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## The Way We Were (Are): Directing Memory, Gender and Identity in Emma Donghue's Ladies and Gentlemen

Kathryn J. O'Donnell

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THE WAY WE WERE (ARE) :

DIRECTING MEMORY, GENDER AND IDENTITY IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S LADIES  
AND GENTLEMEN

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Saint Mary's College, 1996

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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for the degree of

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This thesis, submitted by Kathryn J. O'Donnell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Dean of the Graduate School

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To my Mom and Dad  
for their constant love and support.

## ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes my research, my script analysis, and the rehearsal process for my production of *Ladies and Gentlemen* by Emma Donoghue at the University of North Dakota during the fall term of 1999-2000. My aim is to explore the particular tensions at play in Donoghue's use of postmodern techniques and traditional narrative style from a director's point of view. The focus of the paper is on the themes of gender, memory, and identity as the site of these tensions. Jeannette R. Malkin's *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama* offered a methodology in which to examine these themes, while Harold Clurman's text *On Directing* provided a foundation for a director's analysis.

I hope to describe how Clurman's techniques can be applied to diverse genres and applied to identify problems. Further, I will reach some conclusions about the themes of gender, memory, and identity in Donoghue's play with a particular focus on how gender and memory may determine identity.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On the Vaudeville stage of late 1800's, male impersonation musical acts became popular with American audiences. The phenomenon of male impersonation, according to Laurence Senelick, "began to appear in the 1860's, reached its greatest popularity with Vesta Tilley before World War I, and then died out, except for occasional nostalgic survivals" (33). Of these, one of the earliest stars

. . . .who may deserve the title of Mother (Father?) of Male Impersonation, was Annie Hindle. . . . Annie Hindle appears to be the first woman not only to specialize in male impersonation on the music hall, but to create a character clad in ordinary male street-wear, a flash young spark. (Senelick 34)

#### Purpose of the Study

My aim is to explore the particular tensions at play in Donoghue's use of postmodern techniques and traditional narrative style from a director's point of view. My focus will be on the themes of memory, gender,



and identity as the site of these tensions. Jeanette R. Malkin's *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama* offered a methodology in which to examine these themes, while Harold Clurman's text *On Directing* provided a foundation for a director's analysis. I will describe how Clurman's techniques can be applied to diverse genres and to identify problems. Further, I will reach some conclusions about the themes of gender, memory, and identity in Donoghue's play with a particular focus on how gender and memory may determine identity.

#### Organization of Study

The study will be organized as follows: in Chapter One, I will offer a brief synopsis of the play *Ladies and Gentlemen*, along with some biographical information, which relates to the synopsis, on the historical figure of Annie Hindle. I will then examine the basic concepts of postmodern drama and memory-theatre as described by Jeanette R. Malkin in the book *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama*. Then, I will explain how Malkin's theories relate to Emma Donoghue's *Ladies and Gentlemen* in terms of performance of gender and of memory as these relate to identity in *Ladies and Gentlemen*.

In Chapter Two, I will analyze the script by utilizing the guidelines Harold Clurman illustrates in his book *On*

*Directing* and discuss their relevance and limitations in relation to directing memory, gender and identity. Then, using specific examples from casting, gender playing, and designing decisions, I will discuss rehearsal techniques and concepts I used and challenges I encountered as a director staging memory, gender, and identity.

In Chapter Three, I will further reflect upon and assess my accomplishments as a director in presenting gender, memory, and identity on stage.

#### Background and Synopsis

Emma Donoghue's *Ladies and Gentlemen* is set in a New York dressing room of Tony Pastor's Vaudeville House where the past is re-enacted on the night of a vaudeville star's last comeback. Annie Hindle is at the center of this story.

In real life, Annie Hindle began her career as a male impersonator while a child in England where she, "tried male costume as a joke, when singing a rollicking ditty about wine, women and the races" (Senelick 34). Apparently, Annie improved in her profession so that her "physique thickened, her voice deepened, and she took to shaving regularly" (36). Her fame was widespread in the vaudeville circuit, especially with the female audience members. Annie once compared her fan mail to that of Henry



J. Montague, the matinee idol of Wallack's Theatre, "and her admirers, all women, far outnumbered his" (36).

The action of *Ladies and Gentlemen* spans ten years and through a series of flashbacks traces Annie Hindle's career and her relationship with her dresser and eventual late "wife", Annie Ryan (Ryanny). The supporting characters in the play are Tony Pastor (Annie's manager), Gilbert Saroney (a female impersonator and comrade), and Ella Wesner (a friend and stage-dresser who longs to become a male impersonator, and who eventually follows in Annie's footsteps). Much of the play centers on the past as a present in Annie's mind. The main conflict that Annie faces is dealing with the death of Ryanny and returning once more to her life in the theatre. At the end of the play, Annie is able to come to terms with the past, her gender, and her identity.

#### Postmodern Drama

In applying the postmodern school of thought to drama, Jeanette R. Malkin in her book *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama* explains:

Certain characteristics distinguish postmodern literature: fragmentation, indeterminacy, reflexivity, and intertextuality, montage techniques, temporal conflation, randomness. Postmodern theatre is

additionally characterized through its emphasis on voice and image, rather than on narrative and character. . . . (17)

*Ladies and Gentlemen* fulfills Malkin's characteristics of the postmodern. First, this play contains fragmentation in its narrative style because the flashbacks cut rapidly from one time to another, leaving the script disconnected without sufficiently alerting the audience. Secondly, it contains indeterminacy. Indeterminacy refers to gaps in the text that are not fully explained by the author. There are many gaps in Annie's identity. An example of this would be Annie's gender. Her gender appears indeterminate because she is a female, but has adopted male behaviors, which, she, in fact, learns and unlearns throughout the play. So, not only are there gaps in Annie's identity, but her gender is not fixed and is constantly evolving.

Thirdly, this play contains elements of reflexivity in that it is always referring to the stage and to performance. For example, Annie's first lines indicate that she is talking about her life and the play simultaneously when she says,

Tell you the truth, I'd rather sing something else,  
but the Manager Upstairs won't have it. He fills in  
his big showbook any crazy way he pleases, and he

don't take advice from mere performers. What am I doing here? (Donoghue 7)

Additionally, another example of reflexivity is the fact that all of the characters (excluding Ryanny) in the play are performers of the stage. So, the audience is watching actors perform as performers. The setting of the majority of the play is in a dressing room, and at times, the vaudeville stage. Ella's remark to Annie, "You performers! You can change your clothes, you can change your face, but you're too chicken to change your life" (49) exemplifies the reflexivity in the text. Much of Donoghue's script also exemplifies the postmodern according to Malkin because it contains intertextuality, which is referring to a genre that the audience is expected to understand. In this case, *Ladies and Gentlemen* refers constantly to vaudeville, with references to other performers, cities and halls that the characters toured, and the hazards of a life in vaudeville.

