



Ex-centric Didactic Drama: Owen McCafferty's Mojo Mickybo

Virginie Privas-Bréauté

► To cite this version:

Virginie Privas-Bréauté. Ex-centric Didactic Drama: Owen McCafferty's Mojo Mickybo. Studi Irlandesi , 2013. hal-03843932

HAL Id: hal-03843932

<https://hal.science/hal-03843932>

Submitted on 8 Nov 2022

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.

Ex-centric Didactic Drama: Owen McCafferty's *Mojo Mickybo*

Virginie Privas-Bréauté
Université Jean Moulin - Lyon 3
virginie.privas@univ-lyon3.fr

Abstract

Protestant Mojo remembers his teens in 1970 Belfast when he made friends with Catholic Mickybo. Yet their friendship was brought to an end after the murder of Mickybo's father by UDA men, which shows that sectarianism does not spare children. This play borrows many techniques from Brechtian epic drama that the playwright transposes to a new context. In the written version of the play, this neo-Brechtian use of dramatic devices is also conveyed through the absence of some typographical elements which particularly stands out in the dialogues. McCafferty obviously rejects the typographical norm that should be abided by when writing. We consider this overt ex-centricity on McCafferty's part as an aesthetic act of resistance to denounce the Troubles, violence and its cycle of repetition. The playwright aims to use neo-Brechtian techniques so as to underline the post-colonial dimension of his play and the need to get away from sectarianism. In this respect, the play becomes didactic.

key words: didacticism, neo-Brechtian drama, Northern Ireland, sectarianism, typography

Virginie Privas-Bréauté has been teaching English through drama at the Lyon 3 University (France) since 2006. After a PhD on the religious dimension of the Northern Irish conflict as explored in the drama of Stewart Parker and Anne Devlin, she has explored the use of Brechtian devices to reshape the contours of drama in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

In this Northern Irish play, Mojo remembers his early teens in Belfast, in the summer of 1970, a time when he crossed the divide and made friends with Catholic 10 year-old Mickybo. Even if the two kids spent long days playing together, their friendship was brought to an end after the murder of Mickybo's father by UDA men. Mojo's story highlights the cycle of violence and sectarianism in Northern Ireland affecting both adults and children, even though the latter should be spared.

In addition to the narrative technique, this play borrows a lot of devices from Brechtian epic drama. Yet, McCafferty transposes them to a new context: 1970s Belfast. In the written version of the play, this neo-Brechtian use of dramatic devices is also conveyed through the absence of typographical elements which particularly stands out in the dialogues. Typography shall be closely analyzed since William Worthen explains in *The Print of Modern Drama* that it defines the literary quality of a play text:

[...] the materials and design of the book (size, binding, covers, paper, typeface) and even the "accidentals" of the printed page (spacing, punctuation, capitalization, orthography) – matter once taken as external to the authorial work's perdurable identity – don't merely mark the work's material passage through history: they are the condition of the work's meaning in literature. (Worthen 2005, 11).

Yet, McCafferty rejects some elements of these institutionalized norms which Worthen calls "the drama's 'accessories'" (Worthen 2005, 29) and which should be abided by when writing.

Typographical rules are elaborated so as to help any reader understand a text immediately. This typographical code combines two elements: firstly, all the signs that make up the text (including the letters and the

spaces between and around them); secondly, the writing rules, the aspect of the signs assembled in words, sentences, paragraphs. Punctuation naturally belongs to this typographical code: it is part of the language structure in so far as it introduces the articulations, the breaks, the breaths, within a text. With typography, the text is given a voice and the message delivered can be harder-hitting, fiercer, or softer. The tone of this meta-language is further given by the font. The choice of Belfast playwright Owen McCafferty not to stick to all the rules of this particular code in *Mojo Mickybo* shows his desire to resist what is imposed to him: bad typography resists good typography. This also means that through his style, McCafferty subtly aims at showing his resistance to sectarianism in Northern Ireland. Our focus will thus be on the absence of some typographical rules, which mainly have to do with punctuation and capitalization, and their meanings in the context of "performative writing" (Worthen 2005, 14). This, added to other devices borrowed from Brechtian theory, takes a neo-Brechtian dimension and reinforces the idea that *Mojo Mickybo* exemplifies Brecht's epic drama. The playwright's overt ex-centricity is an aesthetic act of resistance to denounce the Troubles, violence and its cycle of repetition. McCafferty uses neo-Brechtian techniques so as to point out the post-colonial dimension of his play and the need to get away from sectarianism.

