



Intercultural Arrivals and Encounters with Trauma in Contemporary Irish Drama

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This chapter will explore a range of contemporary Irish plays that dramatize and interrogate tropes of traumatic immigration and intercultural relations within the context of the politics of representation. Not only do these plays have in common a focus on the experiences of newcomers in Ireland; but they also both dramatize and disrupt concepts of immigration, community, diasporic trauma, victimhood, social divisions, civilization and the artistic representation of pain and suffering. In this manner, the plays share a focus on the humanity and the individual complexity of their protagonists and on their distinctive human experiences. This emphasis eschews any reductive, divisive and dehumanizing notions of community and identity. The plays also render the experiences of immigrants to Ireland while employing familiar Irish dramaturgical devices, such as tropes of home versus emigration, disrupted realism, expressionist elements or traditional monologue formats.

In spite of Ireland's rapid development towards an intercultural society in the last twenty years, only few plays and theatre productions in mainstream theatres have since included the "New Irish" as either characters or professional actors cast in productions.¹ However, in an article published in 2005, Jason King argues that a number of intercultural plays function "to at least widen an imaginative space of intercultural contact that seems largely absent from other areas of the Irish public sphere".² Most of these types of plays have remained unpublished until very recently. The handful of earlier published plays listed in a footnote by Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler are exclusively by male Irish playwrights.³ Therefore, the often bemoaned lack of attention paid to Irish women playwrights could be extended towards an

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intersectional feminist critique. However, in her pioneering book *Stage Migrants: Representations of the Migrant Other in Modern Irish Drama* (2010), Loredana Salis draws attention to plays by women that deal with issues of migration in the context of Northern Ireland. She argues that “there is also a type of theatre which confirms that, in the longer term, Northern Irish theatre will produce works where migrants play an active role—as writers, producers, and actors, for instance—and where plays are performed or composed by migrants or they are about migrants living in the region”.⁴ She goes on to analyze a number of recent examples from both North and South, including multilingual works. McIvor and Spangler’s recent collection shifts the balance of published plays and academic analysis in the Republic of Ireland towards a closer consideration of a wider range of new intercultural plays from the Fringe theatre scene. In its important interview section, it also gives a voice to emerging “New Irish” theatre directors and performers.

Plays examined here will include Mirjana Rendulic’s *Broken Promise Land* (2013); Owen McCafferty’s *Quietly* (2009); Donal O’Kelly’s *Asylum! Asylum!* (1994); Gavin Kostick’s *This Is What We Sang* (2009); Elizabeth Kuti’s *The Sugar Wife* (2005); Gianina Cărbunario’s *Kebab* (2007); Paul Meade’s *Mushroom* (2007); and Stacey Gregg’s *Shibboleth* (2015). *Asylum! Asylum!* (1994), more topical than ever during the current refugee crisis (at the time of writing, 2017/2018), documents the traumatic journey of a recently arrived asylum seeker in Ireland. In *Shibboleth* (2015), *Quietly* (2009), and *This Is What We Sang* (2009), immigrants from the European continent shed new light on the collective trauma of the Northern Irish Troubles and the Peace Process by offering outside perspectives, which sometimes come with their own experiences of traumatic encounters. *Shibboleth* documents both the experiences and views of native Northern Irish workers and those of Polish workers at a time of rising sectarian tensions, xenophobia, and violence. While *This Is What We Sang* stages the historical experiences of Jewish immigrants who find themselves caught between the sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland. *Quietly* quietly reveals the suffering of a young Polish man who manages a pub in Northern Ireland. He at first appears to act as a mere outside observer and witness to sectarian divisions between Loyalists and Republican factions, before it is gradually revealed that he himself is threatened by xenophobic violence. *Mushroom* (2007) exposes and subverts the limiting notion of reducing the experience of international workers to a one-dimensional representation of economic migration. The play instead emphasizes their agency, human complexity, and the richness of their often cosmopolitan attitude and life experience. *Mushroom* dramatizes the working lives of Eastern Europeans in Ireland and offers a glimpse into both their positive visions and their critical views of Ireland and the Irish to Irish audiences. In contrast, *The Sugar Wife* (2005) and *Kebab* (2007) turn the concept of the outside observer within the Irish community on its head by dramatizing an awakening awareness of Ireland’s troubled relationship with historical and contemporary forms of international slavery. In *The Sugar Wife*, set within Dublin’s nineteenth-century Quaker community, a philanthropic wife who sees herself as someone

who charitably helps to alleviate misery, is suddenly confronted with the role of her husband's tea business in the American slave trade. She encounters not only her husband's morally dubious actions, but also the exploitation of the suffering of a visiting former slave by an anti-slavery activist and artistic photographer. She is thus made painfully aware of the photographer's artistic attraction to her own psychological suffering. This experience also makes her realize her own abuse of the suffering of the Irish poor for personal gratification in her own philanthropic work in the Dublin slums. The recent play *Kebab*, which dramatizes the exploitation of a young Romanian sex worker in Ireland, in somewhat the same manner it compels Irish middle class audiences to uncomfortably recognize Ireland's role in the contemporary global sex trade. However, the complex critical interrogation of different forms of slavery and violent abuse is further complicated in both plays: they highlight connections between art and altruism and their relationship with lust for pornographies of pain and suffering. In this sense, the plays could also be seen to encapsulate the moral ambiguities of the politics of victimhood and pain in artistic creation and spectatorship. *Broken Promise Land* (2013) proposes a somewhat more liberating narrative. This monologue play empowers its Croatian lap-dancing heroine by allowing her to self-consciously tell and shape her own narrative. She subverts notions of victimhood by controversially painting a picture of an international lap-dancing culture that allows young women to gain the financial means necessary for a self-determined life in a capitalist world.

