

“You’re only putting it on”: Dressing up, Identity and Subversion in Northern Irish Drama

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Colloquially within Northern Ireland, “to put on” has a variety of meanings: “to dress yourself; to fake or pretend to something” (Todd 132); and, more widely, to stage a performance. All of these meanings are at play in the use of costume in a number of postcolonial plays.¹ This paper seeks to investigate how costume has been used in pursuit of a variety of postcolonial concerns in contemporary Northern Irish dramas.² In drawing attention to this use of costume, I want to evaluate how theoretical propositions about the use of costume in performance might be operative in practice.³ To do this, I will look first at the ways in which costume signifies within Northern Irish society more generally and then at examples of strategies in the use of costume from the Northern Irish dramatic repertoire.

Founded under the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 which divided Ireland into two states, the political circumstances of Northern Ireland derive from its colonial history. While the most recent period of violent conflict in response to that history has come to a close with the endorsement of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement in 1998 through referenda in the two states of Ireland; the calling of cease-fires by a number of paramilitary groups; and the subsequent formation of a coalition devolved government, this does not mean that Northern Ireland

¹ I am using costume to encompass clothing and personal props and accessories, together with the range of motifs and symbols with which they might be adorned.

² I am using the term Northern Irish inclusively, referring to works about Northern Ireland as well as works by writers from Northern Ireland which been staged in Northern Ireland or elsewhere. This inclusive use is to draw attention to the ways in which conceptions of identity within Northern Ireland are conditioned by a range of discourses within and outside the political borders of the Northern Irish state. For a more complete discussion of this see Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*.

³ It is somewhat contradictory that in examining this performative element, I will, nonetheless, refer to works which have been published as texts in order to offer as wide an access as possible to readers outside Northern Ireland. I should note, however, that my discussion draws on my own experience as a director or performer in a number of the plays; as a reviewer; or, as a spectator taking notes with a view to locating the performances within academic discourses.

has therefore shirked off that colonial legacy.⁴ Both the Belfast Agreement and subsequent negotiations have institutionalised precisely the divisions between specific identity blocs (Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican) which they sought to overcome and which are the most visible expression of an ongoing colonial relationship between British and Irish identities, “encouraging the reification or objectification of cultural identity” (Finlay 6). Thus, any consideration of how political identity is displayed in Northern Ireland is an engagement with colonialism which may also have wider application to other contexts.

In many societies, clothing has an important role in demonstrating publicly who you are: an insignification on the body of the wearer. Davis argues that “what [clothing] communicates has mostly to do with the self, chiefly our social identity as this is framed by cultural values bearing on gender, sexuality, social status, age, etc”(191). According to Barnard, “The things people wear give shape and colour to social distinctions and inequalities, thereby legitimating and naturalising these social distinctions and inequalities”(7). Further, clothing functions both to distinguish individuals and to affirm membership of social groups, since, as Roach and Eicher suggest, “adornment, or rejection of adornment, may serve as a means for symbolically tying a community together. Agreement on bodily adornment reinforces common consciousness and a common course of action that holds people together in a closely knit group” (18). Barnard extends this to argue that, “It is the social interacting, by means of the clothing, that constitutes the individual as a member of the group, rather than vice-versa” (11). Thus, the decision to don a particular social costume can become a powerful expression of group membership.

Within colonised and post-colonial societies, the history of the relationship between group membership and dress has been determined by interplays between colonial codes of dress and indigenous traditions in ways which continue to reverberate. U.R. von Ehrenfels suggests that the enforced acculturation of native populations under the pressure of imperialism has given way to “aggression by imitation” through which Western style garments are seen as markers of wealth and status amongst former colonies. By contrast, Deborah Durham’s account of dress in Southern Africa indicates something of the complexity involved in the negotiation between indigenous local costume and Western modes of dress. She argues that this involves not only perceptions about relationships of power and status but has also allowed the particular Herero group to “configure their traditions as dynamic and interactive, evolving and changing—as invented as the traditions are and committed as they themselves are to an ethnic-national identity” (193). Likewise, the modes of dress for African Americans continue to be a site of contestation and invention as Noliwe Rooks discusses in relation to female hairstyles