In this article, we shall study the neo-Brechtian redefinition of Northern Irish drama through McCafferty's ex-centricity in *Mojo Mickybo*'s text and performance. This study sheds light to the reasons why the missing typographical elements add to the realistic representation of the Troubles on stage and illustrate Brecht's epic theory. The play's neo-Brechtian quality, conveyed through fragmentation, juxtaposition, alienation and historicisation in particular, indeed strengthens its post-colonial message. This present analysis will demonstrate that examining both the performance and the play text from a neo-Brechtian perspective allows for their complementary nature, the neo-Brechtian apparatus being possibly used to explore both a script and a performance. Henceforth, McCafferty's goal is not only overtly aesthetic; it is also covertly political and didactic.

1. *Fragmenting the world*

Brecht's theory about epic drama was based on the idea that the world was fragmented. Reality should be represented as such in drama; as if it were possible to "take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces which remain fully capable of life." (Brecht, 1964: 70). In McCafferty's play, fragmentation, which is found in the contents since it deals with topics such as the religious divide and the Troubles inextricably linked to that religious divide, is also exemplified by the form.

On the first pages preceding the play text, McCafferty warns the readers that *Mojo Mickybo* is a "play for two actors" who "should divide the characters" (8). Both actors should be in their late thirties/ early forties, but they also play the roles of ten year-olds and elderly persons. The actor embodying Mojo is also the narrator, and thus narrates the story as he lived through it. Brecht's theory put forward the idea that Man should be presented as fragmented. The German playwright noted that "the continuity of the ego is a myth. A man is an atom that perpetually breaks up and forms anew." (Brecht 1964, 15). Similarly, post-colonial theories consider the body of the actor as a site for "resistant inscription" since it "disrupts the constrained space and signification left to it by the colonizers" (Gilbert and Tompkins 2006, 204). Deciding that one actor will play the role of many characters including a narrator, McCafferty demonstrates the possible sites of resistance and shows the fragmentation within a character, the "multiple entities that constitute a social subject" (Gilbert and Tompkins 2006, 232). Hence the combination of these devices hindering the unitary view that one could have on a character.

Besides, the narrative technique chosen by the playwright to tackle the subject of childhood during the Troubles is also one of the devices creating fragmentation within the play. At its very beginning, the two characters, Mojo and Mickybo represented in their teens, open the play. Their dialogue is immediately followed by the comment of the narrator, who is in fact Mojo once he is an adult:

MOJO. mojo
MICKYBO. mickybo
MOJO. mickybo mojo
MICKYBO. mojo mickybo
Mickybo is heading a football against the wall.

NARRATOR. belfast – the summer of 1970 – the heat's meltin the tarmac on the street the buses are burnin bright an punters are drinkin petrol outta milk bottles – this is where mojo an mickybo used to play (9).

The narrator's comments on the past of both children, his numerous flashbacks and flash forwards give time a fragmented aspect.

Similarly, space is submitted to fragmentation. The place of the narrator (which could be anywhere in Belfast) and the space of his story (the streets of east Belfast) are not the same, and the places within the story of the narrator, back in the 1970s, also differ. Sometimes readers are warned in the stage directions of their changes, but most of the time they are not told anything and it is up to the actors and their performance on the stage to show them when the play is staged.

