

**JAMES M FLAHERTY LECTURE – 22 February 2018**

Professor Jane Koustas, Flaherty Visiting Professor 2017/18:

**Connections and Contacts on the Global Stage: Contemporary Quebec and Irish Theatre**

A recent newsletter sent by the Ireland Canada University Foundation emphasized the long established and long-lasting links between Ireland and Canada. As Prime Minister Trudeau said on his 2017 visit to Dublin, “it’s the connections between people that have made Ireland and Canada such long and lasting friends”. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar spoke of how, “our countries are connected by our cultures, by our literature, by our peoples. We are divided by an ocean, but bound forever by our past, and united in our hope for the future”.<sup>i</sup> This emphasis by the two national leaders on the ties that bind, on connections through contact, and on friendships forged through culture and literature endorses comparative scholarly pursuits across many disciplines such as history, politics, economics, archeology, geology and, of course the arts including literature, music, visual arts and theatre. The “connections between people” may happen as well beyond the geopolitical, historical, and socio-cultural spaces delineated by the two nations. This paper proposes that contemporary Quebec and Irish theatre, both once rooted in and motivated by the nationalist cause, now “connect” on the global stage. This study considers the global trajectory, success, impact, and focus of contemporary Irish and Quebec theatre tracing its growth from nationalistically motivated drama to global theatre in which

identity, citizenship and belonging are fluid concepts. I contend that playwrights such as Larry Tremblay, Carol Fréchette, from Quebec, Frank McGuinness and Marina Carr, from Ireland, and their plays reach beyond nation and nationalism to achieve the status of global theatre in comparable ways that merit study. The focus here is not specifically on Irish theatre staged in Quebec nor on Quebec theatre staged in Ireland, although these would be valid avenues of inquiry. I am also not considering, for the moment, theatre produced in translation although, once again, this would warrant study. My focus is instead on Quebec plays written and staged in French and Irish plays written and staged in English primarily outside their countries of origin. I contend that the plays and playwrights studied resist, or go beyond, a traditional side-by-side comparison suggesting an exploration of how, by focusing on global concerns, and engaging in theatre reliant on the visual spectacle, contemporary plays in both cultures invite an interrogation of identity and belonging outside the geopolitical boundaries of nation and language. In doing so, they also challenge traditional notions of Irishness or Quebeckness beyond the two nations on the international and global stage and I will return to these terms.

In the contemporary context of neo-liberalism and globalization, there is increased questioning of geopolitical borders. Numerous recent studies of Canadian and Quebec literary cultures (Casteels and Siemerling's *Canada and the Americas*, Khordoc's *Tours et détours*) and of the Irish case (Patrick Lonergan) demonstrate the need to reconsider contemporary geopolitical borders and their transgression or effacement by cultural movements. This study is informed by Benedict Anderson's concept of nationalism and nation-ness and his argument that national community is defined as much, or more, by shared memories than by common biological

origins. It interrogates the transformation and interpretation of nation in a global context. In *The Field of Cultural Production, The Rules of Art*, Pierre Bourdieu illustrates that cultural production is linked to habitus. This study considers cases where plays written within a certain habitus and according to the commensurate “rules” of cultural production, are staged, viewed and reviewed by audiences beyond the original context. Stanley Fish’s theory of interpretive communities can apply to the transformation and expansion of interpretive communities through globalization and the influence of this phenomenon on theatre production and reception. Similarly, Susan Bennett’s theory of production and reception considers theatre audiences as cultural phenomena. I hope to demonstrate that the authors under study participate in a global theatre network that takes their work beyond national borders and, particularly, beyond the national identifiatory model of the past. This is not to diminish the ongoing contribution of the canon of Quebec and Irish theatre but rather to suggest a shared, new direction.

Before discussing the development of Quebec and Irish theatre from national to global, I would like to briefly introduce the writers under study.