⁴ The Northern Ireland Assembly has gone through a number of crises and it was not until 8 May 2007 that the by then two largest parties, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin, were able to reach agreement to enter government together.

and Helen Bradley Griebel in relation to the African-American headwrap. Bradley Griebel's conclusions point to the political functions of the head wrap in particular and costume more generally: "The headwrap serves to memorialize those American ancestors who wore the cloth head covering as a mark of servitude to whites and as an emblem of social and economic privation; but modern black women imbue it with an additional symbol of ethnic identity, as a reclamation of their West African heritage" (225).

The relationship between costume and political identity has been extremely important in Northern Ireland. Organisations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Orange Order, The Apprentice Boys and the Royal Black Institution have adopted colour schemes, insignia and symbolic costumes within their specific ceremonial regalia. When the Provisional and Official IRA split in the early 1970s, Officials became known as "Stickies" since the paper lilies which they wore in commemoration of the Easter 1916 Rising were stuck on, while the Provisionals pinned theirs. In the early 1970s as paramilitary groupings developed and formalised their structures in response to the political crisis, they adopted quasi-military dress, leading the government to ban the wearing of particular items of clothing. This legal manoeuvre was part of a strategy by the state to delegitimize the political claims of such organisations, playing out what Deane has identified as a distinction between its civilising role and the "barbarian" activities of terrorists. This discourse was further articulated in the late 1970s in the treatment of people interned on suspicion of involvement in paramilitary activities or convicted of political offences. From 1972, republican prisoners had been granted Special Category Status allowing them, amongst other rights, to wear their own clothing, instead of the prison-issue dress for convicted criminals. However, when a strategy of criminalisation was adopted by both the British and Irish governments which revoked this special status in 1978, the prisoners refused to wear prison uniforms, wrapping themselves in prison blankets instead. Eventually, this would lead to the Hunger Strikes in 1980-81, of which one of the key demands was the right of prisoners to wear their civilian clothes at all times.

One of the most public means through which communities have been able to articulate their sense of identity has been through sporting clothing, from the county shirts of the Gaelic Athletic Association, to the provincial and national jerseys of the Irish Rugby Football Union.⁵ In these instances, it is the sense of community of locale which is expressed. In the case of soccer clothing, however, any sense of communal identity based on place is complicated. Not only are there large numbers of fans for English Premiership soccer clubs, but certain soccer jerseys are subject to a range of ethno-political over-codings. Since Partition, there have been separate associations governing the sport on either side of the border and

⁵ According to a spokeswoman for O'Neills Irish International Sports Co. Ltd, "the growth in sales of county accessories demonstrates the extent to which the county brand identity is now a significant fashion item" (telephone interview 2 June 2006).

separate 'national' teams.⁶ According to Bairner and Darby, "for unionists themselves the [Northern Ireland] team represents a key identifier of the existence of Northern Ireland as a political entity separate from the rest of the island" (69), with nationalists in Northern Ireland more traditionally identifying with the Republic of Ireland team. More recently, while the political differences between wearing a Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland shirt (for both players and supporters) as an indicator of your position on the border question has become less reliable (Bairner 2001; Hassan 2002), some Ulster Loyalists now wear England shirts in lieu of Northern Ireland jerseys as an expression of a more immutable loyalty to the British Crown. Moreover, the club colours of Glasgow Celtic and Glasgow Rangers football clubs in Scotland have come to stand for specific political and/or sectarian loyalties in Northern Ireland. Frequently, when soccer supporters wearing different jerseys meet, the result has been violent, in every sense a riot of colour (Burdsey and Chappell).

This does not mean that the inscription of such identities is immutable. In 2006 at the funeral of a young Catholic victim of a sectarian attack, Michael McIlveen, the cortege was followed by dozens of teenagers in Celtic and Rangers football jerseys in a show of cross-community unity. This occasion draws attention to the ways in which items of costume can have quite specific and contested connotations which "can be easily changed, extended, or inverted with a change in the wearer and/or situation" (Barnard 30). Such uses of costume as a way of fixing or refuting the relative positions of power for identities within specific discourses can often appear esoteric and impenetrable to many outside Northern Ireland. These uses of costume as a marker of political affiliation suggest that, for an audience able to negotiate the symbols of Northern Irish politics, using costume to explore the construction of identity might have a particularly powerful resonance.

