Doubles, Twins and Triplets: Coming of Age in Contemporary Irish Drama

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The abundance of doubles and split characters in contemporary Irish drama may be, in part, accounted for by the "double visions and double interpretations forced upon [the writers] by the facts of Irish history and of everyday life in Ireland" (Carpenter 178). Such characters embody the dualities, ambiguities, and insecurities in the Irish consciousness caused by centuries of colonial oppression, religious persecution, deprivation or mockery of cultural heritage, replacement of the mother tongue by the language of the colonisers, and other forms of humiliation. The uncertainty of identity was enhanced by the colonial stereotypes the English invented for the Irish and persuaded them to accept: "an identity was proposed for the natives, which cast them as foils to the occupiers" (Kiberd 9). It thus became impossible for the Irish to maintain an independent notion of identity and instead they came to see themselves always in comparison or contrast with the English. Similarly, the whole "Ireland... is never to be seen in itself, but as a flawed version of England" (Seathrún Céitinn qtd. in Kiberd 14).

This exclusive twosomeness in the last few centuries of colonial times was fundamentally different from the ancient Irish capacity for an inclusive, tolerant double view, a "both/and dialectical logic" (Kearney 9) that accepted the validity of different views of the world, well exemplified by the long peaceful co-existence of pre-Christian and Christian sets of belief. At the turn of the century, at the time of the Irish Renaissance, in the hope of the possibility of reviving something of the ancient spirit of the culture, Yeats could still believe in the re-creation of "Unity of Being" and "Unity of Culture," and, as Weldon Thornton asserts, Yeats and his contemporaries, although "aware of [the Descartesean split between matter and spirit]... were less severely affected by it than modern writers generally, partly because of the presence in their cultural milieu of certain pre-scientific or archaic attitudes" (51). But the political, religious, linguistic divisions and the Catholic church's regulations (fossilizing partly due to these divisions), have paved the way in Ireland for those spiritual and intellectual dualities to become domesticated that have been experienced all over the Western world for centuries: body and soul, matter and spirit, intellect and emotion, reason and instinct. Today the dualities are further complicated by the post-colonial moral confusion about national identity and conflicting attitudes towards it. A duality exists also in the simultaneous nostalgic attraction to old Irish culture and the desire to face the modern world without nostalgia (see Gleitman 61)—the well-known split between "revivalists" and "revisionists." The Irish thus suffer from several kinds of split—a manifold double-

ness. It is little wonder then that Ireland has "the world's highest rates of hospitalization for schizophrenia" (Hawkins 465).

At the same time, in present-day Irish culture and thinking strong desires and tendencies to achieve integrity and wholeness seem to work also. All this produces an unusually sharp alertness to the relationship between division and integration, dividedness and wholeness. Among the split characters in contemporary drama, reflecting such divisions and possible reintegration, in some cases the schizophrenic split receives greater emphasis, other times the longing and struggle for reestablishing wholeness, although most frequently the two tendencies appear simultaneously. Playwrights in a great number of recent plays tend to express efforts to overcome and transcend divisions through reconciliation and acceptance between the doubles or by creating images of threesomeness: a better balanced geometrical form than that of the delicate balance of any two.

The formation of literary doubles has a long history, going back to Greek literature (Esslin 35). Martin Esslin, pursuing the changing forms and meanings of this literary device from classical to contemporary drama, points out how it deepened from "the merely coincidental... to the miraculously intentional... on to... existential anxiety," from the physical identity of the doppelgänger towards spiritual contrast, expressing "different spiritual and emotional aspects of the same personality... the human being... split into its component parts" (46). Esslin sees Samuel Beckett's couples as the culmination of this tendency.

