

Forum Kritika: Performance and Domination

BEYOND VERBATIM: DRAMATIZING THE SEARCH FOR JEAN MCCONVILLE

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Abstract

In December 1972, as the bloodiest year of the conflict in Northern Ireland drew to its close, Jean McConville, a thirty-seven-year-old widowed mother of ten, was taken from her home in Belfast. A gang of men and women had entered the family home in the Divis Flats area of the city, and dragged Jean from her bath. In front of her terrified children, they bundled her into a van and took her away. Her family never saw her again. Her body was buried, some sixty odd miles from where she was taken, and for almost thirty years, the IRA denied having anything to do with her disappearance. After Jean's remains were officially identified, her family laid their mother's body to rest with that of her husband in Lisburn (October 2003). *Our Lady of the Goldfinches* emerges from Jane McNulty's friendship with Jean's daughter, Helen, who cannot find peace of mind, even now. Jane writes of Helen, "She needs to know details: when did her mother die, the night of her abduction, or some time later? Where did she spend those last hours and moments, and how? Who killed Jean McConville and who ordered her killing? And why?" This essay combines a critique of contemporary documentary theatre practice with an account of the creation of a play which explores these events and the questions to which they give rise.

Keywords

Jean McConville, Verbatim Theatre, Disappeared, Northern Irish Drama

About the Author

Bill Hopkinson is Senior Lecturer in Drama at Edge Hill University and leads the MA Making Performance there. He was Artistic Director of Manchester Youth Theatre, and from 2000 to 2004 was Literary Manager for Sgript Cymru, the national new writing company for Wales. He has worked extensively encouraging new writing for the stage, including 25 years association with North-West Playwrights. For his work with Jane on

Our Lady of the Goldfinches he was awarded a Writers' Guild New Writing Encouragement Award. As director he has premiered new plays by Kaite O'Reilly, Christina Katić, Mike Mallet and Alan Williams. Recent work as director include *Looking for K* (Soho Theatre/Graeae) by Danny Start, *Henhouse* (Arcola Theatre) by Kaite O'Reilly, *Scaramouche Jones* by Justin Butcher (Greenwich Playhouse), *Illumination* by Donna Worthington (Durham Cathedral and touring) and a European tour of his own play *Ludd*.

Jane McNulty has won awards for scriptwriting, short fiction and poetry including, amongst others, the Lynda La Plante Award for her feature *One Good Man*; the Swanage Literary Festival for her short story *The Last Race*; her poem *A Man Walks Into A Bar...*, about an incident in Northern Ireland where two men were shot dead, won a Poetry Life award and three of her short stories were short-listed for the Westport Literary Festival (Republic of Ireland). She has written for television drama series (*EastEnders*, *Heartbeat*, *The Bill*, *Peak Practice*, *Doctors*, *Crossroads*) and her short film *Result* was commissioned by BBC2. Her work for the theatre has been performed in Ireland (Bó Leictreach Festival, Co Offaly 2011) and Wales (*5Km to Grozny*, won the 1997 One Voice Competition). She is currently working on a new play about identity and ageing in working class men, for Big Telly, a theatre company based in Northern Ireland. She mentors new and developing writers (novelists, screenwriters and playwrights) for a leading London literary consultancy and is an associate tutor at University of Salford and Edge Hill University.

Authors' note

Jane McNulty's *Our Lady of the Goldfinches*, directed by Bill Hopkinson, premiered at the Rose Theatre, Edge Hill University and toured, in April and May 2012: forty years after Jean McConville was abducted and killed

IN DECEMBER 1972 as the bloodiest year of the conflict in Northern Ireland drew to a close, Jean McConville, a thirty-seven-year-old widowed mother of ten, was taken from her home in the Divis flats in Belfast. In front of her terrified children a gang of men and women bundled her into a van and took her away. Her family never saw her again.