In dramatic performance, of course, costume can have a number of functions within the metonymic structures of representation whereby the wearer's place within the dramatic world is articulated materially:

[It] occupies a complex position in the theatre's semiotics systems: while it acts as clothing for the actors and a means of setting the mood and/or period of the play, it also functions as a loaded and problematic signifier ... A deliberately politicised approach to costume recognises that its apparent neutrality in fact conceals a rhetorical power, both as a semiotic code and in its close relationship to the body. (Gilbert and Tompkins 224)

Theorists and practitioners concerned with gender representation and post-colonial theatrical practice have often drawn attention to this rhetorical power to change, extend or invert the connotations of costume in the construction and representation of identity. Elaine Aston suggests that

⁶ A situation further complicated by the position of Derry City who play in the Republic's League of Ireland, and the establishment of an all-Ireland cup competition, the Setanta Cup, in 2004.

gender may be alienated in performance through “playing with the vestimentary codes of gendered costume in relation to the body” (94). There is a presumption here then that the spectator engages with costume in a way that can either confirm or disrupt the dominant discourses by which his/her experiences are organised. Much of the discussion of costume within such criticism has been focused on non-illusionist modes of performance; nonetheless, it has been undertaken primarily in terms of what the performance of costume is taken to stand in for. These theories about the perlocutionary force of costume centre on the possibilities of historicisation which it provokes: “in its conventional iconicity, theatre laminates body to character, but the body in historicization stands visibly and palpably separate from the ‘role’ of the actor as well as the role of the character; it is always insufficient and open” (Diamond 89). Thus, it is suggested, by separating out role, character and actor (what is done, from what is imagined, from who does it), it is possible to see the ways in which meanings are configured in social structures and how they might be reconfigured alternatively through different rhetorical choices of representation.

These theoretical positions seem to accord with the ways in which costume has been used in a range of Northern Irish plays to resist or respond to specific colonial power formations. In Brian Friel’s *The Freedom of the City*, staged at the Abbey in 1973, three characters from the Nationalist community find themselves within the Mayor’s Parlour of the Guildhall in Derry, a symbol of the Unionist domination against which they have been protesting.⁷ Two of the characters, Lily and Skinner, decide to put on the mayoral robes and play act a scene in which Skinner bestows on Lily the “freedom of the city.” As he hands around the robes, Skinner declares, “Don the robes, ladies and gentlemen, and taste real power” (136). As Lily and Skinner act out their fantasy, however, they unsettle the third character, Michael, and his sense of who they are and why they are here: “But this, this fooling around, this swaggering about as if you owned the place, this isn’t my idea of dignified, peaceful protest” (138). They seem to be demonstrating Gilbert and Tompkins’s point that “the destabilising force of costume is even more obvious when the colonised subject wears the costume of the coloniser, particularly when the former dresses ‘up’ or chooses a garment that exceeds his/her assigned status within the colonial hierarchy” (244-5).

This destabilising force of costume is explored also in McGuinness’s *Carthaginians* (1988).⁸ Through an identification between Derry and Carthage as an ‘anticolonial metaphor’ (Butler Cullingford), the play uses costume in two distinctive ways. Firstly, through the presence of Dido, a

⁷ Hereafter, date references in parentheses following the titles of plays are to the first productions; page references in parentheses are to the published scripts included in the list of works cited.

