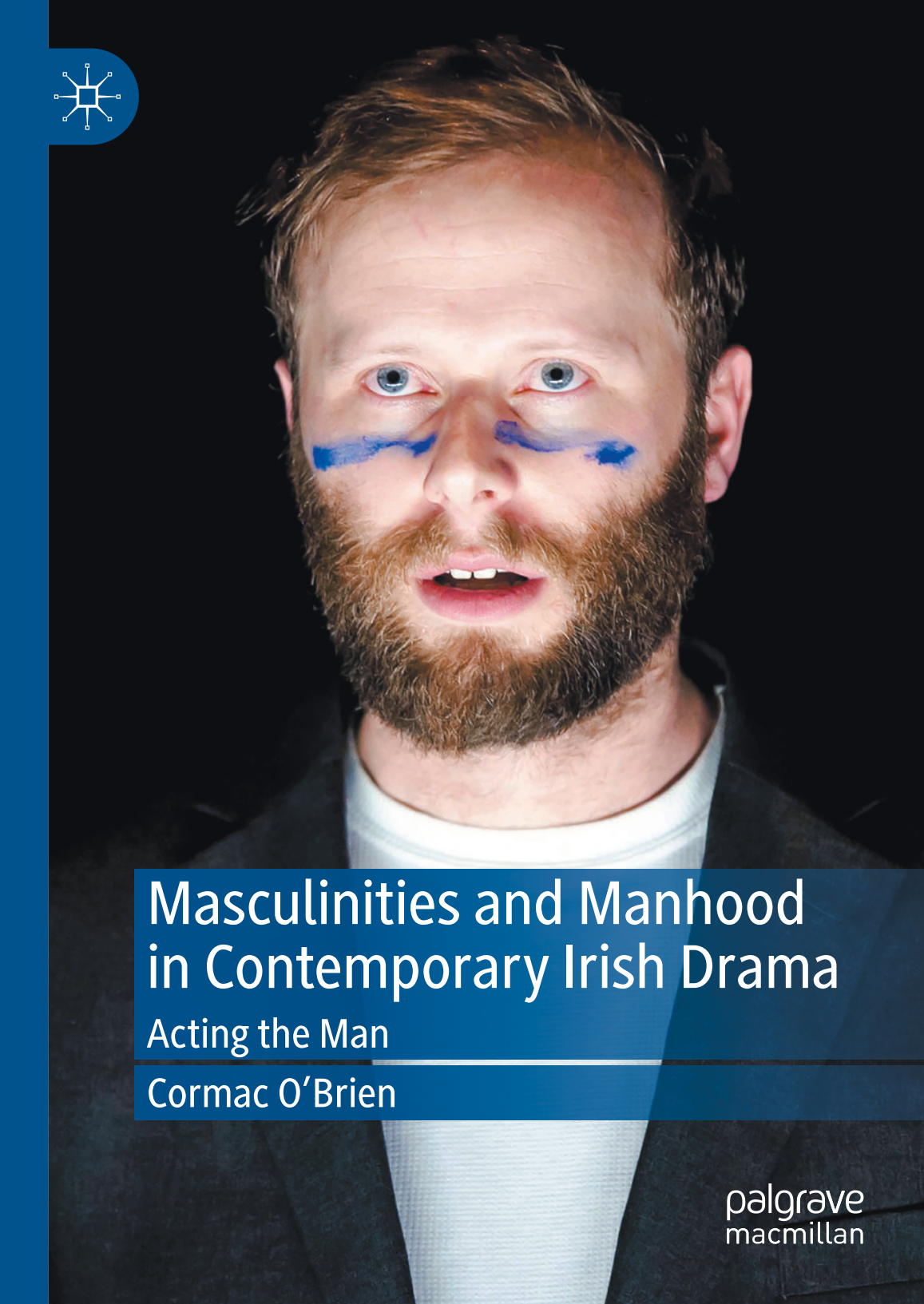

Masculinities and Manhood in Contemporary Irish Drama

Acting the Man

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This book is dedicated—with love always and ever—to Scots Michael, who taught me how to see the bigger picture, Mister.

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Acting the Man

Frank: No, but the job. You know, it's like a big tank. The whole town is like a tank. At home is like a tank. A huge tank with walls running up, straight up. And we're at the bottom, splashing around all week in their Friday night vomit, clawing at the sides […] and the big-shots – are up around the top, looking in, looking down. […] Spitting. On top of us. And for fear we might climb out someday – Do you know what they're doing? – They smear grease around the walls.

Joe: Come on out of here to hell.

From *On the Outside* by Tom Murphy & Noel O'Donoghue, 1959.

Joe: I want to say that I am absolutely outraged! […] A man has a right to his own mind, Carmel. Just because I'm your husband doesn't mean you own my thoughts. You can't know everything about me. […] I love you Carmel, I really do but you can't expect – I'm a human being. I have a right to my own … you know […] Would you give over now with the touchy-feely nonsense? You're making my chest hurt.

Carmel: The worry here is that I opened a letter addressed to you – not that you ordered a pair of stockings for yourself from a girl called Abbi? […] I need to believe that you are a better man than I currently believe you to be, Joe.

From *No Romance* by Nancy Harris, 2011.

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In Noel O'Donoghue's and Tom Murphy's 1959 play, *On the Outside*, Joe and Frank are young single men, futilely trying to beg, borrow, or steal the entrance fee to a rural dance because, although employed, they have no disposable income whatsoever. Their performances thus resonate with the social marginalization, cultural exclusion, and economic precarity experienced by a vast majority of everyday workingmen in late 1950s Ireland. And yet, while both are painfully aware of their lack of financial and social capital, they are more concerned that not gaining entrance to the dance has dashed any hopes of having sex with women that night. With their potential female partners already inside the dance—two women whom they describe in language that belies both their sexual inexperience and an objectified, misogynistic view of female sexuality—their chances of displaying their manly virility and potency is very much left 'on the outside'. Joe's final closing line, 'Come on out of here to hell', indicates not only that they will give up on their efforts to gain entrance to the dance, but also that they will, most likely, abandon Ireland itself and emigrate to the 'hell' of England.