If the fragmented contents of this piece is meant to echo the fragmented situation of Belfast during the Troubles, then it is also conveyed through its structure. The dialogues are often interrupted by either the intervention of the narrator or songs that can be sung by all the characters, including the narrator, like on this occasion:

NARRATOR. mojo galloped back up the road thinkin mickybo was a geg (*Sings.*) rain drops keep fallin on my head – because i'm free nothin worrin me [...] (20).

As a matter of fact, songs were part of a series of tools advocated by Brecht in epic drama. In *Mojo Mickybo*, they are always referred to as sections which are sung. We know when they start, which is written in the stage directions. Yet nothing is said about their ending as we can see in this excerpt when Mojo remembers Mickybo's mother:

MICKYBO'S MA. would you like to hear my plan son – i was sittin on top of a mountain of dishes the other night listening to elvis on the radio and thinking of the time when the man that i love header and all that he is used to take me dancing – (*Sings.*) oh how we danced on the night we were wed we danced and we danced cause the room had no bed – there was this strange noise come out of the radio it sounded like the king had eaten something very large that didn't agree with him and was choking on his own own boke – then a voice said we come in peace earth people if you lose your head you lose your money – things may be getting a bit hairy but we're here to save you all especially wee mickybo [...] (31).

In Brechtian theory, "songs", in addition to being an aesthetic innovation which fragments the play, are meant to criticize the external contemporary world. So when Mickybo's mother mentions the words "peace", "money" and uses the verb "save", we cannot but understand the poor economic situation of the Catholics (and Protestants alike) beset by violence at that period of the Troubles.

Since the "*mise-en-page* [is also] a site of performance" (Worthen 2005, 11), any playwright should aim at getting the contents and the form to coincide. In *Mojo Mickybo*, fragmentation equally pervades the form visually. The reader of the play cannot but be struck by the numerous dashes which do not give the text a flowing, homogeneous aspect like in the following lines:

MICKYBO. Everybody knows rip the balls – he puts black boot polish in his hair an doesn't wear no socks – an my da says he pisses in the sink cause he couldn't be fucked to go out to the yard – nobody's ever saw im but me – I saw im buryin dead rats over the timbers – wanna dig with the stick? (12).

These dashes are here meant to reflect the unstable situation of Northern Ireland as experienced by the two communities all the more so as each clause separated by a dash puts to the fore the idea that there is not only one perspective, there are several viewpoints. In the case of the above example – and this is a recurring device – we get the standpoint of Mickybo, his father, and eventually the narrator since he filters the whole stories retrospectively. For Brecht, reality did not have any centre of action but many, independent the ones of the others, yet they made up a unity in the end. Throughout this play, this idea is highlighted with these numerous markers, separating the sentences and playing their roles of inserting precisions within a sentence as well as contrasting values, opposing opinions.

The dashes, replacing all other signs of punctuation, give the text a fragmented aspect and break the dramatic illusion of reality as first put forward by Brecht. Not only are they meant to reproduce reality on the stage but they also entice the audience to realize that this reality is precisely performed. This is here an attempt on the author's part to redefine Northern Irish drama about the Troubles. Having the play performed for five years in a row (from 1998 to 2003) by the Northern Irish theatre company Kabosh, renowned for pushing the limits of performance in an innovative visual and physical way, enhances this experimental quality. Fragmentation is indeed part of a broader project which Brecht longed for. Throughout his work the German playwright wanted to "show things as they are" (Brecht 1964, 15) but not in a mimetic way. He introduced distance so that spectators had a better and impartial vision of reality. This is also what McCafferty requires from his audiences.

2. *Taking some distance*

To create distance, Brecht used the techniques of juxtaposition and montage in his plays, so does McCafferty. The juxtaposition of sentences is particularly relevant in the dialogues of *Mojo Mickybo* where parataxis is omnipresent. There is no precise outlining of syntactic patterns, particularly in embedded free indirect speech. This is the case in the quote mentioned above by Mickybo's mother when she was reported to have said: "then a voice said we come in peace earth people if you lose your head you lose your money" (31). The juxtaposition of the grammatical subjects and more particularly of the pronouns "we" and "you" hampers the fluidity of the sentence, which arouses the attention of the public.

