



HAL
open science

Didactic Fragmentation in "Scenes from the Big Picture" (2003) by Owen McCafferty

Virginie Privas-Bréauté

► **To cite this version:**

Virginie Privas-Bréauté. Didactic Fragmentation in "Scenes from the Big Picture" (2003) by Owen McCafferty. 2012. halshs-01071477

HAL Id: halshs-01071477

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01071477>

Preprint submitted on 5 Oct 2014

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Didactic Fragmentation in *Scenes from the Big Picture* (2003) by Owen McCafferty

Virginie Privas-Bréauté

Université Jean Moulin - Lyon 3

Brecht's dramatic theory helps demonstrate that the contours of contemporary Northern Irish drama have been reshaped. In this respect, Owen McCafferty's play *Scenes from the Big Picture* has Neo-Brechtian resonances. The audience is presented with fragments of lives of people, bits and pieces of a whole picture. This play exemplifies Brecht's idea of a didactic play in so far as the audience is called to learn about the Northern Irish Troubles from the play through the device of fragmentation: the uneven background of McCafferty's play – i.e. the Troubles – is peopled with traumatised individuals, proportionally fragmented. The play is built on fragmentation to mirror the fragmented environment as truthfully as possible, but it also sheds light to tensions between disruption and continuity giving the play a dialectical dimension that enables it to become didactic. This didactic dimension could not be completely reached without the intervention of the spectators and some awareness on the actors' parts.

dialectics, didactic, fragmentation, reconciliation, unity

In *Dramatis Personae*, a tribute to one of his former drama and English teachers, Northern Irish playwright Stewart Parker mentioned the contribution of Bertolt Brecht to world drama in general and to the Northern Irish stage in particular. After examining some of the plays that have been written in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, Brecht's dramatic theory is indeed of some help when

it comes to demonstrating that the contours of contemporary Northern Irish drama have been reshaped. In this respect, Owen McCafferty's play *Mojo Mickybo*, performed in 1998, epitomises what Brecht meant by epic drama¹. Effectively, in addition to the narrative technique, this play borrows three main aspects from Brechtian epic drama, namely its effect of distanciation, its absence of a fourth wall, and its direct address to the audience. Five years later, McCafferty took up with Brecht again and his first Neo-Brechtian play gave way to another, *Scenes from the Big Picture*. Its title immediately gives the tone since one of the important characteristics of Brecht's theory leans on fragmentation. Therefore, this new piece also has Neo-Brechtian resonances. The audience expects to be presented with fragments of lives of people, bits and pieces of a whole picture. Yet, more than being epic, it is didactic. The audience is called to learn something from the play through the device of fragmentation: the chaotic background of McCafferty's play – i.e. the Troubles – is peopled with traumatised individuals, proportionally fragmented. After studying how the play is built on fragmentation to mirror the fragmented environment as truthfully as possible, we shall demonstrate that the tension between disruption and continuity gives the play a dialectical dimension that becomes didactic. Nevertheless, this didactic quality could not be completely reached without the intervention of the spectators and some awareness on the actors' parts.

A Fragmented Environment

According to Margaret Llewellyn-Jones in *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity*, an Irish play with a 'fragmented and episodic' structure 'has somewhat a