Fifty-two years later, Nancy Harris' *No Romance* (2011) is set in a funeral parlour, where Joe, a once-prosperous businessman who has gone bust, rather than mourn his dead mother laid out before him, agonizes and shouts because his daughter has posted a picture of herself in a wet t-shirt competition on the Internet. His wife, Carmel, annoyed by his sexual hypocrisy, produces a pair of women's lingerie stockings that Joe has ordered from an online sex worker and so exposes his growing addiction to Internet pornography. While the economic precarity that threatens Joe somewhat echoes that of the men in *On the Outside*, the demise of his business is a direct result of the global financial crash of 2008, a fiscal disaster that, as many critics elaborate, was engendered by unregulated neoliberal capitalism. Still, Joe's performance is also undergirded by several problems shared by his counterparts in *On the Outside*, such as an inability to prioritize his anxieties, a misaligned and objectified understanding of female sexuality, and a sense of the contemporary world passing him by. Thus, although the settings and historical placement of these plays are very different, and the individual performances are equally contrasting, there is nevertheless a cluster of underlying anxieties shared by Frank and Joe in 1959, and Joe in 2011, with regard to how they should 'act the man'. Both plays therefore suggest a landscape of shifting and yet at times static performances of Irish manhood; a landscape that this book maps across a time frame—the 1960s to the 2010s—during

which Ireland underwent several periods of profound social, political, economic, religious, and cultural change.

This book therefore charts the journey, in terms of both stases and change, that male characters have made in Irish drama from the 1960s to the present; a journey whose significant characteristics are alluded to in the above quotations. Echoing the similarities and differences between the masculine anxieties of Joe and Frank in 1959 and Joe in 2011, one of the primary aims of *Acting the Man* is to critically elaborate a seismic shift in the theatrical performance of Irish masculinities and, by extension then, in the broader society and culture. Responding to the world around them as it revolves on an ever-changing socio-political axis, male characters in Irish drama, this book argues, have shifted from embodying and enacting post-colonial concerns of Irishness, nationalism, and national identity, to performing paradigms of masculinity that are driven and moulded by the political and cultural praxes of neoliberal capitalism. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Irish drama, as this book shall demonstrate, was underwritten by performances of a nationalist resonance, whereby male characters embodied concerns about overdetermined manhood and Irish identity. More recent performances of masculinity have, since the mid-1980s and even more explicitly since the 1990s, shifted into manifestations of market-driven masculinity whereby hyper-consumers purchase, subsume, and subsequently perform mediated tropes and narratives of homogenously globalized manhood.

Still, this shift is neither as all encompassing nor as liberating from the old ways as it initially appears. Since the 1980s, the increasing entrenchment of neoliberal socio-economic policies and cultural practices means that Irish gender roles subscribe to consumerist tropes of identity that are as class-anxious as they are rigidly gendered—as rigid, albeit in different ways, as the social models of gender that came before. Joe and Frank in *On the Outside* are trapped in heavily gendered socio-cultural schemas and display a hunger for sexual experiences that are intrinsic to their being men from late 1950s Ireland. Not only does their economic precarity and willingness to emigrate from that 'vomit-filled tank' speak to the autarky of Eamonn DeValera'sIreland, but their lack of access to and knowledge of women and female sexuality also resonates with Catholic Nationalist teachings and ideologies of the time. Furthermore, as the emigration narratives of thousands of Irishmen like Joe and Frank demonstrate, life as an Irish navvy building English motorways and council estates, while quite different to the unemployment or low-paid farming such men

had left behind, was nonetheless another form of 'hell' (McEinri 2000). Half a century later, Joe in *No Romance* has easy access to market- and digitally mediated versions of his sexual fantasies, courtesy of high-tech infrastructures and credit cards, and via that most globalized and commercialized of entities, the Internet. Yet, when those fantasizes are disrupted harshly because an online photograph of his daughter forces him to see the anonymous living dolls of internet pornography as real women with lives and personalities, his misaligned notions of women and female sexuality replicate those of the men in *On the Outside*. Crucially, Joe in *No Romance* could be any contemporary Western man. His performance of angst-ridden masculinity, indeed Harris' entire drama, could easily be set in many developed nations across the Global North in the 2010s and still play out in the same ways with the same consequences. Thus, while Joe and Frank in 1959 do what Irishmen must do, Joe in 2011 does what globalized Western men must do.

However, and characterizing one of the key sites of inertia in this shift from nationalism to neoliberalism, the concerns and vicissitudes of heterosexual men still remain the primary driving forces behind Irish theatre (both artistically and as an industry) and Irish social, political, and cultural life. To explore why this might be; to discover why, in so many cases, change in Ireland has meant different ways of staying the same, *Acting the Man* also elaborates parallel shifts and stasis in regressive systems of gender and sexuality in Irish culture, politics, and society, whereby patriarchy, misogyny, and homophobia have morphed from being explicit and easily identified, into implicit, often invisible structures of control. Hiding themselves in market-mediated tropes of polarized gender and sexual identity, these regressive systems are promulgated under the allegedly liberal gloss of 'consumer choice' and 'individualism', thus effacing their workings so as to be invisible by their very ubiquity. Joe in *No Romance*, as an individual in the globalized economy of the twenty-first century, understands purchasing internet pornography as a 'right', and when his wife points out the misogyny and lack of responsibility inherent in his choices, she is chastised for interfering in his privacy and even his thoughts. Moreover, as *No Romance* aptly exemplifies, quite frequently when male dominance is challenged, such challenges are responded to with dire warnings about men becoming disenfranchised, or somehow emasculated, thus heralding doom-laden portents of social breakdown, and, most frequently, of men being thrown 'into crisis'. Therefore, alongside considerations of the shift from nationalism to neoliberalism,

Acting the Man also interrogates the contemporary notion of 'masculinity in crisis' whereby traditional modes of masculinity—in particular patriarchy—are perceived as being under threat due to socio-political gains made by feminism and LGBTQ rights movements.