Also, the play incorporates montage techniques. One example of this is when Annie is binding her breasts for her performance in the present (1891), while a scene from her past between Ryanny and Ella occurs. Likewise, *Ladies and Gentlemen* utilizes postmodern techniques with temporal conflation and randomness. Because of the multitude of



flashbacks in the script, the audience loses track of what exact year it is, and this is acceptable because the actual time appears not to be important to Donoghue. Rather, it is more important that the audience just be aware of the events that occurred and how they relate to Annie.

Another example of *Ladies and Gentlemen* being a postmodern memory play is found in Act II, shortly after Ryanny's death. In this scene, Annie is mourning Ryanny and clinging to a keepsake quilt in order to keep Ryanny's memory alive. During this scene (which appears to be a memory of the past) Annie directly addresses the audience saying,

Oh yes indeed, ladies and gentlemen, you just sit tight there on your plush parasitical behinds and watch me go through my paces, and then you can clap your fat little hands and put your coats on and drive home, feeling kind of peaceful and refreshed, and I'll stay here and live my life over and over and over again. (Donoghue 85)

This direct address takes Annie out of 1889, out of 1891, and very much into present year 1999, suggesting that this, indeed, stems from the fragmentation and simultaneity of postmodern memory-theatre. There is no transition or explanation and the audience is expected to understand this

shift in time and space, as Malkin explains, "Postmodernism shifts the locus of attention from the object-so central to modernism-to the transaction between spectator and object" (18).

I believe that in that one moment on stage, Donoghue accomplishes this interaction between spectator and object. In this scene, the character has addressed the audience explaining that she is repeating over and over this agonizing performance. The audience may become aware that Annie and the actress playing Annie simultaneously are addressing them. In this moment, *Ladies and Gentlemen* resists the limits of the postmodern genre to a new realm of Emma Donoghue's own creation, of which Malkin has no clear definition.

Malkin continues to explain theatre that breaks down past hierarchies and boundaries is also considered postmodern.

The discussion of postmodernism can now be expanded to include the social and political. . . .[this is] reflected in the remapping of political and social power since World War II, and in the general trend toward rereading the past . . . .Gender, ethnic, racial, sexual and social perspectives have been reconfigured and expanded. (19)

*Ladies and Gentlemen* can be classified in this genre because it opens up past boundaries and hierarchies with its candid look at an unusual historical incident, in which a woman in the late 1800's had a successful career as a male impersonator and two women were married in a church. These incidents suggest that *Ladies and Gentlemen*, as a postmodern drama, deals with gender, sexual, and social perspectives "[that] have been reconfigured and expanded, leading to new and multiple power bases, as well as multiple, and unstable redefinitions of the self, the body, society, and the past" (Malkin 19).

*Ladies and Gentlemen* is postmodern in its portrayal of gender and identity under Malkin's definition because, throughout the play, Annie is constantly redefining her gender and her identity--it is never fixed. However, *Ladies and Gentlemen* parts from Malkin's understanding of postmodernism in one way. Under Malkin's definition, *Ladies and Gentlemen* is caught somewhere between modern and postmodern drama. It is postmodern because it allows for a new voice from the traditional hierarchy, and it realizes that gender and identity can be plural, contingent. But, *Ladies and Gentlemen* resists Malkin's definition of postmodernism in relation to the narrator's memory, because Malkin believes that postmodern theatre has many characters



remembering events at once, with contradictions occurring in the remembering.

Regarding the postmodern memory Malkin explains, "Unlike memory in modernist plays. . . .where a protagonist, or group, is the explicit source of remembrance, post-modern drama has no psychologically endowed characters who can act as locus of recall" (7). In this regard, *Ladies and Gentlemen* is modern because it still depends upon the narrative devices of personal flashbacks and realistic frames. Additionally, the protagonist, Annie, remembers all of the memories. Alternatively, elements of *Ladies and Gentlemen* are postmodern because of the fragmentation in the narrative style, and the use of memory and performance of gender and identity throughout the play. It is also postmodern in that it "builds on the audiences' knowledge of the past (or, rather, of how the past is usually represented), in order to question and disrupt that knowledge. . . ."

(Malkin 20). In these ways, *Ladies and Gentlemen* is a postmodern play. But, unlike other examples of postmodern theatre, *Ladies and Gentlemen* resists one aspect of postmodernism because it has a central character for remembering and it has a meaning and clarity that the audience may immediately grasp and understand.



Malkin argues that modern, as opposed to postmodern, memory plays are those similar to the works of Miller or Williams where, "the entire play is a narrated flashback 'framed' by the 'rememberer'" (21). Although *Ladies and Gentlemen* certainly fits within this definition of modern memory plays, I believe it still has elements of the postmodern in its memory because of the flashbacks which create montage and randomness. Its inherent reflexivity and its look at the past concerning gender also makes *Ladies and Gentlemen* postmodern. These examples make it clear that, for the most part, Donoghue's *Ladies and Gentlemen* is a postmodern memory play in regard to gender, memory and identity.

After exploring the relationship of postmodernism and memory, I think it is important to further examine performance of gender and identity, as it is one aspect of postmodernism and an important part of analyzing the text as performance for *Ladies and Gentlemen*.

#### Gender Performance and Identity

An examination of gender as performance is important because in the play *Ladies and Gentlemen*, Annie uses the performance of gender as part of her identity, and, at times, to hide her identity. Utilizing the theories of Judith Butler, Rhonda Blair, and Jean I.

Marsden, I examined the concept of gender as performance and how mainly Annie, and to a lesser extent, the other characters in the play "wear" and "act" their gender. In the late 1880's, the era in which Donoghue has set the play, there were strict divisions between what was considered proper gender behavior for females and males. Jean I. Marsden explains these strict guidelines in her article "Modesty Unshackled: Dorothy Jordan and the Dangers of Cross-Dressing",

. . . .the emergence of a polarized conception of gendered behavior in which the two sexes were endowed with increasingly different qualities. . . .allowed little or no overlap between the sexes; each sex was assigned its own sphere of influence and behavior, and relations between the sexes were predicated upon this restricted vision of masculinity and femininity. (21)

Cross-dressing was one challenge to this rigid system, and Annie Hindle was "the first woman not only to specialize in male impersonation on the music hall, but to create a character clad in male street-wear, a flash young spark" (Senelick 34). Similarly, Gilbert Saroney and Ella Wesner shared with Annie this challenge to society, as they also performed on stage as cross-dressers. Their behavior was

thought to be entertaining, exotic, and shocking, but not normal.