I will begin my analysis with Donal O'Kelly's now classic *play Asylum!* *Asylum!* (first performed at the Peacock in Dublin in 1994) and relate it to more recent works by both Irish and immigrant playwrights. A traditional trope in Irish plays is the traumatic departure or return of Irish emigrants to or from the UK or the USA. In the plays selected here, a common trope of the arrival of non-Irish immigrants to Ireland operates. In *Asylum! Asylum!* we gradually learn of the repressed trauma of a Ugandan asylum seeker who was subjected to torture in his home country, and we are confronted with his experiences with the immigration authorities in Ireland. In a counter-trope reflecting the traditional Irish emigrant plot, an Irish immigration officer seeks a new life and job on the European continent. The play features the first black protagonist in Irish Drama at the advancing of the Celtic Tiger economic boom in Ireland, and is significant as the first play to address new immigration to Ireland.⁵ However, according to Victor Merriman, the play is an example of "the deployment of a postcolonial aesthetic of disrupted realism", which in its dramaturgical structure was already anticipated by M.J. Molloy's 1950s play *The Wood of the Whispering*: "If the persistence of realism is an analogue for attempts to posit a stable social reality as imagined by a comfortable elite, disrupted realism manifests the urgency of postcolonial desires."⁶ Such a "postcolonial aesthetic of disrupted realism" is a feature common to many of the intercultural Irish plays examined here. In *Asylum! Asylum!* the Ugandan Joseph Omara is seeking asylum in Ireland, having survived a massacre and torture in Bucoro, Bulu District, Northern Uganda. At the end of the play he

is violently deported by the immigration authorities as his asylum case is defeated in court. In the course of the play we learn that the well-educated young man has lost his father, who was the local schoolteacher in his home village, in a horrifying act of torture carried out by Ugandan military. Joseph tells the characters Bill, Mary and Leo Gaughran how he disowned his father out of fear, and watched him die in the fire. As a result of this trauma, Joseph has an obsession with his happy childhood memories of his father that he repeats over and over again in a trance-like performative way. The members of the Irish Gaughran family in this play also lack a sense of belonging, because of tragic family circumstances over generations. Beyond the effects of an early loss of the wife and mother of the family, experiences of wartime trauma are revealed when reference is made to the fact that this matriarch's own family were German immigrants, and possibly refugees from either the Second or First World War. The father of the family, Bill Gaughran has also been affected by his experience of the bombing of the Shortstrand in Dublin in the Second World War.

Gavin Kostick's 2009 play *This Is What We Sang* focusses on one such earlier wave of immigration—it tells the story of the Irish-Jewish community's arrival in Northern Ireland and of its successful integration into Northern Irish society and business life.⁷ In this play, the character of Bill directly compares nineteenth century Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe to contemporary refugees and asylum seekers, thereby asking for empathy with their plight. He offers a justification for the possibility that some immigrants may have to invent "stories" just to survive—a possible survival mechanism that Joseph in *Asylum! Asylum!* is directly accused of by Leo who calls him a "sharp operator".⁸

BILL. [...] I suppose it's just, when people tell you stories about this or that, well, it's rarely perhaps quite as simple as is made out. [...] What I think was this—it was greyer. They were trying to get to New York, or Canada or South Africa, but a lot of the countries they came out of wouldn't let them out with more than a certain amount of money, and they were scared that when they got to the other end, they wouldn't be let in. Because they were too poor. Or maybe they were smuggling a bit. Or maybe their paperwork wasn't in order, a lot of the places these people were coming from wouldn't even give them a passport. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland. So in a way, they were the illegal immigrants of their day and only too ready to jump ship if it got them through.⁹

Bill maintains that he is "not in the slightest bit blaming them" for trying to survive, and that as far as he is concerned "they did absolutely the right thing", characterizing them as "brave and adventurous people".¹⁰

Issues around the traumatic experiences of immigrants are examined within a wider European context in *Asylum! Asylum!* as Joseph's account of the burn-

ing in Bucoro is paralleled with a fictionalized rendition of a historical act of arson by neo-Nazis in Rostock, Germany in 1992. In the fictional version of this event in the play, Leo witnesses the burning of an asylum seeker's hostel in Berlin in his professional role as a member of Europol (Europol had nothing whatsoever to do with the actual 1992 event in Rostock, which involved only local police forces). Taking slight liberty with the details, O'Kelly integrates this real life event as recounted by Leo into *Asylum! Asylum!*, which becomes an independent piece of strong agitprop drama within the magic-realist frame of the play. Leo enacts his own memory of witnessing the atrocity through vivid and highly visual language communicated in short forceful sentences. The performance of his speech is designed to recreate the horror witnessed by Leo both for his audience within the play and for the actual audience of the play's production, and to strengthen Leo's new political message against the mistreatment of asylum seekers. Doubt about the factual accuracy of his storytelling performance is introduced through the magic symbolist dramaturgical element of a ghostly appearance by Joseph's father at the end of his "play within the play".¹¹ This magic-realist device of a haunting ghost is a common appearance in Irish drama such as, for example, the ghost of Lily Mathews in Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987). It usually symbolizes trauma and remorse related to violent incidents that have occurred in the past. For Leo, the ghost symbolizes his profound guilt and remorse at having been a witness and bystander of the atrocity without taking any action to help the victims. It parallels Joseph's traumatic guilt expressed in a similar previous performance, in which he recounts how he watched his father being tortured and killed without intervening.