Brechtian flavour'.ⁱⁱ In fact, the starting point of Brechtian drama is a fragmented reality; for Brecht reality could not but be presented as fragmented and episodic. Wolfgang Jeske and Gunter Berg remind us in *Bertolt Brecht*, that from 1926 epic theatre has featured a construction of narrative elements, texts, tunes and scenes that are independent the ones from the others but interact, complement or disrupt one another deliberately through staging. They thus intend to hinder the flow of the action.ⁱⁱⁱ In this sense, *Scenes from the Big Picture* takes a Brechtian dimension since McCafferty depicts a fragmented reality under an episodic form. Since the Troubles in Northern Ireland are the background of the play, that is to say a period of utter chaos, time and space within the play are first and foremost presented under a fragmentary light for the playwright's stage directions are explicit. At the beginning, the playwright writes that 'the play takes place over the course of a hot summer's day in an imagined area of present-day Belfast'.^{iv} There seems to be some kind of unity in terms of place (Belfast) and time (2003). Yet over the three acts, each falling into 14, 12 and 14 scenes respectively, time and space are shattered. McCafferty gives precise references to his readers in the numerous stage directions preceding the dialogues but they might get lost. If he writes that act 1 takes place at '*the beginning of the day*',^v the first scene of this act occurs '*in the middle of the night*'.^{vi} Therefore time in act 1 is overtly fragmented. Similarly Act 2 is said to take place '*in the middle of the day*'^{vii} and act 3 occurs '*at the end of the day*'.^{viii} Therefore the acts and their respective scenes do not provide any unity of space and time. Moreover, in the cast section prior to the play, the only feature of the characters is their age. The characters are not presented from the youngest to the oldest, but in the order of ap-

pearance. This corroborates the fact that time is a key element in this play; the playwright does not see it as continuous, but rather as fragmentary.

Similarly, space is disjointed. It is not Belfast as a whole which is presented but chosen places of the city: a shop, a pub, a hospital, a house, an abattoir. Sometimes, even a specific place is further divided into different spaces. For instance, a house is divided into various rooms, such as the kitchen or the parlour.^{ix} There are fifteen different places scattered all over the play to give space a fragmented form, echoing Brechtian drama. As Bernard Dort explains in *Le Réalisme épique de Brecht*, any theatre play is made of fragments of reality.^x Space and time are also part and parcel of this theory. Yet, if Brecht refused to impart these fragments with a symbolical meaning, McCafferty gives them a significance. Indeed, the German playwright situated them in the world and unveiled their relation with life as a whole. He introduced a tension between these fragments and the world. Unlikely, McCafferty is interested in granting a symbolic meaning to places. For example, the abattoir is a telling location from a Brechtian point of view. This is the place where the working class work – the working-class being the social class with which Brecht was much concerned – and where dead meat is processed.^{xi} McCafferty develops a metonymic relationship between the hollow lives of the working-class characters in *Scenes from the Big Picture* and the hollow bodies of the dead animals they process. The uninteresting lives of the characters cannot but let the audience become aware of the fact that the inhabitants may also be considered to be bodies without living souls; to some extent, they can be compared to dead meat. They thus tend to melt into the background. Another example is given by the shop, which is first broken into and where glass is scattered on the floor. These splinters of glass mirror the

Didactic Fragmentation in *Scenes from the Big Picture*

shattered lives of the inhabitants. And when the shop owner says that his business is a mess,^{xii} the audience might understand that it reflects the situation of the whole play, or even of Belfast/ Northern Ireland at that time.

With fragmented space, we also get a myriad of perspectives on various subjects. The play indeed abounds with examples where two places are represented in one scene. For example, in act 2 scene 4 two locations, a flat and a street, are mentioned. In this scene, two sets of characters see each other despite the distance. There are two centres of perspective. In act 3 scene 6 there are even three places represented in one scene, at the same time. This disrupts the pattern of the play which had been to present one place per scene; it creates confusion, disorder and speeds up the action. Furthermore, the text is itself visually and orally fragmented. For instance, the action of act 1 scene 13 continues in scene 10 in the same act, but is interrupted by scenes 11 and 12. As a recurring feature of McCafferty's play, the scenes are interrupted as if the action was momentarily suspended.