Today, gender has been reexamined and redefined and a new understanding exists. Some feminist phenomenological theorists believe that gender identity is a learned set of patterns that culture and society teach and pass down to each generation. Judith Butler, in fact, defines gender as,

The performance of an unstable identity 'tenuously constituted in time. . . .instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.' [She says that] gender must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gender self . . . . gender is an "act". . . .which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority. (Butler 520)

This understanding of gender breaks from the binary view of "Woman" and "Man" which is not wholly reflective of "the subtle permutations that gender takes on in life and art" (Blair 291). In other words, we are born in separate sexes, but our genders are learned behaviors. Annie demonstrates this theory throughout the play.



*Ladies and Gentlemen* fits into Butler's understanding of gender because Annie is constantly performing a different gender in order to hide her identity, therefore her gender (and her identity) is unstable and an act. For example, at the beginning of the play, Annie walks into the dressing room appearing very much like a woman of her time. She wears a hat, shawl, and woman's travelling suit. At this time, she is disguising her identity as a person of a wonderful myriad of genders from the society around her. Instead, Annie is "performing" as a woman when in the "outside world."

As Annie unpacks, she takes off her wig revealing a short "man's" haircut. This action is another gesture of the performance of her gender. It also demonstrates the unstable identity of gender. Most people go to the dressing room to don a wig, not to remove a wig. Here, it is clear that Annie has "become a woman, [and compelled] the body to become a cultural sign. . . .in obedience to an historically delimited possibility" in order to survive in the outside world (Butler 522). Soon, however, Annie begins applying make-up to darken her eyebrows in a more manly fashion before changing out of her skirt and into male pants. Once safely within the walls of the theatre, Annie can become something other than the norm.

Another example of how *Ladies and Gentlemen* depicts gender as unstable and a repetition of acts is when Annie is preparing for a performance as a male impersonator. As she dons her costume and slowly repeats her ritualized actions of transforming herself from what appears to be a woman into a man, Annie becomes more comfortable. She walks and talks with more freedom than when she first entered the stage. The very first words which Annie speaks indicate something about her identity through a performance of gender and her relationship with Ryanny. "It's a simple story, all told, ladies and gentlemen. Not so much 'Lost and Found' as 'Found and Lost'" (Donoghue 7).

Although Annie experiences great freedom from the dictates of society in this "masculine" role-playing, she continues to experience the ever-changing nature of gender identity throughout her courtship with and marriage to Ryanny. This instability is not always comfortable for Annie, but she finds herself becoming more true to herself as her gender identity shifts and changes. In truth, Annie is not always the cocky, confident, and charming person that she impersonates. It seems Annie had gained, but also lost some of her identity by performing as a man, and by attempting to emulate men in her private life as well. As Butler puts it, "Gender is what is put on," and this put on

gender is only a little more true than the "feminine" gender that Annie puts on for the outside world (520).

With Ryanny, Annie recognizes the constantly changing aspects of gender and stops her "stylized repetition of acts". Annie exists with Ryanny at home in a blend of genders. Annie wears a skirt with short hair, and occasionally wears tails with the outfit. And, she also behaves in a boisterous and tender manner, choosing neither the typically standard "masculine" nor "feminine" traits when being intimate with Ryanny. In short, Annie is herself and in touch with her true multiple, but far more natural, identity while in a relationship with Ryanny. This identity with gender is best described by the playwright Emma Donoghue, "there is a lot about gender (as about sexuality) that shifts and changes, and must be learned and unlearned" (appendix). With Ryanny, Annie learns that she does not always have to perform, either as a personality or as a specific gender. Annie learns, and perhaps the audience through Annie learns, that there exists in everyone, "a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated into the pre-existing categories that regulate gender reality (Butler 527).

In her life, and through her remembered past, Annie gains her identity, but Ryanny is the key to her memory and



identity. Annie is displaced and without any real connection or memories of home or family. Ryanny is the key to Annie's regaining an identity and memories of a genuine personal life. The character of Ryanny offers Annie a spiritual and personal solace that allows her to create a home and identity.

After discussing memory and gender, I believe that it is important to discuss identity and its connection with memory and gender. Although gender certainly affects identity, and Annie utilizes gender in order to create an identity to perform, only Ryanny and her eventual death allows for Annie to realize her true identity. Borrowing from the theories of Trinh T. Minh-ha, I argue Ryanny is the key to identity because she is still connected to the past and its memories, as well as to the stories of the past while adapting and adding to the stories of the present and future. As Minh-ha explains, Ryanny's story "is her mother's story, her grandmother's story, and her mother's story" (121). In order to understand this notion, one must first look at the character of Ryanny.

Ryanny, like Annie, has emigrated from her homeland of Ireland. She is displaced and living in the United States, a country that allows a person to "reinvent oneself at whim." Ryanny served as a novice to the Catholic Order of



the Little Sisters, braved the Atlantic Ocean, and has the pluck to apply for a dressmaker's position with the touring company. These experiences prove that she is a woman of incredible bravery and resolve. Ryanny is a fitting match for Annie. When Annie finally confesses her love to Ryanny, it is Ryanny that suggests that the two be married. Ryanny knows herself and has a true sense of identity. Her being is spiritual and strong, even if the man-made churches have failed her. As she says to Gilbert when she finds out that the two can be married, but by a Unitarian Minister rather than by a Catholic Priest, "He's not a Catholic? Oh, well, I'm sure it's as good as. God's not a fusspot" (Donoghue 62). Ryanny is capable of dealing with the society in which she lives and adapting it to fit her needs and beliefs. Ryanny is extremely loving and spiritual and offers Annie a world that Annie never believed possible.

Ryanny is the key to identity because she is a voice of longer memory. Unlike the world around her, with its chaos and lack of meaning, she is still deeply rooted in the spiritualism and a past of her Irish ancestry. She may not entirely agree with the culture of her past, but she has built upon the things that matter to her. Ryanny has a deep spiritualism with her God and with her loved ones.

Ryanny's presence and partnership offer Annie solace from the ever changing, unreliable world that cannot completely accept her. With Ryanny, Annie finds complete acceptance and love. Even after Ryanny's death, Annie is able to remember and relive their lives together. Keeping Ryanny's memory alive allows Annie to realize herself and to eventually possess newfound confidence in herself. The quilt Annie holds often in the play is the key image to this memory identity. It is also the metaphor for the entire play. The quilt immediately sends messages of history, remembrance, and love.