Although Esslin does not refer to Beckett's Irishness—and in his context it would not be necessary—yet it is probably not a mere coincidence that it is an Irish playwright, however universal his work is, who combines in himself all the personal, national and universally human psychological, intellectual and spiritual impulses for creating a gallery of doubles. On the one hand, Beckett, while dramatizing the decisive twentieth-century human experience of fragmentation, split, alienation, together with the obligation to quest for integrity, conceives of existence in the Irish Berkeleyan terms: *esse est percipi*, not only in *Film*, where the sentence itself features as a motto or subtitle and where Esslin mentions it (45), but in all his plays, whether the character wants to prove his/her existence by being seen or wants to escape from it. On the other hand, in the Irish colonial/post-colonial context that Anthony Roche illuminates, Beckett's doubles continue the Irish theatrical tradition from Goldsmith to Yeats and O'Casey of the conspicuous absence of one leading man replaced by interdependent couples. "The bifurcated dramatic structure of the double-lead means that every pronouncement by the one is likely to be countered or questioned by the other" (*Contemporary* 60). Roche finds the lack of a traditional "leading man" characteristic of "the anti-hierarchical nature of a post-colonial Irish drama," the balancing out of each opinion, statement or stance embodying a protest against any single authoritative voice. He goes on explaining that "[o]n the rare occasion when a central character seems to be foregrounded, his majesty the self is likely to be subjected to all kinds of dramatic cross-questioning and undercutting" (59-60).

Even though Beckett's drama shares features of, and is at least partly rooted in, the experience of Irish colonialism and post-colonialism, obviously nobody would try to call his drama post-colonial. The movement of his protagonists from the necessity of being observed towards the "horror of finding us observed by ourselves" (Esslin 46), is only remotely linked to the Irish post-colonial identity crisis and is

only partly caused by the need (and fear) of facing up to their own selves after the mirror held up by the colonisers is dropped. The insistence on the split characters, the complementary doubles is one of the several features in Beckett's drama that connects the Irish and the general twentieth-century human experience as well as the Irish and the European dramatic tradition.

Literary doubles are congenial to post-colonial experience since they always reflect the problem of identity, and that is the very problem decolonising and post-colonial societies and literatures are primarily concerned with. As Rosemary Jackson asserts: "The process of becoming an ego, becoming a human subject, involves acquiring duality: alienation is at the heart of identification" (46). Therefore, in order to explore one's identity—either individual or national-communal—one has to create a distance and a double, inside-outside perspective. *Identity* in the literatures of free nations refers purely to the individual, whereas in Irish and other colonial and post-colonial literatures, since the personal identity is determined to a great extent by the historical and political circumstances, it is closely related to national consciousness. And, as Christopher Murray rightly contends: "tedious though it might be for outsiders, the Irish, for good historic reasons, must always be picking at the sore of national identity" ("State"18). Hence while the modern split characters in many other cultures epitomise twentieth-century fragmentation of personality in totally individual terms, in Irish plays the split is always symptomatic of the state of mind of the whole community. The character, while remaining an independent modern or postmodern lost individual, is at the same time more deeply embedded in the community experience and becomes the expression of it. In contrast with the usually isolated, psychologically tormented individuals as doubles in other literatures (see, for instance, Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* 1886, Hoffman's *Dopplegänger*, 1816, Dostoevski's *The Double*, 1846, Poe's *William Wilson*, 1839, or Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* 1912), their Irish equivalents, *in addition* to that burden, also carry their national legacy.

The doubles not only abound in Irish drama but also show considerable variety. The two main types seem to be the either/or split and the both/and complementary characters. The either/or exclusive division is usually, though not exclusively, embodied in figures created through "doubling by multiplication" while the both/and complementariness tends to find expression rather through "doubling by division"—one of the main distinctions Robert Rogers makes about the nature of the psychological double, the latter involving "the splitting up of a recognizable, unified psychological entity into separate, complementary, distinguishable parts represented by seemingly autonomous characters" (5). Paradoxically, only the doubles "by division" are capable of uniting, since they used to be parts of a whole whereas the double "by multiplication" or, in Ralph Tymms' term: "double-by-duplication" (16), as the name indicates, only multiplies the same side of the one. The doubles appearing in the individual plays indicate a cyclical movement of the whole body of twentieth-century Irish drama from the early-century quest for unity especially in Yeats's plays, through agonizing splits and schizophrenic distortions in many contemporary plays, towards a new search for reconciliation, repossession of integrity.

