

Breaking the Rules and Pushing the Boundaries in *Silent* by Pat Kinevane.

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compassion and courage.

## Abstract

In ancient Greece, theatre formed the scaffolding of social interaction and religious rituals for all members of society. The amphitheatre where the performance took place is evidence of its social importance by its geographical size and setting. The rise of private theatre in the seventeenth century led to a separation of performer and observer whereby the stage imposed a physical barrier, and commercial division arose among those attending. The working-class who previously had robustly attended the theatre became marginalised. Unwritten rules began to form for performer and the observer.

This paper looks at the work of Pat Kinevane, actor and playwright whose aim is to challenge these unwritten rules and push the boundaries of established theatre by telling stories with social significance such as homelessness, mental health and suicide. It examines the holistic approach to his work, which gives equal credence to the written word, physical performance and connection with the observer. By breaking the barriers between performer, observer and subject matter, Kinevane's objective is to rekindle the connection of theatre in the community and give a platform for the stories of the marginalised in society.

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## Breaking the Rules and Pushing the Boundaries in *Silent* by Pat Kinevane.

### Introduction: The Making of an Iconoclast

Pat Kinevane actor and playwright was born in the late 1960s, in, Cobh, Co. Cork, Ireland. He is the youngest in a family of six siblings, his brother Alan now deceased. As a sensitive child, he always felt safe and protected by his family. They came from a working-class background, and Kinevane is intensely proud of this heritage. As with many working-class families, life was a struggle, but he never felt bereft or impoverished. “I never felt poor or anything like that; I always felt that this was my natural place” (Kinevane 2019). His family, although creative, were not theatrical, “It would have helped in my self-esteem that I was able to excel in school plays, and I knew it was unusual in my family for someone to be doing that because most of my family were very sports orientated” (Kinevane 2019). When he was five years old, Kinevane attended Rushbrook Primary school. He remembers it as an ideal environment, where the emphasis was on holistic education. The nuns who taught there encouraged drama and music, in particular, he recalls Sr. Annunciata who had “loads of dramatic energy” (Kinevane 2019). From his first Christmas play, Kinevane relished the attraction of creative energy. As a teenager, he participated in a youth theatre group run by Claire Cullinane. In a tribute following her death, she was remembered as “[being] well known for her stance on the side of the people, be it in developing the movement for democracy in Ireland, or in assisting people in need who are under pressure from banks and other financial institutions” (Independent.ie). It may have been here that he first became exposed to social and political thinking, which later emerges in his plays.

On leaving secondary school, Kinevane began his training as a psychiatric nurse. Although he did not complete his training, the profession made an impact on him as he engages with themes such as mental health and suicide in his later writings. The death of his father, Denis, when he was a young man was the motivation for him to leave a safe, secure

and pensionable job in the post office in pursuit of a career in acting. In an interview, he says of this period "... this is the one thing life has taught me so far. It's that I am on the way to dying, so I may as well live like crazy" (Fennell). Following a short stint working with a travelling Theatre Education group, in Cork, he moved to Dublin in 1989.

Thus began his busy, diverse and successful career as an actor. He "...has worked with almost every theatre company in Ireland, including The Gate, Druid, the Gaiety, Fishamble and the Passion Machine" (Culleton 566). He played roles such as Gerry Evans in Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* and Keano in the satirical hit comedy musical *I, Keano*. Likewise, he has a successful career in Film and TV; roles included Pat in *Vicious Circle*, 1999, Norton in *King Arthur* 2004 and *Can't Cope, Won't Cope* in 2016 (Brennan). His last ensemble play was in 2005 when he played Perkins in the premiere of Brian Friel's *The Home Place*.

In 1997 a combination of events led him to write his first play, the first being the tenth anniversary of his father's passing. The second was the impending development of a woods in Cobh, where he played as a teenager. An order of nuns owned the woods, but due to their decreasing numbers it had to be sold for development and "... was to be surrounded by housing estates and shut in by gutters, fitted kitchens and patio madness" (Culleton 473). These circumstances inspired Kinevane to "...verify that this was once a grove of giant soul and heavenly access" (Culleton 473). The desire to preserve the history of the woods which dated back to ancient Ireland where felled trees were once transported to the Phoenicians compelled him to approach Jim Culleton, the artistic director of Fishamble: New Play Company, with the beginnings of an idea for a play.

In an interview, Kinevane explains his compulsion to write the play.

I did it primarily because I was coming up to my 30th birthday. I've had the idea for the plot for a while, and I've always been scribbling, but I never wanted to push it out into the public; it was for myself. I suppose it was also because my father has been dead for 10 years now; a decade had gone by and I just wanted to get something down on paper. It's not so much a homage or dedication but it was certainly an impetus to write it (The Irish Times).

Jim Culleton was a founding member of the Pigsback Theatre Company along with Kathy Downes and Paul Hickey in 1988. On the departure of Downes and Hickey in 1996, Culleton renamed the company Fishamble New Play Company. The focus of Fishamble Theatre Company in Ireland is "... nurturing and developing original new writing talent" (Culleton xiv). As a burgeoning playwright, Kinevane found the perfect foil for his plays with Culleton. Dermot Bolger remarks on Culleton that he is "... a special director with whom both actors and writers would happily wade through the blood of the disembowelled critics to work" (Culleton xiv). There is mutual respect and trust between Kinevane and Culleton as evidenced in their opinions of each other. As an artist, Kinevane says that with Culleton he feels "...protected, nurtured and encouraged" (Kinevane 2019). Culleton is equally appreciative of Kinevane's talent "... Pat's writing and performance is so honest and raw that people everywhere connect with it" (Culleton 2019). The relationship between them has culminated in a collaboration of work spanning over twenty years.

The play *The Nun's Wood* won Kinevane the BBC Northern Ireland Stewart Parker Radio Drama Award. The awards were established to encourage new playwrights in Ireland and were "... in honour of the Belfast playwright, Stewart Parker, who died in 1988" (Meany).

Kinevane remarks on the inspiration of the woods for the play as;

There was always somebody watching. I never knew who but, mostly, it was someone from above. Angels perhaps, or a host of goblin spies, but I knew this watching was a blessing- in this place of wood, stone and loamy carpet. Above all, there existed magic. The shadows were frightening and attractive; the nun-worn pathways were ancient and lush. At six, I felt a pagan attachment to its canopy- more than a human child ought to (Culleton 473).

The play tells the story of four teenagers whose lives are torn apart by a secret held from the previous generation. In the process of writing, Kinevane noticed the similarities between the play and Circe and Odysseus in *The Odyssey*. He decided to continue the theme, thus resulting in untypical names such as Picus and Silvanus for the characters living in Cork: “[t]he mythical structure certainly donates an air of mystery and intrigue to the play and also lends curious names to the characters” (Irish Times 1998). Kinevane stamps his authority as the playwright firmly on the script, with the notation, “[t]he stage directions are vital. Atmosphere is all” (Culleton 380). It is not surprising to note that he counts Tennessee Williams as an influence in his artistic career considering Williams’ penchant for detailed stage directions in his plays.

His second play *The Plains of Enna* which premiered in the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1999, also has its roots in Greek mythology. There is a strong correlation “...between the Persephone/Demeter myth and the lives of the Denis family in the late 1960s rural Ireland” (McDonald et al. 239). Cathy Leeney describes the play as a “...realist theatrical form of a drama of family rivalry over land, and deepens it through complex parallels with Persephone’s story” (McDonald et al. 239). Leeney finds the play problematic as it is “...ambitious in scope and arguably tries to achieve too much” (McDonald et al. 239).

In a review of the play by David Nowlan for *The Irish Times*, he states, “[t]he promise of a new playwright’s first play is seldom fulfilled in his second, and such is the case with the still energetic and thoughtful Pat Kinevane”. He elaborates that “...it is a clumsy text in which, far too often, the characters must wade through lines about what other folk did” (Nowlan). Being Kinevane’s second play and as often occurs with learning new skills, it is not the errors that matter per se but what one learns from them.

It is interesting to note that the character of Julia in *The Plains of Enna* is training to be an opera singer and “breaks the stage action with musical interruptions” (McDonald et al. 239). She is furthermore “... almost throughout behind a scrim cyclorama” (Nowlan). This could be a precursor to Kinevane experimenting with different theatrical forms which he later develops in his solo performances. In an interview with *The Irish Times*, Kinevane says of this period “... ‘I think I wanted to work in a different theatrical mode. I knew there was an awful lot of stuff I wanted to do and express, style-wise and presentation-wise, and I thought, well, f\*\*\* it, this was the time to do’” (Crawley).

