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SOME IDEAS ON STEWART PARKER'S
THREE PLAYS FOR IRELAND
AND ON CHOSEN PLAYS BY BRIAN FRIEL

In 1899, the first season of the Irish Literary Theatre opened with W. B. Yeats's poetic and symbolic play, *Cathleen Ni Hoolihan*, followed by Edward Martyn's realistic *Heather Field*. The two different traditions which these plays represented have characterised Irish drama throughout the Twentieth century. On the one hand, there has been the realistic tendency exemplified by the theatre of Synge or the early plays by O'Casey; on the other, such playwrights as Yeats or Beckett directed their drama towards the symbolic and experimental.

The third class comprises dramatists – including O'Casey's later experiments – who cannot be prescribed to either of the above groups. Brian Friel and Stewart Parker, whose dramatic style embraces the opposing trends, established a unique category in contemporary Irish theatre. Friel and Parker search for a common ground between reality and illusion; they examine an area where naturalism coincides with the absurd, where the extremes meet. Friel called that area "the Fifth Province of the mind." He says that the Fifth Province is "a place for dissenters, traitors to the prevailing ideologies of the other four provinces."¹ It is "the secret centre . . . where all oppositions are resolved."² Elmer Andrews interprets the idea of the Fifth Province as the natural realm of the imagination, where the symbol may mediate between subject and object, where actualities need not be so terribly insisted upon as they normally are in Ireland.³ It is not

¹ As in: John Gray, "Field day Five Years On," *The Linen Hall Review* 2 (1985): 7; Elmer Andrews, "The Fifth Province," in: Alan Peacock, ed., *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, Ulster Editions and Monographs 4 (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993), p. 30.

² Richard Kearney and Mark Hederman, "Editorial," *The Crane Bag* 1 (1977); Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), p. 165.

³ Andrews, 'The Fifth Province,' p. 30.

surprising then that the concept of the Fifth Province was easily adopted by the most significant Northern Irish theatre company of the Eighties, Field Day, which was co-founded by Brian Friel himself in 1980.

The group, from which derived a huge cultural enterprise comparable with Yeats's Irish Literary Movement and the Abbey Theatre,⁴ focused on creating a new Ireland, the country without borders, at least on the intellectual and spiritual level. At the time the company was established, however, its creators strongly believed a physical reunion between the North and the South was close. Hence the enthusiasm to drop the nationalism and the loyalism, to condemn the religious sectarianism, and to struggle for an integrated state. The plans to overcome the political divisions were reflected in the artistic manifesto of the Field Day group, who appealed for a literature able to reconcile not only the opposite social parties, but also to blend fact and fiction, the mundane and the metaphysical. Whereas Friel and his group followed the idea of the Fifth Province, Stewart Parker's ideology found its expression in the concept of "wholeness,"⁵ which to a great extent repeated the Field Day doctrine. To prove how similar the two visions were, it is enough to say that Parker's *Pentecost* was chosen by Field Day for their 1986 production.

The main purpose of this article is to show that Stewart Parker, a contemporary Northern Irish dramatist, may be compared to Brian Friel in intellectual élan, formal innovation and virtuosity as a dramatic writer. There are several aspects of Parker's drama as represented in *Three Plays for Ireland*, which bear resemblance to Friel's dramatic techniques evident in the plays chosen for this study. Like Friel, Parker believes in the redemptive power of language; he eagerly tries different linguistic experiments; he provides the audience with thorough psychological analyses of his protagonists' complex personalities; he selects a variety of formal innovations to portray the plurality of human experience; and, finally, he also treats history as a cycle and continuity.

In his Introduction to Brian Friel, *Selected Plays*, Seamus Deane argues that the Irish theatrical tradition depends almost exclusively on talk.⁶ Story-telling, however, becomes more than a source of knowledge about a character's past or a play's symbolics. The stories told by characters give an insight into their minds, explain or parallel their actions and have a healing effect on their disturbed lives. In Parker's *Pentecost*, language, talk and story are

⁴ Joe McMinn, "Cultural Politics and the Ulster Crisis," *Cenrastus*, June-August 1986: 40.