Leo is deeply traumatized by this event, which destroys his trust in European civilization and prompts him to quit his job as an enforcer of European border control. In a way, he reacts like the people about whom sociologist Norbert Elias wrote when he argued that "brought up in the idea that their own, higher civilization was a part of their 'nature' or their 'race', might very well have fallen into despair and been driven to the opposite extreme, when, as adults, they noticed that this flattering belief was contradicted by events".¹² In his essay "The Breakdown of Civilization" Elias argued that "it was partly due to the idea of civilization as a natural inheritance of the European nations that many people reacted to events such as the open relapse of the National Socialists into barbarism at first with incredulity—"that cannot happen in Europe"—and then with stunned surprise and dejection—"how was it possible in a civilized country?"¹³ Flawed notions of what constitutes civilization are also critically explored at various levels throughout the play: from a postcolonial angle and in what could be described as a critique of neo-colonialism in Ireland.¹⁴ Before taking up the Europol job, Leo had contrasted his idealistic vision of European civilization with an image of a jungle to encapsulate his situation and life in Ireland. He had plotted to escape out of this "jungle" and enter Europe. Leo describes the Irish jungle as a stifling atmosphere of oppressive parochialism and nepotism: "Nobody gives you credit here. It's small, it's parochial, nothing

is decided on merit, [...] back biting and back stabbing, I can't stick it anymore."¹⁵ This reference to neo-colonial corruption might link Leo's concept of the jungle to an idea of a formerly colonized nation that has failed to complete a process of de-colonization. As Mária Kurdi argues "Leo's hostile treatment of Joseph is fuelled by the suppression of his own share of the third-world memory as a corollary to his determination to emigrate and rise in the first world of the continent, working for Europol".¹⁶ Leo's ideal vision of "European civilization" as opposed to the "jungle" not only has obvious imperialist undertones, but it could also be said to correspond to Merriman's interpretation of the aspirations of the economic development of Celtic Tiger Ireland:

Tiger Ireland reached its zenith in the years 1998 – 2000 and was marked by deep divisions within the society and between a reified version of Ireland successful and Europe's others, "the wretched of the earth," to borrow from Fanon.¹⁷

Celtic Tiger Ireland positioned the country as a successful leading European nation that had left its colonial past safely behind and opposed it to poorer nations ("the wretched of the earth") with a new national confidence. However, Leo's binary notion of civilization and jungle is undermined after he witnesses the barbaric incident in Berlin and returns to Ireland: His former colleague Pillar, when arresting and deporting Joseph, tries to avoid following all of the new immigration rules and asserts that he wants to behave "civilized". To him the new regulations involving excessive brutality are rules of the "jungle": "*Pillar violently clasps handcuffs on Joseph's wrists and exclaims:* Nothing compared to what I'm saving him from. He should be on his knees thanking me! (shouts) For fuck's sake! I'm trying to be civilised!"¹⁸ Ironically, to him, "civilized" here means the lack of asylum rules and regulations in Ireland at the time when the play was written, when Ireland was still "without a clearly defined immigration policy".¹⁹ The play imagines what will happen once strict standardized immigration rules come into place and prompts the question of whether a system based on "nod and wink"²⁰ policies might in fact be more humane. In opposition to these cruel "rules of the jungle", Leo's father Bill, a retired Sacristan and his human rights activist lawyer sister, Mary, believe real civilization to mean humane behaviour and conditions among people, love and compassion. They can therefore be said to follow a Christian (Bill) and a humanist enlightenment model of civilization (Mary) rather than an imperialist colonial one that stresses modern rationalization/mechanization. However, while Mary is directly described as a follower of Europe's "long liberal tradition",²¹ and of enlightenment thinker Rousseau, there is also a hint at the fact that her romantic feelings for Joseph appear partly aroused by his suffering and Joseph points out their patronizing nature: "JOSEPH. Joseph the Innocent. Joseph the Noble Savage. That's what you want, Mary. You don't want Joseph Omara the small-time smuggler who made his living out of what the fucking department calls crime."²² At the other end of the spectrum, the Darwinism of "the rules of the jungle", as followed by Leo before his remorse-

ful change of heart, includes the cynical use of the trauma and suffering of others for his own personal advancement. When asked to “perform” the role of an asylum seeker at the interview for the Europol job, he tells Joseph’s story of the murder of his father. He thus calculatingly uses Joseph’s trauma as creative inspiration to demonstrate his insight for the job.

The use and abuse of the traumatic experiences of others is a trope common to several other plays examined in this chapter, such as Kuti’s *The Sugar Wife* and Carunario’s *Kebab*. In both plays, the victims of a parasitic and sadistic abuse of their suffering are women. In *The Sugar Wife*, the complexities of altruism are critically examined as the protagonist Hannah Tewkley—the philanthropic and idealist wife of a Quaker tea merchant in an 1850s Dublin traumatized by the famine—thrives upon her idea of helping the poor and oppressed. She gains self-satisfaction from the suffering of a syphilitic prostitute, whom she seeks to help on her own self-righteous terms. However, when the former African-American slave Sarah stays at her house to give an anti-slavery lecture series in Ireland, Hannah is confronted with the involvement of her husband’s tea business in American slavery, as well as with his infidelity. Repulsed, she begins an affair with Sarah’s rescuer, Alfred, an art photographer and abolitionist activist who took sexualized photographs of Sarah, pornographically highlighting the physical wounds she received as a victim of the slave trade’s violence. Sarah plays a double role as a lecturer and witness endowed with agency for the political abolitionist cause on the one hand and a passive “mutilated black body” on the other. Sarah’s double role corresponds exactly to the manner in which, as Alan Feldman describes, “the slave’s authentication of his/her spoken biography through the exposed and mutilated black body” is witnessed by “the nineteenth century abolitionist audience, ensconced in bourgeois rectitude, clothed and relatively insulated from day to day personal violence”: “The ex-slave is endowed with the status of speaking subject, but his/her logos both originates in and requires the supplement and the archive of the subjugated body.”²³ Alfred’s photographer’s gaze and that of his nineteenth century abolitionist bourgeois audience thus function as a metaphorical critique of what Feldman problematizes as the voyeuristic spectatorship provoked by “museums of suffering” in his article “Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and The Trauma-Aesthetic”: “The museum format freezes the past, transforming it into discrete units of time, and petrifying it within classificatory labels, all of which situate the past as an object of spectatorship, no matter how empathic this gaze may be.”²⁴ This act of freezing past events of violent abuse for public “viewing” implies the objectification not only of classified “units of time,” but also the objectification and categorization of victims who are thus dehumanized again as objects of spectatorship. Feldman argues further that “an opening of not only the speech, but also the body of the political victim, in the form of accounts of terror and pain inflects” the “collation and public archiving of these accounts ‘with a postmortem aesthetic akin to the public anatomic dissection theaters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’”.²⁵ This kind of public archiving of physical suffering was

hotly debated in relation to an artistic event: Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B* at the Barbican in London in 2014. This live human exhibition, which featured "black actors chained and in cages to depict the horror of slavery" and which was critically described as a "human zoo" was eventually closed down after sustained protests.²⁶