McCafferty also juxtaposes different layers of reality. We first know the narrator's situation (1998 Belfast) then that of the children (1970 Belfast). Within this particular reality, we get the viewpoints of different people all embodied by the two actors on stage. These worlds are different from that of the spectators (no matter the time, no matter the place of the performance) and that of the readers (since reading it could occur at any time in any place).

Juxtaposition is also present in the structure of the play since the public is never warned of the changes of time and place. Speech switches from the children and the various characters to the narrator and it is up to the performers to indicate it through their performance:

MICKYBO. you shit yourself

MOJO. you do

MICKYBO. you do

MOJO. kack the breesks

MICKYBO. shit the trunks

NARRATOR. mojo mickybo – thick as two small thieves– the greatest lads god ever pumped breath into – the day they met was the hottest ever in the whole christendom [...] the world draggin itself along like it was out of breath – a belter

MOJO. many ya done now mickybo?

MICKYBO. three hundred an twenty-four – twenty-five – twenty-six... (10).

The climax of this juxtaposition of space and time emerges when Mojo narrator asks a question to which Mickybo as a child answers:

NARRATOR (*sings*). don't ever hit your granny with a shovel, it leaves a dull impression on her mind – what happens mickybo when ya hit your granny with a shovel?

MICKYBO. her eyes pop out an her face goes like that (*Grimace*.) (17)

This example, linking the time and space of the narrator (1998) to those of the children (1970), proportionally sheds light on the violent environment that surrounds the children. Yet, this conversation is not real and could never have happened since the public is told that Mojo and Mickybo did not see each other anymore in the 1990s:

NARRATOR. love many trust few and learn to paddle your own canoe – years later i was walking through the town

– this town – belfast – a town with memories – i saw mickybo across the street – mojo mickybo
 MICKYBO. mickybo mojo
 NARRATOR. we both pretended we didn't know each other and walked on – mojo mickybo (49).

This device on McCafferty's part further breaks the illusion of realism and affects both the actor and the spectator as the analysis of the articulation of the play text and the performance confirms.

Worthen writes that "attending to the material form of plays in print may also provide a means to 'alienate' and so to observe, other aspects of our understanding of dramatic performance, the interplay between the text and the naturalized strategies of its production onstage." (Worthen 2005, 61-62). One of the processes creating distancing is alienation, a key-notion of Brechtian theory according to Elin Diamond. In an article entitled "Brechtian theory/ Feminist theory", she explains that "the cornerstone of Brecht's theory is the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the technique of defamiliarizing a word, an idea, a gesture so as to enable the spectator to see or hear it afresh." (Diamond 1988, 84). Thanks to Brechtian distancing, the spectator and the reader become aware of the nature of this relation, of this alienation, this alienating environment and "allow [them] to criticize [it] constructively from a social point of view" (Brecht 1964, 125). In fact, with this piece, McCafferty offers the public a new perspective on the Troubles through the friendship of two working-class children, whose relationship is solidified by a movie, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. This film, which they keep on going and watching, puts the stress on their desire but impossibility to escape their environment. It enables them to get away from the real world, but only for a short time, as the narrator observes:

NARRATOR. half time – back to the real world – decisions have to be made – important decisions that would give a book a headache – who's who and what's what (17).

Readers do not know if the movie can be broadcast on the stage; yet, if it is possible in some performances, then this montage creates even more distance and alienation.

The A-effect in the performance does not only concern the distance set up between the spectators and the play; it is also found in the relationship between the actors and their own roles. From the beginning, we are told that the two actors embody all the characters, be they adults or children. For practical reasons, the actor incarnating Mojo plays the role of Mickybo's parents, and that embodying Mickybo plays the roles of Mojo's parents. Therefore the actors cannot possibly identify with their characters since it would be difficult to share the viewpoints of Protestants and Catholics at the same time. This distance the performers must dramatize is also echoed by the numerous dashes that fragment the play. They materialize the possible slip-pages from one performer to one character, from one character to another performer and thus participate to creating a neo-Brechtian A-effect.