The text is also fragmented. Words, phrases and expressions are repeated very often in the course of a verbal exchange between two or more characters, as observed in act 3 scene 3 for instance:

SAMMY LENNON. where have ya been – I was just about to phone the police

betty – what happened

BETTY LENNON. nothing happened

SAMMY LENNON. a thought something had happened to ya

BETTY LENNON. i bought some clothes that's all – a dress – a bought a new dress

SAMMY LENNON. why didn't ya phone me – ya could've phoned me betty

BETTY LENNON (*takes dress from bag*). do ya like the dress

SAMMY LENNON. it's lovely

BETTY LENNON. do ya like the dress – it took me a long time to pick this dress – do ya like it – look at it

SAMMY LENNON. yes a like the dress

BETTY LENNON. it'll suit me won't it – it's the type a thing I look well in

SAMMY LENNON. you should've phoned.^{xiii}

Repetitions endow the play with a rhythmic aspect, music being an important feature of Brecht's drama as well as McCafferty's.

In addition, the play is thematically fragmented due to the numerous themes it presents, including death, illness, maternity, and adultery. Act 1 presents many centres, many characters and many themes. Each scene in the first act enfolds independently and presents various perspectives notably when the characters are all in the shop or in the pub. This myriad of subjects echoes what Brecht called 'montage'. There are many centres of action within a scene; they are juxtaposed and are meant to give a meaning in the end. To give an example, pieces of information about the story of Dave and Theresa's dead son are scattered throughout the text. They are juxtaposed with other private stories, yet, once their unity is found, meaning arises. This juxtaposition and decentring techniques were advised by Brecht particularly to break the illusory effect of reality.

Didactic Fragmentation in *Scenes from the Big Picture*

The characters present in the play also carry a fragmentary energy. There are twenty-one characters, all acting a major role. Most of them are a part of a binary system; most of the time there are couples. Yet, in the cast section, some couples are presented together, whereas others are not. This immediately implies some division among them. This division is then mirrored by their difficulty to communicate, or even by their rejection to communicate, as one of them, Shanks O'Neill, explains: 'the don't speak – the sons don't speak'.^{xiv} This lack of spoken communication reflecting division reaches its climax when Maeve Hynes decides to break up with her husband Joe Hynes. Yet, more than fragmentation among the characters, a deeper problem arises – fragmentation within themselves. There is a kind of inner fragmentation caused by various unlucky life experiences, such as the inability to bear a child, the incapacity to protect one's business, the denial of a son's death. McCafferty's characters seem to be incomplete, as one of them Paul Foggarty, explains his brother Harry that he knew a man whose 'brother only had one hand'.^{xv} In *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, John Willett analyses the German playwright's objective as follows: 'the fragmentary, episodic style of acting [. . .] was meant to show a man, not as a consistent whole but as a contradictory, ever-changing character whose unity comes despite or rather by means of interruptions and jumps'.^{xvi} Brecht thought that the man created by the capitalist society was a devastated individual, internally torn and was convinced that the role of art was to start from man in that state.^{xvii} **So**, this incompleteness of the body, which emphasises its fragmentary quality seem to ultimately call for the need for reunification in Brechtian terms. If the fragmentation within the play eventually echoes the fragmentation within Northern Ireland, the people, their viewpoints, the themes tackled are all gathered at the same place,

at the same time. Therefore there is continuity beyond fragmentation. The play is based on a tension between fragmentation and continuity. This tension is epitomised by the relationship between Bobbie and his son Bop, who bear practically the same name. The son wants to get the same job as his father in the abattoir, but the latter objects to it. Therefore, Bobbie wants to resist continuity while Bop vindicates it. This tension gives the play a dialectical dynamism that enables it to become didactic in Neo-Brechtian terms.