**Frank McGuinness:** Of contemporary Irish playwrights, McGuinness is among the most prolific, the most internationally renowned and perhaps the most versatile as John Brannigan (2010) notes in his introduction to the special issue of *The Irish Review* entitled “Frank McGuinness”: “[...] it is clear that there is no easy way of categorizing or defining the work of Frank McGuinness. The baggage tags of identity-- *Irish playwright, gay playwright, working-class*

playwright—are inadequate to describe a writer as comfortable in retooling the classics of European drama, or re-voicing the stories of England’s past as he is versed in the vicissitudes of contemporary Irish social, cultural, and sexual politics.” (xi) (). If, as Brannigan notes, plays such as his legendary *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), recently performed as part of the WW I commemoration, staged the complexity of Ireland on the international stage, others, such as *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me* “explained the world to the world” (xi). His recent *The Matchbox* (2012) tackles the universally recognizable themes of senseless violence, incalculable loss and searing revenge. *The Hanging Gardens* (2013) offers a daring look at Irish family life disrupted by globally shared dilemmas. In *Donegal* (2016), centred on “family, place and country music” (Abbey programme) traditional notions of “Irishness” are challenged. If McGuinness “queers” the past “in order to create a space in contemporary Ireland to allow for alternative versions of Irish citizenship to emerge,” (Cregan 2010) he also redefines the limits of nationhood and identity by placing Ireland on the world stage through the global reach of his work and through the content and form staged.

**Marina Carr:** Identified as “one of the most powerful haunting voices on the contemporary Irish stage” (Leeney, xv), Carr, from early plays such as *Low in the Dark* (1989) to the powerfully haunting *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) takes the audience from absurdist gender bending in the first example to the liminal space of the second where, as in Greek tragedy, “the central [Irish] characters are as likely to communicate with the dead as with the living” (Roche *Contemporary* 253). *Marble* (2009), perhaps the most contemporarily urban of her plays,

explores the destructive power of fantasy, fancy and phantasm which wreak havoc on a seemingly calm existence. In *16 Possible Glimpses*, Carr stages imagined scenes from Anton Chekov's life beginning however, with a vision of death, a relative constant in her work. Carr's exploration with form, the timelessness, and indeed "placelessness" of her plays challenge traditional, identifiable Irish drama. Her "riveting" adaptation of *Anne Karenina* (Abbey programme 2016) demonstrates her ability to expand notions of what constitutes an Irish play. Furthermore, Carr, like other Irish playwrights such as Frank McGuinness, premiered her plays outside of Ireland, in her case, frequently in London thus placing her immediately on the international theatre network.

**Carole Fréchette:** Began her career in the early 70's with the feminist theatre collective le Théâtre des Cuisines who produced plays such as *Nous aurons les enfants que nous voulons* (1975) (*We will have the children we choose to have*) and *Môman travaille pas, a trop d'ouvrage* (1975) (*Mom doesn't have a job she has too much housework*). Her first single-authored play *Baby Blues* was published in 1989 and her second play *Les quatre morts de Marie* which was awarded the Governor General's award for French language drama in 1995, was first produced in English in Toronto, Ontario, in 1997 and then in French in Montreal and Paris in 1998. From these 13 earlier plays to her more recent *Je pense à Yu* (2012), inspired by the story of Yu Dongyue, a Chinese woman who was incarcerated for 17 yrs for having defaced a poster of chairman Mao, Fréchette has remained a major player on the Quebec theatre scene and an important contributor to its international recognition. Translated into many languages and

widely travelled, Fréchette, particularly in her more recent work, “dramatizes the moral and material distress of solitary individuals living in a world filled with social injustice, poverty and political violence” (Moss, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*). From the mining regions of northern Ontario and Quebec in *Violette sur la terre* to the bombed-out neighbourhoods of Lebanon in *le Collier d’Hélène*, to silence and the impossibility of communication in *Small talk (2014)*, Fréchette takes the audience beyond the confines of national identity, through poetic, unstructured plays and beyond geopolitical, linguistic boundaries and their commensurate link to national identity.

**Larry Tremblay:** Writer, actor, director and expert in the Indian dance technique of kathakali, Tremblay, whose work has been widely translated and internationally staged, remains one of the most diverse and fascinating voices from Quebec. He is also a very prolific. Tremblay’s first play, a solo production, *The Dragonfly of Chicoutimi* is a landmark play. First staged in 1995 in conjunction with the Festival du théâtre des Amériques, an indication of its potentially global interest became “A true classic of Quebec theatre” (Jubenville 62). This play, one of his earliest and initially directed by Tremblay himself, earned him international fame and a place on the world stage and, later, recognition as a “precursor” (Lefebvre 80 ) taking Quebec theatre beyond the local. From, this “francophone play written in English with French syntax”(céad document/2277) in which the conventional notions of language and identity become blurred in a more complex context of sexual politics, to his *Abraham Lincoln va au théâtre* which, as the title suggests, confuses national, geographical and temporal distinctions, to his 2016

*Orangerai*, based on his novel of the same title, Tremblay transports the audience to a multilayered dramatic universe. Having written, staged and frequently directed over twenty-five plays since 1978 Tremblay pushes the boundaries of theatre crossing the traditional divisions of language, genre and identity to produce plays for a globalized society.