Up until quite recently the landscape of Irish theatre scholarship has been inflected primarily by post-colonial criticism, although it is now starting to move towards identity politics and biopolitical criticism. Certainly, over the last thirty years, there has been a growth in critical examinations of gender and sexuality, albeit predominantly in terms of femininity and feminism. It is only in the last decade, with landmark publications such as Brian Singleton's *Masculinities and the Irish Theatre* (2011) and Fintan Walsh's *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis* (2010), along with several journal articles and book chapters responding to a new wave of male playwrights that rose in the 1990s, that Irish drama scholarship has begun to think about men and masculinities in a critical framework. Of these works, this book acts most in tandem with Singleton's 2011 monograph, however several fundamental critical apparatus set his and my books apart; first, Singleton's work starts in the 1990s whereas this book takes 1959—both in terms of politics and playwrighting—as its starting point. Furthermore, where possible and in consultation with Singleton, we have avoided analyses of the same dramas. Singleton's work has a chapter dedicated to race and ethnicities of colour (which focuses in the main on television drama) whereas this book folds such analyses throughout its chapters with the main focus on opposing ethnic identities being those of differing models of white Irish manhood, particularly with Northern Irish masculinities in Chapter 4, 'Men of the North'. This book, unlike Singleton's, has a chapter dedicated to interrogating 'Masculinity without Men', which is to say, analysing female-centric and -authored plays for the 'presence by absence' of patriarchal masculinity. And finally, while Singleton's book focuses on masculinities both onstage and within the Irish theatre industry, this book is a critical survey of the shifts and changes in the ways in which male characters in Irish drama have been represented since the 1960s to 2020. *Acting the Man* hence aims to intersect several nodes of thinking about Irish drama—postcolonial, gender, queer, and biopolitical—and thus develop a new critical framework; not only by drawing from and building on the long tradition of post-colonial scholarship, but more so by intervening into it, teasing out, and nuancing performances

of masculinities that have been, up until now, largely taken for granted by critics as representing a monolithic 'Irish manhood'.

Examining a diverse corpus of Irish drama and performance both mainstream and on the margins, popular, and fringe, *Acting the Man* maps this new critical landscape and thus creates a space for innovative and original readings of canonical Irish plays while also giving several fringe and alternative theatre events their first intellectual consideration. Chapter 2: The Fantasy of Manhood, examines the ways in which hegemonic or society's dominant form of manhood is constructed both subjectively and in the socio-political and cultural arenas. Having examined how dominant models of manhood are constructed in this chapter. Chapter 3: The Pathology of Patriarchy, then scrutinizes the ways in which these forms of manhood assume entitlement to a place at the top of the gender order and then take that place, often to the detriment of women, trans people, and other less dominant models of masculinity. Chapter 4: Men of the North, examines how the construction of dominant masculinities and their operations in society function in different ways once they are situated in a zone of conflict, in this case during the Northern Irish 'Troubles' and in the post-conflict or peace process. Chapter 5: Masculinity Without Men examines the 'presence by absence' in dramas that have all-female casts or are female-centric and in plays that are written by and for women. The book's final main chapter, Acting Queer, posits queer dramaturgy as a way forward for a more egalitarian Irish theatre, both in performance and as an industry.

Crucially, the book's critical landscape demonstrates the ways in which theatrical performances of Irish masculinity and, by extension, the lives of Irish men and the other lives they touch, have always been subject to inflexible ideologies, driven at first by issues of national and post-colonial identity, and more recently by neoliberal and homogenously Western concerns. Both of these ideologies are universally impacting, as the book demonstrates in chapters on performing masculinity in both the Republic and Northern Ireland, and in chapters that focus on women's and queer drama. *Acting the Man* thus takes its readers on a journey: a journey that begins with an overtly patriarchal, nationalist manhood that often made direct comment on the state of the nation, and ultimately arrives at several arguably regressive forms of globalized masculinity, which are couched in misaligned notions of individualism and free choice and that frequently perceive themselves as being in crisis.

1 Contexts and Concepts of Masculinities

The word 'masculinity' means many different things to many different people. As it is popularly understood in everyday life, it is taken to mean how men—the males of the human species—walk, talk, behave, and think in ways that are specific to and caused by their being male. In other words, masculinity is perceived as a distinct cluster of characteristics, movements, gestures, attitudes, mindsets, and utterances, that are enacted by male bodies and which thus differentiate them from females. Furthermore, that this cluster of characteristics is traditionally bestowed with ideals of power, strength, decision, reason, leadership, economic success, political acumen, and national protection has been used frequently to justify the masculine control and oppression of women and homosexual men. But even this generalized understanding of masculinity has nuances that vary with the march of history and from culture to culture. Consider, for example, the term 'machismo' and its Anglophone counterpart, 'macho'. In its original Spanish and Portuguese contexts, both historically and in the present day, 'macho' functions as a compliment that pays homage to a man's virility and attractiveness to women while signalling his ability to provide for and protect his family. Simultaneously, however, the term has been globalized, at first through Spanish and Portuguese colonialism and later by economic migration, and so its meanings have changed over time beyond its original Iberian contexts. In European and North American nations, 'macho' now carries a negative valence, denoting a particular form of overdetermined, arrogant sexism while also perpetuating racial stereotypes about 'over-sexualized' Latin men. Yet in gay cultures, 'macho' resonates with the sexual fantasy of muscle-bound, domineering men (of any ethnicity) who do 'hard-man' jobs like the cop or the fireman—indeed, much gay pornography and nightclub marketing will have the term 'macho' figured somewhere in its branding.

Geopolitically, the social enactment of masculinity will vary as different governments, educators, religious entities, and sports associations posit and sometimes enforce ideals—both legislative and cultural—about how they expect men to act as men in their societies and communities. Even within the everyday living of one nation state there are vast differences in the ways men are expected to embody their masculinity. Consider, for example, the type of masculinity portrayed by an unmarried farmer, living and working in an isolated community in rural Ireland which is deeply religious and conservative. And compare that to the ways in which an

atheist, married man with three children, who lives in an affluent Dublin suburb and works as a senior executive at a global corporation, would enact his masculine identity. Indeed, one would, with these two examples, see differences in their expressions of masculinity depending on where these men were at any given time of the day and with whom they were interacting. Consider now the single gay man, employed and living in the city-centre, with a busy social life. While his sense of masculinity will contrast with the two above examples, it will also differ from that of another gay man who is older in years and settled with a long-term partner. And the ways in which all of these men convey a sense of masculine identity would change should their sources of income become reduced or stop altogether.