⁵ Stewart Parker, "Dramatis Personae," lecture delivered in memory of John Malone, 5 June 1986, The Queens University, Belfast; published by the John Malone, *Memorial Committee*, p. 19; Elmer Andrews, "The Power of Play," *Theatre Ireland*, 18 (1986): 23.

⁶ Seamus Deane, "Introduction" to *Brian Friel. Selected Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 12.

powerful media for salvation and redemption. Parker endows his characters entrapped in a Belfast house during the 1974 Ulster Worker's Council Strike with the language of religion. They speak with a lofty, solemn style capable of expressing their desire to encounter the divine:

PETER . . . and the three of us felt a messianic impulse to slay these ancient monsters, we felt summoned, as a holy trinity of the new age, father, son and holy ghost, Moog being the ghost and me the messiah, but it was Godhead here who came up with the redemption . . .⁷

Peter tells a story of using LSD as a solution for the Northern Irish conflict by dumping the drug into the reservoir that supplies Belfast with drinking water:

We could turn on the population, comprehensively, with the simple transcendental gesture, that would be it, the doors of perception flung wide, wholesale mind-shift, no more bigotry and hatred, a city full of space-out contemplatives like the three of us. (201)

Lenny, another character in *Pentecost*, tells a story of nuns night-bathing in the sea, whom he saw when he was lying on a beach beside a naked female jazz-singer:

So down they pelted into the sea, frisking around and frolicking like nine-year-olds, the noise of it – while your woman is meanwhile stretched out starkers beside me, singing this deep throated heartfelt version of “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” . . . entirely oblivious . . . and the nuns are splashing each other, and giggling and screaming, and flinging themselves about in the golden light, with the wet interlock clinging to their excited bodies – and it doesn't take a lot to see that the nuns are experiencing their sex and the vocalist her spirit. (203)

Ruth starts a recitation of the biblical passage about pentecost and is gradually joined by the other characters:

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with the other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (204)

Marian recollects her child whose birth ignited so much love in herself and her husband, and she reveals the emptiness and austerity of her life now when the child is lost:

I called him Christopher. Because he was a kind of Christ to me, he brought love with him . . . the truth and the life. He was a future. Until one day I found him dead. I thought like you for a long time. He chose death in the cot rather than life in this town, in these times, it was their fault, they had done it to me, I hated them. Hated life. (207)

⁷ Stewart Parker, *Three Plays for Ireland* (London: Oberon Books, 1995), p. 200. All references in the text will be to this edition.

Parker invites his audience to believe in the ecstatic self-realisation, collective forgiveness and absolution of the characters, induced by the stories they hear. Entangled in difficult relationships, constantly threatened with explosions, injuries and starvation – the bitter emblems of the Troubles – the characters aspire to no longer depend on the degenerating force of the outside world and other people, but to discover “some kind of Christ, in everyone of us” (207). The stories quoted above contain elements of the supernatural. The characters recall moments that bear significant impact on them and their outlooks. However, Parker is not convincing enough in his effort to make the protagonists’ redemption feasible. Their stories are too long and although the extraordinary plots are captivating, one wonders if they possess enough power to change one’s life entirely.

The story-telling time is present in Friel’s *Wonderful Tennessee*, where six characters spend a day at the shore entertaining themselves with stories, each involving some transcendental element as well. Their effect on the protagonists seems to be more convincing than in *Pentecost*. Parker tries to persuade his audience that the stories leading to the climactic moments of epiphany have actually changed and healed the characters, whereas Friel suggests that his protagonists merely touched the unknown and the results of that confrontation do not have to cause any dramatic shifts in the proceedings. Parker devotes only the last few pages of *Pentecost* to all the four stories. Friel, on the other hand, prepares the audience gradually, throughout *Wonderful Tennessee* to the moment of facing the wonderful. The stories are short and apparently casual but the imagery of the conflict between nature and civilisation, man and God is far more differentiated and developed. One of Friel’s characters describes a dolphin he thinks he has just seen:

FRANK And for thirty seconds, maybe a minute, it danced for me. Like a faun, a satyr; with its manic, leering face. Danced with a deliberate, controlled, exquisite abandon. And for that thirty seconds, maybe a minute, I could swear it never once touched the water – was free of it – had nothing to do with water.⁸

Another character tells a story about an ancient ritual of sacrificing a young member of a tribe; there is a story of a floating house and of a disappearing island. Unlike Parker’s, Friel’s characters do not feel forced to tell stories as they do not expect to experience their redeeming function. Their stories are just a means of passing the time and of entertainment. In fact, it is more through the magical ritual of farewelling the shore rather than talking that they are aware of the change that has occurred in them throughout the night.

