

## DESCRIBING PAIN IN MARY RAFTERY'S DOCUMENTARY PLAY *NO ESCAPE*

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### Abstract

Documentary theatre is a genre in which real sources and events are used and edited to become the form of dramatic texts and performances. The personal experiences narrated in *No Escape* (2010), a documentary play by Mary Raftery, have shocked many people, due to the play's multiple graphic descriptions of child abuse which took place in industrial schools and orphanages in Ireland. This article analyses how pain is presented in *No Escape*, by contrasting the language used, in their respective lines in the play, by authorities, victims, and representatives of the institutions. Pain, as a physical and psychological sensation, is a subject that still needs to be examined further in discussing the history of Ireland, to provide

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scholars and society with an opportunity to reflect upon this subject – and, perhaps, achieve healing.

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## Introduction

Irish history and literature are filled with moments built on pain, whether it be explicit physical pain, or implicit, as a feeling, as a private experience. In the introduction to *The Body in Pain in Irish Literature and Culture*, Fionnuala Dillane, Naomi McAreavey, and Emilie Pine argue that Irish society has frequently witnessed suffering, but expression of the feeling of it has remained mute, since, indeed, it is a very intimate subject which may remain unnoticed, unless somehow externalised, “mediated or narrativised, witnessed, and translated” (Dillane et al. 2016, 5).

Translating pain into words can become even more difficult when the source of the feeling is both physical and psychological. The pain discussed in this article relates to the various types of abuse perpetrated in Irish orphanages and industrial schools throughout the twentieth century, as represented in the documentary play *No Escape* (2010), by Mary Raftery. The play offers a significant amount of graphical description of abuses suffered by the victims and shows a lack of response, from the Church and government, to demands for proper accountability and punishment for those who inflicted such pain on children.

The article focuses on the play’s attempts to describe pain – caused by corporal punishments, torture, and sexual abuse. It also discusses how the abuse of children, in the form of punishment, in general, was seen as acceptable by Irish society, and, in particular, how the people acting as representatives of the institutions used language with the intention of diminishing the impact of those feelings.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the government in Ireland had been responsible for several institutions, operated mostly by Catholic Church orders (until the early twentieth century some institutions were also run by the Church of Ireland), with a duty of care for orphans and abandoned children, and for the functioning of correctional centres. James Smith refers to this structure as Ireland’s “architecture of containment” (Smith 2007, xviii), in which, for various reasons, amongst them poverty, and moral-related issues – such as pregnancies out of wedlock – children were separated from their mothers and families.

By the end of the twentieth century, the country was shocked by the discovery that the care that these facilities provided was not exactly what people expected of them. As a result, in 2000, an investigation was commissioned to provide an understanding of what had happened in those institutions from 1936 onwards: the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA). The final report of the inquiry, commonly referred to as the Ryan Report – after Judge Sean Ryan, who chaired the commission – was published in 2009. The report, a five-volume government document of about 2,600 pages, was subsequently condensed into the form of a play by Mary Raftery, an investigative journalist, filmmaker, and writer, who had already dealt with the subject of child abuse in her work.

### ***No Escape* and Its Context of Production**

*No Escape* premiered at the Abbey Theatre, in the series “The Darkest Corner,” in 2010. The title of the series is a reference to then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Brian Cowen’s acknowledgement of the importance of the Ryan Report:

The Ryan Commission report has shone a powerful light into probably the darkest corner of the history of the State [...]. It contains a shattering litany of abuse of children in care in this country over many decades. In doing so, it presents a searing indictment of the people who perpetrated that abuse, of the religious congregations who ran the institutions in which it took place, and of the organs of the State which failed in their duty to care for the children. (qtd. in Kerr 2009)

Further to the Taoiseach’s public acknowledgement, the Abbey put together a theatre programme that would feature artistic productions of reality-based work dealing with the decades of endemic institutional abuse of children in some of Ireland’s reformatories and industrial schools. The Peacock was the venue for the three plays that served to show “similar and different options around [that] highly emotive subject” (Cormick 2012, 179). The plays in question were Gerard Flynn’s *James X*, which premiered at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 2003, and was subsequently performed in New York in 2011; Judge Richard Johnson’s *The Evidence I Shall Give*, first staged at the Abbey in 1961; and *No Escape*, compiled and edited by journalist Mary Raftery, which was the only new commission among them.