The A-effect is thus further found in the written version of a play and specifically suggested by typography. If Worthen observes that "the materiality of the poem on the page alienates language from its typical, commodified usage" (Worthen 2005, 135), it is first the absence of capitals in *Mojo Mickybo* that catches the reader's attention. In *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Randolph Quirk *et al.* remind us of the use of capitals as follows: "in addition to marking the beginning of a sentence, initial capitals are used for specifying proper nouns for example, persons, places, works of literature, days of the week, months of the year [...]" (Quirk *et al.* 1985, 1638). Yet, in the dialogues, McCafferty omits the capital letters on the names of people. Readers can immediately detect it when the two main characters introduce each other at the very beginning of the play:

MOJO. mojo
 MICKYBO. mickybo
 MOJO. mickybo mojo
 MICKYBO. mojo mickybo (9).

Right from the start the narrator aims to consider the two boys as one entity and juxtaposes their Christian names. Likewise, geographical names, such as "belfast" (9) or "australia" (12), do not have any capital letters. They are all treated as if they were common names. Furthermore, there is no capital letter on the religious denominations "catholic" and "protestant" when there should be. Through this absence of capitalization, the

author seems to disclose his desire to forget the notion of hierarchy, the difference between the two religious communities that faced each other in the 1970s in Northern Ireland. On the contrary, he seems to be lauding equality. From a Brechtian perspective, these missing capital letters give the text a strange aspect. It is as if the text was alienated along the Brechtian definition of alienation, as “allow[ing] us to recognize [a] subject, but at the same time mak[ing] it unfamiliar.” (Brecht quoted in Diamond 1988, 84). In fact, readers are not used to reading a text completely devoid of capital letters.

McCafferty confides that one of his objectives was to have all his characters speak in a “heightened Belfast dialect” so as to “try to create a new Belfast theatrical speech”(<http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article.aspx?art_id=1894>) but he had to set aside a lot of linguistic rules to reach his aim. His choice is an act of resistance to specific imposed and institutionalized codes like grammar, punctuation, syntax. That is why, McCafferty’s public can read and hear sentences such as “that’s borin – yer da’s borin mojo – mon we’ll go over the timbers an burn wood” (30) which convey a realistic impression of spoken vernacular. According to Gilbert and Tompkins, “post-colonial stages are particularly resonant spaces from which to articulate linguistic resistant to imperialism” (Gilbert and Tompkins 2006, 166). Therefore, the dialect spoken by the two children acts as a political medium with a meaning in itself. It is strengthened by the lack of punctuation to orient the performance. Worthen calls this style the “performative print style” and gives the example of George Bernard Shaw:

A play’s language does not only live in the mind’s eye, it also lives in the ear and on the tongue. Shaw’s consistently rhetorical use of punctuation – using punctuation to mark the rhythms of speech rather than the logic of syntax – and his celebrated use of dialect might well be read as traces of the stage, or as places where Shaw uses the accessories of the page actually to direct the performance. The tension between rhetorical and syntactic pointing is one of the places where the text’s representation of the dramatic fiction joins its implication of performance, its way of specifying action on stage. (Worthen 2005, 56).

On the one hand, for Worthen, “language writing alienates language because it is an alternative language system” (Worthen 2005, 126). On the other hand, Brecht saw language as possibly “alienated by translation into the actor’s native dialect” (Brecht 1964, 139). Confronted to this, the audience become estranged, unfamiliar to McCafferty’s alienated rhetoricity; their comprehension of the text is sometimes inhibited and they might even be misled. To give a precise example, “wecker” (13), which sounds like the comparative form of the adjective “wick”, meaning “mean” in Northern Irish slang, expresses the exact opposite in the mouth of the two boys. The words of the narrator are thus both alienating and alienated.