It becomes clear, then, that masculinity is not one ahistorical, fixed state of being that applies to all men at all times, but rather a set of ever-changing, geopolitically specific models of manhood that are shaped by socio-political, cultural, religious, and economic contingencies outside of the male subject. This notion of many different, culturally and temporally contingent paradigms of manhood led scholars in the mid-1980s to posit the concept of 'multiple masculinities'. This in turn has fostered the critical study of 'men and masculinities'; thereby not only pluralizing masculine characteristics and mindsets, but further making a definite separation between the bodies of men and the social configurations of masculinities that map across those bodies. Men and masculinity, for so long assumed to be one and the same thing, are now intellectually conceptualized as separate but mutually dependent entities.

Furthermore, as a cluster of culturally constructed paradigms that map themselves across male bodies, we can infer that masculinities are acted out, or performed, as those bodies move through social and theatrical time and space. Yet, while the word 'performance' denotes something that is rehearsed, practised, and deliberately brought before others, for quotidian male subjects this is rarely a conscious process. It would be foolish to suggest that the majority of men awake in the morning and decide to perform their masculinity in one particular way or another. Indeed, as this book illustrates throughout, the performance of masculinity and its effects on others is something to which many men afford little or no thought. Therefore, although we can see how masculinities are, in one sense, 'performed', our understanding of the psychic machinations and cultural conditioning that drive these performances needs further unpacking.

Drawing from the work of linguistics scholar, J. L. Austin, gender philosopher Judith Butler argues that the enactment of gender paradigms can be considered 'performative' rather than performance. Austin theorized 'performative speech acts' whereby certain events are made to happen, or brought into being, by merely uttering that they have happened, with the most cited example being that of a wedding: the minister or legal celebrant, through the performative speech act of 'now pronouncing you husband and wife', changes the social, legal, and cultural status of the couple in question. Butler applies this thinking across gender, arguing that it too is brought into being, or made to happen, through the subject enacting or doing a '*stylized repetition of acts*' which have been embedded deep into the psyche since infancy (1988, 519). The 'regulatory fiction' of gender, as Butler calls it (1990, 45), is therefore brought into being by doing it, rather than brought into doing by being it—or by any essence of innate, pre-birth manliness.

While it is tempting, in the light of these formulations, to consider the male body as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate upon which culturally specific scripts of masculinity are imposed, it is vital to consider the interwoven effects of language, history, and, especially in the case of Ireland (or any post-colonial state), the role of imperialism. At their most fundamental, theories of gender differentiate between the biological sex of bodies as they are born into this world (i.e. male or female), and the culturally constructed codes of gender as they are socially mapped onto those bodies (i.e. masculinity and femininity). However, the 'natural' biological body is known to us, can only be known to us, through language, which itself is a cultural construct—thus the language and taxonomies through which any given culture understands 'natural' bodies will have their own historical bias and, in the contemporary era, market-mediated meanings. To trouble this cultural sex/gender binary even further, it leaves intersex and transgender bodies—those either born with some degree of both male and female biological characteristics or those who need to perform socially a gender configuration different to their biological body—out of the mix completely. Such bodies are, in many cases, perceived as 'unnatural' anomalies and are subject to violence, legal ambiguity, and easy incarceration. Colonization too has had a massive impact on the sex/gender binary with the imperialist formulation of the ideal subject as being a white, heterosexual male still prevalent across the globe—thus 'natural' bodies of colour acquire different, often objectified and eroticized meanings as do the cultural codes of gender that are mapped across them.

As several post-colonial scholars have elaborated, when former colonies transition into independent States, their previous status as colonized, 'feminized other' morphs not only into overdetermined gender roles, but also into violent misogyny and homophobia as the fledgling nation seeks to assert its strength through the valorization of 'natural' strength and prowess and thus 'natural' gender roles (Nandy 1988; Meaney 2010). Vexatious bodies that do not conform to the new nation's ideals of gender (ideals, we must remember, that were inherited from the former colonial oppressor), such as non-conforming women, transgender subjects, gays, lesbians, and other queer-identified people, are ushered out of public sight through exile, criminalization, incarceration, and in some cases, elimination.

The sex/gender binary, then, is not as clear-cut as it may first seem. What is clear, however, is that both our understandings of natural bodies and the cultural codes of gender that are mapped across them are highly regulatory, and those who cannot or will not conform to them are often punished, both culturally and legislatively. And yet, the entrenched nature of these gender performatives, as they are automatically, unconsciously, and unquestioningly enacted by the subject, makes them seem natural, pre-emptive, pre-cultural, part of the order of things. Although the male subject performs his masculinity, by virtue of the performative nature of gender, often he does not realize this to be the case.

2 Hegemonic Masculinity and Performing the Nation

Although one can recognize that social and theatrical performances of masculinities are multitudinous and varied, it is important also to interrogate how, in any given culture and historical era, one particular paradigm of masculinity rises to a dominant position and is thus socially sanctioned as the only acceptable way to be a man in that time and place. Originally proposed in a field study of social inequality in Australian high-schools by Martin Kessler in 1982, 'hegemonic masculinity' is the label given to this dominant construction of manhood (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity can thus be understood as an overarching paradigm of manhood that rises to social prominence and thus dominates configurations of gender practice within any given society. On an individuated level, it becomes an exalted model of masculinity to which men aspire while, on a societal level, it embeds itself into social structures and

cultural practices as a means of legitimizing and sanctioning heterosexual male dominance.