Private Worlds

This essay explores the journey of making a play, *Our Lady of the Goldfinches*: the play itself is an exploration of the search by Jean's daughter Helen for her mother's body. Following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the IRA revealed the sites where the bodies of nine so-called "Disappeared" were concealed. Templetown Beach in County Louth, Republic of Ireland, was identified as the place where Jean McConville's remains were buried, but despite extensive excavations in 1999 her body was not found. Only in 2003 on a different beach, Shelling Hill, was a discovery made by a dog-walker. Forensic tests showed this to be the last resting place of Jean McConville. Thus, Helen and her brothers and sisters had had to wait thirty years for the search to end. In attempting to dramatize this experience there are ethical and political issues, but also dramaturgical ones. There is a world of subjective experience which goes beyond the facts, yet which is critical to the experiences of those living through conflict. These subjective and personal experiences are properly the place of drama.



Fig. 1: Mother and Daughter: Bairbre Ní hAodha as Jean and Rachel Priest as Helen

How can we not feel anxious about making private worlds public, revealing confidential statements made in the context of a relationship based on a trust that can only be established between two individuals? (Enright 181)

Verbatim theatre allows testimony to "have the space to breathe" that is "to preserve the initial impact of it": for Enright, Verbatim tries to "preserve the initial impact of it." The practitioners interviewed in Hammond and Steward's book, *Verbatim Verbatim* (2008) all admit degrees of fictionalization, and the umbrella

term covers a range of possibilities from the restaging of tribunals such as *Bloody Sunday: Scenes from the Saville Inquiry* (2005) and *The Colour of Justice* (1999), to David Hare's partly fictionalized exploration of the Iraq War, *Stuff Happens* (2004), in which direct address is verbatim but scenes are imagined, to Alecky Blythe's detailed transcriptions (*Do We Look Like Refugees*: 2010; *London Road*: 2011). All these practitioners feel that drama comes before documentary, nevertheless there is a currency of thought which ascribes authenticity to the Verbatim Theatre and Documentary Theatre movements, and that virtue is prioritized as the commentary shifts from practitioner towards the academy: to "rewrite" testimony is "to fail to [recognize] its particular significance and relevance" (Enright 183). Whatever the truth of this, the problem for *Our Lady of the Goldfinches* was that in attempting to convey a thirty-year search, to be true to experience, we had to step out of the confines of bearing witness because the elision of inner and outer landscapes happens over time. In order to be true to that original trust which Enright foregrounds, in this instance, writer and dramaturg needed to move beyond Verbatim to convey a trust established between Jane and Helen over time, and an experience which spans three decades.

A Writer's Journey

JANE MCNULTY (JM): In 1999, as I watched the television news footage of the organized dig for Jean McConville's body, a vague memory of the faces of children and teenagers shown on TV news thirty years before began nagging at me. The story was familiar from 1972: a mother "disappeared" and her children bereft and bewildered, the eldest daughter near my own age. It inspired a poem, "Groundwork," which won a small cash prize at the Chester Poets' Open Competition. That daughter, now known to me as Helen McKendry, then appeared in an article in *The Mail on Sunday*: she was trying to raise funds to keep the dig going as, after weeks of finding nothing, the Garda (Irish police) were about to pack up and leave the site. I rang her and offered her cash for her fund. I explained my interest and she asked for a copy of the poem. Thus started our relationship—letters, cards, flowers—and my twelve-year quest to dramatize the story of Jean McConville.

BILL HOPKINSON (BH): One of the first questions we had was, "Why tell this story as a piece of theatre?"

JM: I had kept in touch with Helen as I pitched the story (I was at the time writing scripts for TV drama) first as a TV mini-series, then a feature, finally as a docudrama for the small screen. There was some interest, but not sufficient to take any of the projects forward so by 2008, I knew that I would have to write a play and, if necessary, to produce it myself. I wrote

to Helen with my proposal to write the play and immediately I got the response: "Go ahead."