The author effectively empowers his narrator. The latter relates all the stories of the two boys and twelve other people without ever quoting them with inverted commas in the written text. This device appears to be close to the epic process of historicisation, another technique to create distance. Indeed, historicisation in Brechtian drama was used so that the playwright might point out to the spectators the place of Man in History, how He transforms the world, how He determines History and how History may determine Him. In this play, the narrator is in charge of articulating public History and private stories, time, place and space to the detriment of the protagonists. This is the reason why there is no capital on the subject pronoun “i” whenever a character speaks, as illustrated in the following quote:

MICKYBO. wanna know what i heard?

MOJO. wha?

MICKYBO. the whole a belfast is goin mad an we’re all gonna get murdered in our beds. (30).

In post-colonial theories, histories compete and confront one another and enhance the permeability of space, time and content. The narrator crystallizes all these elements, which creates distancing in so far as the audience becomes confronted to two or three tenses and places: their own (past, present, future) and that of History, or, as it were, the history of Northern Ireland in the 1970s. When a text is historicised, it is naturally distanced in so far as it shows the various possibilities, which is the case in *Mojo Mickybo* with the backward glance of Mojo narrator, thirty years after the episodes he is narrating took place.

This study lays emphasis on "the semantic value of the accessories of print" (Worthen 2005, 58) since both the text and the performance participate to the good understanding of the message of the author: the post-colonial redefinition of Northern Irish drama thanks to neo-Brechtian devices. However, it is up to the audience to decipher the clues left throughout the play text by McCafferty and meant to be staged. That is why *Mojo Mickybo* can be seen as a neo-Brechtian *Lehrstück*, or didactic play.

3. Teaching audiences

Brecht wanted his theatre to "increase its ability to amuse, and [...] to raise its value as education" (Brecht 1964, 130). These two values, entertaining and instructing, were meant to encourage "the spectator to draw conclusions about how the world works" (Brecht 1964, 150). Like Brecht, McCafferty specifically makes use of dialectics and a direct address to the public to entertain and instruct his audiences.

The German playwright saw in dialectics a means to bring out the truth about social realism. He recommended to confront ideas in an artistic way to lead to debates that should point out the power of Man. McCafferty, proposing a text alienated, a man (or a child in this case) dominated, changed and divided because of his environment, calls upon his audience's capacity to reflect upon freedom. He starts from his own, giving himself the liberty not to comply with some rules of typography, grammar and syntax in the dialogues, for, effectively, the stage directions, expressing his voice, are not concerned by the absence of any linguistic rule. They indicate that the playwright is still in charge, that he can always control the world he is creating and that he is delivering a message. Through his style, the playwright puts forward the idea of an ideology of freedom in possible reaction against a given political economic and social system. The neo-Brechtian epic style, which *Mojo Mickybo* illustrates, relies on the double movement of alienation and freedom, of giving up and choosing, of accepting and refusing, which are also encoded in the text through the use of dashes. If the latter reflect fragmentation, they might also give an impression of continuity, of connection between the various characters. Quirk *et al.* call them "correlative punctuation marks" (Quirk *et al.* 1985, 1629). They echo McCafferty's goal to build a bridge between the two boys and their environment despite the external tensions; tensions that are also encoded in the text by the author. Worthen effectively writes that "modern drama in print typically frames a dialectical tension between the proprieties of the page and the identities of drama" (Worthen 2005, 62). In McCafferty's piece, tensions can be found between the page and the stage, notably as far as punctuation is concerned: the question arises so as to represent the dashes on the stage. If the actors might embody the tensions, and so enable them to emerge, the audiences are encouraged to find some appeasement and, most importantly, uncover the coherence of all the stories filtered by the narrator.