⁸ It had earlier been rejected by Field Day who had originally commissioned it (Richards 142-3). It premiered in the Peacock Theatre, Dublin.

gay cross-dressing man, the performance stages a rebuke to gendered notions of Irish identity propagated both within nationalist (Dowler) and colonial discourses (Walter). Secondly, through the play-within-the play, *The Burning BalACLava*, the colonising mediation of the conflict in film and literature is parodied with the stereotypical roles represented through emblematic costuming. In Christina Reid's *The Belle of Belfast City* (Lyric Belfast, 1989) characters costume themselves from a large dressing-up box onstage to recreate the memories as daughters of the seventy-year-old Dolly for Belle, her eighteen-year-old black granddaughter. Set in the midst of a campaign against the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the characters not only play their younger selves, but switch to other roles within these flashback scenes, demonstrating the plasticity of their identities. Thus, amongst a range of devices, the play uses this dressing up to refute the narratives of ethno-religious and racist essentialism being propagated by Jack, a loyalist politician, and Tom Bailey, a representative of the far right British National Front. In the original Lyric production, the casting of Richard Howard in four different roles, each distinguished by a specific costume, further reinforced this sense of the ways in which identity might be something to be played, rather than a fixed characteristic.

More recently, in response to the unfolding processes towards a negotiated peace, two plays have used costume specifically to explore relationships between identity and power. On 8 August 1994 Marie Jones's *A Night in November* was opened by DubbelJoint Productions in The Rock Theatre as part of the West Belfast Festival, directed by Pam Brighton, with a design by Robert Ballagh. Its run coincided with the announcement of a first cease-fire by the Provisional IRA.⁹ In February 2002, Simon Magill directed Tim Loane's *Caught Red-Handed* for Tinderbox in the former Northern Bank Building in Belfast, with set design by David Craig and costume by Lisa Lavery. The production opened at a point at which the political institutions which had been established under the Belfast Agreement of 1998 were stumbling towards suspension in a series of ongoing disputes.¹⁰

Jones's one-man play follows the conversion of Kenneth McCallister from the uninterrogated anti-Catholic bigotry which he exercises as part of his role as a minor civil servant, to a realisation that he can accept an

⁹ That original production toured widely, including a transfer to The Tricycle Theatre, London, and to the Douglas Fairbanks Theater in New York. It won the Theatrical Management Association's award for Best Touring Production in 1995. The play was revived by Tim Byron Owen with Marty Maguire as McCallister at the Celtic Arts Theater and Falcon Theatre, Los Angeles, in 2001. This production subsequently toured to the Tricycle Theatre, London; the Edinburgh Fringe, 2002, and at the Gaiety Theatre and Liberty Hall in Dublin in 2003. It was remounted for an American tour starting in November 2004. The production was staged again, at the Tricycle and the Irish Arts Centre, New York, in 2006. Dan Gordon reprised the role for the Lyric in Belfast in 2002 and on tour to the Perth Festival, 2003. Patrick Kielty is taking the role on in a production directed by Ian McElhinney in Belfast's Grand Opera House in August 2007.

¹⁰ It was remounted for a three-week tour around Belfast and a week's run in Dublin in September and October 2002.

inclusive identity which acknowledges his duality as both Protestant and Irish. This conversion is motivated by his experience of watching a soccer game in Belfast between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland where he is appalled by the naked sectarianism of the home Northern Ireland fans, particularly as they taunt the visitors with chants about a recent sectarian shooting in which seven innocent people were gunned down by loyalists in a bar. He is filled with self-loathing and distaste for the community of which he had hitherto been a part. His rejection of it is completed when he jets off to watch the Republic play in the World Cup finals in New York as a fulfilment of his conversion. The crucial moment occurs when McCallister, played in the original production by Dan Gordon, arrives in Dublin airport to join the throng of Republic supporters, all bedecked in green, white and gold. He feels alienated from the group as he is dressed in a shirt, tie and blazer until a stranger gives him a green, white and orange t-shirt with a tri-colour on it. Although the stage directions in the published script indicate that this takes place onstage, in the 2002 Lyric production, Gordon suspended the narration to perform it offstage, returning in the t-shirt and a pair of shorts but retaining his black socks and shoes. Visually, it represents unambiguously the transformation of McCallister's identity from Protestant Ulsterman to Protestant Irishman.