Although I'd followed the story for years already through occasional news items (Helen was a tireless campaigner for the Families of the Disappeared, visiting places from the USA to Rome, trying to persuade influential people from Bill Clinton to the Pope, to back her request for the IRA to reveal the truth about her mother's murder), between 2008 and 2012, my research became more urgent. As well as reading many books and articles in October 2008, I flew to Ireland, hired a car and went to interview Helen and her husband Seamus (aka Sé) at their home in Co Down. Some years previously, Sé had written a book about his dead mother-in-law—it is a balanced and sensitive overview of the circumstances surrounding the case, as well as a personal account of his life with Helen—and I found it hugely helpful in my research. To meet the man was a great pleasure and to this day, Sé and I exchange texts and phone calls: we share an interest in literature, the theatre and wild birds.

JM: Meeting Helen was invaluable, offering an otherwise unavailable insight into the McConvilles' family life and in particular the relationship between Helen and her mother. Jean, her daughter told me as we chatted in her Killyleagh kitchen, had suffered three mental breakdowns during 1972, a year which began with the death of her husband, Arthur, from lung cancer (he was nursed at home and died in the January) until her disappearance in December. Jean had lost twin babies (cot deaths) a couple of years before and had had a hysterectomy recently. Her eldest son was interred on his 17th birthday that year, too; the widowed mother of ten had had a terrible time. The idea that this woman, given her mental and physical ill health, could have been a spy for the Security Forces takes some leap of imagination.

And on that day, too, Helen and Sé came with me to the beach where for weeks the Garda had dug for Jean's body. The people of the Cooley Peninsula—the beach identified by the IRA was at Templetown, Co Louth, just over the border into the Republic—took the family to their hearts. Casseroles appeared; bathrooms were put at their disposal; a Mass for Jean was held on the beach. But Jean wasn't found at Templetown, and it was another three years before human remains were found by a walker on Shelling Hill Beach, about half a mile further south around the headland. The McKendrys showed me that place too. And it was there that we saw the flock of goldfinches feeding on dried thistle heads above the site where Jean's body had lain all those years, and which gave the play its title.

BH: The authenticity of bearing witness is a central theme of the academic discourse around Verbatim, Documentary Theatre, Playback Theatre and other forms which attempt to bring a particular personal truth to

the stage. Some practitioner/scholars are uneasy about the erasure of the artist as part of a dialogue with what they describe as the “implicated participant” (Gallagher et al 26). Like the “postmodern ethnographer” there is a duty here. Although you may have similar concerns, are you first and foremost approaching this relationship explicitly as a playwright? The personal nature of your story also suggests that you become an implicated participant?

JM: As a writer, I like to soak myself in the material I’m writing about, so as well as those conversations, and the dialogue between Helen and myself on that long drive back to the North while Sé slept in the back of the hired car. I read many articles, websites and books, not only on Jean McConville and the other “Disappeared” but on the IRA, on the Dirty Protest, the hunger strikers and in particular, Bobby Sands. Bobby Sands’s image punctuated that October visit: my hotel was in Newry, and along the drive back from the McKendrys’ to my room, shaking with exhaustion and emotionally drained, I was aware of his image looming from gable ends, out of the gathering darkness. It was as if his ghost demanded a place in the play.

BH: You are balancing the relationship of trust which Enright describes, which can only be established between two individuals, with a duty to research. But also with an awareness that this is a work of art and other imperatives emerge during the struggle for dramaturgical form. After all this began with a poem. Gallagher describes Verbatim as “part story-telling, part composite, part mimicry, part invention” (25). I am also aware that this story had contested elements...

JM: There were many versions, ‘stories,’ about Jean McConville and why she was singled out for murder. One is that she offered comfort to a British soldier injured by sniper fire outside the McConville house. Helen is in no doubt that this happened, and that the next day the words “Brit Lover” were daubed on their doors and windows. Records of British Army casualties around the Falls Road area of Belfast during the relevant period (Spring/Summer 1972) do not show any such shooting, but Helen also said that it could have happened the year before. She was only 14 or 15 at the time, her father was dying or recently dead, and her mother was mentally ill. But many, many British soldiers, as well as prison officers, police officers, civilians, were killed around that time and during the thirty years of violence. And Jean’s husband, Arthur, had been a regular in the British Army up until 1964, so it seemed to me that I had to include a soldier in the play.

BH: And a Republican Volunteer. You went about constructing these characters in different ways. The Volunteer was fictionalized but constructed from available documents: many of the things this composite character says have actually been said by someone. The Squaddie (popular slang for “soldier”),

on the other hand, was imagined from informal research conversations. It was at an early point, as the play began to come together after nearly a decade of research, that I joined your project as dramaturg and director. And you were looking for a form, an appropriate shape for all of this.

JM: Jean McConville's story was in one way simple enough: that she was abducted by the IRA and murdered, her body hidden until by chance it was discovered 31 years later, was never in contention. But there were stories—versions—around the reason she was killed: that she was murdered because she offered comfort and prayers for a British soldier wounded on her doorstep; that she was a convert (Protestant to Catholic) who never fitted in within the staunch Catholic/Republican area where she tried to raise her children; that she was a "tout," an informer for the British Army; that she'd fallen out big style with some local big Republican family over the price of a second-hand three-piece suite of furniture. It is also the case that her husband, a Catholic, had been a regular in the British Army. Jean was of Protestant stock, living with her children in (predominantly Protestant) East Belfast at the time of the Civil Rights protests, and when the family moved to (predominantly Catholic) West Belfast, she had refused to take part in the "chain" (the practice of passing illegal arms through sympathizers' houses to avoid security forces' searches.) It was important for me to incorporate these different stories into the narrative.

And I needed a way to approach the story. I had to represent a daughter's search for her mother, a search that spanned more than three decades, and that revealed bones but not the identity of the perpetrator, nor the motivation behind the murder; a search that asked questions of the authorities (why the police didn't investigate Jean's disappearance; why the security services showed no apparent interest in the case)² and found no satisfactory answers.

The key, for me, lay in Jean's conversion to Catholicism (she was, Helen says, a better Catholic than those born to the faith: Jean attended Mass every day) and in the fact of her, a Protestant girl, falling in love with "the wrong man," a Catholic who served in the British Army. I wanted to embed within the play the rituals of the Catholic Mass—the prayers, the images—and in particular, the Stations of the Cross, the observational prayers associated with Good Friday and Easter (also a symbolically important time in the history of Ireland/the IRA).

BH: You had the research material; you had the different "versions" of what happened to Jean...

JM: And I had a vision of the structure of the play as a sort of triptych. I had a few pages of script, and a sketchy outline, but I still needed to find the shape of the narrative.

In 2009, Northwest Playwrights offered four established writers the opportunity of an intensive residential workshop to develop a new play for theatre. Along with one other television writer, a theatre writer and a radio playwright, I spent five days in a large cottage on the Staffordshire Moors with a group of five actors and dramaturgical support. I was lucky to be allocated Bill Hopkinson as my dramaturg. Four of the actors worked on the 15 pages or so of script under your direction while I watched and listened. The actors asked questions—about the facts of the story, about my research, about the idea I was trying to dramatize—and they read and walked through the script before trying out new ideas we put to them. It was an enlightening process. As a television writer, I had never had this experience before: my scripts had been through several drafts from notes from a script editor, before a final draft was submitted, and the next I saw of it would be when it appeared on screen. This was different. The dialogue between writer and dramaturg drew from the material a potent energy.