The version of the either/or duality in contemporary Irish drama includes such dichotomies as that between man and mask, ideal and real, illusion and reality. Man and mask are separated the most obviously in Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I*

Come! (1969) and in Thomas Kilroy's *Double Cross* (1986), resulting in both cases in split personalities. Gar O'Donnell in Friel's play divided into Public and Private Gar, cannot hope for integrity since the public image is not chosen out of inner necessity—as the mask in Yeats's system was—but only to accommodate to social expectations, to the forbidding environment and to hide the despair of the inner self. Instead of any hope of constructive interaction between the two, the separation only confirms the weakness of the personality, the inability to grow up into a responsible adult. Moreover, Gar seems to be a younger mirror-image of his taciturn father, repeating ("double by multiplication") the old man's uneasy and unhappy relationship with the world around—partly at least, the consequence of colonial dispossession. The split of each of the two protagonists, Brendan Bracken and William Joyce in *Double Cross* is caused even more directly by colonization: its ultimate achievement is the manipulated individual consciousness, which, in its uprootedness, uncertainty and displacement learns to appreciate only the values of the other and deems its own values inferior, shameful, and hateful. Bracken and Joyce embody the colonial psyche and illustrate the irony that the colonised, in their effort to look like the coloniser, often out-herod Herod. Their choice of the exclusive public mask of Britishness and the given reality of Irishness, the escape from the "primary" and the endeavour to identify fully with the "antithetical" (in Yeats's words), leads to the crisis of identity, disintegration and fall; loss of the self to the mask. The manifold doubleness in the play includes the man-mask split of each protagonist, their being mirror-images of each other and also a Jungian shadow type of double in the form of Bracken's brother Peter, who embodies the denied, repressed Irishness and follows Bracken's (assumed) British self. None of these dualities in the play offers the possibility of healing by complementing each other but rather reflect and thus multiply the dangers of disintegration and fragmentation once certainty is lost. As long as part of the self has to be repressed for the existence of the other part whether from external or internal, real or assumed necessity, the inner and outer, private and public or past and present cannot be integrated.

The exaggerated role attributed to the ideal and its either/or relation to reality is another source of creating doubles, and can be easily seen as another form of the distortion of the colonial psyche—an inevitable consequence of national, political, social, colonial oppression. No doubt the problem of the discrepancy between the ideal and the real and the related, albeit not identical, division between illusion and reality is age-old and universal yet, like the question of doubleness itself, this specific form is also more essential and more frequent with the Irish and other decolonising peoples. Since oppressed peoples can often excel only in moral, intellectual or artistic qualities, they become the more desperate to approach the ideal and to find compensation in illusions. The imagination on which the Irish rely so strongly can comfortably hold the ideal and the real together on one plane, and that makes it easy to slip into the world of illusion while pursuing the ideal or escaping from life's miseries. But while Yeats still created admirable images of the ideal in the atmosphere where playwrights believed that Ireland was "the home of an ancient idealism" (Gregory 20), contemporary playwrights can only introduce it with detachment and irony.

One of the severest dramatic confrontations and casting away of illusion is Thomas Murphy's *The Morning After Optimism* (1973), in which the ideal-real split takes both a male and a female form, thus the doubles are doubled. Ideal and real are

mutually exclusive here; the ideal couple have no vitality and do not want any interaction with base earthliness whereas the down-to-earth, fallen couple see themselves and each other as all the more hopelessly irredeemable in the light of the ideal—which actually is only a projection of their dreams and desires, hence only an illusion—so they must kill the ideal in themselves in order to be able to accept their real selves. In Murphy's view the ideal is far removed from the real and the dirty, bespoiled is the very essence of reality; he suggests depowering the shadow not by the Jungian integration of one's dark side into oneself and thus forming a whole, healthy personality (Jung, "Aion" 145) but by eliminating the sunlight—or rather the sentimental moonlight. Seen in light of the nation, the ideal but lifeless couple also personifies the "innocence and bliss" of the Golden Age of Gaelic culture (see O'Toole 73ff) and illuminates the falsities in the national self-image. The nation as well as the individual must sober up from idealizing the past and acknowledge failures and fallibility. The sobering morning after false optimism brings the bitter recognition of the reality of division, discontinuity, and the untenability of idealization and self-deceit.