In a recent interview at the time of his nomination for Bord Gais Energy Book Awards, the interviewer from the *Journal.ie.*, Aoife Barry, entitled her article “Frank McGuinness’s Journey from ‘timid Donegal boy’ to successful writer”. His career did indeed begin with his depiction of Donegal in *The Factory Girls* (1982). Barry’s title, however accurate, conveys perhaps a somewhat straight, maybe even easy, path. As Helen Lojek emphasizes, however, McGuinness’s work cannot be reduced to a single theme or pattern:

There is no unbroken line in McGuinness’s work and that is part of its strength. He refuses to rest comfortably, or to let an audience rest comfortably, in a single notion of what a play should either do or say. (*Stages* 191).

The impossibility of reducing McGuinness’s theatre to a single trend or thread is equally true for the case of the other authors whose work cannot be distilled to a solitary concentration even though, as we shall see, the overarching features of globalized theatre are very much present. In the above article, Barry identifies McGuinness as a “successful writer” and resists labelling him solely as a playwright or, for the sake of the article, a novelist thus highlighting another feature common to McGuinness, Carr, Tremblay and Frechette; none are ‘simply’ playwrights and their oeuvre includes in the case of McGuinness, Tremblay and Frechette, novels and poetry. All are, in addition to writers in the broader sense, theatre scholars who write, or teach,

about theatre from beyond their own perspective. All have earned international recognition, in terms of honours and awards, not just for their theatre but for their contribution to theatre scholarship. The list is too long to provide here but I cite a few recent examples. Fréchette is a member of the Académie des lettres du Québec. Marina Carr was awarded the Windham-Campbell Prize administered by Yale University in March 2017 and Frank McGuinness was honoured with the Parnell Visiting Fellowship at Cambridge University for the year 2016-2017.

The above screen saver style descriptions, however limited, suggest the global trajectory, focus and success of the writers. It is important, however, to recognize the theatre tradition, namely that of nationalist, politically motivated theatre, that preceded, surrounded or perhaps launched and inspired the new directions engaged by these writers.

Garth Stevenson's 2006 landmark study entitled *Parallel Paths: The Development of Nationalism in Quebec and Ireland* underscores the cogency of considering Ireland and Quebec in concert.

While there are many differences between Ireland and Québec, their similarities, as outlined by Stevenson (historically small, problematically post-colonial, traditionally Catholic, with a history of language conflict) offer sufficient common ground for exploring new 'parallel paths' which take both theatres beyond nationalism to achieve the status of global theatre. It is worth noting that a special issue of *L'annuaire théâtral* a Quebec based scholarly review entitled "Le théâtre irlandais au carrerfour des modernitiés" (Autumn, 2006) demonstrates Quebec theatre scholars' interest in Irish theatre. Stevenson demonstrates the importance of the nationalist agenda in cultural production

noting: “Both [Ireland and Quebec] have generated movements of political, economic, and cultural nationalism that have lasted over many generations with occasional episodes, particularly in the Irish case, of violent struggle and protest. Both are stable and successful societies with distinct national identities, but with nationalist projects [...]” (“Anti-colonial Nationalism” 15).

The link between cultural nationalism and nationalist projects highlighted by Stevenson is echoed in numerous earlier discussions of Irish and Quebec theatre. In small nations such as Ireland and Québec, theatre has long been considered a “mirror up to nation” (to cite the title of Christopher Murray’s seminal study of 20th century Irish theatre); that is, theatrical activity is a central means by which the nation becomes and remains conscious of itself. In Québec, where the nation remains stateless, further pressure was frequently placed on theatrical representations to serve as evidence of the nation’s very existence. In his book significantly entitled *The Politics of Irish Drama*, Nicholas Grene illustrates the link between theatre and Irish nationalism: “As long as there has been a distinct Irish drama it has been so closely bound up with national politics that the one has often been considered more or less a reflection of the other”(1). In a similar vein, Jonathan Weiss underlines the importance of the relationship between nationalism and theatre from Quebec for the period under study (1608-1984). He observes: “[...] it is characteristic of Quebec literature in general that nationalism as an inspirational force produces far more than political statements” (1), meaning here theatre as well.