The NWP residential gave me the space to complete the first 20 minutes of the play, and the opportunity to see the scenes performed—script in hand—to a paying audience at Oldham Coliseum at the end of that week (July 2009). There then followed another 12 months or so of writing and redrafting, with regular and fairly intense meetings with you, usually at Edge Hill University where we were both teaching. You posed questions for me to consider, and pointed me to other plays, other ways of seeing theatrical writing. This was revelatory. I tackled the play with new eyes.

BH: It was around this time that we started to discuss some of the issues around Verbatim Theatre which this essay raises.

JM: One of the big questions I had to address was “what is this story about?” Yes, this was a “true” story, but this play was not to be documentary. I could have gone down the route of Verbatim: there was plenty of material to use, although there would have been the “versions” issue to deal with. I wanted to present images from Christian/Catholic tradition; metaphors of sacrifice and martyrdom; the other parties involved in the violence of those years—the British squaddie, the IRA hunger striker. Challenged by your questioning,¹ I came to realize that the story of the play was Helen’s: here was a woman who had spent her life from the age of fifteen in a relentless and often dangerous quest for the truth. Why did she feel she had to go to such lengths, risking her mental health, her marriage, her own life? Did she feel she had failed to protect her mother from the mob that came for her that night in December 1972? (Helen had been sent for chips for the family’s tea, and returned to find her siblings hysterical and her mother gone.) Did Helen blame herself? Was the search somehow her punishment and her hope of redemption? I found in those questions the spine of the play.

BH: One of the big discoveries for me, and a product of having access to actors so early in the writing process, was the realization of how much could be conveyed through gesture and stage image. Away from the personal testimony and the rhetoric, both British and Republican, which you make use of, there was the possibility to suggest these questions, which take us, albeit in a post-Brechtian manner, towards *Gestus*: “It is entirely irrelevant what the scene concerned might have looked like in real life; the director is concerned only with bringing out its content and significance” (Esslin 142; on Brecht).

The year before we toured the production I had directed Brecht’s *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* and this play provides an extraordinary model for the dramatic possibilities of representing personal experience and complicity with power and domination. I don’t think I ever mentioned this to you, but as we stepped into production it was there in my mind. Slogans, contextualizing film footage, song were all in my mind. But you had already gone there in the script: in production your invitation to use documentary footage to create mood was expanded to become a video score.

JM: I used verbatim quotes and news footage in the final scenes of the play, but these were juxtaposed with and superimposed over an imagined scene where a dead hunger striker and a British soldier are served tea by the ghost of Jean on the beach where her body was found.

BH: We attempted to find theatrical representations of the experience of being caught up in multiple oppressions and impositions and most importantly what the legacy at a personal level might be. It is one of the possibilities of Verbatim that “the people who are hardly ever asked their opinion are the people who have to live with the situation day after day” (Soans, qtd. in Hammond and Steward 31). But in choosing so many multiple ways of telling we polarized the reception of the work; a “true story” now raises audience expectations.

JM: Audience responses to *Our Lady of the Goldfinches* were polarized. From a glowing review in Liverpool to three very different ones in Salford, the play has provoked strong feeling. I suppose that’s to be expected. It isn’t an “easy” play. It isn’t naturalistic but instead attempts to evoke the cacophony of war. Some audience members may have wanted to know “who done it” and why. I didn’t set out to answer those questions: in the forty years since Jean’s disappearance, the authorities have not been able to answer them. Conflict is a messy business – it can be noisy, dirty, confused and confusing; truth and lies can be obscured in the fog of war. I flew Helen and Sé over to Salford to see the final performance of the tour at the Lowry Theatre, and I sat with them as they watched the story unfold on stage. It

was, for me, a terrifying experience. But at the end, when I asked Helen, “Was that OK?” She said it was. That was enough for me.

BH: I agree. Ultimately, as Bill McDonnell puts it in *Theatre of the Troubles* (2008), we were concerned with “the ways in which the rhythms and imperatives of the conflict determine the content, form and contexts of Performance”: less so the latter (5). And in this case these were to be filtered through one person’s subjective experience.