⁸ Brian Friel, *Wonderful Tennessee* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 59.

TRISH goes to the mound of stones. She walks around it once. Then she picks up a stone from the bottom of the mound and places it on the top. Then she walks around the mound a second time and again she places a stone on top. Then she goes to the lifebelt and lightly touches her votive offering. Then she goes to her belongings, picks them up and slowly moves off.⁹

Here, the potent dénouement is achieved via a subtler set of implications than in Parker.

For both playwrights, the two tasks: to show the power of language in order to build successful relationships, on the one hand, and to explore its structural, stylistic and semiotic possibilities, on the other, seem to be inseparable. In a similar manner to Friel, Parker perceives "translation" as a process representing political and ethnic tensions, sees it as a device to work upon a given reality in order to shape a new meaning. Friel's linguistic experiments are most evident in "Translations," where he proves the inadequacy of the English translations of Irish place-names and in this way he lets Irish sound English on the stage. As far as the stylistic variations are concerned, Friel demonstrates in *The Freedom of the City* how language can change into a political weapon when manipulated by skilful rhetoricians. Parker exploits the richness of linguistic devices in *Northern Star*. The play is divided into seven parts, each relating to a particular period in the history of Ireland and its theatre, and each devoted to a particular stage of Henry Joy McCracken's life. McCracken, one of the leaders of the 1798 Rising, while recollecting his past the night before the execution, confronts a number of flashbacks which only confirm how inevitable was the failure of the resurrection. According to Elmer Andrews, the Seven Ages in *Northern Star* are written as pastiches of styles characteristic of the given Irish dramatists.¹⁰ The Age of Innocence resembles the style of Farquar's comedy of manners with its wit, complicated intrigue and sexual politics:

PEGGY Such a night for noise and villainy! An honest man mayn't trust in his own shadows, i'faith, that he may not. Nay, not even in his very dreams, lest he mumble aught in his sleep, for as the saying is – the walls have ears to hear. (19)

The Age of Idealism is written in the mode of Boucicault's Victorian melodrama:

McCRACKEN The country round here is as lush and lovely as a garden, is it not? It has riches and rewards a – plenty – more than enough for all like yourselves who labour in it. Tell me, why do you not partake freely of them? (33)

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁰ Elmer Andrews, "The Will to Freedom," *Theatre Ireland*, 19 (1989): 19. In this article Andrews explains the styles attributed to the seven ages.

The Age of Cleverness abounds with the epigrammatic, witty and elegant phrases of Oscar Wilde's comedies (38). Shaw's humorous social critique is visible in the Age of Dialectics (47); Synge's elaborated, metaphoric language expresses the Heroic Age (55); O'Casey's realistic colloquialisms stand for the Age of Compromise (64); whereas the Age of Knowledge is performed in Behan's and Beckett's styles (73). Such a linguistic version of history and of human life clearly harmonises with Friel's approach to the relationship between language and culture revealed through Hugh O'Donnell's words: "it can happen that a civilisation can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of . . . fact."¹¹ Parker and Friel emphasise the ability of language to go beyond a perception of reality. They imply that language can become reality itself.

Another domain where Friel's and Parker's workshops may be comparable is their treatment of characters as complicated, ambivalent human beings torn inside by opposing desires and attitudes. Boucicault in Parker's *Heavenly Bodies* corresponds with Gar O'Donnell in Friel's "Philadelphia, Here I Come!" They both suffer from a split personality caused by their origin, social conventions and aspirations for the future. Dissatisfied with his financial condition, his social position, incapable of establishing a true and fulfilling relationship with his father and girlfriend, forced to think of leaving his homeland, Gar seeks refuge in secluded conversations with his imaginary alter ego. Likewise, Boucicault, a Victorian melodramatist of Irish origin, reveals the unhappiness of his childhood, a series of disappointing affairs with women, the dishonest nature of his theatre career, in retrospective scenes accompanying the last day of his life. Boucicault makes his confession in the presence of his old Irish friend, Patterson.