In *The Sugar Wife*, the "aesthetic" exposed for spectatorship concerns the body of a living human person whose suffering, however empathically gazed at, serves artistic creation. When Alfred shows the pictures that bear witness to Sarah's trauma to Hannah's husband, it becomes clear that Sarah is his artistic muse:

SAMUEL. And here. But so thin. So sickly. And the metal collar. And these scars.

ALFRED. Yes, she bears them still. Though now at least she has clothes to cover them.

SAMUEL. *looks through the plates, examining them.*

SAMUEL. So. She is thy – muse. Would that be right? Thy muse?

ALFRED. Yes, perhaps. She is my muse, among other things.
[...]

SAMUEL. This is not cold science. To capture her mystery, to convey her – vulnerability. That is all I aspire to. As a broken bird. A captive creature, as she once was.²⁷

A sinister sense of sadistic sexual pleasure gained from these photographs complicates her rescuer's relationship with Sarah, which turns out to have been based on sexual attraction from the moment he spotted her in chains and decided to buy her freedom. In fact, Sarah seems to have been aware of this dimension from the start and plays up to Alfred's attraction to make him rescue her. Only when the Quaker wife finds out about this does she realize that she is merely the photographer's next artistic muse, embodying pleasurable female human suffering for him to draw inspiration from. However, while Hannah is shocked at Sarah's revelation, Sarah pragmatically points out that desire is at the heart of all human motivation and that nothing would ever get done without it:

SARAH. He loved my scars. He took pictures of all of them, one by one.

HANNAH. To be motivated by lust, by the basest – an abomination –²⁸
[...]

SARAH. Nothing gets done without desire. You of all people must see that now. We are greedy creatures. Desire. Flesh. Money.²⁹

In this manner, Sarah reminds Hannah of the role of desire and the ambiguous motivations for her work towards alleviating the suffering of others. This makes Hannah embark on a deeper questioning of her own moral principles and a self-reflexive re-evaluation of what constitutes morality in others.

In Gianina Cărbunariu's play *Kebab*, translated by Philip Osment and first performed at the Project Cube in Dublin during the Dublin Theatre Festival in 2007, greed, "Desire. Flesh. Money" and artistic ambition are the major themes. Mădălina, a fifteen-year-old girl recently arrived in Ireland from Romania, is exploited by two young Romanian men in the Irish sex industry. Lured to Ireland by her "boyfriend" Voicu with the promise of a regular job, Mădălina is soon told to give up her first Irish job in a Kebab shop and instead is "trained" to become a sex worker by the ruthless Voicu. When this proves too dangerous however, Voicu develops a new "business" idea together with Bogdan, a Visual Arts student: Bogdan films Voicu and Mădălina having sex while clients pay to watch them online. The boundaries in the ménage-a-trois relationship that develops are blurred. However, despite the mutual friendship and sexual relationship between the three young people, it is clear that Mădălina is considered an object and property by both young men as they disrespect and violently abuse her:

VOICU. That's enough pissing about. Our *public* awaits!!
MADALINA. I am sexy! I am sexy!

Another beep from the computer. Voicu slaps her.

You are wicked nice.

Voicu strikes her again. Her nose bleeds. Mădălina covers her face with her hands.

VOICU. Go to the bathroom and clean yourself up. Now!
BOGDAN. (*Sitting down with the camera behind the laptop.*) Let her stay like that. (*To Madalina.*) Take your hands away from your face. Look at me.³⁰

It is unclear who abuses her most: Voicu who sells her body and services for his own financial profit; or Bogdan, who, like Alfred in *The Sugar Wife*, uses her suffering as artistic inspiration for his research film project to obtain a Masters in Visual Arts. Once Bogdan has obtained his Master's Degree, he drops the newly pregnant girl and refuses to honour his original promise to her to start a new life with her. He declares that he wants a normal life away from the dirt associated with a sex worker.³¹

In Cărbunariu's *Kebab*, symbolism also operates on a dramaturgical level as the "in-her-face" theatricality of sex, violence, and objectivization (reminiscent of Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*) is counterpointed with a number of alienation devices and scenes dramatized in expressionistic, nightmarish stylization. For example, the realistic dialogue between Bogdan and Mădălina in Scene 5 is followed by a scene that breaks the realist framework with the parody of a Brechtian episode title, suggesting a display of "horror cartoons—Gymnastics: Our girls take Gold". This dramaturgical rupture highlights Mădălina's ruptured self as she appears to create a fantasy world in her mind of "horror cartoons" designed to detach herself from reality. This desire for dis-