Fig. 2: Dying: Bairbre Ní hAodha as Jean and Lee Godwin as the British Soldier

Public Contexts

As work on the play progressed, the issues tangential to the play acquired a new currency. The Police Service of Northern Ireland demanded that Boston College hand over tapes made by Ed Moloney and Anthony McIntyre as part of an academic oral history project known as *The Belfast Project*. The progress of the subpoena and opposition to it are outlined in a recent paper given by McIntyre at the Oral History Network Ireland Conference in September 2012. In October 2012 the United States Supreme Court temporarily blocked the release of the material, persuaded by the college’s argument that “the premature release of the tapes could threaten the safety of the participants, the enterprise of oral history, and the on-going peace and reconciliation process in Northern Ireland” (Zezima 12).

One of the witnesses on those tapes was Dolours Price, who died in January 2013, prompting revelations: she claimed that she’d driven Jean to her death. Brendan Hughes, another testimony giver (like Price), implicates Gerry Adams as commander of the “unknowns” squad (Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*), as a historic member of the Provisional IRA, which Adams continues to deny, and apports to him ultimate responsibility for the deaths of many of the disappeared, including Jean (Hills and Seamark). The play however is tangential to matters which maintain journalistic interest. As *The Daily Mail* has it, quoting Helen:

But for Helen McKendry, herself a Catholic, gaining access to the tapes is about much more than sectarianism and politics. McKendry is not only

seeking justice, but also release from the pain of never knowing the truth. “I’ve lived all my life in fear,” she says, “They destroyed my mother’s life, my family life. And they tried to destroy what life I have now. They are the people who committed the crimes in this country. They should be worried.” (Robertson)

The task was to represent the experience of a search for Justice over time, contextualized in a heteroglossia, the competing voices of different sides who, despite the progressing peace process and “normalization” of life in the six counties of Northern Ireland, continue to compete for the ownership of history, for the right to have their story predominate. This is true at the political level, but also at the individual level:

I look forward to the freedom to lay bare my experiences unfettered by codes now redundant. This is the only freedom left to me and those Republicans of like mind. (Dolours Price, qtd. in McIntyre, “Dolours Price Archive”)

What is left for the many who were subject to the vicissitudes of power and domination rather than being its instruments or players for the opposition?

JEAN: We have to have our stories. Otherwise what is left of us when we are gone? (McNulty 50)

In this conflict there is a curious sense in which performance has been a critical factor in the progress towards Peace. Can there be anyone who believes Gerry Adams was not a member of the Provisional IRA? And yet the performance of denial plays a role in greasing the wheels of a peace process and of his political advancement. Similar things could be said of successive British Prime Ministers.

“Verbatim Theatre allows people to speak for themselves” (Soans, qtd. in Hammond and Steward 33). In *Our Lady of the Goldfinches* we were engaged in an act of advocacy, and like David Hare and Max Stafford-Clark, and the courtroom barrister we were engaged in “a re-contextualizing process . . . and rather than being one thing, it inhabits a spectrum—a spectrum between reality and fiction” (Hammond and Steward 74). Yet underpinning the Verbatim movement there still remains a desire to find truth in the rhythms and contexts of accurate transcription. “Anna Deavere Smith was the first to combine the journalistic technique of interviewing her subjects with the art of reproducing their words accurately in performance” and in performance the “actors remain true to how it was first said” (Blythe 22). An “interview text works as a physical, audible, performable vehicle” (Smith xxiii). There is a quest for authenticity here, and that authenticity lies in a naturalistic impulse, the representation of the embodied rhythms of the original speaker.

Gardner suggests that:

Verbatim plays have rightly been credited with galvanizing political theatre in Britain. But the process is fraught with concerns about the veracity of statements and the way that material is edited. It seems that whereas most of us are quite aware when we watch a reality TV show that what we're seeing is strongly shaped and filtered through an editing process, when we watch Verbatim Theatre we quickly lose sight of that mediation. The result? We accept what is presented to us as true without questioning how statements have been selected and organized, or even how the interviews that elicited the "evidence" were conducted

The power of a theatrical experience may carry us along with it, it is "hot" in the McLuhanite sense. Verbatim has evolved in a liberal culture which fears "bias" and in which embodiment and the personal assume a value as sites of authenticity.

I try to notate it as I hear it without actually interpreting what the person says. The punctuation is intended to assist the actors in telling the story as accurately as possible. (Enright 187)

Academic discourse has problematized these sites of discourse, and brought its own sets of concerns, from the Ethnographic to ideas such as authenticity and the mediatized presence (Gallagher et al). This essay does not seek to reject Verbatim as a potent theatrical form, for, as Gardner points out, "Setting aside the fact that verbatim theatre often deals with material that is already heavily mediated in the first place, what these plays offer audiences is an open door into a subject whose density might otherwise be difficult to negotiate" (Gardner 2007).

We continue to need drama which allows us entry to worlds unavailable through other means: from the revels of Dionysus to the last moments of the Titanic. The experience of creating *Our Lady of the Goldfinches* suggests that we should question a theatre that "appears to derive its status of authenticity from its faithful adherence to actuality and reality" (Stuart Fisher 112). Stuart Fisher argues that:

The testimony of traumatized subjects, which verbatim theatre exploits, places great pressure on such literalist construals of truth and authenticity. The "truth" is not transparent, knowable or even communicable. Rather trauma... can be best understood as a radical break or rupture in our understanding of what it means to be in the world. (112)

Modestly, and with faltering steps, *Our Lady of the Goldfinches* may offer a dramaturgical solution to the problem outlined in Stuart Fisher's paper, without losing sight of the need for advocacy and the prioritization of the unheard voice. Here is a non-literalist attempt at authenticity, and an expression of the rupture of trauma. In a central scene on the beach and within sight of the sea, Jean McConville

lays out a picnic for a British squaddie and an IRA Volunteer on H-Block blanket protest; during the course of the scene they bury a dead goldfinch, victim of a sparrow hawk. The soldier swims to England in his shorts and the Volunteer becomes a Sinn Fein spokesman, his reflections on the Good Friday Agreement verbatim from public pronouncements of the time; these in turn interspersed with documentary footage of Tony Blair and reportage from the BBC. Jean leaves the stage.

JEAN: And me? What have you for me? (McNulty 53)

A little later, Helen speaks to her mother's felt presence:

HELEN: It's yourself. Have you no message for me? (McNulty 55)

It is unlikely that anyone in the audience believed for one moment that this picnic actually happened. But the need for a dialogue from stage to audience is maintained in the prioritization of subaltern voices, not least of all those of the dead who are no longer in a position to speak to us. The essential trust established between two individuals to which Enright refers, is maintained as a dialogical one, and a tension between fictional and verbatim dramaturgies maintains and makes explicit both the ethical dimension and the limits of mediation in a way which the conventions of Verbatim may not. The playwright, director and actors are engaged in an act of advocacy which needs to make its limitations explicit. And at the risk of hubris, extend those limitations into the imaginative realm, because it is through acts of imagination that reconciliation will occur.



Fig. 3. Ghosts: Bairbre Ní hAodha as Jean, Rachel Priest as Helen, Lee Godwin as the British Soldier, Cellan Scott as the IRA Man, and Sarah Niven as the Little Girl

Notes

1. In 2011 Bill Hopkinson was awarded a Writers Guild of Great Britain Theatre Committee award in recognition of his dramaturgical work on *Our Lady of the Goldfinches*.
2. See Police Ombudsman Reports (2006). Retrospectively the Provisional IRA offered a justification for Jean's murder, that she was an informer. This was investigated in 2006: uniquely the British Security Services issuing a denial that this was the case. No evidence was found to support the allegation.

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