Problematically, of course, the assumption of this new identity is never tested back in Northern Ireland since the play ends on the streets of New York. McCallister's pilgrimage in search of an Irish identity takes him not to Ireland but America, relieving him of the responsibility to live it out when he returns home. Moreover, Robin Greer's comments for the *Belfast Newsletter* have been echoed in reviews of each of the subsequent productions of the play: "The script gave a very partial view. Protestants are generally dismissed in a clichéd way as a blinkered (aspirant) middle-class clique. There is an impression that hatred and intolerance is only by 'ugly blood-thirsty barbarians' of the Protestant community. The gable walls of the Whiterock are a reminder that the reality is not so" (13).¹¹

Dan Gordon also played a central role in *Caught Red-Handed* in which he took on three separate roles. The play focuses on a point in the near future (2005) where the people of Northern Ireland are faced with a referendum proposing the reunification of Ireland. It resembles a Dario Fo farce where flawed political logic is exposed in a process of *reductio ad absurdum*. Opposition to the referendum proposal is led by "The Leader" of the Alternative Unionist Party and although he is not named, in Dan Gordon's playing of the role the Reverend Ian Paisley "is mimicked with

¹¹ Samples of reviews of London performances can be found in *Theatre Record* 26 February -11 March (1995): 263-4; *Theatre Record* 30 July-12 August (2002):1064; *Theatre Record* 2-15 July (2002): 921-924; and *Theatre Record* 29 January-11 February (2003): 129.

deadly accuracy in the hectoring, harrumphing figure” (Cavendish 238).¹² When he collapses, dead after a rousing speech, however, the inner circle of his party are faced with the disintegration of their campaign. The first example of the production’s running gag about identity is introduced at this point, with Gordon now cast in the role of a steward with a striking resemblance to The Leader. In this role, he in turn points them to his brother, again played by Gordon, as a more fitting doppelganger who they decide to substitute for The Leader for their own interests. This double, Pat MacStiofain, however, is both a country bumpkin and a Catholic and has to be transformed to replicate The Leader. The physical makeover is indicated by the stage directions:

Pat is washed, shaved, brushed, measured and made over by the other men; mute and deftly choreographed.

FX: Lighting change as the music finishes with a bang to reveal:

SCENE 4

Pat stands proudly in the chamber in his suit, crisp and clean cut – a carbon copy of the Leader. The others freeze in amazement and adoration – a tableau of Christ with disciples at his feet. (30)

Its theatrical realisation became a performative high point, choreographed against the soundtrack of Stiff Little Finger’s punk rock anthem “Alternative Ulster”. Pat’s ideological transformation, of which this costume change is emblematic, is completed as he is coached by the inner circle in the rhetoric of Unionist intransigence. This he masters with such aplomb that when he delivers a torrent of anti-Catholic abuse on live television he brings loyalist violence back onto the streets and puts the country on the brink of catastrophe. Thus, it is established that appearance can stand in for reality and that identity can be altered to suit whatever purpose is required. The fact that in both examples, specifically Protestant /Unionist identity can be discarded or simulated through a change of clothing is of course problematic. This is emphasised by Jennifer Cornell’s point that such a (re) construction approach “seeks to remove the causes of conflict by suggesting that some cultures are less essential than others, and therefore may be modified or erased without ill effect” (211).¹³

There is an assumption here then that the fundamentally playful nature of such performances can open up modes of representation which refuse the fixing of identity within narrow bounds, potentially resisting both the demands of colonising narratives and ethno-political imperatives. Such playfulness is achieved or emphasised in the use of costume as a means of dislocating and re-figuring the identity of the character; dressing up becomes a process of self-fashioning. As Susannah Clapp’s London

¹² Dr Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, has been one of the fiercest critics of the Belfast Agreement and most resolute opponents of any moves towards reunification of Ireland.

¹³ For a more developed discussion of this point see Maguire, *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland*, 137-157.

review of Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* notes, such a theatrical device shows "people in the process of making themselves up" (online). Theatre it seems has the potential to reveal identity as a social construct not a "primordial inheritance" (Finlay 21).