The very names of the protagonists envisage the splits in their personalities. Dionysius Lardner Boucicault inherited his names from the two fathers he had. "Dionysius" ironically challenges the lenient, feeble personality of Boucicault's legal protector, whereas "Lardner" is the surname of his real parent. The appropriate stage imagery highlights the difference between the Phantom Fiddler (the ghost of Boucicault's real father) and the materialistic engineer (Boucicault's step-parent) when the young Boucicault ignores the model of a steam engine bought for him by his mother's lover and, instead, declares how proud he is of the play he wrote at school (91). A broader interpretation of that scene explains the conflict existing in the Victorian epoch between the romantic, spiritual values and the materialistic culture of the Industrial Revolution.

In Friel's play, Gareth Mary O'Donnell's second name, the one after his mother, suggests an inner struggle between the feminine and the

¹¹ Brian Friel, "Translations", in: *Selected Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 419.

masculine sides of Gar's psyche. Friel does not only imply Gar's double identity, but he materialises his alter ego in the character of PRIVATE Gar, who acts as *the id* of Gar's personality. In Parker's *Heavenly Bodies*, Boucicault resembles Friel's PUBLIC Gar and Patterson, Boucicault's friend, corresponds to PRIVATE Gar. Like PRIVATE for PUBLIC Gar, Patterson functions as Boucicault's conscience, depreciating the protagonist's high opinion of himself and making him face the truth about the dubious nature of his theatrical success. In the following fragment Patterson reminds Boucicault of the fact that he agreed to the changes in his original play introduced by the managers of a London theatre:

PATTERSON The fact remains – she certainly got your number very nicely with that title.

BOUCICAULT It was still my own work at the end of all!

PATTERSON Did I say it wasn't? Even if you did walk out on the opening night? (p. 101)

Similarly to PUBLIC and PRIVATE in "Philadelphia, Here I Come!," Boucicault and Patterson enact scenes produced by their imagination. Whereas PUBLIC and PRIVATE role-play short dialogues between, for instance, Gar (PUBLIC) and an American employer (PRIVATE) or Gar (PUBLIC) and a customs officer (PRIVATE), Parker's pair enacts fragments of Boucicault's melodramas and farces. As this particular aspect of both authors' playwriting best demonstrates the differences in their dramatic approach, let the chosen passages exemplify the two concepts of the internal dialogue:

PRIVATE (*addresses PUBLIC in sombre tones of a judge*) Gareth Mary O'Donnell.
(*PUBLIC springs into attention, salutes and holds this absurd military stance.*)

PUBLIC Sir.

PRIVATE You are fully conscious of all the consequences of your decision?

PUBLIC Yessir.

PRIVATE Of leaving the country of your birth, the land of the curlew and the snipe, the Aran sweater and the Irish Sweepstakes?

PUBLIC (*With fitting hesitation*) I-I-I-I have considered all these, Sir.

PRIVATE Of going to a profane, irreligious, pagan country of gross materialism?

PUBLIC I am fully sensitive to this, Sir.¹²

PUBLIC and PRIVATE perform conversations that take place in Gar's imagination. The day before emigrating to America, Gar is overwhelmed by doubts about his decision. The function of the internal talk with his alter ego is twofold. Firstly, it visualizes for the audience the process of the character's thinking, and, secondly, it serves as an expression of Gar's scruples, which, while discussed with his other self, can be minutely analysed and, eventually, disposed of.

¹² Brian Friel, "Philadelphia, Here I Come!" in: *Selected Plays*, p. 32.

By incorporating passages of Boucicault's plays in his own work, Parker's technique of exploring his character's complex personality seems to be richer and more dramatic than Friel's. In order to illustrate what happened to him in Paris, Boucicault transforms himself on stage into Alan Raby, the title role of his play *The Vampire*.