While It is difficult and risky to discuss authorial intent, Michel Tremblay, recognized as one of the major voices of politically motivated theatre linked to the separatist movement, strenuously stressed the importance of nationalist based identity when discussing *Hosanna*, one of his landmark plays, first staged in 1973. The play may appear initially as the staging of a domestic conflict in the gay partnership between Claude, whose stage name is Hosanna and whose drag identity is Cleopatra, and his partner. Michel Tremblay is, however, making an openly political statement as he clearly states:

I do not mean that they [Hosanna and Cuirette] are Quebec or symbols or images of Quebec. But their problems with the wider society are political problems. Because they are the fringe group in society, this society in a way hates them. But they want to be happy and they want to be somebody. Hosanna is a man who always wanted to be a woman. This woman always wanted to be Elizabeth Taylor in Cleopatra. In other words, this Québécois always wanted to be an English actress in an American movie about an Egyptian myth in a movie shot in Spain. In a way, that is a typically Québécois problem. For the past 300 years we were not taught that we were a people, so we were dreaming about somebody else instead of ourselves. So Hosanna is a political play. (Tremblay, Michel 283)

*Les belles-soeurs*, his first play staged in 1968, the same year René Lévesque, formed his separatist party, the Parti Québécois, is credited with having launched ‘le nouveau theatre québécois” firmly rooted in the nationalist movement.

It is, therefore, very much against, in several senses of the word, this background in which theatre and nation were inextricably linked that the writers under study began their careers or, in the case of Carr, education and theatre training. In the early years of the 21st century the limitations of a model based on a unified concept of nation and grounded in identity politics

became apparent. Ireland's tumultuous recent past – from celebrated economic and cultural success to billions given in a Euro bailout and subsequent success– rendered it an even unstable subject of representation while the continuing elusiveness of nation-state status for Québec tapped the energies of cultural systems that existed at least in part to keep the dream of statehood alive. Two failed referenda on sovereignty in Québec, in 1980 and 1995, led to disillusionment with the independence project across the general including artistic community even by stalwarts like Robert Lepage who had long embraced it. Voters' attention turned instead to economic and social issues as a result of the economic downturn in 2008, for example, which resulted in the collapse of the already declining manufacturing sector and huge urban unemployment. The influx of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees from francophone, or French-speaking countries, including many former French colonies, destroyed by war such as Lebanon and Rwanda, previously Vietnam, or by environmental catastrophe like Haiti and from north Africa with a primarily Muslim population challenged traditional notions of Québécois identity as evidenced by the 2008 Bouchard-Taylor Report on *Cultural and Religious Accommodation*. Many Syrians refugees speak French. According to the 2016 census, 13.7 % of the Quebec population were immigrants. 9.9% of the population were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. These groups are, furthermore, concentrated in large urban centres such as Montreal.

The social and political challenges wrought by unemployment, displacement and massive immigration similarly rocked the Irish nation and conventional notions of Irishness. Twelve percent of the Irish population are classed as immigrants and 17 percent of people were born

outside the state. A 2008 report entitled *Migration Nation* attempted to address this challenge as does the more recent 2016 *Migration Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future*.<sup>1</sup> With both nations growing increasingly diverse and their entwinement in global economic and political systems ever-more evident, unitary definitions of national identity seem as elusive as they are inadequate.

