and surrogation, showing that performance of living memory creates truth for Thomas as nearly as a recording. Roach argues that “In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric” (2). Thomas does not have a cast of actors who can play the roles of his antagonists, and so his ritual employs the closest surrogate possible – a recording. Over time, and with enough devotion, the insertion of a surrogate can be made to mean the same as that which it is meant to signify. The inclusion of each recorded voice indicates a certain level of reality to which Thomas can cling. As noted with Diana Taylor’s conception of archive and repertoire, these performed memories achieve a status of importance and meaning relative to those who follow them. A written or otherwise recorded performance or speech-act can claim a certain level of legitimacy; and so even if Thomas had the townspeople of Inishfree, he would be better served excluding them because of the impossibility of exact replication in human experience. By tethering his reality to recorded voices and pre-scripted interactions, Thomas crystallizes his claim to ‘correct’ re-enactment of history.

On the other hand, authenticity comes into question whenever there is no record of a conversation happening, as the audience questions whether or not Thomas has fashioned a certain voice simply for his own benefit. As noted throughout, the protagonist has edited and timed his performance with a fanatical level of attention. The zealotry with which Thomas
pursues his re-telling shows his dedication to truth (or at least his version of it), from creating physicalities and voices that re-member the townsfolk to his own incrimination and breakdown by the play’s end. However, questions of legitimacy persist as Thomas actively creates the characters against whom he reacts. There are only two voices he never re-creates – his mother’s and that of Edel, the young girl he murders, which seems to suggest he cannot question the words of the main authority figure in his world nor can he re-member the one he killed. But he assumes the voice and demeanor of everyone else as he shares dialogue with himself; from the little old lady who runs the café in town to Mr. O’Donnell and the other ne’er-do-wells of Inishfree, he can impersonate them all.

Walsh complicates this fact as Thomas seems to perform slight inaccuracies only to go back and alter them for his own purpose. This is made evident when he leaves Mrs. O’Leary:

“He does a gesture to say goodbye to her but it’s not right.
Thomas: No!
He does the line again.
God bless you, Mrs. O’Leary, and don’t you worry about Timmy.
He gestures to her in a new way. That’s correct.
Better” (16-17)

Thomas tries to re-member the people and precise actions of the day, but they are in the past and irretrievable. Similarly to characters in *The New Electric Ballroom* and *The Walworth Farce*, performing a ritual correctly enhances the experience and solidifies the reality they try to create. In this way, re-performing the past becomes sacred. More importantly, re-making the past in the present is part of a communal experience, a social process, in which others create a narrative alongside the main celebrant. In Thomas’s case, these co-participants are either recalled through technology (though heavily edited) or through mimicry (which is inherently subjective and unreliable). But according to characters in Walsh’s worlds, even an amended/subjective history is still more real than one that is forgotten.
The complexities of ritual creation span not only from Thomas as the obsessive constructor of the ritual but also to Enda Walsh as the auteur who originally performed the role and then later rewrote the play so that he could direct it. Examining each of these points provides a more complicated notion of authorship as it pertains to ritual performance. First, thinking of Walsh as the play’s author adds yet another layer of constructed re-membering and storytelling. The playwright writes a text which is then translated to the stage by an actor, with the help of a director and designers. Within *misterman*, Walsh gives Thomas the assumed agency to create his own world. The character, however, controls only as much as the writer allows. In the original version, Walsh followed fairly traditional modes of writing, specifically in the stage directions. While this might have been a sort of safe venue for his own developing style, the fact that he writes a fairly straightforward play with a specific narrative allows him to remain detached as the writer but invested as the creative participant-actor. The problem with this understanding, however, rests in the fact that Walsh also performed the role originally. Granted, Pat Kiernan directed the piece, but largely Walsh wrote a play that he could perform himself and then left it (as many writers do) as something complete after the production’s run. In itself, this relationship of text to performance, with author included in both, followed the expected ritual of theatrical creation.

The second version of the play delivers a new understanding of the creative process, both for the author (now director as well) and also the character (played by Cillian Murphy). In the revision, the author inserts himself as commentator into stage directions. This tactic is most prevalent in the first two pages of the script as Thomas attempts to rid himself of Doris Day’s “Everyone Loves a Lover” from impeding his enactment of the ritual, but the commentary appears throughout (7-8). Walsh wrote the stage directions, but they are meant to be a stream of conscious for Thomas, thereby offering a script for the actor’s interior monologue in addition to his outward performance as the character. Because the playwright
originated the role, he seems to have an intimate knowledge of how the character might think and so would want to maintain this level of detail in constructing the character’s psyche.

This duality may not have existed without his experience of the part, but his desire to construct and dictate the ritual that is *Misterman* also led him to direct the piece. This role allowed him to communicate with the actor who would fill the role of Thomas and perform the world that he so vividly creates with words (and had previously enacted on the stage). Walsh took this opportunity to make the play his own in a different way than when a writer does not direct. In that situation, the author’s voice often begins to dwindle like one of the recorded townspeople of Inishfree. Instead of allowing someone else to be a partial author of his words, Walsh embodied Thomas and instructs the assumed reader/actor/director with an even more detailed version of Thomas’s characterization. Granted, some contemporary Irish playwrights elect to direct the premiere of their new plays, but this was one that had been revised twelve years after its original run. By directing, writing, and previously acting in the play, the author maintains his authority over the role and the events within the work. I will expand on this notion of the author as more than simply playwright in the final chapter, as it pertains to issues of practical application and the evolution of the writer’s role in creating contemporary Irish theatre.

Given these perspectives of Walsh’s participation in the process, Enda Walsh’s *Misterman* presents more than simply the story of a man trying desperately to reclaim his past and identity through a revision of history. Rather, it shows the human desire to free oneself from the confines of personal as opposed to public experience. Truth can be subjective if told in a certain fashion, but more often it will come back to haunt a person. More, it will define a person. One who creates their version of events does so with a purpose, even if it is a

---

22 Playwrights such as Conor McPherson and Mark O’Rowe insist on directing the first production of their new plays.
subconscious one. Thomas does this with tragic consequences. He attempts to create a world
where he could re-fashion his memory through a ritualized performance. Due to the nature of
re-enactment, his world-building restricts him to an existence of perpetual pretense, never
affording him real relief. When he must confront the truth – the climax of his story – he
cannot escape back into the safety of his mind. The place itself becomes too big a space due
to the history inherent in his memorial persistence. The self-incrimination begins
subconsciously, but eventually it becomes the active thrust of Thomas’s memory. A person
chooses to re-member history in a certain way, but sometimes the rituals we have created
make us instead of the other way around. Both versions of (m)Misterman display an active
confrontation with the past; both the original and the revision demonstrate the playwright’s
active participation in the subject matter of his work. In this way, the re-negotiation of scripts
and rituals inflects new meaning on performed events. The play argues that a person may do
this out of habit or through intense acceptance and adherence to taught rules, but the repeated
enactment (either consciously or subconsciously) restates the past as very much part of the
present. The constructed memory within ritual cuts both ways as it simultaneously dulls the
interpretation of histories (both personal and communal) and also intensifies the performer’s
re-membering through the confinement of the body and mind.

As in the previous chapter, misterman presents ritualized memory where an onstage
character repeats and revises the past through embodied performance. The implications for
what constitutes truth change, however, when examining misterman. The playwright
undertook his own type of re-membering when he revised the play to become Misterman.
Walsh’s rewrite expanded the structure of the play to include more specific instances for
control, such as in stage directions and detail in the character’s story. In a similar way,
Thomas Magill’s ritual depicts a world-making process undertaken by someone who has
intimate knowledge and experience with the story he wants to tell. The previous chapter’s
plays acknowledged the constructed nature of memory through nostalgia; *misterman* and *The New Electric Ballroom*, on the other hand, show characters grappling with the scripted ritual and the necessity for strict adherence. My discussion of *The New Electric Ballroom* builds on concepts of ritual: it is a strictly coded set of actions and words that evoke particularly strong meaning for the people who participate. I also continue the discussion of sacred space and actions, particularly as it relates to the creation of belief systems.

*The New Electric Ballroom* as Secularized Ritual

The foundations of ritual determine the lessons that will be learned by the group that participates in the event. Enda Walsh’s play *The New Electric Ballroom* presents characters who have created a small world within which they find safety and solace. While this section focuses on the importance of ritual, the issues of memory and performance necessarily influence the following exploration of the play. Similar to the process of defining the term ‘ritual,’ these interwoven themes and practices enhance the discussion by including notions of re-membering and embodied history. Recollection of the past and the ability to re-enact it provide the characters within *The New Electric Ballroom* an opportunity to re-confront the painful past. This tactic demonstrates the power and influence that repetition of a ritual can have over a person’s daily life as well as that person’s understanding of the world.

Characters in the play relive the past in endless repetition while also claiming ownership of their present-day routine through patterned action and a controlled environment. The play presents the ways in which a person can create an entire world within the confines of a single place. The remembered past is not limited to those who experienced it, but rather a new generation is afflicted with these memories through ritualized storytelling. Instead of refusing the painful past, it is cherished and used in the characters’ search for safety and community. The characters in Walsh’s play demand specific actions and words to both
adhere to the past and also to avoid the pain of the outside world. External influences are shown to be the cause of their suffering; the negative feelings associated with the outside push the characters to follow the ritual which reinforces their beliefs even more fervently. Instead of simply viewing the characters as actors who are mechanically recounting the past, they can instead be seen as using ritual to claim agency over their own self-preservation in a harsh world. Repetition, coupled with strict deference to the scripted story, provides the foundation upon which this re-membered world has been ritualistically built. The characters desperately seek the safety of what they think they know and remember, and this instinct manifests itself in their creation through the sacralization of repeated performance of an imagined world.

The play follows a single day in the life of Clara, Breda, and Ada (eldest to youngest, in that order), three sisters who have taken it upon themselves to retell and reenact the two elder siblings’ excursion to the New Electric Ballroom forty years earlier. Breda and Clara pined for a man called Roller Royle – the object of every woman’s desire and also the man for all others to emulate, according to their story. However, both were denied the object of their desire when he gave his affections to a ‘Doris Day blonde,’ and the two young women became subject to village gossip (30). In response, the pair ritualized their telling of the story, which they have relived hundreds of times, as a means of protecting themselves and Ada from the outside world. Over the course of the performance, it becomes clear that this is a cautionary tale intended for the youngest sister, Ada. In addition to the repetition, Patsy the local fishmonger routinely visits them, interrupting their narrative, with his appearances regulated by the tides. While each character is stuck in the endless mechanism which consumes her, they are all also unwilling to break from their memories and repetitive actions. As the play reaches its conclusion, Patsy has been “baptized into the faith,” transformed into the Roller Royle through the use of a costume, and placed opposite Ada in the hopes of
amending the pains of the past. The would-be lovers, however, are unable to change the circumstances of the history they are repeating; they live the regulated story into which they have been inscribed. In the end, the youngest sister is left with the same heartache that her siblings experienced, a living revival of the past.

Similar to the ritual of the Catholic Mass, the sisters’ stories come from the events of one day many years earlier. Then they pass it along to their ancestors, and soon it becomes the faith around which an entire culture is built (even if the group only consists of three). Religion is something into which many people are born, and the adherence to faith is hardly due to actual belief at baptism – which is often performed on a newborn child who could not possibly understand the workings of faith. And yet, if a family enforces these religious convictions, that child will be marked by that upbringing. The words and associated actions of story stamp themselves onto a person with or without his or her acceptance. In a sense, baptism is the first step in a line of indoctrination that crafts a person’s worldview almost from birth without that person having first consented. While this is not the case with all ritual, one might argue (as Schechner and Turner do) that these actions are intrinsically linked to the social dramas and related processes upon which entire cultures are built.

Just as in *The New Electric Ballroom*, Catholic ritual follows a specific doctrine, perhaps even a script, with appropriate blocking, costumes, and props; making this connection is in itself something of a heresy in that it involves calling the Mass something other than a communion of believers within a sacred rite of remembrance. Noting the performative and scripted nature of the liturgy inspires the negative connotations of secular performance theory. In Catholic Mass, each part of the service holds a certain solemnity that has been passed down from generation to generation and is performed in the same way around the world, due to codified doctrine. The performed faith’s central act of worship depicts the celebration of a personal declaration of one’s sin, the aim of which is to appease
God and provide a true act of devotion. Members of the Catholic Church enact a doctrine which commemorates an event; it memorializes the Last Supper and the subsequent death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This communal showing of faith brings with it all the historical and social implications that have come to be associated with the Catholic Church. There is the expectation that Mass must be celebrated by an ordained priest or other ministerial person who has obtained the sacrament of Holy Orders. These are the people who know the rites, mediate the celebration of the Liturgy, and commune with God and the memories of the past.

These aspects of faith can be connected directly to the storytelling in Walsh’s play. The three sisters, a kind of mock Holy Trinity, all correct each other in their performance of the ritual, and yet they all require the guidance and approval of their fellow celebrants to observe the rite correctly. Important words are written on a piece of paper in the women’s kitchen, memorized, repeated, and thereby commemorated by all who encounter them in their acceptance of the performed rite. The ritual begins with the following:

Clara: Pass me the bowl, it’s time!
Breda holds the bowl to her and Clara puts her hand into it. She’s very excited. She picks out the one folded piece of paper that’s in there. She unwraps it and reads.
Clara: ‘No man is an island’!
Breda turns over an hourglass.
Breda: Begin. (31)

Clara knows the order of the ritual and the timing for the bowl’s place in it, and even so she performs with the same vigor as the time before. There is only one piece of paper because that is where the necessary line is written. Then Breda sets a physical implement by which they set their actions and words – the hourglass. These various actions might appear odd to an outsider, but the women know the exact meaning and purpose behind each aspect of their ritual. The only piece of text in the play appears here with its ironic reference to John Donne’s words in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624). Clara Lander states in “A
Dangerous Sickness Which Turned to a Spotted Fever” that Donne’s work “signifies growth of the spirit through physical ordeal” (92). This claim implies that the work was meant in a performative sense to include religious worship or observance in the term ‘devotion.’ The fact that the text comes from a collection of devotional writings also links the ritual use of the line to an act that is meant to bring a sacred or spiritual understanding to the speaker or reader.

The Catholic ritual follows a similar set of actions. There are readings, call-and-response sections, and the eventual participation in the ultimate consumption of the sacrificed savior. Through ritual, participants learn lessons and stories, and this is the didactic purpose of sacred enactments which is rarely explicitly stated. In this way, the performance of Mass is steeped in the storytelling and the creation of a world where believers can look to the Catholic faith as both divinely inspired and terrestrially enacted. As is the case in Walsh’s play, the ordained celebrants were the ones who mediated this collective profession and explicit sharing of belief. The ritual itself is used as a way to teach faith without necessarily stating the subtextual purpose of the event. The child’s insertion into a sacred ritual without knowledge of its context and meaning provides sufficient grounding for the rite to exist as part of everyday life rather than a perceived set of belief structures.

The characters in Walsh’s play strive to retell a story that is integral to their identity and their existence within the world. This attempt at exact repetition, however, is an impossibility which can never truly be achieved. As a starting point, one must consider the ways in which people remember. Paul Ricoeur describes the process in *Memory, History, and Forgetting*, arguing that “memory begins deliberately with an analysis turned toward the object of memory… it then passes through the stage of the search for a given memory… we then move from memory as it is given and exercised to reflective memory, to memory of oneself” (xvi). The mind triggers a response to an event whereby that moment is stored and
recalled whenever necessary. The initial instance is gone forever; even if it is mechanically or electronically recorded, the context and exact happening can never be revived. Then the person relives his or her memory, either as a series of internal thoughts or outwardly expressed words. In the creation of a ritual, a second person joins the communal celebration of the event and is expected to speak with the same emotional experience and truth of the first time it happened. From this point onward, the exact way in which the event happened is mediated through perceptions not only of the one who was there but also of the person who receives the description or views the re-performance.

If one were to imagine this repetition happening hundreds of times, the characters’ expectations for accuracy within their ritual represent impossible goals. And yet, this is the belief on which all ritual is based: that a certain set of words and actions must be enacted in a specific order or else the meaning and importance of the event deteriorates. By precisely reliving the story over and over, the sisters believe they are commemorating their heartbreak and providing a didactic message to their younger sister. But they, instead, continually move further from the original and become more performative with each iteration.

Given the impossibility of exact replication over time, the desire to perpetuate certain rituals through repeated enactment creates a rift between the purpose and meaning of the act. The structural confines created by the participants within a ritual provide the notion that these lessons appear to represent something greater than what they are. The reenactments, essentially, are stories. The stage directions throughout *The New Electric Ballroom* indicate that the performance is a story. Walsh includes ‘story’ because it is essential to the ritual of re-membering and teaching. Even the characters recognize this fact:

ADA: I’m only a baby when I first hear that story from you, Breda. Then thousands of times I’ve made you tell it again and again like some child… though I am not a child. (*Pause*) Still, it hurts you just the same, isn’t that right?
BREDA: Isn’t this what we’ve tried to teach you? (*Slight pause*) Don’t you feel safer
inside than out? (30)

This brief dialogue displays the meta-theatrical underpinnings apparent not only in the play but also in daily routines. The women stop and note the purpose of their embodied storytelling. Walsh’s plays self-referentially comment on themselves as performances within performances. The characters note the necessity for strict adherence to the scripted actions and words as the means by which they keep their lives in order. By using this technique, Walsh depicts myth-making not only in a socio-political sense but also in a personal way that displays his recognition of human survival tactics.

When the ritual breaks down in the middle, however, there are dire consequences. Each character reacts negatively, often violently, to deviations from the norms and schedules that dictate their lives. The resulting punishment stems from a faith that believes in perpetuating the myths of the past at any cost, not because they are correct but because they are safe. The words of the ritual are sacred and must be spoken precisely as stipulated, or the characters’ world views will crumble under the pressures that they have attempted to avoid. Charles Taylor’s argument about the genesis and creation of religions connects this claim to religions in a broader sense; “Even great innovative religious founders have to draw on a pre-existing vocabulary available in their society… we all acquire [language] from the language-groups we grow up in, and can only transcend what we are given by leaning on it” (147). The importance of language and its regulation codifies experience so that each act or word is entrenched within notions of the past that have been passed down to younger generations, as is the case in The New Electric Ballroom. Rituals promise survival of a certain experience and mindset that has been passed down, whether for generations or on only one occasion. As Breda indicates, this project encourages the participant to accept the feeling of safety even when it is achieved through a strict regimen around which daily life is organized and the threat of suffering if the rules are not followed.
Chapter 2 - Ritual

The women’s instincts for self-preservation provides the impetus for strict adherence to this meticulously crafted personal history. The ritual invokes a story where the actual event no longer seems to matter, but rather the construction of the imaginary world becomes imperative. As discussed previously, the characters serve as the ‘inventors’ of their own history. The play’s characters actively craft the world in which they perform the ritual of remembrance. The power of these stories becomes a way in which the walls are solidified around the women, literally and figuratively as none of them ever leave the house. By reconstituting the fashion in which storytelling occurs, each woman displays Catherine Bell’s sense that she makes a conscious choice to create the memory through reenactment. But this is an illusion as they are imprisoned by their thoughts, memories, and repeated actions.

Charles Taylor, channeling Kantian rhetoric, states that this development effects new meaning from logic and reason: “We have the power as rational agency to make the laws by which we live” (8), he writes. Similarly, the characters believe that they choose to perform the ritual and therefore can claim control over their memories and beliefs. But as the play progresses, the creative agent is proved to be Ada, the sister who has no direct experience of the event to which she demands adherence. Several times during the play, the youngest sister prompts the others, insisting that they not only continue speaking the text but to do so precisely as she remembers it (which is a function of her having been told the story countless times in her childhood).

Ada: And enter then…
Breda: And enter then…

_Sounds of a dance floor and music played louder by Ada as Clara adds make-up to Breda’s face._

Breda: And all is bodies.
Ada: Louder!

[…] With real love, Breda. Do you understand me? (27-28)

The ritual simultaneously belongs to the community and also solely to Ada. At first, this directorial role appears to be the petulance of a younger sister, a person who is demanding
something until she gets her way. As Ada continues, however, it becomes clear that this memory provides safety from the outside world, even though she has no need of it; Ada never experienced the humiliation that her sisters did, but she has assumed their past and has taken it on as if it were her own. The youngest sister does not need her siblings to tell the story, as she can quote it in its entirety herself; but she requires them to enact their roles as the only way the ritual can be fully realized, through their ritualized re-membering.

This fact extends beyond the women’s story as even Patsy cannot escape the dictates of his own tidal coming and going. The fishmonger follows a routine similar to the one carried out by the women, but he is an outsider – never allowed into the house until this day. His interaction in the story becomes one of complicity as he desperately seeks to insert himself into this created world. Patsy accepts the role he is given, complete with costume, with the hope that by making a change to his routine he can transcend his experience of solitude and overcome the cruel words hurled at him by other townsfolk. When presented the chance to tell his own story – something ‘new’ – he returns to what has been said before saying “each yard putting an end to any thoughts of love […] The narrow streets narrower […] The houses on either side leaning that bit close to me. They’re squeezing me, hurrying me towards the inside” (44) which is verbatim what has already been said by both Breda (30) and Clara (20). Without prompting, he seeks the comfort of the women’s story by speaking their words even though he has never actually been present for the story. Patsy falls into the collective memory presented in the house because he is a creature of habit. He says at one point that “The only thing certain in my life is that I always come to this house. I come with the tide, don’t I? And that is a certainty… and that certainty, it soothes me, somehow” (23). This could be the refrain for all the characters of the play. There is safety within routine, and the sense of belonging accompanies that feeling.
This notion of protection through community connects to Astrid Erll’s notions of collective memory, an idea that defines a group’s reconstruction of the past as deliberately manifested. Erll argues that “much of what is done to reconstruct a shared past bears some resemblance to the processes of individual memory, such as the selectivity and perspectivity inherent in the creation of versions of the past according to present knowledge and needs” (5). Patsy cannot explain the origin of his desire to enter the house, but his willing participation in the ritual confirms his wish for comfort found in the women’s collective recollection, which then becomes his own. He concedes to his lack of understanding and becomes complicit in the changing of history. The promise of a place within the performance is enough for him to submit to the women’s designs for him. In effect, Patsy’s agency only extends as far as the limits provided by those who have clothed him.

In a similar way, the women must clothe each other and provide the ability to act through the communal invocation of the faith. When Clara tells her version of the story, Breda dresses her elder sister and Ada provides the music and lighting (19). Clara later dresses Breda so that the pair will embody their eighteen and seventeen year-old selves, respectively (29). The physical manifestation of their past through ritualized performance grants the necessary connection to reality through relics; because they don these vestments, they must tell the truth about their experiences forty years earlier. But the process relies on the participation of others. Just as Patsy relies on the women to affirm his participation, so each woman’s agency must be confirmed through collaboration (and therefore acceptance that what they say and do is true). The storytelling requires a synthesized version of the past to which all ascribe the same meaning. In this way, the women create a sacred rite that follows a strict routine because it is enclosed within the reality of the costumes which are vestiges of memorial and ritual significance.
Chapter 2 - Ritual

The ritual itself necessarily relies on narratives and norms that have come before. So when Patsy requests entry into the faith and the sisters elect to implement him as the ‘second coming’ of their savior, he must be cleansed. While the process is never described explicitly as a baptism, Patsy is stripped to his underpants and made to stand in a small tub while he receives his purifying scrub.

BREDA: Scrub away then and reborn, Clara!
*Clara starts vigorously scrubbing him.*
Off with them words and all those stories pasted together and stuck on your back.
Wipe away all them lazy images that other pin on us… Strip away letter by letter and them terrible words will surely fall” (36)

This make-shift initiation leads to his transformation into the Roller Royle by means of the denunciation of hurtful words from outsiders and the donning of the costume, which is taken down from its vaunted place on the back wall. The other figures of the past have already been pressed into service, and now the final one enters and performs his role. In this way, Patsy represents the missing piece of their ritual which might offer a chance at redemption.

Narratives of the past can be rewritten through this process, but the practice is slow and severely limited due to years of detailed enactments.

Fig. 6 – Clara performs her journey to the New Electric Ballroom in costume. Note Ada in the back controlling the music recording. She would have also operated the light that shines on the current performer. Photo: Druid Theatre Company.
In this way, Patsy is the uninitiated outsider who must come to the priestesses for guidance due to his mindless obedience to the repetitive tides. In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner describes those who subscribe to certain beliefs without recognizing their great importance as ‘segmentalized.’ He states that “In different types of social situations they have been conditioned to play specific social roles. It does not matter how well or badly as long as they ‘make like’ they are obedient to the norm-sets that control different compartments of the complex model known as the ‘social structure’” (46). This claim pertains particularly to the fishmonger as he simply accepts his part in the ritual without question. He happily embodies his role without understanding the metonymy that his costume (as the Roller Royle) and actions (singing his father’s song) represent. Patsy is the layperson who dutifully follows the rules of the faith because of tradition and meticulously taught ritual. The devotion and actions associated with it are ingrained in Patsy’s body without his acceptance or true understanding. The physical manifestation of the clothes connects him to the communal ritual which exists as the symbolic proof of the sisters’ experience and suffering. But the fishmonger simply performs the minimal profession of faith through ritual.

This understanding demonstrates the earlier definition of ritual as a social process that is based on the creation of sacred rites and beliefs from everyday acts. However, the telling of the story is as automatic and tireless as any ritual, based on repetition, strict adherence to a script, and a profession of faith in the actions performed. Although the faith and actions appear to consume all four characters, the youngest sister remains jilted and hopeful of the outside world even against those who might fling insults her way due to her past and the assumed prejudice against the family’s constructed history, which is synonymous with their religion. She still manages to gaze out the door upon Patsy’s entrances and exits as if there could be something more beyond her dutiful observance of her sisters’ memories. But the constructed beliefs dominate the household, and the cloistered seclusion only heightens the
characters’ adherence to the faith in service to their daily performed veneration. Again, this relates back to Catholic doctrine as the ritualists refuse to confront variation from the expected enactment. Instead, they blindly follow the words and actions necessary for survival as dictated by the rite.

Just as the Bible depicts both the Old Testament (angry and vengeful) God and the New Testament (loving and forgiving) God, the deity at the head of the sisters’ self-fashioned religion takes on the role of both Savior and antagonist. The Roller Royle, like a crucifix in a church, is evoked in the construction of the set which places the teen idol’s costume on the back wall (5). At one time the women hoped this costume would be filled with a man who could satisfy his role as their salvation from a dreary life. Now his outfit is a constant reminder of the lifeless, disembodied man they once venerated. It is no coincidence that Walsh places the implements of this homemade liturgy on the set in a construction similar to a Catholic place of worship. From the suitably bland biscuits which signify the Eucharist to the homage paid to idealized idols placed above the celebratory altar, Walsh’s characters have crafted a world wherein they take the Catholic structures on which they were
(apparently) raised and implement their own purpose and meaning onto props and words. The participants elevate these items and actions to a revelation of divine stature. The ritualization and commemoration of these past events provide the sisters with a certain amount of safety from the outside world, but it cannot be denied forever.

The restrictions of the performance are only broken when characters attempt to refuse the stipulated style of remembrance. When his ‘something new’ does not inspire passion and love within Ada (though he is garbed as the Roller Royle), she actively denies his advances and tries to send him away again. But Patsy takes control of the situation when he does, in fact, present new information which breaks the routine storytelling; the fishmonger reveals that he is the Roller Royle’s son, conceived with a ‘Doris Day blond’ the night of Breda and Clara’s heartbreak (41). This creates a rupture in the past and gives Ada the chance to free herself from the story and her sisters. The young love appears as though it will blossom, leaving the repetition behind, as Ada says, “A day like any other day. (Pause. Somewhat nervous) But a different day… because of you. Everything colored by you, every movement, each second passed is touched by you” (42). The routine remains the same, and yet the world has been changed by this new addition. The characters attempt to break the cycle with ‘something new’ but can only partially conceive of a world where things are not predictable. As the couple goes through an awkward courtship, they test the bounds within which they were previously confined.

This attempt at separation from the past proves more difficult than one might assume. Given that neither character has direct experience with the memories, removal of oneself from a past created by others should be relatively easy. But the characters are ‘stamped by story,’ as Breda says. “So what chance any man or woman against the idle word? The idle word?! Sure, there’s no such thing as the idle word. Branded, marked and scarred by talk. Boxed by words” (35). Once again, the importance of words and acknowledgement of their
power wields its power over the characters. The constructed story does not allow for changes, only minor deviations as can be expected within memory. The grooves into which the characters have settled are too deep to escape; the characters recognize this and speak against their fears but are unable to find relief. This memorial adherence is not chosen; rather it is simply ingrained into a person’s being. So when Ada and Patsy attempt to reject the words that have been enacted hundreds of times, it does not provide solace but rather reinscribes the past. As the lonely fishmonger explains, “My heart’s too scarred by days and nights alone. Too set in its ways by years of chit-chat to little old ladies. Too scared to face into the unknown with just love as a map!” (44). The pinnacle to which the characters aspire – love – can never provide the safety and routine they require to feel comfortable. It is unknown and has been so for the last forty years, for all four characters. Patsy leaves, preferring to come and go with the tides, and Ada experiences the same disappointment her sisters felt every time they re-lived this memory. The possibility and fear of failure in love comes to fruition. That which Breda and Clara sought to spare their sister infiltrates and destroys the reality which had formerly been constructed to safeguard the family.

While it would be easy to ascribe to the conception of this dramatic turn as only negative, that understanding ignores the women as active agents of creation. As explained earlier, re-membering is not a stagnation of story but an evolution over time. In his seminal work Matter and Memory, Henri Bergson contends that “All seems to take place as if… nothing really new could happen except through the medium of certain particular images, the type of which is furnished me by my body” (18). This is evidenced in The New Electric Ballroom but displayed in a dark context. The narrative remains the same, mechanically reproduced to provide safety from the unknown outside, but the players and reactions are in constant flux, even if only in seemingly negligible ways. Memory requires performance to perpetuate itself, and through ritual the characters repurpose the past to fit their current state.
Instead of the story existing solely as words, Clara and Breda’s tale becomes lived experience for their younger sister. The Roller Royle, embodied by Patsy, returns to break hearts once again, and Ada is the recipient of this history, except now it is experienced as an actual heartbreak instead of a surrogated one. The formerly oral history becomes bodily experience in the present. This is the ‘something new’ which will allow Ada to perform her role in the ritual more truthfully. In this way, the perceived deviations are refined to exhibit the same meanings and purposes for which the story was originally created, except now it is implemented with new participants.

While the actors within the story have changed, the archetypes on which it was built remain intact. The imagined world continues to provide the apparent sanctuary from the outside. The sisters can continue to tell the story, repeating it now with Ada fully embodying what was previously not her experience. The final moments of the play reconfigure the ritual to include this change in the story.

*Breda presses the tape recorder and a new story is told…*

BREDA: And it was only yesterday and happy with the pattern of things. When routine woke you with the familiar… the pattern safe, life given a purpose.

Breda returns the women to what is ‘familiar’ and ‘happy’ as a way of offering solace to the heart-broken Ada. Again, the pattern reasserts itself because of the need to escape from memories of pain. And yet, it is only through this nostalgic view of the traumatic experience that the women act. There is something comforting in the repetition, even as the story’s meaning shifts over time. And with each passing repetition, the enacted history spreads and affects more participants as they seek to gain a realistic understanding of the original escape from the outside world. Though they try to deny the existence of the village and outside world, the three women have all constructed their own versions of the present from an infinitely repeating memorial to the past to keep the family safe.
But the necessity for repeated enactments of what the characters perceive as reality proves to be a chimera. As Joseph Roach argues, “performance offers a substitute for something else that preexists it. Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace” (3). This claim crystallizes the need for that which cannot be attained except through religious fervor and adherence to faith. Without the fear of the unknown and the hope of salvation, sacred rituals would not exist. The characters in this play, in seeking the surrogate of the original heartbreak, encounter the re-membered version of the past that is both the thing which it aspired to be and not. Therefore, *The New Electric Ballroom* embodies the definition of ritual as a set of actions straddling the religious and the secular.

In a similar fashion, the performance of daily sacred rituals has overtaken the celebration of Catholic rites. As discussed by Charles Taylor, the transition toward a secular society belies the notion that few early twenty-first century social structures rely on revered actions and beliefs. On the contrary, remembering and performing one’s own personal history is integral to life. Walsh’s play destabilizes the dominant religious norms of Irish Catholicism and instead places the emphasis on personal ritual and myth-making. The play explores the narrative of Catholic structures of belief and the rise of the constructed, secularized faith of recent years within the context and framework of *The New Electric Ballroom* in performance. The processes are closely regulated, but in recent years have undergone a transformation toward a more secular style of ritualized sacredness. By doing this, Walsh’s work confirms Victor Turner’s claim that

[A]ny developing structure generates problems of organization and values that provoke redefinition of central concepts. This often seems like temporizing and hypocrisy, or loss of faith, but it is really no more than a reasoned response to an alteration in the scale and complexity of social relations, and with these, a change in the location of the group in the social field it occupies, with concomitant changes in its major goals and means of attaining them. (147)
In this way, narratives of the past return to become experiences in the present. Change comes, but it is often simply a reorganizing of previously inscribed beliefs. Desires for self-preservation become synonymous with ritual storytelling. Because of this expectation, remembered histories provide the necessary distance from outside perceptions and reality due to their constructed nature.

Yet these memories still fall victim to the structures of society that they attempt to escape. To the characters, the unknown represents the broken promises of love and emotion that can be avoided by containing memories within a communal retelling. But this evasion belies the truth that each of the characters has experienced some kind of disappointment and recalls it each time she re-members the ritual. Performed history provides safety not in its repetition and adherence to a text, though that is certainly part of it; rather, people find comfort in what they know and can experience for themselves. Without the experience of heartbreak, Ada would continue to pine for the outside without knowing what it held for her. The desire for personal experience is pervasive among groups both large and small.

Communal history embodies a story told by others, sometimes only a few and in other instances, in the thousands. In performing and living the past narratives through ritual, even painful memories can provide solace because they are known, made, and lived.

Rituals reflect the belief systems of a specific group because of the participants’ adherence to scripted actions and words. As I have shown in mlMisterman and The New Electric Ballroom, these enactments go through the same repetition and revision process seen in re-membering. There is a desire to reproduce a ritual exactly as it is intended with the appropriate intonations and gestures in order to reinforce certain narratives. These rituals, however, can never duplicate the original experience. This fact does not stop participants from appropriating the emotional and visceral reality they believe to be associated with the story, as can be seen in The New Electric Ballroom. Similarly, Thomas Magill uses ritual to
revisit his murder of a young girl, hoping that he can craft a narrative that demonizes the town instead of himself. The memorial reconstructions require careful attention to detail and the illusion of fixed meaning, but this attempt at stasis is destined to change over time.

**Ritual: Change, Stasis, and Failure**

In concluding this chapter, it is important to return to the definition of ritual. As mentioned before, the term requires a broader understanding of performance, memory, and the sacred. Ritual is a social process by which these three entities intertwine – when a person performs an action or speaks particular words in a scripted order, that event is re-membered and made sacred through its repetition. To say that a rite can be considered sacred is tantamount to recognizing the value in everyday performance. This evolution of Western philosophy has shifted the onus of faith to the individual within society. In Walsh’s plays, we see local communities create rituals and narratives that supersede outside stories in their levels of meaning and importance. This transfer of attention and meaning does not imply a decrease in specificity and precision in ritualizing everyday action, but rather the desire for exact replication and memorialization of certain histories fuses the speech acts and words with the act itself.

As can be seen in Walsh’s plays, rituals, by definition, delineate the events within a play. The performance is meant to be precisely performed each night with a strict code of scenography, gestures, and words, all for the benefit of an audience (even if that only happens to be the other actors in the production). While this concept relies on Schechner’s claim that everything can be studied as performance, that argument proves too broad and therefore overly general. Instead, if one considers Walsh’s dramaturgy and its focus on ritualized performance, nuances in personal belief and its commentary on society at large become apparent. The sisters in *The New Electric Ballroom* adhere to the scheduled re-membering of
their story as a means of maintaining safety within the confines of the house (and the narrative itself). This act is didactic, and it simultaneously confines the women in a comfortable world of their making but also grants a level of agency as the tale necessarily changes over time. The same can be said of *ml/Misterman*’s Thomas, who ritualistically constructs a world which shuns the sinful ways of the outside while also taking as its subject matter those same people. But by confronting these issues alone, Thomas must embody that which he hates, and in this way he recognizes and experiences more than his ritual originally entailed.

The characters in both *The New Electric Ballroom* and *ml/Misterman* subscribe to the rituals and repetitions which dominate their daily experience as a means of simultaneous stasis and change. All five characters enact their roles as if they never want the past to change, strictly following the rituals around which their lives are scripted. The plays, and the repeated narratives within them, demonstrate the faithfulness to what are considered sacred actions as part of the individual mythology to which they subscribe. Theorists of secularization such as Austin Dacey, David Martin, David Nash, and Charles Taylor demonstrate this adulation of local narratives over the global. Concepts such as the ‘Catholic country’ of Ireland or organized religion, in general, diminish because smaller communities rely on (and encourage) individual agency/rights/happiness. Characters in Walsh’s plays exemplify this theory as they attempt to process the stories around which their lives have been built. Then the characters retreat into their own stories, but they are indelibly influenced by the society from which they try to escape. So each storyteller attempts to confront and therefore denounce the power the past has over them. But they do so in controlled environments where the words of outsiders are denied and often excluded but never forgotten.
These fictional figures do not perpetuate painful histories for their own sake; rather the characters all seek some kind of redemption and alteration from the past within a community. Granted, the societies within which these rituals take place are often personally generated and lack the larger strokes of a nation. However, each play performs a micro-community that is self-sufficient because of their distinct rituals. The sacred practices perpetuate the notion that each character is responsible for and holds dominion over their own experience because of the strict structures that have been constructed. But this understanding necessarily limits the discussion of the plays as examples of ritual in a more ambivalent sense. After all, if these characters were able to follow the precise expectations of their daily practice, then there would never be change. Performance theory, such as Peggy Phelan’s *Unmarked*, undermines this possibility when she states that “Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representation” (146). I use this argument as well as Auslander’s conception of ‘liveness,’ discussed in the last chapter, to demonstrate the citationality of the re-membered ritual. An enacted performance simultaneously represents a version of the past but also can never be that event. This idea (and the fact that the characters are aware of it) complicates the expectation that to perform ‘correctly’ is impossible. And still the characters attempt to cement their understanding of the present within a replaying of the past, which is a necessarily flawed process of social truth-telling.

The realization of a true or accurate story is difficult. Using these subjective terms conjures lists of requirements which can only partially consider what it means to perform a successful re-telling or ritual process. Catherine Bell’s discussion of ritual, again, helps to illuminate the discussion of ‘correct’ performance. She states that “if an unsuccessful ritual effects change, then a successful one maintains stasis or no change” (34). This brief quotation opens several avenues of discussion which are integral to understanding Walsh’s dramaturgy.
First, her claim implies that those who practice a specific ritual desire the impossible suspension of time in an effort to continually recreate the sacred past as a didactic act of myth-making. The second presumption she makes has already been proven to be true of all ritual— all performance is in constant motion and therefore cannot be repeated, and therefore all ritual is ‘unsuccessful.’ And yet, the characters (and people in general) pursue rituals as if they are the same and will produce identical results, emotions, and feelings.

Each supposition enhances the belief that ‘success’ and reproduction is not necessarily an objective experience, especially in relation to Walsh’s plays. Instead of refusing to face the pain elicited by their experience with the Roller Royle, Clara and Breda decide instead to ritualize the re-telling into a cautionary children’s tale. Because of this constant recollection and remembrance, and the sacramental ornamentation that accompanies the act, one might argue that the women live in a sort of stasis, and this is what they want. The comfort of the story provides the structure they need to understand society as a set of constructs that can be dismantled and reassembled through words and action within the safety of one’s own experience. But this idea ignores performance’s inherent liquidity and the fact that the characters may mindlessly follow the prescribed ritual, but they do so knowing that they do not fit properly within the same narrative they once held dear. In fact, they seem to accept that words are part of the world they have created as much as are the actions. And words, like performance, are never encountered in quite the same way each time.

When considering Thomas and his ritualized reconstruction, the edits he makes demonstrate similar disparities between stasis and the perpetual passing/changing of time. The protagonist tightly cues the entire day with a clear sequence of events and cadence of words so that there is no opportunity for a deviation from the narrative. But still the machines revolt, and so does his body/mind. He has trouble reproducing the exact gestures and words without going back to reassess and revise them, even during the ritual itself. Thomas may not
consciously recognize this process, but he certainly understands the purpose of world-making through the clever arrangement of voices to tell a narrative. He has physically implemented the memories into his daily experience so much that he bears the scars of his re-membering. Stage directions throughout indicate the discomfort he feels when he confronts these moments of reality within the ritual; the past meeting present seems disjointed at these moments, and he does not know how to reconcile the differences. However, at no point does he, or the sisters from *The New Electric Ballroom*, think he has failed. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Thomas (and the other ritualists) delude themselves into believing that the memory and its performance works as intended. The characters settle back into their rituals, preferring the narratives they have created to other versions of existence.

This fantasy about history returns us to Bell’s claim that an ‘unsuccessful’ ritual means change. If the characters accept the notion that the rituals are simultaneously static and changing, then they reside in a strangely liminal world (similar to the one described by Victor Turner and Rebecca Schneider) in which they re-member what is not the past but also not not the past. The ritual can never be original because that first moment only ever existed once. Walsh’s plays demonstrate this fact through the repetition and revision process that accompanies the concepts of re-membering. But the characters all intend this duality to happen because they seek some kind of salve from experiencing the outside world through their sacred performances. While they claim to seek stasis (as shown in their adulation for a specific code of action), each participant also endeavors toward a change in the suffering the past has caused. Granted, none of them escape the pain of the past (in fact, they reinscribe and deepen it), but it is essential that these characters do not appear as sadomasochists bent on pushing themselves to the point of breaking in hopes that that rupture leads to recovery. These characters represent humans who simply wish to survive but are too afraid to make alterations and instead try to embody what they know as a means of dependable self-reliance.
It is instructive to include here one of the famous quotations by Samuel Beckett, whose play *Krapp’s Last Tape* Walsh has cited as “definitely a distant cousin” to *Misterman* (O’Hagan). The quote, however, comes from “Worstward Ho;” reads: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better” (Beckett 101). While this statement seems to echo throughout Beckett’s entire oeuvre, it can also be applied specifically to the contemporary age as theorized by scholars of secularization and in the plays of Walsh. The existential practice of accepting failure as not only part of life but essential to its progression is revolutionary when contrasted with Bell’s assumptions about failed ritual. To perform is to create something anew, whether consciously or not. Therefore, every ritual is ‘unsuccessful.’ And, according to Beckett, to create/try is to welcome failure. Failure becomes a mark of progress – moving toward an ending. Neither Beckett’s nor Walsh’s characters receive respite because they must continue to fail. At the conclusion of both authors’ plays, the audience is often left with the sense that the events which occurred onstage will occur (more or less) the next day as well, as they have hundreds of times before. In repeating these rituals, however, they fail and then return to the narrative again with the same hope that something might change. But in fact, it already has.

Expanding on this notion of repetition as development, one must consider ritual theory in a larger sense. As argued throughout, rituals are repeated performances (recognized as such or not), but performances are unrepeatable. However, using concepts developed by Marvin Carlson (ghosting) and Joseph Roach (surrogation), expectations can be tempered to allow deviations as a process of positive development. So, while the past cannot ever be truly revisited and is in fact in constant process of revision (and re-vision), performance demands that narratives of the past include the present, and even predicate the future. Thomas actively attempts to avoid this fact as he literally re-creates the world by editing recorded voices. He encounters inconsistencies in memory (of his own) and this leads to a breakdown of his
narrative because of the ghosts and surrogates which refuse to be controlled. Instead, the repetition of the past leads to the fracturing of his consciousness as embodied in *Misterman’s* scenography. Similarly, Patsy’s tidal ebb and flow directly references mindless ritual encoded in bodily function: “Sometimes my body has a will of its own and I find myself walking the little streets with no destination in mind” (22). But he is also given the opportunity to escape with Ada into a realm of the unknown “with love as my only guide” (28), and that terrifies him so much that he leaves (but will probably return with the tide). These experiences do not attempt to replace the past in the physical realm of reality because the characters still mentally prefer the beliefs to which they have clung. The problem with this delusion, however, becomes apparent as Walsh’s fictional figures not only allow but encourage change (and failure) of the past as a necessity of perceived stagnation.

These issues of ritual relate to all of Enda Walsh’s plays. As argued earlier, the act of storytelling is a ritual in its own right. In the next chapter, I synthesize the arguments about re-membered rituals and revision of identity and history through performance. *The Walworth Farce* presents an explicit re-scripting of a personal narrative that is perpetuated through the ritual of daily performance. In *Penelope*, the characters create facades of camaraderie to elevate their own position in the eyes of their audience. The latter play lacks the precise re-enactment of a story but instead reflects the dedication to performative revision of character. The earlier plays focus largely on re-membering, an active attempt to revise the past, and ritual, an embodied reproduction of memorialized beliefs. Like the plays previously discussed, *The Walworth Farce* and *Penelope* depict characters whose performances ghost subjective versions of reality. But Walsh presents these plays with attention to the physical presence and embodiment of these versions of self. The next chapter, therefore, explicitly examines the multi-layered performance of actor, character, and character-as-performer within rituals of performed memorialization.
Chapter 2 - Ritual

Works Cited


Chapter 2 - Ritual


Chapter Three: Performance

This chapter considers performance and the physical presence of characters and objects in two plays by Enda Walsh. In *The Walworth Farce* (2006) and *Penelope* (2009), characters enact layered versions of identity which highlights the constructed nature of an individual’s reality in a social space. By exploring these themes, I will examine performance as a representation of inscribed meaning now rendered visible because of Walsh’s overtly meta-theatrical scripts. The chapter opens with a discussion of Performance Studies and questions of reality using concepts from Judith Butler, Diana Taylor, Marvin Carlson, and Richard Schechner, among others. I use these theories to situate performance as a mode of meaning-making, built on socially-constructed rituals and memories. Enda Walsh’s plays, particularly *The Walworth Farce* and *Penelope*, exemplify the simultaneity of stratified performance such that it is impossible to separate the multiple selves of the performer which are always at play. Given this chapter’s intent, it will be necessary not only to provide close, analytical readings of the text but also to discuss the plays in performance. Staging choices for each play, specifically in their premiere productions, will demonstrate the need to consider performance as a reification of ideology and selfhood. Then I will conclude the chapter by referring back to ritual and memory as sites of re-performed identity making, which will be demonstrated through Walsh’s works.

What is Performance and Who/What Performs?

It is instructive to return to Richard Schechner’s claim that “anything and everything can be studied ‘as’ performance” (2002: 1). To take this notion one step further, considerations of agency and transparency in performance add a political bent to the conversation, and I will address those issues in regard to both plays in this chapter. But the largest part of my analysis focuses on questions of performance as a series of socio-political layers, the ones that are evident and perhaps those that are less so. This first section will
introduce ideas of performance theory broadly, but unlike Jon McKenzie’s *Perform or Else*, which has as its entire *raison d’être* “rehearsing a general theory of performance,” my aim is to highlight the applicability of Performance Studies specifically in the theatrical context and its contents (20, 53, 89, 139, 152). This is not to say that my study will ignore sociology, historical considerations, or literary criticism: rather the focus must be maintained so as not to deviate from the main purpose of this chapter: to demonstrate theatre’s capacity for identity and reality creation through multiple layered versions of history and self in performance. The ideal of performance often hinges on an ability to commit to the truth of the scene and the capacity to enact that truth through an embodied character. This stratification manifests itself in the very enactment of performance as something repeated (and therefore relating to the past) yet also inherently different (thereby indicating a new order of selfhood).

To expand on performance as a critical mode of study, one must include those very entities who exist within the ‘staged’ world: onstage characters. The characters are a necessary invention from a text into embodied action. I use the word invention purposely to return to the idea introduced in previous chapters that personal memory and identity are things which can be created and manipulated through repetition. The same is true for an actor. Theatrical performance requires an actor to enter the playing space while embodying a character. The need to truthfully inhabit the reality of the character is famously prescribed by Constantin Stanislavski in *An Actor Prepares*: “The actor creates his model in his imagination, and then, just as does the painter, he takes every feature of it and transfers it, not on to canvas, but on to himself” (21). The pinnacle of achievement, for Stanislavski, resides in the ability of the actor to disappear in service to the character being performed. However, it would be useful to consider Elinor Fuchs’s *The Death of Character* here as it relates to onstage figures, text as character and their thematic import as opposed to the attempts at Realism established by Stanislavski.
In *The Death of Character: Perspectives of Theater after Postmodernism*, Elinor Fuchs establishes just what the title of her book indicates – since the end of Modernism, the importance of character-driven narratives has waned in favor of text and ghostings. Fuchs argues that character has returned to its “cursive pre-psychological meaning – character as impression or inscription” (74). That is to say, characters have been supplanted by patterns, themes, and text within a larger frame of performance. In place of deep psychological realism, artists instead put the burden of meaning-making on the audience. Fuchs’s argument claims that “the spectator’s spatial saturation essentially takes the place of his [sic] experience of characters in drama” (140). These points connect to Walsh’s depictions of the role (or lack thereof) character plays in his postdramatic plays and the emphasis of audience consideration of theme and space over the Aristotelian expectations in his theatre. In particular, these considerations that characters in *bedbound*, *How These Desperate Men Talk*, and *The New Electric Ballroom* are archetypal rather than Stanislavskian in their essence is helpful in unpacking Walsh’s works.

Each theory of acting and character relies on the performative and implied relationship between character, actor, and audience. The purpose of these methodologies claims performance as the highest form of communion between actor and audience – the ability to convey a deeper meaning from one entity to another is the point. This stated goal changes with the intervention of Performance Studies, where every action or object no matter how miniscule is instilled with an ulterior motive and purpose. Instead of knowingly performing for others, every mannerism can be attributed to phenomenological representations of self which are inherently connected to personal and social histories. The shift in focus does not preclude an adulation of communication between two entities; on the contrary, one could argue that the move from enacted to implied integration of performed identity leads to the acceptance of everyday life as performance *par excellence*. 
In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman’s considerations of everyday performance affect onstage figures in plays and also those enactments of the “back region” or “backstage” which extend to performances out of the public eye (114). In other words, there is the version of performance which is displayed for the world and then there is the private life built on personal rituals of repeated habit. According to Goffman, both types of self-presentation are equally performative and actively performed for an audience, even if one is alone. But the latter is more subtly infused with social constructs based on cultural stigmas and expectations. Few people stop to consider the socio-political implications of their repeated actions in private, but these private performances are equally constructed as the outward performance in public. In a theatrical production, the layering doubles because the actor is always two figures – the character onstage and the performer him/herself. This is the liminal space inhabited by Walsh’s plays – a realm of characters who do not always recognize the historicity of their existence alongside the perpetual understanding of the multiple selves by the actor who is charged with embodying this ignorance knowingly. What of those instances where the character performs a lie as part of their reenactment? Intentionality will still influence the way in which that character (or the actor performing the role) reacts to the lie they tell and the implications it has for the front as well as ‘back region’ of performance.

Continuing the discussion of intent, Alice Rayner argues in *To Do, To Act, To Perform* that “the idea of action is predicated on the volition of an intending subject, distinguishing an act from mere motion or from accidental, involuntary, or nonhuman events” (2). In this sense, performance requires a knowing performativity. While I would agree partially with this assessment, the claim requires unpacking and a caveat. If everything can be studied ‘as’ performance, per Schechner’s claim, then the necessity of volition is a moot point. Rayner’s claim here demonstrates the necessity to link a performed action with an
intended purpose. Given performance’s citationality and my claims in previous chapters regarding memory and ritual, it is impossible to conceive of an action that is not inflected by past histories and experiences. Therefore, all actions rely upon a bodily intent, even if the why of performance and reaction is subconsciously structured. This fact is as true for a person who premeditates murder as for the person who receives a surprise smack from a frying pan. Each of these individuals will act in a way that their experience up to that point dictates. But if this claim is to be truly put to the test, then it must extend to words which have no capacity for intent without a speaking subject.

Due to their necessarily embodied nature, speech acts perform a realized iteration of agency. According to J.L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*, to speak is often a “leading incident in the performance of the act, the performance of which is also the object of the utterance” (8). Austin’s claim introduces the idea that the speaking process is both a performative act in itself and an embodiment of the ideological made manifest. In speaking, a person incites an immediately historical iteration of self. Speech acts demonstrate the identity of a speaking subject; or rather, one creates a place in the world through voiced language which is the antecedent to a bodily enactment. But, as Judith Butler claims in *Excitable Speech*, “the speech act, as the act of a speaking body, is always to some extent unknowing about what it performs, that it always says something it does not intend” (10). The voice exists simultaneously with the body, and yet the two can never ‘speak’ in unison, according to Butler. In this understanding of speech acts and bodily performance, the mind is separate from the corporeality of the performer. For Butler, an idea can be considered and then acted upon, but there is no such thing as the ideal performance of an imagined action. How can a performer speak with any authority if the words are always separate from the bodily intent? The answer to this question lies in the separation between layers of identity.
Chapter 3 - Performance

Earlier I alluded to the difficulty of an actor performing a character who is performing a play within a realm of unconscious as well as acknowledged constructedness. Enda Walsh’s plays are layered in this particular way, making an examination of performance necessary to comprehend their meanings. There are times in Walsh’s works when it is clear that the characters knowingly lie about their past as a defense mechanism, but then they shortly follow that performed fabrication with a self-deception that has been repeated so often that the original ‘truth’ has been forgotten. Tanya Dean’s analysis of *The New Electric Ballroom* and *The Walworth Farce* points to layering of fiction with real events. Dean writes: “Walsh employs […] notions of the Real and the Illusory to create the hermetic playworlds […] where story and performance overshadow all other aspects of existence” (119-20). Dean claims Walsh uses layering in the play-within-a-play as both the means and end. My argument, however, takes these concepts one step further; the characters embody the reality of their performed ritual so fervently that they sometimes cannot distinguish between Real and Illusory. These moments can create difficulty in interpreting the plays when an actor confronts the need to perform each version of history and self simultaneously. Agency for the performer (and performer as performer) rests in what Walsh described in an interview as the way in which an actor should approach his plays: “You just do it, and believe in it, and do it one hundred percent. Do not over-analyze” (2001, 477). Walsh’s view of performance seems to require a necessary synthesis of acting methods alongside a directive to commit wholeheartedly to performance not simply as a technique but as the way to understand his work.

The performative acts described above, and everything in between, can be considered performance. This study will necessarily limit its scope to the theatrical and social modes as depicted in the plays of Enda Walsh. In these works, Walsh’s characters engage knowingly in theatrical recreation of idealized visions of reality. Performances rely on past histories and
experiences, which are inscribed in each of the subjects’ bodies because of the corporeal infusion of restored behavior into ideological identity. This last phrase uses terms and theories from various scholars: the subjects’ bodies can be located in Butler’s theories of repeated performativity; ‘restored behavior’ belongs to Schechner; ‘ideological identity’ refers to Althusser’s State Apparatuses of teaching and repression. I invoke these critics not only to exemplify Schechner’s claim that everything can be analyzed as performance but also to demonstrate the theatre’s integration of a vast array of subjects and subjectivities. Walsh’s plays, in particular, depict these complex, multi-layered aspects of performance as a mode of daily re-creation.

In the following section, I will discuss *The Walworth Farce* as an exploration of performance on the level of play, play-within-a-play, and performed reality. In performance, the characters must embody themselves as well as other characters within an invented, histrionic re-membering of the past. This is in addition to the fact that these are actors portraying and submitting themselves to a certain stage reality of performance. After the analysis of *The Walworth Farce*, my focus will shift to *Penelope*, where characters create similarly layered versions of selfhood in order to manipulate others’ (and their own) views of their identity through a dedication to performed reality – which resides in a liminal state of truth and falsehood. In this instance, it is necessary to move in this order because Walsh’s development as a dramatist shifts in the latter play to a more evidently political status. Therefore, it will be necessary to begin with the less overtly politicized play and move to one which is more self-aware of the larger implications of performance on the (inter)national stage.
‘What Are We If Not Our Stories?’: The Walworth Farce as Idealized Past

Humans are creatures of habit, pattern-setters with a tendency toward comfortable, repetitive daily actions. In The Walworth Farce, Dinny, Blake, and Sean exemplify this dedication toward habit and repeated routine. Personal myths and micro-communities instill a sense of purpose and identity in daily actions that can be corroborated through precise repetition. Performance theorists, however, maintain the impossibility of exact replication of a given event, be it theatrical or otherwise. The everyday routine, arguably the most mechanical of actions, rarely presents the exact same sequence from one day to the next. Yet due to their ubiquity, these everyday rituals begin reinforcing personal and communal histories and beliefs. So what happens to beliefs as the performances gradually change? A dedicated performer can lead him or herself to believe that careful reenactment creates the same meaning and ritual every time it is performed; but this repetition simply confirms the instability of performance, especially when the act claims to be unchanged. To believe otherwise indicates a sort of self-deception that can be equated to the theatrical ‘suspension of disbelief’ that goes along with live performance of a play. That is to say, the performer as much as the audience must invest in the illusion of creating a reality within performance that is simultaneously acknowledged as a fiction of the stage. This section considers how and why performers, specifically in Walsh’s The Walworth Farce, practice self-deception as a tactic for repeating and revising the past.

Previously, I explored the use of memory as a performative function of lived history. This argument highlights the process of re-membering as an act of the mind made manifest in

---

23 Louis Althusser’s concept of ‘denegation’ is instructive here as it pertains to a denial of ideology through the use of ideology. Althusser writes that “those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology. Ideology never says ‘I am ideological’” (118).
a physical repetition or re-living. In a similar vein, Marvin Carlson’s conception of ‘theatre as memory machine’ links closely with cultural memory and performance theory. He states:

Theatre, as a simulacrum of the cultural and historical process itself… has always provided society with the most tangible records of its attempts to understand its own operations. It is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modifications as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. (2)

Carlson’s claim is particularly helpful when discussing performance; his book *The Haunted Stage* notes the physical realm of theatre (actors, props, the theatre space itself) as spaces infused with meaning because of their previous performances. In this way, the pieces which make up the theatre actually modify the present iteration of a performative act. The active co-creator is the audience, as each viewer brings a unique perspective into the space, and so do the actors and other members of a production team. These notions play an integral role in the creation of the characters’ reality that has been perpetuated through a performed invention of identity, power structures, and history. Enda Walsh’s *The Walworth Farce* synthesizes these issues by making the structural elements visible alongside the thematic content of the play text.

*The Walworth Farce* presents a repeated history and habitual performance taken to the extreme – a fusion of form and content. The play follows a single day in which Dinny and his two sons, Blake and Sean, perform the story of Dinny’s final day in Cork, Ireland before he fled to London (where the play occurs). Dinny created the farce as a story to tell his sons, but over time Dinny scripted an entire performance for the trio to re-member the events exactly as he remembered. The play-within-the-play frames what exists as an everyday occurrence for the family, as they have performed this version of the story day after day for seventeen years. The routine has become so ingrained into their being that it occasionally becomes automatic, causing minor lapses due to boredom or lack of focus. On this particular day, Sean mistakenly brings home the wrong shopping, which leads to several problems with the ‘facts’
of the piece. These mistakes culminate in the ultimate disruption of their performance, the introduction of another person, Hayley, the Tesco checkout girl who brings the correct bag of shopping to their flat. In an attempt to regain control, Dinny forces Hayley to perform in the farce; but her very presence breaks the carefully constructed barriers of who plays each role and the precision he requires. The play’s climax depicts Dinny’s belief that a series of farcical “twists and turns and ducks and dives and terrible shocks” led to his departure from Cork (82). Blake breaks the final tableau when Dinny shares a loving goodbye with his wife Maureen (played by Blake in a dress and a wig), and the elder son stabs his father. Then Blake tricks Sean into killing him so the younger brother has a chance to escape the farce. Instead Sean remains in the apartment and recreates his own version of that day’s memory, complete with Hayley’s unexpected entrance\textsuperscript{24}. The play ends “as we watch him calmly lose himself in a new story” (85).

This section’s focus on performance requires reference to the physical description of the performance space in what is one of Walsh’s most physically complex plays. The stage direction states: “\textit{Much of the plasterboard has been removed from the walls and what remains are the wooden frames beneath. The two doors on the wall leading into the kitchen and the two doors leading into the bedroom on the other wall have been removed}” (5). The flat’s layout is a testament to the functionality not only of the play itself but of the farce genre. For instance, the fact that the doors have been removed between the three rooms shows the dedication to quick changes and speedy entrances Dinny requires for his farce to work. Similarly, there are two wardrobes on either side of the flat’s entrance in which the sons can make their quick changes. Dinny, Blake, and Sean know all the lines and events of the play, and yet this demand for detail and theatrical illusion demonstrates the separation

\textsuperscript{24} This summary of the plot is necessarily brief and omits many of the finer points and nuances that are integral to the farce’s complex structure. For an extensive exploration of the play’s plot and information about the original production, see Eamonn Jordan, “’Stuff From Back Home:’ Enda Walsh’s \textit{The Walworth Farce},” \textit{Ilha do Desterro} 58 (Jan/Jun 2010): 333-356.
from reality in their lives. Coffins are made from cardboard, they use Monopoly money for the play’s monetary notes, and a stuffed animal is used to represent a real dog in the story. The space, costumes, and props all represent the type of reality that might be crafted by a man and his sons playing the same farce for well over a decade.

Walsh calls for an intense physicality from the performers in the play-within-the-play’s first stage directions: “The Farce begins. The three speak in Cork City accents. The performance style resembles The Three Stooges” (7). The moment the performance begins, an audience (even if they are unaware of the exact intertextual referents) should recognize the style as something heightened and slapstick. The entire opening sequence sets the tone as each of the three men prepares for his performance. They are actors setting their props, checking their costumes, warming up for a sort of homemade drama wherein three actors play three characters who play ten re-membered characters. The play’s pacing requires close attention to changes not only of costume but of characterization so that the actors and audience remain in the world of the play. One would expect to see various breakdowns simply from the velocity and complexity of style (reminiscent of Michael Frayn’s Noises Off), but each time something goes amiss within the performance, it is not the audience who reacts negatively to the glitch but the characters.

Dinny, the ‘author’ of the farce, recognizes the potential power of these seemingly innocuous miscues which lead to doubt in his authority. He scripted a story that vindicates his flight from Ireland, but each instance of a changed word or a forgotten cue undermines the performance and therefore its reality. Each day, the play’s onstage family recreates a story from many years prior with exacting precision such that any deviation from the text leads to a breakdown not only of the story but of the people themselves. All of the character changes are noted in the text of the play – such as “Blake as Maureen” or “Sean (as himself)” – which fractures the very idea that the character is a single entity. Even when they are themselves,
they are performing. The farce moves at such a pace so the characters have no time to critically consider these changes but instead simply must take on and shed identities (including their own) to even re-find themselves. In this way, the performance is integral to the existence of these characters, and the only way they can function is to continue reliving the memory just as they have for years. But with every missed cue in the storytelling, doubts about the performance’s truth arise, threatening the family’s survival. As the daily practice comes into question, it leads the characters and the audience to reconsider the beliefs to which they adhere and subscribe as true.

To achieve his personal conception of truth, Dinny demands accuracy in the performance of his story as a means of correctly recreating the past. The problem with an idea such as truth in this instance is that it is complex and subjective; to focus on one story is a deliberate choice which grants influence and (supposed) dominance over a subjective topic. When an action becomes habitual, a sense of correctness is perpetuated and given a place.

Fig. 9 – Dinny and Sean begin the farce. Note the makeshift costumes, props and the bare wooden frames stripped of their plasterboard. Photo: Druid Theatre Company.
within memory. But each time a person performs this act, it is recalled to the foreground and granted a place of importance. As Judith Butler argues in *Excitable Speech*, “action echoes prior actions, and accumulates force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices” (51). In other words, performed action becomes invested with meaning and power the more it is repeated. There is a problem with this claim, however, because each iteration is another step away from the first instance (the original and ‘true’ performance). So the present action may be instilled with meaning and power based on its citationality, but it is always granted this authority by a past version that is different from the current one. Once an event takes place it is gone forever and can only be resummoned through performed re-membering, even if it is mechanically reproduced using sound or video recording.

In relation to the idea of performance as a ‘mechanical reproduction,’ one can never fully attribute an inhuman style of action to a human performer. But Walsh frames the performance as an act which requires exact adherence to the story’s rules, as if the farce serves as a kind of automated structure. Dinny has timed the actor preparation for the farce’s beginning to a recording of “An Irish Lullaby” on a tape recorder so the farce can begin seamlessly (Walsh 5). Because the song plays on an electronic device it, therefore, cannot defy Dinny by missing its cue. However, the expectation for precision is broken just as soon as it is created when the tape recorder ruins the opening moment by skipping to the second song on the tape, “A Nation Once Again,” just as Dinny speaks his first words. When even machines cannot correctly perform and codify the past, human fallibility comes under more intense scrutiny. The breakdown of the machination displays a crack in the structure, but it fails to provide an escape from the daily repetition.

---

25 Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” claims that authenticity is only available to original pieces of art; but in live performance, every present iteration is an original, even if it is a citation of the past, or an embodiment of a text, or a ritualistically precise repetition of words and actions.
Similar to the music played from the recorder, the actors’ actions have been precisely timed to allow for quick changes and an unbroken flow of storytelling. The characters no longer ask why they perform the farce but simply react and respond to the words, awaiting a carefully calculated phrase or movement rather than responding realistically. In this way, the everyday becomes something that pushes beyond the realm of truth and reality. Bertolt Brecht examines this aspect of everyday performance saying, “before familiarity can turn into awareness the familiar must be stripped of its inconspicuousness; we must give up assuming that the object in questions needs no explanation. However frequently recurrent, modest, vulgar it may be it will now be labeled as something unusual” (144). The characters no longer think of their actions as out of the ordinary because they have moved into an ambiguous space between make-believe and authenticity. However, there is the omnipresence of the actor performing these characters, rehearsing, and re-performing these characters until it becomes accepted as the way things occur. What might be considered normal and innocuous to these three men is out of the ordinary for most people. The actors (and arguably Sean and Blake) recognize the artificiality of their performance, but they must make it seem as if the story is real in a sense. In this instance, the play embraces Brecht’s concept beyond what it claims: for the performers, they have made something out of the ordinary familiar through daily repeated practice, and so the audience sees these unusual acts through the lens of a rehearsed and normal experience.

But Walsh complicates this idea because what is unusual (and therefore worthy of the stage) is the everyday routine that directs this storytelling. The story’s existence as reality (as opposed to fabrication) is never questioned because of its everyday enactment. Per Butler’s claim, there is authenticity in the performance because it is repeated. This detail is heightened because of the physical enactment rather than oral storytelling. Were it merely told, the farce would not have the same power to fully embody a reality as ‘true.’ When an action becomes
routine, it becomes canonized in such a way that even a lie can become the only reality a person (or community) believes. For Walsh, the world, its structure, and characters’ identities are in constant flux and yet remain the same because of the dedication to performance.

By enacting what Erving Goffman calls the “back region” or “backstage,” characters exist within an extreme situation of self-deception (114). Backstage is out of sight of the audience but also part of the performance as the actor awaits the next cue to enter and begin acting again. The characters (and actors) no longer differentiate between the theatrical mechanism and the supposed truth to which they subscribe. There are no secrets about the farce’s performative qualities as Blake plays all the female roles, Sean dons a fake mustache and shaves his head to appear as though he is badly balding, and Dinny wears a wig and moisturizes his face and bald head to maintain his appearance as it was almost twenty years prior. In excess of the actors’ ‘main’ characters, the men play all the other figures who move in and out of Dinny’s story. The farce’s action requires unexpected entrances, mistaken identity, and quick changes between characters (with the exception of the father, who plays only his younger self). When the characters are ‘on,’ embellishment and overacting is encouraged (with the daily award of an acting trophy) further pushing the reality toward absurdity and over-acting.

This particular day tests the family’s ability to maintain their faith in the structures they have created. Even when the scene breaks down, the men try to maintain the illusion – as any actor would during a performance. In these instances, Walsh explicitly demonstrates the similarity of performance in acting and everyday life. If something goes awry in a daily routine, the natural inclination is to either fix or circumvent the issue with a return to habitual practice. People follow a text, whether consciously or not, which defines who they are perceived to be in society at large. As Kristin Ross argues in The Emergence of Social Space, “the moments when everyday life becomes the most vivid or tangible are the moments when
most people find themselves living more than one life” (63). Dinny, Blake and Sean unknowingly exhibit this fact in their pre-performance rituals, which resemble those in a daily domestic space. The audience is thus prepared for a challenge to normal distancing of conscious storytelling and unconscious world-making as the actors, characters, and characters’ characters are proven to be one and the same and also inherently separate. The layering between story-making and true memory becomes apparent (and problematic) when the men perform both as themselves and the figures in the tale. Instead of separate entities, the characters’ various selves demand a fracturing of identity in the way they tell stories. The reality must be maintained even as the boys assume their various roles, no matter the gender or age.

In this way, each character performs a multiplicity of identities as a means of telling the whole story. In one instance, Sean and Blake take on the role of their father as performer of the character Dinny. The sons have memorized the story that led to their father’s arrival in south London, as told to them by Dinny (30-32). This oratory component is part of the tale, but it is given solely in monologue rather than a reenactment as it recalls only the father’s journey. Dinny’s begins the story: “The sea spits me out onto England,” and it proceeds to paint the country, particularly London, as a cesspool of zombies whose only aim is to eat outsiders (30). This tale has become ingrained in the trio’s existence as they perform a three-part monologue where each man successively continues where the other left off narrating the father’s journey to the apartment on Walworth Road. Dinny told his sons this story to counteract their possibly negative opinion of him, and now, as Blake says, “all them pictures have stopped. I say his words and all I can see is the word” (22). As with Austin’s speech acts, the linguistic creation has actually supplaned the physical, but it still carries the weight of a performed reality. Because of this liminal space between physical embodiment and vocal re-creation, the memory only exists in a corrupted form; the past has been tainted by the
farce. The story saturates the family’s thoughts of their final day in Cork. They are incapable of any other type of reflection because it has become a regurgitation which no longer has the same original meaning.

The problem of lost identity multiplies each day not only because of the inherent evolution of a repeated action but also because Dinny constantly edits his script. The father adds or subtracts lines at a whim and verbally abuses his sons for missing a newly imagined line (13-14, 15). Over the course of each day, Dinny can change lines as if he were a writer in the development process of a play. He both rewriting history and polishes the story’s appearance with his directorial power and amendments to the performance. In doing this, however, he not only changes the tale for aesthetic purposes but also shifts the meaning of their daily ritual. Dinny does not provide his sons with new lines but rather expects them to know the history in its most poetic form because it has been reenacted thousands of times (the ‘script’ is never written, only acted).

The lack of a written document (or any writing utensil) in the play is significant. This absence shows Walsh’s subtle depiction of oral history’s dominance over archival documentation in this micro-community. Dinny exerts his control over the family’s beliefs through bodily inscription. Regarding physical implementation of revised memory, Pierre Bourdieu states, “The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life” (1990, 73). Bourdieu’s claim connects to Dinny and his sons as they attempt to find the best way to re-member the past through a medium (their bodies) that cannot perfectly enact Dinny’s idealized version of history. But Dinny has the ability to amend his memory as he performs to suit his preferences (and acting), which serve as yet another separation from the objectivity of their storytelling/world-making.
Bourdieu’s argument about the body creating belief through repetition and performance becomes an explicit point in *The Walworth Farce*’s final fifteen minutes. Dinny’s memory is subject to the same deterioration over time as anyone’s. To cover his reasoning, Dinny claims that his purpose in telling the story is “making a routine that keeps our family safe” (69). The everyday creates a barrier between the world outside and the one constructed in the apartment. But Dinny is the only one who is allowed to judge whether the story is displaying the appropriate reality. When confronted with the realization that his sons have discovered his lies about the family history, Dinny retorts “It’s my truth, nothing else matters” (70). Dinny finds safety and true belief in his revision of history through daily, bodily repetition. Sean’s attempts to confront his father about the false narrative are combated with a call to simply play the role and he will come back to being a ‘good boy’ to his father (71). The characters live in this world of self-perpetuating denial regarding the past because of the constant re-confirmation of the past in Dinny’s farce. In short, Dinny convinces Sean and Blake that if they enact the imagined versions of these characters, they will eventually be consumed by the past so that Dinny’s truth will be all that matters.

Given the controlled mediation of storytelling in this play, the past represents an enactment of ideology similar to physically lived history. To this end, Herbert Blau provides a succinct description of performance’s connection to mentally constructed identities when he states, “There is nothing more coded than the body… The ideological matter amounts to this: we are as much spoken as speaking, inhabited by our language as we speak, even when… we sometimes refused to speak, letting the bodies do it” (458). That is to say, the physicality and history infused in the performer’s body will always trump the intended character in a linguistic and ideological sense. Thoughts become words which are then translated into performative acts, but there is still a necessary distance between the two. Even in Stanislavski’s ideal actor, when the performer disappears in service of the character, it is
impossible to completely turn oneself over as long as the body is in view. Memory plays a particularly important role in the creation of ideology, especially in *The Walworth Farce* as Dinny, Blake, and Sean all remember aspects of the past with varying degrees of theatricality. But they are all encoded by the constructed memories; as Dinny asks late in the play: “For what are we… if we’re not our stories?” (82). In the waning moments of the farce, this statement provides the clearest sense that these characters are only as real as their belief in the stories. The characters’ physical existence is perpetuated solely on the basis of the farce, no matter whose truth it is. Performance engenders belief and authority because it adheres to the story they have told themselves so frequently that it has become their entire world.

This argument for invented existence lends itself to many actions throughout the play, but Blau’s claim for the supremacy of performance over speech clarifies two moments of similar performance. Hayley, the Black checkout girl from Tesco, is forced to take part in the storytelling and re-membering process. She and Sean are made to reenact their meeting that day in the shop; Dinny demands that they “play it” so he can judge the events that led to her arrival (60-61). Words do not provide a real enough sense of the past for Dinny to understand what happened. He is linguistically verbose and capable of creating complex structures of language in the farce, and yet he cannot comprehend a simple explanation from Sean or Hayley; Dinny requires a performance. Dinny cannot help but direct them as they play the scene even though he has no experience of what happened; it went a certain way in his mind, and so he requires an appropriately convincing version to be played without interruption. Dinny controls the situation through directorial fiat, and this leads to his next attempt at appropriation of the new ‘actor’ in the farce.
Over the rest of the action, Hayley is forced to take part in the farce. All the while, Dinny guides Hayley and attempts to clarify her performance as herself and then later as Maureen (75-76). These are vocal manifestations of character, but each is also associated with an action. Hayley must perform the item scanning as she speaks, she must prepare the chicken as she converses with Dinny (within the farce), and then Dinny converts her entirely through performance as he whitens her face with his moisturizer (78). Blau’s argument codifies the need for Dinny’s idealized mental image to match (in a theatrical sense, the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’) the physical performance. Dinny has literally layered a façade on Hayley, which enables her to play her role as Maureen. He only knows truth when he sees it and experiences it because the sense is all in the farce. There is no other version of reality that he can comprehend outside of the performances he and his sons have enacted for seventeen years. Dinny’s ideology of experience, per Blau’s definition, assumes a life that is more real than even his memory.

Dinny’s role in the creation and reassertion of his ‘truth’ manipulates and corrupts the very premise on which he builds the story: his idealized ideology. Philip Auslander argues
that “the actorly self is, in fact, produced by the performance it supposedly grounds” (30). This claim connects specifically with the characters in *The Walworth Farce* in both a dramatic and meta-theatrical way. Auslander argues that an actor (which Dinny, Blake, Sean, and Hayley are, in addition to the actors playing them) supposedly attaches the meaning of their performance to the act itself. The fact that these characters bear an undeniable history in their bodies leads to a layering of meaning and citationality in everything they say and do. Notably, Sean is unable to fully convince himself – even in repeated performance – that his father is telling the truth because he is the only one who actually ventures out into London on a daily basis and does not see the cesspool Dinny describes.

The onstage world’s larger implications stretch even to the actors portraying the roles. In particular, the actors playing the three men must understand that their own physicality and personal interpretation of the characters cannot be separated. Druid’s Literary Manager, Thomas Conway, noted a particular difference in the playing of Sean between the original cast member, Aaron Monaghan, and the actor who played him on the world tour, Tadgh Murphy. Conway described the difference as follows:

Aaron played [the role] with depth, and Tadgh was able to play the surface. The shallowness of his performance lent itself to Enda’s world. Tadgh responded with a kind of innocence… Aaron gave too dark a coloring, so that the darkness of the play couldn’t come through. Rather it wasn’t so much dispersed throughout the play; it became explicit in Sean’s character.

Conway’s assessment of the difference in portrayal demonstrates the layered nature not only of the play but the way in which various actors might interpret a role. The play is undeniably dark, but it also hinges on the fact that Sean cannot (and in the end, will not) leave the performance of the farce. These comments also demonstrate a recognition that Walsh’s theatrical constructions require a certain amount of ‘actorly’ acting. In a sense, Murphy played the character and Monaghan played the actor. Conway was quick to say that

---

26 I interviewed Thomas Conway 4 December, 2013 at National University of Ireland, Galway.
Monaghan’s performance set the tone for the initial representation and success of the play, but he also noted that the character’s awareness of his place within a dark world might overtake the hope that an audience might otherwise have for a possible escape with Hayley.

As the play comes to its conclusion, the audience is led to believe that Sean now has the opportunity to leave the ideologically constricting world created by his father. The story has already marked the men in the room, but it has yet to affect Hayley who represents the ability to leave the dark past behind. Even when she is given a role, Hayley is still herself and constantly aware of the threat the farce poses to her life. Louis Althusser’s argues that “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing” (174). That is to say, a performer gains agency when the controlling ideology of a community provides a purpose.

The men ignore Hayley until she is given a role in the performance. But in the play’s ending, the ability to interpellate an outsider concretizes the farce as worthy of being told. Dinny calls the performance a “story to be retold, no doubt, and cast in lore” (82). Dinny acts as critic and reviewer of his own performance, willing it into the annals of vaunted memory. In his final moments, Dinny claims the acting trophy one last time because he has achieved a reality beyond any previous performance: he says “Fuck it, that’s some acting” as he actually bleeds to death (83). He sees this enactment of real death as the pinnacle of performance, and so in his eyes, the tragedy is worthy of history.

In line with Althusser’s notion of recruitment to belief in the ideology, Sean chooses repetition rather than freedom following Dinny and Blake’s deaths and Hayley’s escape from the flat. His body stops him from exiting the apartment, and instead, he restarts the performance by replaying “An Irish Lullaby” and then reenacting that day’s events up to Hayley’s entrance (84-85). Sean’s performance is dictated by his father’s final call for
memorial repetition. The mechanical reproduction of his body coupled with that of the tape recorder force the performance into a self-perpetuating cycle. In a meta-theatrical sense, the actor must also replay the scenes as the playwright has written and the director has directed. In a similarly descriptive wording, the actor must act and demonstrate his ability to not only follow the words on the page but also to evoke the physical layering necessary for effectively portraying this character’s creation of a new identity based in the reenactment of memory and ritual.

Reading *The Walworth Farce* and examining its performative qualities provides an important analytical lens with which to consider the play. As I have argued, the production of a performance will always carry with it a greater citational layering than the literary text by the sheer volume of those with whom it comes into contact. Performance, by the actors, the characters, and the characters’ characters, allows for a deeper engagement with the words because speech acts are always bodily enactments. To further this argument, Walsh’s *Penelope* establishes a more explicitly political conversation regarding the layering of performance. As the next section will demonstrate, the body may hold within it all the referents of the past, but the performance that comes out of the character and actor necessarily speak to the present and the performer’s ability to interact with those who are watching.

**Penelope’s Performance of Myths Both Ancient and Contemporary**

Performed half-truths and lies form the foundation from which each of the main characters invents himself in Enda Walsh’s play *Penelope*. The ability to avoid mawkish displays of passion becomes the imperative by which performers will be judged. But the play asks several important questions: how do performative practices and their audiences guarantee a certain type of enactment? What tactics do performers (that is to say, all people)
utilize when they know if someone is or is not watching? Is reality built on the delusion that every performance is a version of the truth? This section will attempt to answer these questions by examining Penelope’s various levels of performance and meta-theatricality. To do this, I will discuss some of the key differences between the original German production and the Druid theatre production; the latter premiered after and was set within a specifically Irish sensibility. Then theoretical considerations of the play’s issues of audience, viewership, and performance will be investigated as a prelude to my larger claims about the play’s representations of performance. The analysis necessarily requires a mixture of close textual readings and responses to the play’s original productions which will inform a broader understanding of performance’s socio-political layering and citationality.

In Penelope, Walsh reconstitutes the legend of The Odyssey for a new examination of historical and mythological remembering. The action of the play occurs on the final day of the ancient Greek myth when Odysseus returns to free his wife from the attentions of her would-be suitors. Walsh’s version, however, constructs a roughly contemporary reality surrounding a dilapidated, drained swimming pool where the eponymous Penelope can oversee her admirers’ performances of adulation and wooing mediated through a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) camera. She stands as the detached judge watching (or not watching) the action from the comfort of her home as the men must profess their love on command. The four remaining suitors – Fitz, Dunne, Quinn, and Burns – quarrel violently

---

27 In Limited, Inc., Derrida describes it as “this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident or an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function” (12). In Bodies That Matter, Butler specifically uses the term as a performativity used by a subject “to bring about what it names through citing the conventions of authority” (14). My use of the term interweaves these two notions: citationality is the referent inherent in the constantly performing body. That is, every subject or act cites an authoritative original and therefore inscribes future acts with a specific meaning.

28 Ondřej Pilný’s article “The Grotesque in the Plays of Enda Walsh” notes the political implications of these names, which I will investigate later in greater depth. But for a point of reference, each character represents a major player connected to Ireland’s Banking Crisis in 2008: Fitz is Sean Fitzpatrick (Anglo Irish Bank), Dunne is Sean Dunne (property mogul), Quinn is Sean Quinn (Anglo Irish bank), and Burns is Johnny Burns (Burns Construction). Audrey McNamara’s article offers another interpretation of Burns; he is subservient to and cowed by the other suits and might represent the Irish taxpayers who were burned by the banks (155).
for dominance and Penelope’s attentions after they all share a dream of their imminent demise at Odysseus’s hands. The recounting of this joint vision drives the play to its conclusion where each man must make a case for his own survival and perform his adoration of Penelope as truth, with their survival hanging in the balance. The suitors make a pact that each will support the other so that they all might be saved through cooperation. But the need for primacy gradually destroys this alliance as the men return to their oppositional roles of competition. In the performance of truth, none of the characters can convince Penelope, or himself, that he should be saved. Duplicity mars every one of their actions, and their performed adulation is unmasked as a desperate, unfulfilled attempt at self-preservation.

Fig. 11 – In the German production, Penelope enters the pool after the men have been slaughtered and dances to techno music in celebration. A trailer for the production can be seen at: https://youtu.be/NlSiYSpVXaw. Photo: Theater Oberhausen.

Penelope’s German and English premiere set designs (by Kaspar Zwimpfer at Theater Oberhausen; Sabine Dargent for Druid Theatre) variously depict what should be quite a similar scene. The stage directions stipulate an empty swimming pool that has “been turned into a living space and it seems to have operated as such for years” (3). Zwimpfer’s creation
Chapter 3 - Performance

of the space looks vaguely industrial with grey as the dominant color and fluorescent lights lining the edge of the pool basin. The pool’s contents resemble debris more than items for living, and even the ladder (which characters use to access the pool) is broken. Penelope’s villa is upstage and above the pool but it is cast in darkness except in the few instances where the men profess their love for her. Notably, the CCTV camera is not visible on the stage but rather is imagined to hang in the place from which a spotlight illuminates the performing suitors.

On the other hand, Dargent’s design was inspired partly by the ocean-view villa of Jean-Luc Goddard’s 1963 film *Le Mépris (Contempt)*. The ceramic tiling of the pool is much brighter – beiges, browns, and yellows – and there are steps leading to a windowed space from which Penelope can view the pool. Compared to the German production, the space is tidy and none of the objects in the basin seem particularly worn but rather exude a sense of financial security even in a pool with no water. The two most vivid differences, however, both refer to Penelope’s space upstage and above the pool: Penelope sits in relative darkness until the men are ‘on’ when her space and its ocean-blue backdrop are lit. In her area Penelope also has a television screen on which to watch the performances as opposed to Zwimpfer’s design where she was simply illuminated as a silhouetted voyeur. This variation draws attention to the other major difference of note: the CCTV camera is in full view of the men (and the audience) downstage right. The visibility of voyeurism heightens the threat of judgment along with the ubiquity of mediated images and performances, which are essential themes of the play. I argue that this sense of the production’s world exemplifies a particularly Irish political message as it brings into focus a bevy of thematic issues addressed by the play’s content.

---

29 Sabine Dargent mentioned this connection in an interview at the National University of Ireland, Galway 12 October, 2012; she also mentioned this connection while discussing her various set designs for Druid Theatre Company in an interview with Siobhan O’Gorman in *The Theatre of Enda Walsh* collection (121-22).
Fig. 12 – Sabine Dargent’s design brighter colors and a less debris-filled pool. Note also the difference in Penelope’s costuming. Photo: Druid Theatre Company.

While it would be a misrepresentation to say that the play is solely a play on Irish themes, it is important to recognize the events that influenced Enda Walsh to write the play with the specific focus he did. In 2010, Essen was awarded one of three distinctions as European Capital of Culture (along with Istanbul, Turkey and Pécs, Hungary). As part of its programming, Ruhr 2010 (as the region’s campaign was named) designated a group of architects (Raumlaborberlin) to undertake the creation of a project based on the *Odyssey*, called *Odysee Europa*. The group enlisted six theatre artists to create works relating to Homer’s epic poem which would be experienced over a two day ‘odyssey’ where audiences would travel to six different cities in the Ruhr region to see six performances\(^{30}\). As one stop in the odyssey, Theater Oberhausen commissioned Enda Walsh to write the play which would become *Penelope*. The original German production premiered in February 2010, and

\(^{30}\) In an interview with Deutsche Welle, Germany’s international broadcaster, Matthias Rick (head of *Odysee Europa*) described the project as follows: “Where is home? How do you find home? It's the main theme of the theater pieces... We call this trip ‘an odyssey through the world in-between.’ I think one of the characteristics of this region is this world between the cities: empty spaces. We have islands - the theater pieces are the islands.”
Druid Theatre would later premiere the first English language production in July 2010 as part of the Galway Arts Festival.

To contextualize the creative process further, it is necessary for a brief tangent that will prove essential in the consideration of the text as one of specifically Irish import, even given its German origins. From roughly 1995 until 2007, Ireland experienced an economic boom that provided the country with unprecedented wealth and financial stability, which led to excessive faith in banks and their loan schemes. In September 2008, the Irish government stepped in with a bank guarantee that would cover liability for Anglo Irish Bank’s massive financial irregularities. When it was discovered how deep these financial issues ran (mostly created by Sean Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive of Anglo Irish Bank 1996-2004), the Central Bank of Ireland became responsible for the illegally hidden loans and their defaulted status. Irish Businessman Sean Quinn (one of the largest shareholders in Anglo Irish Bank at a 28% stake in 2008) was financially ravaged because of the underhanded dealings with the bank; litigation was brought against him in 2010 to a value of some €2.8 billion in illegal loans, which are still being pursued in court (O’Carroll). Property mogul Sean Dunne built a name in the 1990s and early 2000s as a land developer, particularly noted (and reviled) for his 2006 purchase (and demolition) of the Ballymun Towers in excess of €500 million (Quinlan). Loan interest rates inflated the value of said properties from 2006 to 2008, so when the properties were liquidated the loans were backed by now-worthless buildings and land. If a play premieres two years after a banking crisis of this magnitude and features characters named Fitz, Quinn, and Dunne, it would stand to reason that this is an important aspect of the performance’s dramatic power.

31 For a more complete analysis of the events which led to the 2008 Irish Financial Crisis, see Blánaid Clarke and Niamh Hardiman’s essay “Crisis in the Irish Banking System,” UCD Geary Institute (February 2012).
In the play, the contest for Penelope’s love represents a function of the men’s desire for victory as the best performer but also for something more directly political. Penelope, the silent observer who watches these performers on a television feed, represents the public who witnessed the events of the Irish financial crisis. Penelope, as the silent viewer watching a television showing these performers, stands in for the public watching the events of the Irish financial crisis (draining the pool). The play revolves around the dramatic player’s need for affirmation as a representation of public personae who seek social approval. Each suitor seeks the favor of the sole woman in the play, judging and undercutting each other based on their competence and eloquence in speaking and emoting truthfully. If any one of them can convince Penelope that he is not despicable, then the group is saved – public opinion and viewership becomes the hinge on which the play functions. While the constructed performativity of the situation could be likened to any public figure (such as a politician), Walsh’s selection of names indicates the focus of the piece. The references become more specific as the men detail their business dealings while not under the scrutiny of Penelope’s gaze. The discussions reference a children’s story – The Magic Porridge Pot – which chronicles a town’s rise and fall due to the greedy inhabitants’ constant desire for more porridge. When Quinn summarizes the story as “a pot that gave and gave, a community that took with no notion of responsibility or future,” he might as well be describing various commentators’ thoughts on Celtic Tiger Ireland (9)\(^{32}\).

Walsh’s play serves largely as cultural critique, but it is important to remember that the characters are continually reminded of their paradoxically genuine/false acts. The actors (and by association the figures they represent) must trick themselves to achieve this balance. But why does constructed illusion equate to an intention of truth? In this play, the suitors

signify their nominal counterparts in real-world Ireland, and Penelope represents the public. This point is made even more explicit as Penelope views what the audience sees through a television. That is to say, this play implicates the audience in the creation of the perceived reality onstage. Alice Rayner’s claim that “the audience is the telos or reason for the performance and in that sense” provides the entire purpose for their existence; it also offers similar insight into the suitors’ actions (27). In a way, this assertion for performance’s reliance on an audience drives all theatre. And it is on this basis that the suitors create their personae, not only for themselves but for Penelope and the audience beyond the fourth wall. The men construct identities based on this expectation. They want to present a desirable image to the silent judges of their performance.

The suitors in *Penelope* (and the audience) are constantly made aware of the social and theatrical devices in which they are participating. The references to congruent events in contemporary politics and local happenings inflect every comment the men make, as they discuss “unstable economic growth” (9) or muse that “every empire has its price to pay” (14) or even liken their predicament to the process of “building a company” (22). Irish audiences might chuckle uncomfortably knowing the irony of the men’s comments, but it is more in solidarity with Penelope than with the men in the pool. In his book *The Politics of Irish Drama* Nicholas Grene argues, “The audience are challenged to think rather than merely empathize, to be always aware of being in a theatre watching a performance with consequences for the extra-theatrical world outside” (Grene 164). While Grene’s quote is intended for Brendan Behan’s *The Hostage*, the claim similarly resonates for Walsh’s *Penelope* because of the far-reaching citationality of the character names and the inevitability of their downfall. In place of Behan’s wrongly accused titular character, the suitors of Walsh’s play have no one to blame but themselves. They try to lie about their love for

---

33 This is the maxim of theatre according to Peter Brook in *The Empty Space*: “A man walks across [an] empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre” (7).
Penelope because they fear death and financial ruin. The layering on display – mediatized images projecting familiar figures who lie to save themselves from public humiliation – encourages Grene’s sense of judgment as part of a consciously theatrical creation of political commentary.

In line with the social contracts and posturing before an audience, the men perform when the camera beckons. They relax and embody their true selves only when Penelope’s gaze is not fixed on them. And still, the suitors consciously perform themselves for each other with the utmost care and calculation. Layers of each character’s performed self are put on or stripped depending on the audience. As Walsh’s stage directions note in the opening moments: “*The men speak with considerable erudition. They may be of different classes... but they all like the sound of their own voice. Their accents are provincial (each one from a different area of the country) though sound soft... as these are men of distinction*” (5). The characters are billed in this way as performers – men who both enjoy speaking and have a calculated aura of constructed identity. They have become so engrossed in their performed selves that they are caught in a constant state of acting and lying.

This notion of constant performance affirms the clearly dramatic personae of the four suitors. The men are exceedingly theatrical (Dunne and Quinn are arguably the most overtly performative) especially when they are under Penelope’s gaze. For example, the stage directions describe Dunne as “outlandishly theatrical” when he performs for Penelope (24). After Fitz fails to woo her, Dunne gives Fitz an acting note – “More energy. And don’t be afraid of the gag” (36). He only conceives of the world in a performative fashion, as something that can be honed and crafted to best appropriate the proper response from a viewer. Similarly, Quinn performs a “very accomplished quick-change cabaret routine with illusion” as his offering to Penelope (47). These men know how to act and do so for very specific audiences. Quinn, in particular, relies on ‘illusion’ and ‘quick changes’ – smoke and
mirrors to distract people from the falsehood that undercuts everything he says and does. They all take the CCTV camera as an invitation to perform, and a performance to the suitors is an act of trickery and deception. But this has come to characterize all their daily dealings with each other as much as their performances for Penelope.

In this way, the men all constantly act (as actors and characters), which highlights the ubiquity of performance in the play. The men may verbally muse on business ventures and their place in the order of most likely winners (not just for Penelope’s love), but they are never able to fully extricate themselves from the body’s inscribed purpose. In a scene of remarkably self-aware judgment, the men each discuss their views on bodily performance and identity:

FITZ: Somewhere on life’s journey the body goes its separate way. My head reconciled a few years ago that I was no longer ‘the man I was’…
QUINN: The day the head and body part company is a tragic day for the self. I am what I was in my early twenties, exactly the same, lads…
DUNNE: As you say… but the body must be respected for what the body wishes and the head must support the body… The body, boys… the body is always the king.
QUINN: Or kingdom.
DUNNE: Or kingdom, yes, Quinn. Depending on one’s…
BURNS: Appetite. Depending on one’s appetite the body is one’s king or kingdom.
(11)

The suitors constantly judge themselves based on their bodily performances. As noted above, the body constantly tells a story by its mere existence that is infused with previous experience. Fitz literally admits that he is not who he once was. They all recognize the truth of Burns’s comment that the body is an entity of the self that either rules or is ruled, but not one of them is willing to admit that they are not in control of their personal history and situation. Commenting on embodied repetition and citationality, French sociologist Emile Durkheim suggests that “in each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday’s man; it is yesterday’s man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we
result” (1938: 16). Durkheim’s claim highlights the thing which the men in Penelope wish to deny – that the body is their king. These are men of a certain quality and power, and they cannot fathom the possibility of allowing something that is outside their control to have such an influence.

To counteract their lack of control, each one of the men attempts to dominate the others. Whether this is achieved through violence or simply the threat of it, the suitors are unable to escape the truth that they are lying to themselves and to Penelope about who they are. They still try to assert their ability to manipulate and win. Later in the play, it becomes clear that these are men who will things into being. Quinn exclaims, “We annihilate every single thing that doesn’t comply to our tastes, to our sense of good, our idea of beauty. Each second of the day is a challenge to control, to win, to shape” (43). The destructive desire from the quote’s first sentence is not literally true, because once the words are spoken they cannot be unsaid and the experience cannot be unlived. The speech act, per Austin’s definition, in fact acts and therefore creates an illocutionary force. So it would be closer to say that Quinn wishes to exert his dominance through performative manipulation – the second part of the quotation. And this is a necessity in his creation of identity because of his previously noted statement that he has maintained his body in the same state it has been since his youth (which is, of course, impossible).

Once again, Durkheim’s commentary is instructive: “it is an act of will which gives birth to the social order and it is a perpetually renewed act of will which upholds it” (1966: 134). The ability to maintain a consistent existence is a fallacy. But the desire to enforce a

34 From the original French text: “car en chacun de nous, suivant des proportions variables, il y a de l’homme d’hier; et c’est même l’homme d’hier qui, par la force des choses, est prédominant en nous, puisque le présent n’est que bien peu de chose comparé à ce long passé au cours duquel nous nous sommes formés et d’où nous résultons” (Emile Durkheim, L’evolution pedagogique en France. Paris: Alcan, 1938)
35 From the original French text: “c’est un acte de volonté qui donne naissance à l’ordre social et c’est un acte de volonté perpétuellement renouvelé qui en est le support” (Emile Durkheim, Montesquieu et Rousseau precurseurs de la sociologie. Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1966)
certain performed version of self as the truth of one’s current experience is not unique. As with any ritual or repeated performance, the social order is reinscribed and revised as something that cannot possibly remain the same. Quinn wishes to engage in a kind of world-making where his actions and his words maintain his sense of self and identity. This ‘act of will,’ however, does not represent his desires as he intends but rather what has been instilled in him by the past. His bodily experiences constantly belie these desires as the physical self is rarely (if ever) synonymous with the spoken or ideological identity.

Given the characters’ (and actors’) wish to truthfully portray a version of self in performance, it is still important to recognize the fact that all people are personal manufacturers of meaning and purpose in life. Indeed, a person’s existence and their relationship to others within a community grant a kind of agency which functions as a self-perpetuating identifier. Through performance, the ideological becomes a bodily inscription. To live is to have a history. Similar to the characters in The Walworth Farc, the suitors create a kind of scripted repetition of finding meaning and variation in their performed lives. In The Future of Ritual, Richard Schechner argues that “the ‘as if’ of dreaming is by means of performance transformed into the ‘is’ of bodily actions. And once the boundary between dreaming and doing is ruptured, all kinds of things – conceptual, fantastic, recollected, spill through in both directions” (263). The suitors embrace this desire for dreams to be made manifest through action. They believe in the ability of performance to make reality out of a performed, mediated existence.

In the same way, the men in Penelope actively admit and recognize their performativity. In response to their carefully constructed facades, Quinn contends, “It’s the mark of a great artist that you found truth in such wonderful delusion” (31). While this comment is directed specifically at Dunne (who moments before notes his desire to pursue a life in the theatre), Quinn provides a broad reference to the same creative process of world-
making through actions and words. The men in the play see themselves as artists, and they represent people who have created imaginary power to bankrupt their capacity to tell the truth. The repeated act in which these men are engaged may be couched within the framework of a game for Penelope’s love, but that does not mean each time they perform some grotesque, manufactured show of adoration it is not also as real as it possibly could be. Similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s assertion that ‘the body believes in what it plays at,’ the characters in the play invest in their performance certain beliefs about themselves and the world in the hope that it will be made manifest through enactment. Each man truly believes in his own performance as truth and his ability to construct a reality from his performance.

By making the play openly self-aware and self-critical, Walsh’s text forces the performers to enact the play (which is a constructed lie of sorts) and do it truthfully. The performed truth within the play contends with the very presence of the performer as both character and actor. This model presents a layered complexity of which the audience must be made aware. As noted above, the men constantly play into the idea of deception through performance. Because of this need to constantly play and dominate, they are in a perpetual process of performance. Similar to a public figure, the suitors can never stop acting the part that they are expected to play; and this cycle leads to questions of honesty. For if there is no disparity between the performed self (a kind of honesty, because of the body’s inscribed history) and the underlying character, then how can there ever be a truth that is separate from a knowing deception?

The moment when honesty aligns with deception is inherent in every performance. This is just as true in the construction of a person’s identity in daily life as in a play. In Penelope, the men onstage engage their own notions of truth as they try to shift their beliefs to fit what they perform. Their identities are constructed on that reality which they have created each day in front of the camera for Penelope. These on-camera performances are
unmediated by a screen when viewed by the audience beyond the proscenium arch. This fact further complicates the issue of appearance and truth. The viewer beyond the fourth wall is permitted a clear vision of these men while Penelope sits behind a screen, only seeing what each man chooses to present. The suitors have performed versions of themselves so often that they begin to believe the lies. The characters explicitly state these expectations and understandings of reality:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{BURNS: } & \text{But will you ever return to reality?} \\
\text{DUNNE: } & \text{What reality?} \\
\text{BURNS: } & \text{A reality!} \\
\text{DUNNE: } & \text{I am in one!} \\
\text{BURNS: } & \text{A reality closer to what the people of the world may ACTUALLY RECOGNISE! I mean, look at us!} \\
\text{DUNNE: } & \text{How dare you bring the world into this! I have spent a lifetime escaping this world! What the fuck has the world ever given to me?!...} \\
\text{BURNS: } & \text{But your words have meant nothing to her! She\’s an object to you, an ending, another deal!} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(38)

The characters are aware of their own alteration of personal history and reality. The verity of their world may have its basis in illusion, in playing a game, but that only makes the legitimacy of their performances within the play all the more necessary. The performer in this play must actively and fervently pursue the fraud on which his character is based. By placing these types of enacted truths in opposition to the actor performing the role of each character, the playwright highlights the performances’ simultaneous distance from and proximity to everyday ritual. Walsh’s play disrupts the expected (in)visibility of the performer as the character onstage by producing reality through revision and delusion. This exposure emphasizes the fact that performance, not just on the stage, constitutes a sort of deceit that cannot truly be escaped.

In the play’s final speech Walsh gives voice to an idea that consumes all of society: words are constructs based on a set of conventions, and those cannot be avoided any more than these men can evade their imminent deaths. Burns says, “Rules are placed on stories,
talk is a veil for lies and people carry around little pedestals of differing sizes and half-talk to each other and lie to themselves and others that they are part of a community, part of a civilization” (50). However, in that moment just before death, there is a sort of enlightenment as he shares his true self. His words, in ironic self-reference to actor, character, and audience, present both a ‘veil for lies’ and also the truth the onstage figures wish to embody. Language provides the most paradoxically appropriate interrogation of socially and culturally performed roles and masks, all due to the fact that Burns is willing to embrace his own dual nature as both truth-teller and fraud.

This section has extensively considered the enactment of performance and its ability to willfully create versions of identity. Mediatized images of self become hyper-performative while those enacted selves outside of the ‘public’ scrutiny are highlighted as performance. A viewing audience would be confronted by the distinct differences between the men as performed in general and their constructed images for Penelope’s consumption and judgment. The similarity in constructedness proves that the performance of self is always ‘on’ rather than only appearing for particular instances. However, even considering all these elements of performance, it is impossible to extricate the play from its initial conception. Penelope is necessarily about the public performance persona of a contemporary economic failure in an Irish context. Through performance and its transmission across the liminal space of interpretation, the audience is forced to confront issues of political import that directly reflect contemporary events at the time of the original production.

This specific citation of Irish experience does not, however, preclude the broader implications of performance. Rather, the issues become highly concretized and therefore more easily translatable in performance. This concretization implies, as Roman Ingarden theorizes, that “no aesthetic concretization of a literary work of art is intentionally determined alone but requires a codetermination by the reader” (397). This theory relies on the subjective
experiences that an individual actor and audience member bring to a production. In this way, the various bodies onstage provide the truth of performance alongside the linguistic constructions, which demonstrate the layering of power structures. Similar to Judith Butler\(^\text{36}\), I contend that issues of performance, power, and agency are all intertwined. It is impossible to separate the idea of performative creativity from a subject’s ability to convey meaning and claim an identity. The characters in *Penelope* (like those in *The Walworth Farce*) represent individuals who cling to their repeated gestures of deception around which they have built their existence. This claim leads to a broader interpretation of performance as an inherently inventive act. By making a play which cites the people responsible for Ireland’s 2008 banking crisis and putting them into direct confrontation with the viewing public, Walsh creates a world wherein the people hold the power. Penelope never speaks a word, just as the voice of those not in the public eye are rarely heard. And yet, the performance of lies is depicted as self-evident in its enactment, because the titular character never gives in to the men’s attempted deceptions. People now recognize what they view through mediated media: all is performance, and it is all subject to transformation over time.

**Performing Contexts and Versions of Reality**

My commentary in this chapter has focused mostly on two plays by Enda Walsh as exemplary of larger themes and issues of performance and performers. Throughout the project as a whole, I allude to issues such as re-membering (a present tense manifestation and revision of the past) and ritualized reality (that is, a moderated repetition of gestures and words that creates a form of truth and faith in the practitioner) alongside notions of performativity and inscribed, physical histories. These analyses are all interrelated: ritual is a type of performance built on memory; remembering is an ideologically wrought reification of

\(^{36}\) In her essay “Critically Queer” Butler argues that “The performative is thus one domain in which power acts as discourse” (17).
the past, and performed truth manifests the beliefs of communities and individuals based on social and political constructs. These claims are situated within the expectation that the body represents a historical archive with the same power as the written word. In this way, oral and ritualized identities can claim agency and the ability to enact versions of truth.

When reflecting on the debate between written and spoken memories and performance, Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* provides a useful rubric for considering performance as it relates to social constructions. She argues, “If performance did not transmit knowledge, only the literate and powerful could claim social memory and identity” (xvii). Dinny’s farce and the overtly theatrical presentations in *Penelope* form distinct kinds of history, ones in which reality is constructed across time and cemented into truth through the physical act rather than the written word. As is the case in both these plays (and, indeed, every other), the reality is a suspension of disbelief that has its truth confirmed in performance. The mental capacity and desire for duplicity is not only understood but expected as a logical construction of theatre and society, and it is expected to fail in the face of performed identity. This final section will suggest that actors, characters, and the audiences of contemporary plays constantly recognize (even subconsciously) the layers of performance in which they constantly engage; and this is not a problem.

Meta-theatrically, actors must recognize that their character’s fate is decided; the script has been written. In fact, *Penelope*’s first printing (among others that are sold as programs) even notes “This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ slightly from the play as performed” (2). The text, by its very nature, differs from performance, and this is acknowledged by the publishers, the actors, and the audience members who purchase a copy of the script. Moving a play from page to stage represents a revision of the word. While the playwright provides instructions for a vision of the piece, this caveat allows for deviation and interpretation. Any departure from the script therefore no
longer represents a deviation from the writer’s original idea; rather it is an acceptance of the collaborative aspect of performance and its inherent changeability. It is impossible to reproduce the exact same effect onstage each night in a live performance, and this accepted deviation is what the suitors enact in hopes of changing their fate. The creation of an onstage reality – by people pretending to be who they are not – provides the most truthful version of performance, and for that the audience applauds the actors as the performers confront their own scripted ends.

Of course, the ‘ends’ referred to here are not in fact the irreversible erasure of a character, actor, or self. Even considering the fact that an act is impossible to repeat in the exact same context and performance, immediacy is integral to the relationship between the body of the actor, words of the character, and the audience’s responses. Because of this knowingly revised connection, the audience is equally implicated in the creative process. As director-theorist Vsevolod Meyerhold writes, “We produce every play on the assumption that it will be still unfinished when it appears on the stage. We do this consciously because we realize that the crucial revision of a production is that which is made by the spectator” (256). In this way, the recognition of performance as world-making requires a social construction.

For Walsh’s plays, the audience acts as silent collaborators rather than active participants. This need is made literal in Penelope as the men openly seek approval for their performances directed to the camera which happens to face them out toward the audience. It is more subversive in The Walworth Farce (and many of Walsh’s other plays) where the judging viewer is both onstage, in the form of Hayley, and off, as audiences watch the performance. In both instances, the process of including an audience is a revisionary process as this outside eye influences performance. This external viewership also relates back to my discussion of Misterman when Walsh served as director, and will be discussed further in relation to his directorial role for Ballyturk.
This collaboration is never explicitly offered to the audience in Walsh’s plays; none of his plays (except arguably *Once* and *Room 303*) require or even invite audience participation. However, the revisionists are represented onstage. The characters (and the actors who portray them) constantly re-member a production, both due to Walsh’s thematic interest in the subject and because that is the nature of live performance. But the characters reflect on themselves and their creative methods of world-building as something over which they hold control, and this belief (deception) can affect the viewers. In this way, Walsh implies collusion and connections to be made between the plays’ contents and the audience’s experiences. While the events onstage may seem unrealistic and expressly theatrical, the performances always indicate an underlying current of reality for the characters. Socially performed interactions create reality because they construct an identity on top of an already-existing person. The participatory act of theatre invites audience considerations. As Meyerhold stated, there is no performance without the revision of the viewer.

Similar to the collaborative relationship between actor and audience, an individual’s performative capacity is necessarily constructed on past experience and expected reiterations of social values. To make this claim more explicit, Susan Bennett argues that “both an audience’s reception of a text (or performance) and the text (performance) itself are bound within cultural limits” (240). In other words, the reception of a production by an audience is necessarily inflected by the subjective experience each individual has. A person very rarely breaks out of their expected response to a particular performance. To this end, Pierre Bourdieu’s conception of the ‘habitus’ informs a reading of performance practices. He explains that the “habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated

---

37 The original production of the musical *Once* featured a pub with a live traditional Irish music session onstage where audience members were able to purchase drinks and mingle with the cast before the show officially began. In *Room 303*, as produced at the Galway International Arts Festival 2014, audience members sat in a room that had been made to look like a hotel room inside an art gallery while a recording of the text was played.
improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the… motivating structures” (1977: 78). In this sense, the habitus refers to an individual’s experience and every subjective experience that person has had. Bourdieu’s theory insists on a citationality of experience where performed reality reproduces the structures in which it was originally created. This idea encompasses not only the characters of *The Walworth Farce* and *Penelope* but can be applied to all the other plays I have previously discussed. Bennett and Bourdieu’s arguments here demonstrate the limited nature of expected audience responses based on whatever culture is being displayed and received.

The fact that these performances are repeated, ritualized, and revised demonstrates the supposed willingness to offer commentary and challenge power structures. But if Bennett and Bourdieu’s claims are to be believed, the reproduction of identity is necessarily limited to that which has previously influenced an individual. This contention limits the discourse available on performance as it leaves little room for development. However, in *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* Victor Turner argues against the self-perpetuating notion of bodily enactment. He claims that “performances are presented which probe a community’s weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known ‘world’” (11). As noted in previous sections, memory and ritual attempt to claim stability through repetition and strict adherence to rules. Performance, on the other hand, exercises a certain level of influence over these two practices. In fact, any individual performance has never existed before and will never exist again, making it the anti-thesis for what remembering and ritualized acts seek. But these processes are types of performance: re-membering and the enactment of ritual.
Chapter 3 - Performance

To continue this argument of interconnection, one must recognize the layering of performativity as a palimpsestuous experience. Like a wall mural that has been painted over, the traces of the past are forever part of the wall, the area, and those who encounter(ed) the work. Similarly, the human body is a site of constant evolution and development. Everyday life constitutes an act of performed reality not simply because it cites previous experience but because it continuously transforms. Put another way, Alice Rayner argues that “Performance, because it is a practice rather than an idea, dissolves the idealized fixation of identity. Performance by its very multiplicity breaks down the singularity of an authentic self” (102). Walsh’s plays represent this same instability of identity. Performance is a practice, and therefore the work and process must be cited as re-constructions of identity. That which has come before can never return, and yet it constantly reappears as an attempt to present that authentic self. Rayner implicates actors, audience, and anyone who comes into contact with a performance (whether in theatre or everyday life) in the perpetual struggle to define identity.

This chapter has presented a case for the layered performativity of bodily enactment as a process of creating reality. Schechner’s claim that ‘everything can be studied as performance’ proves the omnipresence of layered visions of self. As a point of critical engagement, The Walworth Farce and Penelope depict worlds of attempted deception which always both succeed and fail because of the body’s inherent reliance on past experience. The possibility for a complex creation of self exists within the realm of performance because of its relationship to bodily citation and the evolution of personal meaning. While I have referred to the premiere productions of Walsh’s plays as examples of this theoretical framework, the next chapter will engage a more practical approach to these considerations. I will examine Walsh’s development as an artist (writer, actor, puppeteer, director) alongside the productions that determined his own citation as a performing entity. Additionally, I will reference my own directorial and dramaturgical work as practitioner and scholar in an
attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Through both parts of the next chapter, I will establish the applicability of ritual, memory, and performance studies to the multi-layered creation of a theatrical production. I will use performance-as-research methodologies to examine on my own theatre-making process and demonstrate the ways in which a production, from concept to rehearsal to performance, exhibits memorial revisionist performance in action.
Chapter 3 - Performance

Works Cited


Conway, Thomas. Personal Interview. 4 December, 2013. Recording.


Chapter 3 - Performance


https://youtu.be/NISiYSpVXaw


Chapter 3 - Performance


Chapter Four: Production

This chapter explores Enda Walsh’s plays in production. By putting the plays into practice, I sought to demonstrate the ways in which repetition, ritualized behavior, and emphasis on memory can influence rehearsals and production, especially in the plays of Enda Walsh. To situate this argument within a theoretical context, I reference my own theatrical explorations of Walsh’s work. The information included in this chapter is necessarily reflective of my own practice and is particular to The Enda Walsh Project, and as such the conclusions demonstrate a singular connection between my theoretical discussions in previous chapters and the practical application of those concepts. However, I argue that the conclusions here can be applied to the production of Walsh’s plays more generally. The Enda Walsh Project, therefore, serves as a case study in which I demonstrate my practice-as-research (PaR) methodologies from the beginning of the design process to the final performance. My productions provided examinations of the various ways in which a production team and actors (and myself as director) respond to the thematic issues in these plays, particularly in relation to memory, ritual and performance. The chapter begins with an overview of the pre-production process and the preparation for testing my theories in practice. Then I discuss the ways in which the themes of memory, ritual, and performance were evidenced in the production process. The chapter ends with an exploration of the responses to the project by my collaborators. My own experience and those of various members of my production team provide insight into what can be gleaned when linking the practical and the theoretical.

To examine the PaR relevance of The Enda Walsh Project, I turn to Anna Pakes’s ‘intentional action model’ and Robin Nelson’s ‘praxis approach’ to inform the case study of my production process, which takes its influences from Richard Schechner. While it may seem incorrect to relate my process to both Pakes and Nelson, I find the use of both
informative to my process as an artist and researcher. The intentional action model, according to Pakes, “seems to place too much emphasis on artistic purposes and not enough on the process’s outcome, the artwork, which is after all the thing with which the wider audience would engage” (6). In this way, the intentional action model prefers process to product. On the other hand, Nelson’s claims about praxis seem to indicate that an artist-researcher should never separate the two aspects of art and research. She says, “Above all it asserts the primacy of practice and insists that because creative practice is both on-going and persistent, practitioner-researchers do not merely ‘think’ their way through or out of a problem, but rather they ‘practice’ to a resolution” (8). Nelson’s point here emphasizes praxis as “theory imbricated with practice” (5). I use both Pakes’s and Nelson’s styles throughout my project because both the perpetual artist-researcher is useful for me personally as the director of The Enda Walsh Project, but the consideration of the process as conceived by Pakes relates more closely to the experiences of my production team. My interviews of the actors, designers, and crew allowed me to gain a perspective not only on my process but theirs as well.

Through this emphasis on production, the playwright’s written work mirrors the role of the theatre-maker – an experience of slow but eventual realisation at the agency (or lack thereof) in the production process. In this chapter, I argue that directing and producing three short Walsh plays – How These Desperate Men Talk, My Friend Duplicity, and The Small Things – is analogous to directing one of his full-length pieces. Obviously it is not the exact same process to direct The Walworth Farce as it is to direct several plays. The claims I make about rehearsals, designs, and the final performances connect broadly to theatre-making practice and therefore could be connected to a production of The New Electric Ballroom, for example, without directing every Walsh play. I contend that these three representative plays demonstrate production team members taking part in memorial reinscriptions of world-making in the rehearsal process as well as the performance of an idealized past. By creating
and revising expectations throughout, the designers, actors and I engaged in the performative
repetition that closely resembles what characters in Walsh’s plays enact. I do not mean that
we relentlessly repeated the same actions and stories every single day allowing these worlds
to overtake our lives beyond theatre. I do, however, intend to show that *The Enda Walsh
Project* reflects the themes of memory, ritual and performance that exists in theatre-making
generally.

**The Enda Walsh Project: Methodology and Preparation**

This chapter foregrounds the discussion of my own work as a director and theatre-
maker interpreting the themes of ritualised repetition, performed (re)memory, and revised
performance. In 2015, I directed a trio of Enda Walsh’s short plays – *How These Desperate
Men Talk, My Friend Duplicity, and The Small Things* – as a single production called *The
Enda Walsh Project*. The three casts and the production team consisted of students at
National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) within the Centre for Drama, Theatre
and Performance, varying in years of study from first years to MA level. As such, students
began with varied levels of experience, but I encouraged collaboration and communication
between all participants as part of the process for unpacking and understanding Walsh’s plays
not only as complex texts that can be read closely, but also as performances to be enacted
before audiences. By stressing commentary and feedback between students and myself, the
production process provided opportunities for dramaturgical discussion amongst the actors
and designers, for reflection upon larger implications and themes. This relationship led to
open dialogue not only about how Walsh’s themes impacted upon each play individually but
on the project as an interlinked whole.

I began the process by considering Practice-as-Research (PaR) methodologies and the
best ways to test my theories about performative re-membering and rituals. In particular,
Anna Pakes’s theory of ‘intentional action’ in performing arts influenced this project and the process I undertook. Pakes defines the term as follows: “art making [is] a form of intentional action, of which the cognitive value lies in the reasoned decision-making of the artist as agent” (4). She expands on this claim saying that “through intentional action […] art-making’s distinctively practical knowledge or phronetic insight is generated, [therefore] the processes and not their outcomes carry the practice’s epistemological weight” (5). This core belief is essential to my own practice: the process arguably creates more opportunities for theoretical discovery than the end product. To engender these beliefs in my production team, I always foregrounded the present work rather than reminding them of the performance dates. It is hard to commit fully to this claim, however, when you ask actors to memorize lines and designers to fully realize their designs in a space. Theatre consumption is a necessary part of the process and therefore relevant to Pakes’s claim, but the production meetings and rehearsals frequently provided examples of revised performances of memory.

To further connect my theoretical and practical goals, I refer to Robin Nelson’s theory of “praxis” or “theory imbricated with practice” (5). Nelson’s conception of the practitioner-researcher refutes definitions that otherwise privilege either the academic or the artist. The two aspects of a theatre-maker can and should co-exist allowing for the flow of knowledge to affect theatre practice and research. To do this, PaR requires embodied knowledge such that the tacit understanding that is achieved in performance can be then translated to critical reflection on methods and outcomes. In this case, my role as director was to not only embody the practice of researcher/artist but to instil those values in my production team. While I never explicitly asked them to think of research questions and the larger implications to the study of theatre, I found that my production team came to the larger contextual issues on their own during the process. Nelson also notes that “PaR researchers sometimes evidence the research inquiry in writings but not to yield answers in the form of analytic or synthetic
propositions” (58). I agree with this refusal of traditional scientific standards and quantitative results that allow for consumption of numbered outputs rather than nuanced commentary. My own reflections below follow this desire to provide an analytic consideration of *The Enda Walsh Project*, but I also cannot claim any objective findings that will necessarily apply to all productions of these plays. Therefore, I couch my own expectations for this PaR project within a realm of necessary subjectivity based on exploring my own research topics.

The objectives for the production follow my line of thinking for the memory, ritual and performance studies sections of my analysis. Repetitions and revisions of memory appear in all three plays in *The Enda Walsh Project*, as do ritualized performances through which the characters hope to achieve an idealized version of the past. As an artist-scholar, I aim to link these aspects of thematic importance to production by highlighting these concepts in rehearsal and the design as well as the final performance. However, these issues are also subjective and the perception of them in performance is not guaranteed. Kim Etherington in *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher* argues that “nothing is fixed; knowledge can only be partial and built upon the culturally defined stocks of knowledge available to us at any given time in history; reality is socially and personally constructed; there is no fixed or unchanging ‘Truth’” (27). This claim resonates strongly with my own understanding of theatre practice and the research I undertake. I would argue that the characters in Walsh’s plays actively ignore Etherington’s point but that through production an audience can see the commentary Walsh offers on their situations. In looking at a finished product, Nicholas Davey argues that “Everything that can be said about an artwork and its subject matter is incomplete. There is always more to be said. Neither the theoretician nor the practitioner has definitive rights to closure over what an artwork has to say” (24). With that being said, the following expectations and critical reflections represent my own interpretation of the production process and performance of three Enda Walsh plays. I use this PaR project to frame my
understanding not only of the plays in production but the larger theoretical implications I have discussed in previous chapters.

My goal in directing these productions was to test whether the themes of memory, ritual and performance would be applied to production. To do this, I began the process by selecting the plays that would do two things: provide a range of eras and styles within Walsh’s playography, and allow a group of actors the opportunity to engage substantially with the textual and performative complexities of staging these plays. I would argue that Walsh’s plays all demonstrate the qualities I have discussed, so I limited my selections to three shorter works so that I could produce them in a single performance. With two exceptions (The Walworth Farce and Once), Walsh’s plays are all one-acts, but many run between 70 and 90 minutes, and it would be too much to expect audiences to watch three performances of that length. Directorially, I wanted a cohesive structure and setting in which to explore these worlds; therefore, I limited the choices to plays which take place in a single room. Finally, I decided that each play should only include two actors so as to allow actors (and myself) to explore the texts in as much detail as possible, to achieve an almost ritualised sense of the production. Given these stipulations, I decided to direct How These Desperate Men Talk (2004), My Friend Duplicity (2010) and The Small Things (2005). Each play has a unique place within Walsh’s works, and a brief examination of them will provide a more specific explanation for my choices.

How These Desperate Men Talk was originally produced at Schauspielhaus-Bunk’r in Zurich, Switzerland in German under the title Fraternity in 2004. The play would be staged later at the Kinsale Arts Festival by Corcadorca in a co-production with Eat My Noise in 2014 for its professional Irish premiere. This production was also the first time since misterman (1999) that Corcadorca had produced Walsh’s work. I have already discussed the play at length in the first chapter so I will not repeat my reasoning for the play’s relevance to
discussions of memory, ritual and performance. In staging *How These Desperate Men Talk*, I wanted to explore the themes of what constitutes reality and the limits of what can be precisely recalled by individuals within the plays. The actors’ process somewhat mirrored Dave and John’s attempts to re-enact previous attempts and achieve the same emotional response with each performance. In my direction, I pushed the actors to confront and explore these issues by testing various solutions for staging and building tension. The actors often remarked on their own predicaments in re-membering what we had done during previous rehearsals, and then after performances, they also noted that the show would change no matter how they tried to maintain the same standards each night.

The creative process of making and re-making worlds is particularly poignant for Walsh’s play *My Friend Duplicity*. The play originally premiered at the 2010 Edinburgh International Festival as a staged reading held in the mornings before performances of *Penelope*. Then when the production of *Penelope* travelled to America, the staged readings continued for two one-time performances in New York and Washington D.C. So my production was the Irish premiere of the play, because it had not been produced in a full staging. The play features two characters who go to a room in Kilburn (northwest London) so that they can imagine and perform worlds. Fergal and Jean speak to each other and create places that only exist in their minds as a form of escape from the boredom and lack of creativity beyond their room. However, Jean begins having doubts about their purpose and reasons for coming to this room, and the routine breaks down as she attempts to steer the creation toward the reality of London. The play clearly demonstrates the themes I have already discussed. In production, actors try to determine what is true for the characters and find the logical basis for their motivations, and often they confront notions of incomplete memory and revisionist rituals as a mode of survival.
Chapter 4 - Production

*The Small Things* was originally produced by Paines Plough as part of their “This Other England” project, which highlighted stories about the UK beyond the cultural center of London. Interestingly, Enda Walsh (an Irishman) wrote a play using the Lancashire dialect, what one reviewer called “North Country accents” (Fisher). To highlight this otherness, I cast a woman from Donegal and a man from Tipperary and asked them to use their natural accents as a way to mark them as coming from outside the major urban areas of Ireland. This status led to even more connections with the content of Walsh’s play, which allowed actors to engage the somewhat surreal notion that these characters might be dead or figments of each other’s imaginations. Rather than pointing them to these conclusions, I asked the actors to embrace the story and their characters’ idiosyncrasies – specifically focusing on the physical storytelling that happened even as they sat for more than half of the show. This attention to the body allowed them to connect in the full storytelling mode that drives the play. In their post-production responses, the actors recognised the work they had done in creating repertoires for the characters’ histories had led to a more nuanced understanding of the play and its themes.

To find the impact of these directorial strategies, I asked the actors to keep rehearsal journals and I conducted interviews with the actors between one and two weeks after the end of performances. I met with each actor for an hour so that I could ask questions about how they interpreted the various stages of the process from table work/research to the public performances. These discussions also provided an opportunity to hear critical feedback of my readings of the plays and the rehearsal/performance process. The meetings also provided insight into the ways they approached the project and the student-actor’s mindset, which is quite different from that of a professional actor. Where a professional actor can focus wholly

38 The journals were part of a module at NUI Galway and I do not have the permission to reproduce their writing. When I quote a student, it comes from my own notes that I took during rehearsals and in post-production meetings with each actor.
on a production, my production team balanced their time between rehearsal and other responsibilities. However, I held them to professional standards for attendance, timeliness and performance expectations. This section will take the students’ reflections upon the rehearsal/performance process and consider them alongside my own directorial expectations from the outset as well as my experiences throughout the production. The reactions will be necessarily personal, but I will frame each description within a system of verifications from various sources.

While considerations of this process might seem unconnected to the themes of ritual, memory, and performance, *The Enda Walsh Project* demonstrates just the opposite, especially when discussed in connection with the final interviews. The process of theatre-making relies on the rehearsal process, a memorising/repetition of lines and blocking, in the hopes of achieving something that appears fresh on each night of performance as a performed ritual of a certain reality. I did not ask the students to look for specific themes and issues, but I did often ask them to remain aware of the connections and differences between the three plays. In their journals and the final feedback sessions, the actors did not need prompting to mention the repetition and revision process that they had experienced and to consider how it mirrored some aspects of the plays. Actors did not necessarily recognise these themes until challenged to consider these connections regarding their own experience. In this way, the student-actors develop their own sense of self onstage through the process of creating these characters, but they also do this in tandem with script analysis and the other collaborators in the project. By looking for connections between plays, the production team uncovered Walsh’s overarching themes which span his entire oeuvre.

In addition to the examination of various production, my analysis will point to some performance studies and practical theatre application theories as necessary. Specifically, Marvin Carlson’s considerations of haunting and re-staging will provide a basic framework
for understanding the ways in which the production process constantly repeats and revises personal experience. I connect his consideration with Suzan-Lori Parks’s ‘Rep&Rev’ and physically-inflected writing as a dramatic and human act of storytelling and re-enacting the past for the present. These concepts also link to what Jeanette R. Malkin terms ‘memory-theatre’ and the (re)production of versions of the past which break down simple understandings of linear narrative. Given these three theories, I argue that Enda Walsh’s works in production not only highlight their relationship to ritual, memory, and performance but are inextricably linked to the themes. These issues may seem focused solely on memory, but the theoretical ideas also point to physical embodiment because of the plays’ performed nature. And performance, as has already been argued, relies on ritualised repetition and remembering not only of texts but of rehearsed enactments. In this way, Walsh’s productions (both his own and those at NUI Galway) depict a direct correlation between the way in which the actors perform and inscribe belief in their ability to realise their characters’ stories on stage.

**Proto-performance, Performance, and Aftermath in The Enda Walsh Project**

This section will discuss the rehearsal and production process of *The Enda Walsh Project*, produced by NUI Galway’s Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance. In particular, I use the structure of ‘proto-performance, performance, and aftermath’ as set out by Richard Schechner in *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (225). In particular, these three parts of the performance process relate to the before, during, and after of a public performance (or run of a show). My commentary below follows these structures to highlight the ways in which the production team for *The Enda Walsh Project* unconsciously followed a development process similar to the ones experienced by characters in Walsh’s plays. The project began rehearsals in January 2015 with a read-through. From there, the production team and actors engaged in table work, blocking rehearsals, run-throughs, technical
Chapter 4 - Production

rehearsals, and eventually performances for an audience. This well-worn path from casting to production could be discussed as yet another layer of ritualised experience, but instead I will focus on individual stories and the ways in which actors engaged with the text and its performance over six weeks. Because of the repetitive process inherent in rehearsal, students came to recognise the malleable memory function of learning lines and physically enacting a script with an end goal of public performance. In this way, The Enda Walsh Project provides not just a single example of re-produced storytelling, but also represents many personal explorations of the issues relating to ritual, memory, and performance.

The three plays How These Desperate Men Talk, My Friend Duplicity, and The Small Things comprised The Enda Walsh Project. From the beginning, I chose to present all three short shows in one night of theatre. In performance, the Project took place on a small, box set and it ran for one hour and forty-five minutes without an interval – choices made to show the direct link between the themes and styles of repetitive world-building. While the production was always meant for an audience response, the real test came within the first five weeks of rehearsal and revision in which the students and I, as director, engaged. I have already discussed the first and last of the trio in other chapters, so I will not recount their plots but instead assume a basic knowledge of the play. However, I will provide some information regarding My Friend Duplicity (which had not had a full stage production before this one). Much of my analysis, however, will still focus on the Project and its participants. As such, I will demonstrate the links between Walsh’s themes and the production process itself as it directly relates to The Enda Walsh Project.

In production, I wanted to highlight the interconnectedness of the three plays both thematically and as a collaborative process of revision. Therefore, I organised the rehearsal process as follows: two rehearsals for each play during the week and a run-through of all three plays every Friday where the casts could not only see the work the other groups had
done but offer feedback on a regular basis. This choice was important to the production because I wanted to create a community that resembled the ones in Walsh’s plays – small number of people who intimately know all the various aspects of each story because of the continued viewing and re-viewing. By expecting the actors to attend these run-throughs and offer critical feedback, I attempted to instil a sense of what Anna Pakes describes as “events [that] take place within – and are a result of – an intersubjective context in which it is crucial to have a creative sensitivity to others participating in the process, to the materials at hand and to the evolving situation” (4). In short, I created a collaborative environment in which the production team could be part of the repetition and revision process. This PaR methodology was essential to the development of the production because of the communal storytelling and myth-making that is common to all of Walsh’s plays. As discussed in previous chapters, the characters’ attempts to create an idealized version of the past must be part of a memorialized ritual performance. In each micro-community, there is direct experience of the narrative through performed re-membering but the other members who hear and see the story repeatedly take part in the creation of each play’s world.

In the first show – How These Desperate Men Talk – I cast Jonathan Halnon as John and Connor Curran as Dave. Through much of the rehearsal process, we kept the same sessions – two hours on Mondays for individualised work and three hours on Fridays to show what we had worked on earlier in the week. This approach proved difficult for the two actors, who both noted their own fatigue by the end of the process even with the short hours required for rehearsal. They both especially spoke to the active rehearsing as exciting and collaborative, but they also described watching the other two shows each week as overly repetitive. These reflections provide an interesting contrast to the characters that Halnon and Curran played, and while of course equating actors with their onstage persona is problematic, they did recognise the importance of repeated reflection when prompted to consider the
organization of the production process. Granted, this development came only with my encouragement to them to see these themes, and once the thought has been introduced it is difficult to say whether the rest of a student’s considerations constitute something of their own making or mine. This discussion of *How These Desperate Men Talk* refers to these complex issues of performed authorship and memory prompting, specifically the ways in which theoretically it should have worked and the ways it did using my perception and the actors’ experiences.

Connor Curran and Jonathan Halnon only attended rehearsals for five hours each week, only three of those dedicated directly to their work. While this would be too small an amount for a professional production, especially given the intricacy of the themes and issues in the play, it was important to provide time throughout the six weeks of production not just for active rehearsal but also for personal reflection. I cannot vouch for the students’ outside activity, but each time we came to the rehearsal room I asked if they had thoughts or questions that had come up at the previous session or in their own line-learning and research for the roles. Both Halnon and Curran often responded with thoughts for staging or with different interpretations of lines that they had previously not understood. The directorial process for this play (and all the others) followed a collaborative model in which I would offer guidance and direction only after the students had spoken. These two aspects – asking for new thoughts on the play and providing the actors with the agency to work and re-work the process – provided an environment much like those in the plays. In *How These Desperate Men Talk*, Dave and John repeat and revise the story about John’s alleged murder but they never find the ‘truth.’ One could argue that this exploration for the eponymous men mirrors that of the rehearsal process in which we engaged. In their individual feedback sessions, both Curran and Halnon spoke about this reflection of art and formal process without my prompting.
Each actor spoke of how he approached the character and how his interpretations crystallised over time because of the growing comfort and relationship each had with the other. Neither Curran nor Halnon had met before the production, and by the end they both spoke of the deep friendship they had developed and how it complemented the one onstage. Because John describes Dave as his ‘best friend’ throughout the play, the actors both recognized the necessity in their ability to offer suggestions or changes to the scripted performance in rehearsal. While Halnon and Curran stayed within the written text, the rehearsal process demonstrated the level of comfort that repeated attempts to find the right tone or action provided to the actors. So, as the actors became better friends (like their performed counterparts), the production process became more like a joint project for discovering the ‘truth’ that the characters seek in the play. One would come up with an idea; then we would try it. If it needed clarification, the other would provide an idea about how to hold the gun or use the space to create a more hostile environment. This realization by the students revealed to them the way in which Walsh’s works not only put the themes into the text but also that memory, ritual and performance are necessary for performance. In this way, my directorial vision became almost secondary to the needs of the production because of the frame I had imposed on the process.

The students were consistently asked to consider the larger implications of how and why we rehearsed the way we did. In my planning of the process, this format provided a way for collaboration and interconnection not just among each individual play but for the Project as a whole. Curran and Halnon saw the benefit of the process, but unlike their characters, the actors noted that these weekly showings often produced almost imperceptible differences from previous run-throughs. Or there would be a major change in the staging choices for one moment, but that was the only change which elicited commentary. While this chapter’s purpose is not to critique my own production process, the students’ recognition of the
repeated, subtle changing demonstrated the way it happens in their own play. Halnon, in particular, said that “I would often zone out because I had seen *The Small Things* so many times, and then I would come back and wonder how we got to a part I didn’t recognise” (Halnon). The admitted detachment was not ideal, but the comment shows what Walsh’s plays implicitly do to their characters; the performers repeat or see something so often that when it changes slightly it is impossible to tell the difference until you find a moment that strikes you as such. The everyday and re-experienced nature of the performance lulls even the actors into a false sense of an unchanged story. In this way, the rehearsal process and response by the actors to *How These Desperate Men Talk* provided explicit moments of Walsh’s revisionist dramaturgy and theatrical style.

The second play of the trio – *My Friend Duplicity* – focuses again on the need to repeat certain stories and narratives, with slight variation, as a means of creating a safe world in which to exist and find meaning. For the play, I cast Orla Tubridy as Jean and Michael Irwin as Fergal. Similar to *How These Desperate Men Talk*, the rehearsal process for *My Friend Duplicity* met on Tuesdays and Fridays for two and three hour sessions, respectively. This adherence to expected timetables and repeated meetings in the same place at the same time mirrors the events of the play. Walsh presents a version of his own writing process in a dramatic format – engaging and critiquing himself onstage while also depicting the repetitive nature of individual ritual, memory, and performance. As Fergal eloquently puts it, “We are proving our existence by making shit up” (Walsh 2014; 198). Through this character, the playwright asserts his own precarious identity as author of the work. This understanding leads to the production process of this play as an opportunity to explore what kind of reality can be made by ‘making shit up.’ For a cast not intimately familiar with Walsh’s writing style, the text in performance forms an explicit basis for exploring the theatrical form and writing process as an enacted version of re-membering.
In the play, Fergal and Jean meet daily in a northwest London room on Streatley Road to imagine worlds and stories, constantly inventing something different from the previous day’s creation. But today, Jean wants nothing more than to sit in the quiet and just be present in the room around them rather than using her imagination to escape the reality of their empty space. By the end, Fergal confesses that he cannot exist happily outside of these daily stories, and Jean silently accepts her role as co-creator of these worlds and chooses to stay with him. Walsh has said in interviews that the play represents his relationship to his own work: “it’s all the things that go through my head when I climb up to my office at 10 past nine. As much as I want to live in the real world, I can only operate properly in my imagination” (Higgins). As with his own directing, Walsh’s playwriting connects to his personal experience and understanding of the theatrical and creative process. By giving voice to these divergent perspectives within him, Walsh invents a world of his own making that is all in his head but also meant to be staged.

The rehearsal and production process for *My Friend Duplicity*, as any other play, requires a consideration of the physical implements and world that is created. Michael Irwin, who played Fergal, began the process asking many questions about the reality in which these two characters physically reside – the one in which he and Orla Tubridy would perform. Irwin’s attention to detail and his focus on the performed reality alongside Fergal’s invented one demonstrated a direct understanding of the connection between wordplay and theatrical performance. Tubridy and Irwin spoke at length in rehearsals about the contextual information and research they had found on the play, which was all they had to interpret apart from the script because it had never been fully staged. Both actors noted their excitement at bringing the world to life, specifically with the tea and Jammy Dodgers in the real world alongside the fountains and gardens in the imagined one. Irwin, in particular, noted the difficult task of oscillating between fiction and reality within a fictional world – that is, he
was particularly interested in the actor as the character who is also a performer. Walsh’s theatrical aesthetic necessitates this kind of attention because none of his onstage figures willingly relegates himself or herself to only one role. The playwright’s other works depict characters who openly deny this relationship, but Fergal and Jean embrace and take advantage of this blurred definition of identity.

In relation to the characters as actors and his own role as actor, Irwin called the play “a love note to theatre” during rehearsals, explaining his understanding that Fergal and Jean are actors who do not write their imagined worlds like novel writers or poets but instead perform it as a mode of world-making (Irwin). I have discussed the multi-layered nature of performance in previous chapters, but here the concept of individual actors grappling with these stratified notions proves both exciting and quite complex in performance. Both Tubridy and Irwin had to perform their roles as imaginative world-makers, but the reality also comes crashing in several times throughout the play as Jean questions the purpose of their daily meetings. Walsh even explicitly writes in the stage directions in the play’s final moments that “Tears fall from his closed eyes as Fergal remains lost in this moment and Jean looks on. After only ten seconds his reverie ebbs away and disappears like a drug and he is returned to the shell he is” (206). This onstage transformation requires a distinct change, but to move through the emotional shift without pathos would miss the point of the play. Irwin and Tubridy grappled with this moment and how they should each interpret it in performance, and they eventually found that by performing and repeating it in rehearsal they could meet the emotion of the scene without getting lost in it.

When Irwin and Tubridy received feedback from the other actors, they took the time to explain why Jean stays at the end even though her final line is “[w]e can go, you know” (206). The actors discussed the safety and the need to experience moments of revelation and beauty even in a difficult creative process, not only referring to the one onstage but their own.
The actors both noted the difficulty they found in endlessly repeating the same lines and the fatigue it induced by the end. However, the actors in the other plays noted that the process made *My Friend Duplicity* a play that directly examines the theatrical process. Like Irwin’s comment about the play as a ‘love note to theatre,’ other production team members (specifically Sorcha O’Mahony, the stage manager, and Rosie Ni Ghairbhígh, who played Woman in *The Small Things*) responded to the exhaustion of *My Friend Duplicity* in performance as something that connected all three plays. The repetitive process of rehearsing, running lines, and solidifying blocking was draining to the actors, but those who saw the production noted the repetitive, ritualized format as a distinct feature of Walsh’s style. And while it would be possible to say all three plays demonstrate this kind of crushing existence of ritualised storytelling, *My Friend Duplicity* both uses the playwright’s sense of his own relationship to his work and it infuses that complex struggling with themes and performance style into the actors.

All three plays are linked by themes of repeated storytelling performance. *The Small Things*, the third and final show in *The Enda Walsh Project*, represents a slightly different undertaking from its counterparts. First, the script is roughly double the length of the other two plays, making it require almost double the amount of weekly rehearsal time (sessions on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday during the process). Second, the play arguably represents the world furthest from Realism and therefore requires a stronger hand in directorial concept. And thirdly, in production, I expected this play to present a more sustained version of what Walsh does in his playwriting and theatrical aesthetic-building because of the length and the distinctly non-realistic style. These three issues connect to the other plays thematically because the characters in *The Small Things* have, supposedly, been there the longest and therefore have had the most time to cement their storytelling style and distance themselves from the truth. As such, this play’s production presents a formidable task not only for actors...
to find the rhythm and energy of the piece but also for a team of designers and a director to codify exactly how the world should look and function, given the technical demands of the piece. First, I will discuss the actors and their response to the text, and then I will demonstrate the ways in which Walsh’s repeated aesthetic was represented and revised in the Project’s design and interpretation.

The two actors – Rosie Ni Ghairbhigh as Woman and Cathal Ryan as Man – diligently attended rehearsals at the agreed-upon times, but Ryan had memorised the first half of the script prior to these sessions. This fact did not create tension, according to the actors, but it did provide an interesting disparity of character development for the pair. On one hand, Ryan had an idea for line interpretations and the larger implications of certain moments in the play because of his memorisation and extensive note-taking during table work. While Ni Ghairbhigh also took notes during table work, her understanding of Woman came organically as we rehearsed. In her final feedback, she mentioned a desire to learn her lines earlier, but she also stood by the fact that she would not have connected everything she had discovered in rehearsals with the pacing and movement of the story (Ni Ghairbhigh). She mentioned, for example, the feeling in the early sessions that her monologue at the window (the longest sustained speech in the play, spanning three full pages in the script, 161-163) came quite a long way into the play and it is something for which she needed to build up quite a bit of energy. In hindsight, Ni Ghairbhigh noted that it came only about 20 minutes into performance – less than halfway. The compression and oppression of time in *The Small Things* has been discussed, but for the actors, it became a pursuit for the correct way to tell their stories. Because she came into the process without the pacing and intonation memorised, she could react in the moment as she approached each question of how and why Woman might be affected (or not) by a certain line. Her development, therefore, occurred as a by-product of repeating the same lines and trying one way of saying it, and then her self-
reflection to stop and consider whether or not it is right for the world we had collaborated to make.

Ryan’s rehearsal process was smoother in the beginning because of his knowledge of the text. However, learning the lines before we began working on the play as a group presented its own challenges for the actor. Ryan noted that although it gave a definite sense of security knowing the words, he also recognised that he had not discovered some of the physical and emotional intricacies that would not come until a week or so before public performances. He said of the process, “it wasn’t until you reminded me Man is a performer that I started looking for ways to keep busy. He doesn’t just sit there, whether he’s looking at the clock or waiting for her, he’s very active” (Ryan). This point resonates for both characters, but it is especially important for Man who spends the entire play in his chair. Acting from a seated position is difficult, and Ryan explained his issues in overcoming the constraints he felt the armchair presented. By the end, however, both he and Ni Ghairbhígh had found ways to animate their personae. In his development journal, Ryan and Ni Ghairbhígh wrote about an exercise we used, called “Paris/New York,” where the actors perform a scene in which they are in their own respective city, Paris or New York. However, everything they say or do must somehow influence the other. These affectations should only hint at the connection, like the cliché of the butterfly effect creating a response a world away. Both actors found this exercise helpful, but they also went beyond it to create their own onstage relationship of storytelling and personal world-building.

For this play in particular, my directorial approach – always asking the students to consider their role as a creator of the piece – proved particularly helpful to the actors. Ni Ghairbhígh and Ryan stressed the importance of taking the time to consider the character they had created within the arc of their play and the entire Project. In their individual feedback sessions, both appreciated the way in which their opinions and thoughts were not only
respected but often implemented. The actors would have portrayed the characters and done more research on them than I could, splitting my time between the three plays. So I encouraged the actors to take responsibility for the choices and actions that occurred onstage. The actors, not just in The Small Things but across The Enda Walsh Project, could then test various styles of performance and line-delivery as a way of finding the right version for the production. Students did this not only on a script analysis level but in the most practical sense of rehearsal and performance. While it is difficult to reconcile this style of directing with Walsh’s own framing and boxing characters, I will admit even this approach is a type of control.

As with any revision that occurs in Walsh’s works, someone always manipulates the rules within which changes can take place. I did offer many reminders to the students throughout the process that they had the ability to challenge anything that I said so long as they could convince me that their interpretation was a stronger choice. I had written extensively on these plays in a theoretical, academic context but I had never produced them; so it was a learning process for everyone involved even though I might have initially seemed to hold the most knowledge on the plays. However, my encouragement for them to take agency in performing and revising stemmed from my argument that Walsh’s plays demand that type of sensibility for those taking part in the play (and the repeated ritual within the play). My frequent refrain that the students look for connections between the plays was not an idle statement but a pointed direction that instilled a sort of lens through which the actors should consider the plays. I never gave explicit instructions or details for how I personally interpreted the texts, but I did mention frequently that they were all thematically linked. This directorial approach, while not overtly prescriptive, did influence the students to respond to and consider the ideas that their development across the rehearsal process all came from the same text but it changed based on the way they interpreted it in the moment.
While I would not equate my direction to the actions of Dinny in *The Walworth Farce* or Thomas in *misterman*, I would contend that the plays in production depicted repeated rituals and performed revisions of personal history. As such, the rehearsal process and the final performances were both distinct in their styles and implied meanings to each actor over time, but the first rehearsal and the final performance mirrored each other. The beginning and end points of the process might seem opposites, but the students came to realise that they are necessarily interconnected because one grows from the other. And even if an actor’s interpretation of a line changes drastically, he/she always subconsciously has the feeling that the previous version existed even if it does not fit the current needs of the production. Therefore, Walsh’s theatrical creations, even when undertaken in a production not his own, necessarily implies a certain revisionist aesthetic that is inherently fluid while supposedly remaining the same.

*The Enda Walsh Project in Performance*

I have already discussed *The Enda Walsh Project*’s rehearsal process and my attempts to include various connections to memory, ritual and performance. Rehearsals are repetitive attempts to find the best way to perform a certain set of words and actions. This process directly reflects the characters’ need to perfect a version of the past in performance. While I did not demand this level of obsessive dedication to the production, the basic tenets of finding the best way to enact Walsh’s plays is essential to theatre-making. The performances changed on a nightly basis, as would be expected, because the actors attempt to re-member the versions of their characters that I directed them to enact. The designers also undertook similar revisionist strategies to not only achieve a look or soundscape that was suitable for the production based on my directorial vision but also an aesthetic that fit their conception of the

---

39 Please contact Nelson Barre for a recording of the production’s final performance. The video can also be found at [https://youtu.be/itTBTgAyxDQ](https://youtu.be/itTBTgAyxDQ) (but due to copyrights, the video has been muted).
three plays. Like the actors, the designers and I shared ideas, changed expectations and then ultimately agreed upon a final design to be included in the production. This section will consider the plays in production and make conclusions about the project’s implications for theatre more generally.

*The Enda Walsh Project* ran for three nights showing *How These Desperate Men Talk*, *My Friend Duplicity*, and *The Small Things* each night without an interval. In performance, each play represented its own world on stage but the three together highlighted the thematic resonance across the production. Whereas in rehearsal, it was the process itself that resembled the repetitive actions from the plays, the final performances only gave one opportunity to most audience members to see and reflect on the project. Some nights received more vocal reactions to funny moments or audible sounds of fear at the situations onstage. The responses often were the catalyst for change in the actors’ performances, but sometimes they changed with little to no audience response. These variations cannot be avoided in performance, and I reminded the actors to try and achieve the same version of characterization on each night knowing that it is an impossible task.

![Fig. 13 – The opening of *How These Desperate Men Talk*. Photo: Emily Bohannan.](image)

---

40 I did not take an audience survey or record any responses to the plays. Therefore, all my commentary reflects what I could take from my perspective of the viewers on each given night.
As mentioned before, the repetitions in rehearsal were attended only by actors and members of the production team so they had never had an audience before the preview night on 4 March, 2015. *How These Desperate Men Talk*, which had a consistent run-time of 22 minutes in run-throughs, became much faster (19-20 minutes) in front of an audience. The preview performance added urgency to the play’s content as they heard laughs and gasps from a group of 12 audience members. This realization that the play has moments of humor surprised the actors who had previously considered the play quite dark. On subsequent nights, they then would drop some lines from the repetition – perhaps fatigued by the six week process and altering certain lines such as “That young woman you had followed that first week” became “The woman you followed every week” in performance (32 and 41). While this may not seem to have radical implications, it does change the meaning slightly from something quite specific to a more general remembering. These men are dedicated to finding their version of the truth, so the details make the story.

Fig. 14 – Jean tries to convince Fergal to leave the room. Photo: Orla McDermott.
The preview night of *My Friend Duplicity* provided an opportunity for the actors to see what level of detail was actually necessary to effectively play their roles. The audience seemed engrossed in the stories Fergal and Jean spoke. But Fergal’s musings would often deviate from the script, unnoticed by the new viewers. Even the first line of the play – “It was absolutely the most transplendent!” – was not consistently the same each night (193). Of course there is no way for an audience member to notice changes such as these, but the fact that they happen and are accepted as normal points to the revisionist process of performance. Sometimes the actors would fumble the lines, but they played it into their characters so that it seemed part of the play. On the first night, Michael Irwin (playing Fergal) got the opening line correct but then changed “Maybe I wasn’t happy” to “Maybe I was unhappy” which would normally be an acceptable change to make except that it makes Jean’s next line “Maybe you were unhappy” seem out of place (193). Again, these slight shifts in wording did not upset the piece significantly, but it is useful to note that each night there were moments such as these that changed. Then when I would ask the actors if they felt like they missed or changed something, they more often than not did not even recognize that something was wrong. I did not tell them, instead leaving them with the illusion that they had re-membered everything exactly as we had rehearsed.

*The Small Things* had the most interesting transformation from the preview performance to opening night. Rosie Ní Ghairbhigh was admitted to the hospital on Monday, 2 March, 2015 and was not able to perform in the dress rehearsal or preview performance. Orla Tubridy took on the role of Woman for the preview performance with a script in hand. The play is meant to be performed with neither character openly acknowledging the other except for a few specific moments, but Ní Ghairbhigh’s absence affected Cathal Ryan’s performance as Man. Tubridy had seen the play many times over the rehearsal process and so she knew much of the blocking and pacing, but much of the intonation had changed. The
wistful recounting of her first meeting with Man seemed distant with an unrehearsed voice reading it, and the tear-filled pleading at the end of the play was not performed. I also heard lines that had not been spoken since the early rehearsals when the actors had scripts in hand. Ní Ghairbhígh had simply memorized the lines and omitted an occasional phrase and I had never checked. The audience still found the pair’s performance engaging and humorous as they went through the stories at the timed pacing of the play. In particular, Ryan’s performance as Man continued to develop as he finally was able to speak to the audience and perform for them as the character. This energized him as he felt more able to deliver the lines to a now-present group of viewers whereas before it had only been the production team watching.

Fig. 15 – Preview night photo of Cathal Ryan as Man with Orla Tubridy as Woman. Photo: Orla McDermott.
Then on opening night Ní Ghairbhígh was able to return; she had not fully recovered and the pacing lagged in the first performance. Instead of worrying I looked at these differences as aspects of the repetition and revision process that accompanies all performance. By the time Ní Ghairbhígh returned to the pre-sickness style of performance, Ryan’s performance had changed and the two characters felt appropriately distant even in their shared space on the stage. Ryan had developed a sense for the timing of his asides to the audience, which made him seem more personable. Ní Ghairbhígh on the other hand never has these moments where she performs to the audience, and so she maintained this emotional distance even when she moved physically closer. There were also moments when Woman hobbles across the stage early in the play as opposed to when she frees herself from the storytelling at the end. These parts changed on a nightly basis as Ní Ghairbhígh recovered physically from her illness. However, she went back to a type of movement in the final performance that had not been part of the blocking for weeks. She hunched over with her face directly to the ground and moved in that position as she goes to look out the window. This change provided an interesting contrast to Tubridy’s completely upright walk and Ní Ghairbhígh’s earlier ‘correct’ movement of a slight hunch, resembling an old woman’s movement. But the actor’s recovery from illness did not appear in the character’s physical movement. Instead she heightened Woman’s pained walking and hunch in the final performance, changing the physical storytelling while keeping the same words.

The design for *The Enda Walsh Project* relied on similar notions of revision after repeated attempts to find the right version of set, costumes, lights and sound. I did not artificially lengthen the process for designers by asking for many revisions to their concepts. Instead I asked each designer to focus his or her concept to highlight a single aspect of the design. For example, in Mairead Ni Chualain’s design, the costumes looked like well-kept versions of old clothing. So I asked her to consider the amount of time these characters had
been wearing the same clothes or if they would change. Rather than distress the costumes, she washed them several times to fade the colors and give them a worn look. Similarly, Emily Bohannan’s lighting concept took the plays’ dark content and presented some ideas that reduced the light significantly. When I reminded her that the characters were using make-shift spaces, she gave the plays somewhat more realistic lighting as opposed to stylized representations of theme. The discussions I had with designers led to more nuanced visual and aural designs that developed over time rather than in one attempt.

As the production approached, some of the designs changed. Lee Vahey had previously considered scoring almost the entirety of all three shows. When he came to watch a run-through, he changed his mind saying that it did not suit what he had originally conceived of the pieces. The same happened with Bohannan and her lighting design. She wanted to add elements unique to each show such as fluorescent lighting for *How These Desperate Men Talk* and constantly changing lights for *The Small Things*. After re-reading the script and attending several rehearsals, she found these choices did not quite fit the aesthetic she wanted. Similarly, Ni Chualain envisioned the characters as almost archetypal images of themselves. Dave and John would be dressed as suburban middle-aged men; Fergal costumed as a haggard writer with Jean dressed as his secretary; Woman as a stereotypical old woman in a housecoat and slippers with man looking a bit like a scary clown. Ni Chualain attended the early rehearsals as well as some of the later ones, and her design ideas changed each time I met with her. I did not stipulate these changes. The designers came to me with questions about the original concept and their continually developing ideas. I only reminded them of the general claustrophobia of the set I had designed with splattered walls and dirty floorboards. The aesthetic, however, was in flux up until previews when it was finalized before opening night.
In the end, the production reflected only a little of what I had originally intended in my directorial concept. I had imagined the worlds as quite dark, reflecting the bleak atmosphere that accompanies all three plays. But by the end of the run, I could not imagine the plays in that way. There are moments of humor in each production, and there is a hopefulness in the repetitive world-making that occurs in these stories. The content of the storytelling conveys a specific tone but the rest of the design and performances could expand into different directions. For example, I had originally programmed the plays to go from lightest to darkest. But in performance, I saw audiences most engaged with that play and the bits of humorous action from these two mostly-sedentary figures. Similarly, the intensity of the men in *How These Desperate Men Talk* drove the audience to only laugh at certain moments before returning to careful re-membering of the story. *My Friend Duplicity*, likewise, received mixed reactions where audiences felt they could laugh or respond to moments that I had originally thought were quite serious.

The designs also helped to reflect the ways my idea of *The Enda Walsh Project* evolved over time. As I mentioned, the designs changed from their initial concepts to the final product, notably in the reduction of sound cues, subtlety of lighting, and more nuanced versions of character costuming. Vahey used the music and sound cues to punctuate certain moments such as the flourishes on the timpani drums in *The Small Things*, which he composed himself. These moments gave him precise control over the type and length of the flourish, the pace of the cue, and the way it would resonate in the space. For the lighting, Bohannan opted to omit the special lights in favor of less overtly realistic lighting. This change led to an ambiance that reflected the stylized, other-worldly aesthetic she wanted to create. Bohannan used purple gels in lights for Fergal’s monologues to show his distance from Jean. The separation on stage seen in the lighting helped convey the story in a clear way. Similarly, the costumes originally began as almost literal representations of specific
types of characters. By the time we reached production, Ni Chualain opted to make the characters slightly heightened versions of themselves. Dave and John wore suburban dad clothes and their performances fit the costumes. For Man and Woman, she found clothing that matched the color of the chairs in which the characters sat during the show. These choices showed a more nuanced understanding of the plays and the worlds the characters create onstage.

Like the characters themselves, I watched and re-watched these performances many times and would realize how attentive I was to particular aspects but less responsive to others. Irwin approached me after the first night of performance and asked if his last monologue worked because he had changed where he stood on the stage. I told him that it worked, but I had been paying more attention to his rhythm and intentions rather than his placement in the world. Ryan, on the other hand, attempted to create as close a replication of the preview (what he thought was his best performance) each time he went on stage. Then he would recount to me the ways he had forgotten a line or made the wrong gesture. These moments further solidified my understanding of Walsh’s plays as memorially performed rituals. The actors had an appreciation for the characters, and they knew what they could test different ways of performing. None of them explicitly stated this intention, but they would confide in me that they had purposefully changed some bits that they liked while other parts were unintentionally different and also good. These recognitions of performance’s malleability demonstrates the themes Walsh includes in all his works.

**Finding Memorial Rituals in Practice**

I have discussed the ways in which Walsh’s own productions of his work have demonstrated the same repetitive world-making his characters undertake. By specifically focusing on the author’s dual role as writer-performer or writer-director, this analysis has
sought a practical focus on Walsh as co-creator and revisionist in his works. The examination of my own productions in *The Enda Walsh Project* linked that same repetitive and revising notion of the playwright’s style to another iteration of his plays in performance. The broader implication of the claims points toward the notion of theatre itself as an open process of constant repetition and revision. In relation to this claim, Marvin Carlson states in *The Haunted Stage* that,

> like the memory of each individual, [theatre] is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations with these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the process of recycling and recollection. (2)

Carlson points out that things which happen in the present are necessarily influenced by things which have happened in the past. This understanding presents a basis for analysis on the application of Walsh’s plays in production. The previous sections discussed the themes of ritual, memory, and performance as necessary to understanding specific productions, but the following will reference the playwright’s works more broadly. I will connect Carlson’s notion of ‘ghosting’ as a process that occurs in these productions. Over time, Walsh, like his characters, has codified his own development as a theatre practitioner.

As a theatre-maker, Walsh has become even more explicitly theatrical and self-reflective over time. From *bedbound* to *The New Electric Ballroom* and even to *Ballyturk*, Walsh continues to push the formal style in which he writes alongside his development as a director. This attention to an aesthetic and how it should be portrayed onstage links him with other contemporary playwrights who do not use a realistic style. While it would be easy to connect him with the German practitioners with whom he has collaborated, he seems to have more in common with American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks. Parks creates her own aesthetic for Rep&Rev,’ but her designation for what makes theatre is an important distinction. In her essay “Elements of Style,” she argues that “Language is a physical act. It’s
something which involves your entire body” (11). Parks describes contemporary playwriting as a style with an associated performativity to it; Walsh’s aesthetic follows a similar pattern, using the physical as something necessary and complementary to the textual.

Jeanette R. Malkin’s concept of memory-theatre, like Parks’s discussion of contemporary theatre styles, relies on the distance-proximity of the current piece to its present performed version. In her definition of memory-theatre, Malkin links contemporary playwriting styles to ancient Greek memory techniques. She explains that “Classical mnemonics was, thus, a visual endeavor, a vivid inward seeing into the theater of the mind that performed the mental act of ‘staging’ unforgettable images as an aid to pragmatic recall” (5). Therefore, the process of creating a memory is an active and performed ritual. A play is necessarily about memory, simply because it invokes a practice of re-membering – whether the object or ritual to be enacted is written or not. The important part of the definition requires a physical connection, ‘a visual endeavor,’ which acts as the practical implementation of the theatrical process. While Malkin does not speak directly about Walsh’s work, her claims still resonate with his writing and style. So, to call plays like misterman or The New Electric Ballroom memory-theatre would be appropriate, but it should be recognized as only one aspect of his playwriting that links the physical to the theoretical. In staging Walsh’s plays, the production team encounters these issues of memory because they are present in both the text and the physical world that accompanies theatre.

Walsh began as a collaborator trying to produce his work in any way possible. He started as a writer and performer in some of his earliest work such as Fishy Tales and misterman, but he exhibited little control over the directorial vision of the pieces – often ceding the responsibility to others. As his concepts became more crystallised in his theatrical creations, so too Walsh desired more control and attempts to shape and revise the narratives that made his productions. His directorial roles depict this shift in some of his recent
productions and also in the writing/revision process for his own works. Particularly, Walsh’s first directorial role directing *bedbound* frames the following work on *misterman*’s change to *Misterman* and the change from the original German version of *The New Electric Ballroom* to its Irish premiere. In these productions, Walsh explores the themes of ritual, memory, and performance not only in the textual world he creates but in the aesthetic he made as either actor or director. This is not to say that his other works do not depict similar themes and issues, but rather the fact that Walsh has undertaken the role of actor or director in these specifics piece indicates his attention to the aesthetic creation that he wants. Again, the fear of being boxed in drives much of his playwriting so that he creates worlds in which characters push against those physical boundaries through the creation of imagined and performed realities.

In my own productions, I found a similar recognition that Walsh’s words provide a seemingly broad scope for creation but ultimately led to various members of the production team realising their role within the playwright’s created world. Actors took responsibility for their engagement with the text and its physical implementation in performance. They recognised and embraced the constant repetition and revision that accompanies all performance. Even my directorial scope in the production, reminding the team to find thematic connections, took cues from the style in which the characters in the play interact with one another. While it was not an abrasive tactic, the actors still found links because of the selections and the guidance provided. *The Enda Walsh Project* also demonstrated a greater sense of agency within the creative process once this recognition took place. Student collaborators, like Walsh in his own journey as a theatre-maker, came to see the process as one where they both exercised control over the development of the production but also recognised the instability of performance from one moment to the next. Like Parks’s and Malkin’s assertions, the practice of producing a play provided a physical way in which to
engage the thematic issues of Walsh’s works. While I never explicitly stated these theory-based frameworks to the students, they found the connections between the three plays through exercising their creative world-building. The students undertook the repetitive, ritualised performance process and made it their own while also recognising the limitations that so often plague Walsh’s characters. In this way, Enda Walsh’s works not only theoretically demonstrate the applicability of ritual, memory, and performance studies, but the practice of theatre-making itself is necessarily intertwined with these issues.

In sum, Walsh’s plays in production provide examples not only of the playwright’s thematic interests in revisionist memory but also ways in which he acts author of the works’ aesthetic. Like his characters, however, the playwright can never truly achieve the quintessential version of any play, and he therefore consistently revises the form even if he maintains the same text. Statements by the playwright that he does not rewrite entire scripts because he is “not writing to try and make a perfect play” demonstrate his acceptance of his fate as a constant revisionist because a live performance is also never perfect (Whitney). The playwright also does not need to write a ‘perfect play’ because he continues to explore issues of ritual, memory, and performance even as he writes. His development as an artist and collaborator is always in process. When someone encounters one of Walsh’s plays, that person would best be served to look at the performance as another version of something that cannot be perfected.
Chapter 4 - Production

Works Cited


Ryan, Cathal. Personal Interview. 16 Mar. 2015.


Walsh, Enda. Interview by Patrick Lonergan. 30 June 2013.


Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated the ways in which Enda Walsh’s works depict ritualized performances of memory as modes of identity-making. I argue that Walsh depicts characters who re-enact and ritualize communal histories in order to master the narrative surrounding their group’s belief systems. These processes offer commentary on narratives created by micro-communities as well as cultural contexts. In this way, Walsh’s plays push the boundaries of performativity by questioning the (un)conscious agency that makes up an individual or communal history. Memory, ritual, performance, and performance-as-research methodologies provide opportunities for textual analysis alongside the application of theory to practice. These parts interlink to create a variety of useful avenues for studying not only the work of Enda Walsh but theatre practice and research more generally. Below, I will discuss the implications of my research to theatre more broadly as well as offering summative comments regarding memory, ritual, and performance as intrinsic to production. I also explore the ways in which these three aspects can all be seen explicitly in his 2014 play *Ballyturk*. By citing this play and likening it to his other works, I hope to demonstrate a through-line that continues even in his new works.

Memory studies methodologies situate the larger context of my argument that remembering the past serves to create realities that parade as truth when in fact they are subjective versions of reality. This claim of crafted legitimacy represents the main crux of all Walsh’s plays. That is to say, characters onstage selectively (mis)remember events not out of malice but self-preservation and the perpetuation of a particular belief system. As I showed in my discussion of plays such as *Disco Pigs*, *bedbound*, *How These Desperate Men Talk*, and *The Small Things*, Walsh depicts these situations where the story being told relies on fractured memories and wishful thinking as a means of survival. Using these early plays as the foundation upon which he crafts his memorially-reinscripted dramaturgy, I examine the
Conclusion

ways in which characters re-member the past in the present as a singular moment. It is necessary to recognize that this revisionist process affects the storytelling that takes place in all Walsh’s plays.

All forms of memory are subjective and at risk of changing, not only in Walsh’s worlds but in theatre generally. As noted by Marvin Carlson, audience reception is constantly informed by previous encounters with a certain play, company, actor or prop, but the members of the production cannot help but performatively revise the play through its recycling every night of a run (2). Carlson’s argument refers to the phenomenological experience of theatre broadly but it also reflects on Walsh. Actors in a play cannot help but be likened to previous iterations of that character or character-type. By re-membering a text into a performance, the enactment coincides with memory as meaning-maker where what has come before is both there and not, actively resonating while also existing as a passive reference point. Walsh’s characters highlight these issues as they move within their self-made worlds. The situations in which the characters find themselves reflect the viewing process – especially in plays such as *How These Desperate Men Talk* and *The Small Things* – by considering whether they have achieved the correct version of the past in their performance. This aspect of myth-making through memory affects the perpetuation of self in acts of re-membering, which are crystallized in ritual repetition.

Ritual is a type of performance that requires a dedicated adherence to memorized words and gestures. As defined by Catherine Bell, rituals sacralize and repeat actions based on a specific set of expectations which are used to reinforce a certain set of beliefs (15). I focus the exploration of Walsh’s ritualized repetitions by analyzing plays that resemble the Catholic Mass (*The New Electric Ballroom*) and zealous adherence to a particular religious dogma (*misterman*). His other plays depict characters stuck in the cycle of repeating certain actions and speeches for vindication of some past wrong; this need for precision is heightened
in *The New Electric Ballroom* and *misterman*. In these plays, characters take the basic tenets I described for re-membering to a new level of strict devotion through ritual. Then in the execution of these rituals, characters cannot help but enact something different (whether consciously or not) from the original because of the necessarily transitory nature of performance, as explored in Peggy Phelan’s discussion of reproduction in *Unmarked* (146). Performance is inherently unrepeatable, but the ritual continues even acknowledging its small deviations from the ideal version as it happens and requires confirmation of rightness from other sources in performance.

It is the performative aspects of ritual which substantiate and perpetuate meaning through reproduction of an expected set of actions or words. As mentioned earlier, several scholars focus on the religious enactment of beliefs and that anything short of that implies a secular set of actions rather than a ritual. This claim privileges the notion that certain acts are sacred and require a heightened level of devotion which is absent outside of spiritual contexts. Instead, I have argued that these secular experiences are just as important to daily repetition and identity-formation that happens when a person performs personal grooming habits or greets someone publicly. These seemingly insignificant acts make up the majority of a person’s life and it is these minutiae that Walsh depicts. Theatre is filled with these types of secular ritualized actions, even when the subject matter is religious in nature. Instead, characters infuse their personal storytelling with the importance of a religious ritual and the precise repetition of certain expected acts. Rather than ignoring what Goffman calls the ‘back region,’ contemporary performance valorizes these depictions. In considering these individual rituals, scholars and practitioners can consider subject matter that is sufficiently weighty theoretically and theatrically.

Performance theory connects memory and ritual to Walsh’s worlds. The characters who inhabit these spaces onstage necessarily take on the act of world-making as performers
of certain rituals and memories. In short, everything that appears in a production of Walsh’s plays is a type of performed reality. As mentioned before, I define the creative act of performance broadly by appropriating Schechner’s claim that ‘everything performs’ and then specifying the multi-layered ways in which an actor enacts a character who performs a version of reality that is then knowingly revised through repetition. The seemingly complex play-within-a-play structure of *The Walworth Farce* presents itself as a clear depiction of performance as necessary to theatre and production. That is, the facades performed by the characters in service to Dinny’s story are both recognized as an exaggerated, scripted set of events and also as a kind of truthful re-telling of the family’s history. By foregrounding performativity, identity-creation is perpetuated through a knowing performance of memory and ritual that once was true but has been repeated so many times as to obscure what has now been changed.

The active process of making and revising performances is evident not only in Walsh’s plays but in theatre generally. While some plays such as *Play* by Samuel Beckett depict a literal repetition of the exact same text multiple times, most theatrical performance does not openly acknowledge its own performativity. Using *Penelope* as a model, the notion that the four suitors put on an act not only for Penelope but for each other becomes integral to seeing the duplicity of their personae. Referring back to Beckett’s *Play*, even if we strip the repetition of the text, the spoken revelation of the characters’ lies and truths create a performance of interrelated manipulation. Even in a sort of purgatory the characters cannot expose themselves (literally or figuratively) due to their stubbornness. But if someone were to read the play, the permutations of one line to the next, pacing and the staging of the scene are only imagined. By producing a play, the theatre-maker(s) and audience come together to share in a communication of words, sounds, actions, and stillnesses. Reading the play has its

---

41 In brief, the play depicts two women and one man who are stuck in urns endlessly, frantically repeating the story of their tangled romances (or lack thereof) as a spotlight shines on them sporadically.
place, but it largely misses the most important aspect of theatre. It is in production that theatre-makers and audience engage performatively to examine larger issues beyond what exactly the text says.

Performance-as-research enacts theoretical considerations into production as a performance of that which was formerly only manifested as text. Production practice, therefore, is the culmination of all attempts to interpret a play. I argue that Walsh’s plays in production depict these theories of memory, ritual and performance put into practice. To exemplify this claim, I used my own theatre-making to test the viability of my research. This section asserts that not only is performance an integral part of conceptualizing a play to its fullest extent but that the rehearsal process perpetually points to the notions of performative, ritualized memory I discuss throughout the dissertation. By staging the plays after weeks of rehearsal and design meetings, an artist-scholar undergoes a gradual transformation from the desire to produce an idealized version of what originated as a reading of the text. Then there is the difference between the imagined version of the production and the actualization of that same thought into a physical form. But rather than refuse to stage a performance due to limitations of space or funds, characters in Walsh’s plays and those who would produce them confront the same processes of repeated rituals used to tell a story.

These aspects of identity-making through ritual, memory, and performance speak to cultural myths as seen through the lens of theatre. Enda Walsh’s plays depict character-made worlds where performances re-member the characters’ personal and communal histories as derivatives of their adherence to a repeated set of actions, words, and intonations. Performers, therefore, have a double performance as characters but also as characters who enact an invented reality. These performances depict the multi-layered existence of actors as characters who also play precisely coded versions of themselves. The on-stage performers attempt to mirror life and create a space where their rituals shift between personal, subjective
Conclusion

reality and the supposed, objective truth of experience. In production, these themes and issues must be confronted to make sense of the plays’ actions and characters. A director, designer or actor need not highlight the performative and revisionist nature of Walsh’s work because a production will necessarily respond to these issues as integral to the staging process.

Ritual, Memory, Performance, and Ballyturk

The use of his early plays in the first section might indicate that Walsh’s works became less interested in memory and its (re)production through re-membering. However, the playwright has continued to use the same themes and issues throughout his career. To demonstrate the applicability of my claims about ritual, memory, and performance to Walsh’s work, I will briefly examine his 2014 play Ballyturk to demonstrate a synthesis of my arguments in a single piece of theatre. Ballyturk premiered at the Galway International Arts Festival on 14 July, 2014 with four days of previews beginning on 10 July, 2014. The production changed from its published form to its initial previews and then finally into the production which toured Ireland before transferring to London. It is important to note the differences and slight nuances which defined the production as it moved from the page to the stage. I saw the first and final previews on 10 July and 13 July, respectively; and then I saw performances on 19 July and 22 July to see what had happened after nearly a week of shows in front of an audience. My analysis will explore all three phases of the process – play as text, production in previews, and production in its ‘finished’ state. In the first part, I will use specific examples from the script to show that Walsh’s dramaturgical choices depict a theatrical world where ritual, memory, and performance repeat and revise a micro-community’s history and beliefs. The second part expands to an analysis of the play as it transitioned to a production. Changes in staging ideas from concept to embodied performance provide examples similar to the ones found in my production of three Walsh plays.
Conclusion

While the Enda Walsh Project, which I directed in early 2015, presents three short plays (*How These Desperate Men Talk*, *My Friend Duplicity*, and *The Small Things*) rather than one full length play (*Ballyturk*), the comparison demonstrates similar thematic resonances and performance choices that are written into his texts and are then translated into a stage production. I differentiate between my own theoretical explorations and conclusions – which I discussed at length in chapter four – and those which I perceived in my multiple experiences with *Ballyturk* in its various forms (text, preview, final). My repeated attendance marks an attempt at verification of a standard for the performance, but the commentary necessarily represents my own subjective experiences viewing the production. The conclusions made in this section reflect on my own thoughts, the original production team’s comments about the play and the ways in which an analysis of a single play might apply to any of Walsh’s works as ritualized re-memberings of imagined pasts.

I use *Ballyturk* as an example of Walsh’s recent work to exemplify his style in its most complete and complex form. The introduction provided a very brief overview of his oeuvre with basic explanation of his thematic and performance interests in each play. One might consider those to be abbreviated versions of the following analysis; that is to say, Walsh’s plays represent attempts to ritually codify a space and body into an idealized past that is written and revised continually through experience and performance. While one could argue that all of his plays follow a similar thread, his aesthetic developed over years of calibration beginning in Cork, developing in continental Europe and then focusing further in the theatre hub of London alongside his plays’ Irish premieres and international touring. Walsh’s style has not so much crystallized as established a consistent frame for the themes and aesthetic he frequently employs. It would be incorrect to say that every one of his plays deals with the same subject matter or even represents a stagnation of theatrical form. Instead, I will demonstrate the ways in which *Ballyturk* reflects repetition and revision, ritualized
myth-making, and performed versions of reality to exemplify the connections between the previously discussed plays and their thematic representation of ritual, memory, and performance.

_Ballyturk_ starts with 1 (a man in his thirties) delivering a monologue under a spotlight, directly out to the audience. But when he comes to the climax of his speech and fails to find a purpose for the heightened emotion, the lights return and we see 2 (a man in his forties) watching the performance by 1. These two men are stuck in this room creating the world of Ballyturk (an imagined outside world) with words and impersonations of its denizens. We learn later that these characters have forced themselves to forget reality beyond the walls of this room, and in their imaginations, bunny rabbits have five legs and flies are buzzing specks of dust. This invented world is upset when the back wall comes down and exposes the outside world and 3 (a man in his sixties), who destroys the façade that 1 and 2 had previously committed their lives to creating. In a god-like turn, 3 tells 1 and 2 that he has been there before but they have forgotten, and now one of them must go to the outside world to die while the other continues to seek meaning by re-membering Ballyturk. The confrontation between invention and reality leads to a frantic attempt to forget what 3 has revealed. In the final imagined exploration of Ballyturk, 1 questions the reality of their daily performances while 2 attempts to reassert its primacy as their purpose for being – the need to create. 2 re-members the first time he and 1 created Ballyturk with just twenty-seven words, and from there it expanded into an all-consuming performance. But 1 seeks an end to the repetition and departs at the end. 1’s absence leaves a vacuum where once the space was filled with energy and words, but 2 is stunned into silence because he knows what happens next. A hidden door in one of the walls opens, and through it enters a young girl who will take up 1’s place in re-making the performed reality of Ballyturk.
Conclusion

The play’s plot provides various avenues for studying Walsh, particularly when considering issues of ritual, memory and performance. As discussed in the first chapter, remembering is a process of physically enacting the past that is meant to connect the performer with the original event. As with The Walworth Farce, the men ritually reenact a history that is supposedly true because it has been re-made each day so many times. That is to say, through volume the narrative has gained currency because it fits into the world they have so carefully constructed to maintain the order of repetition. This repeated revisiting of the narrative 1 and 2 have invented for the outside world also heightens the connection with memory. Similar to bedbound, Misterman, or The Walworth Farce, problems with their version of reality are completely self-driven. Whenever one forgets a line or deviates from the script, the illusion of their performance drops and reveals the reality of their isolation. These issues of memory resonate with Disco Pigs, bedbound, How These Desperate Men Talk, and The Small Things. In those plays, the characters require a precise re-membering of the identity they have crafted. Pig and Runt, Dad and Daughter, Dave and John, and Man and Woman all engage in various attempts to re-access the past through storytelling and embodied memory. 1 and 2 attempt to create a performative reality through exact replication of a past narrative that they realize has
been forgotten. So, to make up for this lapse in memory, they invent rituals to help them verify their personal beliefs.

The two men note that they do not precisely remember either how they got there or what the outside world actually looks like. 1 has drawn pictures that are posted all over the walls and 3 confirms that these images from his memory are in fact real, but it is unclear whether they are ‘real’ because 1 and 2 have made it so through repeated embodiment of these characters and places or the various characters exist outside the confines of this room. This question of what constitutes 1 and 2’s reality informs discussions of performance as well due to the transitory nature of a production. It is impossible to perfectly recall and repeat an action and therefore each iteration of the invented narrative is doubly removed from Ballyturk (if the town even exists). Therefore, the performance of these two characters, which relies on precision of action and re-membered words, attempts to follow an idealized version of the narrative that can never be attained.

From the opening moment of the play, when 1 speaks out into the darkness with a tight spotlight on his face, the characters rely on the release that storytelling and performance gives them. 1 comes to the end of his first monologue, unable to find the purpose of his speaking, and the lights come on to reveal 2 standing nearby eating a bag of crisps and watching in nothing but his underpants. The humor here deflates not only the situation’s importance to 1 but also 2’s attempts to deflect attempts to find the truth beyond their carefully scripted performance. With this opening failure to find meaning in the story, both men recognize the escape 1 desires and the difficulty in finding it because of the layered narrative and repeated (inaccurate) memories that make up Ballyturk in their performance. This first moment demonstrates the dedication attended to the ritual that follows, and 2 is able to shrug off 1’s attempt to tell the story without him because it failed. In this way, the ritual has righted itself because one of the participants attempted to change its structure.
Conclusion

significantly (one performer in place of two). 1 does not realize that the rest of the play actually confirms his initial attempt for change as the myth surrounding Ballyturk fails to satisfy the men and their need to perform and find meaning in the performance.

As the play continues, 1 and 2 go through an extensive preparatory routine complete with shower, breakfast, exercise, and beginning the performance with the same phrase – “So to finish what I started earlier…” (10). This statement indicates to the other person that what follows is part of the ritual. The phrase is said each time they begin a new day, which begins after their ‘warm-up.’ Then 1 or 2 continues a philosophical discussion about what they are doing in that room, which is followed by a realization that performing the story of Ballyturk will help answer their questions. The scene ends with a long-winded monologue performed by the main ‘player’ in the story (either 1 or 2), and then the pair finishes the day with a rehearsal of sorts to prepare for the next performance. All of these performances within the play highlight the constructed nature of the rituals they follow and the ways in which the enactments require their full bodily investment to achieve what could deliver them from ignorance of the world outside. They perform in this room what they believe is outside because that is all they know how to do, but when they call flies “dust” and decide that bunny rabbits have five legs an audience member can see the disparity between their view of the world and what actually is.

The repeated ritual changes several times when there are breakdowns of the barrier between the outside and the inside worlds. The first scene introduces voices coming from the walls, ostensibly confirming that there are people who live next door. These mysterious people speak loudly enough about the outside world that it confirms for the pair what they know about Ballyturk outside. In the first scene, 1 catches a fly buzzing around only to have a horrified 2 smash it. In the second scene, a potted flower is placed by the stage right wall and grabs the attention of both men. 1 is mesmerized by it and stops performing his role and
leaves 2 to play both parts of the Ballyturk story. These breakdowns in the routine depict the natural changes one might encounter in any daily ritual, no matter how attentive to restrictions and details a person might be. However, these glitches unsettle the men’s worldview and beliefs because it fractures their sense of what exists or does not. 2 calls the fly he kills ‘dust’ and tries to avoid talking about it with 1, which leads to more interest in knowing whether they have the right word to describe various objects and experiences that have become part of their daily routine. In short, the appearance of the fly destroys the world the men have made for the past several years.

Fig. 17 – 1 and 2 perform a scene from the story of Ballyturk. Photo: Adam Silverman.

The world of Ballyturk the two men create represents a carefully calibrated sequence of myth-making, repetition and attempts at virtuosic performance. The performance is a ritual because it depicts the community-constructed beliefs and re-members them every day to further cement their veracity. The first scene depicts the supposedly random way in which they select the subjects for their daily performance:
2 performs three subjects whose portrait he hits with the darts, and 1 plays the supporting characters with whom 2 will interact. From this description, the audience is led to believe that the dart-throwing deters the two men from telling the same story each day. However, the strictly regimented schedule given by the cuckoo clock and the timing of the machinations required to properly run the ‘show’ indicate that there is little room for diversion from the script. The men have been performing so long that they have no idea how many years it has been, so even though 2 closes his eyes there is a strong possibility he knows exactly where each face is on the wall. In fact, he mutters ‘Cody Cody’ under his breath as he throws his second dart and then celebrates when he gets Cody Finnington as one of his characters (19). The ritual eye-closing and selection process, therefore, enacts a ceremonial purpose more than a meaningful one. Although the method appears random, the men have enacted the scripted story enough times to know where it will go no matter what combination of characters they choose.

In production, the characters undertake the storytelling and acting of these characters by changing costumes, bounding across the stage to portray multiple characters at once, and using stylized lighting. The stage directions describe it as “almost like film noir – lights cut through the darkness and catch detailed glimpses of what 1 and 2 are creating in the moment” (19). 1 and 2 seem to have props stashed around the stage for their performance ahead of the selection process; so when 2 reaches in his pocket, there is already a comb that Cody uses in the opening monologue. 1 reaches in his pocket to find a plastic bag for packing the carton of milk 2 brings him. In short, the performance follows a tightly scripted format that requires attention to detail not only in action and words but also with additional objects.
Conclusion

Given this, it could be argued that both characters knew that they would perform these characters today and so prepared the room accordingly, further highlighting the constructedness of their memorized ritual. Their repeated gestures and speeches crystallize the way in which the performance goes, but there is an inevitability to the production as if someone has a hand in the outcome.

One could argue that *Ballyturk* is a scripted play and therefore it cannot do anything but follow the text, but that ignores the fact that the actors still must perform as if things could have gone any number of other ways. The layered performance – of the actors, characters and characters played by characters – highlights what people in general do every day. Walsh’s play depicts extreme versions of daily life where instead of preparing in what might be considered a logical or ‘normal’ way, his characters knowingly and actively choose to perform. However, just like a person interacting with someone on a daily basis, 1 and 2 have enacted these characters so many times that they have stopped recognizing the performative aspects. Instead, these performances become inherent to their being in a way that comes from highly structured lifestyles. This generalization assumes that Schechner’s claim that ‘everything can be studied as performance’ is true. Or as performance scholar Herbert Blau puts it in *The Eye of the Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern*, “it is theater which haunts all performance whether or not it occurs in the theater” (164-65). These claims situate the performances in *Ballyturk* as both specifically theatrical and also performative because they cannot be anything else. That is to say, everyday life is performance and is therefore theatrical, just as 1 and 2’s ritual represents a version of enacted self and identity that can be seen beyond the confines of the theatre. However, the strict confinement of the characters’ lives has stunted their ability to recognize and change their situation. The moments when the performance breaks down forces them to confront their experiences as disconnected from the real world outside.
Conclusion

If the introduction of the fly, outside voices and flower into 1 and 2’s space represents a disruption that threatens to break down the language and world they have worked to create, then 3’s entrance disintegrates any notions that what they have done for the past several years has any meaning outside their own minds. The back wall tears away from the side walls, literally breaking the barrier between them and the outside world, and a third person enters.

Fig. 18 – The model for Ballyturk’s set upon 3’s entrance. Photo: Jamie Vartan.

Once he enters, 3 begins introducing ideas of time and change that neither 1 nor 2 can understand. When 3 asks if they have a mirror and 1 responds that they have one, 3 says “Well one’s more than some and some don’t even have mirrors – so at least you’ve seen how you’ve aged – though it’s impossible to gauge that as time hurries by – but you’ve seen at least your reflection and maybe you notice small changes weekly – have you?” (39). Instead of responding to the philosophical musings about existential time and change, 1 asks “What do you mean by ‘weekly’?,” indicating that he has no concept of time or the changes that he has undergone since he first entered the room. This realization introduces the problems with memory in an explicit way that previous miscues and incorrect definitions (‘bunnies have five legs’) only partially indicate. Here, memory is seen as something that has no time but instead is only needed for repeating the story. And in the theatrical sense, the performer is
never expected to consider the multiple layers as part of the show. In Walsh’s play, the actors and audience cannot help but confront the purpose of acting and creating imagined worlds that have to mean something.

This theatrical examination of myth-making pushes the boundaries of what rituals, memories, and performances can consider. The walls are broken down, and 1 and 2 meet their maker (in a way\textsuperscript{42}) as they come to terms with the fictions that they have held as fact for so long. In production, this enforced consideration of what it means to enact certain histories and how people ritualize aspects of identity reaches its peak when 3 and 1 discuss the nature of Ballyturk and its reality.

3: What do you see when you speak about Ballyturk – do you imagine people’s faces and homes – can you see them?  
1: I see him as them – I see the drawings as the places – sometimes I see nothing but the word.  
3: Because none of it’s real – before the fly, before me.  
1: Only inside our heads it is.  
3: And that’s enough for you?  
1: I don’t understand what you’re asking.  
\textit{A pause. Then...}  
3: Everything you’ve imagined – it is. All life. It’s out there. Everything. (44)

The scene explores the theatre’s purpose and shows that imagined communities are representations of cultural memory as much as personal memory. In performance, the scene takes on a somber tone as compared to much of the rest of the play. By performing what is inside their heads, 1 and 2 make a version of reality that establishes itself as part of the larger narrative. Where the rest of the performance is often manic, these words are given silence and time to resonate in the world of the play and with the audience. The characters consider their options and their place in the world and the one they have created as an embodied memory.

\textsuperscript{42} Shortly after 3 leaves, 1 recalls where he saw his face before. He closes his eyes and remembers being on a beach, but 3 kidnapped him and brought him to this room (49). Given this realization, I will assume that 3 brought 1 and 2 to the space in which they now reside.
They can only escape it once someone from the outside enters and disrupts the story as it has always been performed.

The world 1 and 2 have created has been irrevocably changed, but when 3 exits they both look to the turntable to play the song they hear after each Ballyturk performance (“Living on the Ceiling” by Blancmange) but instead hear something else. The unexpected change forces the men to go through their memory for what Yazoo’s “Situation” entails, and they get into a vigorous exercise routine and the stage direction reads “All this time and their minds are racing with what 3 has left in the room – perhaps the exercise will expel these thoughts of life and death” (47). The men are terrified to face the notion that the world they perform is only real in their minds and does not exist beyond the four walls of their room. Things are not going as planned, and the performance continues to break down, which might return them to the safety of their routine. 2 even attempts to use “So to finish what I started earlier…” to restart the ritual (48). They cling to what they know and understand while trying to process the notion of death. The men face the same reality that normal people do – death is inherently part of life, and people still go about their daily business. It is only once they are made aware of this possibility that they consider existence and its effects on them. The memory – of what 3 represents and the world outside that they glimpsed when the wall came down – overpowers the repetition and a new performance begins.

In response to 1’s need to remember the past and figure out how and why they came to this room, 2 continues his construction of worlds made from words. Like calling the fly ‘dust,’ 2 rejects the notion that their names or even their pasts have meaning. To him, Ballyturk provides a better version of reality than the outside world. 2 describes the creation of their home:

There was nothing to start with – and out of that me and you pushed words. (Slight pause) ‘Above and there’s large clouds looking like islands and through them sunlight

260
Conclusion

shines down – and down on a small town lying by these woods on a hill.’ Twenty-seven words I used first… and each [person in Ballyturk] with their own wants, each with their own skin and voice and each shaped differently – each pushin’ their doors open into what’s been knitted by us. (50-51)

This world-making process requires ritualized embodiments and revisions of memory. 2 explains the necessity for making Ballyturk and forgetting the reality of the outside world. In its place, they can make – through performance and strict routine – an imagined community where they know everyone and their individual stories. And if these are not satisfactory, the narrative can be changed. The characters seem placated by the existence of Ballyturk. The physical reality created through use of props, costumes, and sounds strengthens the illusion that the room can be enough for them.

The re-membered world established in 1 and 2’s minds represents the physical embodiment of ritualized memory in a performed and performative setting. The dedication to explicit rules and stipulations for enactment of the routine and the rehearsal process’s inclusion in the production heightens the connection to these three aspects of Walsh’s dramaturgy. The characters demonstrate the reality of the world they have made through performance and the need to revise as we see one of the major changes from text to performance. 1 questions the source of sound effects and their ‘home’ they have made. Then their time-telling device – a cuckoo clock – spontaneously ignites and 1 stops 2 from putting it out with a fire extinguisher and says “Let it burn – I can’t go on” (53). This represents a significant turning point where 1 rejects the imagined world they have created as 2 frantically attempts to re-establish it as ‘real.’ In preview performances, 2 (Mikel Murfi) went straight for the cuckoo clock and blasted it with the fire extinguisher against 1’s protests, but it had not been on fire. In final performances, the clock catches fire as in the script, but 1’s attempt to stop 2 was cut. While these details might suggest the simple calibration of parts that either work or do not work in a production, I contend that Walsh’s dramaturgy and experiences played a part. 1’s line appears to be a kind of homage to Beckett – a playwright with whom
he is often thematically linked. In performance, the words came off as heavy-handed quotation, but still seemed appropriate given the rest of the play. However, Walsh cut the line and opted for a silent revision of the Beckettian reference and instead moved straight into 2’s attempt to re-order the world. 3 reveals the inner workings of 1 and 2’s repeated fiction, and 1 chooses to abandon the world they imagined into existence. On the other hand, 2 chooses to go on with the act of forgetting his name and purpose in favor of a ritualized, re-membered world.

The final moments of *Ballyturk* reference the themes of performance, ritual and re-membering. The back wall – through which both 1 and 3 exited – returns to its place and seals 2 inside to consider the drawings, the props and what is described in stage directions as “his cell” (57). After 1 has walked outside the room to embrace his humanity and die, the cuckoo clock beckons 2 to re-enact his imagined outside world. Similar to *bedbound* or *The Walworth Farce*, the story must continue and imprison the people with its imagined and real structures. A knock on the wall behind a chest of drawers causes 2 to cut open a hidden door that has been wallpapered over. From there, a girl of seven enters to take 1’s place. 2 recognizes the cycle to which they have both been doomed and closes his eyes as the door closes behind the girl – sure to be forgotten in time, as it had been the last time. Then the play ends, and the audience is left with questions about what will happen next. The pair will create their own version of Ballyturk, but how much will it resemble the version 1 and 2 made? Given the history that is written into his body, 2 might try to forget what he has experienced but it will be impossible to erase the past re-membered Ballyturk stories. And, like Dinny’s farce in *The Walworth Farce*, the story will have to begin somewhere. The speculation could go on endlessly as to the meaning and purpose of the repetition, but Walsh’s aesthetic and theatrical choices show that *Ballyturk* still depicts a world built on the same themes of ritual, memory, and performance in a repeated embodiment of reality.
Walsh’s Aesthetic and Theatre at Large

Walsh’s plays depict characters in situations where they are seemingly in thrall to the need for revising and vindicating their past (imagined or otherwise). In production, these choices represent distinctly theatrical worlds that are also highly constructed. The meta-theatrical imagining Walsh utilizes in his plays is not the same as Brecht’s Epic theatre or other forms that make reference to theatre explicitly. Instead, plays such as Ballyturk represent the performativity of everyday life taken to an extreme. Characters in plays – not just Walsh’s – are driven by their need to produce the best version of themselves. They invent a routine which keeps them safe because it relies on memory that they have revisited so many times that their own version is correct. By enacting these rituals, the characters demonstrate their need for a narrative that fits their own world views. A person does not make negative choices; that is, when a character speaks or acts in a certain way, it is done in the hope that something positive or desirable will come from the words or gestures.

While it would be presumptuous to generalize broadly about people in general, the need to use routine and carefully crafted narratives reflects on everyone who performs in some way. To take Schechner’s ‘everything as performance’ theory, his claim presupposes that ‘everyone’ also performs. Therefore, characters in a play such as Oedipus Rex make choices that they believe will affect their world in a positive way. Walsh’s plays focus these aspects of human nature so starkly that there is nothing for his characters to do but pursue the need to ritually repeat and revise their personal and communal histories through performance as a means of creating a safe and positive world for themselves. Pig and Runt create their language so they can escape ostracization in ‘Pork Sity;’ Dinny creates his farce to ‘keep the family safe;’ Thomas Magill attempts to use recorded voices to vindicate his purge of Inishfree; the four suitors woo Penelope with the knowledge that their wooing is a performance meant only for survival. These characters may seem to make negative and
terrifyingly stilted choices that would shame someone who sees the plays, but the choices are made to save them and make a better life.

In relation to memory and performance, Frawley, Kearney, and Pine’s discussions of subjectively shaped narratives resonate in theatre generally not just Walsh’s plays. Characters onstage enact versions of themselves in an attempt to present the version they want to show publicly. As seen in the literal depiction of Gar Public and Gar Private in *Philadelphia Here I Come!*, characters want to curb the possibility of letting emotions take control. Instead, playwrights often write these revelations into climactic moments. Similarly, characters in the plays of Suzan-Lori Parks enact re-memory as a way of moving forward. There is progression in returning to a certain narrative for characters in *The America Play* where the Foundling Father is dressed as Abraham Lincoln and patrons can pay to perform the role of John Wilkes Booth. The characters in Parks’s plays recognize the citational actions they take in addition to the precedent they set (and change) with each repetition. In Walsh’s plays, however, these accidental moments of truth supersede the performed reality. Characters reveal a personal secret and the results are often devastating. The re-membering of past wrongs engages in forward progress, but only insofar as the characters believe they have changed.

Examinations of ritual similarly reveal these instances of unintentional disclosure. Rituals are repeated actions or words that have been learned and become part of everyday life such that they are almost second-nature. People do not need to think, and when attention is split or fatigue sets in, there are problems with the enactment where the system of belief to break down. Identity is formed in the ritualized repetition of certain acts so much so that it becomes a characteristic or trait. The return to known stories provides comfort, but in repetition, the ritual grows and like memory becomes more grandiose with each passing iteration. When characters in Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* enact their gestic
characterization, they have ritualized the essence of their identities. The same can be said for Walsh’s characters who choose the way in which they perform these identifying acts and stories. Thomas’s exit from the house into Inishfree, performed while standing isolated from everyone else, and the costuming for the characters in *The New Electric Ballroom* represent these rituals as communal identity.

Performance and production reflect interrelated issues when it comes to theatre. Both the acts which make up the production and the staging of the play are integral to any study of theatre. The re-membering of lines and movements in rehearsal resonate through all performance. In contemporary performance practice, the overt reference to performative roles may seem to negate a need for analysis, but it is important to consider these issues within the frame of theatre and beyond to the ‘real world.’ Meta-theatrical devices such as direct address and self-referentiality have been part of theatre since the Ancient Greeks and it will continue to be part performance practice. However, this comment is not meant to dismiss the need for analysis. On the contrary, layering of performance and questions of actors playing characters who enact other characters introduces new questions for what it means to be a performer. In production, the theatre-maker must embody several roles at once whether as actor-character, actor-director, director-writer or any other combination. The analytical methodology of Performance Studies considers the ways in which a layered version of performed identity both masks and depicts a kind of truth.

I will conclude by saying that Walsh’s plays often include horrifying situations, but these stories represent a greater attempt to create a personal story that is worthwhile. The playwright, obviously, has control over what the characters say and do. In an interview, Walsh has said that “when you’re lost in [writing] you feel empowered to let the characters do what they want to do, where the world begins to feel confident in itself” (Barre). This ceding of control seems magnanimous and for someone like Walsh whose stories are so
meticulously crafted it seems suspect. But the desire to give in to what the world or the characters want to do infers a larger acceptance of the ritualized performance of memory and its permutations after even just one repetition. This notion plays back into Rep&Rev and the re-membering of history such that it refocuses on a new aspect of a narrative. The collaborative, rehearsed work of theatre necessitates an acceptance of change throughout the process. When a theatre-maker recognizes the ghosting and repetitive nature of performance, the art can sometimes deviate from a specific style or it can open new possibilities for staging and performance.

Walsh’s aesthetic includes plays depicting characters caught in a cycle of repetition and revision, often within the confines of a darkly comical and imposed routine. In these worlds, Walsh uses rituals and routine to show that he is not in control; the words and actions that his characters use take precedence. Memory and the human mind represent an amorphous and ever-changing entity that shifts as quickly as the present replaces the past – both immediate and ancient. Examples of performance and performativity as creators of identity and history enable a discussion of theatre generally and the ways in which an actor undertakes the embodiment of a character. More broadly, Walsh’s plays highlight characters as makers of their own worlds; even when it seems that onstage figures are themselves, the interior actor and the character’s subtext constantly create and inflect the ways they inhabit and process the events around them. In short, Walsh’s plays examine reality, truth, relativity, repetition, revision, and the unending chasm between one moment and the next as arbiters of a distinct narrative that can never be anything but a uniquely subjective experience.
Conclusion

Works Cited


Appendix

This section does not provide analysis of Enda Walsh’s plays. It should be used as a resource for reference to Walsh’s works in a broad sense. I go through the playwright’s entire catalogue from his first professional production – *Fishy Tales* – in 1993 with Graffiti Theatre Company to his 2015 Off-Broadway musical – *Lazarus* – to provide a basic outline of Walsh’s oeuvre. I give original production dates and, where applicable, first English-language, and revised-script dates.

*Fishy Tales* (1993) –

Walsh’s first play – *Fishy Tales* – premiered in Cork with the children’s theatre group Graffiti Theatre Company. The story depicts a young prince who is stuck in a fish’s stomach recounting the many stories of how he has not learned lessons about other people and their talents and gifts that make them special. Instead he spends most of the time, even in retrospect, berating the children he aims to outdo with his princely skills and unique bellybutton. He tells and reenacts these stories for the benefit of a goldfish and the audience to see that he is not such a miserable person, but each story proves he has not learned. The entire apparatus revolves around the prince re-performing these events with the help of various objects and makeshift puppets he finds in the fish’s belly as props and other characters. Due to this staging device, the goldfish (voiced by Enda Walsh, as a puppeteer) served as a conscience and incredulous arbiter for the prince’s tale. Even in his first play, Walsh highlighted the theatrical medium and poised himself as a commentator on the human instinct to choose self-preservation through storytelling and repetition of narratives even if they are untrue.
Appendix

*A Christmas Carol* (1994) –

The playwright’s next project began his long collaboration with Corcadorca Theatre Company. Founded in 1991 by artistic director Pat Kiernan, Corcadorca became known for its productions of site-specific versions of plays such as Georg Büchner’s *Leonce and Lena* and Federico García Lorca’s *The Love of Don Perlimplin*. In 1994, Walsh wrote a version of *A Christmas Carol* which was staged in the Cork City Gaol. The production was set amongst a troupe of actors who all attempt to tell the best version of the Dickens classic. However, along the way, they all end up forgetting the main thrust of the plot and improvising narratives that lead to darker aspects of the tale – highlighting greed, poverty, and death. However, this was not quite an original script from the playwright and would mostly be attributed to the creativity of the artistic director and the company.


Walsh next wrote a play that revolved around a ventriloquist, his mother, and the love interest who he hoped to impress with his act. *The Ginger Ale Boy* premiered in 1995 under the direction of Pat Kiernan. Walsh recognises this play as a flawed attempt to include everyone who was part of Corcadorca at the time, but he also stands by the project as the first time he got attention for his writing and style. The play’s protagonist, Bobby, lives with his mother who hopes he will be a star ventriloquist like his grandfather. She woos a television promotor named Danny to give Bobby a shot, but when Bobby and his dummy Barney go on TV, they fail to go through with the act. Bobby gets horrible stage fright and embarrasses himself in front of the audience and his love interest. The use of songs and long monologues in the play would come to characterise many of his future plays, but the themes of performance, repeated rituals, and the protagonist stuck in reliving the past demonstrate the focus he maintains throughout his writing.
Disco Pigs (1996) –

In 1996, Walsh’s play *Disco Pigs* (again with Corcadorca) vaulted him and the cast – Cillian Murphy and Eileen Walsh – to international fame. The play seems focused entirely on the young, angst-ridden energy of Cork outsiders, Pig (Darren) and Runt (Sinead), who have created a child’s-play world specifically to exclude anyone else from their version of Cork. The pair speak in a mixture of slang and invented words and their hometown Pork Sity to differentiate their view of the world from others. Pig and Runt, born on the same day, share everything including an awkward sexual encounter that might be entirely imagined, and when their seventeenth birthday comes around they cannot maintain the world they have created without hurting others or each other. Pig ends up killing a boy at a club who showed Runt courtesy and affection, and this causes Runt to flee and leave the friendship behind her. The play’s intense language and content prompted a strong response when it went on to win an Edinburgh Fringe First, the Stewart Parker Award, and the George Devine Award all in 1997. The production also went on a world tour, performing in the UK, Canada, Australia, Denmark, Hungary, and Germany from 1998 to 1999. Subsequently, the play was translated in many different languages as it was produced in Europe through most of the late 1990s and early 2000s. This international touring would open Walsh up to future collaborations and a desire to move his playwriting into a more experimental style.

Sucking Dublin (1997) –

Walsh’s international fame grew, and so did his expectations in Ireland. He was commissioned by the Abbey Theatre to write a play for the Outreach Department which would include a chorus of actors from various community centres around Dublin including: Ballymun, Ballyfermot, Basin Lane and North Great Georges Street. Walsh wrote *Sucking Dublin* to include a story of immediacy and violence to the rougher side of Dublin with
rampan drug use and a rape during a party onstage. The play begins as five teenagers celebrate a birthday for Little Lamb, but the night goes out of control and Steve rapes Little Lamb. The other characters who witness these events either ignore or outright deny the occurrence causing Little Lamb to flee Dublin and her baby for a better life elsewhere. The other characters remain entrapped in their usual dealings even as they lie to themselves about the awful circumstances of their day to day lives. In this play, Walsh demonstrates the ways in which people (even from a young age) can feel the pressing need to maintain a specific, outward expression of self that may not fit with the narrative of what is considered normal. And the drug and alcohol-fueled emotions perpetuate a culture of repeated lies and unrealistic expectations for the people who stay. But this type of storytelling would lead Walsh to craft plays which focus on the people who make these decisions and choose to stay rather than on what makes them leave.


After *Disco Pigs* toured the world and *Sucking Dublin*’s run at various venues in Dublin, Walsh was in the process of writing a new play which would also be produced by Corcadorca – *misterman* (1999). The play follows a day in the life of Thomas Magill (originally played by Walsh himself) who takes it upon himself to right the wrongs of his small community, Inishfree. Thomas is a godly man and goes around recording people speaking and taking note of their sinful ways to vindicate his spite for the town. In performance, he carries a tape recorder with him and uses the recorded voices to act as his co-performers in reliving the story of this fateful day. But Thomas enacts these memories in an isolated state where he is the only one on stage and the author/editor of the recordings’ narrative. This play demonstrates Walsh’s first instance of inserting himself (literally as actor, and figuratively as author) into a production. He exercises considerable control over the stage and how things are
Appendix

told as author, and the later version of the play would undergo a similarly meticulous crafting when Walsh took on the role of director.