(Vampire wedding music)

(Snow covered mountains appear)

(Enter ANN GUIOT – from BOUCICAULT's The Vampire in a filmy wedding dress and veil (BOUCICAULT has become ALAN RABY))

RABY At last. She is here. Tonight, ere the moon rises, a new life drawn from the pure heart of a maiden must enter into this form. Her life for mine!

ANN *(French accent)* What do I hear? . . .

(As they reach the mountain peak, the macabre wedding music wells up. RABY lifts up Ann's veil and bends down as though to kiss her – but instead sinks his teeth into her neck)

(She gives a deathly cry and falls off the mountain out of sight. RABY turns his bloodstained mouth and outstretched arms in triumph towards the new moon rising. Then, as the music peaks, he sweeps back down)

(The lights change, the music finishes, and BOUCICAULT is once more standing in front of his make-up box, and of a mirror held by PATTERSON, wiping the blood off his mouth) (p. 108–109).

The enactment of Boucicault's genuine play's fragments, instead of merely performing the incidents from the playwright's life to expose some important biographical facts, allows Parker to investigate the relation between Boucicault's life and art. From the conversation between Boucicault and Patterson, following the passage from *The Vampire*, the audience concludes that the melodramatist was once married to a French heiress who later died in dubious circumstances. Thus, not only does the above passage exhibit the nature of Boucicault's attitude to the woman, but, in a broader context, presents the playwright as a kind of vampire himself with his never fulfilled lust for women, desire for money and fame. The intertextuality of Parker's *Heavenly Bodies* and *Northern Star* used in order to enrich the characteristics of his protagonists, as well as to show the inseparability of life and art, shows Parker to be a conscious post-modernist playwright, fully aware of the coexistence of literary works and their influence on one another.

The device of double self is not the only formal innovation introduced by Friel and Parker. They are both convinced that a singularity of human experience does not exist, that all attempts to show a uniform, congruent portrait of reality are pointless and the successful creation of theatrical illusion is an irrelevant concept in modern art. Therefore, the playwrights employ metatheatrical techniques to present the process of making the play. In doing so, they follow the "estranging" theory of Brecht, who assumed

that constant breaking of the illusion and distancing the audience from characters and action should be the purpose of dramatic art.

Like Cass in Friel's *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Parker's characters turn directly to the audience. McCracken in *Northern Star* describes to the audience the scenery of a flashback, "Harry steps in. A popular melodrama. Scene – the county of Armagh. Nature has lavished its beauty" (29); Boucicault in *Heavenly Bodies* introduces his poem in the following way, "Dear friend, you have shown this poor old actor great kindness, yes indeed you have..." (83), and later, he desperately begs his audience for compassion, "She says you will go bail for me . . . you are the only friend I have. Long life t'ye! – Many a time you have looked over my faults ..." (140).

Another Brechtian device are the songs and music performed by the characters in between their speeches. They make their parts sound unrealistic and remote to the audience. Friel's *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and "Philadelphia, Here I Come!" are prolific with songs serving exactly the above purpose. Parker's excellent use of the song as an estranging technique is epitomised by Patterson's recollection about his Liverpool performance during the Famine (*Heavenly Bodies*).

(Sings unaccompanied) She was singing an old Irish song, Called "Gradh Geal mo croid-he" . . .

(Speaks) I was orphaned very young, I grew up with the smell. My uncle enlisted me, I was a drummer boy, I marched with the regiment, along by the ditches piled high with misshapen corpses, with the mouths stained green from eating grass and docken.

(Sings unaccompanied) I was on important business but I did not like to go, And leave the girl and garden where the praties grow . . . (p. 113)

The song mitigates the effects the story about Patterson's miserable life might evoke in the audience. The dreary events reported by Patterson are emotionally counterbalanced by the cheerful lyric and the tune he sings.

Another formal innovation inspired by Brecht relates to Parker's characters who put on make up and costumes on the stage. Thus, the audience, aware of the illusion being created right in front of their eyes, is prevented from any serious, sympathetic reaction towards Boucicault's and Patterson's enactments of the melodramas.