*The Nuns Wood* and *The Plains of Enna* have a realistic theatrical form albeit with mythical subtexts in both. During this period Kinevane as a writer and performer aspired to create a new style of theatre telling stories which reverberated with the audience while encompassing physical theatre and song. In an interview I conducted with Kinevane on the 10th May 2019 he states that;

I have great respect for the word actor, all I ever wanted to do when I entered the industry was to respect those who went before me, and I watched a lot of wonderful actors as a young man. I was lucky enough to be able to work with them in The Abbey and The Gate. What I saw in them was humble respect for the profession, for the word ‘actor’. There is a certain amount of service involved that we have to respect the trade of it, the dignity of it and what it says culturally to be an Irish actor.

As he identified as an actor and writer, it was only a matter of time before he began to write plays in which he also performed “if I were to be remembered, it would be as an actor and writer” (Kinevane 2019) to push both disciplines for himself rather than being one or the other. He expands further that, “there are unwritten rules in the theatre and what I was trying to do was rather than abiding by the rules of theatre, I was trying to imagine if there were no rules. Just to push it and see how far they could go” (Kinevane 2019). He endeavoured to experiment with the traditional boundaries between the audience and the performer, where the audience did not communicate directly with the actor. He wanted to extend this relationship and engage with the audience in a personal way without affecting the performance or story. In an email interview I conducted with Jim Culleton on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 2019, he says of this process;

Pat loves to engage directly with the audience, and I think it is one of the most memorable aspects of the productions for audiences and creates a theatrical event that is very different every time the play is performed. It is also part of what keeps the performance by Pat so fresh, even after 12 years of performing *Forgotten*, the first of the solo plays. Reaching out to the audience is really our way to invite the audience to go on a journey in an intimate, visceral way - to bring people on the journey into the world of the characters.

In 2006, Kinevane set about doing precisely that, to experiment with writing a solo play in which he also performed to push the boundaries of performance and interaction with the audience. This play, *Forgotten*, tells the story of four people aged eighty to one hundred living in retirement homes and care facilities in Ireland. The inspiration for the play came when Kinevane visited his aunt Teresa in a nursing home in Cork — struck by people’s very different attitudes to his new-born son Kez, as opposed to the loneliness and abandonment of the elderly. In the preface to *Forgotten*, he remarks on the diversity of the love and affection shown to Kez,

how it contrasted sharply to the neglect of some of the elderly by their families in the nursing homes. It led the playwright to question "...the reality of being no longer thought of, no longer touched, no longer cherished like we are when we first arrive on Earth" (Kinevane 2011). *Forgotten* became the first in the trilogy of plays, followed by *Silent* and *Underneath* all written and performed by Kinevane and directed by Culleton.

This essay explores how Kinevane through his plays, connects with the audience on issues of contemporary importance in a theatrical style which is unique to him. It will examine primarily the play *Silent*, which began as a development showcase at the 2010 Dublin Theatre Festival (Kinevane 2011 2), culminating in winning for Kinevane the Laurence Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an affiliate theatre in 2016. Through its storytelling, it brings taboo subjects such as homelessness, mental health and suicide, into the public domain. It examines the unique way with which the performer connects to and responds to the audience. In his role as artistic director, Jim Culleton describes some of the process involved in extrapolating a script in conjunction with experimenting in performance style:

I think theatre can be provocative, and explore taboo subjects that we are often 'silent' about, so that is the aim really, in our work on Pat's plays for Fishamble. So, in developing the script, Gavin Kostick (Fishamble's Literary Manager) and Pat and I question everything, and interrogate the script, and explore how we can help realise what Pat wants to say in the most truthful and powerful way. My role as director is often to help make choices with Pat between many creative options, to try to drive home the message at the heart of the play (Culleton 2019).

To examine the boundaries and rules Kinevane wishes to break free from, it is necessary to see how they arose in the theatre in the first instance.

## Chapter 1: Disruption of Expectations

In 1968, Peter Brook, the English Theatre and Film director, wrote *The Empty Space*. In this book, Brook states that he can “take any empty space and call it a bare stage”, all it requires is for a person to walk in this space while another observes (7). The combination of performer and observer constitutes theatre. The perception of theatre is of an elaborate machine with many parts, a sophisticated industry with a set of rules and boundaries. As David Wiles comments in *Greek Theatre Performance*, “[w]e know what ‘theatre’ and ‘drama’ are because we derive those words and concepts from the Greeks; armed with that knowledge, we return to the Greeks and analyse their ‘theatre accordingly’” (1). As we shall see, theatre in Greece formed the scaffolding of social interaction and religious rituals for all members of society.

Greek theatre is, as Susan Bennett describes, “the earliest drama” (2). The space in which theatre was performed was known as the amphitheatre. No physical boundaries separated the chorus, musician’s performers and spectators:

Greek theatres were modifications of the landscape rather than impositions, and Greek architects always built their theatres with attention to the view... [t]he audience on slopes of the Athenian Acropolis had a fine view of the hills to the south-east, and a few at the top could also see the sea. Greek plays dealt with the limits of the human ability to control the world. Spectators sat inside the city they had created and looked at the wilderness beyond (Wiles 113).

As Bennett notes the amphitheatre’s geographical setting and size demonstrated the importance of theatre at that time, “[w]ith an estimated 14, 000 people attending the City of Dionysia, theatre audiences represented the majority, rather than the ‘educated’ (and other) minorities of more recent years” (3). She expands by saying that the theatre was “further

substantiated by the economic support it received” (Bennett 3). Greek theatre was “...inseparable from the social, economic and political structures of Athens” (Bennett 2). Theatre was less influential socially and politically during the medieval period and sixteenth century than it had been during the Grecian period. The rise of private theatre in the seventeenth century led to a “move towards [the] separation of fictional stage world and theatre” whereby the stage imposed a physical barrier between performer and observer (Bennett 3). In his introduction to *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, Richard Bevis illustrates how much theatre had changed from Grecian times:

In seventeenth-century theatres, before the first curtain, an actor or actress stepped forth alone as prologue: to anticipate criticism, perhaps to needle the playwright or the audience, certainly to whip up interest and ‘set the stage’ with a series of neatly turned couplets.

From Bevis’s description, it is of note that in addition to the physical separation of stage and spectator, a curtain further reinforces their division. This is in direct contrast to Greek theatre where, “[t]he spectator 100 metres away was part of a single crowd, bonded by a space that created no vertical or horizontal boundaries, and concealed no group from all the rest” (Wiles 112). The segregation of performer and spectator gathered apace in seventeenth-century English drama and became one of the unwritten rules for modern drama. This is one of the rules Kinevane breaks: through his interaction with the audience, Kinevane strives to reconnect the bond which existed between actor and observer.

Seventeenth-century theatre imposed more than a physical separation between performer and observer; a commercial division also arose. Bennett attributes the cultural change of the audience from inclusivity to “more elitist audiences” to the higher admission price of tickets during this period (3). The working-class who previously had robustly attended the theatre became marginalised and the physical change of replacing the pits, where

once they stood, into stalls, further embellished theatre as a medium for the middle and upper classes. The expectation of people going to the theatre from this period on is as Brook remarks of “box office, foyer, tip-up seats, footlights, scene changes, intervals, music” (7). Theatre had morphed from the inclusivity of Grecian theatre to being “...thought of as a middle-class occupation by definition” (Bennett 3). Economic and social class obstacles incorporated the theatre into a middle and upper-class establishment.

It is in this setting that the unwritten rules of theatre began to emerge, where the audience sits in silence in the dark of the auditorium and the performer is on stage, set apart from them. The audience and performer fell into a pattern not only of how they behaved, but the form of entertainment the theatre provided “[r]ed curtains, spotlights, blank verse, laughter, darkness, these are all confusedly superimposed in a messy image covered by one all-purpose word” (Brook 7). That word is ‘theatre’. So accustomed have audiences become to this setting that Brook believes that if they were “...ever really to demand the true entertainment it talks about so often theatre-makers would hardly know where to begin” (8). This is one of the impediments Kinevane intends to address to bring theatre back to the community. His ambition is to tell stories to an audience from all walks of life, allowing them to openly respond to the action on stage, to generate a discussion, by so doing remove the silence of secrecy, stigma and shame which often accompanies issues of social imbalance.