Because hegemonic masculinity is popularly imagined, with idealized men appearing in media, sports, drama, film and television, and public discourses, its reification ensures that it is, in actuality, embodied by very few, if indeed any men. As Raewyn Connell puts it, 'Hegemony is a question of relations of cultural domination, not of head-counts' (1993, 610). Clearly then, while hegemonic masculinity cannot be considered normal because it is rarely achieved, it is certainly normative and asymptotically aspirational; rather than being a suggestion of how men should act and treat other people, it functions as a regulatory dictate. Hence, hegemonic masculinity is competitive, and, being based on a reified ideal, remains constantly unresolved, subject to eternal self-doubt and questioning by other men. This questioning happens most of all in all-male or homosocial settings. Within homosocial groupings of men, the subject's masculinity must be validated by his peers through systems of surveillance. Men find themselves under the perpetual scrutiny of other men; ranking each other, evaluating their counterparts' performances of manhood, and thus permitting, should the performances be found up to par, entrance into the dominion of hegemonic masculinity. Men in homosocial settings constantly check themselves, and each other: 'Am I manly enough? Is he?' This social dynamic thus autologously feeds into hegemonic masculinity's schema of competition, suspicion, and self-doubt. The constant need to keep up with and then outdo other men's performances of manhood means that masculine peer surveillance functions as one of hegemonic masculinity's most powerful social tools.

Irish drama, by virtue of the Abbey National Theatre's role in the early twentieth-century struggle for Irish independence, has been heavily bound up in the project of nation building and promoting the national imaginary. However, what much scholarship has elided is that the project of theatrically building the nation is inextricably interwoven with the project of promulgating Irish hegemonic masculinity. Performances of hegemonic paradigms of manhood in Irish drama, despite shifting and changing over time, so often essentialize Irishmen as 'sons of the nation' or as symbolic of the state of the nation. Writing in a specifically Irish context, Debbie Ging asserts:

> gender identity and national identity are remarkably similar [....] Through subtle processes of symbolic and cultural reinforcement, nationality and

> masculinity tend to become viewed as essential qualities […] how masculinity and femininity are defined in a given society is central to that society's collective concept of self, and vice versa. (2012, 21)

Indeed, it is possible to trace a through-line of hegemonic masculinity in modern Irish theatre using a few prominent examples: It begins with W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory's 1902 drama *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, in which the male hero abandons his bride in order to die for Ireland, moves via Tom Murphy's and Brian Friel'sAngry Young Men in *A Whistle in the Dark* (1961) and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), to its most recent manifestations in Conor McPherson's disaffected, socially disorientated men who question the supposedly egalitarian nature of Irish society from the 1990s and beyond. Falling in line with several prominent Irish cultural institutions such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the state-sponsored broadcaster RTÉ, the Irish political establishment, and the Catholic Church, Irish theatre has functioned as a primary site and conduit of hegemonic masculinity. In many ways, then, the history of modern Irish drama can also be read as a cultural history of modern Irish manhood.

However, the hegemonic paradigms promoted by entrenched bastions of Irish masculinity such as the GAA and RTÉ are shifting, a phenomenon that has not gone unnoticed by several prominent scholars of Irish culture (Cronin 2014; Mulhall 2013; Ging and Free 2016). The place of hegemonic masculinity in Irish social life and the cultural associations that support it have, since the exposition of Church and Institutional abuse scandals in the early 1990s as well as generational shifts in attitudes towards LGBTQ sexualities and women's rights, made decisive moves away from traditional strangleholds of identity such as Catholic Nationalism and its overt homophobia and misogyny. In 2009, Dónal Óg Cusack, a high-profile and much admired GAA hurling player, came out publicly as gay via his autobiography *Come What May*. Cusack spoke subsequently on many national media platforms about Ireland's entrenched architecture of homophobia and the often life-long harm caused by homophobic bullying of young LGBTQ people while simultaneously raising awareness about men's mental health. Cusack thus prompted a shift in attitudes towards gay masculinities in Irish sporting traditions and by extension in the culture more broadly. Furthermore, his public coming out, I would argue, had a positive influence on the subsequent success of the Equal Marriage referendum in 2015. The

GAA has since spoken out in support of gay players and has mounted several campaigns to dispel homophobia from Gaelic games while also promoting women's GAA sports. Simultaneously, the successful passage of the Equal Marriage referendum was overwhelmingly supported by many heterosexual men—both ordinary citizens and public figures—who could be considered exemplars of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, the Abbey Theatre hosted several events in support of a Yes vote for the Equal Marriage referendum.

It tempting to thus argue, particularly given the success of the marriage referendum, that Irish hegemonic masculinity has evolved to encompass queerness or at least gay-identified men. In this vein, scholars such as Eric Anderson argue for 'inclusive masculinities' (2009), a hybrid model of hegemonic masculinity in which gay men allegedly function freely and without oppression. However, for other critics, this formulation is too simplistic. Scholars to date have asserted that one of hegemonic masculinity's defining characteristics is heterosexuality; therefore any social enactment of male homosexuality was considered to sit firmly outside the boundaries of the hegemonic project. Up until the last decade or so, this claim certainly held weight, particularly when we consider that hegemonic masculinity—because it is an unstable, idealistic identity with ever-shifting boundaries—has always defined itself as that which it is not, rather than state what it is. Homosexuality, therefore, has functioned as a key counter-identity for hegemonic masculinity.

There exists, however, a narrow, limited performance of commodified and market-driven gay masculinity which, while it cannot exactly be considered part of hegemonic masculinity, can operate in tandem with it. I speak here of a mode of gay lifestyle and living that theorists such as Michael Warner, Lisa Duggan, and Gavin Brown identify as 'homonormativity' (1999, 2003, 2012). I would also argue moreover, that within the realm of queer-identified masculinities, homonormativity can be conceptualized as the gay equivalent of hegemonic masculinity (and this is an argument I critically unpack in fuller terms in Chapter 5). This model of gay manhood, apart from same-sex partner, looks and acts very much like heteronormative masculinity and is inextricably bound up in neoliberal consumerism. Indeed, contrary to Anderson's claims that the apparently reduced homophobia of hegemonic masculinity has facilitated the emergence of more inclusive or non-homophobic forms of manhood, several scholars argue that Anderson's 'inclusive masculinities' may be little more than a strategy for so-called 'progressive' straight, white, middle-class men

to increase their economic, social, and political power (O'Neill 2015; De Boise 2015; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Ging 2017).