To confirm that although throughout the play the audience's sense of dramatic illusion has been constantly broken, yet, unconsciously, they believe in the stage reality, Parker constructed the end of *Heavenly Bodies* in such a way, that the finish still comes as a surprise to our expectations. When Boucicault's dead body ascends to heaven, we are inclined to believe that the fictitious theatre roof opens letting the rain pour on his bed and destroy the paper moon landscape. The audience realise that they have

been "caught" relying blindly on the pre-ordained idea of a traditional dénouement. When the actor playing the supposedly dead Boucicault sits up on the bed and the audience are confronted with the circus music, they understand that they are simply the victims of the playwright's joke. Such a confusing and equivocal effect is possible only by employing another metadramatic technique, namely, a "theatre within theatre and within theatre" device. Like Pirandello's characters in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, stepping from one level of theatrical illusion to another, Boucicault and Patterson move from the primary, fictitious stage of the Madison Square Theatre in New York, where the action begins, to the places required for Boucicault's lifetime flashback, from which they transfer to the locales of Boucicault's plays.

Heavenly Bodies, formally the most varied of *Three Plays for Ireland*, best illustrates Parker's fascination with Brecht's dramatic technique as a means of mirroring the fragmented, chaotic state of everyday reality. Friel also adopted many of Brecht's models. They frequently occur in "Philadelphia, Here I Come!", *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, *Living Quarters* or *The Freedom of The City*. None of those plays, however, is as technically differentiated as *Heavenly Bodies*. Although Friel has never avoided formal experiments, his drama has been appreciated mainly for its contents and his method of characterisation.

Friel and Parker share the same opinion about history, which they view as cyclical and continuous. Their characters cannot break the "vicious circle" of Irish history, which is condemned to failure. By accepting the inevitability of a collapse, Irish people readily romanticise their past endowing it with a mythic quality. As Elmer Andrews points out, "the tradition of Irish political martyrdom . . . may be understood as ritual sacrifice demanded by an indigenous territorial numen – Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the Shan Van Vocht – which is invoked as spiritual or symbolic compensation for the failures of historical reality."¹³

In each of *Three Plays for Ireland*, the ghosts of the past haunt the present lives of Parker's characters. McCracken in *Northern Star*, enchanted by the embrace of the Phantom Bride, commits himself to the national cause regardless of its inescapable defeat and at the cost of his family. Unable and unwilling to free himself from the ties of fate, McCracken heads for the unavoidable imprisonment and death.

The ghosts of *Heavenly Bodies* are Johnny Patterson, a circus clown who guides Boucicault during the last tour of his life, and the Phantom Fiddler, an elegiac figure associated with the Famine. Whereas Patterson exemplifies a typical stage Irishman, a grotesque character whose cruel,

¹³ Andrews, "The Will to Freedom", p. 20.

ironic remarks deflate the Irish myth of national failure, the Fiddler, on the other hand, whose sorrowful music contrasts with the loud and raucous Patterson, embodies the Irish tragedy.

Lily Mathews in *Pentecost* is "condemned to live indefinitely" (202). Guilt-ridden for betraying her husband and abandoning her child, Lily's ghost chooses suffering by means of reliving the past. She influences Marian, a woman who inhabits her house now and who also experienced the loss of a child a couple of years ago. Marian initially agrees to cultivate Lily's self-condemnation by becoming her personality replique, but during the course of the play finds an individual way to free herself from the even-returning, tormenting past. She says she has discovered Christ in herself and recommends an inner spiritual change to the other people present in her house outside of which there are street riots and the noise of bomb explosions.

Besides Marian's solution, Parker offers another possibility of avoiding the recurring phenomena of Irish determinism by introducing the ghost of the future, Jimmy Hope, in *Northern Star*. His fresh socialist ideology and enthusiasm counterparts the deadly embrace of the Phantom Bride. Unfortunately, Parker fails to persuade his audience that the new "faith" promoted by Hope is not going to terminate with a disaster in the manner the previous systems have done.

The ghosts personifying the fatalism of Irish history are not the only means of representing it on the stage. By the use of flashback, Parker indicates the necessity to re-live and re-enact the crucial events of one's life and of the Irish past. The flashback scenes in *Northern Star* take McCracken to the very roots of his decision to accept the leadership of the poorly trained army urged to face the irrevocable defeat of the 1798 Rising. Although the recollected scenes foretell the imminent failure, he accepts what he perceives to be his predestination and is ready to die for his country's myth.