Kinevane follows a rich tradition of theatre in Ireland which reflects the political and social convictions of its citizens. The National Theatre of Ireland was formed on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1904 by Lady Gregory and W.B Yeats (amongst others). The ambition, as Ben Barnes points out in his preface to the *Abbey Theatre, Ireland’s National Theatre the first 100 Years* was that “...through its writers, The Abbey was a potent voice for the emerging Irish nation, and the theatre continues today to chart and articulate the profound changes in Irish society” (Fitz-Simon 7). Barnes continues by saying, that Irish theatre today is influenced by

the playwrights of the past such as Sean O'Casey, Brian Friel, Tom Murphy and John B. Keane. Rhona Trench states that contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr;

enters this theatrical tradition in a culture whose fundamental dramatic definitions are overtly male, but her dramas simultaneously perpetuate and contest dramatic traditions. Carr shares with the older generation, namely John Millington Synge, Seán O'Casey and Samuel Beckett some dramaturgical conventions such as devices of storytelling (8).

Trench expands by stating that Carr “shares with these writers an unrelenting sense of confrontation with issues” (8). It is this pushing of the boundaries in regards to controversial subjects which Kinevane tackles in his plays.

Kinevane holds the playwright John B. Keane in high esteem, saying in interviews that Keane influenced his writing on a subconscious level. Kinevane not only admires Keane's plays but he performed in his *Sharon's Grave* in the Gate Theatre, in 1995. The playwright says of Keane that he addresses issues in Ireland at a time when others were afraid to confront them. Like Keane, Kinevane's intent is through his plays debunk uncomfortable social issues in a theatrical setting. By openly discussing such problems, he hopes to begin a conversation from the audience, which will last long after the performance is over.

Due to the impact Keane's work had on Kinevane, it is important to delve deeper into one of his most famous plays, *Sive*. John B. Keane, a native of Listowel Co Kerry, wrote his first play *Sive* in 1959. The play based in rural Ireland tells the story of a young girl Sive forced into a marriage engagement to a much older farmer. It ends in tragedy when Sive seeing no way out “took her own life” (Keane 93) by throwing herself into the bog. The play shines the spotlight on what rural life was like in 1950's Ireland. It was not the Celtic romanticism version of Ireland spun from the tales of Yeats' *On Baile's Strand* or Lady

Gregory's comedy *Spreading the News*. Instead, it told the story of poverty-stricken Ireland, which “forced desperate characters to take desperate measures” highlighting the shame brought to bear on children who were born out of wedlock (Keane 119). It also underscores the reverence paid to the clergy, doctors and schoolmasters and the indifference to those of lower social standing. The characters of Pats Boccock and Carthalawn, being tinkers, were on the lowest rung of the social ladder. The story of *Sive* is all the more potent as it is based on a real-life marriage between an old man and a much younger woman. In the introduction to the play, Joanna Keane O’Flynn, Keane’s daughter relates the following story:

One afternoon, while my father was working behind the counter, a haggard old man called in for a drink. He announced to all and sundry that a match had been arranged for him and that he would be getting married in the not too distant future. He requested that my unsuspecting father accompany him to a nearby jewellery shop to help him purchase a ring for his intended bride to be. My father visited the shop with the old man and thought no more about the encounter until months later. To his dismay, he heard from a friend that the aged man had married a girl who was too young for him (Keane 7)

It transpired that the young woman in question suffered a nervous breakdown and ended up in an institution. Carthalawn becomes the voice of Keane at the end of the play and sings

“Oh, they drowned lovely Sive,  
She would not be a bride  
And they laid her for to bury in the clay” (Keane 94)

It is interesting to note that the Abbey Theatre initially rejected the play outright. One may surmise that as the play addressed rural issues “...of poverty and loneliness and sexual frustration” (Keane 113), there may have been a perception it would not have resonated with an urban Dublin audience and therefore, would not have been supported.

Nonetheless, undeterred Keane collaborated with the Listowel Drama Group, and they went on to win the All-Ireland Amateur Drama Festival in Athlone with their production of *Sive* in 1959. That same year, "... the Abbey Theatre invited the Listowel Drama Group to perform *Sive* for one week which they did to popular acclaim" (Keane 8). This resounding success came in no small measure from the vast support the play received from the people of Kerry. Margaret Dillion, the first actress to play *Sive*, recounts the first performance for The Abbey "... 'Standing there and looking out across that sea of faces, it was like being in my home town — I knew practically everyone in the theatre'" (Daly).

Kinevane, like Keane, addresses issues in contemporary Ireland which are socially and politically uncomfortable in order to bring them into the public domain. In a 2010 YouTube interview as part 'Phizzfest', he states that it is vital that art and theatre come from a community level, "...that it doesn't become an elitist sport. Theatre is very elitist in Ireland, and the audiences that go to see theatre in Ireland are bred or educated into going to the theatre" (Gunning). To break this cycle, he believes that theatre and art begin at the community level, then it belongs to everyone. As part of his commitment to bringing theatre to local communities, Kinevane's plays are performed in venues throughout Ireland. The static custom of proscenium theatre which utilises a fixed arch to separate the world of play from the observer is challenged today by dramatists to create theatre relevant to contemporary audiences and to enable reconnection with theatre and people of all social standing. Most notably in Ireland ANU Productions are at the forefront in performing in site-specific productions "...moving theatre out of buildings—and thus from their marginal socio-cultural arena of impact" (Singleton). To fully break down the barriers of theatre, then geographical boundaries must be challenged to highlight the work and talent in regional areas as well as in the larger cities.

Kinevane, in bringing theatre to regional audiences, also believes that issues of injustice which are evident in his plays are political; by presenting these injustices through theatre, he sees his role as a facilitator in highlighting problems rather than providing solutions. For him theatre is more than the written word; the style of performance is of equal importance: “I believe that theatre is all-encompassing, that it has to do with the written word, it has to do with the style of performance, and it has to do with the body, its multifactorial” (Kinevane 2019). During the interview, Kinevane said he aims to invent a “different form of theatre, a different style of theatre and to tell stories about joy but also to talk about injustice” (Kinevane 2019). This combination of performance and content is even more striking due to the influence of his upbringing, giving his plays realistic and honest undertones that grip the audience.

While acknowledging “intentional fallacy” the idea that the artist’s purpose should reveal itself in the work, and if it does not, then the artist has failed (Wimsatt and Beardsley 468). I nevertheless contend that the output of the author is influenced by background, environment and development. These factors are an essential part of the final work. Thus, some further examination of the playwright's biography proves relevant to his creativity.

## Chapter 2: Sets, Settings and Story

Cobh is the backdrop to Kinevane's trilogy of solo plays *Forgotten*, *Silent* and *Underneath*. Cobh's wider historical relevance comes as the final harbour the Titanic sailed from, "Cobh sits on the second biggest natural harbour in the world and was the last port of the Titanic before the big glug-glug" (Kinevane 2015 5). It is also where Queen Victoria arrived when she made a royal visit to Ireland, and it became known as Queenstown in tribute to her, "[o]n this day 2 August in 1849 Queen Victoria first visited Cobh. She briefly disembarked and renamed it Queenstown to honour it as the spot where she first set foot on Irish soil" (*Irish Examiner* 2018).

For the people of Cork and Cobh, it is its sad history of ships leaving during the famine which holds most resonance. In famine times those who could afford it left Ireland via Cobh bound for America. In *Silent*, the character Tino mentions The Samaritans and the Simon Community, two charitable organisations which assist the impoverished and the homeless. He says of them that "[t]hey are great people. This city would be like a famine ship without them" (Kinevane 2011 16). The night before people left for America, a wake took place in their honour. A 'wake' is a traditional Irish ritual venerating the recent dead through song, drink and story. It signified that those who left would not be seen by their loved ones again. "An estimated one million people died from disease and starvation, and over a million more had fled to America on coffin ships" (*Irish Examiner* 2018) The ships were nicknamed 'coffin ships' as many who boarded, died before they reached the shores of the land of opportunity. Kinevane believes that the soil in Cobh holds onto the sadness of the millions of people who have left Ireland, families through the centuries torn apart by immigration. The town, according to him, retains this inbuilt sadness. In the author's note to *The Nuns Wood*, he remarks that "...the trees remember" (Culleton 473). Kinevane gives a direct reference to this particular history of Cobh in *Underneath* as he describes Jason

“standing by the quay, where thousands left by tender over the hundreds of years before him” (Kinevane 2015 21). “It is a place of great sadness as well as a place of departure, people were passing by, people passing through” (Kinevane 2019). Cobh, moreover, is an island, which holds a great sense of community. In such small towns, it is difficult to escape the history of the lineage carried down through generations. Once the character Pearse, Tino’s brother in *Silent*, was revealed as being gay in Cobh, that was all he was ever going to be known as in a small town, “...the Bastard pigs spread the gossip like wildfire, and that was the start of the torture for Pearse and it spiralled and grew to tornado very quickly” (Kinevane 2011 4). Walnut, Pearse’s lover in *Silent*, could escape the ridicule as he was a sailor, but Pearse would not be so lucky.