For Gilbert and Tompkins, histories in post-colonial drama "compete with each other to form a complex dialectic which is always subject to change as new players enter the fields of representation" (Gilbert and Tompkins 2006, 110). They particularly shed light on the tensions arising from their evolution between past and present and their differences between public and private receptions. Hence the power of the audience. In her book, *Bertolt Brecht*, Francine Maier-Schaeffer notes that the epic form of drama gives us the formal means likely to re-centre observable facts which are not natural phenomena and can eventually be changed by Man. Brecht's conception of Man and of the world was philosophical; for him, Man had to be changing. He noted that "changes in his exterior continually lead to an inner reshuffling" (Brecht 1964, 15). So the world had to be completed and the role of drama was to show this possible transformation. The dialectical method was the a tool that Brecht could think about when it came to grabbing reality so as to change it thereafter. McCafferty shares the German playwright's opinion. He sheds light on the changing nature of a child, in this case, Mickybo, who first went beyond the divide and then got closer to children from his "tribe" – Gank and Fuckface, his previous enemies – after his father died. The narrator explains:

NARRATOR. mojo mickybo – great lads – mickybo's in the hut along with gank and fuckface – they're smoking fags an talking the talk of men – it's showtime (48).

Mickybo even accuses Mojo of stealing his bike. Nevertheless, Mickybo could have resisted it. In his play, McCafferty suggests that one's future has alternatives. Indeed, if we adopt a Brechtian perspective, McCafferty here presents the audience with past facts and their outcome, so that, after taking them into account, they may learn that the future could have been different, and that the cycle of endless violence could have been

broken back then. The personal futures of the children could have changed had Mickybo acted differently at his father's death, or even later. As a matter of fact, between then (the time when the children met) and now (the time it is narrated), there have been many changes in Northern Ireland. The peace process had already started. Yet, Mojo has still been considered as an enemy and has been left on his own. The narrator advises him to: "love many trust few and learn to paddle your own canoe" (49). Mickybo's decision could also have influenced the future of their communities if we consider Mojo and Mickybo to be allegorical characters speaking for their respective community. For Brecht, epic drama triggers off the morale of History, but does not speak for History, rather for the victims. In McCafferty's play, both Mojo and Mickybo, representing their communities, can be held as victims of History and place.

Gilbert and Tompkins explain that "post-colonial spatial histories dramatise the dialectic of place and displacement" (Gilbert and Tompkins 2006, 156). In the play under scrutiny here, the movie the two children are keen on watching becomes a parable of their relationship to their environment. The lives of the cow boys appeal to the children as the narrator says:

NARRATOR. butch cassidy an the sundance kid – a fine feelin it must be to be a cowboy – money in yer pocket a horse on yer arse an a gun in yer holster – but times are hard – there's no ham for the sandwiches an torch woman is in the box office paying her dues (16).

Similarly, the countries that attract them most, Bolivia and Australia, represent places where life seems to be better. Francine Maier-Schaeffer explains that parables are at the heart of the dialectical relationship between the general and the particular – which is a basic principle in Brechtian theory. In McCafferty's play, the parable forges a relationship between the Northern Irish communities (the general) and the two boys (the particular).

If the audience is never warned of the shift from one situation to another, from one character to another, from one episode to another, because of the little information they are given and the lack of any institutionalized norm that could orient their thoughts, it is up to them to follow the play with careful attention and bridge all the gaps. This process on McCafferty's part, as well as the intervention of a narrator commenting upon the story of two children years later, echo the abolition of the fourth wall that Brecht advocated and which is another image for getting people closer in a post-colonial context. As a matter of fact, in focusing their attention on what is said by whom, the readers and the spectators are fully implicated in the action and are asked to react. The narrator helps the audience understand their participation. He directly asks them : "know what a mean"(10). For Brecht, the audience must learn by themselves. This is what the German playwright called the play's didactic quality. In a book entitled *Lectures de Brecht*, Bernard Dort specifies the idea that the strongest ideological message is delivered through didactic plays which are indeed the most perfect realizations of epic plays. When didactic plays are performed, the gap between the playwright and its readers, the actors and the spectators of drama, the actors and the spectators of life, between drama, fiction and reality, between philosophy and politics is filled. Positioned against capitalism, Brecht's aim was to prevent drama lovers from being mere consumers. Similarly, McCafferty invites his audience to meditate upon humanity through this play. Readers and spectators must understand and learn some information by themselves, for, it goes without saying that teaching is closely linked to learning.

