Theatre within the Theatre, Play within the Play—Self-Reflexivity in Jim Nolan's *Blackwater Angel*

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Jim Nolan's *Blackwater Angel* (2001), a rich, complex but barely-known play combines the two basic kinds of play-within-the-play and this metadramatic method multiplies the layers of self-reflexivity. The external play, dramatizing the seventeenth-century healer, Valentine Greatrakes' fate, his predestined role, his and his family's plight, invokes the *theatrum mundi,* the World Theatre whereas the inset play, the travelling theatre's performance of *The Broken Heart* influences the characters and plot, and reverberates throughout the play. The two kinds of play-within-the-play, however, are not neatly separated but rather open up into each other; boundaries break down, the characters of the different plays interact, the role-playing reduplicates itself inside and outside.

Theatrical reality itself is a dual reality, the actor being both him/herself and the character in the play, the theatrical space being a "(two-fold) referent of all theatrical texts" (Ubersfeld 95), at once a physical presence and a representation or symbolic evocation of a fictional place. The play-within-the-play, a duplication of this already dual reality, is, in one definition, primarily "an artistic agency of self-reference and self-reflection" or "a special mode of perception that allows for different ways of presenting perspectives of appropriating and placing itself in relation to the world at large." It functions "most prominently as a meta-theatrical strategy of self-reflection, especially in the modern context of the establishment and foundation of the concept of the self, that is to say in the affirmation of a self-conscious subject ('the actor') that transcends the masks of social roles" (Fischer and Greiner, "Play within" xii, xiii). Obviously, this form of meta-theatricality is particularly suitable in the postmodern aesthetics of preference for quotation, intertextuality and self-referentiality.

David Roberts, theorizing the play-within-the-play, distinguishes its two main types and identifies the Renaissance *Hamlet*'s mouse-trap, which "uses reduplication to internalise the origin and causality of the scene," as the prototype of the *inset play*. The other type, the *framing play* of the "world theatre," "externalise[s] origin and causality" by projecting the belief that all the processes and interactions in the world itself are a theatrical performance. Again, the notion that "all the world's a stage" derives from Shakespeare and becomes often employed in Baroque plays, the best early example of which is Calderón de la Barca's *The Great World Theatre* (1633). "In each case," Roberts asserts, "reduplication has the purpose of making the invisible closure of representation visible in relation either to the form or the content (meaning) of representation" (38). By closure of representation he means, after Artaud, the "space of play," the limit of representation, which remains unrepresented. In the play-within-the-play, representation itself becomes represented, either as self-critique or as self-affirmation (37-38).

Roberts goes on exploring the ideological and theological implications of these two kinds of metadrama, calling attention to the distinction that while the inset play "anticipates through introversions the modern recession of origin, that is, the paradox of self-implication," leading towards "the stage becoming the world through staging itself" (39), hence dispensing with any external causality, the World Theatre "looks backwards to reaffirm through extraversion the medieval closure of meaning whose outcome is the allegory of self-explication" (39). In other words, it accepts the idea that the world is moved by external authority, by God. In it the audience is "transformed from self-observing observers into authorized participants, called to represent in a worthy fashion the role allotted to us in the world theatre" (40).

Blackwater Angel and *Faith Healer*

Apart from plays-within-plays, Nolan includes echoes of, or references to, a number of dramatic works. The primary intertext behind the whole play is provided by Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979), which Nolan rewrites more than twenty years later, revisiting many of its issues and dilemmas. He takes the historical figure, Valentine Greatrakes, whose miraculous healings in London and Ireland are noted in chronicles and turns him into an artist-healer figure similar to Frank Hardy, struggling with the same sort of "agonizing questions," uncertainties, self-doubts. Nolan's protagonist becomes closely linked to the theatre which further concentrates the tormenting questions on performance, acting, mask, art and healing.

The prologue to *Blackwater Angel* begins where Friel's *Faith Healer* ends: with a formal, symmetrical stage image and ritualistic movements, when the

> *double doors of Greatrakes' Castle swing open and a shaft of white light invades the interior. GREATRAKES stands alone in the open doorway. A single bass drumbeat is heard, followed by two more in rapid succession. The drumbeat continues in this rhythm and gradually increases in intensity as GREATRAKES comes forward. ... YOUNG BOY ... approaches him tentatively through the central aisle of the auditorium*. (11)

But at the point where Frank Hardy arrives at accepting his fate, subordinating, thus transcending his self and finding his peace, Greatrakes' troubles are about to begin.