If he was alive today, he could get his hole in any gay club he wanted, and nobody would bat an eye. Shur, there’s Hurlers and Footballers n all sorts comin out these days’ fair fuckin dues to them. It was tough for Pearse daw....sneakin around, ashamed of himself. There were lads in that town who would have gladly kicked him to death (Kinevane 2011 8)

The place and time for Pearse would not allow him to live freely “[a]ll he wanted was to be wanted, like the rest of us hah?” (Kinevane 2011 8). However, in Cobh in the 1980s, it was next to impossible to survive the ridicule.

There was a stark contrast in Cobh from a geographical viewpoint, which reflected both the economic and social demographic differences in the town. The hills in Cobh are monumental and not for the fainthearted to climb. The big houses on the hills were where the affluent people lived and looked down on the working-class houses below. Kinevane was fascinated by the opulence of the people who lived in the houses on the hills. In the Cobh of his youth in the 1970s “it was a place of either wealth or servitude” (Kinevane 2019). There was the vast wealth of the big houses or the deficiency of the gardeners and chambermaids:

there was no middle ground. In many ways, the playwright reflects that divide in his writing. There is a definite social divide between Her and Jason in *Underneath*. Her's mother works in "the big houses on the high road" (Kinevane 2015 6). Jason's father, by contrast, is one of the 'Anglo tyrants who fucked the locals off their small farms durin' the famine'. (Kinevane 2015 17).

The social segregation extended to the sports of golf, tennis and hockey. These games were played by people who had a social standing in their community due to economic status. It was a direct way to let people know how financially successful one was by the sports they supported. Although he is writing for contemporary Ireland, the contrast between the different classes the playwright depicts remains in sharp focus. The lady 'posin at Punchestown races with a huge fuckin ostrich feather stickin out of her botox forehead' is characterised as vacuous and ridiculous. (Kinevane 20116). Those at the tennis club come under equal ridicule as 'the posh wans'. (Kinevane 2015 11). There is very little empathy or sympathy shown in his plays for those who are not of a working-class background.

As a young child, Kinevane recalls in his authors note to *The Nun's Wood* his overwhelming memory of playing in the woods was that "there existed a magic" (Culleton 473). Perhaps it was here or through the encouragement of the teachers from his school that he developed the art of storytelling. Theatre is an extension of storytelling as Roche remarks, "theatre in Ireland probably had its origins as much in the communal art of oral storytelling as practised in the pub, or the hearth as in a fourth wall drama performed on a proscenium stage in a metropolitan centre" (223). Storytelling is an inherent part of a society's culture and identity. The philosopher Richard Kearney states, "the need for stories has become acute in our contemporary culture; it has been recognised from the origin of time as an indispensable ingredient of any meaningful society" (4). Storytelling is an intrinsic part of being human.

### Chapter 3: Play, Performance and Production

Kinevane combines the art of writing with his performance as an actor; both disciplines require imagination and role-play. Robert Gordon states that role-play is inherent in the notion of society (1). It is through role-playing that children learn to mimic, communicate and entertain while “developing a consciousness of self in a process that involves the rehearsal and enactment of a primal family drama” (1). In a clinical report by the American Academy of Paediatrics, it notes that while playing “children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them” (Ginsburg 183). Children use games and play to hone storytelling skills. For Gordon “role-playing is a spontaneous human activity” (1). Richard Kearney, the philosopher, identifies three types of story-telling. The first is the “...narratives of fatherlands and motherlands” (29), the second “...are stories which serve the purpose of creation” (29). Finally, the third form of storytelling is as “...creative solutions for actual problems” (30), which is the genesis of *Silent*. Richard Schechner remarks that the earliest performances date back “as far as archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians go” (221). He states that “...no one knows if these palaeolithic performers were acting out stories, representing past events, experiences, memories, dreams or fantasies. I would like to think they were; that making what we would call theatre-dance-music-is co-existent with the human condition” (221). Through role-play and imagination, we learn about the world around us, the development of this role-play into theatre allows the writer and performer to bring their story to a broader audience.

Kinevane understood the power of role-play and imagination “never underestimate the power of the imagination in the audience” (Kinevane 2019). It was a trip to New York in 2008, which was the impetus to create a different form and style of theatre which aimed to use imagination to explore issues and boundaries. In an interview with the *Irish Times* in 2014, he recalls that he “wanted to work in a different theatrical mode. I knew there was an

awful lot of stuff I wanted to do and express, style-wise and presentation-wise” (Crawley). This compulsion to try something new in theatre, together with the experience of witnessing the homeless in America was the inspiration for *Silent*. He saw the opportunity to use the medium of playwriting to challenge the subject of homelessness as the acceptance of homelessness as a subculture in the wealthiest country in the world was unfathomable to Kinevane. Rather than stand idly by he was “determined to explore this shameful legacy of capitalism – this epidemic that has left so many gorgeous hearts behind, left them empty and without shelter and alone” (Kinevane 2011 Preface). When he returned to Ireland following his visit, he “was even more aware of the amount of homeless people there also” (Kinevane 2011 Preface). He felt an urgency to write about homelessness and more importantly, to write the stories of the homeless themselves. He believes his function as a dramatist is to raise awareness of social and political issues: The role of the audience is whether or not to begin a conversation on these issues. In her book *Theatre Audiences*, Susan Bennett states that “performance can activate a diversity of responses, but it is the audience which finally ascribes meaning and usefulness to any cultural product” (56). In live theatre, once the play is performed, it is over, Kinevane wants to engage the audience to continue the conversation long after they have gone home.

Kinevane’s first two plays, *The Nun’s Wood* produced in 1998 and *The Plains of Eanna* produced in 1999 dealt with secrets and forbidden love. Recognising that Ireland is renowned for its dramatic writing, he wanted to experiment with the written word and performance. He believes that theatre is all-encompassing; that the written word, bodily movement and performance style have equal importance; and that the work is made up of all these components. He began this process in experimenting with developing the script in conjunction with performance in *Forgotten*, but it was in the exploration of *Silent* he

expanded on the different ways of telling stories through the use of movement, mime, dance, song and recorded voice.

During my interview with Kinevane, he named the playwright Tom MacIntyre and actor Tom Hickey as exceptional artists. He recalls, in particular, The Abbey's production of *The Great Hunger* based on the poem of the same name by Patrick Kavanagh, which was written by MacIntyre and performed in by Hickey in 1983. In a podcast from the Abbey Theatre oral history project, MacIntyre, Hickey, Patrick Mason, the director and actor Bríd Ní Neachtain all speak of their experience of the production. Bríd Ní Neachtain commented that the rehearsals from the outset were very unusual. It was the first time that at the beginning of rehearsal, there was no script "I went into rehearsals, and there were no scripts, okay everybody into the middle of the floor and do something" (Ní Neachtain Abbey Podcast 14 mins). The play was a complete collaboration between the writer, the director Patrick Mason and the actors, chiefly Tom Hickey "it was that collaboration between director, writer and actor" (Ní Neachtain Abbey Podcast 24.20mins). MacIntyre remarked in the podcast that when he was in New York, he was fascinated by the work of Merce Cunningham and Pina Bausch, "especially in the zone of movement and gesture" (MacIntyre Abbey Podcast 2.28mins). MacIntyre recognising the power of words felt that "the imagistic was even more powerful" (MacIntyre Abbey Podcast 3.30mins)

As a result, MacIntyre infused physical theatre into the performance. During the rehearsals the actors, playwright and director would improvise each scene independently of the next. Hickey remarks "basically what we started off doing was improvising which never went on in the Abbey before" (Abbey Podcast 9.36mins). It was the most physically and mentally demanding role he was involved in "it was extremely demanding, physically mentally and every other way" (Hickey Abbey Podcast 16mins). In the book *Irish Moves* by Deirdre Mulrooney, Hickey comments, 'it's the old story of play: It's by play that you reach

whatever you are going for. It's not an intellectual exercise. It's exploring the body and voice' (Mulrooney 184). The play received a mix reaction from different audiences, and it was not unusual for audience members to leave during the production. MacIntyre commented that rural audiences were more receptive, while American audiences were appalled by the play as it was far from keeping with their view of Ireland of the saints and scholars. For the playwright, he said of the production that "the silence in the theatre at key moments, that is the silence I long to hear, you know they're spellbound" (MacIntyre Abbey Podcast 27.35 mins). The strength of the performance is embracing that silence. It demands confidence from the performer not to be scared by the silence of the audience but to respect it and allow it to continue to a natural end. Kinevane similarly demonstrates this in his performance by asking the audience questions, allowing them to engage or not and adapting his response accordingly.