tance arises from the forced physical intimacy vividly described by Sara Keating in her *Irish Times* review of Orla O'Loughlin's production in Dublin as "all overlapping limbs and intermingling bodies, forcing the characters, sandwiched together on a tiny couch, into an uncomfortable, inescapable intimacy".³² Bernard McKenna, in his emphasis on "the theatrical representation of the traumatic event" describes "'distancing', a psychic construction of a fantasy life designed to protect an individual from further damage" as a common "symptom of traumatic rupture".³³ As we learn in the following ironically subtitled paragraphs of Mădălina's abstract monologue, "Gymnastics" and "Our girls take gold" here refer to painful sex acts, such as anal sex, which are demanded by many of Mădălina's customers and which her pimp Voicu "trained" her for as these "Compulsory Routines" presumably pay particularly well.³⁴ In the last paragraph of her monologue in Scene 6, subtitled *On the Podium*, the reason why Mădălina finds herself in this situation in Ireland is explained by an unspecified, repressed, even greater unhomely horror awaiting her "at home": "Home? This isn't my home, but then home's not home either. Because home is worse than anywhere that's not home. Never going back home. Never going back. No."³⁵ In Scene 10 *Horror Cartoons—Fairystories from Childhood*, in a manner reminiscent of the role of fairytales in psychoanalysis, Mădălina directly compares herself to a fairytale character who ran away from home: "I'm not Maddy any more. No, I'm not Maddy any more. I'm little Red Riding Hood—running like mad through the forest."³⁶ In an expressionistic telling of a version of *Little Red Riding Hood* Bogdan and Voicu take on the roles of "the boy who cries wolf and makes the townsfolk think he's coming to eat them up" and "the eldest of the three little billy-goats—the naughty one who opens the door to the wolf".³⁷ In the macabre Scene 14 *HORROR CARTOON—ABRAKEDABRA* the victimization of Mădălina at the hands of Bogdan and Voicu is nightmarishly brought to a climax as she is described by all in their sleep as "kebab meat", "fresh kebab meat", "sliced kebab meat", "grilled kebab meat",³⁸ with Mădălina herself concluding that "every night I dream that I'm a doner kebab", imagining herself as dead flesh.³⁹ In the next abstract scene it is implied that they kill her. While *The Sugar Wife* unambiguously critiques voyeurism and the artistic exploitation of the suffering of others, *Kebab* has been attacked for the play's own pornographic nature. For example, Charles Spenser, in his review of the 2007 Royal Court performance expressed a wish for "fewer in-her-face dramas offering voyeuristic voyages round the underclass", regretting that "here we are, yet again, in some grotty flat where a ménage-à-trois of desperate kids indulge in lashings of loveless sex and graphic violence for the titillation of the audience".⁴⁰

While its title suggests a similarly traumatic immigrant experience in the sex industry as that of Mădălina in *Kebab*, Mirjana Rendulic's partly autobiographical one-woman monologue play *Broken Promise Land* tells a very different story. The protagonist, Tea/Stefica, performs her own experience as an empowering one: as a young woman she escapes the limitations of poverty in post-war

Croatia and, if not fulfilling her initial American College dreams, succeeds in gaining access to higher education in Ireland after working and earning well as a lap dancer in several countries, including Ireland. In McIvor's words, "the play challenges stereotypes of dancers and sex workers as victims through relating a fictionalised version of Rendulic's experience",⁴¹ and "perhaps controversially, does not represent scenarios of exploitation and violence in the sex industry apart from Stefica falling victim to a scammer who promises to transport her to the US for Euro 6000, but instead takes her money and leaves her behind".⁴² McIvor quotes Rendulic's assertion quoted in an *Irish Examiner* review by Caomhán Keane that her protagonist is "not a tragic martyr, she's just a girl with a mission".⁴³ This concept of refusing victimhood, at the centre of Rendulic's play, challenges not only "the habitually marginalised typecasting of Eastern European actresses in Ireland"⁴⁴; but it also challenges the politics of trauma around conceptions of damaged selfhood and identity in academic discourse. "This defiant portrayal of a woman's life remaining whole" in the face of great adversity is in fact a critique of a concept of trauma that habitually insists on the inevitability of brokenness after trauma.⁴⁵ Instead, it posits another possible way forward: the transcending of traumatic experiences that, in the case of Rendulic herself and her protagonist, are likely to have occurred, but that are—rather than simply repressed—consciously overcome through the creative "defiance" of this play and its fully rounded central character.⁴⁶ This resonates with Irene Visser's argument in her essay "Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies", in which she underlines the power of human resilience in the face of trauma with a quotation from Chinua Achebe on colonial trauma:

In this respect, resistance and resilience are to be seen not merely as responses of individuals but more importantly, as part of a communal process of living and working through trauma. This resonates with Chinua Achebe's remark in a recent essay, published in 2010, that while colonialism "was essentially a denial of human worth and dignity" it is important to understand that "the great thing about being human is our ability to face adversity down by refusing to be defined by it, refusing to be no more than its agent or its victim."⁴⁷

A similarly defiant, fully rounded central character who immigrated to Ireland not for economic reasons, but out of cultural curiosity, a sense of adventure, and to fulfil his spiritual dreams, is the cosmopolitan Polish man Andrzej in Paul Meade's play *Mushroom*. He expresses an important characteristic that appears entirely ignored in contemporary dehumanizing discussions about "economic migrants": Andrzej reclaims his humanity by highlighting the wealth of his international experience, obstinately refusing to be reduced to a cardboard cut-out stereotype and to be patronized by people who have never experienced even a fraction of his vastly rich experience:

ANDRZEJ. [...] They look at me they see a Polishman. I look at them and I think, I have worked all over the world, I fixed roofs in Italy, I built saunas in Germany, I sold kebabs by the Black Sea, I saw the Pyramids, I spoke to the oracle at Delphi, I. ... and you say... ‘Good man yourself’. What do you think I am doing here? A job? Ha, Ha. A job? I can get a job anywhere. I came because... but they don’t understand. I came...I came because of Newgrange.⁴⁸