Similarly, the doubles in Stewart Parker's *Northern Star* (1984) suggest that if the present and future cannot organically incorporate the past, the haunting past can only be a death-bringer. Again, an allegorical figure, the Phantom Bride, evoking past greatness, helps the hero McCracken confront present reality's bleakness with her deadly embrace. Her earthly counterpart, the sober, practical-minded and loving Mary, McCracken's real bride, cannot hold the hero back from following the phantom, from running to his death. The two women symbolize the division between reality and illusion, prosaic future and romantic past—between life and death (with Mary undoubtedly standing for the life force, emphasized also by the presence of her baby). The hero, who failed to unite all the Irish in their fight against the colonizer Britain in the 1798 uprising, is equally unable to create unity between past and present in himself and cannot face the unromantic future deprived of the heroism of the past. The Phantom Bride, another Cathleen ni Houlihan or Shan Van Vocht, similarly to the situation in Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), calls the man to his "destiny." Yet the moral imperative to die for the country is degraded to a desire for the fame achieved in martyrdom and the mostly pointless self-sacrifice at the call of the partly frightening and partly ridiculous phantom in the place of Yeats's young girl with "the walk of a queen."

A both/and possibility prevails, however, in probably a greater number of contemporary Irish plays, with a focus on a possible hope for healing even though replete with much fighting and suffering. Jungian shadows as well as ghosts or allegorical figures seem to be able to bring forth such developments just as they played parts in the irreconcilable couples. Past and present, sectarian divisions and personal antagonisms are tenderly guided towards reconciliation with the help of a ghost in, for example, Parker's *Pentecost* (1987), the play following his *Northern Star.* The agents of reconciliation and peace, Marian, the heroine and Lily, the ghost, meet at the crossroads of time and place: the house where the play is set is on the "firing line" (154) between the Protestants and Catholics in the 1974 Belfast of street fighting, and on the border between past and present through the event of Lily's recent death and Marian's subsequent moving into the house.[1] The initial sectarian hostilities between the two women, echoing Marian's earlier alienation and division within herself, gradually give way to their recognition of the similarities in the pat-

tern of their all-too-human suffering. Consequently, Marian's intentions of conserving the past (the house and her painful memories) immobile and dead, are replaced by gestures of continuity and renewal (trying to finish the knitting left unfinished by Lily, airing the house instead of offering it to the National Trust for preservation). The Pentecost miracle of understanding and acceptance, however, must be preceded by Easter, and Easter by Good Friday, so the heroine must go through emotional and spiritual death, must descend deep down into her personal hell of suffering, alienation, loss, disintegration, loneliness and despair. Only after all that does she succeed in integrating her sinful, hostile "other"—the ghost Lily's otherness alongside her own hatred and self-hatred. Allowing the past to live inside her instead of conserving it externally as dead, she becomes able to turn to life instead of death, and to accept the Pentecost fire in peace with the other members of the tiny community of people with different voices in the house.

In both Hugh Leonard's *Da* (1973) and Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1986) the past is also evoked through ghosts: the central character is confronted with his earlier self and other ghosts from the past. Past and present become simultaneously co-existent, and the split can be and actually does become bridged, serving better self-understanding. Since the split in *Da* remains mostly at a personal level, it is easier to incorporate the past (the hero's own younger self and the ghost of his father) than in *Ulster*, where the hero tries to arrive at a better understanding of his community, the Protestant experience and heritage by re-living the past with the help of the ghosts and his own younger self.