The quilt represents Ryanny and the long history and roots that she comes from. Everything about the quilt is womanly and comforting. Women who worked all their lives had little free time had to create art that could be used practically. As Emma Donoghue puts it, "a quilt is an almost cliché feminist image of women's work" (appendix). The quilt is a reflection of the love and work of Ryanny's mother and Ryanny. The quilt represents the memories of family and community that the modern world is beginning to rip apart. When Annie is in mourning and needs comforting, it is the ever-present quilt that she relies upon and seeks solace in.

The quilt is a physical metaphor of Ryanny and her love for Annie. Ryanny's mother passed the quilt and her life story to her daughter, who, in turn, passed the quilt and her life story to her lover, Annie. Annie, in turn, passed this quilt and these stories to the playwright, Emma Donoghue, who has given us this story. In this way, the past is made present, and we are the bearers of these stories and identities made real before us. Trinh T. Minh-ha explains the story of identity more profoundly:

In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me, nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring. Pleasure in the copy, pleasure in the reproduction . . . .my story carries with it their stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly despite our persistence in denying it. *I don't believe it. That story could not happen today.* Then someday our children will speak about us here present, about those days when things like that could happen. . . .(122)

In conclusion, in this story, which may be repeated over and over, the playwright has created a new history; a history which celebrates love, life, and "marriage" between two people. The memory of this transcendent love is the true identity, an identity that transcends the constraints of society and gender by using gender identity. For in this union, Annie is able to reconcile with the performance and flexibility of gender identity. It is also in this union between Annie and Ryanny that they are able to find a "longer voice of memory" that is more dependable than their present society. And, it is in Annie's remembering of the ever-present past that identity is found.



CHAPTER II  
PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIRECTING MEMORY GENDER AND  
IDENTITY

Though I have explored the critical theory of memory, gender and, identity as it applies to the post-modern stage, and, more particularly, Emma Donoghue's *Ladies and Gentlemen* in a textual manner; I have yet to explain how this plays out in the practical experience of script analysis, rehearsal, and production. In this chapter, I will discuss my experiences of script analysis and directing memory using the methods of Harold Clurman. I will also discuss how I directed memory with the aid of music, stage design, and lighting design. Lastly, I will discuss directing the rehearsal and performance of gender and how casting and design choices aided in this process.

Script Analysis

When initially analyzing the script *Ladies and Gentlemen*, I utilized the methods of director Harold Clurman as illustrated in his text *On Directing*. I chose Clurman as an example to follow because his approach is very practical and easy to follow with various examples of his own work in the book. Additionally, these examples of his work showed that Clurman had some experience in dealing

with memory from directing works by Miller, Chekhov, and O'Neill. I also felt that I needed to ground my direction with a theorist and director who had more experience working in various genres, as I am still learning about the art of direction. Clurman's theories of analysis allowed me to connect the performers directly to the text in meaning and blocking, and it also gave me a great place to begin characterization work with the actor.

Clurman borrows heavily from the theories of Stanislavsky, insisting that a director analyze and create a spine for the entire play, and for each of the characters that exist within the world of the play. Clurman expands upon Stanislavsky in defining a spine as "the play's main or through action which leads to the 'super-problem'-the dramatist's basic motivation in writing the play" (28).

Following Harold Clurman's example, I created an overall spine for *Ladies and Gentlemen*, a spine for each character, and a working script that analyzed each scene of the play. As the spine of the play has to encompass all objectives and spines, my spine for the play was "To seek solace and forge a family despite the dictates of society." I found this spine to be the most active and inclusive. I believe that the lead character, Annie Hindle, is striving to seek solace for herself in mourning Ryanny. Likewise,

forging a family for Annie is to find a "home" for herself, a home where she can find solace in her constantly shifting gender and identity. Annie is also seeking a home of reality, and she must break out from her home of memories throughout the play.

Spines for each character were created and each word was carefully chosen in order that they emerge from the play's main action. Annie's spine was to find love and realize the non-performer within herself (find her true self). This spine was created from analyzing what is learned in the script about Annie, and does not directly relate to the theories of postmodernism. Ryanny's spine was simple in contrast to Annie's. Her spine was simply to love nakedly with no masks. The supporting actors also easily fit into the spine of the play. Ella Wesner's spine was to break from her former role and realize her potential and her needs. Gilbert's spine was to escape from life and to hide in the embrace of his "show-biz" family. And, lastly, Tony Pastor's spine was simply to keep things as they were (or as they should be).

When in process with the actors, I would frequently ask them how a certain behavior or interpretation corresponded with their character spine. Clurman's method was certainly helpful in this endeavor, but I found it



lacking in regard to directing certain moments of the play, especially in regard to directing memory.

Though I found the spines and creating a working score necessary to interpret the script, I did experience some difficulty in expressing the adjustment for each action. I found this especially difficult because *Ladies and Gentlemen* is a play of memories and memories contain action, but the remembering is difficult to find words for. Neither Clurman, nor my own inventiveness could solve this challenge completely. So, I worked with Clurman when his words and methods helped me, and then I utilized my own inventions and instincts in the moments of the play (especially in regard to memory) that I felt the Clurman method had failed.

#### Directing Memory

All actions, according to the Clurman method, are written in active verb format, with the adjustments (adverbs which modify the action) further coloring the action. For example, In Act I, Scene i, I wrote down "to remember" for the first moment that Annie hears a refrain from "Fair Irish Girls" and begins singing to herself and looking about the old dressing room. I used the words "with sadness and sarcasm" to further describe the action. Similarly, later in Act I, when Annie experiences another

memory flashback, I wrote, "to recall another time." To describe the adjustments this time I wrote, "automatically, naturally." It became difficult for me to find the right words to describe the constant memory shifts from the past to the present that move the entire plot in such a cyclical format. I felt that Clurman's method worked better to describe the action of the memories that continued in the scene rather than the initial change or flashback into the memories that Annie experiences throughout the play. Part of this difficulty could stem from the fact that Harold Clurman did not give examples of directing postmodern memory theatre. The characters in the plays which Clurman directed and theorized about, deal with memories and may live psychologically in the past, but they were not transported rapidly in time through serial flashbacks. So, for my directing of memory, the Clurman analysis did not offer me enough tools. In regards to directing identity and gender, however, I believe that the Clurman method offered a solid base.