This insistence on self-expression and on a depth of insight and experience conveys a strong sense of personhood, agency and self-determination instead of passive objectified victimhood. It suggests that the character of Andrzej would, similarly to Tea/Stefica in Rendulic’s *Broken Promise Land*, reject the limitations of a concept of traumatic immigration by insisting on his own unbroken strength and vigour, which he has actually gained from his international experience. When things don’t work out as imagined, Andrzej open-mindedly looks for “a different perspective”.⁴⁹ Rather than merely performing immigrant workers on mushroom farms for Irish audiences, Meade’s *Mushroom* performs active immigrant workers’ minds and dramatizes critical immigrant perceptions of Ireland. According to Jason King, the play, which “portrays the mushroom tents and chicken farms of rural Monaghan to be grim settings”,⁵⁰ provides “a defamiliarised vantage point from which members of the audience can imagine how they must appear to immigrant agricultural labourers and mushroom pickers whom they would otherwise never encounter”.⁵¹ I would add to King’s analysis that the play allows audiences to encounter immigrant workers as independent thinkers in a way that they might not be open to encounter within society, which, as the play highlights, often fails to integrate newcomers and outsiders as full members. However, the thoughts of immigrants as represented in the play are not always insightful and are at times offensive, especially when dealing with the hurt of rejection. They sometimes portray an immaturity, cultural prejudice and racist contempt for the Irish that is every bit as nasty as that of anti-immigrant xenophobes: “They (Irish people) are all fat in the face and they have big ears. Like this... (*she demonstrates*). Their food is so bad”.⁵² The racism of anti-immigrant xenophobes is forcefully critiqued in an earlier play dealing with exploited Bosnian immigrant workers on a mushroom farm in Northern Ireland, Damian Gorman’s significantly-named *Darkie* (2005).⁵³ By allowing immigrant characters to express a variety of opinions freely, Meade’s *Mushroom* more fully humanizes them with strengths and weaknesses, far from creating mere one-dimensional or idealized victims against the backdrop of a critical representation of Irish society. The alienation experienced by immigrants is dramatized through the expressionist technique of two dialogues in two different countries (Ireland and Romania) running on a parallel level. These dialogues intercept each other, thereby suggesting rupture as a fundamental experience of the characters. However, according to Loredana Salis “the play follows the parallel lives of the protago-

nists to show how, regardless of their backgrounds and cultural differences, these people share more than it may at first seem”,⁵⁴ thus emphasizing universal human experiences through a dramaturgy of rupture. This expressionistic dramaturgy of cross-dialogues is a device commonly used in Irish Drama, such as for example in *The Silver Tassie* (1927) by Sean O’Casey and in Frank McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (1985). Consequently, I argue that, by employing a defamiliarization device familiar to Irish audiences, Meade’s *Mushroom* makes “the other” more familiar.

Gavin Kostick’s *This is what we sang*—based on a collection of interviews with the Belfast Jewish community—also applies a common feature of Irish dramatic structure in order to effect a sense of familiarity. In contrast to *Mushroom*’s defamiliarization devices, this play is composed in a traditional Irish monologue structure. Several characters of one immigrant Jewish family alternate in telling the story of their lives. It has this structure in common with some of the most well-known modern Irish plays, such as, for example, Brian Friel’s *Faith Healer* (1979). Eamonn Jordan distinguishes three different main types of monologue clusters in Irish drama, “single character interior monologues”, monologues performed by a single actor “impersonating a range of characters”, and monologues that “consist of two or more characters narrating a sequence of events from their own perspectives”.⁵⁵ This formal structure also, in some sense, engages with the dialectical concept of traditional study of the Talmud, which is based on the idea of a series of arguments between different voices with a focus on the continuous dynamic of the argument rather than the conclusion. In the words of Steven Jaffe in an interview with Jo Egan: “The way of studying the Talmud is by argument. The Talmud itself is a series of arguments between Rabbis who lived in the first century onwards and they are constantly arguing and therefore it’s a dialectic. The essence of it is in the argument rather than the conclusion. It’s a thinking thing rather than a clear yes or no.”⁵⁶ The play was staged site-specifically in Belfast’s Synagogue, and the monologues were symbolically framed with an enactment of the Jewish religious ritual of Yom Kippur:

Enter LEV, HANNAH, SISS, to the edge of the playing area, predominantly in white (but not obsessively so). Enter BILL in a suit, separate. They are barefoot. They stand waiting. They don’t engage with each other. Enter Saul singing the Kol Nidre (the prayer before evening service).

The story is told through the stages of:

Repentance.

Sacrifice.

Forgiveness.

All these are both in relation to God and man. The characters are speaking to God (or to their own sense of the divine) and man.

The characters all understand what they are being asked for, but don’t necessarily agree with it.⁵⁷

Occasionally, in the individual monologues and in quotations from interviews collected in the epigraph, references to anti-Semitism and discrimination against the Jewish people caught up between the Protestant–Catholic division in Northern Ireland are made. For example, in the Section 1 Repentance, the character of Siss reflects on her personal experience growing up as a Jewish child in Belfast in the 1930s and 40s, asking herself whether her life “was limited by anti-Semitism” and concluding “that’s too much to say. I don’t know” and “But no, anti-Semitism wasn’t a big thing in my life”.⁵⁸ According to Siss, it was quite simply the same bigotry that prevented Catholics from joining the Protestant Tennis clubs that was applied to Jews, but she insists that “rather than cry about it, we formed our own”.⁵⁹ However, she also recalls an episode playing with children in the street who sang two different versions of a song about King Billy and how she got caught up in between the resulting Unionist–Nationalist confrontation, being called “yid”: “I tried to say it was only a game that had gone wrong, and one of the boys said, ‘what’s it to you yid?’”⁶⁰