Gay masculinities we cannot therefore assume will always already be pro-feminist or anti-patriarchal merely by virtue of same-sex coupling or because this was once an outlawed and oppressed sexuality. Indeed, upon closer scrutiny, it appears that hegemonic masculinity will allow gay masculinities to operate alongside it on the provision that the common bond is misogyny. Ging demonstrates in a 2017 study of online self-labelling masculinities—a toxic digital space known as 'the manosphere'—the ways in which both gay and straight men espouse virulent misogyny in the name of 'men's rights'. Indeed, as Connell and Messerschmidt remind us:

> Men can dodge among multiple meanings according to their interactional needs. Men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable; but the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments. Consequently, 'masculinity' represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices. (2005, 840)

It follows, then, that the pro-gay yet anti-feminist discourses that Ging identifies demonstrate the ways in which Anderson's 'inclusive masculinities' not only exclude women but can also be explicitly invested in uniting men—regardless of sexual orientation—in a bid to secure social privilege over women.

Certainly the 'straight-acting' homonormative paradigm of gay manhood is easily digestible to the mainstream and, in keeping with hetero-patriarchal hegemonic masculinity, will subscribe to normative lifestyle choices such as proclaimed monogamy, the creation of a family with children (either through adoption or a surrogate mother), home ownership, and the right to join the military among other things. Here, then, is a model of gay manhood that seeks assimilation into normative structures as opposed to radical queer masculinities which look for liberation from capitalist systems of governance and their incumbent market-driven lifestyle paradigms. And while the assimilatory aspects of this gay manhood are no bad things in and of themselves, they become problematic when they become normative; by which I mean when these cultural codes and scripts are not only popularly understood but more so

politically promulgated as the only way in which gay masculinity can and should operate in social and theatrical time and space.

Furthermore, because this model of gay manhood is now part of normativity, brought into being primarily through consumership and in online spaces, it slots neatly into the already patriarchal structures of the State and shores up the neoliberal status quo.

Moreover, as this book demonstrates throughout, while many of these shifts in Irish hegemonic masculinity, including its tolerance of homonormative manhood, are inherently progressive, they are nonetheless underwritten by political and social practices of neoliberal capitalism. By attending to all of these recent, ostensibly progressive shifts in Irish manhood, *Acting the Man*, it is hoped, augments and furthers a nascent body of Irish cultural and queer scholarship that is now interrogating not just how hegemonic masculinity is performed by gendered subjects operating at the top of a social hierarchy, but also the ways in which that hegemony plays out across the bodies and lives of others, including the theatre spectator.

3 Patriarchy and Its Dividends

On 28th October 2015, the Abbey Theatre publicized its programme of events for the following year's centenary celebrations of the 1916 Rising which it called 'Waking the Nation'. That of the ten plays programmed only one was female-authored and a mere three to be directed by women was, paradoxically, both shocking and unsurprising. The misogynistic structures of the Irish theatre industry were now fully and publicly laid bare and what had, up until that point, remained a well-known but rarely examined problem in Ireland's theatrical culture could no longer remain ignored. Clearly for the Abbey, as Carole Quigleyputs it, 'women and their artistic work do not belong on the national stage and they do not represent a part of the nation worth "waking"' (2018, 85). The Abbey's sexist programming gave rise to an international activist movement protesting the patriarchal structures and secondary status of women in creative industries. Kickstarted on social media by Irish set-designer, Lian Bell, and named #WakingTheFeminists by director Maeve Stone, the hashtag went viral within days; with the irony of its shortened tag, #WTF, (an Internet acronym for 'what the fuck?') serving to hammer home the outrage, exasperation, and injustice experienced by female theatre practitioners in Ireland and abroad. And while #WakingTheFeminists proved

successful in terms of forcing change in the Abbey's programme as well as sparking a global movement with subsequent rallies and conferences and publications, this work is not over. As I elaborate further below, the Irish theatre industry—both artistically and managerially—remains patriarchal in ideologies and personnel.

In terms of patriarchy in performance, the masculine body onstage performs within a kaleidoscope of signifiers of hegemonic masculinity—those culturally embedded symbols of power, strength, leadership, national protection, and control. Coupled with male-peer surveillance and the subjugation of women, these signifiers mean that several systems of male dominance—explicit and implicit, visible and hidden—move and shape the lives of characters in Irish drama. As such, both the characters' and the spectators' investment in and journey through the worlds in which the drama operates are shaped—and to a great degree, controlled—by several systems of entrenched male dominance or patriarchy. Patriarchy, then, can be understood as a set of socio-political, cultural, economic, and religious systems, that intersect and control configurations of gender, class, race, and sexuality, by positioning the social and cultural performance of hegemonic masculinity as the dominant central identity from which all other subjectivities are deemed to have deviated and to which they are thus considered inferior. These sometimes subtle and insidious systems, in which both women and men (often complicitly) participate, privilege the interests of hegemonic men and boys over the bodily integrity, autonomy, civil rights, and dignity of women and girls, as well as queer-identified subjects and non-hegemonic males.

These entrenched systems engender what Connell identifies as 'the patriarchal dividend' (2005, 79). Although only a small number of men will identify entirely with or subscribe to male dominance in society (and over the last decade, such men tend to congregate in digital online spaces), and while many men will actively agree with the tenets of feminism, the majority of men still stand to gain from patriarchal structures. The history of patriarchy and its perpetuation in our contemporary world thus gives rise to structures of male privilege that go largely unquestioned by and are often invisible to the men who stand to gain from them. That even men who perform an ostensibly egalitarian model of masculinity can still reap patriarchal dividends illustrates the complexity of systems of patriarchy while simultaneously foregrounding how such systems are bound up in intricate relations of complicity and coercion. But beyond that, what the patriarchal dividend really highlights is that as much as

individual men (and some women) may need to examine their behaviour and beliefs when it comes to masculinist centrality and visibility, it is the very structures of patriarchy that need to be challenged and reformed if society and culture are to move towards an egalitarian gender order.