In regard to the failings of Clurman's examples regarding memory, I encountered much difficulty as director and attempted various ideas to "solve" my problem. One problem that arose from the Clurman examples was some trying director-actor communication during the staging of

the play. I found myself at an impasse to have my actress playing Annie effectively "play" a memory, so that every memory flashback would read to the audience. The action-orientated language of Clurman seemed repetitive rather than original in this instance. The most effective direction I could give for playing memory was for the actress playing Annie to slowly mime a response to an object that reminded her of her lover, Ryanny. However, conveying the memory was too much of a challenge for just the actress to convey to the audience, so I, as a director, would institute various staging techniques.

An example of one of the staging techniques that I employed was during Act I, when Annie is transported from her present day dressing room to her dressing room in 1880. I staged the ensemble of her past around the dressing room. I, then, instructed the lighting designer to have each character lighted as they said their first line to Annie and entered the dressing room. This allowed the audience to grasp that Annie was no longer in the realm of reality because they were immediately pulled out from the scene with its presentational style. Additionally, in Act II, I would often direct Ryanny to remain motionless as Annie drifted rapidly from one memory of their relationship into another. This presentational style, again, caused the



audience to break from the action of the play and realize that they were, indeed, witnessing a remembered past rather than a present moment. Although I think these stagings helped to communicate *Ladies and Gentlemen's* fragmented memory narrative, and may have, in effect, made the production more postmodern, I believe that this was the weakest element of the production.

#### Music and Memory

Although I experienced great difficulty in staging memory, tackling these challenges of playing memory was made somewhat easier by Emma Donoghue's playwriting. Throughout the play, Emma has incorporated songs and bits of songs that the character Annie Hindle sang throughout her career as a vaudevillian male impersonator. Although the songs were also selected to comment upon the Victorian society in which Annie lived, they also serve as a perfect "sense-memory" for the character of Annie. As Malkin points out in *Memory Theatre and Postmodern Drama*, the very premise of Stanislavsky's actor training believes, "there is not acting without the activation of memories from experience. His theory of 'affective memory' turns the actor into co-author who rewrites a character by channeling; a fictive text through a remembered one (4). For any person, there are strong memories attached to most of the

senses that he/she experiences in a lifetime. Certainly sound and music can have memories attached to them that take one back in time and emit a strong emotional response. The music running throughout *Ladies and Gentlemen* helped to convey memory shifts to the audience, and they also served to help the actress playing Annie emotionally connect and commit to the memory.

Initially, when first reading *Ladies and Gentlemen*, I was bothered by all the musical numbers that occur throughout the play. But I liked the play, and I realized the merit of the music. During my research, I wrote to the agent of the play in order to secure the rights to the music. Much to my dismay, the original composer was on an American tour and impossible to reach. Emma Donoghue granted me permission to create new music for my production.

Not being a musician, let alone a composer, I immediately turned to the music department of the University of North Dakota for help. Fortunately, Professor Michael Wittgraph donated his time and talent to creating eleven pieces of music for *Ladies and Gentlemen*. Not only did he create music for the large musical productions, but he also created small instrumental

introductions, as written in the play, to be played as Annie remembered her past.

These musical memory introductions are described by Emma Donoghue as a "music box echo", and they serve as yet another cue to the audience that Annie is rekindling a memory of her past with Ryanny during the vaudeville years. The song which dominates the entire play is "*Fair Irish Girls*." It is a direct reference to Ryanny, who is an Irish immigrant. It is this song that is hummed and sung by Annie when she remembers the death of Ryanny. Additionally, almost all of the music created by Michael Wittgraph are romantic in nature and reflect Annie's love for Ryanny and the various stages of their relationship.

I chose to have live piano accompaniment for the show. Not only did it add more realism to the musical numbers when Annie is performing in front of an audience, but it also enabled more expression and creative interpretation of the music box by the accompanist. I encouraged the accompanist for the show to improvise some upon the basic pieces so that "*Fair Irish Girls*" sung after Annie meets Ryanny varied some from the music box echo that haunts Annie in her mourning for Ryanny.

The "music box" music also helped in directing Annie in playing memory and in some basic acting in general. In



one rehearsal I asked all of my performers to bring an object from their character's past and explain why it was important to them. Interestingly, the actress playing Annie brought in an old, antique music box. The repetition of the music box was a strong memory with the actress and she acquainted the music box as a gift from Ryanny.

I took the importance of the music one step further. One evening, the actresses playing Ryanny and Annie were asked to improvise Ryanny's death scene. During the scene, I had a recording of the song "*Fair Irish Girls*" softly playing in the background. Now, the music and the memory became meshed and one with the actresses' memories and the characters' memories. This exercise was successful, as the play's most powerful moment, and the actresses' most believable moment was that of Ryanny telling Annie of her illness and then slowly exiting with a sad music box echo of "*Fair Irish Girls*." Then, Annie dances hypnotically holding Ryanny's quilt and singing the same tune. Because of the work in rehearsals, it was not only clear that this was another of Annie's memories, but also it was clear that this memory was most heart wrenching for her.

#### A Space for Memory to Play

Clearly analysis and directing were important for staging memory, but it was equally important to choose a

space where memory could play effectively. Since the postmodern performance of memory often consists of

" . . . .structures of repetition, conflation, regression, echoing, overlap, and simultaneity" (Malkin 1), I needed a stage that would reflect this concept, and I believe this was achieved in my production of *Ladies and Gentlemen*.

After my initial reading, I could only picture a blank space in which to set the play. *Ladies and Gentlemen* covers such a long time period and multiple locations that I knew my setting needed to be simple. This play could certainly be directed on a proscenium or thrust stage, but I wanted to keep the audience closer to the actors and I wanted the actors to be in a constant state of performance. Therefore, I decided that *Ladies and Gentlemen* should be staged in the round with vomitoriums coming from each side to the stage into the audience. After several meetings with set designer, Beth Froelich, she created a floor plan with a small playing area around the elevated platform in the center of the theatre. This allowed for quick movements from stage to dressing room. Beth also selected pieces of furniture that would invoke the period, but would also be practical in moving quickly on and off stage. Additionally, Beth's prop and furniture selections were

able to convey to the audience the harsh conditions of the dressing room and the luxury of Annie's cottage.

I wanted everything in a state of change and performance. Even when the other characters were off of the stage, they were often behind the audience humming, sewing, changing costumes, or moving about. Additionally, after meeting with costume designer Michelle Davidson, even the stagehands were costumed in period costumes. Then, I directed the manager, Tony Pastor, to direct the "stage hands" in the furniture positioning and set changes. This concept not only strengthened the idea of this play being a performance within a performance, it also allowed for a slick transition of memories for Annie. Annie could easily be transported from the dressing room (the elevated platform) onto the stage (the floor around the platform) or the platform could be cleared to allow Annie to perform a solo on stage. This allowed for a seamless playing of memory.