This experience of an outsider caught between the sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland is mirrored in the more immediately threatening experience of a Polish bar worker in contemporary Belfast in Owen McCafferty’s *Quietly*. The play is set on a quiet evening that Polish barman Robert spends chatting to a customer, Jimmy, in his pub. As they discuss the football game of the day between Northern Ireland and Poland, violent clashes between Northern Irish and Polish football hooligans are reported. When Loyalist Ian arrives in the pub, Robert witnesses a tense “truth and reconciliation” meeting between a Loyalist perpetrator of sectarian violence and the son of one of his Catholic victims. It is revealed that Catholic Jimmy’s father was killed by a bomb thrown into an innocent group of men watching a football game in a local pub by Ian when both men were sixteen-year-old teenagers in 1974. Their dialogue expresses the traumatic memories of both men. Helen Meany, in her review of the 2012 Abbey Theatre production, argues that “rather than staging a ‘truth and reconciliation’ process in microcosm”, McCafferty “shows how these two men have been moulded by their backgrounds, each steeped in prejudice against the other’s traditions and beliefs”. Meany goes on to maintain that “even now, they find that hard to shake off; through the character of Robert, it is suggested that the sectarianism with which Ian and Jimmy grew up has found a new outlet in racist intolerance”.⁶¹ Later at night, after Ian and Jimmy have left the pub, Robert is afraid to leave for fear of being attacked by a group of drunken teenagers shouting xenophobic abuse at him from the outside. As he prepares to protect himself with a baseball bat positioning himself behind the door, we get a sense that he has already experienced the trauma of being the target of xenophobic violence and that standing behind the door with a baseball bat might well be his evening routine. The play thus concludes with what seems like a routine threat of violence that recalls the sectarian violence that killed the victims of the Loyalist bomb attack on the day of an important football game in a pub similar to Robert’s workplace.

Robert starts to clear up. The kids in the street start beating on the window shutters. They shout abuse:

VOICES. Three-two – three-two – fucking Polish bastard – go back to where you come from and shite in the street you fucker – polish wanker – three-two – three-two – three-two.

*Robert gets a baseball bat from behind the bar and stands waiting. Lights fade to dark.*⁶²

Similarly, in Stacey Gregg's 2015 play *Shibboleth*, which also dramatizes the difficult situation of Polish workers in a society already divided by sectarian lines, an undercurrent threat of violence is always present underneath the minimalist colloquial dialogue. In her "Afterword" Gregg describes the title as symbolizing not only the play's dramaturgical representation of the continuous divisions in Northern Irish society, but also the complex linguistic divisions that keep people apart: "I called it *Shibboleth*, a Hebrew word for words or customs one tribe uses to mark itself apart from others. A linguistic wall, of sorts."⁶³ In *Shibboleth* the conversation of a group of construction workers who are building a "peace wall" to prevent violence between Republicans and Loyalists in Belfast is ironically peppered with a singing wall as "almost every scene is divided by one of James Fortune's genre-hopping musical interludes".⁶⁴ The Northern Irish workers' expressions of xenophobic hatred against Eastern European immigrant workers are counterpointed with expressions of solidarity and support for each other as "on site, the workers' conversations slip frequently into a poetic unified consciousness, or a mantra of groupthink".⁶⁵ This "mantra of groupthink" is expressed in the frequent repetition of the colloquial linguistic turn of phrase: "Looking out for the Lads":

STUARTY Look what the European Union brought in.
 MO Flip who's that?
 BRICKIES Who?
 STUARTY Pole.
 MO A pole?
 STUARTY He's the Pole.
 COREY A telegraph?
 ALAN Right enough?
 MO Job thief, give him a slap.
 STUARTY Look out for the Lads.
 BRICKIES Look out for the Lads.⁶⁶

Ironically, the Lads turn out not to look out for the Lads at all as in the end their aggression turns against one of their own group, when Mo is beaten to death by Corey after he made advances to Corey's Polish girlfriend, Agnieska, whose father Yuri also works on the site. This violent outcome undermines the fictive notion of solidarity within sectarian or right-wing nationalist groups.

Such collective loyalties are exposed as arbitrary, temporary, self-interested, and as based on the manipulation of particular circumstances of competition by the powerful. In the case of Northern Ireland (as elsewhere in the UK, Europe and beyond), the analysis that “the various sections of a polarized proletariat are apparently more willing to ally with their bourgeois co-religionists so as to engage in sectarian warfare, rather than co-opting in a united struggle to improve their living conditions as a class” still applies and can be extended: time and time again national and ethnic identity politics is used to create a false sense of collectivity, and foreigners and immigrants are used as convenient scapegoats for the exploitation of the working classes by those in positions of power.⁶⁷ In the words of Peter Crawley in his review of *Shibboleth* in the *Irish Times*, “There is an acrid wit in Stacey Gregg’s new play, centred around the extension of such a wall, that ‘Themens’ and ‘Usens’ are never explicitly named, as though belief in division itself had eclipsed actual identity”.⁶⁸ Crawley wittily concludes: “Perhaps that’s why the wall in Gregg’s play has its own voice, supplied by the versatile singer Cara Robinson, as insatiable and insistent as the plant in *Little Shop of Horrors*: ‘Build me’”.⁶⁹ Through the use of familiar Irish dramaturgical devices, plays staging intercultural arrivals and encounters—as do all the examples explored in this chapter—make “the New Irish” more familiar to Irish audiences. This emphasis on a shared humanity thus reveals the senselessness of divisions or “walls” between people from different religious, national, political or ethnic origins that are built on superficial ideas of exclusive communities and limited notions of identity.

NOTES

1. Brian Singleton has drawn attention to the fact that in Irish mainstream theatre productions “the notion of colour-blind casting remains an alien practice”. Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 20. Quoted in *Staging Intercultural Theatre: New Plays and Practitioner Perspectives*, edited by Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler (Cork University Press, 2014), 2. I would extend this to the notion of nationality-blind/ethnicity-blind casting also. This does not mean that works including either international characters or international actors or both are not written or produced, but they rarely make it from the vibrantly cosmopolitan young Fringe scene into the mainstream theatre sector. An important example of international and colour-blind casting was the 2013 international co-production, *The Conquest of Happiness*. See Eva Urban, “‘Actors in the same tragedy’: Bertrand Russell, Humanism, and ‘The Conquest of Happiness’”, *New Theatre Quarterly* 31, Issue 04 (November 2015): 343–358.
2. Jason King, “Interculturalism and Irish Theatre”, *Irish Review* 33, Global Ireland (Spring, 2005), 23–39.
3. Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler, eds., *Staging Intercultural Ireland: New Plays and Practitioner Perspectives* (Cork University Press, 2014), 2.
4. Loredana Salis, *Stage Migrants: Representations of the Migrant Other in Modern Irish Drama* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 10.