In *National Performance: Representing Québec from Expo '67 to Céline Dion* Erin Hurley offers a nuanced model of nation and nationhood using figures such as metonymy, simulation, and affect to analyse the relationship between key moments of Québec cultural performance and Québec itself, thus revealing meanings, narratives and subcurrents that have previously gone unrecognised. She notes: "Neither 'nation' nor performance allows for transparent reference between the two terms such that one might perfectly stand in for the other" (*Performance* 8). Reflecting on the role and place of Irish "national" theatre, Lisa Fitzpatrick also outlines the inadequacies of facile links between nation and performance when the shared mythology on which theatre once relied is no longer operational. She suggests the emergence of a pan-national, or global theatre that nonetheless remains local:

How can the dramatist represent the absence of a shared mythology, without the shared mythology to ground the work? Mythologies are built, not given; and the Irish theatre is at a liminal point, in transition between national myths whose elements no longer function, and a new mythology that is either more local, more pan-national, or more likely, is simultaneously both. (178)

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<sup>1</sup> Fintan O'Toole Irish Times Ireland ignores Muslims until someone makes controversial comments about female genital mutilation. We need to talk about multiculturalism Feb. 17, Review 1

While he is commenting specifically on Marina Carr's work, Fintan O'Toole's similar 2002 observations have a wider meaning;

The three pillars of the old Ireland – Church, State and Family—are in an advanced state of decay. [...] Carr is laying out the ground that the best Irish dramatists of the new generation must now occupy. The society that gave form and meaning to the work of their older contemporaries is now in disarray. Playwrights such as Carr and Sebastian Barry [...] have to start almost from scratch. They have to find a way to make their own private myths fuse with the public world they now inhabit. (qtd. In Leeney 89)

Similarly, by stepping outside the postcolonial paradigm which dominates Irish theatre studies, Patrick Lonergan, in *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*, demonstrates that viewing performance/nation as a binary, reflective transaction keeps other key factors out of the frame, not the least the meanings Irish and, in this case, Quebec theatre and performance make outside of Ireland and Quebec. The financial boom served as a starting point launching plays that articulate the concerns of “an emerging generation of Irish people using international culture and themes [...] and which showed frustration with the idea that Irish drama should be exclusively national in outlook” (Lonergan, *Globalization* 25). Lonergan readily admits that “there are difficulties in this shift from the postcolonial to the global” (*Globalization* 221) having convincingly argued that “globalization has changed the remit and responsibilities of national theatres [such as the Abbey]” (*Globalization* 5).

In their significant collection entitled *Ireland and Quebec: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on History, Culture and Society* editors Margaret Kelleher and Michael Kenneally make similar observations summarizing articles by Hurley and Lonergan which discuss, respectively, McGuinness and Tremblay. Using the latter as an example, they underline the links between

cultural production, including theatre, performance and identity in both societies and in many areas of cultural production as both Quebec and Ireland move towards globalization:

[...] the essays on Irish and Québécois theatre reveal the rupture of theatrical traditions in both societies, as the conventional role of “theatre as mimesis” is challenged by the disruptive pressures of transnational cultural interventions and influences. For example, the various forms of performance, not just in theatre and cinema but in politics, tourism and even economic policy, that have become such powerful indicators of contemporary Irish identity, find suggestive parallels with the use of theatrical character-objects by some contemporary Quebec playwrights (notably Larry Tremblay). Such instances of performativity, whether musical, theatrical or otherwise, offer new perspectives on how the two societies are currently responding to similar global, cultural and economic imperatives. (14)

While focusing on the Irish case, Lonergan convincingly argues that theatre is changing worldwide in four general directions. He contends that globalization has created new opportunities for writers, that audiences are coming to terms with social changes wrought by globalization such as asylum seeking and human rights and that this is evident both in the plays and in their reception, that globalization has produced formal changes such as increased emphasis on the visual spectacle and that categories such as nation and region previously used to study theatre have become obsolete because of globalization (*Globalization* 5).

The previous too brief synopsis of the playwrights globally relevant, travelled and appreciated oeuvre highlighted but a few of the defining characteristics of global theatre outlined by Lonergan. All four writers have, indeed, found success on the global stage, or on the local stage with global theatre. Issues of human rights, asylum and concomitant violence are staged in McGuinness's *Someone who'll watch over me*, Frechette's *le Collier d'Hélène*, Tremblay's *Orangerie* all of which are set in conflict areas in the Middle East. Violence resulting from