In the transformation of McCallister in *A Night in November* and of Pat McStiofain in *Caught Red Handed*, the capacity to put on identity by changing costume is contained diegetically within the dramatic world. The audience witnesses the transformation of identity, while remaining keenly aware of the simultaneous presence of the character as known previously and the new role which the character plays by donning new clothes. Indeed, there is a requirement that the spectator retains an awareness of the underlying identity of the character for the juxtaposition upon which the dramatic conceit of dressing up relies. There is, thus, a reaffirmation of the persistence of the identity of the dramatic persona of the character. Character is reaffirmed as the principal mode of figuration upon which any sense of temporary shift in identity is predicated.

The issue becomes more complicated, of course, when it is the actor who takes on multiple roles which are visually signified by changes in costume. Forms of drama involving multiple role play have become particularly prevalent in Irish theatre since the 1980s, with the advent of storytelling forms of representation in which narration and non naturalistic physical representation combined to break with the conventions of theatrical realism.¹⁴ In performance, such plays rely on the virtuosity of the actors to achieve the physical realisation of the dramatis personae in quick succession. This is the case with Gordon playing the three roles of The Leader, the steward and Pat in *Caught Red Handed*. Moreover, even in *A Night in November*, the playing of multiple roles by the single performer exceeds the diegetic demands of McCallister's narration. Here the identity of the actor is no longer subordinated to that of the character but remains a key element of spectatorial experience and, arguably, pleasure. As McCallister, Dan Gordon's original performance was commended as "powerful and convincing" (Clarke B6), displaying "maximum versatility" (Gore-Langton 263); while Marty Maguire's performance was praised as "funny, sympathetic, deeply felt and vastly versatile" (Spencer 922) and "a tour de force" (Logan 923). Critics lauded Gordon's performance too in *Caught Red Handed*, with Cavendish proclaiming it as "wonderful, exhausting" (238) and Fricker declaring it "electric".

While such theatrical identity changes through costume are integral to the performances of both plays, there is, nonetheless, a difficulty in suggesting that they have the consequential effect of disrupting the sense

¹⁴ Arguably, the form emerged initially in the work of Charabanc Theatre Company as discussed in Foley and reached its most popular expression in Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* (1996), with a revised version being mounted at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast in 1999 and transferring to The Tricycle Theatre, Kilburn, and from there to London's West End in 2000 and Broadway a year later.

that spectators have of themselves, not leastly because not all spectators have the same identity or strategies when reading the stage. There is a variety of other reasons too which contribute to the ways in which such costume changes can be accepted readily as intrinsic to this mode of performance but not to the construction of social identity. Audiences may therefore regard costume changing as rhetorical conventions of the genre of performance rather than a signal of a fundamental instability or plasticity of identity. They are the means by which the performance is constituted not an imperative to review one's own sense of self.

This is particularly encouraged by three aspects. The first is the necessity of repeating such conventions to establish and maintain them within the performance as a key indicator of who is who and how the convention itself is to be taken. The second relates to the repetition of such conventions from performance to performance, leading to a sense of stylistic orthodoxy. As Kruger comments:

even those innovations whose initial purpose may have been to critique the social as well as theatrical status quo can become essentially a profitable trademark. We can see this in the practice, ubiquitous in British theatre with radical claims, of disrupting the naturalist imitation of life and indiscriminately calling these 'Brechtian'. Techniques such as *gestic* acting, direct address, songs or abrupt scene changes do not in themselves guarantee critical effect; on the contrary, they have become so much part of the repertoire of advertising, let alone theatre, that they no longer offer a critique of convention. (53)

Thus, the process of one actor playing multiple roles through changes in costume can be seen less as a challenge to essentialist notions of identity than the reinforcement of a theatrical convention which has no effect beyond the theatre. Notably, for example, Gordon has become so identified with precisely this ability to play different roles that it has almost become a theatrical trademark which, while very entertaining, is no longer challenging. Thus, in Marie Jones's *A Very Weird Manor* at the Lyric in June 2005 he took on three roles; while in Tim Loane's follow-up to *Caught Red-Handed, To Be Sure* at the Lyric in March 2007, he took on four roles.