5. For an account of the play's production and reception history see Victor Merriman, *Because We Are Poor: Irish Theatre in the 1990s* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010).
6. Merriman, *Because We Are Poor*, 55.
7. Please see Loredana Salis, *Stage Migrants: Representations of the Migrant Other in Modern Irish Drama* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) for a detailed account of an earlier play with a similar theme: Rebecca Bartlett's *Shalom Belfast!* (2000), 10–11.
8. Donal O'Kelly, *Asylum! Asylum!* In *New Plays from the Abbey Theatre*, edited and with an Introduction by Christopher Fitz-Simon and Sanford Sternlicht, 119.
9. *Ibid.*, 46.
10. *Ibid.*, 46–47.
11. *Ibid.*, 166.
12. Norbert Elias, "The Breakdown of Civilization", in *The Norbert Elias Reader*, 1998, 119.
13. *Ibid.*, 114.
14. "The nationalist bourgeoisie, to use Frantz Fanon's term, inaugurated and maintained a neo-colonial social order in Independent Ireland, in which, broadly speaking, relations of domination established during the colonial period persist." Victor Merriman, "Postcolonial Criticism, Drama, and Civil Society", *Modern Drama* (2004): 626.
15. *Ibid.*, 134.
16. Kurdi, *Codes and Masks: Aspects of Identity in Contemporary Irish Plays in an Intercultural Context*, Peter Lang, 2000, 93.
17. Merriman, *Because We Are Poor*, 629.
18. O'Kelly, *Asylum! Asylum!*, 163.
19. *Ibid.*, 90.
20. *Ibid.*, 34.
21. *Ibid.*, 147.
22. *Ibid.*, 151.
23. Alan Feldman, "Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and The Trauma-Aesthetic", *Biography*, Volume 27, Number 1, Winter (2004): 188.
24. *Ibid.*, 165.
25. *Ibid.*, 167.
26. Hugh Muir, "Slavery Exhibition featuring black actors chained in cages shut down", *Guardian*, 24 September 2014.
27. Elizabeth Kuti, *The Sugar Wife* (Nick Hern Books, 2005), 31.
28. *Ibid.*, 70–71.
29. *Ibid.*, 71.
30. Gianina Cărbunario, *Kebab*, translated by Philip Osment (Royal Court, Oberon Modern Plays, 2007), 49.
31. For a detailed analysis of the representation of the prostitute's body as dirt in *Kebab* within a biopolitical framework see Sarah Heinz, "The Shite of Dublin: Body Metaphors, Biopolitics, and the Functions of Disgust in Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* and Gianina Carbuariu's *Kebab*", *JCDE: Journal for Contemporary Drama in English*. 1.1 (2013): 80–91.
32. Sarah Keating, Review of *Kebab*, *The Irish Times*, 1 October 2007.

33. Bernard McKenna, *Rupture, Representation, and the Refashioning of Identity in Drama from the North of Ireland, 1969–1994*, (Praeger: Westport, Connecticut, 2003), 2.
34. Kuti, *The Sugar Wife*, 33.
35. Ibid., 34.
36. Ibid., 44.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 53.
39. Ibid., 54.
40. Charles Spenser, “Kebab: A pile of rancid clichés”, *Telegraph*, 25 October 2007.
41. Charlotte McIvor, “Introduction to Mirjana Rendulic’s *Broken Promise Land* (2013)”, in *Staging Intercultural Ireland: New Plays and Practitioner Perspectives*, edited by Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler, 319.
42. Ibid., 320.
43. Caomhán Keane, “New play captures life as a lapdancer in Celtic Tiger Ireland”, *Irish Examiner*, 11 March 2013, cited in McIvor, “Introduction to Mirjana Rendulic’s *Broken Promise Land* (2013)”, 319.
44. McIvor, “Introduction to Mirjana Rendulic’s *Broken Promise Land* (2013)”, 322.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Irene Visser, “Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies”, in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, edited by Michelle Balaev, 106–129, 108.
48. Paul Meade, *Mushroom*, in *Staging Intercultural Ireland*, edited by Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), 249–300 (251).
49. Ibid., 250.
50. Jason King, “Introduction to Paul Meade’s *Mushroom*,” In *Staging Intercultural Ireland*, 245.
51. Ibid., 247.
52. Meade, *Mushroom*, 268.
53. See Salis for a detailed analysis of *Darkie*.
54. Loredana Salis, “Immigrant games: sports as a metaphor for social encounter in contemporary Irish drama”, *Irish Studies Review*, 18,1, February 2010, 57–68 (62).
55. Eamonn Jordan, *Dissident Dramaturgies*, (Irish Academic Press, 2010), 219.
56. Steven Jaffe, in an interview with Jo Egan, quoted in Jo Egan, “The Lamplighters”, in Gavin Kostick, *This Is What We Sang*, Belfast: Kabosh, Lagan Press, 2009.
57. Gavin Kostick, *This is What We Sang* (Kabosh, Lagan Press, 2009), 26.
58. Ibid. 40.
59. Ibid., 39–40.
60. Ibid.
61. Helen Meany, “Review of *Quietly*”, *Guardian*, 28 November 2012.
62. Owen McCafferty, *Quietly* (Faber and Faber, 2012), 32.
63. Stacey Gregg, *Shibboleth*, London: Nick Hern Books, 101.
64. Peter Crawley, “*Shibboleth*: Examining the Walls than run through Northern Irish heads”, *Irish Times*, 8 October 2015.

65. Ibid.
66. Gregg, *Shibboleth*, 28.
67. John Martin, "The Conflict in Northern Ireland: Marxist Interpretations", *Capital and Class*, 1982, 6, 56–71 (60). Quoted and applied to an analysis of Northern Irish Drama in Eva Urban, *Community Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 27.
68. Peter Crawley, "Shibboleth: Examining the walls that run through Northern Irish heads", *Irish Times*, 8 October 2015.
69. Ibid.

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