familial and social breakdown is the central to Carr's *The Bog of Cats* and Frechette's *Les quatre morts de Marie*. McGuinness's *Baglady*, Tremblay's *Gaston in the Dragonfly*, Carr's *Hester and Portia* are all victims of isolation and abandonment. All four authors prioritize the visual spectacle, making use of all the languages of theatre, over conventional sets and structures. We can think, for example of Carr's mythical, surreal characters such as Scarecrow or Catwoman and the Ghost in the *Bog of Cats*. Tremblay's *Abraham Lincoln Va au Theatre* stages performing objects such as a wax figurine with a speaking role. In a production of *Je Pense a Yu*, Frechette uses cinematic visual techniques. The emptiness of the stage space contributes to the feeling of isolation and placelessness experienced by McGuinness's *Baglady* and Tremblay's *Gaston in The Dragonfly*. As importantly, to address Lonergan's final point, all four playwrights transgress, redefine and reimagine conventional notions of nation and region; this is not Irish or Quebec theatre produced only for an Irish or a Quebec audience nor staged for an international audience in search of a dose of Irish or Quebec culture of the tourism variety. Absent from these plays are, for example, Michel Tremblay's easily identifiable Montreal kitchen/ tenements or glimpses of the quaint Irish countryside or cottage.

In sum, the success on the international stage and the subject matter, such as social changes resulting from globalization, dramatic structure and the categorization in terms of national identity, of the work of all four authors suggest that both Quebec and Irish theatre now follow similar paths towards the creation of global theatre. Commenting on contemporary Irish drama, Anthony Roche notes: "What the audience most often witnesses in contemporary Irish drama are damaged people, on the verge of cracking up, lamenting the absence of wholeness in their

lives and the people among whom they live, suffering the break-up of traditional forms of belief [...]” (Contemporary 12). Noting a similar breakdown and emptiness, Jane Moss identifies a new Quebec theatre which could be called post-identity theatre for the expression of the postmodern condition which raises serious questions about human nature, spiritual and emotional emptiness and the relationship between language and identity outside of a nationalist agenda (“Larry Tremblay” 255).

I do not contend that the authors selected are the most travelled or most well-known nor that they are necessarily superior to their compatriots. Tremblay, Fréchette, McGuinness and Carr are instead representative of playwrights who “reveal how globalization--as a cultural phenomenon and, an economic process, a mode of rhetoric--can help us to understand very different kinds of theatre” (*Globalization* 4). I argue instead that the dramaturges discussed consciously embrace globalization, including its many challenges, in terms of tropes, theatricality and itinerary.

It is important to note that the theatre under study could not be described as homogenous like the Broadway mass-musicals labelled McTheatre (Rebellato) or theatre “that is everywhere and everywhere the same” (Lonergan, *Globalization* 87). This theatre is not simply ‘international’ meaning that it is staged outside the country of origin, a distinction Christopher Morash makes when contrasting international theatre or “theatre that moves from one specific national space to another (2) and genuinely “globalized” theatre. Furthermore, these authors are not on the

festival circuit which, as Sylvain Schryburt argues, is yet but another form of a market driven cultural product. These playwrights stage instead reflexive theatre that invites the audience to “to relate the action to their own preoccupations and interests, as those preoccupations and interests are determined locally” (Loneragan, *Globalization* 87). This is theatre for which the reception is everywhere different and determined by “the audience’s willingness to interpret the play in relation to individual or communal concerns” (Loneragan *Globalization* 87) and is, therefore, well beyond any nationalist agenda.

Globalized, versus international or festival theatre, does not, or should not, function as a “branding” or marketing exercise aimed at conveying, and selling, stereotypical images of Ireland or Irishness or of Quebec or Quebeckness and this transition from Irish or Quebec theatre on the international circuit to genuine global theatre is not necessarily smooth. In her study of Marina Carr’s reception in the United States, Melissa Shira quotes Andrew Paul, the then Artistic Director of the Pittsburgh and Irish Classical Theatre Company who, commenting on the 2001 production of *On Raftery’s Hill*, noted: “I think Carr’s voice is unique and it will take time to establish itself among American theatre-goers. Her vision of Ireland is certainly not one the Irish Americans want to see and embrace. We seem to prefer Franck McCourt” (Shira 97).