Echoes of the uncertainties, questions, anguish related to the gift in *Faith Healer* resonate throughout *Blackwater Angel*. Where Frank in his tormenting self-searching worried whether he was artist or "con-man," Greatrakes insists that he is not "some mountebank or conjurer" and his healing was "not a trick" (31). Both healers want to justify to the world and, most importantly, to themselves, their honesty and real achievement. Frank Hardy with the newspaper clipping that he crumbles and throws away in that eerie scene where we already know that he's dead, Greatrakes by showing letters from important people, testimonies to his good character and real

healing (30-31). But while in *Faith Healer* Frank's action was a supreme moment of life and death, past and present collapsing in some inexplicable way and involving both the healer's triumph and his final dismissal of it, Nolan's protagonist makes himself ridiculous and pitiable in his desperate attempts to prove his authenticity. Both suffer from the lack of control over their miraculous gift and their helplessness when it is ebbing; neither wanted to bring it on or take advantage of it and neither can force it to work yet both know when it is going or not going to work. Also both have loyal helpers and supporters, most significantly longsuffering wives (whose fathers disapprove of their marriage partly for political reasons: Grace's Protestant middle class father cannot accept the "mountebank," penniless, jobless Catholic Hardy, while Ruth's well-to-do father doesn't like Greatrakes' past as a Cromwellian soldier). Yet, despite these many deliberate echoes of the earlier faith healer, Nolan's emphases fall differently.

The inset play

While the distinction between the performer, who focuses on his audience and the artist, who concentrates on his subject is phrased in the brilliantly crafted monologues in *Faith Healer*, it appears in *Blackwater Angel* in the juxtaposition of Greatrakes and the actors of the inset play. Soon after the beginning a travelling show arrives and its actors will come to participate in the primary action. On the plot level this group brings the mysterious Angel Landy into Greatrakes' life which encounter changes him and everybody around him. On the level of dramatic structure the play-within-the-play anticipates the characters' relationships and many of the issues dramatized, primarily those of the nature of art, the origin of inspiration, the role and responsibility of the artist, and the possibilities of healing through art.

The travelling troupe perform the English Elisabethan play, John Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1633). Only small fragments are shown from this play, however, so the tragedy of power and passionate love, forced marriage and revenge does not unfold in front of the audience of the outer play. Nor is much betrayed by the stage audience since they hardly discuss the events or figures in *The Broken Heart*. Only the closing scene is performed onstage, and that in rehearsal—another way of calling attention to the representation of representation—but the scene includes several significant lines that will then connect to the main play, such as the lines containing the image of the eponymous broken heart:

> When youth is ripe, and age from time doth part.
> The lifeless Trunk shall wed the Broken Heart. (1014)

The broken heart image becomes a leitmotif and keeps moving between the inset and the outer play. It occurs either in mockery, applied for instance to Michael, Greatrakes' disciple and servant who is laughed at by another character, who suggests

that he should put his heart "back in its chamber … we know it breaks" (59) or is used seriously, for example when Greatrakes is trying to persuade Angel to stay with him since she can heal a broken heart (85-86). Later plot-developments of the main play are condensed in the line about "The lifeless Trunk" and the "Broken Heart," who will not wed but which possibility will cause much conflict and suffering.

Even more crucial are the closing lines of Ford's play that carry the essence of Greatrakes' plight:

> The councils of the Gods are never known,
> Till men can call the effects of them their own. (1014)

As in *Hamlet*, the actors' lines reveal what is sick in the world of the play itself, or in this case, with its protagonist. While he was able to heal, his "innocent" acceptance of the effects of God's plans enabled him to carry out His will. Now, wanting to know "the councils of the Gods"—a form of original sin—leads him astray. Yet the play-within-the-play only tangentially reduplicates what goes on in the main play, mostly through these lines and the final tragic outcome of the action. The actors of the travelling theatre appear more often off- than onstage so it is their opinions, attitudes and experiences rather than their acting itself that offer the parallels represented in the play.