#### Performance of Gender in Rehearsal

The actors for *Ladies and Gentlemen* were selected carefully, as I needed talent that could not only sing and dance on stage, but I also needed actors that could believably perform as a stereotypical "man" or "woman". This is especially true of the characters Annie and



Gilbert, and to a lesser extent, Ella. My auditions were open, but I knew that the actor I chose to play Gilbert and the actress I chose to play Annie had earlier proved their ability to convincingly play a different gender style in a class that I had taken with both of them the previous semester.

Initially, I was most anxious to work with the actress playing Annie because her role required her to perform a myriad of constantly changing gender identities, and it also required more intimate contact with Ella and Ryanny. In the beginning, I worked primarily on the outer traits which Annie needed to display, her walk, talk, her posture while seated, demeanor, etc. I insisted that the actress study various male performers and emulate their various styles. At every rehearsal I had the actress wear period male shoes and slacks so that these outer trappings would affect her movements. I knew that in order for her characterization as an experienced male impersonator to be realistic, it would require hours of repetition in order to "perform" as a "flash young spark" of a man onstage and carry some of that same presence backstage with the other characters. So, the actress nightly repeated her wide stance, slouched posture, and bold movements. I directed in this manner because I believed this to be gender through



performance as defined by Judith Butler. Many times, the actress and I would discuss Annie's gender construct and we both concluded that Annie was a beautiful mixture of male and female genders containing "multitudes".

However, it was more of a challenge for the actress to decide when Annie was performing with more of a false male bravado for herself and her friends, and when she was being Annie, the wonderful combination of genders. It was decided that Annie would always be performing as a male with the male gestures that had been learned except when she was with Ryanny. With Ryanny, Annie became more soft-spoken, more unsure of herself, and downright silly as Annie herself points out to Ella, "I'm a hammy old flirt without the courage of my convictions" (Donoghue 48). Only after honestly expressing her love to Ryanny does Annie stop entertaining in order to hide her insecurities. She is still exuberant and expressive, but she is also more honest. From Ryanny, Annie has learned that it is acceptable to be herself, even if that means she is always changing and learning. These moments of truth and romance between Annie and Ryanny developed quite easily. The actress playing Annie utilized her own honest emotions and associations and had little difficulty portraying the softer, more romantic and nurturing Annie.

In order to attain the initial comfort level between the two actresses playing Annie and Ryanny, I had them learn stage combat so that they would become comfortable with one another on a "big" physical level. After that, many of their initial scenes were improvised in babble before the actual blocking and memorization occurred. Few changes were made in the blocking from these improvisations, only what needed to be done in order for the scene to be played in the round.

The great difficulty in gender performance for the actress playing Annie was in being the larger than life, robust character that Annie performs for her audiences and backstage peers. The actress had difficulty maintaining that robust personality that the character demands. As Blair explains,

Certain feelings and forms of expression can be psychologically difficult and even frightening for an actor. Some young women are literally petrified of being powerful, loud, large, angry or genuinely ominous; of taking the stage even when it is required by the role they are playing. Some women have difficulty sustaining aggressive, "nonfeminine" modes with conviction. (300)

The actress could imitate the gestures and memorize these fully, but she could not allow herself fully to be loud and powerful. Playing the lover was much easier than playing the manly, enormously entertaining performer.

Various exercises and actor games were tried in an attempt to help the actress move through these inhibitions. At one point, the actress was instructed to play Annie as a cartoon character from *Popeye* in order to encourage a bold, theatrical presentation. At another rehearsal, the ensemble was asked to play act one of the play as if it were an episode of *Laugh-In*, complete with music, go-go dancing, and comedic interjections. These exercises did help to a great extent, but it seemed that the actress could not fully invest herself in Annie's aggressiveness and flair. Though this was true, the actress still gave a very moving and honest performance in all other aspects of the show.

The actor playing Gilbert seemed to fill the character and the demands of his character's gender performance more easily. In part, I believe this was because as a person, he "performs" more naturally. Additionally, the feminine trappings of wardrobe, easily aided the actor in his repetition of stylized acts and stereotyping of gender. Certainly, costume designer Michelle Davidson worked toward



keeping Gilbert in glamorous period dresses, corsets, and gloves that made him appear convincingly feminine. Also, the character of Gilbert, unlike Annie, keeps his performance of male and female genders separate when he is out of the theatre. Because he is a married man and very much afraid that if he is caught behaving and dressing like a woman or acting effeminate in "real" society he would "be horsewhipped out of town" (Donoghue 24). Gilbert, like Annie, is gay, although he is a married man. In many respects, Gilbert performs even more than Annie does because he only allows himself to be his true self and gender in the company of Annie, Ella, and Ryanny. The actor playing Gilbert played his part to its fullest, but this, too, took some time. Eventually, he took great pleasure in the vaudevillian numbers that allowed him to over-stereotype the behaviors of a Victorian woman, and he balanced his characterization of Gilbert backstage with his "girls".

At the beginning of the production process, however, the actor playing Gilbert took very tentative steps in his characterization because he wanted to respect Gilbert and not create a stereotypical image of a male cross-dresser. After much reassurance from me that he had a proper gauge and his sensitivity would never allow him to cheapen



Gilbert, the actor finally began experimenting and playing more as Gilbert.

An opening up to the playful possibilities of Gilbert's character became evident after the actor had revised an imagined biography of Gilbert. Although all of the characters in the play are real historical figures, very little is known about Gilbert Saroney. In order to compensate for that lost history, the actor had created his own imaginary circumstances for Gilbert and shared those with me. At first, he had been reluctant to talk about Gilbert's love life. He preferred, instead, to concentrate upon his life as a child star and the horrible abuse he suffered from these experiences. I suggested that Gilbert was torn not only by his life on the stage, but also by his need to express himself as a gay man in a society that did not recognize, let alone condone or understand such love. This discussion led the actor to reflect more upon Gilbert's performances in the society in which he exists and he began to allow Gilbert to express himself and his gender more fully.

Ryanny, too, had to work on performing gender in a different style than her own. Ryanny appears to be "an old fashioned girl" who is very proper in her demeanor and language. One example of this is her constant nagging of

Mr. Pastor to mind his language in her presence. Tony describes Ryanny as "quiet" and she shows no interest in male impersonation, or what she describes as "pretending to be a man". So, even with this actress, I had to train her to behave and move in a manner appropriate for a woman of the 1800's. Throughout rehearsals she had to wear a rehearsal skirt and corset, and I kept a close eye on her posture while sitting and standing. This training was also the performing of a gender constraint. Additionally, Ella had to move from a corseted lifestyle into that of a male impersonator. This was especially difficult for the actress because once she had become comfortable with the constraints of a Victorian "feminine" gender, she was allowed to learn the gestures of Victorian "masculine" gender. As the masculine gender was more comfortable, her gestures while in the Victorian feminine costume would appear too modern or out of place. In this case, I also had to bring attention to the actress's gestures that did not read correctly.