In *Forgotten*, Kinevane, in collaboration with Culleton, experiments with physical theatre and Japanese tropes, in particular with Kabuki. Kabuki as described by A.C.Scott is a mixture of "[d]ance, music, symbolism and powerful exaggeration [it has] a universal appeal" (Scott Preface). Kinevane aimed to break the taboo of not speaking about the elderly and the loneliness they may experience in nursing homes and depict them in a way that was graceful and dignified. Using techniques from Kabuki, the characters of Dora, Eucharia, Flor and Gustus move with fluidity and freedom, not shackled to Zimmer frames and walkers. He wanted the characters to maintain their dignity through their movement and not follow the stereotypical portrayal of older people. The use of movement in the portrayal of characters along with the written word is of equal importance in his plays.

Culleton gives an insight into the process involved in developing the movement for the pieces;

In *Forgotten*, his first solo play, he wanted to experiment with Japanese Kabuki theatre and their very unique, disciplined movement. In *Silent* the movement was inspired by silent movies, and in *Underneath* it is inspired by Egyptian hieroglyphs – we worked in rehearsals with Emma O’Kane, the choreographer, on *Underneath* and did a lot of research on each of the aspects that influence the plays, so we could make sure these influences helped shape the productions in the way we wanted (Culleton 2019).

*Silent* is a scream to banish silence. It combines the story of the McGoldrick family with mime, movement, recorded voice and song to give a multifarious performance. The silence which surrounds suicide, mental health, and homelessness is at the forefront of the play. Intertwined with this social narrative are stories of love, joy and humour. Moments of sadness, gruesomeness and distress are often broken by humour. *Silent* tells the story of Tino McGoldrick, who was born in Cobh Co. Cork. Tino’s grandmother “...lived for Silent Films” (Kinevane 2011 4) so she named Tino’s father Valentine, in honour of the silent movie star, Rudolf Valentino. Tino notes that his father “...then called me Tino for short” (Kinevane 2011 4). Pearse, a year older than Tino, was named “...after Pádraig the freedom fighter” (Kinevane 2011 5). Tino thought that it should have been Pearse rather than he, named after Rudolf Valentino, he remarks, “...imagine a gorgeous version of me. One year older, shorter nose and face, slanty eyes, curly jet-black locks and the lips of Marlon Brando- cheekbones that would cut Waterford Crystal and the smile ( ...) the smile that would trump Jesus” (Kinevane 2011 5).

Pearse’s tragedy in life was that he was a gay man at a time in Ireland when being gay was illegal, hidden, and covert. Homosexuality became decriminalised in Ireland in 1993.

Before that time, people like the character Noellette Amberson wielded themselves as self-appointed overseers of morality. Noellette Amberson uncovered his secret when she witnessed Pearse and a sailor named Walnut kissing “down the side lane of her boutique” early one morning (Kinevane 2011 4). Noellette contacted the guards to report the event, and she “...told the cops to get up quick and stop the dirty homosexuals soiling her alleyway” (Kinevane 2011 4). Life for Pearse which was difficult before Noellette’s interference now became unbearable “... he really and truly, lost the will to live in the town of Cobh, or anywhere, anymore” (Kinevane 2011 4). It is uncomfortable to address one's faults and failings and for Kinevane to call out homophobia as it existed in Ireland of the 1980s to an Irish audience is tugging at their sleeves and holding a mirror to the boundaries of their acceptance.

*Silent* is a homage to those who suffer in silence, who endure insults, until, like Pearse, “ashamed of himself” he could not bear it any longer and commits suicide. (Kinevane 2011 8). Tino relates how Pearse when he was younger, cried every day and ran home from school to escape the taunts from other school kids who “chopped him to pieces...Every flawless inch of him- murdered him with giggles and sneers” (Kinevane 2011 5). The constant ridicule led to Pearse's death, the guilt in not standing up for his brother led to Tino’s. The lack of mental health awareness and resources killed them both. In the 1980s for Pearse, mental health awareness did not exist. His mother's response to the first suicide attempt was to say “...how/dare/you/do/that/to/me on/a/stormy/fuckin/night/ya/selfish little nobshiner with every prick in the Navy slidin down yer throat” while she continually slapped him (Kinevane 2011 9). Years later, when Tino went for medical assistance for his mental health, he recalls, “...the first doctor I went to about my nerves. Never really caught me a glance. Head down, writin out prescriptions to beat the band- I think he heard me...but he didn’t listen!” (Kinevane 2011 9).

Very little has changed in the intervening years; people are encouraged to speak about their mental health, but in reality, there is very little there to help them.

By expressing his struggle with mental health professionals, Tino is speaking to the audience as a shared collective experience. He by-passes the idea that mental illness is something that happens to other people. In breaking this façade and combating the prejudice surrounding mental illness, Tino compels the audience as a collective to banish the negative connotations and anonymity associated with it.

Pearse's struggle and suicide attempts crisscross through the play with Tino's downward slope into alcoholism, mental breakdown, and homelessness. Tino is speaking from beyond the grave, telling the story of how he and Pearse came to be buried together in a quiet graveyard in Cobh, Co. Cork. When addressing suicide, very little is spoken of the aftermath suffered by the remaining family. By tracing Tino's path to homelessness, Kinevane explores the consequences of suicide to those left behind, again breaking the barriers of the accepted social norm.

Pearse attempted suicide three times before the fourth and fatal one. The attempts on his life are shown as silent movie excerpts, starring Tino as Rudolf Valentino. Tino re-enacts Pearse's life as the movie star, through movement and dance while his recorded voice narrates the events. Kinevane remarks "it was the only way Tino could without words and silently tell the story of his brother because his brother was as beautiful and as spellbinding as Rudolf Valentino" (Kinevane 2019). The first attempt with the movie title 'The Eagle' occurred on the October Jazz weekend in Cork, 1986. Pearse went to see Alison Moyet in the Opera House, and as the evening wore on, he failed to return home. When the Guards called to the house at two-thirty in the morning, Mam questions them about Pearse "is he dead Guard, where was he found?" (Kinevane 2011 9). Pisspot the Guard tells how Pearse jumped out of the window of the Metropole Hotel, got his boots tangled on the wires on the

way down and was spotted when his wallet fell out of his pocket “hit the receptionist on the ear and she coming off duty!!” (Kinevane 2011 10).

The receptionist called the emergency services, and Pearse promptly transported to the North Infirmary Hospital. The juxtaposition of Pearse not wanting to live anymore and the comic way in which it unfolds is typical of the dark humour sprinkled throughout the play.

Pearse and Tino’s father is only mentioned once when Tino explains how they got their names. His non-involvement in their lives plays out another silence; that of the absent father, a role which Tino later emulates in the upbringing of his son. Their mother is not shown in a sympathetic light as she physically and mentally abuses Pearse. When she arrived at the hospital to see Pearse, she “...had on a sable stole what she bought in Noellette Amberson’s Boutique! She gave Pearse a bottle of Tanora, Fox’s glacier mints and an almighty fuckin clatter across the back of his head about twenty or thirty times!” (Kinevane 2011 9). Pearse’s mother subjected him to her embarrassment at being the talk to the town and for the next time to “...polish off the rat poison from the back of the shed like a real man would” (Kinevane 2011 14). She ridiculed his attempt at suicide and his sexuality. Coupling her with Noellette reinforces the audience's impression of the mother as unsympathetic, and concerned with what people will think rather than the welfare of her son. Kinevane breaks the rules of the accepted norm of the ‘Irish Mammie’ by epitomising her as self-serving rather than the selfless, loving, and indulgent matriarch.