A dialectical play to enhance its didactic scope

McCafferty has one of the main places of the play, the shop, shattered into pieces become one of the main places where all the other characters, being perfect strangers to each other, meet. Since the places in the play cannot possibly convey continuity, the latter must be found elsewhere. The first element is sound, as established by the playwright before the play begins. He writes: ‘There is a constant hum of the city in the air’.^{xviii} This sound evokes the noise of the helicopters flying over Belfast during the period of the Troubles and becomes the thread with which the text has been sewn, when its needle is one of the characters, as insignificant as he may seem, Frank Coin. The latter in fact shows up from time to time in the shop, on the street, in the pub. No one notices him, no other character addresses him and he is always on his own. Yet from his recurring, even rhythmic appearance, a sense of unity emerges. The audience is first introduced to him in act 1 scene 5. He immediately encodes solitude but wholeness unlike the other characters. Frank Coin thus becomes the Neo-Brechtian embodiment of the

role of art, stuck in a dialectical conflict which is the only tool for the playwright to seize reality and be able to change it, contradiction, according to Brecht, is indeed necessary if the artist wants to change the world.^{xix}

Several contradictions effectively pervade McCafferty's play. They first centre on the characters who must build up their individuality against a chaotic social environment. For Dort, in *Lectures de Brecht*, the tension between the social collective 'I' and the individual 'I' constitutes the contradiction within a character.^{xx} These contradictions then pertain to the themes in which love is opposed to hatred, life to death, peace to verbal and physical violence for instance. They are linked to the will of the author to blend imagination and reality (McCafferty warns us that 'the play takes place [. . .] in an imagined area in Belfast'),^{xxi} outside and inside, reflecting outside what is inside (the characters keep on admiring the lovely day but regret it is the time of a funeral)^{xxii} and matching the general and the particular, the community and the individual and confronting them.

Contradictions also lean on the style of the artist who opposes prose to poetry when he has his characters talk about trivial themes in a poetical manner such as in the following dialogue between Maeve and Joe Hynes where the repetition of the pronoun 'it' creates rhythm:

MAEVE HYNES. you stickin to it

JOE HYNES. that's what we agreed isn't it

MAEVE HYNES. you'll better be off for it

JOE HYNES. increase the sperm count^{xxiii}

This is also Neo-Brechtian since it takes up Brecht's advocating musicality through language and songs, endowing his text with a poetical and musical quality.

McCafferty's minimalist grammatical style reflecting the dialect of Belfast and devoid of punctuation markers at least in the dialogues (the stage directions are written along the conventional rules of grammar and typography) also illustrates some tension in so far as it echoes the desire to resist set rules. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Northern Irish conflict and the peace process in as much as the people keep on fighting for their rights against the governments and the politicians who cannot satisfy every one. The absence of signs putting an end to the line of a character underlines continuity. Yet the use of dashes as the only signs of punctuation is particularly telling in the economy of the play in as much as they visually fragment the play and interrupt the flow of speech of the characters very frequently. At the same time, they can also visually put the stress on the link between the words and further mean some kind of possible reconciliation within the characters and between themselves like in the following passage:

PAUL FOGGARTY. She wasn't yer girl – wasn't she goin out with yer man
brennan – brother only had one hand – the only reason my da assumed it was
me was because ya told him it was me.^{xxiv}

Bernard Dort explains that Brechtian realism represented as being fragmentary springs from the intertwinement of daily life and History bound in a dialectical relation-

ship.^{xxv} For Brecht, he adds, parables and fables are at the heart of this dialectical relationship. Similarly, McCafferty intertwines private stories and the public History of Northern Ireland, not only metaphorically, but also overtly. Through the story of two brothers, Harry and Paul Foggarty, who had been separated for a long time before being reunited on their father's death, McCafferty evokes the story of Northern Ireland biblically. If Harry and Paul embody both religious communities in Northern Ireland fighting for their privileges or lack of privileges, they also stand for biblical Cain and Abel, two men fighting over a territory. After their reconciliation they go back to the place where they grew up and where their father left their inheritance. If they clearly voice the fact that they do not want to 'divide up' the house – and by this the audience is led to understand that Northern Ireland is referred to – the allotment of the place is where a roar breaks up again between them over a gun they discover.^{xxvi} Likewise, when Maggie Lyttle imagines dating Bop Torbett in act 1 scene 1, she respectively compares the two of them to a fish (because she swims well) and a meat boy (for the reasons explained beforehand). More than setting another dialectical dialogue opposing fish and meat, this metaphor reminds us of the episode of the multiplication of fish in the New Testament.^{xxvii} These metaphors also covertly refer to the assumption that the conflict in Northern Ireland derives from religious disputes.

These biblical parables were meant to teach Christians religious lessons. Similarly, in *Scenes from the big Picture*, the audience is taught historic lessons on the world and Northern Ireland. In its opening scene, Maggie Lyttle suggests Bop, who will not go to the lake with her for lack of knowing how to swim, that she will teach him.^{xxviii} In his plays, McCafferty takes it for granted that children need to be educated since they are

naïve and innocent. This idea leads us to consider the didactic dimension within this particular play, all the more so as knowing, physically but also mentally, is also discussed. Effectively, the progressive disclosure of information throughout the piece enables the audience to become aware of what the characters know, the reasons for their misery. If we take the example of the story of Theresa and Dave Black, the public, for lack of knowledge, cannot imagine what Dave refers to when he tells Theresa: ‘you know what’.^{xxix} Yet, as the play unfolds, the audience gets to know more about their situation: they lost a son.^{xxx} The same applies for many of the other couples. McCafferty plays on who knows what, and the public is even assigned the role of confidant. Sammy Lennon, the shop keeper, asks one of his clients, Robbie Mullin, to take his wife to the hospital for fear of taxi drivers. Yet, Sammy does not know that Robbie is a drug dealer, but the audience has been acquainted to him beforehand and knows about his fishy activities. This situation is highly ironical, notably when Sammy explains he fears taxi drivers because he ‘read somewhere that it’s them that delivers the drugs all over the city’.^{xxxi}

If the stage is also devoid of any setting representing the situation overtly, some signs must suggest History like any Brechtian play. But these signs are not the ones Brecht put forward, they are different, they have changed. That is Neo-Brechtian too. Out of all those signs which add to the words of the characters, the visual situational movements, something has to be learnt. Out of the dialectical situation of the play springs some kind of teaching on Man, on History. In fact, if the play is fragmented, its message is not. This play, like any didactic Brechtian play, is only fragmented in its internal structure, not in the final message it delivers.

Didactic Fragmentation in *Scenes from the Big Picture*

In his translation of Brecht's *On Theatre*, John Willett reminds us that with Brecht, 'the stage began to be instructive. Oil, inflation, war, social struggles, the family, religion, wheat, the meat market, all became subjects for theatrical representation'.^{xxxii} There was a link between didacticism and the economic situation. The same approach applies to McCafferty's play. There is an economic dimension stemming from the political crisis – that of unemployment in Northern Ireland, of the difficulty of the working-class to make ends meet. The audience must be taught about that. If the external means to show artificiality are not the same as Brecht chose 60 years before (let us remember that films, choruses and projections were parts of the anti-illusory devices recommended by the German artist), McCafferty approaches the subject too in a didactic manner, with a more recent external prop. He shows the artificiality of theatre through the use of a telephone. Before the play starts, the playwright writes that 'whenever phone conversations are taking place the person making the call walks into the scene of the person receiving the call. The characters should speak directly to each other even though they are on the phone'.^{xxxiii} Characters phone one another to deliver information. Therefore, these phone conversations and the way they are put on stage enhance artificiality. The telephone becomes a social prop and phoning a social *gestus*. It creates a link between people and enables them to communicate at a distance when face-to-face communication is disrupted. This fulfils Brecht's dream on the fact that his theatre was meant to establish new aesthetic forms of communication^{xxxiv} and convey anti-illusory effects. The phone conversations are also submitted to fragmentation, not only because they interrupt the flow of dialogues in terms of aesthetics and they require from the actors new kinesics performance but also because they are at times juxtaposed. This reinforces the

Brechtian technique of montage previously dealt with. As a matter of fact, there are sometimes two parallel phone conversations on stage. For example, in act 3 scene 6, Joe Hynes is on the phone with his mistress Helen when Maeve, his wife, calls him. He ends up caught in a tricky situation and, on the stage, he stands in between the two women who love him.