In summary, all of the actors in the play experienced various challenges while playing memory and gender identity on stage. I, too, faced these same challenges, but throughout the production process, I was able to assist the actors in finding solutions to playing

memory and gender identity through careful analysis, exercises, improvisations, visualization and the repetition of day to day rehearsals. Additionally, the performers were able to utilize the music, space, and memorized gestures to aid them in a production that forced the audience to remember the past and to realize the performance inherent in identity and gender norms.

### CHAPTER III

#### ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

*Ladies and Gentlemen* was a joy to research and direct. The process of production taught me much as director in regard to staging memory, gender and identity. The process also taught the importance of a working vocabulary (which Clurman emphasizes) that transmits meaning accurately to actors and designers. By the end of *Ladies and Gentlemen's* run, some honest artistry had occurred. Yet, in this chapter I will further reflect upon and assess my accomplishments as a director in presenting the themes of gender, memory, and identity on stage. I will also discuss relevance and limitation of utilizing Clurman's action-centered theories when directing memory, gender, and identity.

From the beginning, the most challenging aspect of the production was directing memory. Admittedly, the music, the quilt, and a chair, all of which represented Ryanny, assisted the actress playing Annie to connect to a past memory, but I do not believe that every flashback was compelling (or, for that matter, entirely necessary) to the audience. "Memory" props were used in order to allow the



actress playing Annie an opportunity to connect visually with each memory. For example, Ryanny's quilt was kept on the stage at all times, and often, Annie would pick it up or wrap it about her, just as Ryanny had once done. Also, there was a chair on stage that was always kept on the same part of the stage, and upon which the other characters rarely sat. This chair was reserved for Ryanny. These memories were intended to help carry the audience through the frequent flashbacks. I do not believe, however, that all of the momentary flashes to the present read to the audience. In my opinion, some of those momentary flashes to the present could be eliminated from the script with little damage done and the same meaning present.

Additionally, although some nice pictures were created with the stylized movement and the lighting design by Steve Augustin, not enough was accomplished to differentiate the past from the present. The light designer and I worked endlessly to solve this problem, but I do not believe we were completely successful. I still wonder if the audience realized that Annie was in the present in such moments in Act II, when Donoghue writes:

Ryanny: Give over. (Worriedly, as she exits) I'll be in the pantry, sorting out those pickle jars.

Music: *off-stage fragment of "Minnie the Mermaid".*  
*Annie is briefly in 1891, trying to remember when*  
*things started going wrong. As Ryanny enters,*  
*carrying a towel, it is 1889 again and Annie*  
*intercepts her. (73)*

Is it possible to translate such a page accurately to the audience? How is it possible through direction and lighting to show Annie briefly in the present? I often found myself frustrated and wondering if is it even necessary. In an interview with Emma Donoghue she admitted,

Some of the transitions to the flashbacks are really creaky. We struggled with them in the first production, in Dublin. . . .memory is such an arbitrary business! In fiction it's so much easier to segue into a memory, because the narration can include it--whereas to convince an audience that the same characters on the same stage are now fifteen years earlier is a bigger deal, and sometimes you can almost hear the creak. (appendix)

This leaves me to conclude that a director and designer may do everything in their power to aid in the illusion of memory, but just by the convention and limitations of the stage, it will not be completely

effective. It is my belief that this inability to suspend the audience's disbelief may just be another indication of how postmodern theatre has affected the theatre of today without even the playwright being fully conscious of its affect. Again, although *Ladies and Gentlemen* has postmodern elements, it also has elements of traditional storytelling in which the fragmentation is somewhat ordered and clear in its meaning so that the audience may easily grasp the playwright's message.

Another aspect of memory in relation to my directing that I still question relates to the scenes in which Annie directly addresses the audience. I chose only to have Annie directly address the audience after Ryanny has passed on and she is in the midst of her mourning. Upon further reflection, I might have had Annie speak more directly to the audience at the beginning of the play to allow the audience to adjust to the random direct addresses that Emma Donoghue uses in *Ladies and Gentlemen*. Another director may have chosen to direct Annie in this manner, but I was not comfortable with this idea. I chose instead to have Annie's first words be more reflective, as if she is talking to herself. Now it seems more consistent to have Annie directly confront the audience with her words,



It's a simple story, all told, ladies and gentlemen.

Not so much "Lost and Found" as "Found and Lost".

Tell you the truth, I'd rather sing something else,

but the Manager Upstairs won't have it. He fills in

his big showbook any crazy way he pleases, and he

don't take advice from mere performers. (7)

If Annie speaks more directly to the audience, it reveals a

stage convention that will not shock them later in Act II.

Additionally, it enforces the basic themes of the play and

the aspects of postmodernism that I realized while

directing this play.

Furthermore, another aspect of my production of *Ladies*

*and Gentlemen* that I was not satisfied with was that I only

fully succeeded in making the lead actress comfortable in

her role, and thus liberating her to fully perform, on the

final performance of the show. This is not to say that the

actress did not perform very honest and beautiful emotions,

especially in regard to the more intimate and emotionally

trying scenes with Ryanny. But, I felt that there was some

reserve in acting out the more bold behaviors of Annie

Hindle. This failure could be attributed to my lack of

directing regarding character work, or it could be

attributed to the fact that the role is highly demanding

and the more time that the actress was allowed in the role,



the more comfortable she finally became. Perhaps after a two-week run as Annie, the reserve within the actress would have dissipated completely, as it certainly lessened by the last of the four performances.

Looking at the play and the method in which I chose to analyze it, I would have to say that the action-centered language of Clurman enables a director to begin rehearsals with a working vocabulary in dealing with blocking and actor characterization. In contrast, perhaps Clurman's analysis might be somewhat dated by its deep roots in realism. Certainly the majority of *Ladies and Gentlemen* was realistic in its structure, but there were moments that went beyond realism and into postmodernism and a realm which left me unable to use the words I had crafted in my Clurman script analysis. Perhaps this was my own failing, but I believe it to be a larger issue. An issue that could not be resolved in this paper alone, but one that merits consideration. Has drama moved beyond a strictly realism-rooted interpretation of script? I believe this to be true, but at this time I offer no solutions or researched discoveries--I offer only this puzzling question that may leave me with more questions for another production.