In the second suicide attempt, titled ‘All Night’ Tino plays Valentino the boxer and recounts how Pearse “devoured forty junior Aspro and hid himself in the neighbours’ kennel” (Kinevane 2011 13). Boxing his way through the recorded narrative, Tino expresses that even though the desire for Pearse to die is strong, “...the body, the body is always out to survive! And it is harder to stop the heart, much harder than you would think. The body is

always in the ring, gloves on, flakin away at danger” (Kinevane 2011 14). Pearse survived because he “...wasn’t the brightest bulb in the ceiling” (Kinevane 2011 13). The punctuation of the suicide attempt by Tino’s boxing emphasises the battle between the will to die and the strength and power of the heart to survive. No amount of junior aspirin will be strong enough to stop his heart beating in this ill-matched fight. The boxing match visually exposes through theatre the predilection to commit suicide as Kinevane continues to push the boundaries in his themes and performance style.

‘Beyond the Rocks’ was the silent movie title for the next suicide attempt. Pearse misjudging the sea tide, weighed himself down with a cavity block and “...stood there for hours with the tide going out” (Kinevane 2011 20). His mother's response this time to the public humiliation by her gay son was to say nothing and spit in his face. The fourth and final attempt occurred on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1987, titled ‘The Wonderful Change’. Noellette Amberson was travelling home by train from her Flamenco dance classes in Cork. The carriage window was open to allow cigarette smoke out. Pearse jumped from the “passenger bridge at Fota Island Station” in front of the train (Kinevane 2011 20). His “half a human leg” came through the window straight onto Noellette Amberson’s lap (Kinevane 2011 21).

Writing on the use of comedy in Fishamble productions Culleton remarks, “...we were excited by the audience response which sometimes involved uneasiness caused by the comic treatment of serious, upsetting subject matter. It also raised issues about whether comedy is really an appropriate medium through which to explore taboo subjects and whether there is any subject matter that should not be joked about” (Weitz 69). By making Noellette a comic figure with her garish clothes shop, it gives the audience permission to laugh at this grotesque image and turns the event from the macabre to ridiculous. The use of comedy by Kinevane is not an instrument to let the audience off the hook lightly, but as Rebecca Wilson suggests, “...intensifies the pain; it is the lightning flash that illuminates and etches the tragic

moment” (Weitz 130). Kinevane’s use of humour to tackle uncomfortable subject matter may similarly be seen in the work of the playwright and screenwriter Martin McDonagh. McDonagh, in a scene from the award-winning short film *Six Shooter*, likewise has a woman throw herself from a moving train. Jim Culleton remarked, during rehearsal that he “...needed an extra reference to Noelle Amberson to help the audience remember this character, so Pat decided she would go to Flamenco classes, and he would insert some of her moves, to help the audience identify her” (Culleton 2019). Noelle Amberson in Kinevane’s performance is brought to life vividly by the frantic Flamenco dancing and the striking of the castanets. Both the characters of Mother and Noelle are depicted as self-serving and mean spirited. It is challenging to feel empathic towards them even as Pearse’s mother “went into a kinda coma” (Kinevane 2011 19) when Pearse died, and Noelle “retired to the land of Severe Trauma” (Kinevane 2011 22). Laughing at these characters does not remove the unease felt by the audience in relating to attitudes which they represent.

It is Pearse who paid the ultimate price for a small community’s judgement; he could never confess his love for Walnut, never admit to being gay, and never feel he belonged. His continued suffering and silence are released by the sound of a train screeching to a halt. In the performance, Kinevane stands with his mouth wide open, while the sound of a train comes to a screeching stop. No words are necessary to fill in the emotions of Tino, Pearse, Noelle or the audience.

Tino tells his story as an alcoholic on the streets of Dublin; he traces the beginning of the story from when he shared a room with Pearse as a teen to cutting his throat with a knife, shortly after his fortieth birthday. Following Pearse’s suicide, he wanted life to be “...normal, balanced” (Kinevane 2011 6). He fell in love and married Judy. In the beginning, their relationship was perfect “...it was all me and Judy and Judy and me” (Kinevane 2011 8). Tino lost his job at the weed killer factory and stayed at home to look

after their son fulltime while Judy managed the shoe shop. With time on his hands and little adult contact, he had time to think about Pearse, “I knew that was the start of when I began to lose my mind” (Kinevane 2011 15). His drinking began “...slow at first, maybe a Pernod at lunchtime” (Kinevane 2011 15). It reached a crescendo when Judy came home from work, the baby had fallen out of the cot, and Tino was asleep on the couch. Judy took out a barring order against him. He moved in with his Aunt Rita, who had him committed to a psychiatric hospital because he wrecked her house “with piss and vomit” (Kinevane 2011 17). Tino spent two years in hospital. On leaving there with nowhere to go, he moved to Dublin, signing on “with the social in James St. officially like, as a homeless man” (Kinevane 2011 18). He lived on the streets, depending on the charity of The Samaritans and the Simon Community. All the time, he battles with the “fuckin guilt” of not standing up for his brother (Kinevane 2011 18). Until five days before Tino begins his story, he takes a walk to the Garden of Remembrance, to the sculpture of the Children of Lir and ends his life. He is laid to rest beside Pearse “and everything is finally glorious – and- Silent” (Kinevane 2011 23).

The audience is left to decide whether to continue the silence of the marginalised or to become political agitators and highlight the issues of mental health assistance, suicide prevention and loneliness raised in the production. Kinevane expressed the view that;

... any kind of injustice is political, so in order for it to become just, there has to be a political argument there, between the audience, not me, I'm presenting it as a tale, a journey, of somebody, and it is up to the audience then to really discuss amongst themselves what is just and what is not (Kinevane 2019).

He notes that he did not set out for his plays to be categorised as political, that he leaves that to the audience to decide.

However, the fact that Kinevane exposes the subjects of homelessness, mental health and suicide, means that his plays by their very nature, become political.

## Chapter 4: The Politics of Performance

The concept of Irish Theatre as a medium for political discussion is not new. In Nicholas Grene's book *The Politics of Irish Drama*, he discusses how "Irish drama since the time of the early Abbey has remained self-consciously aware of its relation to the life of the nation and the state" (1). Grene suggests that there is a "...three-way set of relationships between subject, playwright and audience" to that which is represented on stage (1).

The images created before a live audience are representation in action, the negotiation of meanings through the words of the playwright, the real bodies and voices of the actors, the *mise en scène* of the director and designer, all operating within the field of the spectators' preconceptions and prejudices, likes and dislikes. The words of the text bear a specially close scrutiny, not primarily for their authorial authority, but as they reach out towards theatrical embodiment (Grene 3)

The perception of a play as more than the written word ties in with Kinevane's theory of it being multifactorial. In this regard, he is continuing the tradition of Irish theatre as a political vehicle which began with the foundation of The National Theatre. As discussed by Grene, Sean O'Casey raised awareness of the suffering endured by the people who lived in Dublin's tenements in the 1920s with his trilogy of *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars*. The audience for these plays had no idea of what it was like living in the tenements even though as Grene remarks, they would have walked by them on the way to the Abbey Theatre (111). Grene says of O'Casey's drama that it was a "...slice-of-life naturalism, with all the contemporaneity of immediate events rendered from within by the self-educated slum dramatist" (111). O'Casey, despite popular opinion and the romantic views O'Casey himself allowed propagate, was not from working-class Dublin. He "belonged to the commoner type, the writer from a middle-class family gone down in the world" (Grene 112). O'Casey did, however, 'endure real poverty' (Grene 112).

It was from this perspective, which the plight of the working class Dubliner's experience came to life in this trilogies.

In 2008, almost sixty years after O'Casey wrote about working-class Dubliners, Kinevane wrote about the homeless living on the streets of Dublin. A new homeless population had emerged from the 'wino's' of the 1980s as illustrated by Tino when he says "I love Merlot! Oh, I wouldn't be your normal bum. On no! This is what I call hobo chic!" (Kinevane 2011 5). He started to question why people were living on the streets. Was it as a result of mental illness or if they were there as a result of a financial disaster? Through speaking and listening to the homeless, Kinevane discovered that many people did not have mental health issues when they first started living on the street. They developed as a result of their rejection by society, which led to isolation, sadness, depression and paranoia. He wanted to open the eyes of the passing public and change their view from "...all they see is the blanket" and remove the anonymity of homelessness (Kinevane 2011 5). It is easy to pass an anonymous body under a blanket; it is more challenging to do so when their story is known. This is one of the boundaries which he keeps pushing, that the audience is not always sitting comfortably in their seats, that they sift and move when presented with afflictive reality.