With social and theatrical systems and performances of patriarchy so deeply entrenched at all levels of Irish culture and society, and their subsequent dividends providing ample rewards for just being born a man, regardless of one's level of active participation in hegemonic paradigms, the internalization of such systems engenders a skewed form of base knowledge, or axiomatic epistemology, that is masculinist to its core. This patriarchal epistemology undergirds received truths and assumptions, operating at the very root of society's core beliefs. In essence, patriarchal epistemology functions as the baseline from which all other forms of knowing and believing spring, and, as the baseline, it goes unquestioned. Philosophers of systems of knowledge and epistemology identify two fundamental forms of human knowing: a priori and a posteri. The former is knowledge that is non-empirical, acquired independently of experience, and is arrived at 'before the event', indeed, brought 'to the event'. While the latter is knowledge garnered from experience and evidence, knowledge gained from 'the event' itself. What I argue here is that while patriarchal epistemology is popularly understood to be *a priori* knowledge, it is, in fact, an *a posteri* system of knowing. The collective and individual internalization of patriarchal systems and their dividends, coupled with the performativity of social gender roles skews understandings of patriarchy so that, much like gender, it appears to be a natural, pre-cultural force emanating from the beginning of time. Yet, it is clearly not. Systems of patriarchy and their dividends are derived from an *a posteri* knowing and set of experiences that have taught men, implicitly and explicitly, and over a long period of time, that such systems are to their advantage.

Irish theatre is a culturally prominent economic and socio-political structure with a meta-structural existence outside of itself not only in media commentary, reviews, and scholarship, but also in the hearts and minds of its audiences. Thus the Irish theatre industry operates both within and as a sub-system of the various patriarchal systems that constitute Irish society. That Irish theatre is a patriarchal entity, not just as an industry, but more so in its creative practices and policies, is well documented. As Eamonn Jordan puts it:

> the imaginations of Irish theatre practitioners, playwrights especially, have been seriously ideologically loaded, not only in the specific prioritization of primarily male values, references and aspirations, and in their general scrutiny of, and obsession with, masculinity, but also in their consistent subjugation, marginalization and objectification of the feminine. (2007, 143)

Where female characters are given prominence in Irish theatre they have, until very recently, generally fallen on either side of the madonna/whore binary—either sexualized objects, or asexual maternal figures. Ubiquitous throughout the Irish theatrical canon is the trope of Mother Ireland, whereby women are figured as nation, as an imagined, objectified space that might perhaps be fought and died for, but above all is romanticized and de-humanized.

As illustrated not just by #WakingTheFeminsts but by vicious criticism of the appointment of Garry Hynes as the Abbey Theatre's most recent female artistic director in 1991,[1] the performance of patriarchy in Irish theatre is not restricted to its stages. Patriarchy is embedded within the industry itself, in media events, and, importantly, in the board rooms where programming and funding decisions are made. Moreover, that unproblematic representations of gay men did not come to prominence in Irish playwriting largely until after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993 further illustrates the national theatrical imaginary's propensity towards propping up the patriarchal status quo.

As my analyses of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy throughout this book illustrate, entrenched forms of patriarchal manhood are limiting, narrow, harmful—even dangerous—and, above all, exclusionary; not only to women but also to men who do not meet hegemonic criteria. This is the case whether theatre is created within the 1960s–1970s model of man and nation, or the more recent market-driven paradigms of masculinity. This exclusion is present not only in Irish playwriting, but also, in subtle ways, in Irish theatre scholarship. Much drama scholarship to date (with notable exceptions of course), has largely been uncritical of Irish male characters as gendered subjects, and the ways in which such subjects

[1] The first official female artistic director of the Abbey was Lelia Doolan, who held the post from January 1972 to December 1973. Furthermore, it should be noted that from 1937 to 1941 the actress and director Ria Mooney held a similar post at the Abbey which was, however, not labelled as 'Artistic Director'.

move through theatrical and social space and time. Such criticism, while sometimes giving passing mention to a monolithic notion of singular 'masculinity', parses Irishmen as being symbolic of their struggles against Englishmen. Or Irishmen are analysed in terms of their efforts to gain autonomy within oppressive state and religious apparatus, but seldom discussed in terms of being hegemonic men who function at the top of a gendered social hierarchy. Such uncritical figuring of Irishmen not only fails to uncover or foreground challenges to hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy in both Irish drama and society, but also renders masculinity as unproblematic, as somehow unmarked by ideology and history.

Certainly, *Acting the Man* draws from and is indebted to the large body of post-colonial criticism in Irish theatre studies. But simultaneously this book aims to intervene into that scholarly conversation by interrogating not only how Irish hegemonic masculinity and systems of patriarchy mould dramatic characterizations and theatrical performances, but more so by asking questions about how men perceive themselves *as men* and the ways in which these perceptions are performed.

4 Irish Manhood and the Market

In September 2008 global financial markets crashed—quite spectacularly. This market meltdown brought to a sudden and unexpected halt a fifteen-year period of unprecedented economic growth and wealth creation in Ireland known as the 'Celtic Tiger'. The harsh effects of the crash's subsequent long-recession were particularly debilitating with two successive governments implementing breath-taking programmes of austerity while seeking financial bailouts (in reality, loans with stringent conditions attached) from the 'troika' of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Union (EU). Recovering from the crash in typical neoliberal boom-and-bust cycle, Ireland's finances rebounded so well that by 2017 the economy was again thriving with a mere 4% unemployment and an ever-rising Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which saw the nation cited as one of the fastest growing economies in the EU (Whelan et al. 2017). However, because the Tiger Era boom relied heavily on a construction industry bubble, a key strategy of economic recovery undertaken by the government was to sell distressed property at knock-down cost (Kitchin et al. 2015). These unoccupied buildings, mainly apartment complexes and hotels, were scooped up by American venture capitalists (aka, vulture

funds), thus giving their new owners a near-monopoly over the rental housing market. This meant, in turn, that the supply of rented accommodation dwindled with many small-business landlords departing the market due to their inability to compete with the venture capitalists. Unsurprisingly, the cost of renting a home, especially in the nation's cities, has soared to unaffordable levels (Byrne 2020).