A patron’s assessment of the 2001 production of Portia Coughlan was more precise: “Very positively disgusting. The Irish may drink and swear and fight but surely not as they were portrayed in the play (if that’s what you call it). My kind of Irish are not interested in such trash.” (Shira 102)

Far more recently, in 2010, the Abbey theatre (Ireland's national theatre), staged McGuinness's version/ translation/adaptation, *John Gabriel Borkman* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. While at first blush this may seem to be solid proof of the Abbey's commitment to global, or globalized theatre, namely a Norwegian play, translated by an Irish playwright featuring two distinguished British actors, Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan, staged in a prestigious New York venue, Patrick Lonergan convincingly argues that this was instead a branding exercise by Culture Ireland in the wake of the banking crisis and subsequent bail out and negative image. It was an attempt to demonstrate fiscal responsibility. He states:

That state -sponsored visit was 'performed' in newspaper profiles in North America, Ireland and Britain. ; it was performed in subway stations and in city billboards where posters for the show appeared. And what was being performed [...] was that a country that had recently received bad publicity about its finances was showing an ability to create a counter-narrative about banking—one that suggests that there is more to Ireland than bad news about corruption. ("After the Celtic Tiger" 217)

Once again, while authorial intent is sometimes difficult to gauge, it quite fair to assume that McGuinness did not adapt an Ibsen play in order to raise the ranking of the Irish economy.

If McGuinness's adaptation was commandeered to promote a nationalist cause and a new version of Irishness, versions of Quebeckness can similarly work against the playwright's original intent. Images of Quebec, or Quebeckness, far more folkloric than, for example, Larry Tremblay's spiritually empty characters in search of identity beyond national boundaries or Fréchette's complex characters who struggle to find meaning in a very non-localized world, still have currency. Over forty years after its creation, Michel Tremblay's was staged before sell-out audiences in Paris in 2012. It was performed in Quebec French by an all Quebec cast. In this

case, the author's clearly stated nationalist agenda was largely erased. As the 2012 poster and format, a musical, suggest, Tremblay's "tragi-comedie" to quote the author or a tragic comedy depicting several generations of women oppressed because of their lack of a collective, political, meaning nationalist, separatist voice, has been reduced to Broadway musical format featuring a very folkloric, marketable, humourous portrayal of Montreal slum desperate housewives which is bleached of the gritty, tough social and political message. The upcoming Abbey adaptation describes it as a comedy (<https://www.abbeytheatre.ie/whats-on/the-unmanageable-sisters/>).

If in McGuinness's case Irishness and a dose of nationalism were superimposed on a play of global relevance, impact and significance, the nationalist message was sidelined in Michel Tremblay's politically motivated piece in favour of a more marketable, comically derisive version. In both cases, branding flouted or at least subverted authorial intent.

In spite perhaps of some lingering and marketable notions of Irishness and Quebeckness anchored in a folkloric, local past, this study has demonstrated that the paths of these two nations and their theatre that once led to nationalist goals, have been remapped in the contemporary theatre that traces new directions placing both theatres on the network of global theatre. Drawing on Gadamer's notion that "self-understanding always comes through understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other" (83), I focus on how globalization has shaped the work of playwrights who see themselves as global (which does not exclude national) citizens and active participants on the global theatre network.

I would like to conclude with a quote from Carole Fréchette commenting on the inspiration for *Je Pense à Yu*, the play which draws on the true story of Yu, an Chinese woman, imprisoned for 17 years for having defaced a portrait of Chairman Mao:

*Je pense à Yu* se situe au coeur de la question qui me hante comme auteur : comment parler du monde sans faire abstraction de soi ? Comment parler de soi sans oublier le monde ? À la jonction de la grande histoire et de la petite, du monde réel et de celui que j'invente, cette aventure m'a menée dans des zones dramaturgiques inédites pour moi, entre fiction et documentaire; elle m'a menée en quelque sorte aux limites du théâtre. (Actes sud cover)

*Je pense à Yu* is at the heart of the question that haunts me as an author. How can one talk about the world while not including oneself? How can one talk about oneself without including the world? At the junction of History as the big picture, with a capital h, and history with a small h, of the real world and the one I invent, this adventure has led me into unexplored zones of drama, between fiction and documentary; it has led me to the limits of theatre [my translation].

I contend that all four authors discussed, and I believe the list will grow, constantly negotiate between the real and the imaginary, between fiction and documentary, between History, with an h, as the big picture and local and personal history and between their own and the global picture. In this regard, Quebec and Irish theatre, once rooted in and motivated by the nationalist cause, now “connect” on the global stage.

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<sup>i</sup> Ireland Canada University Foundation Winter Newsletter, Dec. 21, 2017

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