The 'Celtic Tiger' was a term given to a period in Ireland of enormous financial growth. As with all economic booms eventually, there is a bust, and the Celtic Tiger came sharply and swiftly to an end in 2008. The recession was hard and stark, and many lost their livelihoods and consequently their homes. Kinevane's return from his visit to New York coincided with the catastrophic collapse of the Irish economy. People who are living on the streets, through fear and isolation, put on a persona to protect themselves from harm.

Beyond this defence, they want to be seen, to be spoken to, looked at in the eye, as Tino relates, "...got a fifty euro note last week from a fella- glasses, brown Winstanley shoes. Gave it to me like that law...wouldn't look at me, no contact" (Kinevane 2011 9). It is interesting to note that Tino describes the shoes that were worn by the passer-by, reinforcing the chasm between them.

In Ireland, the subject of homelessness features daily in the media. It is a national issue, affecting people from all walks of life. Theatre is a medium for highlighting issues of social importance. In 1980 the playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rae set up 'Field Day Theatre' to "...provide new ways of thinking about Ireland, of giving expression to the unexpressed in Ireland" (Greene 34). They toured *Translations* which is set in "...a 1830s Irish hedge-school centring on the loss of the Irish language and the Anglicising Ordnance Survey mapping of Ireland" (Greene 34). Friel wrote the play conscious of the political divide and resulting violence in Northern Ireland in 1979. Friel and Rae sought to challenge the cultural stronghold of Dublin and Belfast by touring the play around Ireland, bringing it to people who would not usually be exposed to professional theatre. Social issues do not dissolve with time, they change, and the marginalised will always need a voice to expose their plight.

Stephen Rae in an interview with Independent newspaper, speaking about the fortieth anniversary of Field Day Theatre remarked "[w]e felt the need to do something creative instead of just weeping and shouting about what was happening...I think we did achieve something remarkable, in a way. People started to look to theatre for inspiration" (Healy). Further on in the interview, Rae insists there is no merit in being nostalgic about the past when the present has many social problems which need to be solved "... let's not forget about the 10,000 people who are now homeless. How can anyone feel comfortable with that?" (Healy). It is this spirit of speaking out which prevails throughout Kinevane's work.

In his compulsion to bring something original and fresh to Irish theatre, he continues the tradition of representing those living on the edge of society. In doing so, he is bringing a new wave of breaking social boundaries to contemporary Irish audiences.

In the production of *Silent* which I saw in Waterford on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2019, through the character Tino, Kinevane spoke of the ten thousand homeless living in emergency accommodation, plus three thousand children. He feared for these children's future and the ramifications it will have on Irish society. He spoke of the fact that there is no affordable social housing "...[s]o many on the streets, so many to let and empty buildings. So many people under pressure. Depression hah?" (Kinevane 2011 13). He remarked that the political leadership consists of '...public schoolboys wearing suits, shirts and ties'. These are new statistics unscripted and seemingly improvised by Kinevane since the first production of *Silent* in the Dublin Theatre Festival in 2010. There is a sense of frustration with politicians and of the circumstances surrounding the homeless and mental illness; "Look after yourself, look after your Mental Health! What a fuckin laugh! ...ah sorry bout this now Minister but, ah, how can I?" (Kinevane 2011 13). When suffering so profoundly from mental illness, the capability to help oneself is impossible.

An article in the Irish Times on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2019, written by a woman who lived in sheltered accommodation describes how homelessness impacted her mental health to such a degree it led her to attempt suicide. She echoes Tino's sense of worthlessness when he defines himself as a "...number 1 langer, coward, destroyer of lives, shit husband, shit father, shit person, useless homeless loser, hopeless, helpless in the way person" (Kinevane 2011 18). The writer of the article recounts how she thought of herself leading up to her attempt of suicide "...I wonder would it be doing the world a favour? I'm nowhere. I'm no one. I'm a useless sack of sh\*t – I can't even get somewhere to live" (Dáís). The shame of homelessness prevented her from contacting her family when she was at her lowest ebb.

She allowed herself seven days to see if her situation would improve and if not, then she would kill herself. She contacted a helpline looking for help explaining that she was suicidal. In *Silent* Kinevane predicts the response from the Health Service Executive seven years earlier ‘the HSE! trying to fool us into thinkin that they give a shit about us, about our Mental Health!’ (Kinevane 2011 13). When she contacted the helpline “... to see if any spark of my humanity remained” they responded by “talking to me about cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to practice. I was tempted to assert that I was homeless, hopeless, utterly beaten down since I knew I could only withstand another day” (Daïs). She finally succumbed to hopelessness and took an overdose. When she awoke, she persuaded the doctor attending to discharge her from the hospital. She explained to him that if she were not in the sheltered accommodation by eleven pm, the rules are violated and she would lose her place. Despite attempting suicide a few hours earlier, she returned alone to the shelter.

Throughout *Silent*, Tino gives several examples of the futility contacting the mental health helplines, ‘...hello and welcome to the Mental Health Hotline! If you are obsessive-compulsive, press 1 repeatedly!!’ (Kinevane 2011 5). Kinevane’s use of humour at a mental health affliction is rule-breaking and by laughing, lessens the stigma of the illness. The second phone call, “if you have multiple personalities – kindly press 3, 4, 5 and 6” (Kinevane 2011 7). The third and final phone call to the help line, “if you’re paranoid, we know who you are and what you want so stay on the line and we will trace your call!” (Kinevane 2011 16). Laughter erodes the politeness, which often surrounds an honest discussion on mental health and pushes it into the realm of everyday conversation.

Openly discussing mental health and suicide is breaking the barrier of social norms. The playwright pushes the boundaries of the subject with the audience by directly addressing the topic with them. At the beginning of the performance in *Silent*, Tino speaks to a member of the audience. He asks them their name and how their day has been.

In the production I saw in Waterford in April 2019, he asked Laura where she worked. Once Laura had recovered from being spoken to directly, she readily engaged with Tino. He then asked her, was it okay for him to tell her about his brother Pearse? This sense of trust works in both directions, as Tino connecting with the audience speaks as if they were passers-by on the streets where he lives. As it is a story of Pearse's suicide presented in a personal way, it removes the anonymity, and the audience responds not only to Pearse but to Tino.

The dynamic of this discourse with the audience of speaking directly to them and then letting them go to continue with the story to be later reconnected runs through the production like an invisible thread. It developed in the production as a result of experimentation from performance and direction. The degree of direct speech was guided by the director Jim Culleton. In the email interview which I conducted with Culleton, he addresses this technique;

In *Silent*, Tino Mc Goldrig asks people their names, and names are a very special part of the play; there are some beautiful and heartbreaking moments later when he calls out the names of the audience members in times of distress, that can be very powerful. Tino talks to the audience as if they are the passers-by on the street – it makes people feel connected to him in a way that, when they leave the theatre, I think, they view homeless people differently (Culleton 2019).

One of those very poignant moments occurred during the performance in Waterford when Tino directly addresses the audience about antidepressants.

Think about this so now lads! Please don't censor your thoughts! What is your honest response? The images and feelings you have when I say the following words...Are you ready? Here's the words..... 'Anti-Depressants!' Responses? Anyone prepared to put their hand up and say that they are now or have in the past been on them? Why the fear to admit that? You know why? In case people think you are somehow unhinged,

unpredictable, nuts...A bit less dependable as a friend, a worker, a parent or son or daughter, or maybe even....A lover? And that makes you weak and this 'weakness' will be forever recorded on yer permanent record as a patient, citizen and a person.

Forever recorded. Recorded (Kinevane 2011 10)

When Tino asked for responses, the audience remained silent. This is theatre, after all, not panto, and one of the rules of going to the theatre is for the audience to remain quiet, even when asked direct questions. Tino held the silence, and then a lone female voice replied 'they help sometimes'. Tino, with his back to the audience, replied 'Good, very good'. Then another voice from the audience answered, and with Tino's gentle voice and understanding of the people in the audience several replies came back to him, one voice replied 'Grief' to which Tino responded 'interesting'. It was a moment in theatre when the barrier between actor and observer broke and what emerged was a shared experience. It is not like stand-up comedy where everyone is in on a joke, and the responses are superficial. At this moment in the play, the audience expressed their thoughts on a serious topic with honesty and intimacy. Kinevane's trust in the audience as a performer by allowing the silence to hold is breaking the rules of how the actor and audience behave. The silence in *Silent* gives space to the performer and the observer to absorb and collect their thoughts collectively and honestly. In Gareth White's book *Audience Participation in Theatre*, he discusses the complex issue of the relationship between performer and observer.