Both employment and the provision of home are key components of masculine identity. Therefore, while the long-recession disrupted the former, the rental crisis threw the latter into disarray. Unemployment, since the foundation of the State in 1922, has played a major role in the Irish economy and has long been, therefore, a key factor in the construction of Irish masculinities both hegemonic and other. The housing crisis, however, has engendered a previously unexperienced disruption to this other crucial tenet of male identity—the ability to provide shelter for oneself and one's family. A new model of homelessness has emerged whereby ordinary families with both adults working stable jobs on industrial-average wages cannot afford to house themselves. Compounding this further, I write this Introduction during the current Coronavirus pandemic which has stalled national economies on a global scale with unemployment sharply on the rise again. Currently the world, not just Ireland, faces an uncertain economic future.

Masculinities and money are inextricably bound together in many ways and on many levels, not least the typical hegemonic role of male as breadwinner and provider. Discussing Irish masculinities and the long-recession, Diane Negra foregrounds the 'seldom elaborated or explored point that cultures of male entitlement and risk had much to do with the global financial collapse' (2014, 223). Quoting Michael Lewis's prescient observation that 'Ireland's financial collapse […] was created by the sort of men who ignore their wives' suggestion that maybe they should stop and ask for directions' (2011), Negra notes that while other recession-torn nations such as Iceland were quick to interrogate correlations between patriarchal systems and the economic crash, 'Ireland almost uniquely clings to its status quo' (223). What Negra and Lewis make clear, then, are the complex relationships between masculinities—particularly patriarchy—and both national and global systems of capital. It becomes apparent not only how any given economic culture and climate shapes and shifts masculinities as they play out in many different arenas, including drama; but also how masculinities have an overdetermined bearing on those same economic cultures and climates.

Indeed, social and theatrical performances of Irish masculinities have always taken their cue from the nation's financial vicissitudes while simultaneously feeding back into them. Joe and Frank in *On the Outside* are not only excluded from the dancehall by virtue of lacking the entrance fee, their economic and class precarity directly caused by and dramaturgically symbolising decades-long government policies of economic protectionism and cultural autarky. More so, they are also positioned on the outside of, or just before, what is known as 'the Lemass Era'; a period of political, economic, and theatrical upheaval that this book takes as its historical starting point. Sean Lemass, succeeding as the fourth Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of Ireland in 1959, implemented T. K. Whittaker's 'Programme for Economic Expansion', thus opening Ireland to global markets and heralding a fifteen-year period of economic growth and quotidian prosperity. Wind forward fifty-two years to Joe in *No Romance*, and we are presented with a performance of patriarchy in crisis—his crisis engendered not only by the boom-and-bust cycles of neoliberal capitalism that put pay to the Celtic Tiger, but more so by his own participation in it. Joe, given his age (mid-fifties), performs a paradigm of patriarchy that historically encompasses and is inflected by the prosperity of both the Lemass Moment and the Celtic Tiger, as well as two long-recessions that engulfed Ireland, first from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, and again after the global financial crash of 2008.

Joe in *No Romance* thus performs not just a crisis of patriarchy, but also a crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Throughout this book I interrogate the complex nexus forged by social and theatrical performances of masculinities, patriarchal structures and governance, and the cultural and biopolitical practices of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism as it plays out in contemporary culture is best understood as a series of economic political practices that conceptualize unfettered and deregulated markets as the optimum method of progressing human well-being. Thus, free markets, free trade, and unregulated entrepreneurial freedom are not only promoted but also shored up by structures of governance that simultaneously provide strong property rights. These economic institutional frameworks should, in theory, provide the much-lauded 'trickle down economics' (Harvey, 2005, 20); the assumption being that through state-engineered mechanisms which make the wealthy even wealthier, they will in turn become 'job creators'. Simultaneously, citizenship morphs into consumership as ordinary working people bolster their local economies

by spending the money they earn from the job creators. 'Neoliberalism', then, as Colin Crouch states:

> has many branches and brands. But behind them stands one dominant theme: that free markets in which individuals maximise their material interests provide the best means for satisfying human aspirations, and that markets are in particular to be preferred over states and politics, which are at best inefficient and at worst threats to freedom. (2011, 11)

However, neoliberalism's supposed conservative ethos is paradoxical. At surface level it claims to provide economic liberty to corporations and businesses which then engenders both jobs and consumer choice. However, this is an economic practice that relies heavily—albeit quite underhandedly—on government intervention. First, the wealth of the so-called job creators does not trickle down because, without heavy-handed State involvement the like of which we have yet to see, the wealthy are free to create jobs on their own terms. Nefarious employment practices such as zero-hours contracts, banning trade unions, denial of health and other insurance benefits, and hiring workers as freelancers who must pay their own taxes, are now so ordinary that they pass without comment.

Further iterating the paradoxical relationship between freedom and government control within neoliberalism, the State must ensure a viable currency and underwrite any failures in the banking system. The State should also shore up the integrity and functioning of financial markets, especially (as we saw with the 2008 financial crisis) when the actors of those markets overextend their remit and crash the market. Furthermore, where markets did not before exist they must be created. Therefore, public services which were previously financed through wage-earners' taxes—social housing, water, education, health care, environmental protection—are now brought to market. However, and herein lies the crux of neoliberalism's shill of 'freedom', beyond creating these markets, the State should have no say in their operations.

As my elaborations above highlight, the underlying principles of neoliberalism—entrepreneurial freedom, economic liberty, social policing, property rights, and harsh individualism—are particularly patriarchal characteristics. These characteristics, when coupled with neoliberalism's championing of markets and creation of hyper-consumers mean that, in its cultural manifestations such as media events and the products stocked in retail outlets, only the most profitable representations of gender prevail.