In 2011, Walsh edited *Misterman* for a production in the Galway Arts Festival starring Cillian Murphy as Thomas. The new version depicted a grander scale where the protagonist had created a world within an abandoned warehouse to keep outside influences from infiltrating the purity of his story and mission. While this theme exists in the original text, the second iteration relied on bigger technical demands and a self-admitted stronger actor.\(^{43}\) The larger venue and expectations for the Galway Arts Festival (a multi-million euro annual festival) required that Walsh’s play fill the space in a more literal way. The original production, however, was also the breaking point for the relationship between Walsh and Pat Kiernan. Walsh says that “[a] consequence of acting in *misterman* was that I inevitably fell out badly with my co-creator Pat Kiernan […] Corcadorca went on to building huge shows and I went the other direction” (2011; viii). As such, Walsh’s next project would be his first as director and sole creator.

*bedbound* (2000) –

At the 2000 Dublin Theatre Festival, Walsh premiered his play *bedbound* – another play about two characters trapped in a world made of words where they do everything to keep people from breaking down the walls they have erected. Except this time, the walls and stunted world are literal; Dad has built a box around Daughter and the bed in which the two live. The pair reenacts the story of Dad (Maxwell Darcy) and his attempt to create a furniture store empire in Cork and Dublin. Max plays himself and Daughter plays all the other characters, but occasionally he comes to a moment of truth and embarrassment and cannot continue, forcing Daughter to act all the roles or face the terror of silence. The characters try

\(^{43}\) In his Foreword to his *Plays One*, Walsh says of the original project: “I ended up playing Thomas. It’s a one-man show. It was a dangerous thing to do as I’m not a natural actor […] As much as the writer is always ‘on’, I needed to find ways of disappearing and allowing characters to just be” (viii).
their best to stick to the story, but when moments of honesty break through the performed fairytale version of Max’s life neither can avoid the painful truth of their own confinement. Dad created this box to contain his shame at failing to live up to expectations and for the shame of having a daughter with polio. She has been there for ten years, but he has only been there a relatively brief amount of time since he murdered one of his co-workers and Daughter’s mother passed away. The repeated ritual begins and ends the play as Daughter says “all that’s left is ta start over” (2011; 101 and 126). And they continue reliving the story as the box closes back up around them.


Walsh’s work continued to receive international premieres, especially in Germany, where he spent with Tilman Raabke (a dramaturg with Müncher Kammerspiele 2000-2008, and Theater Oberhausen since 2008) and Thomas Ostermeier (director of Berlin’s Schaubühne since 2000 and original director _Disco Pigs_ in Germany in 1999). These two relationships led to Walsh’s works receiving informal staged readings around midnight at a club where the playwright read Dad’s part from _bedbound_ in English (while mixing sound live) and an actress read Daughter’s part in German.⁴⁴ Ostermeier wanted to produce Walsh’s works, and Raabke wanted to give him the opportunity to work on what the playwright called “exercises in form and atmosphere more than anything else” (2011; ix). The above statement specifically refers to his development and direction of productions of _Disco Pigs, misterman_, and _bedbound_ in Italian and in German which took place in the early 2000s. Even later in his career with works such as _Lazarus_, Walsh continues to collaborate and work with Raabke to develop new plays and ideas using an experimental approach. Walsh would then go on to write plays shaped by his new viewpoint in those late-night stage readings; “I’m watching my work done in different languages, it was great. You begin to see what’s important in the work

⁴⁴ These events were described to me in a personal interview with Enda Walsh on 18 May, 2015 in London.
Appendix

– the shape and rhythm of it” (Barre). In Walsh’s mind, the ways in which events unfolded and the tensions and energies of a piece became the crux of the production more than the essence of the words. This focus becomes evident in the plays that follow.


In 2004, Müncher Kammerspiele (in Munich, Germany) produced the world premiere of Walsh’s play *The New Electric Ballroom* in German. This work would not receive an English-language premiere until 2008 when Druid Theatre Company produced it and Walsh directed it himself. The play follows three women who live in a small cottage near a fishing village in the west of Ireland. Every day, the youngest sister Ada forces her older sisters Breda and Clara to remember and retell the story of how they sought the love of a 1950s showband singer called the Roller Royle. The older sisters, now in their 60s, squeeze into their old costumes they wore to the New Electric Ballroom as they perform the story that led to their self-made confinement from the outside world and the pain of lost love. The sisters physically embody the cautionary tale for Ada to learn. However, the performance is frequently interrupted by Patsy the fishmonger who comes and goes as regularly as the tides. He is always denied entry, but today Breda invites him into the house to insert him into the storytelling, dress him as the Roller Royle, and set up a relationship with Ada. The couple cannot break the rhythm and cycle of their lives and so he leaves and Ada becomes yet another heartbroken sister in the house as they now insert her experience into the repeated story. In this play, Walsh’s words construct the world and its tensions – “boxed by words” and “stamped by story,” as the characters say (35). And yet, Walsh does not speak German and was part of the rehearsal process for the original production. So he saw and heard the emotion and actions of his play but could not respond to it directly but only through his interpretation of the actors’ embodiment of the world he created.
Later in 2004, Walsh’s play *How These Desperate Men Talk* received its world premiere in Zürich, Switzerland at the Schauspielhaus under the title *Fraternity*. The play relies largely on the energy of the two men on stage, one holding a gun to the other’s head and forcing the latter to tell a story. The men, Dave (the storyteller) and John (the interrogator), are stuck in a repetition to find a reasoning for why John might have murdered a woman whom he had stalked for an entire year. They try various people from John’s life, such as a priest or his mother, to blame for his anger at the woman, but nothing seems right until John inserts Dave as the possible reason. As the story progresses, John more violently forces Dave to continue incriminating himself only to end with John admitting he still does not know if it is the truth. Rather than leave the story unknown, Dave desperately restarts the search to find a new scapegoat for John’s murder of the young woman as the play ends. Instead of an easily discernible plot, Walsh inserts tension and a dangerous mood as if they were characters imposing their will on the two men. They wrestle with truth as a concept, the faultiness of their individual memories, and the imperfection of reperformance only to come to the conclusion that they must simply keep searching. In this play, Walsh presents the theatrical medium as a thought experiment of life and death. The characters are actors, directors, and critics of the other’s performances and yet there is no objective ‘truth’ to be achieved and they must continue on until they find it.

In 2014, the play premiered in Ireland under its published English title – *How These Desperate Men Talk*. The production returned Walsh to Corcadorca’s repertoire in a co-production with sound design duo Eat My Noise. The play was produced in the Kinsale Arts Festival with Corcadorca’s site-specific flair, set in Graepel Perforators and Weavers now-derelict metal factory. The production was a slow promenade through the factory, following the two men through the heaps of steel and timber as they perform each version of the story.
as a separate vignette. The aural experience that accompanies the crucial moments where tension is highest punctuate the scenes – most notably the ending moment of each repetition. The lighting provided shadowy glimpses rather than bright openness on the men and their stories, which followed the expectations set forth in the play’s stage directions. In short, the production’s new approach was most dependent upon Pat Kiernan’s vision for found spaces and their artistic uses rather than the text. However, as the first Irish production of the play, it set the standard by which other versions would be judged.

*The Small Things* (2005) –

2005 was Enda Walsh’s most productive year to date in terms of number of premieres with four new plays receiving productions in one year. Paines Plough of London produced *The Small Things* in January of 2005 as part of the ‘This Other England’ season which included new work from David Greig, Douglas Maxwell, and Philip Ridley. The original production used a heavy Lancashire dialect from northern England after Walsh spent a few weeks cycling the countryside there. Two characters, Man and Woman, appear onstage seated in a house but they do not speak to each other. Instead, they remain distant but still speaking of a shared past where each one references the other and their childhood experiences together. The two stories, however, are dictated and timed by alarm clocks which the characters use to make sure they are staying on schedule with the telling. They perform their roles and remember the town’s downfall as Woman’s father instigated a reign of terror slicing out tongues of everyone in the community. Man and Woman eventually escaped, but neither knows if the experiences that followed were real or a dream. And so, to keep their existence and purpose intact, the pair strictly remembers and retells the story in the same way each day. The pair locks themselves in routine in order to create their identity as something to which they can cling for stability, but it only leads to a further distortion of what happened in one memory to the next.
Appendix

Chatroom (2005) –

The National Theatre in London commissioned Walsh to write a play for their NT Connections programme which premieres new plays for young actors with challenging content and styles. Chatroom premiered on 10 March, 2005 in the Cottlesloe Theatre (the smallest auditorium at the National Theatre). The play follows six teenagers in digital chatrooms where identity and conversations shift from fun-loving teens talking about Willy Wonka and Britney Spears to hateful discussions of suicide. Jim contemplates the purpose of his life while Eva and William encourage negative thoughts and depression. Emily, Jack and Laura all try to combat these conversations but feel they are fighting a losing battle. In the end, Jim chooses to embrace his offbeat love of childhood and games rather than the dark reality of adulthood. But these characters all represent fictions of their own experience as they all try to avoid outing themselves as real people behind screens with issues of their own. The revelation at the end points to more than issues of teenage bullying and online culture; the voices onstage depict versions of people who want to hide behind stories and masks of identity to maintain their own life. The play’s focus on more than the progression from childhood to adulthood presents visions of individual worlds built on words like many of Walsh’s other works.

Pondlife Angels (2005) –

The next play dealt with similar issues of rejection from society and the attempt to safeguard oneself against others. On 16 June, 2005, Pondlife Angels was commissioned and premiered as part of the Cork Midsummer Festival and co-produced by Asylum Productions. Jean wakes up and begins her day in her bedroom which then becomes the kitchen and Tesco and the pub and then all of Cork as she goes about her day. But she has a collaborator (simply called Him) who forces her to retell this single day and relive the experiences as he plays the
other characters. The play opens with an ominous placement of a blood packet strapped to her stomach underneath her clothing, but she goes about her day working at Tesco, pining for her ex-boyfriend (Paul) who is set to be married that evening, and wandering around Cork as she follows yellow Post-it notes written to ‘sweet Jean’ all over the city. As she gets closer and closer to the end of the story, Him forces her harder and harder to relive the details of the day. When she dresses up in a fancy red dress for the wedding to see if Paul has had seconds thoughts about his wedding, Jean arrives and is insulted by Paul for her uncontrollable spasms when walking through doorways. She runs out and finds one of her co-workers who has been leaving the Post-it notes who then stabs her in the stomach as she tries to reconcile the end of her life and the shame of the whole experience. The play is told in a flashback as she reenacts the day to the best of her ability, but Him pushes her to live it truthfully when she strays in an attempt to avoid the pain of her last day of life. She tries to avoid it, but by re-living the experience she must confront the reality that she cannot change the past that she knows has already taken her life.


On the same day, 16 June, 2005, a Portuguese company called Artistas Unidos premiered Enda Walsh’s play _Lynndie’s Gotta Gun_ as part of the Conferência de Imprensa e Outras Aldrabices (Conference of Media and Other Deceptions). The short play is subtitled “A play for former US soldier Private Lynndie England” which references one of the eleven soldiers who were court-martialed for their abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison during the US occupation of Iraq. As such, the play is immediately politicised and about American jingoism, but it also contains themes similar to Walsh’s other works such as performed lies and bending of truths. Lynndie, dressed as a children’s party clown, comes onstage to a scared Man asking about his missing son and she proceeds to hit him with a fish, a frying pan, and a cream cake, as clowns do. Even as the man begs to know why he is detained,
Lynndie refuses to respond instead leading the interrogation herself and asking for information about anything. This devolves into her asking whether he likes her, if she is nice, and if she is funny. Lynndie threatens Man with a gun as she admits she does not know what she is fighting for or why she is there. She reveals and looks at the mechanism of torture, opining her purpose and identity within the system. As Man refuses to offer information, she shoots the gun which pops out a flag with ‘Bang’ on it. The tension breaks momentarily before she pulls out another gun and shoots him dead just before a boy runs onstage and she points the gun at him. Performance and identity are important issues in this play, even if the obvious theme examines American interrogation procedures. The juxtaposition of clowning with interrogation (similar to Disregard This Play by Greg Kotis of the Neo-Futurists in New York City) provides an opportunity to think about the ways in which performance create versions of reality, and what is perceived can be construed to mean anything by someone with a strong enough conviction in a certain belief.


These same themes and issues of performed reality and belief would go on to characterise Walsh’s next play in 2006, *The Walworth Farce*. The production marked the first collaboration between Druid Theatre Company and Walsh, a relationship which would continue for the next four years as his plays were produced and then went on world tours to Australia, Canada, the UK and the United States. The play is often called a companion piece to *The New Electric Ballroom* because it features a father (Dinny) and his two sons (Blake and Sean) stuck in a flat off Walworth Road in London performing a story of Dinny’s last day in Cork. The performance is highly scripted and relies on tenets of farce – quick changes, mistaken identity, overly complicated plots and descriptions, and a bit of slapstick comedy.

---

The story has been authored by Dinny himself as “a routine that keeps the family safe” but much of the day revolves around issues with the wrong shopping, misremembering and missed cues (69). With each forgotten line, Dinny’s authority and the ‘truth’ he has made comes into question. The ultimate interruption comes when Hayley, a checkout woman from Tesco, brings the shopping Sean forgot to their apartment. She is forced to join the performance, but she does not know the words and instead needs to improvise many of the lines which moves it further from Dinny’s version. By the end, the flat and the story are in tatters and both Dinny and Blake are dead leaving Sean to leave with Hayley. She escapes, but Sean locks the door and returns to the safety of the routine and replays the day. The play points again to the same issues of performance, memory, and daily routine as confrontations rather than objective truths that can be recreated.

_Gentrification_ (2008) –

When Walsh’s _The New Electric Ballroom_ received its first English-language staging in 2008, produced by Druid Theatre and directed by Walsh, the company also included a short repertoire of short plays as an afternoon pre-show. One play was _Lynndie’s Gotta Gun_, and the other was a new play called _Gentrification_. The latter play was directed by Druid literary manager Thomas Conway as part of a Galway Arts Festival double-bill called “Enda Walsh One Acts” which premiered 22 July, 2008. _Gentrification_ puts two men – Enda and Henry – in a room at a table with Jaffa Cakes. Henry has kidnapped Enda and his wife Jo’s daughter Ada, and Henry wants Enda to tell him about his day, his breakfast, his life – all set to “Ode to Joy.” Henry makes Enda describe his day in detail, guiding and directing the way he tells it throughout. Enda wants to negotiate the return of his daughter, but Henry would prefer he remember and retell the details of his morning before Ada was kidnapped without Enda getting worked up about his missing daughter. Once Enda has told his story, Henry tells the

---

46 A playwright writes what he knows; Enda Walsh’s wife is named Jo, and they have a daughter named Ada.
story of his morning in similar amount of detail and how he prepared to kidnap Ada along with 53 other children in the neighborhood with the help of the police. Henry says they are trying to force people to leave their neighbourhood, to which Enda agrees, but Henry wants to hear the breakfast story again and then they can negotiate. Again, Walsh’s play seems to highlight the need to relive parts of life and personal history in an attempt to grapple with one’s own identity and place in a community. Henry believes he belongs to this area, but he also wishes to hear stories repeated and then to counter with his own version to assert his place. The characters do not explicitly examine these issues, but it can be inferred through the detailed remembering each man undertakes in his own storytelling.

*Delirium* (2008) –

Walsh’s next collaboration in 2008 brought him back to the Abbey Theatre and paired him with Theatre O, a UK-based theatre company known for its multimedia-driven, experimental style. *Delirium* is based on Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, which tells of philosophical debates and familial rivalries among a Russian family. The 19th century novel translates to the stage with a focus on inventive staging practices including projections, puppetry, and recorded dialogue mimed by actors. The play version modernises the story and gives the characters thumping dance tunes to which their pace and energy are set. Instead of simply following the story, Walsh’s play focuses on the intermingling of narratives and versions of personal philosophy set against the moral backdrop of religious and academic questioning. The use of puppetry and recording devices to play and replay versions of the story in contrast to the acted version, the audience can see the issues with each character’s espoused identity to which they so desperately cling for safety and stability.

*The Man in the Moon* (2009) –
Walsh returned to children’s theatre in 2009 with a piece co-written with Jack Healy called *The Man in the Moon*, based on Healy’s short story. The play was produced by Moonstruck Astronaut Theatre Company in February 2009 using puppets to tell the story of a boy made of balloons bereaving the loss of his father. The play is told without words save one “Daddy” spoken as the boy pulls his father’s air plug and sends him sailing away to the moon. The boy then must grapple with his mother’s overly-protective nature in order to find his father who has flown to the moon. The play deals largely with the theme of a child’s loss of a parent, but the staging and mechanisms of storytelling dictated by the script demand attention of the puppeteers that they are in fact reliving a story – one which can be interpreted in a multitude of ways because of the lack of words. The play also necessitates an imaginative world-making on the part of the characters who use various household objects to create the implements that will help them move about the stage in control (as a balloon boy, mother, or father).

*Penelope* (2009) –

The following year Walsh’s international presence premiered the same play only five months apart in two very different venues. *Penelope* premiered in German as part of Ruhr.2010 (Germany’s recognition as European Capital of Culture). Under that moniker, Theater Oberhausen (for who Tilman Raabke now worked) took part in a project called Odysee Europa which transported audience members to six venues to view six different plays over two days. Walsh’s *Penelope*, which focuses on four suitors on their final day in Homer’s *Odyssey*, came second in the list of productions in Odysee Europa and premiered on 27 February, 2010. The play depicts four men desperately trying to win the affections of Penelope in order to survive Odysseus’s imminent arrival. However, much of the play relies on references to the fall of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland and the business dealings (and failures) of these men are necessarily part of their characters. This interpretation fed into the English-
language premiere of the play with Druid Theatre at the Galway Arts Festival on 13 July, 2010. In the Irish context, the posturing and lies of businessmen in the public eye became a commentary not only on the Celtic Tiger but on a person’s attempts to perform for their own survival even in a dire situation.

My Friend Duplicity (2010) –

The Druid production of Penelope then transferred to Edinburgh for the Edinburgh Festival where it won a fourth Fringe First Award for Walsh. However, the playwright also used that time to premiere a new play as a stage reading. My Friend Duplicity premiered 26 August, 2010 as part of the “Impossible Things Before Breakfast” series in the Edinburgh Fringe using two members of the Penelope cast as the characters Jean and Fergal. The two characters come to the same flat in northwest London every day to create worlds with words, to make something out of nothing. They never write anything down to remember things, but the pair uses their time to explore whether or not they are Irish or if they have a purpose in life. Jean unwillingly participates in the repetition of Fergal’s imagined landscaped lawns, but she eventually confronts him and his mind-made existence. But when he tells her that his life revolves entirely around making their imaginations come to life, she too stays to help him survive. This issue of inventing reasons for existence through stories appears once again in Walsh’s play, and it continues into the era of his ‘box plays.’

Room 303 (2011 / 2014) –

The first of these plays that take place either in a box or a defined locale in which the audience experiences the show appeared as part of the Bush Theatre’s Sixty-Six Books project which offered 66 different artists the opportunity to respond to an individual book of the King James Bible. Enda Walsh responded to 3 John – the third to last book of the Bible – with his short play Room 303. The play featured the voice of a man, a traveling Irishman,
Appendix

over a phone or speaker calling from room 303. In the original production, the audience listened to a recording sitting in the Bush Theatre where Man told of how he was deteriorating after years of peddling ‘the good news’ to people’s homes. As he continues speaking, he forgets details of his past experiences and tries to recall them as he once could but even his mind is failing him just as his body has. He now lives entirely in his head, and he shares his thoughts with the listeners until he comes to the end and sees himself lying in bed and speaking. He cannot hear the man speaking, and then the phone line goes dead. Walsh’s musings on life and death here take place entirely in the mind of this character and presents itself to the listening audience. But Man openly recognises his unreliability, both in body and mind. In the second production, during 2014’s Galway International Arts Festival, the audience went into a makeshift hotel room constructed inside a gallery to listen to Man (and a slightly amended script, to reduce mention of religious connotations). This experience further immersed the audience in the play’s words while also providing the sense that the man is not there and cannot even exist in this room because he is so far gone. And yet, he ghosts the performance space so that some people would look around the room afterward to see details of the room he described. These themes permeate his work in general, but it is the focus on performing a version of self that translates into his next project.

Once (2011 / 2012) –

In a change from much of his other work, Walsh was asked to write the book for a stage version of John Carney’s film Once. It was workshopped at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, MA in 2011 before moving to the New York Theatre Workshop later that year.
and then eventually opening on Broadway on 18 March, 2012. Like the film, the play follows the story of Guy and Girl, two musicians in Dublin who create a bond through Guy’s desire to write and perform music. The stage adaptation, however, takes on a decidedly Walsh aesthetic as he sets the entire performance in a pub with mirrors on the walls aimed at the audience. This choice emphasises that these characters are performers taking on these roles, remembering the story of the play, and we the audience are invited to commune before the show and during the interval at the working pub onstage. The musical’s content includes various characters (not just the protagonists) who hide behind one identity while they perform another through music, but the aesthetic still hinges upon the fact that these are fellow people who welcome audiences (who are part of the performance) to openly recognise and take part in the event.

_Ballyturk_ (2014) –

As _Once_’s run on Broadway continued until 4 January, 2015, Walsh worked on other projects that returned once again to his themes of performance, memory and ritual. On 14 July, 2014, _Ballyturk_ premiered at the Galway International Arts Festival before moving to Dublin, Cork and London. The play features two men stuck in a room with no windows or doors and all the furniture pushed to the walls, leaving a central playing space for performing. The men have been there for quite some time and have forgotten how they arrived or even their names, but they have taken great pains to remember all the details of every person who lives in a nearby town called Ballyturk. They reenact the subjects, using costumes, and props from inside the room to make it more real before the back wall comes down and allows a third man to enter and tell them that he has come to ask one of them to leave with him. The pair desperately cling to the hope that their stories will drown out the revelation that they do not live in

---

47 Walsh personally won the Tony Award and Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Book of a Musical in addition to go along with seven other Tony Awards, two other Outer Critics Circle Awards, three Lucille Lortel Awards, a Drama League Award, a Grammy Award, and two Laurence Olivier Awards.
isolation. But in the end, the younger of the two men leaves only to be replaced shortly thereafter by a young girl who will take his place in the daily repetition of these stories of Ballyturk. Walsh literally places his characters in a box and they are left to survive in the only way they know how – they make up stories to entertain themselves and create a purpose for living.

*The Twits* (2015) –

One might say that Walsh’s next play might not fit into the usual themes of performance and distorted memory, but his ‘mischievous adaptation’ of Roald Dahl’s *The Twits* only enhances the expectation that his plays still focus on issues of reenacted world-making. The play premiered on 14 April, 2015 at the Royal Court Theatre in London with the same characters as the short children’s story – Mr. and Mrs. Twit, a family of monkeys, and many birds – plus some Walsh invented for the purpose of adding a story to Dahl’s 30-page list of pranks that the character play on each other. Walsh inserts three carnival performers who were tricked into selling the Twits their carnival years ago. When they return to get back their fairground, the Twits insist it will return if only they wait and watch the family of monkeys perform stories depicting each of the three carnival performers’ embarrassing misdeeds that led to the loss of the carnival fairgrounds. Mr. and Mrs. Twit write and direct the monkeys to act out the short plays to further humiliate them. But eventually the monkeys escape, and with the help of the birds and the carnival performers, they turn the Twits’ house upside down which causes them to panic that they are upside down and then they glue their heads to the floor, causing them to shrink into oblivion. The children’s play also uses audience interaction, self-referential comments and direct address to the viewers in an attempt to further highlight the performativity of characters taking on these roles and performing plays within plays.

Walsh continued to box his characters into spaces where they both existed and reveled in their storytelling with his second box play – *A Girl’s Bedroom*. The play premiered during the 2015 Galway International Arts Festival and it included a box constructed inside a theatre where four audience members would enter a girl’s bedroom and listen to a voice of Girl, now a grown woman. Inside the room, there is a bed, a wardrobe, bookshelves, and toys strewn about collecting dust leading the audience to believe she has been gone for quite some time. Girl tries to remember the details of her room and the night she ran away from the room, her parents, and home. In the telling, she looks back and tries to imagine why she left because she cannot recall the reason, only that she did. Over the course of the play and Girl’s narrative, the room darkens and obscures the details of the room as Girl’s memory of the place fades. Notably, the main source of light is in the centre of the room on the ceiling – a mobile of the Milky Way Solar System with a sun as the light. The set literally represents a world that has been created as a version of this girl’s fading memory of childhood, and the performance allows an audience to become part of that failing remembrance.

*The Last Hotel* (2015) –

In 2015, Walsh collaborated with composer Donnacha Dennehy to write a new opera. *The Last Hotel* (2015) is a fictional story about a woman who hires a couple to assist in her suicide. Although the story is loosely based on the Rosemary Toole Gilhooley assisted suicide case from 2002, Walsh has said that he wanted “something completely different because we can’t have people from this woman’s family saying ‘oh my god, they’re doing her story on the fucking stage’” (Barre). The play opens with the hotel’s Caretaker (the one silent role) cleaning a bloodstain from centre-stage before the other three characters arrive. When the Woman enters, she sings about seeming trivialities of life and her need to find

---

48 The room is decorated largely in pink coloured sheet, rugs, jackets – all items you might find in a six-year old girl’s room. But an item of note on the nightstand was a copy of Roald Dahl’s *The Twits*. 

288
peace. The Husband and Wife confront their own marital issues in song, but they vacillate between personal and existential topics of what it means to help someone commit suicide. Then as the time approaches, the characters rehearse Woman’s death – going through the motions in all but the end product. The Caretaker is witness to many of these interactions prior to Woman’s death, but his interactions remain physically distant as he must continue the upkeep of the hotel even as it serves as a place of death. The Woman, Husband and Wife all come to the realisation that their place in the world seems significant when looking back on what they have experienced and the connections they share. The Woman’s life ends with her attempt to escape the constant pull and movement of life as she sings “It is there. That breath. Still there. Always…” (Walsh 34).

Lazarus (2015) –

*Lazarus* (2015) is a musical collaboration with songwriter David Bowie and director Ivo Van Hove based on the book *The Man Who Fell to Earth* by Walter Tevis, but told within the frame of the lead character’s mind as broken space of hope/memory. The production opened at the New York Theatre Workshop in late 2015 with Michael C. Hall (of *Weeds* and *Dexter* fame) in the role of Thomas Newton, the alien who came to Earth in search of water for his dying planet only to be stranded. The musical picks up several decades after the end of the novel with Newton stuck in a room where he laments his inability to leave but refuses to even attempt to exit the apartment. He dreams of his lost love Mary Lou and hires a woman named Elly as his assistant. Elly begins performing Mary Lou’s personality and outward appearance, as Newton spends quite a bit of time lamenting what he misses about her. In the midst of Elly’s visits, memories of Mary Lou haunt him as he tries to drown his sorrows in gin and Twinkies. Then a young girl appears before Newton, and only he can see her. She says she must help the alien leave Earth in a rocket that they will build in his apartment; she makes it out of tape. A man named Valentine adores Newton and wants to gain access to his life and
apartment, but he also wishes to destroy the alien. In the end, the young girl (who we find out was recently murdered by her school teacher) is killed by Newton himself as she begs him and Valentine goads him to murdering this figment of his imagination. Newton then accepts this ending and the freedom that silencing his mental creations has done, and he flies away on his tape-made rocket. In his review for the *New York Times*, Ben Brantley ascribes the plot’s complexity to “highly fluid” identities and “cryptic collegiate dialogue in which it’s suggested that what you’re seeing is only a Newton-spun illusion” (Brantley). While it would be simple to dismiss the production as overly complex and a symptom of Bowie’s aesthetic choices, I would argue the musical still reflects on Walsh’s themes of ritualised memory and revision through performance. The characters all exhibit similarities to the denizens of Walsh’s other plays, and they seem to revel in it given Bowie’s lyrical stylings and the mise-en-scene delivered by Ivo Van Hove’s ultra-modern, sleek interpretation of these elements.

**Future/Planned Productions**

*Pinocchio* (2016) which will be produced at the National Theatre London is based on Carlo Collodi’s story, but this adaptation focuses on the darker elements and issues of Pinocchio’s attempt to become a real boy; the playwright has mentioned in a personal interview that he is working on an unnamed play about Alzheimer’s that features a children’s choir. The playwright has also said he wants to continue writing his ‘box plays’ – as he says “every year, make a room; or maybe two or three in a year. And eventually, allegedly, they’re all talking to each other, they’re in the same geography as one another” (Barre).
Bibliography


Conway, Thomas. Personal Interview. 4 December, 2013. Recording.


Bibliography


https://youtu.be/NlSyYSpVXaw


Ryan, Cathal. Personal Interview. 16 Mar, 2015.


Walsh, Enda. Interview by Patrick Lonergan. 30 June 2013.

Walsh, Enda. The Last Hotel. Rehearsal Copy. 2015.