Performers are inspired by their audiences and are dismayed by them, feel and feed off connections with the audiences, or perhaps try to ignore them. Audiences and actors, writers, directors and producers work together to bind theatre and society together, so that one influences the other, inhabits and is co-extensive with the other, exists in the other as metaphor and metonymy (4)

The actor and audience shared a bond like this in the Waterford production, which resulted in spontaneous applause from the audience at the end of this section of the play. I recorded an interview with the stage manager, Ger Blanche, after the performance. He stated that “the performance is a two-way thing, the audience performs for Pat, and Pat performs for them” (Blanche 2019 6 seconds). He noted that “tonight was really special, the anti-depressants part, never in all the time I have been working on it have I heard it get an applause” (Blanche 2019 20 seconds). He remarked that when the play started in 2011, the economic crash had occurred in Ireland. When Tino asked the audience to share their thoughts on anti-depressants, they never responded, “no matter where you went, whatever town in Ireland you went whatever city, you never got a reaction” (Blanche 2019 50 seconds). He believed it was because people were too fearful that the neighbours would find out, or someone in the audience would pass judgement on them by admitting to knowing about or taking anti-depressants. These are the very fears which Tino addresses when he mentions anti-depressants. Through increasing awareness of mental health in the intervening years, Blanche noted the audience has begun to respond to the question of taking medication for mental health reasons. At the time Kinevane wrote the play, it was still very much a hidden subject. This is one of the barriers the playwright set out to challenge as he discusses issues of social importance and gives a voice to the marginalised. His aim is that the discourse between the audience and the performer will open up a debate long after the performance is over. Blanche comments that as the number of homeless continue to grow, Kinevane reflects this through Tino, thus keeping the material current and up to date.

During this particular section of the play, the lighting is very dark, and Tino asks people to put their hands up if they have been on anti-depressants. He again waits in silence and then turns around abruptly to the audience, saying, ‘... it's okay; I can't see you in the dark’ to which the audience relieved laugh with Tino.

## Conclusion

When Kinevane first began to explore a new way of theatre both in subject matter and style of performance, he broached material not discussed in the theatre at the time. In *Forgotten*, he addressed the change in Ireland from the culture of respecting the older generation to the growth in nursing homes. In *Silent* not only is homelessness and mental health discussed, he likewise brings to the fore a conversation on suicide. Kinevane, throughout his life, has been seeking to break the rules and push the boundaries. When Kinevane first experienced creative drama in Rushbrook National School, a spark was lit, which would bring him from participating in Youth Theatre to being a professional stage, film and TV actor. From the outset, he was aware of the social differences between the working and middle classes. Arguably, the theatre was the domain of the middle classes and being from a working-class background he was already entering a world which set him apart.

His native Cobh is prominent in the majority of plays from the first play *The Nun's Wood* to last of the trilogy, *Underneath*. He was conscious even as a child of the social differences between the big houses on the hill looking down physically and metaphorically on the working-class houses below. Through the trilogy of *Forgotten*, *Silent* and *Underneath*, working-class people are treated with sympathy and understanding, while the playwright is sharp and judgemental in his treatment of those from the middle and upper class. Kinevane ridicules the women who buy the jewellery made by Gretta "...stupid bitches from Foxrock wear them to charity balls at the Radisson- standing beside some celebrity from TV3" (Kinevane 2011 6). Similarly, the women who attend Punchestown races in *Silent* and the women who play tennis in *Underneath* do not escape severe criticism. His harsh attitude towards women continues in the depiction of the mother in *Silent*, and Noelle Amberson is very much the villain along with Judy, who throws Tino out of their home.

Even auntie Rita for all her goodness “...had to commit me. God love her. Shur I was out of my coconut on brandy and Seroxat, wreckin her house with piss and vomit- that wasn’t the deal when she took me in” (Kinevane 2011 17). Tino has some introspection of his actions but never delves deeply enough to recognise the full extent of his responsibilities to his downfall.

The tenth anniversary of his father’s passing was the catalyst which took Kinevane from writing for pleasure to writing a play. From the “rehearsed reading of an idea in skeleton format” and a commission from Jim Culleton, he wrote his first play *The Nuns Wood* (Culleton 473). The beginnings of experimenting with content and performance continued with his second play *The Plains of Eanna*. Unlike the first play, it did not win critical acclaim and remains unpublished. The desire to bring stories of social and political importance to contemporary Irish audiences led him to write *Forgotten*, which focused on the loneliness of the older generation in care homes. For Kinevane, the performance is of equal value to the written word. In harnessing aspects of Kabuki theatre, he not only wanted to bring dignity and grace to older people, but he likewise wanted Irish audiences to experience the style of Kabuki complete with Kimono and white make up.

Irish Theatre has a proven history of raising issues of social relevance. There is a rich catalogue of writings from O’Casey, to Beckett, to our contemporary playwrights of Carr, and McPherson. John B Keane is of particular relevance to Kinevane as he wrote about issues on which people of 1950s rural Ireland kept silent, such as poverty, sexual frustration, the treatment of women and children who were born out of wedlock.

Kinevane was transfixed by the playwright Tom MacIntyre’s use of physical theatre in the production of *The Great Hunger* on the Peacock stage in the 1980s. It was “...the development of a new idiom in Irish Theatre, with equally weighted verbal, gestural and visual score, even if the language was mostly incantatory as opposed to anecdotal or narrative

in the traditional sense” (Mulrooney 175). MacIntyre comments on the development of the process “...I had an instinct that it might have to do with bringing what I knew about dance theatre and the whole movement theatre and image-based theatre into play” (Mulrooney 179). In the collaboration of Kinevane and Culleton on *Silent* the aspiration of bringing together a story with physical and image theatre combined with a tangible interaction with the audience brought to full circle the new theatre he desired.

Kinevane was blocked in by his own rules of what constitutes theatre and wanted to break free from them. Unlike many Irish dramatists who brought political issues to the fore in theatre and writers and directors embracing physical theatre and song, Kinevane is set apart by the dual role of actor and playwright. He is breaking his rules and pushing his boundaries, and Irish theatre is all the better for it. When I asked him in his interview what he would like to be known for he replied “I have a great respect for the word ‘actor’. I respect those who have gone before me, those who I have watched and worked with in the Abbey and in the Gate” (Kinevane 2019). He continued “it’s very humbling to continue to be a part of it” (Kinevane 2019), he wears the title of actor with trepidation. Culleton attributes the success of Kinevane, and the trilogy to the “writing and performance [which] is so honest and raw that people everywhere connect with it. We feel honoured that there is still such an appetite for all the Fishamble/Pat plays!” (Culleton 2019).

By continuing to break his barriers and rules and experimenting with story and performance style, Kinevane says of the future “I come from a place of absolute gratitude that I am still working. I am a worker, I love theatre, and I am trying to contribute to Irish Theatre. As a working actor, I will work the best I can to contribute to the overall canon of it, in the most original way I can” (Kinevane 2019).

Considering the strong traditional ethos in Irish Theatre which embodies that premise, audiences can look forward to new and exciting performances.

The Arts Council have contributed substantially on a financial basis to new work, especially in Dublin. Kinevane and Culleton were also quick to commend the support Fishamble have received in producing their work. However, to get a full, balanced and diverse representation of Irish theatre, support must likewise be given to actors, writers, directors and other artists outside of the Pale. The cost of working and living in Dublin is prohibitive for artists, and without adequate funding, a rich tapestry of work will go untapped. An economic boundary between urban Dublin and rural Ireland must not impede the work of artists. Irish theatre needs to reach out to communities and break the confines of social elitism.

*Silent* aspires to tell the stories of the politically, economically and socially marginalised. In attributing equal value to the written word of the script with the physicality, spoken and singing voice of the performer whilst embracing the audience as a vital and contributory element of the production, Irish theatre-makers such as Kinevane will continue to break taboos and give a voice to those in our society who would otherwise remain silent.

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