The flashbacks of *Heavenly Bodies* undoubtedly resemble those in Friel's *Living Quarters*, where SIR directs the other characters' reconstruction of one day on which Frank committed suicide after he had learnt about his second wife's affair with his son. Although, before Boucicault dies, he demands "a fair appeal," (86) a review of his *whole* life, not only one day, the manner the flashbacks are built in both plays is similar. Patterson assumes the controlling position of SIR. He leaves Boucicault some freedom in selecting the scenes to be re-enacted, but most of the time it is he who directs the spectacle, and he who starts and finishes the succeeding stages of the playwright's life. Like the characters in *Living Quarters*, Boucicault occasionally tries to interrupt or intervene in the action, but fails to alter the pre-ordained events. Similarly to *Everyman*, when summoned by Death,

Boucicault begs for a postponement of his trial and unlike his counterpart from the medieval morality play, he receives it. During that time, he is supposed to prove his innocence or attempt to get a kindly verdict. *Heavenly Bodies* is also full of situations paralleling those Faustus and Mephistopheles in, for instance, Marlowe's play. Whereas Patterson/Mephistopheles acts merely as the executor of Satan's will, SIR in *Living Quarters* is a god-like figure determining the characters' proceedings.

Although both Friel and Parker admit the existence of the mythologised desire of Irish people to re-live the failures of Irish history, as the flashbacks of their plays indicate, they believe in the power of the theatre to provide at least a momentary freedom from the tradition of imprisonment. Parker understands the role of theatre as a chief cultural instrument to be used in the examination of the past without being trapped by it. There is a hope for liberation from the historical repetition in all the three plays: through the new, socialist ideas of Jimmy Hope in *Northern Star*, an individual redemption as proposed in *Pentecost*, and, finally, through the art of theatre in *Heavenly Bodies* by showing how a character and a play are capable of liberating themselves from the stereotyped conceptions and closed frames of traditional drama.

The last postulate of Parker's dramatic manifesto puts him on an equal level with Brian Friel and his concept of playwriting. Although growing in the shadow of Northern Ireland's most important contemporary dramatist, Parker is able to produce theatre comparable to the achievement of Friel. They both believe in the artistic imagination – the Fifth Province – to be the only unifying force in Irish political and cultural conflict. Parker writes, "I can only see a point in actually embodying that unity, practising that inclusiveness, in an artistic image; creating it as an act of imagination, postulating it before an audience."¹⁴ Like Friel, Parker challenges his audience's imagination with his creative use of language and stylistic variations, a wide thematic scope and the employment of formal innovations. Even though the three plays can be accused of some imperfections – *Northern Star* might change into just a guessing game of the styles pastiched, *Heavenly Bodies* may seem formally overloaded and, as in *Pentecost* the redemptive ending not entirely convincing – Parker verified his ability to write a highly intellectual drama accompanied by an inventive form.

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¹⁴ Stewart Parker, "Signposts", *Theatre Ireland*, 11 (1985): 28.

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**ROZWAŻANIA NAD *THREE PLAYS FOR IRELAND*
STEWARTA PARKERA I WYBRANYMI SZTUKAMI BRIANA FRIELA**

Artykuł jest wynikiem badań warsztatu dramaturgicznego Stewarta Parkera, współczesnego dramaturga północnoirlandzkiego, na przykładzie jego tryptyku pt. *Three Plays for Ireland*, który został przedstawiony w świetle twórczości Briana Friela. Autorka, porównując zawartość tematyczną utworów oraz ich innowacyjną formę, ukazuje poglądy obu dramaturgów na rolę języka i eksperymentów lingwistycznych w teatrze, prezentuje wnikliwość analiz osobowości ich bohaterów, ujawnia nowatorskie techniki dramaturgiczne stosowane w celu odzwierciedlenia wielorakości ludzkich doznań i przeżyć, zestawia opinie pisarzy o istocie historii i jej cyklicznej naturze.