The Jungian process of "individuation": the formation of the "in-dividual," the non-dividable wholeness, "'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization'" (Jung, "Relations" 121-22), as a result of hard struggle, pain and loss, is obviously central to any decolonisation. Several of Murphy's plays dramatize such both/and doubles, where "individuation," coming of age: growing up to adulthood and self-acceptance, or at least a new glimpse of wholeness becomes possible in mutual interaction with, indeed with the active help of, the negative side of the personality. In *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1976), for example, Harry, the obviously shattered ego-personality becomes able to transcend his bitterness, hatred, "compulsion to kill" in revenge (10) and arrives at reconciliation and acceptance of himself with the help of Francisco, his destructive, negating side, directly identified with evil: "Evil, be thou my good! Evil, light my path!" (15). The classical psychological responses to the appearance of one's shadow-figure—escaping, hiding, ignoring, then trying to annihilate it—eventually make Harry realize the futility of escape as well as the falsity of his moral superiority. Harry's triumph over his shadow manifests itself first in a violently miraculous theatrical image: lifting up the pulpit with Fransisco in it onto his shoulders, which also confirms his regaining his long-vanished strength and manliness. The private tragedies and sins of the two men and Maudie, the somewhat mentally handicapped young girl, are all set against the general tragedy of humankind: homelessness and loneliness in a god-forsaken world. All the three characters have lost or thrown away institutional faith although not the desire for the transcendental. By the end of the play they invent a new, human vision of salvation: the souls of the loved ones finally uniting in eternity, completing each other. This new, non-Christian religion, also based on love, is founded in the deserted church with the help of religious imagery and in the presence of the sanctuary lamp which may not directly re-

spond to their quests yet aids them in groping closer to a sort of redemption. The play ends with the three of them, as an unholy trinity, going to sleep in peace, arranged symmetrically in a horizontal confessional in the deserted church.

An even more clearly Mephistophelian negating side of the self becomes the agent of healing, which, in turn, leads to unexpected creative energy in *The Gigli Concert* (1983). The two desperate men, one Irish one English, keep struggling with each other and with themselves in a changing relationship: trusting, hating, savagely attacking, then understanding each other (and/or themselves). The Faustian pact between two halves of the one whole, the conflict of good and evil, light and darkness, spirit and matter closely resembles the way Jung understood the Faust-Mephistopheles relationship (see O'Toole 167).[2] It is, however, further complicated by the ambiguous distribution of positive and negative values between the two men. The violent, arrogant, destructive half is again the Irishman (as it was in *The Sanctuary Lamp*), this time a rich self-made businessman—embodying all the arrogant mediocrity that Yeats so feared and inverting all the traditional racial stereotypes—but possessed with artistic desires. As the Irishman gradually gives his burden to the English quack psychologist JPW King, he is able to return to normality and expel his obsessive desires. King the psychologist, taking over or being taken over by the self-same obsessions, integrates his shadow figure into himself by carrying the desires to full realization. José Lantern contends that the two men's "crises are defined solely in terms of the mind" and so, for them "finding wholeness means finding a way out of *mental sterility* and into self-awareness" (280). Hence, Lantern suggests, King has not completed the journey towards full humanity, but emerges again as a half which, in order to become capable of healthy relationships, would need "the destruction of... the woman as myth" (281). It is true that the women around King are but halves of a whole themselves—the recurring Murphy motif of the split between the idealized and the all-too-earthly women, another echo of the Yeatsean split, as the women in *The Morning After Optimism* were also—which can again be related to the Faust-motif (as O'Toole also does, 169). Yet I believe that King's awakening to his love for Mona and to the pain of losing her, together with his spiritual renewal, opens him up to embrace the totality of human experience, even though part of it—the emotional—can only be realized as pain and loss at the moment.

The three characters, two men and one woman in *The Gigli Concert*, as the similar pattern in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, evoke images of symmetrical threesomeness. In *The Gigli* wholeness cannot be achieved due to Mona's death and the three characters never occupy the same theatrical space simultaneously. Unlike in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, where two quarreling men finally form a symmetrical tableau of balance and equilibrium when they, in reconciliation, lay a confessional on the floor of the church and go to sleep in the two side compartments with the young girl they both want to protect, in the middle. *Three* is one of the most universal magic numbers, always suggesting wholeness, perfection, balance, equilibrium—a trinity which is an ancient symbol of completeness, later transformed into the Christian Holy Trinity. Many contemporary plays employ ritualistic arrangements of three characters such as, for instance: Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979) and *Molly Sweeney* (1994) with their three characters or *Wonderful Tennessee* (1993) with its three couples and the family symmetry of the three women, McGuinness's *Carthagenians* (1989) focusing on three women or *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992) having a

cast of three men. Some few among these plays depict a threesome formed out of split or double or duplicated characters that gain completion by a third. This differs from the frequent replacement of the doppelgänger by the "polygänger" in twentieth-century writing, where the multiplicity of figures reflects the fragmentation of personality, without any attempt, hope or desire for unification.

A symmetrical tableau of three closes Murphy's *Bailegangaire* (1984). The two antithetical, complementary halves, the two sisters share the role of helping the grandmother, Mommo, to exorcise evil. With their prompting, urging, and increasing participation in the story-telling, Mommo, after her play-long, tormenting and self-tormenting struggle finally becomes able to face and name the evil in herself and her life and complete the telling of the story of her misery, loss and guilt. Simultaneously, the two girls transcend their hostilities and accept each other, which is confirmed by Mary's promise to bring up Dolly's unwanted baby soon-to-be-born—somewhat similarly but more realistically and concretely taking over the other's burden as happened in *The Gigli Concert*. Mommo, this Mother Ireland figure, although old and bereaved, is nevertheless still powerful enough to gather the next generation around her in love instead of hatred. "In the attachment of both granddaughters to her, in their involvement in the constantly re-told story, are figured the aliveness of the lines linking present to past in Ireland" (Grene 230). When Mommo has her two granddaughters lying down to sleep on each side of her in the concluding image of the play—in one of Murphy's most beautiful visions of hard-earned harmony—she finally achieves peace, wholeness, "unity of being" and salvation, not after but *through* agonizing pain and damnation.

Another image of a trinity of women who, after much suffering and frustration, find a note of peace and love concludes Frank McGuinness's *Mary and Lizzie* (1989). In this wild surrealist fantasy, however, the mother image itself is split, forming one of several duos in the play. The Old Woman is the compulsive and demanding Mother Ireland, who cared only for her son, was willing to sacrifice more lives for saving him and to continue discord. Her human counterpart, Lizzie and Mary's dead mother—who emerges after the Old Woman fades away—instead of a desire to dominate, is willing to help. This personal, emotionally related and concrete mother figure can be more helpful even in her death than the allegorical Mother Ireland. While the Old Woman-Mother Ireland was fighting for her exclusive Catholicism, the personal mother becomes a partner of God in her non-dogmatic faith: "God did not make the earth. We sung it. He heard us and joined in. We did it together, creation" (48). This resurrected mother figure replaces the old Mother Ireland and recreates life. The transmutation of the old image of Mother Ireland into the personal loving mother promises a transformation of old-fashioned sectarianism, exclusivity, male-centeredness and the repression of the body as sinful into a new, direct contact with God through love and beauty (singing), independent womanhood, and an acknowledgment of the rights of the body.

Among the multiple dualities and splits in the play a central one is that of the "magical priest" who represents the dualism of Catholicism and Protestantism: having united them in himself in a destructive way, he inverts both to their opposites, teaching hatred instead of love, "a killing combination of two defunct faiths that can only survive by feeding off each other" (11). The Mother's two daughters, on the other hand, are independent, irreverent, seeking love, and together embody the depth of the feminine psyche (Cave 58), so little explored in Irish drama. They are not op-

posites of each other, but rather inseparable, incomplete beings, together embarking on their spiritual journey through time and space, through a part of history, in search of wholeness. They are *both* spiritual (moving across boundaries of life and death) *and* very definitely, sometimes quite vulgarly, of the flesh, stressing the right of the repressed physical side of human experience. The indivisible natural unity between soul and body that the sisters realise, sharply contrasts with the social division and the "repression of the body on a grand scale... on both individual and collective levels" (Herr 6), especially of the female body that is so conspicuous in Irish literature and arts. One of the comico-grotesque situations in which the play dramatizes this division is where the girls confront Mother Ireland's son who so far has been provided with women only to "sin" with and is now shocked, even frightened, at Mary and Lizzie's independence and equally strong mind. In encountering Marx and Engels, the materialist, rational thinkers, on the other hand, the girls experience the conventional gender view combined with the colonial stereotypes: Engels identifies them with the darkness he is afraid of (itself a powerful irony): with the dark powers of instinct and flesh as well as with the uncivilized Irish, living "little above the savage... on the lowest plane possible in a civilized country" (40). As in the trio with the magic priest where the women counterbalance overblown spirituality turned into inhumanity, so in the image of their threesome with Engels they make the repressive dominance of reason and rationality ridiculous. In these scenes the irony is also directed against the contradictions of Marxist hypocrisy and neocolonialism, if not in Ireland, then in other parts of the world.

The two heroines *together* represent daring femininity, freedom of speech, liberation of instincts, the rebellious spirit which will not put up with conventional social roles nor with colonial prejudices and despite much frustration, humiliation and betrayal, are able to preserve integrity. Outcasts from society, they make a pair of those socially marginalized people whom McGuinness puts into the centre: the gay, "the outsider, the wanderer, the rebel" (Pine 29), the colonised, to emphasize their right to otherness, to being different. The concluding scene when they form a symmetric threesome with their (dead) mother in between them and sing about love which "is lord of all" (49), offers a potent image of their painful victory. The background of conventional role-expectations and prejudices throw Mary and Lizzie's "fierce and joyous sense of self" and "new, utterly Irish, indominatibility" (Cave 59) into all the more sharp relief.

The split and division within the psyche of a great number of characters in contemporary Irish plays and the purgatorial process pointing towards, even if not always achieving, reintegration underlines the difference between Irish culture and non-colonial Western civilisation in general. Rosemary Jackson, working with Freud and Lacan's theories, finds "an eternal desire for the non-relationship of zero, where identity is meaningless" (46-47) the chief motive in literary works of doubles in general. The Irish doubles move in exactly the opposite direction. After waking up from "optimism," instead of desiring a "meaningless identity," they strive to arrive at a new level of consciousness, identity and integrity. The majority of split characters and doubles in contemporary Irish drama tend to move beyond colonial and post-colonial dualities and confusions towards a possible healing. The both/and tolerance, characteristic of ancient Irish thinking, might, after all, prevail over the newer, colonial, either/or exclusivity. Or at least one would hope so.

The outsider observer may easily be misled and tempted to construct such a line of development. Upon further examination this edifice begins to crumble since recent examples of dramatized tortured split characters and doubles seem to haunt the stage again. Martin McDonagh's two spiteful brothers boiling with destructive and self-destroying hatred in *The Lonesome West* (1997) is only one of his several tortured—self-torturing families. The two brothers in their "world more claustrophobic than ever in McDonagh [...] are complementary figures, with neither of the two better than the other: between the two of them they have broken all the major commandments" (Kurdi 83). Their vicious hatred and resourcefulness in finding ways of torturing each other fill the play with wild tensions throughout and the scenes of apologizing and "stepping back" only give occasion for spitting out more of their murderous intentions and become a mockery of any reconciliation. What makes it worse is that, as Mária Kurdi rightly observes, their fight goes beyond the divisions within the individual psyche and rather "signals an essential intra-community [conflict]... enact[ing] the pervasive hateful tensions within their larger environment" (83).

Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* (1995) focuses on the relationship between indivisible twins who are, however, divided by death. Portia, the surviving twin, is haunted and tormented by her twin brother all her life after his death and makes all her family suffer in a hell from which there is no redemption, where every attempt at reconciliation or rekindling relationship deepens the inferno. The archetypal twins, belonging together, sharing one soul, feeling each other's pain, living in each other is one of the most direct possible embodiments of the double. What Jung describes about the ideal harmony and happiness of marriage is true of the twins in Carr's play:

> the return to that original condition of unconscious oneness is like return to childhood. [...] Even more it is a return to the mother's womb, into the teeming depths of an as yet unconscious creativity. It is, in truth, a genuine and incontestable experience of the Divine, whose transcendent force obliterates and consumes everything individual; a real communion with life and the impersonal power of fate. ("Marriage"167)

This relationship is very clearly spelled out in the play, Portia especially is keenly aware of her belonging to Gabriel and longs to return to their togetherness in the womb.Yet Portia and her twin brother Gabriel are not a married or marriable couple but brother and sister. The chief archetypal symbol of the play, the river Belmont, where Gabriel drowned and where Portia sees and continually hears him in the fifteen years following his death and where she is ready to follow him again, is an obvious reference to that prenatal state. The deep, mythical union between the twins, that obliterates every other relationship no matter how many years pass after the death of one of them, is reinforced by Portia's mythical relationship to the river to which "she is wedded... just as fatally as a legendary mermaid to the sea" (Murray, *Twentieth-Century* 238). The Irish Midland twin-lovers' irrepressible passion for each other echoes the unfathomable depth of love between Heathcliff and Catherine, their indivisible oneness that ordinary human beings can never understand nor influence, but which, if circumstances hinder its fulfillment, turns into destructive and self-destructive power. But whereas incest was only hinted at as a possibility in

the nineteenth-century *Wuthering Heights,* it is openly discussed as a psychological torment in *Portia Coughlan.* The indivisible divided twin-lovers from the womb can find reunion only in death: here as in any other play, there is no return to the womb.

Of these last two plays McDonagh's *The Lonesome West* is somewhat surprising with its dramatization of such a high degree of violence, insularity and inescapable confinement in contemporary Ireland which has long stepped out of incestual isolation and where the countryside seems to have opened up to be in touch with the rest of the world. The play remains unsatisfactory not because of its theme but because it construes a mostly naturalistic image of the distortions caused by unhealthy confinement and appears to identify such distortions with the Irish psyche. Moreover, McDonagh's plays, by emphasizing Irish rural barbarities and savageries, seem to echo the colonial image. In Vic Merriman's words, Ireland's image "as a benighted dystopia," with its characters as "[g]ross caricatures with no purchase on the experiences of today's audience as ludicrous Manichean opposites–[appears] the colonised simian reborn" (312-13). As Merriman goes on to argue, such a presentation of "the emptied shell of peasant life for smug dismissal by a metropolitan audience" best serves neocolonialism ("metropolitan" in the sense of a colonial or neocolonial mindset, 316).

Carr's *Portia Coughlan,* on the other hand, while also set in a small, choking rural community, and dramatizing the heroine's suffering and struggle with deep psychological realism, lends itself to interpretations in the context of the changing value-system and its debilitating effects in modern Ireland: "in the context of Ireland's rapid material development, the gap reveals itself as one between postmodern crudities and the attachment to a more attractive, because emotionally grounded and aesthetically varied past" (Kurdi 69). Carr's poetic rendering of this theme gives it a mythic depth which elevates Portia to be the embodiment of the suffering human soul itself in the modern world as well as in a timeless existence, torn in twain, in search of completion, the unattainable wholeness in the Yeatsean sense.

Instead of supposing a linear movement in Irish drama from division towards reunion, or even instead of seeing a cyclical movement from the search for "Unity of Being" through the emphasis on dualities towards attempts at reconciliation becomes thus more fruitful to apply what Christopher Murray stresses in the context of tradition and innovation: "an oscillation," a "tension between different poles" (*Twentieth-Century* 224). Dualities have not disappeared in Ireland so naturally they keep inspiring drama. The nature of the dualities, however, is changing from colonial divisions towards more personal, internal, individual splits, which, while sharing much with similar psychological ills elsewhere in the world, are nevertheless deeply embedded in the specific Irish reality. They also show more of a metaphysical dimension, even in today's mostly secularized world than their counterparts in other cultures. The theatre, with the healing power of its magic, either gives the audience "a working model of wholeness" (Parker, qtd. in Harris 233-34), or urges spectators to overcome divisions by confronting them. Freud allegedly said that "the Irish are the only race that cannot be psychoanalysed since they are too ready to invent dreams or to invent lies more interesting than the truth" (qtd. in Murray, *Twentieth-Century* 224). From Friel's imagining himself twins to Carr's exploration of the haunting dreams caused by the separation of twins, contemporary Irish drama, dramatizing many forms of divisions and doubles, brings the dreams and the

lies into living contact with reality, thus helping both the individual and the nation to come of age.

Notes

[1] On the two woman being ego and alter-ego, and the various inversions of the roles and interactions between them see Roche, "Ghosts" 60-61, and Bertha 83.
[2] "Mephistopheles... who in spite of his negating disposition, represents the true spirit of life as against the arid scholar who hovers on the brink of suicide" (Jung, *Memories* 262). Fintan O'Toole is right in maintaining that Murphy equates his characters with Goethe's in the same way as Jung saw Faust and Mephistopheles (167).

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