Nolan's play is engaged much less in the reduplication of representation itself than in the self-reference to theatre's existence, role, function, possibilities of healing and its interaction with the audience and the self-reflections of the protagonist (and some other characters) that the presence of the theatre facilitates. Reduplication operates in terms of showing theatre's possible effect on the audience and the close parallels between actors/artists and healers. One example of theatre's direct effect on theatre-goers is demonstrated through Greatrakes' servant, the once healed Michael, who is drawn to the theatre from the first moment. His being mesmerized by the idea of acting (annoying or entertaining the other servants around the house with his reciting passages at any moment), becomes coupled with his reflection on the relationship between reality and art, his own place and what he sees on the stage. His first encounter with the theatre reconfirms his longing to leave the "hellhole" where he lives (27) but changes into the mature realization that "the connivin's and the skullduggery is the very same in that quarter [in Sparta] as you'll find in these parts" (40). Some of his affirmations contain unmistakable references to Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*: "every man's story is a gallant one when it's told upon the stage" and "the stories of a hole the like of your own place is as gallant as them you'd find anywhere" (83). Synge's contrasting one's own place and the "big world" in *Riders to the Sea* also echoes at the beginning of Nolan's play when Michael is mocked for his wounds and deformities by people on the road, unlike in his own village. His own community acknowledges his sufferings as the scapegoat's atonement for their sins and later everybody rejoices in his miraculous recovery (12-13). As he discovered the ugliness

of his own deformity in a Narcissus-like moment when he looked into a river, so he recognizes his own position in the mirror the theatre holds up to him. And so as he was earlier cured from his wounds and swells by Greatrakes, now he is cured from his desire to escape his own country by the theatre. Michael's sober understanding of the human plight, as he once simply sums up: "miracles is rooted in the clay, not the stars" (84), sharply contrasts with Greatrakes' admiration of the world beyond their place and in particular of some well-educated English lady whom he tries again and again to cure while neglecting the thousands of miserable Irish people who have come to his place in the hope of healing. If he cannot control his gift, he certainly can abuse it as when, instead of obeying its call, he wants to decide himself where, and for whose healing he will use it. As we know from T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*,

> Servant of God has chance of greater sin
> And sorrow, than the man who serves a king

because he may make the cause serve him "[s]till doing right" (45). Serving God and serving the king are juxtaposed in Greatrakes' healing career in London where his success provoked the King's anger and jealousy because Greatrakes endangered the "King's Evil," the King's prerogative of healing. An unknown gift, a mysterious, spiritual inspiration originating from a higher source than the earthly power is always frightening to those in power. The parallel between actual healing and the healing power of art, more particularly theatre, is spelled out in the play in several ways, one of which is the story of the travelling theatre's (and all theatres in the Cromwellian times) being banned by the court for a while.

The presence of the travelling theatre thus gives ample opportunity for self-reflexivity—of the healer, of theatre, of art. The healer and the theatre "have much in common," as the primadonna, Madame Eustacia announces. Unintentionally, she washes together the distinctions between artist and performer that were so carefully maintained in *Faith Healer* when she speaks with admiration about Greatrakes' "performances" which leave theatre's efforts "quite in the shade" and which she describes using the word that he most protests against: "trick" (35). Yet later her words gain more currency as she proves able to distinguish between talent and "gift," calling herself a mere "trickster" but acknowledging that her husband "has the gift. His faith *is* his gift" (43). Her husband, in his turn, confesses that while he pretended to be certain that the theatre would open again and they would be able to play again, he actually lived full of doubts and uncertainties. The actors reminiscing about the time when they were banned and secretly played on Midsummer Eve in the forest so that they could keep themselves in practice and ready for the time when they could return to the stage, encourages Greatrakes to keep hoping that his gift will survive or revive like that of the actors. Their self-doubts also echo Greatrakes' own. Naming theirs helps him to face his own. The point is made several times that "faith is the gift," without faith the gift cannot work. So when Greatrakes loses his faith, he loses

his gift together with everything else, until he regains his faith after hitting the depths of Job-like despair.

The actors' acting in the forest just for themselves on Midsummer Night, their perseverance in practising their profession when it is forbidden, is rewarded by the appearance of Angel, this mysterious child whose voice becomes associated with God's voice and herself with innocence. Theatre is able to incorporate the voice of innocence amid the grimmest tragedies and crimes as Angel becomes the singer in the crucial last scene of *The Broken Heart*. Again, the implications of this scene are manifold. It raises, among others, the question of the director's rights, since the director-within-the-play replaces the epilogue of the original play with Angel's mysterious, wordless song, maintaining that the epilogue gives a kind of resolution that is alien to life. True-to-life performance is preferred to the neat solution of a well-written play, but that truth must include the unknowability of life, of the future.