McCafferty's play then sheds light to Brecht's idea that a play can be built in pieces. Bernard Dort asserts that Brecht breaks up with the inevitable enfolding of classic drama where one scene leads to another, with this irresistible progression of this theatre relying on psychology or the demand for a culminating moment, a climax, where catharsis might be reached.^{xxxv} For, indeed, if the spectator is called to participate in the action in Brechtian drama, it is at the detriment of experiencing catharsis. The objective of Brechtian drama is not catharsis but intervention and pedagogy. *Scenes from the Big Picture* could not possibly be qualified to be didactic in fact if the spectator was not asked to take part in the action and if the actors were not aware of their playing a role.

Spectators and Actors or 'spect-actors' and 'act-spectors'?

Bernard Dort recalls an anecdote concerning the putting on stage of Brecht's *He who says No, He who says Yes*. He had pupils watch the play and comment upon it. He took the remarks so seriously that he decided to rewrite the whole play at the light of what they had said. The intervention of these pupils in the creative process of Brecht bespeaks the importance of the mediation of the spectator and the audience in Brecht's dramaturgy^{xxxvi}.

Didactic Fragmentation in *Scenes from the Big Picture*

In a book entitled *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, John Willett reminds us of the fact that in Brechtian didactic plays based on fragmentary elements, ‘it was up to the spectator himself to see that [the pieces] hung together’.^{xxxvii} Similarly, in *Scenes from the Big Picture*, the spectator is asked to participate actively in the action in collecting the pieces of information scattered over the play to get the totality of the ‘big picture’. The gestures of the characters and the deictics written by the playwright are part of the numerous scenes to create meaning. In Brecht’s plays, there was meaning behind the succession of the scenes, but it was up to the spectator to define it, Brecht never voiced it, there was no key-scene in which the meaning was expressed. This is why Bernard Dort explains that Brecht favoured the form of the trial in his plays. It enabled him to have numerous interpretations and various meanings coexist on the same stage. Many of his didactic plays – the *Lehrstücke* – are thus trials in which many versions of a same event are opposed and where the spectators is held as a judge.^{xxxviii} In this respect, the spectator may also become a judge in many episodes in McCafferty’s play: sometimes the characters seem to address him directly rather than another character on the stage, sometimes they fight in front of him and he must take sides. This is the case when Robbie and Connie are attacked in their flat. If Robbie proved to be violent against Connie before act three scene 5, he is assaulted by two gunmen who let Connie go but shoot him because he owes them money. Yet, Connie leaves the flat with her handbag where the money is hidden. This episode is meant to raise a judgement on the audience’s part and might be seen by some spectators as shedding light to some justice being done to the victims.

As a matter of fact, the central questions in Brechtian and Neo-Brechtian didactic plays partake of social and economic problems. This aesthetic alienation, choosing fragmentation, montage, decentring and juxtaposition instead of linearity, is designated to denounce the socio-political alienation. One of the questions arising from epic drama had to do with the origins of the issues, if they were psychological, social or economic. McCafferty broaches the three subjects. Creating people who must survive in the social environment they were given, facing economic problems, he particularly focuses on their difficulty in being psychologically healthy. Act 2, scene 14 presents the audience with a character lost on a street; there is no dialogue, only a few lines for stage directions; this visual scene must trigger some questions in the audience's mind particularly the notion that Man is not at the centre anymore, there is an interaction between Man and the environment: he creates the environment but he is also created by him. This is an idea Brecht also developed in his didactic plays: through his plays, Brecht wanted to show that History was no fatality but the product of an endless exchange between the world and Man. If the environment can put pressure on Man, He can also change it. That is what McCafferty induces through the character of Joe Hynes in charge of a team at the abattoir. As the play unfolds, the audience is meant to understand the social problem underpinning Joe's worries. The declining economic situation in Northern Ireland has led the abattoir's managers to reduce the costs, and Joe has to bear with short term contracts for the team. He is torn between following the managers' order or rebelling against it. He realises this as the following episode puts forward:

THERESA BLACK. go down an give the cheques out

Didactic Fragmentation in *Scenes from the Big Picture*

JOE HYNES. know what i'm thinking – know what would happen if i didn't
weigh in on monday morning

THERESA BLACK. what

JOE HYNES. fuck all – that's what would happen – i'm takin the wee lad's
cheque

THERESA BLACK. aye.^{xxxix}

Through the use of the modal auxiliary 'would' in this occasion, and others along the play (for example, we 'could'),^{xi} the audience is led to understand the power of Man in changing the world. Joe finally resigns himself to obeying the managers but he could also have decided to thwart the order and another situation might have emerged. The role of Neo-Brechtian drama is precisely to throw some light to the power of man on the world. The spectators must realise that, retrospectively, the situation could have been different. This power can change the course of history. Through this dramatic device, the spectators are enabled to decipher their own historic situation and might act on it to modify it or better to improve it. In her book, *Bertolt Brecht*, Francine Maier-Schaeffer asserts that teaching does not go without learning indeed. She clarifies it when she says that the spectator is not a mere consumer for Brecht.^{xli} His didactic plays are militant and are also instructive for those who play in them. Indeed, they fill the gap between the actors and the spectators in the theatre, between actors and spectators in life, between theatre and life, between philosophy and politics. This raises the question of the awareness of the actor. For Maier-Schaeffer, all actors are also learners in Brechtian drama.^{xlii} An actor must then put himself at a distance of his own role, not identify with the cha-

acter(s) he embodies. He must make it clear that he stands in-between the spectator and the text. He is seen as a character and not a real person and must also watch his performance. In doing this, he prevents the audience from identifying with the character(s), and enables them to make a judgement. That is what the actor playing the role of Frank Coin must bear in mind when he is on the stage. Effectively, McCafferty's character is obviously at a distance of the other characters in the play. The actor who plays his role must make it clear that his role is precisely to be at some distance of the situations and the problems. Frank Coin is the teacher in a way because he orientates the behaviour of the audience, he also acts as a kind of chorus^{xliii} in Brechtian terms. He punctuates the play to enhance fragmentation but also to enable the audience to stand at a distance. Frank Coin is an 'act-spectator'. His final appearance at the very last scene of the third act, teaches us that the situation has not come to an end. The cycle goes on and on as was previously shown through Joe and Maeve's break up and Betty Lennon's smashing the shop down again. If for some the end of the play is also the end of their quest – Theresa and Dave's dead son's body is found – for most of them the story is not finished. Indeed, no answer is given by McCafferty, the play is let open to interpretations, and Man is left to this destiny that he may eventually want to change.

Scenes from the Big Picture is Neo-Brechtian in its fragmentary didactic approach of the Northern Irish question. It leans on a tension between continuity and discontinuity that is meant to trigger the audience's discovering the impact of the Troubles on the inhabitants and questioning their *raison d'être*. The people and the environment are deeply fragmented. Yet there seems to be no reconciliation possible out of fragmentation in McCafferty's play unless his characters all become aware of their power on the

world. If they cannot all take some distance from their situation, they will remain stuck in conditions of living that will not change. If they cannot take into account their power, the audience may. The theatre for McCafferty is the place where we, actors and spectators, adults and children, learn. It is more than the tool leading to awareness, it is the place where we all strive to get some meaning. Yet, drama remains an art which is meant to arouse pleasure both for Brecht and McCafferty. Distanciation is the aesthetic means that allows the didactic dimension to merge with the artistic pleasure. Yet, if Brecht was not in favour of an emotional drama, McCafferty lets some moments of deep emotions; this is another idea he does not share with the German dramatist.