In contrast, I believe my production embodied the intent and passion of the script, especially in relation to

gender and identity. My production of *Ladies and Gentlemen* accurately explored the idea of gender as performance. As Donoghue explains,

My own sense is that we're born with very little in the way of sex markers; most of it is learned . . . . there is a lot about gender (as about sexuality) that shifts and changes, and must be learned and unlearned. I think the fact that Annie Hindle resumed wearing skirts in married life in New Jersey shows that the process can go both ways; it would be far too simplistic to see her as a 'trouser-wearing character'. (appendix)

In addition to showing the shifting gender performance that Annie, Gilbert, and Ella explore and experience, one of my goals in production was to make clear that beyond the gender and identity issues prevalent in the play, there is also love. This is a pure, honest love that exists between two people and the friends which support and surround them. Ryanny and her quilt that enfolds Annie allows for a recognition of and temporary solace from issues of gender, identity, or the dictates of society. This love allows Annie to become comfortable with her "multitudes" in a constricting society.

The play is a process, a process of understanding one another and oneself. By the end of the play Annie has "Found but lost". Through her relationship with Ryanny, Annie has found herself, but she has lost Ryanny. The important thing is that she can never lose her sense of identity again, for she has become more completed in the multitudes and learning and unlearning she experiences with Ryanny.

During Annie's final comeback performance, as Annie sings "A Real Man" to the audience, she entertains once more under new terms. Now, Annie knows why she does what she does. She must perform on the stage and act and sing her heart out over and over again, just as she must live life, regardless of the pain. It does not make the process less painful, but it adds meaning. It was my hope that the audience would be caught up in the same process and cycle that Annie lives, that they, too, would see the performance in life and the life in performance. Emma Donoghue explains this feeling as, "The requirement we all sometimes experience to rush on stage under-rehearsed, ill-costumed and hungover!" (appendix) In sum, we must live life with all its monotonous repetition, all-too brief joys, and pain to the fullest.



## APPENDIX

### E-Mail Interview with Emma Donoghue

1. Q: How did you first discover and become interested in the life of Annie Hindle?

A: In the early 90's I came across a few paragraphs on her in Laurence Senelick's article on theatrical cross-dressing (reference is in the acknowledgements of the play, I think). There are many stories of women passing as men and marrying women in disguise, and many other stories of women dressing up as men on the stage, but this was the only one I found in which the two apparently contradictory traditions touch. I suspect I was also drawn to the story because Annie Ryan sounded like an Irish name, so I immediately started daydreaming about an Irish immigrant ending up as the dashing Miss Hindle's bride...

2. Q: Judith Butler believes that gender is a performance of learned actions. Do you agree with this concept?

Certainly Annie uses gender as performance. I mean, when she first walks in she takes off a wig instead of putting one on.

A: Yes, I deliberately showed a lot of costume-changing rather than presenting the fully finished 'disguise'.



Certainly the play is all about gender as performance, though since I find Judith Butler literally unreadable, I don't think my ideas come directly from her theoretical work! My own sense is that we're born with very little in the way of sex markers; most of it is learned. In L&G, my exploration of gender games grew out of the highly suggestive historical facts. Annie's combination of male clothes and female name, husband and wife. . . .Gilbert's dignified, glamorous role as a 'dame comedian' but also a married man. . . .Ella's mid-career shift from 'dresser' (of others) to 'crossdress' (herself). . . .All these examples suggest that rather than having one permanent, lifelong, natural identity, there is a lot about gender (as about sexuality) that shifts and changes, and must be learned and unlearned.

I think the fact that Annie Hindle resumed wearing skirts in married life in New Jersey shows that the process can go bother ways; it would be far too simplistic to see her as a 'trouser-wearing character'.

3. Q: What playwrights influenced you?

A: I grew up on whatever was playing in Dublin-i.e. the strong tradition of realistic but lyrical and often 'talky' twentieth-century Irish plays (O'Casey, Synge, Brian Friel,

Frank O'Connor, Tom Murphy), plus classics (Shakespeare, Sheridan, Lorca, Wilde). At school and college I read other plays-including Brecht, Ionesco, Pinter-but frankly, scripts don't do much for me on the page, so I'm not sure anything I've read has influenced my sense of the theatrical as much as what I've seen. I saw and read some plays by women, but not many. I like all sorts of devices for framing and breaking up the action-such as the structure of a memory play, which is a strong form within Irish theatre-so long as the basic believability of the characters and stories are maintained. So long as, at all times, the audience continues to credit and care about what's happening to the characters.

4. Q: Do you think that *Ladies and Gentlemen* is of the modern or post-modern genre?

A: Oh Lord. I'm not sure what modern means. Personally, I've never claimed the term 'post-modern' for my writing, because I believe it most usefully describes certain writers who want to keep their readers/audiences in a constant state of self-consciousness about the fact that they are indulging in fiction/theatre which is full of arbitrary conventions. Whereas I'm an old fashioned girl who wants to move people and give them pleasure and

resolution. My preoccupations may be quite contemporary (e.g. gender as performance, sexual orientations) but my methods are not. Memory plays have been around forever; I'm thinking of, say, *The Glass Menagerie*.

5. Q: The format of your play is very circular in nature- what were you intending with this format? Also, do you think that women write differently than men?

A: I'm not widely read in women's and men's drama to answer this. Let me know your conclusions! I think one thing I was trying to capture in *L&G* with the circular format was the repetitiveness of theatre work; the idea of having to get up and act your heart out over and over again. Not just gender as performance, but life as performance; the requirement we all sometimes experience to rush on stage under-rehearsed, ill costumed and hungover!

6. Q: While directing *Ladies and Gentlemen*, I encountered the most difficulty in directing memory, especially in regard to the flashbacks. What do you think?

A: Yes, I have to admit, some of the transitions to the flashbacks are really creaky. We struggled with them in the first production, in Dublin. I think my writing-as in ideas and dialogue-is better than my stagecraft; the fact

that I've read a hundred times more novels than plays rather shows. I still think the basic pattern of *L&G*, the moving in and out of memories, is right, but I think a more experienced playwright could have shaped it so that each flashback grew perfectly out of its spot. Memory is such an arbitrary business! In fiction it's so much easier to segue into a memory, because the narration can include it—whereas to convince an audience that the same characters on the same stage are now fifteen years earlier is a bigger deal, and sometimes you can almost hear the creak.

7. Q: Why did you choose a quilt to be the memory prop that enables Annie to remember the past?

A: A quilt is an almost cliché feminist image of women's work. I wanted something maternal, portable, tender, multi-use (e.g. Annie uses it in the dressing room to keep warm but also to pose in, and it has associations with bed, too).



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