A third aspect is the way in which the achievement of such costume changes demonstrates an ineffaceable persona of the performer which remains constant throughout the performance, despite the many apparent changes of identity. This derives in part from the excessive presence of the actor in this mode of performance. This sense of excess points to the ways in which the physical presence of the actor supersedes the requirements and limitations of the role where the illusion of character is overwhelmed by the sense of the actor. Even in a play like *A Night in November* when the actor is in role throughout, recounting the narrative from within that role, any sense of character is disrupted by the physicality of the actor. By the time Dan Gordon or Marty Maguire has removed his suit in Act Two, the audience is keenly aware that his physical condition as an actor is

asynchronous with both the chronology of the overall narrative and the situation of utterance from which it is being recounted.

It might be argued, moreover, that the recognition of the ineffaceable persona of the performer is also the foundation of the audience's pleasure in the performance; an engagement with the materiality of what it is, as well as or instead of what it is about. In order to enjoy the skill of the performer the audience has to separate out the work of the actor from the role of the character, something encouraged by the frontal acting and direct address of the performance to the audience. Occasionally too, the complicity under-pinning the performance is ostended when the actor shares a knowingness with the audience, as perhaps a wry smile or self-deprecating look. The pleasure of the audience is located in the presence and power of the performer in creating the performance. Here, I draw on Bauman's anthropological discussion of verbal art as performance in which he argues that:

It is part of the essence of performance that it offers to the participants a special enhancement of experience, bringing with it a heightened intensity of communicative interaction which binds the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance as a mode of communication. Through his performance, the performer elicits the participative attention and energy of his audience, and to the extent that they value his performance, they will allow themselves to be caught up in it. When this happens, the performer gains a measure of prestige and control over the audience - prestige because of the demonstrated competence he had displayed, control because the determination of the flow and interaction is in his hands. (305)

The key idea here is that the audience is bound to the performer, rather than the character, and this performer is allowed a license to challenge or go beyond the audience's social boundaries. This seems to be borne out by Sarah Hemming's review of Gordon's performance as McCallister in 1995. "Simplistic? Yes. Sentimental? Yes. Loaded? Yes. The play wields clichés about the lovable Irish like there is no tomorrow and the extended football metaphor drags Jones into a bog of sentiment. But you forgive her all this because of the play's hopefulness, because of its ironic humour . . . and because of Dan Gordon's solo performance" (264).

These characteristics which affirm the ineffaceability of the performer's persona suggest then that contrary to any suggestion that changes in costume might undermine stable and fixed senses of identity, they in fact contribute to a sense of the persistence of identity within the performer. This persistence of the performer's performance persona is connected, of course, to the narrative drive of both plays since each argues that it is possible to take control of and /or remake one's own identity. This assumes a subjectivity and agency that can supersede changes in context and environment on behalf of the characters, and is incorporated within the performance of the actor. Such a capacity for self-authoring claims legitimacy and authenticity which colonial discourses deny. However, it relies on a stable sense of individual identity which can then be articulated as authentic over and above any sense of collective

belonging. This is not unproblematic. According to Finlay, “Eriksonian theory provides the rationale for the notion of mutual respect and parity of esteem that lie at the heart of the peace process and liberal multiculturalism more generally: to be secure, individual identity needs to be grounded in a strong cultural identity, and if the cultural identity is not recognised in the broader society, the individual’s sense of self-worth or esteem will be damaged” (20-1). Individual agency seems therefore to be circumscribed by the security of the collective: life does not imitate art.

The assumption then that dressing up can be a subversive strategy in relation to fixed notions of identity encounters difficulties when tested against the experience of these plays in performance. These difficulties centre on the possibility that costume change can be regarded as a rhetorical convention which the audience needs to understand to follow the performance, not re-construct its identity. Spectators can frame off such a rhetorical convention as pertaining only to the specifically theatrical mode of communication not their own social identity. So it is then that a spectator watching such a performance of either play might regard the actor as: staging a performance; dressing himself in something; creating a fiction to amuse; faking or pretending; or “only putting it on”.

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