Notes and References

- i Virginie Privas-Bréauté, “Ex-centric Acts of Resistance in neo-Brechtian Didactic Drama: Owen McCafferty’s *Mojo Mickybo* (1998)”, *Studi irlandesi*, Special issue: “Ex-centric Ireland”, n°3, 2013, pp.207-220.
- ii Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002) 31.
- iii Wolfgang Jeske & Gunter Berg, *Bertolt Brecht, L’Homme et son œuvre*, (Paris: éditions L’Arche,,1999)., 107. ‘Dès 1926, Brecht proclame l’idée d’une œuvre scénique comme construction d’éléments narratifs, texte, musique et tableau, qui sont indépendants les uns des autres mais agissent les uns sur les autres, se complètent, ou se perturbent sciemment grâce à la mise en scène, empêchant dans tous les cas une action fluide, homogène et donc un effet d’illusion sur le spectateur.’
- iv Owen McCafferty, *Scenes from the big Picture* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2003) 7.
- v McCafferty 9.
- vi McCafferty 9.

- vii McCafferty 56.
- viii McCafferty 88.
- ix McCafferty 12.
- x Bernard Dort, *Lectures de Brecht* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960) 200. ‘Une pièce de théâtre est faite de fragments de la réalité, de situations brutes révélées à partir de gestes, d’objets simples. Seulement Brecht ne se laisse jamais aller à donner une signification symbolique à ces fragments. Il les situe dans le monde. Il dévoile leur rapport avec l’ensemble de la vie. Il introduit entre ces fragments et le monde, une tension, une contradiction’.
- xi McCafferty 37.
- xii McCafferty 56.
- xiii McCafferty 94. Our emphasis.
- xiv McCafferty 27.
- xv McCafferty 99.
- xvi John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1967) 173.
- xvii Dort, *Lectures de Brecht* 43.
- xviii McCafferty 7.
- xix Dort, *Lectures de Brecht* 46.
- xx Bernard Dort, ‘Le Réalisme épique de Brecht’, *Réalisme et Poésie au Théâtre, Conférences du Théâtre des Nations (1957-1959), Entretiens d’Arras (1958)* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1959) 294. ‘La tension entre le moi collectif (social) et le moi individuel, fait la contradiction au sein d’un personnage (archétype).’
- xxi McCafferty 7.
- xxii McCafferty 32.
- xxiii McCafferty 15.
- xxiv McCafferty 99.

- xxv Dort, *Le Réalisme épique de Brecht*, 200. ‘Voici donc la vie quotidienne et la fresque historique unies l’une à l’autre dans un rapport dialectique. Tel est le premier élément du réalisme brechtien.’
- xxvi McCafferty 99.
- xxvii John 6: 1-15.
- xxviii McCafferty 11.
- xxix McCafferty 13.
- xxx McCafferty 41.
- xxxi McCafferty 58.
- xxxii Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. And trans John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 71.
- xxxiii McCafferty 7.
- xxxiv Jeske, 116.
- xxxv Dort, *Le Réalisme épique de Brecht* 201.
- xxxvi Dort, *Le Réalisme épique de Brecht*, 206.
- xxxvii Willett 173.
- xxxviii Dort, *Le Réalisme épique de Brecht* 202.
- xxxix McCafferty 93-94.
- xl McCafferty 118.
- xli Francine Maier-Schaeffer, *Bertolt Brecht* (Paris: Belin, 2003) 111.
- xlii Francine Maier-Schaeffer, “‘Le Méchant Baal, L’asocial’ et la Poétique Des Genres Chez Brecht: Fragement, Pièce Didactique, Théâtre Épique’, *Revue de littérature comparée* 2.9 (2004) 11.
- xliii Werner Hecht, 99. ‘Le chœur détermine le comportement du spectateur. Le chœur c’est l’enseignant.’