Yet, it is also important to remember the lines that are omitted from the original play that became the inset play. Calantha, the tragic heroine, in her dying moments calls up the song that she herself "fitted for [her] end," which closes with the following words (that never appear in Nolan's play):

> Love only reigns in death; though art
> Can find no comfort for a broken heart. (1014)

Replacing those words with the beautiful wordless song denies the statement of the powerlessness of art. Instead, it confirms the players' boast that if a play cannot "fix a lame leg," it "may heal a fractured spirit" (42) and, as Christopher Murray observes, "the Cromwellians silenced them because they gave 'heart' to the miserable" (16). Greatrakes becomes mesmerized watching the rehearsal, but it is not so much by the play or the performance as by the young girl singing. Through her the boundaries between theatre and the outside world dissolve since the action includes her as a significant agent in both the inset and the framing play. The theatre group badly needs her and Greatrakes' obsession with her becomes the guiding light in his otherwise darkened life. It is through her that the question of the origin of the gift is most directly addressed, since Greatrakes believes that her voice is God's voice to him, and, therefore, she should remain with him. But in the second half of the play, after Angel loses her voice, healer and the client-to-be-healed change places, blend and multiply since both Angel and Greatrakes now need healing and each hopes to obtain it from the other. Greatrakes, by that time, has entirely lost his healing ability and with that his faith—"something died in him"—and, instead of really trying to heal Angel so she will be back to her own self, attempts to change her into what she is not. He, in his need for new inspiration, falls into the trap of unacknowledged emotional, sensual, sexual desire, which Angel cannot and does not want to gratify and which rather frightens her away. Greatrakes himself, due to his strong moral sense, becomes horrified by his

own desire when confronted with it and quickly withdraws. The "broken heart" in the outer play does not wed the "lifeless trunk."

Role-playing, which the actors' presence brings into the limelight, becomes an increasingly difficult task for Greatrakes. His role as healer that everybody expects him to fulfill but which he cannot any longer, is what he rebels against, what he wants to break out of, damaging himself and others in the process. The play does not deny nor does it affirm that Angel's voice was really God's voice to Greatrakes—Angel herself and her voice remain forever enigmatic. If it was God's voice, then his infatuation with her as a flesh-and-blood woman—a sublimation of desire into religious devotion—becomes a self-serving justification. Losing, Job-like, everything before the close of the play, he turns his belief into blasphemy, calling God a puppetmaster, playing with humans and that, in turn gives the clue to the nature of the other kind of metadrama, the framing play.

The framing play

The World Theatre offers the "external origin and cause" of the play. If "all the world's a stage," directed by God, having given out the roles, then all the characters only fulfill what is prescribed to them. *Blackwater Angel* is, to some extent, such a divine comedy. Greatrakes believes with a true belief—unlike Friel's Faith Healer—that his gift was God-given. While able to heal, he was sure that his hand was led by God and only began to inquire about its purpose and his own worthiness of it once he felt his force diminish. And yet, even when he rebels and blasphemes and calls God a puppetmaster who amuses himself with human fates (78), he does not doubt the origin of the gift. Hence the sharpness of his agony when he tries, like Jonah, to escape from his fate and run away from the burdensome task that he needs to carry out.

Angel's name already indicates her role. Like her namesakes, she also mediates between two spheres, between God and humans and, on another level, between the theatre-within-the-theatre and the characters in the main play. Being innocence embodied, she does not seek the origin of her voice nor her self since her identity is unproblematized, a naturally given until she loses her voice and with that her identity. Her allegorical role makes Greatrakes' outcry in the closing scene meaningful: he believes he has "murdered innocence"—as Macbeth murdered sleep.

The framing *theatrum mundi*, where everybody is handed out his/her role, again highlights the problem of the role and role-playing. Questions may arise such as how far people can be free and how much their given roles bind them. Whether they can identify with them or can escape from them in the big theatre of the world of life. And where is their moral responsibility? In Calderón's *El gran teatro del mundo*, God the Creator/author and Director,[1] wanting to entertain himself, orders the World as Stage Manager to arrange a performance while He Himself distributes all the roles. Calderón solves the age-old intriguing theological problem of predestination and free

1 In the Spanish text it is "El autor" but the English translation has Him as "Director."

will in his vision where people have no choice in what they are going to be, nor do they have any rehearsal time but must play as well as they can from the moment they are summoned to the cradle, to the moment they are sent to the grave. But God the Director also gives them free will as far as *how* they play their parts and that makes them responsible for their own conduct. God wants them to play their roles well, whether they be King or Beggar, and rewards them afterwards for that: "You are judged by how well your part is played / And what you have earned will then be paid / After the play" (169). For guidance he provides them with the law in the form of "an inner voice which tells them what is right and wrong" (Herzmann 223-24). But it is not just any law but the "Law of Grace": if they get lost, "The World, with the script of the Law of Grace, / Shall act as Prompter to assist" and "to show the way" (Calderón 170). This inner voice is what Greatrakes lost in his digression and only regains after all his suffering and spiritual death. In Calderón's play the characters act out the great world theatre's third act which is called "The Law of Grace," following the first two acts, "The Law of Nature" and "The Law of the Commandments" (165). Nolan's play also follows this pattern of Nature/Innocence; Commandments/Fall/Experience and finally unmerited Grace—which is, of course, another formula for the Christian course of life-death-salvation/resurrection.

The combination of the two kinds of metadrama, the inset play and the framed play, allows additional interpretations of masks and playacting. Actors of the inset play can choose and change their roles while those of the framing play, Greatrakes, his wife, children and servants cannot. They are not performers who act to entertain others but actors on the world's stage who have to play their allotted parts. The inside theatre-actors with their freedom thus point out the tyranny of the role from which characters on the world's stage suffer. Eamonn Jordan asserts that the "terror of play must be the threat of becoming locked into a role" (197). Yet the role does not necessarily have to be a burden. Calderón's Director-God casts each human "in a suitable role" (162) even if some are unhappy with their lot. In the inset play of *Blackwater Angel*, the actors also seem suitably cast. Especially Angel, who simply accepts her part defined by her exceptional singing voice and embraces it as her identity. When she loses her voice, she loses her livelihood in the theatre, but also, more importantly, her identity; her whole existence becomes endangered. She never experiences her role as singer as a burden, in contrast with Greatrakes. She, like some characters in the Great World Theatre, plays her role perfectly and is rewarded: after her disappearance (probable death) she regains her ability to sing. Greatrakes, who rejects his role yet remains a "good man," as everybody around him asserts, fights against his own weaknesses, goes through much suffering, eventually is also saved in the "law of Grace" and has another chance to fulfill his role.

While Greatrakes attempts to escape his part, depicted, among others, through his coming and going via the secret tunnel under his house[2] and trying to hide from

2 Ironically, this tunnel was built by Greatrakes' grandfather, in fear he might need to run away from the natives—exactly what the grandson is doing in the present of the play.

the "cripples" waiting for his touch in his courtyard, Angel begs to be given back her essence, her voice. The tragic scene when she is transformed by Greatrakes into a fashion-plate and an ordinary mistress, makes clear that she is only at home within her God-given appearance. The given role fitting one and not another echoes the Yeatsean notion of true and false masks. Moreover, the true mask, even if difficult to carry, causes more disturbance if cast away. Greatrakes falls into such a trap when, instead of using his gift, instead of healing, instead of serving and following God's guidance, he attempts to act God-like—or, what is the archetypal artist's sin: Pygmalion-like—by wanting to create what he needs. With that he commits greater blasphemy than when he openly rebels. His servants' warnings often help him to return to the right path, as, for instance, when Elisabeth asks him to "save her to save yourself" (80)—another, this time inverted echo of T. S. Eliot's chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*.[3] The spiritual leader is responsible for those around him, as Greatrakes' wife, Ruth asserts: "If you perish, we will perish with you. All of us" (91).

Greatrakes, trying to get rid of his role as healer, loses himself and almost everybody else, until he finds the way back and picks up his true mask, knowing now full well how burdensome it is. The end of the play leads us back to Friel's *Faith Healer* in a different form: the healer at last submitting the self accepts his gift and the service that goes with it. Yet Greatrakes, unlike Frank Hardy, arrives at this point when there is still time to amend his ways. And in that sense Nolan's "vision is optimistic where Friel's is tragic" (Murray 16).

The function of the theatre is "to bear witness, not to deceive" (Nolan 34), to be "a voice for those who had none; . . . [to give] heart to those whose hearts were broken; … [to] heal" (35-36)—as some of the summarizing announcements of the inset-play actors testify. Greatrakes, like Hamlet, takes courage and example from the actors as to how he should act although, again like Hamlet, he keeps postponing fulfilling his task. Greatrakes also learns from the actors how he should *not* seek an explanation for everything but instead accept the mystery—of life, of the gift, of the world. The mystery of Angel's voice, the mystery of God's voice, the mystery of the "gift" coming and going, the miracles of healing are all beyond rational understanding, but instead of following the urge to understand, the artist should embrace the mystery of art. Angel is the most powerful agent of bringing home to Greatrakes the necessity of accepting the unknowability of the gift. The real artist's gift is his/her identity, an inseparable part of the self.

The many Biblical references also link Nolan's play to the Baroque theatre of the world with its Christian morality. Greatrakes' raging against God, however, is closer to Tom Murphy's characters fighting, arguing, reproaching, blaspheming, yet deep down still needing and seeking God or at least some of Christianity's values. The resolution of the play—as of other Nolan's plays—leads to a sort of reconciliation,

3 The chorus helps Thomas á Becket to find his right path by asking and warning him: "save us, save us, save yourself that we may be saved; / Destroy yourself and we are destroyed" (44).

mostly human, of finding ways to express love and care while also accepting God-given miracles. Some miracles remain forever inexplicable whereas others derive from a sort of internalized Christian, self-sacrificial love that reaches a level of selflessness. This is close to what is understood as contemporary Christianity, "a quest for life through which God can be found in the innermost humanity of man" (Maignant 104).

Greatrakes' spiritual homecoming involves interiorizing God's voice. The recurring visions of Angel, sometimes physically appearing on stage, other times only through her voice, give him guidance. In the closing scene, after going through all his personal hell, he does try and succeeds in healing the blind man, regains his wife and children, and hears Angel again. She is gone and probably dead in the "reality" of the framing play, yet, as he is mourning for her, she comes back in the closing moments:

> *Then we hear the voice of Angel Landy in the distance. Gradually coming closer until ANGEL herself appears, naked, dishevelled and bleeding. She enters upstage and is seen as through a mist. GREATRAKES gradually becomes aware of her voice. He does not 'see' the child – her voice is inside his head. ANGEL continues singing, comes further downstage as GREATRAKES again beholds the dress, finally holding it aloft in a last ecstatic gesture as ANGEL sings on and the lights fade to black.* (94)

The voice is no longer coming from an external source, authority or cause but has become Greatrakes's own. The metaphysical became immanent, the healer became whole. That this process is assisted by plays-within-the-play underlines theatre's significance, responsibility and possibility of healing. With its insistence that "the broken heart . . . may be healed," as Christopher Murray suggests, "in a world of crumbling beliefs . . . the play flies in the face of contemporary fashion and it has the courage of its convictions" (16).

Conclusion

Deploying the device of plays-within-the-play, Nolan's artist-plays—*Moonshine* (1991), *The Salvage Shop* (1998), alongside *Blackwater Angel* take advantage of the possibilities of multiplying angles—mirrors opening up to and penetrating the vision of others. Revisiting Shakespearean characters and situations, *Moonshine* has almost as many layers as Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guilderstern Are Dead* (1966). Nolan's play features local artisans attempting to perform the artisans in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* performing the inset play, *Pyramis and Thysbe* to entertain Theseus and Hyppolita in the framing play. The whole performance then in turn becomes the inset play around which the local people act out their own grievances and conflicts. *The Salvage Shop*, while "not directly employ[ing] metatheatre, uses "the visually emphatic conceit of a second-hand shop to promote the dramatic idea of salvaging damaged relationships" (Murray 16). It also relies on singing and playing music

for multiple-layered self-reflection when it creates parallels and contrasts between present concerts, an incredible concert in the past and the desperate attempts of some contemporary characters to repeat the miracle to give joy to a dying musician.

Blackwater Angel, like Nolan's other artist-plays, also "flies in the face of contemporary fashion" in terms of theatres' and theatre-makers' ambitions. Irish theatre and many playwrights of the Celtic Tiger era seemed to deem it much more important to be acknowledged abroad, especially in England and the United States than addressing their own people's ailments.[4] The strong emphasis on local communities, their strength and weaknesses, troubles and needs as well as their supporting power along with some of their members' heroic struggles to help others is itself a heroic attempt to salvage local interests. The explicitly drawn parallels between theatre and healing, moreover, the necessity of having faith in healing, serve as timely reminders of the ancient responsibility of the artist-healer to heal his own people.

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4 See, for instance, Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization. Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* or Victor Merriman, *Because We Are Poor: Irish Theatre in the 1990s* on Irish theatre courting international interest.

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