*No Escape* results directly from the Ryan Report, which created wide awareness of and reaction to the issue of child abuse in the country. The report, in turn, resulted from investigations made public by the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse in 2009, as previously mentioned. All the lines of *No Escape* were extracted verbatim from transcripts of the investigation tribunal hearings conducted by the CICA, and published as the Ryan Report. The CICA, established on 23 May 2000, had three main functions:

*To hear evidence* of abuse from persons who allege they suffered abuse in childhood, in institutions, *during the period from 1940 or earlier, to the present day* [as of the period during which the investigation took place, 2000]; to conduct an inquiry into abuse of children in institutions during that period and, where satisfied that abuse occurred, to determine the causes, nature, circumstances and extent of such abuse; [and] *to prepare and publish reports* on the results of the inquiry and on its *recommendations* in relation to dealing with the effects of such abuse. (*The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* “About Us” 2009, our emphasis)

The CICA itself was not responsible for offering financial compensation for the victims of decades of institutionalised violence, but was expected to “recommend” the measures the government should take in response to the findings, on the basis of the complainants’ evidence of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and/or neglect.

The report was published after nine years of investigation. Aileen Howard, then literary director of the Abbey Theatre, had been considering the shape of a play, adapted from the report, from May to October 2009, “editing in a very serious way, . . . making decisions with regard to whose testimonies [to] include, . . . playing to what they considered their strengths were – that is . . . being a theatre organisation that c[ould] mobilise an audience and provide an infrastructure” (Howard 2014). And yet the Abbey’s challenge was finding someone who had “encyclopaedic” knowledge on the topic: that was when Mary Raftery came to Howard’s mind.

Mary Raftery was a journalist and broadcaster who produced the TV documentary series *States of Fear* in 1999 (broadcast by RTÉ). The series exposed the abuses children suffered in reformatory and industrial schools during most of the twentieth century. Her documentary outraged people, which led the government to deliver a public apology to the victims and, in 2000, to organise the CICA to investigate the subject. Raftery’s role in exposing the atrocities that were part of the Irish childcare system was key for the investigations carried out by the CICA. She then transformed the government document into the six-act piece that provides accounts by both men and women who suffered and witnessed psychological, physical, and sexual abuse in the institutions where they lived as children. For most of her career, Raftery strived to give voice to, and pursue justice for, vulnerable citizens who suffered due to the country’s system. She investigated not only child abuse, but the country’s psychiatric units as well, beginning her investigative career in the 1970s. She died in 2012, being recognised by Ireland’s former Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister), Éamon Gilmore, as an important figure in the area of human rights and justice (Hickey 2020).

The Abbey Theatre commissioned Raftery to write the play, probably on the view that she was best-placed to provide a concise, uninterrupted and powerful version of the report. Her work of editing the 2,600 words of the report for the theatre was indeed meticulous, and the first ever-commissioned documentary piece by the Abbey, *No Escape*, was performed in 2010, directed by Róisín McBrinn. The play combined, as Emilie Pine has put it, “the tribunal-approach of interviews (based on inquiry transcripts) with testimony-style direct address to represent abuse-survivor evidence” (Pine 2020, 10). The set of the first production, thus, as Pine explains,

bisected the stage with two glass screens onto which Judge Ryan (played by Lorcan Cranitch) wrote place names, dates and figures. . . . Behind the screens, stacked boxes of files represented the original interviews, and research conducted by the Commission, and the historical records of the religious congregations and the state. (Pine 2020, 10)

This enabled the audience to actually see onstage “part of the material history of the abuse” and it supported the truth claims of the play (Pine 2020, 10).

In Brazil, *No Escape* was performed as a staged reading at Teatro Eva Herz, in São Paulo, in November 2015, as part of the fourth series of readings organised

by the Brazilian theatre company dedicated to Irish theatre, Cia Ludens: “Cia Ludens e o Teatro Documentário Irlandês” (“Cia Ludens and Irish Documentary Theatre”). The cycle included five contemporary Irish documentary plays, and a documentary play with Irish theme, by a Brazilian author – all written after 2010: *Os Diários de Roger Casement* (*The Diaries of Roger Casement* – later produced and published as *The Two Deaths of Roger Casement*), by Domingos Nunez; *No Escape*, by Mary Raftery (translated as *Sem Saída*, by Alinne Fernandes); *The Speckled People*, by Hugo Hamilton (translated as *Mácula*, by Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos); *Down off His Stilts: W. B. Yeats and the Abbey Theatre*, edited and compiled by Aideen Howard (translated as *Descendo da Perna de Pau: Yeats e o Abbey Theatre*, by Maria Rita Viana); *Guaranteed!*, by Colin Murphy (translated as *Garantido!*, by Leonor Cione); and *Titanic (Scenes from the British Wreck Commissioner’s Inquiry, 1912)*, by Owen McCafferty (translated as *Titanic – Cenas de um Inquérito*, by Fernanda Verçosa).

Domingos Nunez commented in an interview that he hoped the audience would be able to reflect on thematic, conceptual, and formal questions proposed by the plays in the cycle, and also establish a dialogue with Irish theatre, and make connections with social issues in Brazil (qtd. in Arcanjo 2015). In fact, the cycle was received quite favourably by audiences and critics. José Cetra, for example, pointed out that the dramatic interest of those plays lay in the themes they explored, which presented a dramatic load with a vast range of human questions and interests (Cetra 2015). *No Escape*, particularly, Cetra stated, approached a theme of general interest, with high potential for a production with good results on stage (Cetra 2015).

The play was translated into Brazilian Portuguese by Alinne Fernandes as *Sem Saída*, as previously mentioned, and the reading was directed by Laerte Mello. The performance was followed by a round-table discussion with the translator, the director, Brazilian theatre critic José Cetra, Irish researcher Sheila Ahern – a long-time collaborator with Mary Raftery – and Emilie Pine, the principal investigator in the research project *Industrial Memories* – a UCD digital humanities project conducted as a response to the Ryan Report (Pine 2015-2019).

*No Escape* was published in 2020 – on the tenth anniversary of its first production – in the first anthology of Irish documentary drama, *Contemporary Irish Documentary Theatre*. In the editors’ words, the plays in the collection,

all enable audiences to hear the often lost and forgotten voices from Ireland’s historical and recent past, bringing them to life in dramas that bear witness to their suffering, but also their forbearance. . . . The very rawness of their evidence is as painful to experience on the page as it was on the stage. But by giving voice to the voiceless these plays enable audiences to experience the anguish of the past in the knowledge of their freedom to create better future. (Bastos and Richards 2020, 5)

This is certainly the case in Mary Raftery’s *No Escape*.

### **No Escape as a Piece of Documentary Theatre**

Documentary theatre is a genre which provides audiences with opportunities to engage in the experience in question, reflect on its subject and draw their own conclusions towards a closure – perhaps in relation to a search for healing. Some understand documentary theatre as an umbrella term for various types of “real life”-based drama. According to Tom Cantrell, documentary theatre may encompass: verbatim theatre, which involves the transcription of spoken testimony; tribunal theatre, which involves the edition of court transcripts; testimonial theatre, in which a writer documents their own story; and, finally, plays may also result from material edited from sources, such as letters, diaries, and newspapers articles (Cantrell 2012). A piece of documentary theatre may, of course, use all or some of these types of documentary theatre in the same production.

This article does not go deeply into the history of the genre, but we do highlight some of the specific features that make the genre fundamentally different from others. For Gary Fisher Dawson, documentary theatre can be based on oral history, on memories that are recounted to prove the validity of a situation (Dawson 1999, xiii); and can also be seen as a form of journalism, in which close examination of events aims to release “a healing effect” (Dawson xii). The genre’s primary source often consists of official documents, sometimes with parts modified, or with additions of dialogues or explanations, as a way to develop the narrative into the form of a theatrical play. Dawson, thus, defines documentary theatre as

a theatre genre in which primary source documentation is directly incorporated into the dramatic text, and the performance text of each play, and a documentary play is one that has had conferred upon it by the institution called theatre the status of a documentary play for the purpose of learning about, recalling, interpreting or responding to, a historical moment. (Dawson 17)

Carol Martin, another scholar on the subject, specifies six functions for documentary theatre: to reopen trials in order to critique justice; to create additional historical accounts; to reconstruct an event; to intermingle autobiography with history; to critique the operations of both documentary and fiction; and to elaborate the oral culture of theatre and the theatricality of daily life (Martin 2010, 22). She supports Dawson’s emphasis on the effectiveness of documentary plays based on oral stories when she writes that storytelling and truth-telling provide emotional weight for the person/people who are experiencing the story (Martin 23).

This effect is strongly in evidence in *No Escape*, in which editing enhances the victims’ voices, as against those of the Church and the government. Martin also states that, while this genre emphasises some memories, it buries others (Martin 19) – a choice Raftery seems to have made when choosing only a few institutions, and testimonies, to achieve her objective. Raftery opted to use only



the Ryan Report as source material for her play. By using court material, and the actual testimonies from the people involved, she reconstructs the event a decade after Irish society first heard of the abuses.

Documentary theatre, and more specifically its verbatim variation, is marked by uses of the vernacular speech of a particular community. According to Derek Paget, verbatim theatre is about documenting life in a specific time and place: it was originally designed to portray the history of a specific community, and would ideally “give back” to that community by being performed in the community where the material was collected (Paget 1987, 317-20). Verbatim theatre is thus about documenting memories, and, to some extent, treasuring the local; and it may, also, take local issues to national level. For Paget, one of the aesthetic functions of verbatim theatre is the demystification of history by “foreground[ing] its sources while simultaneously utilizing them for entertainment” (Paget 326-7). In this light, *No Escape* can be characterised as a “verbatim play,” one that consists of the exact words historically spoken. According to Will Hammond and Dan Steward,

the term *verbatim* refers to the origins of the text spoken in the play. The words are recorded or transcribed . . . or are appropriated from existing records. . . . They are then edited, arranged or recontextualised to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors take on the characters of the real individuals whose words are being used. (Hammond and Steward 2008, 9)

Thus, the actors on stage, reading excerpts from the report, provided the audience with the actual testimonies from victims – a veracity that helps strengthen the development of the play’s atmosphere. Bearing in mind how types of documentary theatre may overlap, Sheila Cormick also suggests that *No Escape*, akin to tribunal productions, uses material deriving directly from a legal process, but “as a production it adopts a theatre of testimony aesthetic” (Cormick 2012, 183).

### **Describing Pain in *No Escape***

*No Escape* has a similar structure to the Ryan Report. It begins with a prologue, in which Judge Ryan explains how the report came into being, and which gives some data, and glimpses, from victims, of their sufferings, asking to be believed after many years and presenting a desire for justice. The six acts that follow delineate the victims’ stories – the humiliations, punishments, and sexual abuses – with accompanying excerpts from the Department of Education’s Rules and Regulations for Certified Industrial Schools on punishments, and a description of the lack of investigation by the department when a relative or student tried to lodge a complaint about the abuses. It also includes statements from representatives of the Sisters of Mercy and the Christian Brothers – the bodies responsible for running the institutions – in which they make ironic comments on the situation, and provide excuses for what happened, as well as explanations on how the Church handled the accused priests and sisters. As Emilie Pine has put it,



the contrast between the sincerity of the survivors' memories and the evasive responses by the religious staff is notable, and serves to illustrate both the hardships of the past and the battle that survivors have had in being believed. . . . In *No Escape*, Raftery creates the conditions for audiences to believe survivors and to witness their pain. (Pine 2020, 10)

In his extensive study of pain, *What the Body Commands: The Imperative Theory of Pain*, Colin Klein argues that “pains are strongly and directly *motivating* (Klein 2015, 1; author’s emphasis). Pains motivate people because they “give us reasons to act rather than just pushing us around” (Klein 1). For Klein, pains make people move forward so as to somehow deal with the problem and pursue the normal balance of the body once again. Klein states that, when pain motivates people to do the right thing for themselves, pain is “*part of the cure*” (Klein 10; author’s emphasis). Thus, an interpretation could be drawn that dealing with pain is necessary for finding a cure to the problem – and that speaking about it, using language to describe it, can be useful as a means to do so, that is to say, to achieve healing.

The victims from the laundries and industrial schools in question longed to have their pain told, as is expressed in the prologue of the play when Witness 6 asks: “Is anyone ever going to listen?” (4). Raftery’s work, since *States of Fear*, indicates a desire to give victims the voice they had never had before, an opportunity to put their pain into language. This is underlined by the fact that, in *No Escape*, Raftery chose a small number of institutions to represent the system, but many testimonies from survivors to validate their position. As Pine has stated, “collective voice is a key part of this, the play is not the story of one individual, but an overview of systemic failure” (Pine 2020, 10).

*No Escape* is constructed in a way that its atmosphere becomes gradually more suffocating as the abuses increase in each act. At the beginning, the focus is on acceptable types of punishment, contrasting with what truly happened. The narrative then escalates, to humiliation and torture, finally culminating in sexual abuse, how the institutions handled the situation, and the effect the events had on victims. Each part is constructed as a combination of Judge Ryan’s descriptions, the testimonies of the representatives of the institutions, and the testimonies of the witnesses on each aspect, with the judge attempting to communicate information on the abuses on behalf of the complainants. According to Elaine Scarry, in her book *The Body in Pain*, when physical pain is discussed in court, an official of justice needs to invent a language to describe pain for those who have not experienced it, serving as a sort of a bridge to achieve full comprehension, since this task will, in most cases, be difficult for the victims, who have to re-live the episode in question (Scarry 1985, 10).

Various scholars, throughout time, have studied how the brain perceives physical pain. To put this roughly, our body is provided with pain receptors and transmitters. When a person suffers an injury, these receptors and transmitters are activated and “project [a sensation] to an isolated pain centre, via the spinal pathway,” to the pain centre in the brain, as Sandra Horn and Marcus Monafa explain in *Pain: Theory, Research and Intervention* (Horn and Monafa 1997,

2). The brain is, subsequently, in charge of decoding that sensation in order to differentiate types of pain (dull, sharp, or wrenching, for example), and identify where the pain or injury is located in the body. Yet, as Horn and Monafo have affirmed, “pain experience is undeniably a very personal and individual thing” (Horn and Monafo 1), so how can a person put his/her individual feeling into words when in pain? How can one describe a pain that does not come, necessarily, from an injury in the body?

Elaine Scarry discusses the difficulties of using language to describe suffering, stating that “physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story” (Scarry 3). Scarry makes us aware of the fact that describing physical pain is very difficult, since it is felt internally by one person and may not be shareable (Scarry 3). Even though an attempt is often made to define pain with analogies, the person who is in pain will not be able to characterise what s/he is feeling with all the intensity of the actual experience. She affirms that physical pain destroys language, resulting in “sounds and cries a human makes before language is learned” (Scarry 4). This is a well-expressed justification for the difficulty of translating the feeling. This struggle is seen in many moments of the play – for example when witnesses start to cry in the middle of their depositions, in moments of silence, or when they use words that may evoke some emotion in others, but hardly the actual feeling of what they experienced.

In *The Body in Pain in Irish Literature and Culture*, Dillane, McAreavey and Pine attempt to expose the fact that pain is culturally coded, but that, more specifically in the Irish case, it is a major part of the country’s history (Dillane et al. 1). The authors observe that, in Irish culture, pain has become a part of the self, leading one to infer that suffering is somehow necessary for a person to belong in Ireland. This can be seen as early as in Act I, in a passage where Judge Ryan explains that people did not complain “about punishments that were *justified*” (Raftery 2020, 5; our emphasis), since there were rules from the Department of Education on how to handle misconduct, which also authorised punishments:

**Dept of Education** 1933 Department of Education Rules and Regulations for Certified Industrial Schools – Rule 13, The Manager or his Deputy shall be authorised to punish the Children detained in the School in case of misconduct. Punishments shall consist of: a) Forfeiture of rewards and privileges, or degradation from rank, previously attained by good conduct. . . . b) Moderate childish punishment with the hand. . . . c) Chastisement with the cane, strap or birch. (Raftery 21)

Even though a circular from the department informed that beatings should be the last resort, and only in cases of severe transgressions, witnesses stated that this would happen whenever the person responsible wanted – thus being inevitable. In addition, representatives of the institutions believed that punishments were necessary to maintain the order and to preserve respect:

**Dunleavy** . . . the boys would not respect a Brother who did not discipline them extremely severely . . . (Raftery 18)

**Witness (male) 4** *You don't seem to understand, the place was built on terror, regular beatings were just accepted. What you're hearing about is the bad ones, but we accepted as normal run of the mill from the minute you got up, that some time in that day you would get beaten.* (Raftery 18)

These extracts support the idea that physical punishment was typical in Irish society for a long time, as implied by the occurrences of the terms “accepted,” “normal” and “justified.” In addition, there is the fact that the government authorised such conduct, and there was also the belief that inflicting pain was necessary to teach how to respect – who to respect and how to properly behave in society.

As the play progresses, some of the passages deal with the beatings and the instruments used by nuns and brothers:

**Sean Ryan** Female witnesses reported being hit or beaten with wooden sticks, blackthorn sticks, rulers, pointers, window poles, wooden spoons and other kitchen implements, chair legs, wooden crutches, hurley sticks, cricket bats, coat hangers, towel rollers and sally rods, . . . bamboo canes, . . . leather straps. . . . Other witnesses described being pinched with pliers, jabbed with a knitting needle, hit with shoes, a shovel, wet dishcloths, bunches of keys, serving spoons, scissors, electric cord and the treadle belt from a sewing machine. (Raftery 22)

Sean Ryan is very descriptive in relation to the instruments of punishment, since he is the victims’ representative. He uses language not to describe what the victims felt, but as a way to make the audience perceive the levels of pain inflicted. This excerpt reinforces Scarry’s argument that pain is discussed indirectly in court, since it will be understood and judged by others.

There are also descriptions of forced labour, and humiliations, such as being obliged to undress in front of peers, to starve, to endure cold and other punishments:

**Witness (female) 12** *I was hungry, I took an apple ... I took it off the ground, one of the nuns caught me . . . and she said ‘when you come in I want to see you’. . . . Anyway they called me out and 6 nuns held me and they cut my hair ... [crying] . . . I don't know why they done that . . . I did nothing wrong, I was hungry.* (Raftery 25)

**Sean Ryan** The work was relentless, with demanding quotas. This was hard work over long hours during six days a week, for children obliged to do the work with no reference to their capacity to manage it. (Raftery 29)

**Witness (male) 1** . . . *It was awful, it was very very cold, it was very very lonely, but the worst thing about it all, it was so scary.* (Raftery 31)

**Sean Ryan** Br Sorel made the shocking admission that he forced a boy to eat his own excrement. (Raftery 31)

In the excerpts above, a contrast can be seen between the language of the witnesses and that of the judge. Female Witness 12 provides a context to her story and

becomes emotional when reviving the memory; she shows difficulty in giving her account, which is signalled by means of several ellipses. Male Witness 1, in turn, uses adverbs of intensity and repetition to reinforce his statement. In contrast, Sean Ryan provides a detailed and precise description in his speech, using formal vocabulary and stating his position as a representative once more, but revealing a small glimpse of emotion when using the word “shocking,” as to prepare the audience for the following testimony.

The descriptions worsen as the play develops, with testimonies about sexual abuse, which was considered endemic in boys’ institutions; but they also happened in girls’ institutions, where male employees, visitors, relatives and even priests performed the abuses:

**Sean Ryan** The forms of sexual abuse reported included anal rape, oral/genital contact, masturbation, kissing, inappropriate fondling, indecent exposure and voyeurism. Witnesses described physical abuse perpetrated in the context of sexual abuse as serving to both enforce compliance with the sexual assault and as a means of securing the silence of the witness concerned. (Raftery 33)

**Witness (male) 4** *I was brought to the infirmary...they held me over the bed, they were animals....They penetrated me, I was bleeding.* (Raftery 33)

**Witness (female) 7** *I remember going back in the car, he stopped and said to me ‘if you tell anyone I will tell the priest it was your fault’. . . . I told Sr X once and she beat me black and blue with a hand brush, she said ‘you are a terrible liar’ and what a good family they were. O God, I can’t even talk about it, I feel sick ... distressed .... I couldn’t sleep at night it was on my mind for a long time.* (Raftery 34)

Again, Judge Ryan is descriptive as he lists the sexual abuses in a way that stresses their severity for the audience. Male Witness 4 is concise in his testimony and is clearly struggling in his recall of the event, marked by moments of silence in his speech, represented by the ellipses in written text, which characterise the difficulty of putting his suffering into words. Female Witness 7, even though her testimony is more detailed, expresses her difficulty in exposing her distress, and the consequences for her of the abuse, not only at the time when it happened, but also while remembering it – a demonstration of how she suffered both physical and psychological abuse.

The 1,712 victims that came forward with their stories presented difficulties in exposing the intimate and distressing details of the abuses. Readers/audience can only try to perceive how demanding it had been for them to put these experiences into words after so many years, and to reveal their physical and psychological outcomes. The struggles are characterised in the written text by the ellipses when witnesses are described as crying, or when they say it was difficult to remember the events, or when they strive to explain how the abuses have reflected on their lives after leaving the institutions.

As seen in the excerpts above, the descriptions in the report, and consequently in the play, are very graphic. Sean Ryan is the spokesperson for all the victims – including those not incorporated to the play in Raftery’s editing – and, as such,

his use of language is formal, and highly detailed, indicating every type of abuse as well as the instruments used. On the other hand, the complainants attempt to express their suffering by describing the situations that inflicted pain, rather than trying to put pain itself into words: as a result, their effort to share pain is subjective and evokes a variety of emotions. Dillane, McAreavey and Pine affirm that for a human mind to accept what is being witnessed or recounted is a difficult matter, since people can get distressed in trying to handle the emotional responses provoked by the stories (Dillane et al. 7).

In contrast to the judge and the complainants, some representatives of the institutions seem to diminish whatever pain victims felt when interrogated, while others assumed their participation in the abuses and even show regret. It is noticeable that the institutions have disregarded the complaints made by relatives and students, since, in some of the depositions they give, their representatives attempt to show that reports have been exaggerated, or seem to speak with irony in attempt to lessen the weight of allegations:

**Br Reynolds** . . . the overall picture that has been given of Artane as an abusive institution is not correct, in fact the opposite is the case. (Raftery 17)

**Christian Brother** . . . I have ascertained that she is a mental case with a strong antipathy against Artane School and that she is given to exaggeration in all matters she speaks or writes about. (Raftery 18)

**Sr O'Donoghue** . . . Goldenbridge was . . . a reasonably efficient and caring school . . . We believe that having examined some of the, certainly, serious allegations we have not been able to find grounds that would convince us that they were part of the reality. (Raftery 27)

**Sr O'Donoghue** We accept that children were beaten in terms of corporal punishment. We do not accept that it was excessive or excessively harsh. (Raftery 28)

The institutions sheltered minorities, children with particular needs and, often, children with no families. The government and Church made no effort to resolve the situation while it was happening, as it becomes clear when they deny the allegations, providing responses in a defensive, accusatory and disrespectful manner, and state their investigation lead to nothing, so as to avoid scandals.

In the play (and in the Ryan Report), on the subject of sexual abuses, even though representatives agreed that some brothers and priests did wrong, the representatives of the institutions continued to provide excuses for not taking actions on the issues, such as that improved vigilance or transferring the offender could resolve the situation. Their attempt to cover up the inflicted pain reinforces the idea that children's pain need not be regarded, since, if children's pain is not acknowledged, there is no need for society to empathise with them.

It is seen that language is used with two different objectives. Judge Ryan and the testimonies of the victims use it to provide detailed descriptions, enabling the audience to understand the level of physical and psychological pain felt by the complainants, and its consequences in their lives. The representatives, on the

other hand, use a form of discourse that avoids any indication of responsibility for severe abuses, alleging exaggeration on the issues raised and on the need for beatings. Mary Raftery focused on the voice of the victims, acknowledging their story; and, at the same time, she does not spare those responsible, contrasting the two levels of discourse and providing the audience with a fuller access to what actually took place. As the play ends, however, with testimony from several people who clearly have accurate and convincing memories, the audience may still feel a sense of lack of justice, or of some sort of compensation for the victims. Crucial to the emotional effect on the audience is that the narrative built by Mary Raftery seems to be developed towards a conclusion that does not come.

### Conclusion

Janelle Reinelt comments that spectators of documentary theatre try to experience, recognise, and understand the event portrayed (Reinelt 2011, 10). This is certainly the case in *No Escape*: audience members (and readers) find themselves seeking answers for the events, as retrieved directly from the Ryan Report, to enable them to form their own opinion on the truth in the accounts they witness (or read).

*No Escape* deals with one of the bleakest chapters of Irish history. Many of the children victims of abuse are still alive, which means that the play is not just a representation of the past, or just a metaphor, but for some it is the exposure of very intimate and painful pasts. It displays out in the open – although not referring specifically to individuals, but to nameless witnesses who are numbered – what may perhaps be many people’s darkest memories. The play raises disquieting questions, still unanswered: what was (or is) *No Escape* supposed to do as a show? What has it done to the victims of such systematised violence? Does it effectively work as a caveat against the mistreatment of children?

The reception of *No Escape* in Ireland was replete with mixed feelings. Sara Keating, writing for *The Irish Times* as a response to the premiere of *No Escape* in 2010, asked: “Is it possible for a piece of theatre to *adequately represent* the scale of damage perpetrated by the Catholic Church in 20th-century Ireland? How can the extent of the social dysfunction that allowed it to happen be given metaphorical form?” (Keating 2010; our emphasis). Keating’s questions are crucial when considering the ethics of representation involved in such a performance. Keating criticises *No Escape*, pinpointing that, in the face of the myriad of facts and statistical information presented in the play by Sean Ryan, who acts as a narrator figure in the play, the overall effect is “clinical,” thus desensitising the audience from the “individual truths that connects us [the Irish people] to this dark story of our nation’s past” (Keating 2010).

Also, on the topic of the mixed reception of the play, Luke Lamont remarks:

Some criticized it for glorifying a report which they felt was an inadequate response to the decades of abuse committed in Industrial Schools, while



others praised the show as a brave attempt to make such a daunting archive available and visible to Irish audiences. . . . *No Escape* selectively edits the report, prioritizing certain voices while excluding others. . . . Such a representation is not entirely unproblematic, and critics of *No Escape* have questioned the ethics of presenting – or exploiting – the voices of abuse victims for theatrical purposes. (Lamont 2018, 777)

As for the effectiveness of the production, Miriam Haughton observes that, with *No Escape*, as with a number of other significant Irish works that have approached the themes of trauma and pain, “stimulated by history of performance on stage, . . . there remains a sense of distance between the production and the audience. . . . A physical separation between the performers and the audience in their seats in the theatre” (Haughton 2018, 138).

Despite the concept, initially discussed above, that pain is not shareable, and the question that has been raised as to whether *No Escape* is an appropriate way of representing suffering, one could argue that Raftery succeeded in portraying the victims’ feelings of pain. On the other hand, the “healing effect” mentioned by Dawson may be a little harder to come by, both for audience members and readers, since the statements may evoke more negative feelings than expected, and there is still a lack of compassion for the victims, from the government, Church and society (as there was, especially, in the past). A conclusion that can be drawn is that pain, in this case, is still very recent in Ireland’s history, not only as recorded and perpetuated in the feelings of the victims, but also indirectly for the people who were or are close or related to them. Specifically, the play evinces the difficulty of translating pain into language, evoking a continuing opportunity to reflect on pain – as both an experience and subject – and also to pursue change and, perhaps, healing.

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