When the narrator addresses the public directly, he entices them to question themselves. As a matter of fact, the interrogation mark is the other punctuation mark that we come across in *Mojo Mickybo's* dialogues. It is also used by the author to enhance the innocence of the two boys, a virtue to which McCafferty pays careful attention. In a private interview, McCafferty confided that it was crucial for him to see the Troubles through the prism of childhood since there is an articulation between segregation and the innocence of the children. He explains: "The reason the play is seen through the eyes of children is that I wanted to show the absurdity of sectarianism. And I thought the best way to do that was through the innocence of children." Both children are indeed eager to have all their questions answered. Some questions even startle the audience because they have nothing to do with the main action. For instance, when Mojo keeps on asking "are wasps bees ?" (37), the audience is expected to react. And so are the actors. Indeed, Maier-Schaeffer explains that didactic plays are revolutionary plays in so far as they also instruct the performers. The play is thus peppered with numerous questions some of which remain unanswered so that audiences and actors might find their own answers.

The study of the absence of typographical rules, notably punctuation, their impact on syntax and grammar, as well as other devices borrowed from Brechtian theory, invites the readers and spectators of the play to understand the message the author delivers. McCafferty's overt ex-centricity, meant to reshape the play aesthetically, strengthens his covert political message: denouncing the conflict. He stages the impossible friendship of two innocent children who managed to go beyond the divide and keep themselves at a distance of the atrocities of the adults' world, that is to say sectarianism and the Troubles. They were caught up by reality but it could have been different. The playwright's ambition is to put forward the mighty power of Man in changing, transforming the world and being transformed. Therefore, the playwright devises new means to reshape the contours of Northern Irish drama, and his use of neo-Brechtian techniques in a post-colonial fashion sheds light on the possible emancipation of Northern Ireland from Great-Britain in the context of the peace process. If having this play printed allows it to be part of literature since "the power of print [is a way] to secure the literary identity of writing" (Worthen 2005, 26), it also guarantees its access across the world over the years. Yet, modifying the rules of print through punctuation and capitalization is a device McCafferty resorted to so as to show the ultimate power of the artist over History and place.

Works cited

- Brecht Bertolt (1964), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. by John Willett, New York, Hill and Wang.
- CultureNorthernIreland, "Owen McCafferty & Martin Lynch", <http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article.aspx?art_id=1894> (01/2010).
- Diamond Elin (1988), "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory", *TDR: The Drama Review* 32, 1, 82-94.
- Dort Bernard (1958), "Le Réalisme épique de Brecht", in *Réalisme et Poésie au Théâtre*, Paris, éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 195-208.
- Dort Bernard (1960), *Lectures de Brecht*, Paris, éditions du Seuil.
- Gibert Helen & Tompkins Joanne (2006 [1996]), *Post-colonial Drama, Theory, Practice, Politics*, London, Routledge.
- Maier-Schaeffer Francine (2003), *Bertolt Brecht*, Paris, éditions Belin.
- McCafferty Owen (2002), *Mojo Mickybo*, London, Nick Hern Books.
- Nightingale Benedict, "Mojo Mickybo", *The Times*, <<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/stage/theatre/article1868124.ece>> (01/2010).
- Parker Stewart (2008 [1986]), *Dramatis Personae: a John Malone Memorial Lecture*, in Gerald Dawe, Maria Johnston, Clare Wallace (eds), *Dramatis Personae and Other Writings*, Prague, Litteraria Pragensia, 9-27.
- Quirk Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, London, Longman, 1985.
- Shuttleworth Ian, "MOJO-MICKYBO", *Financial Times*, <<http://www.compulink.co.uk/~shutters/reviews/03023.htm>> (01/2010).
- Valentin Jean Marie (dir.) (2000), *Ecrits sur le Théâtre*, Brecht, Paris, éditions Gallimard.
- Willett John (1967 [1959]), *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht. A Study from eight Aspects*, London, Methuen.
- Worthen William B. (2005), *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP.