



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

“‘The truth is just so damn...elusive’:
Selected Plays by Neil LaBute - Dramatic Aesthetics
and Reception on Viennese Stages“

Verfasserin

Gunda Weiss

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, im Februar 2010

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:
Betreuerin:

A 190 344 333
UF Englisch
O. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Margarete Rubik

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my parents for always being there for me and for having given me all the support I needed to be able to concentrate solely on my studies. I highly appreciate that they constantly encouraged me in everything I did and also provided me with professional inspiration.

Furthermore, I want to express a special thanks to Univ.-Prof. Dr. Margarete Rubik. She is certainly the most reliable and thorough supervisor one could wish for. Her comments on the drafts of this thesis were always inspiring and very helpful.

I consider myself very lucky to have friends who unfailingly make me laugh, offer valuable advice, comfort me if necessary and also support me in all my decisions. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. STRUCTURE	3
2.1. EXTERNAL STRUCTURE.....	3
2.2. INTERNAL STRUCTURE	5
2.2.1. DRAMATIC PAST AND PRESENT.....	5
2.2.2. LEVELS OF AWARENESS AS PLOT.....	14
2.2.2.1. Initial situation	15
2.2.2.2. Discrepant awareness.....	17
2.2.2.3. Endings	21
2.2.2.4. Re-reading the plays.....	26
3. PRESENTATION	31
3.1. LANGUAGE AND STYLE	31
3.2. FORMS OF SPEECH	34
3.3. SECONDARY TEXT	38
3.4. A METADRAMATIC ELEMENT – THE NARRATOR IN <i>THIS</i> <i>IS HOW IT GOES</i>	44
4. CHARACTERS	51
4.1. DRAMATIS PERSONAE, CONFIGURATION AND FIGURE CONSTELLATION.....	51
4.2. FIGURE CONCEPTION	55
4.3. TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERISATION.....	62
5. THEMES	77
5.1. RELIGION	77
5.2. GENDER.....	79
5.3. MORALITY	83
5.4. CONTEMPORARY AMERICA.....	87
6. INTERTEXTUALITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE ...	90
6.1. GREEK MYTHOLOGY	90
6.2. ERIC ROHMER.....	92

6.3. HAROLD PINTER	94
6.4. RESTORATION COMEDY	95
7. RECEPTION ON VIENNESE STAGES.....	98
7.1. <i>BASH</i>	100
7.2. <i>THE SHAPE OF THINGS</i>	103
7.3. <i>SOME GIRL(S)</i>	105
7.4. <i>THIS IS HOW IT GOES</i>	108
8. CONCLUSION	113
9. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	115
9.1. PRIMARY SOURCES.....	115
9.2. SECONDARY SOURCES	115
9.2.1. REVIEWS.....	118
10. INDEX	123
11. ZUSAMMENFASSUNG	128
12. CURRICULUM VITAE	130

1. INTRODUCTION

To the question what good can come from depicting the bad Neil LaBute gave the following answer:

Awareness, principally. I've never felt that showing something negative—a negative lifestyle, a negative character—was a bad thing to do. I've never felt that I was reveling in the behavior of any of the characters I've written. That's closer to what one might consider pornography to be: there's nothing to gain from watching their behavior except to be titillated by them undressing, them shooting someone in the face. It's really just there to provide a kind of stimulation or entertainment. I've always taken the work a bit more seriously than that—although never too seriously! I still think of it as work; I still think of it as trying to create entertainment; it's still just made up. But I do think that you have quite a forum on the stage or screen: you're concentrating people on looking at something, and you can influence them in a certain way. You are being instructive, hopefully. You're saying, "Don't look at just what they do, but look at what's behind it." (LaBute interview Welch)

Neil LaBute is one of the most discussed contemporary playwrights and filmmakers. His plays and films are highly controversial and certainly polarise audiences as well as critics. Many critics accuse him of simply wanting to shock and categorise his theatre as boulevard. As in the quote above, he has emphasised on various occasions that his main purpose is not to disturb but rather to educate the audience. He does not produce lightweight theatre which only intends to entertain. It is the aim of this thesis to arrive at a generically differentiated evaluation of LaBute's dramatic aesthetics on the basis of a detailed analysis of four of his plays: *bash*, *the shape of things*, *some girl(s)* and *This is how it goes*. Various of his plays have been staged on Viennese and other Austrian stages. These four plays were selected since they were produced in Vienna's most prestigious theatres, the Burgtheater (Akademietheater) and the Theater in der Josefstadt, which gained these productions as well as these plays the highest amount of symbolic capital in the Austrian context.

The textual analysis will focus on structural issues, the construction of characters and the treatment of major themes. The structure of the texts and the dramatique technique LaBute employs are far more complex than that of conventional boulevard theatre. Especially the aspect of poetic justice will receive close attention. LaBute's evil characters remain unpunished and he

shifts moral evaluation towards his audience. He does not feed his viewers with moralistic pieces of wisdom but wants them to identify the imperfection and moral flaws of his characters themselves. Not cheap amusement is his intent but he aims at challenging his audiences by triggering a thought-process. As he himself puts it, he wants them to “look at what’s behind it” (LaBute interview Welch).

His dramatic figures will be explored with a view to their multidimensional or ambiguous nature. A good deal of the criticism of his figures relates to the employment of stereotypes. However, it is the deconstruction of clichés which interests LaBute. He peoples his plays with stereotypical characters, dramatising their conventionality and at the same time exposing it and holding it up for criticism, thus adding a further dimension to his characters.

The major thematic concerns of the plays under discussion will also be investigated. In the selected texts LaBute is primarily interested in the question of morality in the postmodern world as well as in issues of gender and religious problems. Moreover, the representation and criticism of contemporary America in LaBute’s works for the stage will be explored.

The reproach of producing boulevard theatre arises when critics only understand the surface text but not the subtext. This and other aspects of the reception of LaBute’s plays in Vienna, like the specific Americanness of some of them, will be analysed on the basis of reviews in various Austrian newspapers and magazines. Where appropriate comparisons to the reception in England and America will be made.

It is the the aim of this thesis to show that Neil LaBute produces multidimensional and thought-provoking plays which confuse, irritate, entertain and ultimately instruct the audience. This is intelligent postmodern theatre and a far cry from trivial boulevard theatre.

2. STRUCTURE

The four plays *bash*, *the shape of things*, *some girl(s)* and *This is how it goes* are structured very differently. Moreover, Neil LaBute uses numerous, sometimes highly idiosyncratic, dramatic techniques in his texts. In this chapter the external as well as the internal structure of these plays will be analyzed. In particular such elements as expository strategies (relationship between dramatic past and dramatic present), driving forces of the plot, turning points and endings will be discussed.

2.1. EXTERNAL STRUCTURE

The overall composition of the plays is very divergent and LaBute employs different strategies and techniques to structure his plays. Moreover, primary and secondary text are used in many different ways. Primary text denotes “the spoken dialogue that takes place between the dramatic figures” and secondary text refers to “the title of the play, the inscriptions, dedications and prefaces, the *dramatis personae*, announcements of act and scene, stage-directions, [...] and the identification of the speaker of a particular speech” (Pfister 13-14)

Bash, to begin with, could be seen as a play with three rather independent acts, as they are published and performed together and show similarities in terms of the subject or the themes, for example, religion and violence. However, there are a few aspects which do not support this interpretation. First of all, the title “bash. three plays” indicates three autonomous one-act-plays and not acts of one single play. In addition, each of them has an individual title: *iphigenia in orem*, *a gaggle of saints* and *medea redux*. The play was first performed in New York as “bash: latterday plays”, a title which also suggests three individual plays which are loosely connected by their content, as the subtitle implies a connection with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly called Mormons. (Cf. Bigsby 20)

Moreover, in each text there are different characters, settings and stories that are not related to each other. In addition, the structure of the three texts varies to a considerable extent. Whereas the first and the third play feature a single character who addresses monologues to an imaginary listener, the second text

has two characters. However, it has to be emphasised that this text is not a conventional dialogue since the characters do not always speak to each other but the audience gains the impression that they sometimes speak to an invisible third party and are ignorant of what the other says.¹

The external structure of LaBute's play *The shape of things* is completely different from that of *bash*. Although this text is not divided into acts or scenes in a conventional manner, its structure is determined by similar external parameters, i.e. the settings. There are ten different settings which are clearly separated by headings, for example "A MUSEUM," (1), "A RESTAURANT LOBBY" (16), "A LAWN" (72). The play has four characters who interact with each other in terms of conventional dialogues. Compared to *bash* this play appears to be rather conventional as regards its external structure.

On the other hand, *This is how it goes* is definitely much more unconventional as far as its structure is concerned. First of all, the play is not divided into acts or scenes and new settings and characters are only introduced by the narrator² or in the stage directions, for example "Cody and I met up one day ... over at this nature reserve, where they have these running trails" (64-65) or "The lights change to some sort of restaurant," (15). These changes happen casually, mainly during the speeches of the narrator and are not formally marked. Pfister refers to this phenomenon as "implicit stage directions in the primary text" (15).

The external structure of *Some girl(s)* is more clearly discernible than that of *This is how it goes*. It does not have conventional acts or scenes but is divided into four parts. The male character, Man, remains the same in all four parts, only the female characters, which give the parts their names (Sam, Tyler, Lindsay, Bobbie), change.

¹ This technique will be analysed in the chapter on presentation.

² The introduction and the narrator figure will be closely analysed in the chapter on presentation.

2.2. INTERNAL STRUCTURE

2.2.1. DRAMATIC PAST AND PRESENT

In these four plays by Neil LaBute that have been selected for analysis the relation between text and story is very diverse since there are one-act plays, an episodic play but also plays with a continuous action. Accordingly, he employs different expository strategies. In this context the analysis of the role and importance of the dramatic past and present is an essential tool for the interpretation of his plays. In his texts, Neil LaBute deals with these two concepts in various ways. While the dramatic past always plays a considerable role, the degree of importance and the presentation differ greatly in the four plays.

Pfister refers to “the transmission of information to do with the events and situations from the past that determine the dramatic present” (Pfister 86) as exposition. In traditional drama the antecedents are often revealed at the beginning of a text, either in a prologue, in a soliloquy by the protagonist or in an expository dialogue. However, the exposition is not necessarily confined to the beginning of a play but can extend well into the play. (Cf. Pfister 86-88)

This is exactly how information about the dramatic past is provided in *This is how it goes*. In many ways this play can be considered as post-modern, yet, regarding the expository strategies, it is rather conventional. Like in Ibsenesque, analytical drama the dramatic past prevails and determines as well as dominates the dramatic present. Throughout the play events from the past gradually come up in the characters’ dialogue and constantly influence and change the perception of the dramatic present. Even if some of these events date back a long time they still affect the relationships of the characters and make them more transparent for the recipient.

This procedure can be illustrated by various examples from the text. Right at the beginning of the play, during the first encounter of the Man and the Woman we learn that they know each other from high school, which indicates that the two characters have some kind of past history in common. The way they speak about the past also reveals a lot about their previous relationship. When the Man asks her whether she can remember the night they went to the

movies she pretends she can but it is obvious that she cannot. For him though, “it really is like yesterday [...]. Seriously” (6). Here it becomes clear that he was definitely interested in her then but that she was not paying any attention to him. Now, however, she does not seem so reluctant. It could be for the simple superficial reason that he was obese in school but has lost a lot of weight since then, but she also admits that her marriage is not a happy one:

WOMAN. [...] it's probably pretty regular. As marriages go.

MAN. Great...

WOMAN. ... I didn't say it was that. [...] (13)

As far as the woman's husband, Cody, is concerned, we are confronted with a very direct, not to say rude, arrogant, chauvinist and seemingly obnoxious self-made man. In the following scene we learn about events in Cody's past which have shaped his character and influenced his present situation to a great extent. This information also allows the recipients to adjust their perception of the figure. His mother left the family occasionally in his childhood, hence the negative attitude towards women. Moreover, “he was the only black kid around for, like, a *hundred* miles or so” (22), which seems to account for his inflated ambition. In school days he trained hard to become the high school sports star, especially a good runner, and now he does everything to be a successful business man and is very proud of his financial situation. Furthermore, this could be the reason why he takes everything so seriously and thinks that people behave in a certain way just because they do not respect him since he is black.

Another key scene happens way into the second half of the text when we receive information on the marriage between Belinda and Cody from her point of view. She tells the Man that she married Cody not only because she was in love but mainly because she wanted to stand out. She only agreed to their first date because she wanted to be noticed, and admits

[...] guess I never really stopped. Doing this I mean, marrying Cody and staying here – if you could've seen my dad's face! [...] And I still get some kind of thrill from it...walking into an Arby's or through Wal-Mart, with these two gorgeous brown children in tow. (52)

This again changes the way her character and her relationship to Cody is perceived since up to this point we only see her as the victim of Cody's acrimonious and derogatory statements.

It is obvious that the Man and Belinda get on extremely well and that she sees the understanding listener in him that she misses in her husband. He treats her with a lot more respect than Cody and constantly pays her compliments. However, this image of “the nice guy” changes when he tells Belinda and Cody the story how he lost his job as a lawyer. We know that he is an ex-lawyer from the beginning but only later in the text are we presented with an explanation of how he lost his job. On a plane back from a business trip where he gets to sit in the business class by chance he talks to the person next to him about an African-American colleague: “Well, at least they still sit in the back of the bus” (60). This female colleague, who is also a passenger on this plane, hears that and loudly confronts him. Instead of apologizing he says: “Hey, Carol stop it! Stop acting like some *blue-gummed chimp*, just fell outta the tree!” (61). This event from the dramatic past where he displayed a highly racist and offensive behaviour certainly has a very negative impact on the way the audience perceives the Man’s character.

Concerning Belinda, we know that the Man was interested in her in school already. The whole image of this innocent high school crush changes, though, when the man says

MAN [...] We did kiss once. Yes. I don’t mean in the past, not at the drive-in or anything, but recently. Like, within the last couple weeks. (63)

The perception of this romantic situation, however, entirely changes in the following dialogue between Cody and the Man. Up to this point we believe that they saw each other the last time in high school but now we get to know that they incidentally met at the airport not too long ago. This happened definitely before the point of attack in the chronology of the story, before the Man met Belinda at Sears. This encounter between the two men and a deal that they had in high school determine the whole dramatic present. In school Cody once asked the man to take Belinda to the cinema so that he could meet another girl. In return for this favour he gave him a highly valuable baseball card he got from his father. When they meet at the airport after all these years Cody suggests a new deal. He wants a divorce but wants to keep his money and leave the marriage as the “winner”. When asked why he doesn’t simply leave her he answers:

Because if I go, I lose. I am the loser and that is bullshit! Bullshit! [...] 'S the same reason my ol' man stayed – that guy hung in there, built his wife an empire. A goddamn *empire*! [...] And you know what? People round here *respected* him. (73)

In connection with the information on his background we received earlier and another story he tells about when he deliberately won a race when he was supposed to lose for team-reasons, gives a better understanding of the development of his character. He wants to be looked up to and respected at all costs; for these reasons he plans this intrigue to get rid of his wife.

Cody knows that the man liked Belinda in high school, so he offers the Man his wife in return for the baseball card he gave to him in high school, and the man agrees.

With this information the dramatic present appears in a completely different light, the whole action, everything that we believed happened incidentally, was determined by this one decision made in the dramatic past. In this play the chronology of the text and the story do not correspond at all, and we gradually get to know bits and pieces from various periods of the dramatic past that only in the end form a coherent picture.

This is handled differently in *bash*. In these plays the chronology of the text is similar to the story. The events of the dramatic past are presented retrospectively in a narrative form. In *iphigenia in orem* and *medea redux* the events are presented from one perspective, in form of dramatic monologues, in *a gaggle of saints* we see them from two different points of view.

Although the events are presented chronologically, there are certain exceptions in *iphigenia in orem*. In the first account we are not presented with the full truth. The events are depicted in a certain way but only later, in a different context, are we confronted with the fact that they actually happened under very different circumstances. The young man tells the story of the death of one his children to an imaginary addressee. At first he portrays it as an accident where the baby slid under the blanket and suffocated. The police investigated but they soon classified it as an accident. Moreover, the young man and his wife conceived another child the very same night. He stresses that even after such a tragic experience their life went back to normal, especially

after the birth of their new baby: “and over time, and with the new child...life goes on. [...] it’s true. you just go on. you do.” (21)

At this point, however, the young man goes back in the chronology of the story to the time before the accident and starts over again. A few people in his office were meant to be laid off and he was afraid to be one of them. When his old friend called from the head office to tell him that he definitely was one of the employees to be dismissed he killed his daughter:

i realized that’s what it was. an opportunity, and i wasn’t going to waste it... [...] i took the risk, this calculated risk for my family that this whole episode would play out in our favour, give me a little edge at work and maybe things’d be ok [...](27)

Only six months later does he get to know that the phone call from his friend had been a joke and he was never meant to be laid off.

In this play, again, the dramatic past clearly predominates over the dramatic present. The exceptional way in which it is presented will be analysed in the chapter on LaBute’s *dramatique* techniques.

Medea redux is another dramatic monologue where the events are presented in chronological order on the text- as well as on the story-level. A woman tells her story to the authorities. She had an affair with her high school teacher and became pregnant when she was fourteen. As soon as her teacher got to know that he left town. The woman however, was taken out of school and brought to her aunt. Interestingly enough, she never told anyone who the father of her child was. As her son grew older she established contact with his father and went to visit him on the boy’s fourteenth birthday. Her former high school teacher was married without kids, though, and seemingly happy to see his son. Moreover, he was satisfied “because he’d gotten away with it all” (92). On this day the woman threw a tape-recorder in her son’s bath to kill him. Although the woman’s account of events is very personal and certainly biased she never tries to hide information or to deliberately mislead the audience. In this play, again, the dramatic past dominates over the dramatic present.

In this respect, *a gaggle of saints* is slightly different from the other two plays. The events from the dramatic past are presented in a narrative way as well, however, from two different perspectives. A young couple recounts their memories of a night out in the city. The incidents are depicted chronologically, although there are occasional flashbacks to their youth which influence the

image we have of the characters. The most important event of this night is the brutal attack on a gay man in a park by the young man, John, and his friends. As we know from various hints that the couple is very religious one might be led to think that this assault was religiously motivated: "i mean, come on, I know the scriptures, know 'em pretty well, and this is wrong." (60) However, a little earlier, Sue and John explain how they first met in high school. They saw each other on the school track and suddenly her ex-boyfriend turned up and confronted John. Without saying a word, John attacked him: "and i turn on him. never spoke to him the whole time, just turned on him and flipped him over onto the ground and started pounding on his head." (49) Knowing that he had displayed violent behaviour in a non-religious context before we see the incident in the park in a completely different light. Also in this play, one can see, that the dramatic past prevails over the dramatic present.

In *some girl(s)* the dramatic past plays an important role as well. The internal structure of this text, however, is completely different from that of the other plays. The dramatic past dominates over the present but since this play is episodic, the role of the expository information can only be determined for the individual episodes which are only connected through the figure of the man. Timeframe and storyline are not at the centre of the analysis as it is clear that the play centres on the dramatic past. The essential aspect is how differently the past is perceived by the man and each of the four women, Sam, Tyler, Lindsay and Bobbie.

In the first episode there are substantial discrepancies in the way the past is seen by the two characters. The man and Sam had been a couple in high school and apparently he had left her then. How these past events were experienced can be illustrated with various examples from the text.

MAN. [...] I get a feeling that it didn't end well...[...] ...we sort of...

SAM. You ended it!

MAN. Uh-huh. Right.

SAM. *You* broke up with me. [...]

MAN. Well, we were just kids, right?

SAM. Eighteen. When you dumped me, I mean. That's an adult.

MAN. True, but, that's what it seemed like. To me. *Kids*.

SAM. Whatever. Whatever *you* say. [...]

MAN. [...] I think the reason we broke up back then was...this. We were, umm...

SAM. Not we. You. *You* ended it. (9-11)

As one can see, they have entirely divergent memories of the dramatic past and completely different emotions connected with it. One gets the impression that he is either emotionally insensitive not to have realised what he had done to her or he might simply suppress the negative memories and pretend that their separation was not as dramatic as it actually was.

Moreover, she seems to remember a lot more details from the past than he does:

SAM. I thought maybe it slipped your mind. So much else seems to've...

MAN. I thought we even talked about this once.

SAM. No.

MAN. We didn't? Over the summer there, before I ...?

SAM. No, we didn't. Not ever.

MAN. Oh. Okay, my mistake. (17)

Although most of the dialogue focuses on the dramatic past, there is one important moment in the dramatic present when their conversation causes a change in her conception of their past relationship:

SAM. [...] I realize now, though, it was just a teenage thing and you dated somebody else right after me, so...how's that for a wake-up call, huh? Shit. (20)

On account of the information received in the first scene, the audience now has certain assumptions and expectations and therefore approaches the next scene differently. As the audience suspects, it becomes clear very soon that these two had a relationship too.

In this episode with Tyler, though, the audience soon realises that a totally different atmosphere prevails since the female characters Sam and Tyler could not be more different. It is highly interesting however, how the mood changes the more information about the dramatic past is revealed. At the beginning we see Tyler as a strong, independent woman who, in contrast to Sam, is not upset about the breakup with the man. They reveal a few details about their relationship, for instance, about their sexual experiences, that he never minded her smoking, etc. The tone is light-hearted and it is obvious that they still find each other attractive. Only at the very end of this episode an aspect of the dramatic past is revealed that changes this seemingly untroubled small-talk:

MAN. I felt so shitty about what I did to her by leaving that I just...plunged in with you, did whatever. All the, you know...[...]
 TYLER. Look...it is never cool to be second, you know. In a relationship. It's not. And I was a *distant* second there for a bit! [...] you can talk yourself into anything if you say it enough. But it's not really true. That shit hurts. (39-40)

Another important bit of information that is disclosed is the man's reason for visiting various of his ex-girlfriends: Do a check-in, you know? Get caught up to date with 'em, make sure that we're...you know: no harm, no foul. [...] Right a wrong, or whatever. (32-33). Behind all these visits seems to be a good intention, he thinks "it'd be a good way to start [his] new life" (33) as he is getting married.

While the dramatic past prevails in their conversation, in the end the dramatic present becomes important as well. During their conversation she tries to seduce him several times and each time he allows it a little more so that when the scene ends with her blowing smoke into his mouth the audience cannot be sure about what else is going to happen between them.

Having already witnessed two entirely different encounters between the man and two of his ex-girlfriends influences the audience's expectations concerning the third part and evokes curiosity as to the next female character.

We soon realise that, like in the first scene, the relationship between these two did not end happily. Lindsay is still very angry and full of sarcasm and we soon get to know why. They had an affair while she was married and when it came out he left town immediately without ever contacting her again. Furthermore, we find out that the man used some details of their affair in one of his articles.

Like in the second part, towards the end of the third scene, events in the dramatic presence gain more importance when she persuades the man to sleep with her. As he tries to apologise and find excuses for what he had done throughout the dialogue she wants him to sleep with her to make up for it. That way he would have to carry the guilt around and hurt his girlfriend in the same way that she hurt her husband. At the moment when he is ready to betray his girlfriend Lindsay leaves.

In the following fourth and last part the audience meets another woman, Bobbie. At the beginning the relationship between the man and Bobbie does not seem hostile or reproachful. This soon changes when events from the dramatic past are revealed. While they were still together he left for Chicago and without even ending their relationship he never contacted her again. Apparently he tried calling her a couple of times but always hung up again. From information we received in the second part we now know that Bobbie was the woman he was still thinking about when he got together with Tyler. The more the audience gets to know about the dramatic past the clearer the man's character and the more comprehensible the connections between the individual episodes become.

Moreover, during their conversation he explains the procedure of how he picked the ex-girlfriends he visited. At first one could have the impression that he only contacted those that were either still important to him or where he has a bad conscience about the end of their relationship. With this new information though, we see that he chose them randomly, a procedure which has a negative influence on the image the audience has of his character.

The most important piece of information, however, is only revealed at the very end of the play. Bobbie finds a microphone in the man's jacket and the audience finds out that all these visits were inspired by a purely egoistic intention: He recorded all these conversations to write another article since he found out that writing about his own romantic experiences brought more success as a writer. Like in *This is how it goes* this decision in the dramatic past determines everything that happens in the dramatic present.

Compared to the other three plays, the dramatic past in *the shape of things* only plays a minor role since the two main characters, Adam and Evelyn, do not have a shared history but meet for the first time. Moreover, in the dialogues there is little information about their childhood or youth which could influence our impression of their characters. Only little details are interspersed occasionally. The only information we receive about Evelyn is that she supposedly comes from Illinois, is 25 and an artist. The small details from Adam's dramatic past which are revealed are more important in the play's context since we witness his change in the dramatic present. He was shy, did

not care about his looks, used to bite his nails and wear glasses. In the course of the play he loses weight and starts to work out, cuts his hair, stops biting his nails and begins to wear contacts.

The only event from the dramatic past that is disclosed concerns Adam and his two friends, the couple Jenny and Phillip. Jenny and Adam took a course together in college but even though he was interested in her he was always too shy to ask her out. The first day his friend Phillip saw Jenny he asked her out though, and the two are about to get married now. This illustrates his character and explains in a way why he is so obsessed with Evelyn.

In contrast to the other three plays, in most parts of *the shape of things* the dramatic present dominates over the dramatic past. Only at the end does the audience get to know that a decision in the dramatic past determined the whole action in the dramatic present. For her thesis Evelyn decided to create a “*human* sculpture” (118), her material being “the human flesh and the human will” (119) which she found in Adam.

In this respect the play shows similarities to *This is how it goes* and *some girl(s)*. Due to details about the dramatic past that are revealed only at the end of the text the audience sees the dramatic present with different eyes and evaluates the situation in a completely different way.

2.2.2. LEVELS OF AWARENESS AS PLOT

Most of Neil LaBute’s plays feature very unconventional, indeed postmodern structural patterns, which makes it highly problematic to apply traditional concepts and terms of analysis. Tools for the structural analysis of plays, like Freytag’s triangle, for example, were derived from five-act tragedies and later employed for the interpretation of well-made plays. However, most of these analytical methods are of no use for LaBute’s texts. Therefore, it appears to be more adequate to introduce Labutian structural characteristics. Thus, the inciting moment at the beginning of the drama will be referred to as the “initial situation”. Moreover, instead of using the terms “complication” or “climax”, the “moment of first suspicion” and the “moment of revelation” will be introduced. It is exactly this level of knowledge that structures the plays: the audience/the reader moves from a state of complete nescience to a first suspicion, on to the moment where everything we believed is totally subverted and what we thought

to be the dramatic reality proves to be entirely untrue. To analyse these stages Bertrand Evans's concept of discrepant awareness will be used.³

2.2.2.1. Initial situation

In three of the plays, *This is how it goes*, *the shape of things* and *bash*, we step right into the middle of the action.

In *This is how it goes* the Man and Belinda meet in the first scene. As soon as a third person, Cody, enters the situation becomes more complicated and troubled. In this triangle emotions are released and aggressions are generated. This situation, which has been problematic from the beginning, intensifies when the Man moves into the apartment above the garage. From then on, the problematic relationships start to escalate.

The shape of things also starts with an encounter of the two central characters. Adam and Evelyn meet in a museum. He has a job as a guard there and tries to prevent her from spraying a penis onto one of the statues there. Unlike *This is how it goes*, where the Man and Belinda know each other from high school, Adam and Evelyn have never seen each other before. Evelyn's behaviour in this highly precarious situation seems to impress Adam and he asks for her number to see her again. While in *This is how it goes* it is revealed at the end of the play why the Man and Belinda met, not as we first believe coincidentally but deliberately, we never get to know whether Adam and Evelyn's encounter was planned. She claims to have seen him while she "was actively pursuing another set of 'base material.'" (119). This would hint towards the museum, the other "base material" being the statue. To Adam, however, she says that she once met him in the video store before that. Therefore, it remains obscure whether she planned their meeting or whether she decided spontaneously to take him as the object for her thesis.

Some girl(s) is somewhat different since there is no continuous action but four individual episodes. In the initial situation the audience witnesses the first of four encounters between the man and his ex-girlfriends. The motivation for this

³ Evans's concept as delineated in Pfister, 49-50.

and the following three visits appears to become clear very soon: the man wants to clear his conscience before getting married. Like in the two previously analysed plays the real impetus for his travels is only revealed at the very end.

Concerning the initial situation and the start of the action *bash* is distinct from the other plays and therefore has to be approached from a different vantage point. Since the three plays are quasi-narratives, the figures are not only characters but also narrators. The trigger of the action cannot be determined since we are only presented with an account of the dramatic past. However, it is important to identify the characters' or narrators' motivation to tell their stories. Two of the texts, *iphigenia in orem* and *medae redux* can be seen as confessions, although made under different circumstances. In the first one, the young man evidently wants to clear his conscience; however, by telling his story he does not want to take unnecessary risks. For this reason, he chooses a complete stranger as his listener, someone who is already intoxicated and will probably not remember what he has been told: "...i can't tell deb, it'd kill her. kill us, as a family, i mean, that's obvious, right? can't tell anyone in the church, or the police, of course...so i chose you." (30)

In *medea redux* the audience witnesses another confession; however, in different circumstances. The stage directions imply that the woman is in some kind of interrogation room: "woman sits alone in a chair at an institutional-style table, a harsh light hangs down directly overhead. a tape player, water carafe and cup, cigarettes, and an ashtray are close at hand." (77) This suggests that she is making her confession not entirely voluntarily but because she committed a crime and has been caught. The assumption that her confession does not have the same motives as in *iphigenia in orem* can be supported by the beginning of her monologue: "[...] 'cause i was never, like, this major talker or anything...like to keep things to myself, some people'd call it "private" or whatever, but it's more like just being sort 'a "inward." right? i'm an inward kind 'a person..." (77).

What distinguishes the central piece, *a gaggle of saints*, from the other two is not only the number of characters speaking but the apparent lack of motivation to narrate. At the beginning the speeches of the two speakers, in this quasi-monological dialogue, seem to supplement each other until at one point

their stories diverge because they were separated on the evening they are telling about. From then onwards the characters give the impression that they are not speaking to each other anymore but to someone else. Sue's story is the account of a nice evening she spent in New York together with her fiancé and some friends. She seems to narrate because she wants to share her pleasurable experience with someone. At the beginning John appears to have the same motivation; at the point where they separate, however, he speaks about events that are not pleasurable at all but violent and repulsive. One might think that, like in the other two plays, he wants to confess his deeds but the tone and atmosphere of his story is completely at variance with this assumption. He does not show a hint of regret for what he has done and when one of the men starts praying over the body of the man they have just beaten to death he reports: "[...] we all start giggling, like schoolboys, we're howling, tears running down, can't catch our breath we find it all so funny!" (64)

Considering these aspects it is impossible to determine a definite motivation for their narration.

2.2.2.2. Discrepant awareness

The term discrepant awareness defines

[...] two different relationships. First, there are the differences in the levels of awareness of the various dramatic figures, and, secondly, there are these between the fictional figures and the audience. (Pfister 50)

According to Pfister, this discrepant awareness is determined by two conflicting aspects. On the one hand, the audience is omnipresent and gets to "join up and collate the partial 'awarenesses' of the individual figures". On the other hand, the audience can never be sure whether the characters have shared all their information or have withheld crucial aspects. (Cf. Pfister 50) In this context, Pfister quotes Dürrenmatt, who regards exactly this relationship as the essential element of the dramatic:

If I show two people drinking coffee together and talking about the weather, politics or fashion, however cleverly they may be doing this, it is not as yet a dramatic situation or a dramatic dialogue. Something must be added which will make their speech special, dramatic, ambiguous. If, for instance, the audience know that there is poison in one of the coffee-cups, or indeed both, so that what results is a conversation of two

poisoners drinking coffee, as a result of this trick a dramatic situation emerges from which and at the basis of which the possibility of dramatic dialogue ensues. (qtd. in Pfister 49)

Dürrenmatt talks about superior audience awareness here but seems to have neglected the concept of inferior audience awareness: what if the figures have not shared their information and the audience is as ignorant as the other characters? What if the audience only becomes aware of the essential aspect which makes the situation “special, dramatic, ambiguous” at the end of the play? Even if the first model is far more common in traditional drama the second concept certainly prevails in Neil LaBute’s texts. Pfister claims that it is typical of “trivial drama, whose intended effect is both generated by and restricted to creating powerful elements of suspense and surprise or encouraging the audience to indulge in intellectual detective work” (Pfister 54). Moreover, he argues that “texts of this kind are only intended to be seen once, since actually knowing “whodunnit” undermines the whole intended effect” (Pfister 54). That LaBute’s plays are not typical “whodunnit” stories and that creating suspense and encouraging the audience to play the detective are certainly not the only effects of inferior audience awareness in LaBute’s plays will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

In *This is how it goes* the audience are clearly aware of their inferior awareness and know that the Man might have information he does not share. Since he refers to himself as an unreliable narrator he is definitely not to be trusted. On the one hand, we do not know whether he tells us everything but on the other hand, we can also not be sure whether what he tells us is true. This uncertainty is especially noticeable when the man presents two entirely different accounts of a highly precarious situation. In fact, we never get to know whether the incident happened the first or the second way, not at all or in a completely different manner. At the point where the Man admits that he and Belinda kissed we get the impression that we now have superior awareness, especially over Cody, and have been given important background information. Even if the audience might suspect that there is something more to the whole story there is absolutely no hint as to what this could be. Furthermore, Cody convincingly plays the jealous husband, which contributes to the surprise we experience

when we get to know all the details in the end. We are now in a superior position and can evaluate and judge the situation, whereas Belinda still has no clue about the truth. Re-reading the play is far from pointless as with the superior awareness we have now we approach the text in a totally different manner. We can now concentrate on possible clues which we have simply overlooked in the first reading. Moreover, it is really fascinating to re-evaluate the conversations between the characters since we know that two of them are lying, in fact playing a role.

Inferior audience awareness in *the shape of things* is very distinct from that in *This is how it goes*. At no point in the text do we suspect that there could be something we might not know. We certainly adopt a certain attitude as to the characters and their behaviour and also judge them but we would never guess the truth. The only figure with superior knowledge is Evelyn; however, in contrast to *This is how it goes*, she never indicates that she might know more. For this reason the ending comes as a shock to the audience. The audience was as ignorant as Adam and could at no point have suspected the real motivation behind her actions. Again, in this play inferior audience awareness does not create suspense and does not induce them to do detective work but only results in utter surprise at the end of the play. The impulse to search for clues and indications of her intention is only generated after we have seen a performance or read the text. We now have the desire to re-read the play and find out how we could have been so misled.

In *some girl(s)* discrepant awareness is handled differently than in *This is how it goes* and *the shape of things*. There are varying levels of awareness between the audience, the man and the four women. In the first part Sam and the audience do not know about the real purpose of the Man's visits and Sam also never gets to know about the other women or the microphone. In the second episode he tells Tyler about his purpose of visiting some of his ex-girlfriends. We now think that we are fully informed and have superior knowledge. There is no reason to suspect that there could be more to it and to disbelieve what he tells her. In the third part the man wants to convince Lindsay that he contacted her to "make amends. Some sort of complete reparation for

all my behaviours” (51). However, he does not tell her about the other women, which means that in this moment we have more knowledge at least compared to Sam and Lindsay. At the end of this episode he pulls out a microphone. This is the point where we start suspecting that there might be something more to these visits but we cannot be sure what it is. This can be considered as the moment of first suspicion but we still have inferior awareness. In the last part the audience gets to know that the man told Bobbie already in an email that he was visiting various ex-girlfriends. In the course of the dialogue he admits that he chose them randomly. Clearly, in this respect Bobbie’s knowledge is superior to that of the other women, who still think they are special. In the end she finds the microphone and the man admits the real reason for his travels, namely his personal success as a writer. Bobbie and the audience now have superior awareness but the other women will never get to know about his deception. The man gets away with it and can use the ostensibly reconciliatory conversations for his next article.

In the first monologue of *bash, iphigenia in orem*, we are confronted with an interesting situation. The young man, who is our only source of information and definitely has superior awareness, seemingly wants to confess to someone to clear his conscience. Therefore, there is absolutely no reason for the audience to disbelieve his story. We might be slightly surprised by his factual account of the events but we initially do not think that there could be more to it. The viewers are then clearly astounded when he starts over again and reveals the real circumstances of his baby’s death. Neil LaBute himself comments on this aspect of confession and secrecy in the interview with Christopher Bigsby:

NL: [...] What I do know is that there is a confessional quality to it. He has a need to talk, to confess to what he has done. Does he at the end find that he is confessing to a crime? He seems not to think so. He gets to a place where he says, ‘I dare you to tell me that I have been wrong. I dare you tell me that you could love more than I have. I don’t think you can.’

CB: But in this case he takes a kind of pleasure from this. The essence of his power lies in withheld knowledge. He has a secret that he keeps to the end. But that, surely, is exactly what you do as a playwright?

NL: That is probably because I get pleasure from it as well. I probably get pleasure from it when it is done to me as an audience member. [...] But the idea of a secret is a provocative tool to use in the theatre, the

idea of someone who willingly withholds information, that or a strong reversal of plot. (Bigsby, 240-241)

Also in *medea redux* the Woman has superior knowledge to the audience. Again, she is the only character we receive information from. However, she sticks to one single version of her story until the end and gives an ostensibly true account of her story.

The audience witnesses another unusual constellation in *a gaggle of saints*. In this play we have two characters who provide information, John and Sue. At the beginning, both of them have more knowledge than the audience. Their level of knowledge, however, differs as they separated on the evening. Therefore, they both know details the other one is not aware of. In the end the viewers know both sides of the story whereas the characters are still oblivious to their partner's experiences. In the case of John this does not really make any difference for him, since Sue went to sleep with the other girls in their hotel room. For Sue, however, it would certainly change the relationship to John if she knew what happened this night. Knowing the details, the audience finds the ending, which is rather romantic for Sue, highly appalling: John gives the ring he has stolen from the homosexual they have beaten to death to Sue for their anniversary. She "loved him so much at that moment" (66) and when John plays with this ring on the train while he watches a man beat up his wife without the slightest reaction, he "made [her] so happy" (68).

2.2.2.3. Endings

In his standard work on drama Pfister distinguishes between two forms of endings: closed and open endings. He characterises the first as endings where "informational discrepancies between the dramatic figures and those between the figures and the audience are reduced to a minimum or are abolished altogether" (Pfister 95). Moreover, a closed ending is signified by "the resolution of all conflicts and ambivalence in the moral values expressed in the play, thereby clarifying once and for all the intended reception-perspective" (Pfister 95) As regards poetic justice, all moral and ethical issues have to be resolved favouring those who follow the norm and those who do not have to be punished

(Cf. Pfister 96). In terms of closed endings the audience will take sides with the good parties and condemn the evil ones.

Open endings mostly occur in modern plays and can be identified by a “refusal to supply an ending in which all the informational discrepancies are eliminated and all the conflicts resolved” (Pfister 96). In many cases this kind of ending leaves the responsibility to find a resolution to the audience. In terms of poetic justice Jay Oney very well describes the effect the endings of LaBute’s plays have on the viewers:

When LaBute’s brutes avoid poetic justice, their gratification also offends modern audiences, especially those expecting the good to end happily and the bad unhappily. But after the performance of a LaBute play, the audience is meant to be outraged at the unpunished behaviour of the shallow and powerful. (43)

Neil LaBute’s plays are characterised by a mixture of these two kinds of endings. This claim will now be supported by the analysis of the plays selected.

In *This is how it goes* the informational discrepancies between the audience and most figures are resolved, which is an indication of a closed ending. However, one important character, Belinda, remains ignorant. This circumstance can be seen as an element of an open ending as not all ethical conflicts are resolved and poetic justice is shifted towards the audience since the two “bad guys” get away with their betrayal. On the one hand, the fact that they remain unpunished is an indication of an open ending. On the other hand, the audience takes sides with the not necessarily good but certainly betrayed character, which points towards a closed ending. This effect is emphasised by the reaction of the audience in the London production:

When the Man, played by Ben Chaplin, put his arm around his new wife and grinned smugly at the audience at the end of the London production of *This is How it Goes*, a palpable chill went through the crowd because they were aware that the Woman would never know that her courtship had been a sham. (Oney, 44-45)

The next play, *the shape of things*, is similar to *This is how it goes* in various aspects. It suggests a closed ending since all the informational discrepancies are resolved between the audience and all the characters. However, it has an open ending in moral terms: Evelyn remains unpunished for what she has done. Again, it is for the audience to decide how they judge her

behaviour. This time there are two likely reactions. Most of the spectators/readers will probably sympathise with Adam as Evelyn played with his feelings and deceived him. In contrast, some might also take Evelyn's side and appreciate the motivation for what she did, namely to create pure art. Moreover, she did something good for him in making him more attractive and interesting.

Although in *some girl(s)* the discrepancies between the audience and the man are resolved, there are different levels of awareness among the women.⁴ Therefore, it is only partially a closed ending. Like the other two texts, it has an open ending in terms of poetic justice since the man gets away with his behaviour unpunished. Once again, it is left to the audience to judge. Most probably, the viewers will take the women's side as these are the characters who have been used and betrayed by the man's egoistic quest.

As regards the endings, the three plays in *bash* are highly interesting and diverse. *Iphigenia in orem* features a closed ending in terms of informational discrepancies that are resolved. However, in moral terms it has an open ending since the young man is not punished for murdering his own child. Again, poetic justice is shifted towards the audience. Even if he constantly tries to find excuses for his deed the viewers will certainly find him guilty in moral terms.

On the one hand, *a gaggle of saints* features a closed ending as no discrepancies are left between the audience and John. However, John and Sue still have a different level of awareness. Like the other plays, this text's ending is open in moral terms since the murder carried out by the young men remains unpunished as well. It is again delegated to the audience to arrive at a verdict, so to speak: we certainly despise them for what they have done. The reason why so many of his characters remain unpunished is explained best by LaBute himself: "And you have to be true to your characters. I am not here to be true to the audience...characters sometimes go unpunished, because that is the way things work out in life." (qtd. in Bigsby, 102).

Like in the other plays, the ending in *medea redux* can be characterised as closed concerning the resolution of informational discrepancies. However, as

⁴ For details see the chapter on discrepant awareness.

to moral issues it is certainly different. The ending is not as open as in the other texts as the protagonist, apparently, is held responsible for what she has done (she is shown in an interrogation room) and she will probably be punished for killing her child. It is interesting though, that in a way, the audience is inclined to take her side. We do not ignore the fact that she killed her son but since she has been victimised her entire life and certainly has psychological problems the audience will show some understanding. This effect cannot be observed in the other plays.

What all the other plays have in common, however, is well summarised by Jay Oney:

Though LaBute leaves characters unpunished in his plays, he clearly signals to his audiences that those characters have transgressed. In fact, as noted above, morally questionable characters like the Man in *some girl(s)* and Evelyn in *The Shape of Things* often face strong verbal condemnation. While LaBute's plays and screenplays take place in a world where moral absolutes rarely dictate behaviour, he still relies on our retention of those absolutes for his plays' effect. (49)

In the context of the endings of all the four plays in terms of morals it is appropriate to quote Mark Steyn's article "Desensitized Beyond Belief" where he describes an effect LaBute's play and movie "In the Company of Men" has on the audience:

What we mostly feel, however, is how much better we are than they are. And, in a community ritual such as theater, the ability to imbue an audience with a sense of its own superiority is not to be disdained. In the cramped confines of the Fairbanks Theatre, LaBute does that superbly: the air is thick with self-congratulation.

Bearing in mind the above examination of the four endings, Steyn's analysis of the impact on the audience certainly applies to these plays too. Mendell looks at this effect from another perspective in which the viewers are urged to question themselves:

Neil LaBute is a didactic writer. [...] He holds a mirror to his audience as well as to his characters and asks us to scrutinize ourselves. He wants us to consider our own behaviour, to question whether our own attitudes and actions differ from those of the characters we are watching and judging. (Mendell, 87)

This fact is also emphasised by John Lahr, who claims that LaBute “force[s] the audience to take a position rather than to abdicate thought for the sake of fun” (qtd. in Wood 77) and “courts provocation not for the sake of shock but to make an audience think against its own received opinions” (Lahr, 11).

Whatever specific effect LaBute’s plays may have on the audience it can certainly be said that he “prefer[s] strong reaction to indifference” (Oney, 40). This strong effect postmodern texts may have has been observed by Rubik in her analysis of Peter Carey’s short fiction, which challenges a similar audience reaction: “[...] they are provocative, gripping and always leave that haunting aftertaste which makes them lodge in the imagination long after the reader has put the book down” (169), or, in this case, after the viewer has left the theatre. Furthermore, there are various other parallels between the effect of Carey’s fiction and LaBute’s drama. Rubik claims that Carey “is a master of shock effects, which [...] are based on a sudden and unexpected change of cognitive frames at the end of the tale, forcing the reader to reconceptualise and re-evaluate the narrative in entirely new terms” (170). Peter Stockwell describes this effect in the context of contextual frame theory⁵:

Of course, sometimes readers make mistakes and sometimes texts provide cues that deliberately mislead the reader in order to provide suspense, shock or a satisfying plot resolution. In all these cases, a **frame repair** is made. An element of a frame is reinterpreted and the frame is modified retrospectively. [...] Sometimes the repair would need to be radical in order to maintain the coherence of the narrative. This typically happens with large-scale surprise endings, or twists in the tale. [...] For these, ‘repair’ hardly seems adequate, and I have called such contexts cases of **frame replacement**. (157-158)

Although this theory was originally developed for narrative texts, it can also be applied to LaBute’s plays. The twist at the end certainly destroys our assumptions and conclusions and we have to re-interpret the action. Moreover, Carey “deliberately mislead[s] both the fictional characters and the reader into projecting a familiar text or world schema to make sense of the unfolding plot and hence narrativising an elaborate but ultimately false explanation for the action” (Rubik, 170). This is especially true for LaBute’s *the shape of things*,

⁵ “Contextual frame theory was developed in order to understand how readers track reference to characters and events through the process of reading. The basic notion involves the idea of a contextual frame, a mental representation of the circumstances containing the current context. This is built up from the text itself as well as from inferences drawn directly from the text.” (Stockwell, 155)

This is how it goes and *some girl(s)*. In the first play, although we have doubts about the relationship between Adam and Evelyn we would never suspect the truth. As we are aware of the obsession with looks and appearance in modern society we think that Evelyn simply wants to “improve” her boyfriend in this respect, as it is often suggested in magazines or TV shows. Also in *This is how it goes*, we are confronted with a typical and highly familiar scene: The poor wife is driven into the arms of an understanding lover by her own egoistic and cruel husband. Only at the end do we get to know that this schema is only partly true. Also, in *some girl(s)* we are deceived by our own general knowledge: According to our experience we consider it as quite possible that a man would visit his ex-girlfriends before getting married either to really make up for some of his “deeds” or with a less commendable intention, to make sure he has chosen the right woman.

2.2.2.4. Re-reading the plays

As mentioned in the previous chapter, LaBute’s texts are not conventional “whodunnit” stories that one only wants to read once. On the contrary, one has the desire to re-read the plays to see whether one has overlooked any hints and missed important information or whether characters simply withheld facts or lied to the audience. The number of such misleading devices varies considerably in the four plays. Moreover, some utterances gain another level of meaning, they suddenly take on an ironic or sarcastic flavour once the end is known.

It appears to be rewarding to employ Grice’s co-operative principle in the present analysis since the violation of its maxims often misleads the audience. By way of introduction, Grundy’s definition of the term “implicature” will be given: “[Grice] deliberately chose this word of his own coinage to cover any meaning that is implied, i. e., conveyed indirectly or through hints, and understood implicitly without ever being explicitly stated” (Grundy, 73).

Furthermore, the four maxims of Grice’s co-operative principle are introduced here as analytical tools of the following reading of LaBute’s plays:

- The category of Quantity
 - Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
 - Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. [...]

- The category of Quality
 - Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. [...]
- The category of Relation
 - Be relevant. [...]
- The category of Manner [...]
 - Avoid obscurity of expression
 - Avoid ambiguity.
 - Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
 - Be orderly. (Grice, 2-27)

The concept of implicature is especially important for this chapter since the audience only realises these implied meanings once the ending is known. Also, the viewers and readers only find out that Grice's maxims have been violated after all the secrets have been revealed. This will be illustrated with various examples from the texts.

In *This is how it goes* the Man certainly gives the audience enough reason to not fully trust him. However, he is our main source of information, and this way we are sometimes tempted to believe him, especially, when he provides us with additional information about his relationship to the other characters:

MAN. Am I being too obvious? 'cause I really liked her back in school, junior year [...] I know she's married and all, probably got kids, even, but...hey, I'm just saying. Whatever. 'S just a little history. (9-10)

This comment has the flavour of a confession made out of insecurity and self-consciousness. This tone certainly was deliberately chosen to mislead the audience since at this point the Man is well aware that Belinda has children and also knows very well who her husband is. Nevertheless, a few pages later, when Belinda tells him about her husband, he says:

MAN. Cody Phipps. Holy shit...I mean, you know, come on. Come *on*! I can't believe she went and...no, I guess you can believe whatever happens in life – there's actually very little that is *unbelievable*...but that's way out there. Cody Phipps. [...] (15)

Here, the Man does not obey the maxim of quantity as he does not say as much as it is required and he holds back important information. Once the audience know the ending they can identify all the utterances where the Man deceived them. Moreover, hints at the deal between the Man and Cody can be found before the audience is fully informed about it. These references are very oblique

though, so the viewers do not suspect anything. First, Cody suggests a deal - "Whatever. (*Beat.*) You serious about it, i'll swing a deal with you" (31) -, although they have already agreed on one. A later remark of Cody's indicates that they seem to have made an agreement on something: "And you didn't bring your cards, I see. [...] Nah, we can do it later" (47). At the time when these comments are made the audience does not realise the underlying implicatures. Moreover, there are utterances which, after the ending is known, are rather ambiguous and might also refer to something else than the obvious, which violates the maxim of manner:

MAN. Oh, yeah, sorry...I was finishing up this movie. On TV. Had to let it wrap up...that' the best part. See who ends up with whom. (47)

Furthermore, the Man offends against the maxim of quality when he tells the story of the fight between Belinda and Cody as he says something for which he definitely lacks adequate evidence and also admits this.

Summing up, one could say that Cody and the Man mainly delude the audience and Belinda by either withholding information or by pretending not to know some important detail.

In the *shape of things* additional effects can be indentified. It is highly interesting to see that apart from the information on her past (which is utterly unimportant to the plot) Evelyn never actually lies to Adam or the audience. At two points she even gives away what she is doing to him: "i gave you a couple ideas and you're changing your entire life. i'm very proud of you." (20) and

EVELYN. it's not just that...you're running, you're eating better, are you still lifting?

ADAM. honestly... no. i totally hate it!

EVELYN. so why would you...?

ADAM. because you suggested it. which is kinda pathetic, but true...(19)

She only withholds information or tries to give the conversation a different direction when the situation becomes precarious:

ADAM. me...why would you like me? i'm not anything, i mean...and you're so...

EVELYN. don't do that, okay? that's the only thing about you i don't like...what you see in yourself. or don't see. your insecurities. (*beat.*) do you like me?

ADAM. of course, you know i do...

EVELYN. do i appear to like you? hmm?

ADAM. yes. it seems like it, yeah.

EVELYN. i do like you. do you think i'm smart? [...] and do i seem to know my own mind? [...]

ADAM. no question.

EVELYN. so, don't you trust me, then, to know how i feel? [...]

ADAM. yeah. no, you're right.

EVELYN. don't worry about why when what is right in front of you. (23-24)

In this speech she circumvents the maxim of quality and relation since she does not lie but does not exactly answer his question and by cleverly asking counterquestions distracts him. Moreover, there are certain passages which suddenly receive an additional meaning: "i'm a very straightforward person . [...] it's the only way to be. why lie?" (68) or "something like that...or it could just be that i care about him." (93). Once we know the truth, these utterances clearly receive a highly sarcastic and ironic dimension. In other words, Evelyn violates the maxim of quality: She says something that she knows to be false.

Also the Man in *some girl(s)* deliberately lies to the audience and the other characters and so offends against the maxim of quality: "Sure, okay, yes. Look...I called you, I mean, came into town and contacted you because...I just wanted to do something here. Right a wrong or whatnot. Make things okay" (9). We do find the occasional reference to his real intentions, which, however, we do not immediately identify as such:

MAN. I just...look, I needed to see you.

SAM. 'Needed'?

MAN. Wanted, actually, but there's some need in there, too. Yes. *Need*. (7)

Again, the audience does not realise the implicature yet. At this point we think that he is only sweet-talking her when in fact he speaks the truth. He actually needs the conversation with Sam for his new article. The same effect is derived from the following speech as well:

LINDSAY. [...] Does your girlfriend know about this?

MAN. No, God, no. (Beat.) She doesn't. She thinks it's for work, so...(57)

The irony behind this is that the audience thinks he has once again lied to one of his girlfriends when in fact he has actually told her the truth. This is highly interesting in terms of Grice's co-operative principle: We assume that a maxim

has been violated when in fact we only do not understand the implicature of the utterance. We fail to understand his intentions even though two of the women hint that he has used details relating to their relationships for one of his articles before:

TYLER. Of yourse you did. I remember it clearly. Oh, yeah. (Beat.) And don't think i didn't notice a couple of our 'greatest hits' in your little story there! Which was naughty... (24)

and

LINDSAY. Well, you're right about that. I do have a number of memories about the room, this place...I do. And some of them didn't even end up in your article. (Beat.) It's astonishing to me how vampiric you people are! How cannibalistic. *Writers*. [...] (43)

He also confesses to this behaviour himself: "[...] that's the deal when you're a writer, I guess. You just can't let shit go! You gotta turn it over and study it and poke it and you know..." (37). However, we only identify these remarks as hints once we know the Man's real motivation.

In comparison to the other plays, *bash* is rather unobtrusive in this respect. Apart from the first play, *iphigenia in orem*, we are never deliberately misled. There, the young man lies to us but soon starts over again and gives us a full account of what happened. In the other two texts, *a gaggle of saints* and *medea redux*, the audience gradually gets to know the truth and the characters do not try to conceal information.

3. PRESENTATION

3.1. LANGUAGE AND STYLE

In this chapter the language and style of LaBute's plays will be analysed. The various effects of his language as well as the way in which it is used for characterisation will be examined. Moreover, the speech forms of dialogue, monologue and polylogue, as depicted in Pfister's *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, will be analysed.

In general it can be said that LaBute employs a rather colloquial and often non-standard language. The level of this colloquialness varies from play to play and character to character.

The first aspect that catches our attention is LaBute's orthography. In two of the plays, *bash* and *the shape of things*, he only writes in lower case. Before over-interpreting this technique it seems more appropriate to quote LaBute's comment on his non-standard use of orthography:

Beyond the inevitable e.e. cummings connections – whose work I admire and adore – it's a simple matter of being able to type faster, to write more and in a way that allows the work to flow out of myself more completely, without stopping for the 'shift' each time it's expected. I still punctuate – punctuation is the gift and weapon of the writer – but I skip the niceties of capitalization and try never to do what's been bred in me/or whatever's the standard requirement. (Bigsby, 18-19)

In addition to his idiosyncratic spelling, he uses contracted and truncated forms which can be found in all four plays. Illustrative examples for the first occur mainly in *This is how it goes*: "could've" (10), "that'd" (12) or "why'd" (23).

Instances of the latter can be found in all four texts: "em" (*This is how it goes*, 22) for them, "kay" (*the shape of things*, 12) for okay, "ol" (*some girl(s)*, 22) for old and "cause" (*bash*, 37) for because. Moreover, he makes use of many so-called eclectic forms, where two or more words are formed into one: "kinda" (*This is how it goes*, 8), "whaddayacallems" (*some girl(s)*, 24), "gonna" (*bash*, 48) and "wanna" (*the shape of things*, 13).

Furthermore, LaBute sometimes uses expressions which are not grammatically correct, in different words, non-standard. Again, many of these

can be found in *This is how it goes*, especially in Cody's speech: "I don't do nothing for fun" (21) or "I'm not talking about no servant" (28).

What all these different forms have in common is that they are typical of spoken language. In general, the tone in the plays is rather casual and therefore, even if the topic is a serious or philosophical one, the dialogue is very approachable and catching. Also, on the level of vocabulary one can find many colloquial expressions. When speaking about his underwear the Man talks about "*undies*" (*This is how it goes*, 27), Tyler refers to Don Quixote as "the old dude on the pony and shit" (*some girl(s)*, 33), Phillip tells Adam that he is a "party-popper" (*the shape of things*, 28) and one of John's friends calls a homosexual a "fag" (*bash*, 63).

Moreover, swearwords are no rare phenomenon in LaBute's plays. He does not recoil from using the f-word or other rude expressions. However, he does not simply disperse them randomly in his texts but uses them cleverly to characterise his figures. Pfister refers to this technique as "implicit, unconscious or involuntary forms of verbal self-presentation" and the characteristics of these forms "reveal to the receiver the figure's temperamental and ideological disposition directly" (Pfister, 125). Cody's language, for instance, is very explicit and he constantly cusses. This reflects his highly aggressive behaviour and the fact that he thinks that everyone treats him differently because he is black. Also, Tyler in *some girl(s)* permanently uses expressions like "Holy shit" (22), "No shit, fuck." (22) or "fucking cool" (23). In contrast to Cody she is not aggressive but outspoken and maybe slightly uneducated⁶. Their language not only exposes their character but it also "places [them] in a particular social context" (Pfister, 125). Even if Cody is very wealthy he does not seem well-educated, especially in comparison to his wife who often makes allusion to literature. In contrast to Cody or Tyler, Lindsay seems eloquent and educated. This impression we get from her language is supported by the fact that she started working in the department much earlier than him and is married to the dean, in other words, she belongs to the educated classes. Whereas swearwords in Cody's and Tyler's speech are not considered as something extraordinary, when Lindsay cusses we are alarmed by her intense reaction: "I was gonna say 'run away and hide like a fucking *child*', but..." (51).

⁶ See the comment on Don Quixote above.

Not only characters are defined by their use of language, LaBute also knows well how to create atmosphere with language. A representative example can be found in the first episode of *some girl(s)*:

SAM. [...] Pretty nice here. I've never been before.
 MAN. Oh. Yeah. (looking around) They're good...they've got 'em all over the place now, so...a *chain*, I think.
 SAM. I mean, why would I, right? Live in town, how often are you gonna stay in a local hotel?
 MAN. That's true...
 SAM. You wouldn't.
 MAN. No, not usually.
 SAM. Not for any reason, really. Not even if there was a convention and you were attending or something...you'd just drive home after.
 (Beat.) I mean, unless...
 MAN. What? Unless what...?
 SAM. You know.
 MAN. No, I don't...
 SAM. Yes, you do. You know what I'm saying.
 MAN. I don't, no. Truthfully. *What?*
 SAM. ...Unless you were seeing someone. Illicitly.
 MAN. Oh, right. That.
 SAM. Yes. *That*.
 MAN. Yeah, but, I mean...we're seeing each other. Now. *We're* here and... (4)

In this conversation one can really feel the utter embarrassment and Sam's insecurity about what to think of the Man's invitation. This is indicated by the unfinished sentences, pauses and her complete unwillingness to say the word affair. In contrast to this situation, the atmosphere and sentiments of the characters which are also conveyed by language are totally different in this conversation from *the shape of things*:

JENNY. (*whispering*) the penis...
 EVELYN. (*whispering*) yes, i did. why are we whispering?
 PHILLIP. because you don't say 'penis' in jenny's house. but we're at my place now, and so we sing it from the eaves! 'penis!! pe-nis!!!'
 ADAM. okay, bar's closing, last call...
 EVELYN. i'm an artist, so i didn't...
 PHILLIP. no, seriously, do you believe that shit? somebody with the gall to do that kinda bullshit on our campus?! that fucking burns me up...
 ADAM. we should probably get, ummm...
 PHILLIP. ...what does that mean, anyway? 'i'm an artist?' (31)

In this scene various aspects can be analysed by means of language. Indignation and aggression can be identified on Phillip's side and embarrassment at Jenny's and Adam's end. Jenny is afraid to say the medical

word for the male genitals, which also reflects her rather shy character. From his conciliatory statements and unfinished sentences one can deduce that Adam is embarrassed since his new girlfriend is having a fight with his friend. Phillip on the other hand, uses various swearwords and rudely interrupts Evelyn's sentence, which can be seen as a sign of aggression and outrage.

The characters' language not only characterises them but at times the way something is told can also have an effect on the audience:

my first shot catches him against the cheek, just under the eye and he slams into a sink. all snot and blood running down. with so many of us hitting, tearing at him, it's hard to get off a clean punch but i know i connect a few more times, i feel his head, the back of it, softening as we go, but i just find a new spot and move on. tim kicking him long after he's blacked out... (*a gaggle of saints*, 63)

John here describes how he and his friends beat a homosexual to death in a toilet in Central Park. As appalling and horrid this event itself already is, it definitely becomes worse for the viewers through the factual tone and callousness of the account.

3.2. FORMS OF SPEECH

Pfister defines various forms of speech in his standard work on drama; however, only three are important for LaBute's plays: monologue, duologue and polylogue.

He defines a monologue as a longer and coherent speech that is addressed to someone in the internal communication system. A soliloquy differs from a monologue in that the speaker does not communicate with other characters on stage; she/he appears to talk to her- or himself and either is or thinks she/he is alone on stage (Cf. Pfister, 127).

Interestingly enough, there are two whole plays consisting of an utterance of a single character: *iphigenia in orem* and *medea redux*. These two texts fully comply with the structural criterion, as both of the accounts definitely are "self-contained, autonomous speeches of a reasonable length" (Pfister, 127) since they are coherent stories and have the length of a one-act play. However, whether they meet the situational criterion will have to be discussed. On the one hand, the speakers are alone on stage, which would indicate a soliloquy. On the

other hand, the figures do address someone, which is a feature of a monologue. Although this other character is never present on stage, he is inscribed in the text. In *iphigenia in orem* it is a patient listener from the hotel lobby the audience never gets to see and in *medea redux* the speaker tells her story to the authorities, represented by a tape-recorder.

The structure of these plays also resembles the form of the dramatic monologue, a genre brought to perfection by Robert Browning. He referred to such poems as “dramatic lyrics”, emphasizing the blurring of the genres implied in the form” (Princeton Encyclopedia, 799). In such texts a lyrical speaker addresses a listener, who keeps quiet; in such poems the speaker tells a story to his addressee and inadvertently reveals his character. This is exactly the scenario displayed in *iphigenia in orem* and *medea redux*.

In *This is how it goes* there are speeches which can be considered as conventional monologues as well as speeches that are similar to the two plays analysed above. An example of such a traditional monologue that fulfils the criterion of length and autonomy and is also addressed to someone on stage (Belinda and Cody) is the Man’s story of how he lost his job. Although he is occasionally interrupted by short remarks from Cody or Belinda, the Man gives a complete account of his story. On the other hand, we find longer and almost autonomous utterances of the Man which are not addressed to the figures on stage. Although other characters are present, they cannot hear the Man and the speech is directed to the audience. The fact that it is not addressed to another figure on stage points towards a soliloquy. However, several aspects are at variance with such an assumption: “the speaker is neither alone on stage, nor does he imagine he is alone, nor has he forgotten that he is in the presence of others” (Pfister, 138). According to Pfister’s tools of analysis this can either be considered as an “aside *ad spectatores*”, which has an epic and mediatory function⁷ (139), a soliloquy *ad spectatores* (depending on length and coherence) or as a “conventionalised monological aside” (138). The latter type of aside has two purposes, it either

present[s] the figure’s thoughts directly [...] to give a frank commentary on a particular situation free of any strategic considerations (often

⁷ The epic/narrative elements in the Man’s speech will be discussed in the chapter on the narrator.

expressed by scheming figures who thus emphasise the comic or tragic irony of that situation) or to convey information on the intentions of a figure or the background to a particular situation in an economical way. (Pfister, 138)

Both is true for the Man in *This is how it goes*. He provides us with his ideas and opinions and directly comments on various situations. Moreover, he constantly provides the audience with important background information. As the Man is a highly scheming character, these asides/soliloquies also serve the purpose of manipulating the audience.

In contrast to *This is how it goes*, we only find one but highly conventional monologue in the *shape of things*: Evelyn's presentation of the project for her thesis towards the end of the play. This monologue fulfils the situational as well as structural criteria. She delivers her long speech in an auditorium, which means that in addition to Adam and Phillip, there many other figures on stage to which it is addressed. Moreover, she gives a very detailed and self-contained account of her project.

In *some girl(s)* no monologues or soliloquies can be found, only duologues, which are "dialogues conducted by two figures" (Pfister, 141). In contrast to duologues, polylogues, "dialogues conducted by three or more figures" (Pfister, 141), have a "more complex semantic structure" (141) and can "present certain relationships that could not be conveyed in a duologue" (141). One aspect Pfister does not mention in this context is that polylogues usually bear more potential for conflict. One might therefore assume that plays consisting only of duologues cannot communicate more complex information on the characters' relationships. This is certainly not true for *some girl(s)*. Since this play is episodic and the female characters do not have any kind of relationship to each other, polylogues are simply not needed. The complex structure is built up continuously over the four episodes. There are various connections between the episodes that are gradually perceived by the audience. An example of such a connection is the sequence of the women, i.e. who has been left for whom. Furthermore, an emotionally charged atmosphere is conveyed through the Man's conflict-ridden relationship to the individual female characters.

In the *shape of things*, however, the argument that certain relationships only become explicit in polylogues applies to a certain extent. Moreover, the polylogues in this play definitely present more conflict and confrontation than

the duologues. The conversations between Adam and Evelyn (apart from the final one) and Adam and Jenny are relatively peaceful since he displays a rather submissive behaviour. In contrast to that, the two polylogues (A LIVING ROOM, 26-37 and A COFFEESHOP, 90-104) are loaded with antipathy. Certain elements of the relationships between the figures and specific character traits come to light in the course of these conversations which would probably not surface in duologues. An example is the way that Adam always tries to soothe angered or upset interlocutors:

ADAM. okay, bar's closing, last call... [...]
 ADAM. we should probably get, ummm... [...]
 ADAM. evelyn, maybe we should... (31)

Only in some of these aspects, *This is how it goes* shows similarities to the *shape of things*. In the polylogues we do not necessarily get a deeper understanding of the characters' relationships or receive information we would not get in the duologues. The three characters interact in duologues in all possible variations (Belinda and Man, Belinda and Cody, Cody and Man) and therefore, the audience receives a coherent and simultaneously varied picture of the relationships between the figures. An example of this is the way that Cody treats Belinda. He is as obnoxious and dismissive in duologue as he is in the polylogues with the Man. Moreover, the most important details concerning the alliances between the characters are only revealed in the duologues. For instance, the audience can only find out about the deal between Cody and the Man in duologue since Belinda is not allowed to know this. However, like in *the shape of things*, in contrast to the duologues between the Man and Belinda, the polylogues have again more potential for conflict and tension.

With respect to forms of dramatic speech the central play of *bash, a gaggle of saints*, can be considered as one of the most interesting texts. On the surface, or graphically, it appears to be a conventional duologue. There are two characters who speak in turns. At the beginning of the play the utterances of the two figures, John and Sue, seem to complement one another:

JOHN. sue's a year ahead, almost, two semesters, we're juniors, but nearly a year... (BEAT) both going to b.c....
 SUE. boston college, you know, we almost didn't get in. i mean, both of us... (37)

At a slightly later stage, however, the characters do not speak to each other any more but rather past each other. It is the same topic they are talking about but their utterances do not relate to each other any more. Moreover, the audience gains the impression that they are talking to an anonymous third person who is never seen or mentioned in the text:

JOHN. [...] i ended up buying a perry ellis, finally. a size big, but i got one...looks okay, doesn't it?

SUE. it looked good on him...i had to put a safety pin in the vest, in the back of it, but it was really nice when he had it on...

In the further course of the play they are still talking about their evening in New York, although they begin to give completely different accounts of it. This as such would not be unusual since they separated on that evening and, therefore, had different experiences. However, each of them tells their own story so their speeches are not only not connected, the figures are also not aware of what the other character says. Pfister refers to this phenomenon as “monological tendencies in dialogue” which “can be the result of disrupted communication which, in turn, may be either because the channel between the dialogue partners is severely disrupted or even non-existent” (129). In this play it rather seems that this channel does not exist at all since there is no event or situation which could disrupt it.

3.3. SECONDARY TEXT

According to Pfister the secondary text includes elements such as “the title of the play, the inscriptions, dedications and prefaces, the dramatis personae, announcements of act and scene, stage-directions, whether applicable to scenery or action, and the identification of the speaker of a particular speech” (Pfister, 14). As certain aspects, like the announcement of act and scene, have already been analysed in the chapter on the external structure and the elements concerning the dramatis personae will be analysed in the chapter on the characters, the focus here will lie on the title, the introductions to the plays and the stage-directions.

bash. three plays is the most widely used title of this collection of three one-act plays. In respect to indicating the themes or similarities of the plays the title of the New York performance, *bash: latterday plays*, appears more

appropriate, though. Moreover, plot-wise the title only fits the middle one, *a gaggle of saints*, albeit in both its meanings. In the play we get an account of a bash referring to a party or celebration as well as to hitting someone. In the text itself, though, it is only used in the positive sense:

JOHN. So, okay, so there was this big bash...
SUE. a party...

According to secondary literature (cf. English), the story *a gaggle of saints* shows analogies to Euripides' *Bacchae*. However, this intertextual connection is not referred to in the title. On the other hand, the titles of the other two plays, *iphigenia in orem* and *medea redux*, immediately reveal a parallel to Euripides' tragedies *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Medea*.⁸

The title of *the shape of things* well reflects the central theme of the play. As Evelyn puts it herself, Adam is a "living, breathing example of our obsession with the surface of things, the shape of them" (121). Once the audience is aware of the twist of the play it becomes clear that "things" rather refers to a human being than inanimate objects, the only exception being the statue at the beginning.

Some girl(s) is a title that catches the attention right away since the brackets are something rather unusual. Taking a closer look at the content of the play, though, they seem very appropriate. In each episode the audience encounters one individual girl but in total there are four. Each of these women thought in a way that she was unique but, on the other hand, most of them were treated badly and left for someone else. To all the women the Man pretends that they were something special for him but in fact, when he talks to the other women, he refers to each of them (except Lindsay) as "some girl" (16, 38, 73).

This is how it goes is different from the other titles as it does not reveal anything about the story or themes of the play. Once it becomes clear that the play has a narrator figure, this phrase seems very fitting though. Also, the Man in his function as this narrator, uses this sentence in various forms to present certain situations to the audience. Right at the beginning he initiates the action: "...Okay. This is how it goes. I mean, went. This is the way it all played out. Or, is going to...right now." (3). The Man plays with this set phrase to indicate the

⁸ The parallels to these plays will be analysed in the chapter on LaBute's literary influences.

important relationship of the dramatic past and present on the one hand, and the forthcoming performance, on the other hand. Moreover, the narrator announces the brutal scene between Cody and Belinda as well as his conversation with Cody at the running trails with this phrase.

However, the Man is not the only a character who uses the title phrase in his speech. When Cody tells the story of how he won a race when he was actually meant to lose for team-reasons, he concludes his account with the words “And *that* is how it goes...”. By altering “this” to “that” he emphasises the fact that he did not do what he was told and is proud of his egoistic behaviour. Moreover, when speaking about the failure of his marriage to Belinda he does not show any sorrow or regret: “[...] but, hey, after a while, you know how it goes...I guess the novelty of it just wore off.” (72).

Towards the end of the play the Man addresses the viewers for a last time, and while asking them for advice he actually questions the substance of what he has told them once more: “But the thing of it is, the truth is just so damn...elusive, isn’t it? In the end. The second you start telling somebody what the truth is – how it goes – it all starts to slip away. Not like, some lie, exactly, but close. This half-remembered version of one side a’ things” (80).

This is exactly how Neil LaBute himself characterises this phrase in his introduction to the play, which is called “This Is How It Went” (vii). He says that he started the play with this title not knowing exactly what he was going write. He was inspired by a song by Aimee Mann, whom he admires, the title of which is *This is how it goes*. LaBute claims that “almost instantly, I wanted to use it. It wasn’t the specifics of the song itself, the lyrics or anything like that, that attracted me to it, but the implied promise of a truth revealed – knowing full well just how subjective truth can be [...]” (vii).

Moreover, he mentions how he generated the characters and which topics he included in the play. The characters seem to have gained depth only during the writing process, with the environment in which the play is set, however, he followed a pattern: “With This Is How It Goes I continue to dissect small communities in the Midwest, mostly because I know the territory, the people and the mindset.” (viii)

Moreover, in a highly casual tone, LaBute provides information on his writing process and comments on the dramatic techniques used in the play:

I myself am as unreliable as my own narrator [...]. As the writer of this play, I utilized everything I could get my hands on to help tell the truth or at least one side of it – the shifting sands of a narrator’s voice, the repetition of scenes from different perspectives, a set of stage directions that has more asides than a Borsht Belt comedian. [...] Maybe all of this is just crap and I’m alone somewhere, cackling into my soup. Who knows? [...] Besides, the worst offence a writer of fiction can perpetrate on his unsuspecting readers is this old chestnut: ‘Trust me’. I mean, where’s the fun in that? (ix)

Even before the play starts LaBute questions the validity of the following events and suggests that the trust of the reader will be betrayed in some way. His diction and style clearly resembles that of the Man in his function as a narrator: “Can’t help you out with everything, wouldn’t be any fun!” (74).

Furthermore, LaBute mentions other famous writers and singers that inspired him: Harold Pinter, Graham Greene and Johnny Cash.⁹

It is important to mention here that this kind of information is only available to the readers of the drama but remains obscure to the audience of a performance. This is also true for another element, the highly idiosyncratic stage directions:

A Man walks on stage. Let’s give him a little light. There, that’s better. Now what? Wait – I think he’s going to say something. Yes, he is. Good. (3)

The audience of the play only sees the light but the unusual style of the directions is lost. Also in examples like “She looks at him, shit-scared. I mean, come on, wouldn’t you be?” (36) or “Suddenly, the Woman walks back into the room – how did she get out here? Well, it should seem pretty magical but it’ll need to be a theatrical trick” (37) one can definitely recognize the tone of LaBute’s introduction or the narrator’s comments. The claim that these directions come from the narrator is supported by the circumstance that the Man is “gonna do some writing that [he] always wanted to do [...]” (29), in other words, he also functions as the writer of this particular play or story he confronts the audience with.

Harald Allacher, however, forms two further theories to explain these stage directions. On the one hand, he sees a second narrator in these comments, on the other hand, he claims that it could also be the author’s voice.

⁹ Some of these parallels will be further discussed in the chapter on LaBute’s literary influences.

The first assumption is supported by the fact that this voice “makes a reference to itself as “I”” (124-125) which can be seen in various examples above.

Allacher points out that this voice has numerous facets: Sometimes it seems to be observing the action: “Out of nowhere, a hug. Nice. Now we’re getting somewhere. The man hugs her right back.”. (*This is how it goes*, 4). Sometimes it seems to be omniscient and knows about the thoughts and feelings of the characters: “Cody smiles at this – an easy smile. He doesn’t mind being called that. Some things he doesn’t like, but this is ok.” (*This is how it goes*, 17).

Sometimes, however, this voice also seems amazed by what happens in the play: “The lights change to some sort of restaurant. Now there’s a table and some chairs – I didn’t even notice that before.”. (*This is how it goes*, 15). As a result of these different perspectives it appears somewhat difficult to position this voice. By using “us” and “we”, though, the voice positions itself among the audience, as can be seen in the following remark: “The woman stops, working to remember this. The man steps away for a minute. Toward us.” (*This is how it goes*, 6) These rather contradictory aspects

could be – at least partly – be explained by looking at the voice in the stage directions as the author’s voice. [...] A basic dilemma, for instance, is that the voice in the stage directions seems to be able to change the course of events (at least have an influence), which suggests that it is not only all-knowing but omnipotent. On the other hand, this voice is unaware of what will happen and consequently surprised by how things turn out. (Allacher, 126)

This situation complies exactly with what LaBute says about his writing process in the introduction to the play, *This Is How It Went*:

I’m not sure where this one came from. This is one of those plays that just sort of dropped out onto the page and I figure it’s best not to ask too many questions; [...] Not that I knew where I was headed, mind you, not at all, but that’s rarely stopped me before. (vii)

As Allacher points out, the stage directions could be the voice of the author observing the genesis of his play. (cf. Allacher, 124-127)

Unfortunately, this additional narrative element completely disappears in a performance (unless directors decide to have a voice commenting from the off):

Some of LaBute’s trickery will, of course, affect only readers of the play and not a theatre audience. The audience will realize that truth is refracted through characters who are often lying to each other and

through a narrator who admits that he is deceiving the audience. But they will not be aware of the preface or of the superfluous stage directions in the printed text, which refract the kernel of presumed truth at the heart of the play still a few more degrees. (Mendell, 98)

Moreover, Mendell claims that these stage directions “distract[ing] us from the dramatized sections and help[ing] to destroy the illusion that the story is true” (98). In consequence, he draws a parallel to Brecht’s alienation techniques. He is right in that LaBute’s way of constructing this play does resemble epic theatre, however, the effect on the audience is not exactly the same. Although, we are made aware of the fact that we are watching a play, by giving the narrator and the voice in the stage directions an individual character and such highly idiosyncratic qualities we are fascinated by and involved into the story even more.

Compared to the introduction and stage directions of *This is how it goes* the one in *some girl(s)* is not as informative and playful. However, the way LaBute summarises his play perfectly meets its tone and atmosphere: “an entertainment made up of a series of duets that features a hearty number of women’s roles and follows the journey of a modern-day Candide as he stumbles through a landscape familiar to most men – the mess he’s made of his romantic life on his way to manhood” (vii). Moreover, LaBute mentions his admiration for the French filmmaker Eric Rohmer, whose films partly served as a model for this play.¹⁰

The stage-directions in this play are not as idiosyncratic as in *This is how it goes* but in a few instances slight similarities can be observed. Examples like “The man tries to say something but just goes for a quick nod instead. Not much to say, really.” (18) or “She tries to kiss him again – bingo.” (26) certainly resemble the tone of the stage-directions in *This is how it goes*. Moreover, an aspect that attracts the readers’ attention is that even though the episodes are named after the woman appearing in it, he additionally uses four different phrases to introduce the female characters: “let’s call her Sam” (3), “this one is named Tyler” (22), “Another woman – known as Lindsay” (41) and “Another woman – she goes by Bobbie” (63). The directions are very frequent and give

¹⁰ The parallels to Eric Rohmer will be further discussed in the chapter on LaBute’s influences.

detailed instructions about the characters' movements, gestures and facial expression.

In contrast, stage-directions in *bash* and *the shape of things* are rather scarce and not as complex. In *The shape of things* we have conventional directions concerning the characters' movement and reactions. In the first two plays of *bash*, *iphigenia in orem* and *a gaggle of saints*, there are no stage-directions at all, apart from a few pauses and the initial and final comment. In *medea redux* there are a couple of conventional stage-directions as to what the protagonist does with a glass or the way she is smoking.

Even though the stage-directions in the four plays greatly differ from each other in their style and diction they share one aspect. All of the texts begin and end in silence and darkness, as the secondary text indicates.

3.4. A METADRAMATIC ELEMENT – THE NARRATOR IN *THIS IS HOW IT GOES*

In this play LaBute employs a very idiosyncratic metadramatic or one could also say epic or narrative element. One of the characters, the Man, acts as a narrator and constantly steps out of the action of the play to address the audience. However, the man is not a conventional narrator. On several occasion he informs the audience that he is not to be trusted:

[...] You know what I'm saying! Sort of. And which is okay, because I only sort of know, too, at this point. (*Beat.*) Geez, I think I might end up being an unreliable narrator... (3)

Another time he presents a highly precarious situation to the viewers and afterwards says:

Whoah! Geez, that was a bit much! Alright, so maybe it wasn't exactly like that. I dunno. Hey, look, I'm a writer – would-be writer, anyway – so, what can I tell ya? It could've happened that way! [...] Anyway, sorry about that. Told you before that you shouldn't totally trust me on any of this!... (37-38)

Even though the concept of unreliable narration has originally been developed for works of fiction, it appears perfectly appropriate to consider this concept in the analysis of the dramatic technique in this play. Therefore, a short account of recent developments in the theory of unreliable narration will be given. There

are a number of theoretical concepts of unreliability, the most important among them being those of Wayne C. Booth and Ansgar Nünning. Nünning's theory, with the reader (in this special case also the audience) at the centre of attention, seems to be the most convincing and most practicable, so his model will be used in analysing the effects of unreliability on the audience/the reader of this play.

Until recently unreliability in fiction had been defined in Wayne Booth's terms. Booth introduced the concept of the implied author to define the unreliability of first person narrators as a discrepancy between the norms of the implied author and those of the narrator. It has been argued that Booth's explanation of the implied author as his "second self [who] chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" (Booth, 74-75) is not entirely convincing. It is certainly difficult to pinpoint the norms of the text which in Booth's view represent those of the implied author:

[...] I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not." (Booth, 158-59)

Although the reader does play a certain role in this construct – he is encouraged by textual signals to find the norms that govern the text and do not conform to those of the narrator in unreliable narration – author and implied author have a central position. Contemporary narratologists, dissatisfied with Booth's concept, have looked for other criteria to define unreliability in fiction. One of the most practicable schemata has been suggested by Ansgar Nünning. Monika Fludernik defines this shift of paradigms from Booth to Nünning most appropriately:

Whereas, traditionally the unreliable narrator was treated as the necessary complement of the implied author Nünning here proposes to anchor the issue of unreliability in the reader's constructivist engagement with the text: narrators are interpreted as unreliable if their behaviour deviates from the reader's expected standards of normalcy, objectivity or factual accuracy. (Fludernik, 75)

In contrast to earlier Booth-oriented scholars, Nünning places the reader at the centre of his theory, which is based on so-called frames of reference. He distinguishes between two different frames, one referring to the relation

between values that are accepted in the real world of the reader and those prevalent in the text, another one referring to literary norms and the reading experience of the recipient:

The question of whether a narrator is described as unreliable or not needs to be gauged in relation to various frames of reference. More particularly, one might distinguish between schemata derived from everyday experience and those that result from knowledge of literary conventions. (Nünning, "Unreliable compared to what", 67)

In this respect Nünning provides a list of highly useful textual and extratextual signals to identify an unreliable narrator in a text. The textual aspects which are relevant for the analysis of *This is how it goes* are the following:

- Differing versions of events between the narrator's and those of other characters
- Contrasting versions of the same event
- High frequency of reader addresses and attempts to manipulate the reception
- Narrator's admission of incredibility
- Admission of bias and partiality (Cf. Nünning, *Unreliable narration*, 27-28)

Moreover, two of Nünning's frames of reference will be of importance:

- Generally accepted moral and ethical norms in a society
- Individual system of the norms and values of the recipient (Cf. Nünning, *Unreliable narration*, 30)

These criteria shall now be illustrated by means of various examples from the text. There is one central scene between Cody and Belinda which serves as an example for several of the above mentioned signals. First of all, the audience is presented with two different versions by the narrator:

[...] But this part right now is pretty important to the rest, so do pay attention. 'Kay? (*Beat.*) If you don't, you'll never find out how Belinda ends up with the black guy...eye, I mean 'black eye!' Geez, That's a Freudian slip, huh? (*Chuckles.*) Now, like I said, I wasn't there, so I didn't see it – but you get to see it all if you pay attention. (32)

The Man tells the audience that he was not present in the following situation, nevertheless he seems able to present a full account of the story. This can be regarded as the first sign of incredibility. The viewers now witness a fight

between Cody and Belinda, which after many verbal attacks ends with Cody hitting his wife. After admitting that the confrontation did not happen “exactly like that”, the narrator suggests to “give it another try” (37). Then he presents the scene the way Belinda described it to him but as he “didn’t really believe her” and thought “something seems a little off about it”, he “made up the other story” (38). Even though there is no account of Belinda herself, the audience now sees the conversation as she presented it to the Man, or at least this is what the Man claims. Although there is no presentation from multiple perspectives (the Man’s and Belinda’s), we get two contrasting versions of the same event, one version by the narrator and the other one assumingly by Belinda. Even though the viewers cannot be sure that Belinda’s account is correctly reproduced by the narrator they witness differing versions of events. Moreover, the Man again points out that he is not to be trusted. Therefore, this scene can be regarded as an example of the first two criteria as well as the fourth one. Furthermore, this scene is exemplary of the admission of bias and partiality. After the first account the Man admits: “Actually, I think it’s how I *want* it to be, like, so I can jump in there, save her or whatever” (37).

Also, the text is full of, in this case, not reader but audience addresses and the man tries to manipulate the viewers’ reception of events:

[...] Not that I...well, watch what happens. You’ll see what I mean. Sorry! I’m being so cryptic and I don’t mean to be. Just watch. It’s all gonna be okay in the end. It will, I promise... (46)

or

[...] God, sorry for that! Got a touch otta hand, so forgive me. I should explain. You really need to take a good look at the last few moments, decide for yourselves what happened there. I mean, how much is real...(Beat.) It happened, that much I can tell you. We did meet, talked for a bit, he even gave me an envelope. But the rest of it? Hey, that stuff’s for you to decide. [...] (74)

In his function as the narrator the Man constantly addresses the viewers and in fact tries to confuse them. On the one hand, he promises factual renderings, on the other he permanently emphasises not to believe him.

Another unusual element is that the narrator puts words into another character’s mouth, in this cases Belinda’s, and immediately afterwards admits that she has not actually said this. In *This is how it goes* this technique has a kind of shocking but also comic effect:

MAN. Oh, you know, because...it's true love and all that. Right?

WOMAN. ...You sure it's not just because I like a nice, thick black cock?

Hmm? Maybe that's why...

She tries to smile but has to look away, blushing. The Man stops for a moment, as if stunned by this. He then moves down center. Toward us.

MAN. Okay, obviously she didn't say it like that. I mean, it's *obvious*, right? She'd never say a thing like that...God, can you picture her saying that? *Anything* like that? (*He laughs.*) No way. Not at all. [...]
(50-51)

In this situation the narrator's blatant lie is supported by the misleading stage directions. Then the Man starts over again with "Oh, you know [...]" (51) and instead of this daring comment the woman only says "I guess." (51) This again can be seen as an example of two contrasting versions of the same event.

Moreover, one can find numerous extratextual signals for the narrator's unreliability which can be identified in relation to Nünning's frames of reference. There are various aspects which certainly clash with generally accepted ethical and moral norms in society. Divorces have become the rule rather than the exception in modern society; however, the circumstances of this particular one are certainly out of the ordinary. The two male characters "put aside their racially based revulsion for each other in order to transfer a woman between them because it suits their needs, but without ever telling her the transaction occurred". (Oney, 43). The casualness with which the Man speaks about his deal with Cody does not conform with the norms of society. In which culture would it be normal to trade a human being for a baseball card? Also, this deal certainly does not go with the readers' or audience's norms. It simply seems appalling to betray someone like that and let this person live a lie.

Furthermore, there are various instances where the narrator gives an insight into his highly racist and politically incorrect behaviour. Even though the audience later finds out that the story of the black woman on the plane was invented, it still shows that he does not have any scruples to admit overtly racist behaviour to a black person, in this case Cody. In addition, he sets off a barrage of abuse about Cody which is addressed to the audience:

[...] See, Cody Phipps was born a nigger. Still is, to this day. And I do know the difference between regular black people and what Cody is. Oh, yeah, absolutely. I never really liked the guy – yes, back in school I'd hang out with him, do some stuff, but basically just so he wouldn't make fun of me or knock me around. But Cody was always a nigger, even back then. A selfish, mean-spirited coon who acted like

everybody owed him something. All that sort of post-Civil War, Malcom X, heavy-lidded bullshit that guys like him have been trading for years. (81)

Such stories and comments certainly do not agree with either the norms of society or those of the audience.

All these examples definitely support the claim that the audience is confronted with an unreliable narrator in *This is how it goes*.

The narrator as a dramatic device has also to be placed in the context of the epic theatre. Bertolt Brecht defines epic theatre as follows:

Von keiner Seite wurde es dem Zuschauer weiterhin ermöglicht, durch einfache Einfühlung in dramatische Personen sich kritiklos (und praktisch folgenlos) Erlebnissen hinzugeben. Die Darstellung setzte Stoffe und Vorgänge einem Entfremdungsprozess aus. Es war die Entfremdung welche nötig ist, damit verstanden werden kann.“ (Brecht, *Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater*, 264-265)

This alienation then has an effect on the audience:

Damit ist gewonnen, daß der Zuschauer im Theater eine neue Haltung bekommt. [...] Er wird auch im Theater empfangen als der große Änderer, der in die Naturprozesse und die gesellschaftlichen Prozesse einzugreifen vermag, der die Welt nicht mehr nur hinnimmt, sondern sie meistert. Das Theater versucht nicht mehr ihn besoffen zu machen, ihn mit Illusionen auszustatten, ihn die Welt vergessen zu machen, ihn mit seinem Schicksal auszusöhnen. Das Theater legt ihm nunmehr die Welt vor zum Zugriff. (Brecht, *experimentelles Theater*, 302-303)

This anti-illusionistic effect is reached with various alienation techniques, for example, a narrator, songs, projections, music, which make the viewers aware of the fact that they are watching a play. The audience is disaffected and does not fully identify with the characters any more. Interestingly enough, the narrator in *This is how it goes* does definitely not produce an alienating effect but rather the opposite. The narrator figure who constantly addresses the audience draws the viewers and readers deeply into the story and manipulates them. We do not accept the characters at face value but on account of the information about their past we receive from the narrator we do identify with them in a certain way. On the one hand, we are aware that they do not necessarily have to adopt such an identity, with such a specific history, on the other hand, we do understand their

behaviour to a certain extent.¹¹ By partly placing the responsibility for their character and behaviour with their circumstances we also develop the wish to change these. In *This is how it goes* we condemn racist behaviour, for example, and we leave the theatre with the intention to watch our own language and behaviour. Even though the Man does not have the effect a narrator in epic theatre would have the play is still didactic in a way and, in Brecht's words, motivates the viewer to "master" the world.

¹¹ This corresponds with the following of Brecht's views: „Damit ist gewonnen, daß der Zuschauer die Menschen auf der Bühne nicht mehr als ganz unänderbare, unbeeinflussbare, ihrem Schicksal hilflos ausgelieferte dargestellt sieht. Er sieht: dieser Mensch ist so und so, weil die Verhältnisse so und so sind. Und die Verhältnisse sind so und so, weil der Mensch so und so ist. Er ist aber nicht nur so vorstellbar, wie er ist, sondern auch anders, so wie er sein könnte, und auch die Verhältnisse sind anders vorstellbar, als sie sind.“ (Brecht, *experimentelles Theater*, 302)

4. CHARACTERS

It is certainly not easy to depict LaBute's complex characters in a few words; Wilhelmus, however, provides a very accurate summary:

LaBute's world [...] is provocative. Visually and verbally it assaults theater or film audiences [...] with metaphors that disturb and disgust, challenging them to find any redeeming human dignity or feeling among his characters. The characters themselves are monsters of self-interest and egotism, sexual and societal predators or their victims, but also usually lacking direction, vitality, understanding or will of their own. Occasionally they evoke pity, but there is seldom anything soft, or even polite, about the manner in which he portrays them. (61-62)

As the previous chapters have shown, LaBute's plays are certainly not of the lighthearted kind and this is also true for his characters. To specify Wilhelmus' comment, we are confronted with murderers (*bash*), child molesters (*medea redux*), chauvinists and homophobic brutes (*iphigenia in orem*, *a gaggle of saints*), moneygrubbing and calculating husbands (*This is how it goes* and in a way *iphigenia in orem*), ruthless and opportunistic artists (*the shape of things*, *some girl(s)*) and their victims.

The effect these characters have on the audience has been analysed in the previous chapters, their construction and constellation though, will be explored in the following section, with the help of Pfister's categories and tools for characterisation.

4.1. DRAMATIS PERSONAE, CONFIGURATION AND FIGURE CONSTELLATION

The first and most conspicuous criterion is that of the number of dramatis personae (Cf. Pfister 165). In LaBute's plays there are usually rather few characters. This is especially true for *bash*, where we have two monologues (*iphigenia in orem*, *medea redux*) and one duologue (*a gaggle of saints*). In these plays there are also "backstage characters", characters which are only spoken about without them ever actually being seen on stage" (Pfister, 164). They do not have any individual qualities and only function as listeners who do not influence the plot and can therefore be excluded from the analysis. In *This is*

how it goes we are confronted with three characters, if we consider the Man and the narrator as one single character. Again, there are so-called backstage characters, namely Belinda and Cody's children, Ralph and Cody Junior. They never appear on stage and the narrator even comments on their absence: "By the way, funny how you never see the kids, isn't it? Yeah. It's not weird or anything, like in Virginia Woolf or like that...it's just my main concern is the two of them"¹² (45).

In *the shape of things* there are four characters, Evelyn, Adam, Phillip and Jenny.

The play with the most characters is *some girl(s)*: Man, Sam, Tyler, Lindsay and Bobbie. If we look at the individual episodes though, in each one there are only two characters, the Man and one of the women.

The next aspects to be analysed with regard to the characters are "quantitative relations of dominance", that is "the length of time that a dramatic figure spends on stage and the extent of its participation in the primary text", and "qualitative correspondences and contrasts" (Pfister, 165-166). There are various features which are "suprahistorically relevant" such as "gender, generation and social class" (Cf. 166-167).

Iphigenia in orem and *medea redux* are easy to classify in this respect since these plays are monologues. Therefore, the characters are always present on stage and feature in all of the primary text. Moreover, there are no correspondences or contrasts between characters as there is only one single figure. In *a gaggle of saints*, the third play in *bash*, we are confronted with two characters. They are both present on stage all the time; however, as John tells his story of the attack in the park, he has a little more talking-time than Sue. They are both equally important for the plot, even though John appears to be more dominant and causes stronger reactions in the audience. However, his account of the assault on the homosexual in Central Park certainly assumes an even more gruesome quality when he gives the ring to Sue and we get to know her feelings and emotions towards him. The most obvious contrast between the two characters is their gender. Regarding their background, generation and education, however, they are very similar: They come from the same neighbourhood, went to the same high school, now attend the same college and

¹² "the two of them" meaning Cody and Belinda.

are both religious.¹³ Although Sue has the more passive part, they do seem to share certain attitudes and their inclination towards violence. John brutally beat up her ex-boyfriend and “sue’s just standing there...waiting” (*a gaggle of saints*, 49). Moreover, when John pricks his index finger on her corsage, Sue admits: “but see, in a weird way, though, it excited me. the blood, is that stupid to say?...probably, but it did. (BEAT) i mean, it was stunning to look at, you know? [...]”. In the end, they witness a violent incident where a man beats his girlfriend but none of them tries to help:

everybody got quiet, i could feel john tense up, getting all tense, but the couple was, i don’t know, kind of dirty-looking and they seemed like, you know, those kind of people – i don’t know what i mean by that, exactly, but they were – so i asked john, whispered to him to “let it go.” (BEAT) and you know what? he didn’t so much as bat an eyelash. just kept holding my hand. holding it and playing with the ring on my finger, that made me so happy...(68)

Neither of them shows any signs of moral courage and they obviously only care for themselves; just as Wilhemus says, they are “monsters of self-interest and egotism” (61).

In *the shape of things* we are confronted with a slightly more complex set of characters. The two predominant characters who are also most important for the plot are Adam and Evelyn. Phillip and Jenny, Adam’s friends, appear in some important scenes but are not present as much as the other two. As regards contrasts and parallels, there are various interesting constellations. There are two men and two women, who even though they share this one criterion of gender could not be more different from each other. Especially Evelyn and Jenny clash in several scenes. Adam and his friends are from the same “conservative midwestern town” (*the shape of things*, setting), which provokes a conflict with Evelyn, who calls it a “little college town in the middle of nowhere” (34). Evelyn claims to be from near Chicago; yet, bearing in mind the ending, this is probably not true. It appears, however, that she thinks herself to be superior to them:

¹³ In previous editions there seems to have been clear evidence for them being Mormons: “Both are evidently members of the Mormon Church. His father had been a bishop. They had both attended a seminary and he had been on a mission.” (Bigsby, 21). These references have been eliminated in later editions (as in the one used for this thesis), most probably because of the scandal this had caused as LaBute himself was a member of the Mormon Church.

EVELYN. i mean, it's a little college town in the middle of nowhere and...
 PHILLIP. one you chose, presumably...
 EVELYN. no, it chose me, actually. *full* scholarship. [...] (34)

On the other hand, she could just have said that to provoke Phillip. Evelyn's character is very hard to determine since in the end she admits that nothing that she said was true. Therefore, for most of the play we only see her as what she pretends to be and not what she really is like. The other characters seem to be genuine; however, we also do not know much about their social background. We are only aware of the fact that Adam has to have several jobs to afford the college fees. Adam, Phillip and Jenny are of about the same age and attend the same college, which means that they have a similar educational background.

This is how it goes offers an entirely different constellation. In this play the most dominant character is the Man since he also figures as the narrator. In this function he certainly controls the play and he and Cody pull the strings. Belinda then behaves exactly in the manner they want her to. As we learn from the play's introduction the setting is a "small communit[y] in the Midwest" (viii). All of the three characters went to the same high school there. The Man then studied law, whereas Cody took over his father's business and married Belinda. Now, Cody is "*stinking* rich" (17) and looks down on the middle class: "We just, you know...take advantage of the ignorant middle class, that's all! 'S true...take away all the Ralph Lauren and shit, they'd only be hardware stores." (17). On the other hand, the Man has lost his job as a lawyer, wants to become a writer now and occasionally does gardening for Cody and Belinda. Therefore, he could be regarded as socially inferior, which is clearly contrasted with and outweighed by the power he exerts in the play.

Certainly the most complex play in this respect is *some girl(s)*. On the whole there are five characters, one man and four women. The Man is certainly predominant since he appears in each individual episode and has the greatest influence on the plot. The four women could not be more different in their social background and character. Sam, the Man's college girlfriend, is a full time housewife and mother married to a store manager. In short, she is leading the conservative and unadventurous life that the Man was always scared of. Tyler is a very outgoing jewellery designer, with whom the Man experimented a lot with

sex and drugs. Lindsay is older than the Man and held a superior position at the university where he was teaching. Moreover, she is married to the dean. Bobbie is working as something like an X-ray assistant or maybe radiologist. The only facet these women share is that they have all been left by the Man. The Man teaches writing and now has gone into writing himself. He is a highly ambitious intellectual.

As Pfister points out, “the structure of the dramatic personae is not exclusively associated with contrasts and correspondences that interrelate in a purely static manner” but it “also includes a number of dynamic structures of interaction” which he describes as “figure constellations” (170). Furthermore, he stresses that figures are primarily distinguished by “their positive, neutral, or negative attitudes towards other figures” (170) and the origin of these cannot only be found in the contrasts or parallels between the figures. These attitudes lead to common constellations as, for example, that of the hero and his opponent or the protagonist and the antagonist. In LaBute’s plays the constellation of the characters is not as simple as that. It is the attitudes of the figures rather than, for instance, different social backgrounds or generations which bring about conflicts and motivate interaction. Moreover, the roles of the good and the bad are certainly not as clear cut. Also, the audiences and readers are often not aware of the exact role or position a character has in the story.

4.2. FIGURE CONCEPTION

One of the most important distinctions that Pfister makes in this respect is that between static and dynamic characters. Static figures stay the same throughout the play and do not change. Dynamic characters, on the other hand, “undergo a process of development in the course of the text; their sets of distinguishing features change”. Moreover, “it is not just the receiver’s views of these figures that change [...] but the figures themselves” (177). This distinction is most important with regard to LaBute’s plays since our perception of a character alters frequently whereas the figure itself remains the same and only at a certain point reveals his or her real disposition.

In *iphigenia in orem*, *a gaggle of saints* and *medea redux* we are confronted with static characters. We continually get to know more about them so that our views of them may change quite drastically but the figures themselves remain the same. If we take, for example, the young man in the first play, we can perceive him as a man under stress who works in business and as a pitiable father who has lost a child. In the further course of the play we get to know that he is a chauvinistic, opportunistic man who has actually killed his child. While telling his story he did not change but only reveals details which change our perception of his character. One might argue that the woman in *medea redux* undergoes some kind of change during the story which she tells. At the beginning she is the victim, a thirteen-year-old who was seduced and made pregnant by her teacher, who still loves him and has never told anyone who the father of her child is. In the end she kills her own child to take revenge since she sees that her lover is satisfied because he had got away with it. It may seem to be quite a sudden change in her perception of this relationship as she kept quiet and held contact with him for years. But when she says “yes, i planned it, yes. but...maybe longer than you thought, huh? lots longer...” (93), we can see that the change in her mood was not all that sudden. Perhaps she wanted the invisible interrogator to only see her as the victim all the time; so again it is only our perception that changes and not her character.

In *This is how it goes* we have two static characters, the Man and Cody, and one dynamic character, Belinda. Cody's behaviour and his attitudes do not really alter, even if the narrator's account of the events changes. It is highly difficult to determine the Man's character as he also functions as the narrator and we never know what to believe. His behaviour towards Belinda very much differs from that towards Cody and we gain the impression that he only pretends to be nice to her to reach his goal in the deal with Cody. Therefore, we are inclined to believe that in his conversation with Cody and in his actions he shows his “real” character.¹⁴ Belinda, on the other hand, undergoes a change during the play. At first she is an unhappy but submissive wife but in the end, when she is already with the Man, she finally dares to speak up:

¹⁴ The difficulty in determining the Man's character will be analysed in greater detail in the section on open and closed figure conception.

You can't do a damn thing to me...none of you silences or mumbling under your breath or, or judgements about my...*nothing*. None of the 'Cody Phipps' bullshit that you've gotten away with for so long. (*to him*) You stole my life...my adult life...but you will never do that again! [...] when I think about...oh my God! The things I gave up, squashed inside of me just to, to...what? To keep the peace... [...] Jesus...how could somebody be so stupid, huh? *How?! (Beat)* I'll tell you how...by being scared of your own husband.[...] (78)

In *some girl(s)* there are five static characters. The Man does not alter his behaviour in any way, apparently he treated all the women in more or less the same way. Moreover, his opinions did not undergo a change as he first pretends but in fact he remains the egoist he has always been. We only get to see each woman in one of the episodes so there is not much time for them to change anyway. However, from what we get to know in their conversations they do not seem to have changed much since their relationships with the Man. Sam is still rather insecure and Tyler still very attractive and seductive. We do not get to know enough about Lindsay's and Bobbie's past behaviour to determine whether they have changed much or not but there is no indication in the Man's speech that they have.

In contrast to the other plays, in *the shape of things*, there is one genuinely dynamic figure: Adam. He certainly undergoes a change in the play, concerning his looks as well as his behaviour. He cuts his hair, loses weight, starts to work out, stops biting his nails and even gets a tattoo. Moreover, as he became handsomer and firmer and more confident, his actions became more and more, ahh, *questionable*. Against medical advice, he had work done to his face, cosmetic surgery at age twenty-two, [...] he also started to deceive his friends and myself with greater abandon during this period while showing increased interest in other women. (121)

Adam, however, does not change on his own initiative but because he is manipulated by Evelyn. Whether he changes for the better or the worse is a matter of opinion. On the one hand, it can not be denied that he is better looking and more confident, on the other hand, he willingly abandons his friends and cheats on his girlfriend. The other characters, Evelyn, Phillip and Jenny remain static throughout the play and do not undergo any noteworthy change.

Summing up, one can say that except one character who changes drastically, the majority of LaBute's characters are static figures.

Another binary opposition Pfister introduces is the difference between mono- and multidimensional characters. (Cf. 178) These terms are self-explanatory and it can be claimed that LaBute's characters are all multidimensional. They are defined by a "complex set of features" which may "concern his or her biographical background, psychological disposition, interpersonal behaviour towards different people, the ways he or she reacts to widely differing situations and his or her ideological orientation" (178-179).

A further important notion Pfister employs in the analysis of character is that of open and closed figure conception, i.e. the difference between "fully explained" and "enigmatic" characters. Closed figure conception is divided into two further categories:

a closed figure conception in which the figure is completely defined by information that is explicit, and one in which it is completely defined by information that is partially explicit and partially implicit. In the first case, the figure is defined explicitly and unambiguously for the receiver, in the second it is also unambiguous, but in a way that is only implied, thus encouraging the receiver to interpret for himself. (Pfister, 181)

One can certainly say that none of LaBute's characters are completely defined only by explicit information, for example by explicit authorial characterisation. As we have seen in the previous chapters, he is certainly not the author who feeds his readers with explicit and totally unambiguous information. In various cases the audience and the readers are confronted with open figure conception, where the character

becomes enigmatic either because relevant pieces of information – explaining the reasons for a figure's actions, for example – are simply omitted, the information defining the figure is perceived by the receiver as being incomplete, because the information contains a number of unsolvable contradictions or because these two factors (incompletion and contradiction) function together. (Pfister, 181)

The young man in *iphigenia in orem* can be classified as a closed character. He provides the audience with all the necessary information: even though some of his thoughts and actions can be considered as highly questionable, he gives insights into his feelings and emotions and also fully explains the motivations for his actions. He does not deliberately omit information or contradict himself.

Also the woman in *medea redux* can be considered as a fully explained figure. Her actions are highly questionable as well, but again, she gives a full account of her motivations and feelings. Therefore, even though she is certainly not entirely sane, she is not ambiguous in any way.

Another figure that is unambiguous is Sue in *a gaggle of saints*. She is not a very deep and independent character altogether. She seems to define herself through her fiancée John and probably also her church community. Moreover, her account of the events is entirely unspectacular and never contradicts John's version. Quite the contrary can be said of John. He can be considered as an enigmatic character. He provides some explanations for his actions but they seem like an excuse. He claims to have religious reasons for the assault on the gay man, although we can never be sure about that. One of the gay men they see in the park looks like his father, so maybe he has some suppressed aggressions against him. About his father we only know that he always forced John to cut his hair but there could also be more to it. Moreover, before attacking the gay man in the toilet John touches him and allows him to kiss him. John himself says he does not know why he tolerated that and hence again leaves room for speculation.

In *the shape of things* we meet with three fully explained characters, Adam, Phillip and Jenny, and one highly enigmatic character, Evelyn. Although not all the information we get about Adam, Phillip and Jenny is explicit, there is nothing deliberately omitted and there are no striking contradictions. An illustrative example is Adam, who at one point admits to Evelyn: "[...] you're dangerously close to owning me" (40), which we find confirmed when he abandons his only friends just because she wants him to. In contrast to the other characters, Evelyn is certainly a very obscure figure. In the course of the play we get to know a few facts about her (she is from near Chicago, 25 and born in June, is a sculptress, had a nose job done at 16, her mother is Jewish) only to find out in the end that nothing of this was true:

ADAM. was any of it true?

EVELYN. what do you mean?

ADAM. not the things we did, or the kind words or whatever...but any of it?

EVELYN. ...no. not really. (134)

In fact, her mother's name is Anderson, she is 22 and not Gemini but Pisces. Strangely enough, this is the only reliable information we receive. All that appears to be incontrovertibly genuine about her is her passion for art and her very own understanding of it. Moreover, she allows us insights into her motives for her "project" and also into her feelings after she had revealed the truth: "i'm not sorry. i mean, not for what i've done. i just feel bad that you're so upset..." (125).

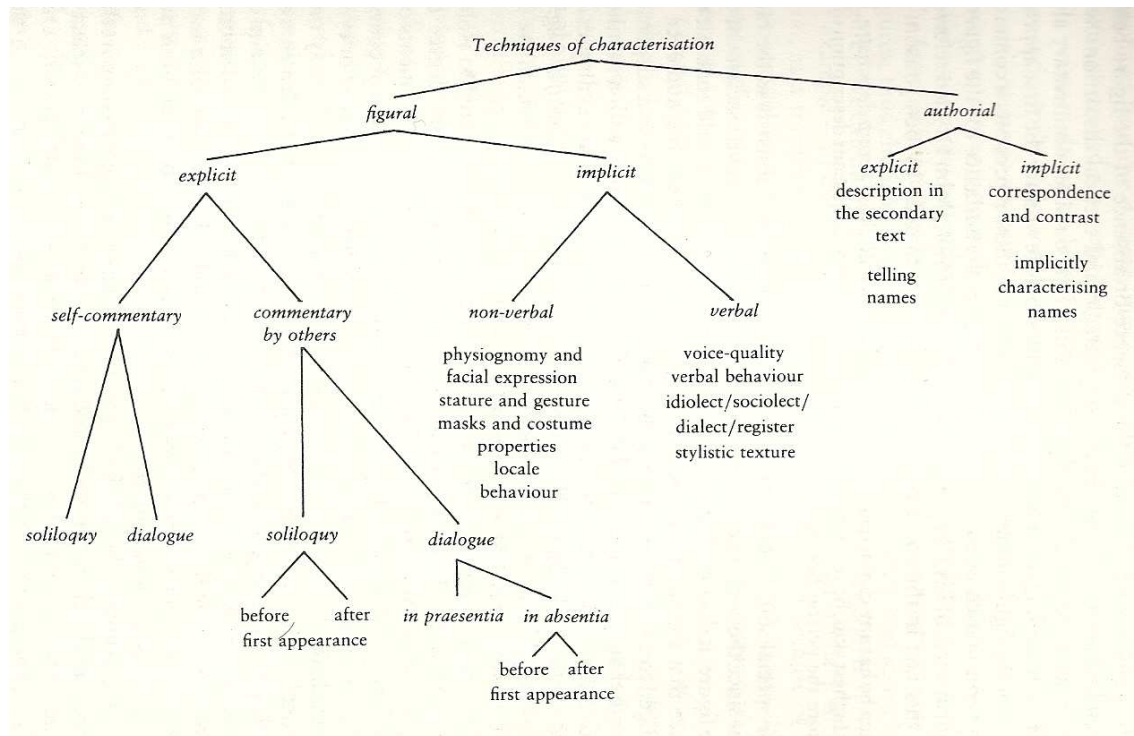
In *some girl(s)* we encounter a closed figure conception, although, a lot of the information is implicit. While, in the beginning, we are not entirely sure what to make of the character of the Man, in the end, we have received enough information to form a coherent picture. We are aware of the motives of his actions and there are no obvious contradictions. Also, three of the women, Sam, Tyler and Lindsay, are clear-cut figures. We learn about their character and can infer their individual traits from what they say and do in their conversation with the Man. Moreover, in these dialogues we get to know various details about their past relationships with the Man. This is not true for Bobbie, though. We only find out that he left her like the other women without any explanation but we do not get any information about the nature of their relationship nor, about the features of Bobbie's character. In their conversation they mostly talk about him and his "project" but her character remains shady. However, there are no contradictions and it does not seem that information has been omitted deliberately, as for example in *the shape of things*.

In *This is how it goes* we encounter open as well as closed figure conception. Cody is a fully explained character. The information we receive about his character and his past history seems to be confirmed by his behaviour. He appears like a greedy, arrogant self-satisfied business man throughout the play. Therefore, we are not surprised when we learn about his deal with the Man. It seems only too likely that a man like Cody would trade his wife for a baseball card and some money only to keep up his reputation. Quite contrary to that is the Man's figure conception. We know a lot less about his past and we get the impression that a lot of details regarding this character are omitted on purpose. Moreover, the Man is multi-faceted, he can be a

calculating, cold-hearted racist or a sensitive, caring lover. In short, a lot of conflicting elements can be found in the conception of his figure. Belinda's character is somehow difficult to determine. If it were not for the scene between her and Cody which we get to see in two different version, she could be defined as a fully explained character. At first she appears to be an unhappy wife who is constantly humiliated by her husband and "needs to stay out of the way a lot" (*This is how it goes*, 32). In these two scenes, however, she is quite direct and gives Cody a piece of her mind. She is jealous and dissatisfied with the situation and one could even say she is quite snappish. Of course, Cody is a dominant and maybe also intimidating personality, but sometimes we cannot be sure how much of a victim Belinda really is.

4.3. TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERISATION

By way of introduction it appears appropriate to illustrate the various techniques of characterisation in terms of Manfred Pfister's diagram:



(Pfister, 185)

The information about the characters can be conveyed either through one of the figures (explicit-figural, implicit-figural) or by means of the implied author (explicit-authorial and implicit-authorial). (Cf. Pfister, 184). The various sub-categories of these techniques can be seen in the diagram; however, not all of these will be relevant for the analysis of LaBute's texts. Some of these techniques are restricted to the performance of these plays (e.g. facial expression, masks and costume, properties, voice-quality) as, in most cases, there is no specific information on these aspects in LaBute's plays, neither in the primary nor the secondary text.

With these tools then, an attempt at drawing a comprehensive picture of LaBute's complex characters will be made.

Bigsby portrays Adam, in *the shape of things*, as follows: "[he] has something of a Woody Allen character about him, intellectually acute but

emotionally adrift, physically unappealing and socially inept” (3). However, this is not entirely convincing. Adam may not be very attractive, which we know from various of Evelyn’s comments (explicit figural characterisation in dialogue) but he does not seem to be “socially inept” as he is witty and quick-witted when we meet him in the first scene (implicit figural characterisation). As soon as he starts dating Evelyn he begins to change, or rather, she begins to change him. Apart from a few short descriptions in the stage directions (16,17), we receive most information about this development through comments of other figures (explicit figural characterisation in dialogue). Jenny, for instance, calls him “this totally hot guy” (52), Philipp asks him how much weight he has lost (82) and Evelyn tells him that he has “gotten cuter. and stronger. more confident. and craftier...” (97). While he seems to become physically more attractive he is still quite self-conscious and insecure, as one can see in the following examples (explicit figural characterisation through self-commentary):

[...] He looks a bit different, not as bulky and he’s letting his hair go. [...]

EVELYN. ...no, seriously. you have.

ADAM. yeah?

EVELYN. no question.

ADAM. i dunno. i think i still look... (16)

or

EVELYN. (quietly) were you always like this before? so...you know...

ADAM. ...shy? just about the fact that no one would sleep with me. that’s all. [...] you’re sort of in uncharted waters here. (38-39)

Another interesting aspect of Adam’s character is his effect on the audience as he evokes very ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, we despise him for being such a weak character and for making some wrong decisions. In the end he even cheats on his girlfriend he is so committed to. Moreover, he is not unfaithful to her with some stranger but with his best friend’s fiancée. As Bigsby puts it: “Adam, after all, is scarcely innocent. He readily collaborates in his own seduction. His version of love is not without its masochistic dimension as he equates a surrender of will and moral judgement with personal commitment.” (99) On the other hand, we sympathise with him and LaBute achieves exactly what he wanted: “[...] I still want you to like him, because that makes it more painful for the audience when you find out what’s happening to him. At the same time it’s happening to him, it’s happening to you.” (qtd. in Bigsby, 99)

In contrast to Adam, Evelyn evokes rather unambiguous reactions. “In the name of art, ambition, self-regarding sense of power, she crosses moral boundaries, defies conventional assumptions. She invites trust in order to betray it.” (Bigsby, 83) She not only deceives Adam but also the audience and that is why, in the end, the viewers take Adam’s side. She is a figure which is mostly characterised through her actions and her behaviour (implicit figural characterisation). She is defined primarily through her ruthless and calculating conduct, which is also referred to by the other characters (explicit figural characterisation):

JENNY. [...] sorry if i’ve offended you in some way, or done something to make you so indifferent to me, cold or whatever. and i don’t mean what’s happened, i don’t, because i think you’ve been this way the whole time i’ve known you. (104)

or

ADAM. no, listen, what you did was shitty, and awful and just plain wrong...[...] you had no right to do that. [...] it was still wrong to treat her like that. and me. (105)

Moreover, she is extremely direct and sometimes her remarks can be very hurtful:

EVELYN. adam, you don’t have any friends. (*beat.*) you gave up the only ones i’ve known you to have. gave ‘em up pretty easily...
adam shivers at this one; she’s turned out to be a cool little number.
(126)

In this case her callousness is also emphasised by the stage directions (explicit authorial characterisation). Moreover, she is completely convinced of the correctness of her actions: “i have no regrets or feelings of remorse for my actions, the manufactured emotions...none of it.” (122) From among the entire audience present at her presentation, we only get to see Adam’s reaction to her revelation. Because she gets away with what she has done and does not acknowledge her faults, “there is no catharsis for the audience” (Mendell, 93). Furthermore, it irritates the audience that she is right in a certain way: “and yet open any fashion magazine, turn on any television programme and the world will tell you...he’s only gotten more interesting, more desirable, more normal. in a word, *better*. he is a living, breathing example of our obsession with the surface of things, the shape of them.” (121)

Although Jenny is certainly very different in character to Evelyn, she unconsciously agrees with her on this specific point. It seems very unlikely that she would have cheated on Phillip with Adam if he had not changed or “improved” his looks. Apart from that though, she is quite the opposite of Evelyn. She is called “sweet” (37) by Evelyn, “pretty amazing” (50) by Adam (explicit-figural characterisation) and she characterises herself as follows: “sorry i’m not an artsy person or cool enough or, you know, i’m not super-smart, sorry about that. but as far as just *being* a person, like, an average-type person...i’m pretty okay. i am. [...]” (104) (explicit figural characterisation through self-commentary). Moreover, she tries to soothe the conversation when Evelyn wants to heat it up (31) and she can be considered rather shy since she does not dare to say the word “penis” aloud and never dared to ask Adam for a date (29) (implicit-figural characterisation).

Her boyfriend, Phillip, is also a multifaceted character. On the one hand, he seems quite rude, arrogant and fairly immature, as can be inferred from some of his comments (implicit-figural characterisation):

‘good luck’, hey, fuck.you! (*to adam*) where in hell did you meet that bitch?! / what’d she do, give you a haircut and a blow job and now you’re her puppy?!! [...] (37)

or

somewhat, yeah. but i’m nice-looking, which makes up for a lot. (73)

and

listen, no hard feelings...i was looking to get out, you know that. but once you start making those plans, you know, like picking out *napkins* and shit, it’s almost easier to just do the thing! (*beat.*) you did me a favour, really...too young to get hitched. (114)

Moreover, he is described by Adam and Jenny as follows (explicit figural characterisation):

JENNY. yeah, you know...sweet. now, i love him and all, i do, you know that, but that’s not the way i’d describe him to people. ‘sweet.’ would you?

adam thinks for a moment

ADAM. no, i wouldn’t exactly use his name and ‘sweet’ in the same short story... (48)

On the other hand, one could call him loyal since he forgives Adam for kissing Jenny and seemingly Evelyn for insulting him and even suggests that all four of them should do something together some day. In addition to that, he seems to

be ready to be Adam's friend again even if he abandoned him and broke off their contact (implicit figural characterisation).

Summing up, one could say that figural characterisation definitely prevails in *the shape of things* and that we have very few instances of obvious authorial characterisation.¹⁵ Taking a closer look, however, one can find various instances of implicit authorial characterisation. What LaBute does is "to confront several different figures with a similar situation, either simultaneously or consecutively and thus to establish their individuality by comparing different ways they react to it" (Pfister, 195). As examples of this technique of characterisation we can take Evelyn's spraying of the statue at the beginning and the different ways the figures react to Adam's development. Adam understands her impulse to a certain extent (8-11), Evelyn thinks it is "graffiti" (33) and Phillip calls it "vandalism" (31). Evelyn and Jenny's reactions to Adam's transformation are very positive: obviously, Evelyn is happy that her "project" works out and Jenny, who has always liked Adam on account of his character, is seduced by his physical change. Phillip, on the other hand, is not as enthusiastic as the two women: "you and the...what is going on with the 'metamorphosis' thing here? you're like frankenstein..." (81) and "i just hope next time we pass each other i recognize who the hell you are..." (89).

In terms of characterisation, one could say that *the shape of things* is the most conventional of the four plays and that the various techniques of characterisation are quite balanced.

This is certainly different in *This is how it goes*. Here we primarily have explicit figural characterisation in the form of comments from other characters and implicit figural characterisation¹⁶. Whereas in the *shape of things*, most of the explicit figural characterisations happen in presentia of the respective character, many of those in *This is how it goes* take place in absentia of this figure. Moreover, because of the highly idiosyncratic format of the stage directions, which has been analysed in the previous chapter, the descriptions there cannot be regarded as conventional instances of authorial

¹⁵ The telling names, Adam and Eve(lyn) will be analysed with the help of Olson's article "Fall, Creation and Redemption in Neil LaBute's *The Shape of Things*" in the chapter on themes.

¹⁶ For the analysis of the figures' speech (implicit verbal figural characterisation) see the chapter on language.

characterisation. This assumption shall now be illustrated with various examples from the text.

Cody's character, for instance, is portrayed either by explicit figural characterisation, through comments by the Man and Belinda, or through his behaviour (implicit figural characterisation). Many of these descriptions pass between the Man and Belinda or between the narrator and the audience, in the absence of Cody. At the beginning they joke about Cody being a mute because he does not talk much (8-9), the Man tells the audience that Cody has always tried to take advantage of the fact that he is black (22-23) and emphasises this again in his racist rant at the end of the play (81). One of the seemingly most appropriate depictions though, is made by Belinda in her fight with Cody, in his presence:

[...] you're just so paranoid, so worried about everybody giving you shit, or disrespecting you or I don't know what – doesn't matter that you do it to me, treat me like the hired help! Snap your fingers or laugh in my face, but life's not about that...black or white or any of that crap. It's about being a good guy, Cody. A decent person. And you're not...In the end, I'm with somebody who's like all the other guys I grew up around. Not so terrible, but not very good, either. You're just a guy. Just a normal guy...which means kind of shitty, actually. Completely average and a little bit shitty. (36)

The only problem here is that the Man, in his function as the narrator, admits to the audience that this scene did not exactly happen this way, so we must assume that this description is the Man's rather than Belinda's characterisation of Cody and rather addressed to us than to Cody. Moreover, Cody never really comments on his own character, there are no major explicit self-commentaries. However, he exposes his character through the way he treats and speaks to other figures (implicit figural characterisation). A representative example, which also illustrates Belinda's character, is his comment on women:

CODY. No need. She'll be back...(Smiles.) That's the thing about women, they always come back.
[...]
MAN. Like Lassie, you mean?
CODY. Huh?
MAN. Lassie. She was famous for getting home. Returning. And she was a woman. Or female dog, anyway...
CODY. ...a bitch.
MAN. Well, yeah, technically.
WOMAN. Sweetie...
CODY. What? That's what they're called.

WOMAN. I know, but...people are...

CODY. It's just a word. What's wrong with that? words only have power if you let 'em...(19)

He can be described as the most static and well-defined character.

Except for Belinda's appearance, which is described by the Man in dialogue and briefly in the stage directions, she is not much referred to in comments of other figures. It is rather her behaviour and her self-commentary from which we infer the features of her character.

You're so desperate to fit in, and at the same time totally needing to stand out... [...] Doing this, I mean, marrying Cody and staying here – if you could've seen my dad's face! – it's pathetic really. Not pathetic, I suppose, but...sad, almost. That I needed people to be aware of me that badly. [...] And I was raised with a total sense that I wasn't good enough...or that I wouldn't make the right choices. [...] And so, at some point...that is what I decided to do. Prove 'em right. I made a mistake they'd never forget...(Beat.) But I was in love, too. (52-53)

This ambiguity of Belinda's character, which can be seen in this quote again, has already been explored in the previous chapter.

A very inconclusive character is certainly also the Man. Apart from the facts that he is witty and was obese in high school (6,8, 17, 20, 51) he is not characterised by commentaries from other figures. Only once, do we have a comment about him in the stage directions: "These two [Cody and the Man] may be more alike than we first suspected" (71). However, bearing in mind the analysis of the stage-directions in the previous chapter, we cannot be sure whether this is explicit authorial characterisation, a self-commentary or a commentary by another figure, another narrator so to speak. Moreover, the Man rarely comments on himself. The only exception can be found towards the end:

Also, I think maybe I came off a little too, I dunno, *something*, in that last bit. Not like myself. (*Laughs.*) But, then, people are so many things, faces, in a given day, maybe that's just some side of me, this other part, that doesn't get out that often but is there. I dunno. But this time – 'cause we're about to finish this off right now – this time out I'll be a bunch more like I was in the beginning. 'The Sensitive Guy.' (75)

This again emphasises the ambiguity and instability of this character: "And that, of course, is the dilemma for the audience. It is the Cretan paradox. Is the person who tells you he is a liar telling the truth?" (Bigsby, 183). The fact that

various of LaBute's characters have no fixed identity can be regarded as a post-modern element of his plays.

In *some girl(s)* we are confronted with another highly interesting situation as regards characterisation. The Man can be regarded as a well-defined figure, explicitly characterised by all the four women and also by seemingly very honest self-commentaries in numerous instances. While the women often speak about his character and behaviour in his presence (explicit figural characterisation), he very seldom comments on them. The women are mostly defined through their behaviour.

Wilhemus provides a convincing description of Man's character which runs as follows:

The structure of *some girl(s)* is simple. Like the movie *Groundhog Day*, its repetition affords the man the opportunity to get things right, although ultimately he just always gets them wrong. With each repetition we learn more and more that he is a familiar character from LaBute's plays: selfish, estranged, shallow, a user who seems to mean well before he fucks you over. (70)

We also receive a very similar picture from the women's comments on his character. Some of these commentaries are very direct in their judgement, others are little side blows during their conversations with the Man (explicit figural characterisation). One of these sneering remarks, for instance, comes from Sam: "Then you decide. Which was never one of your strong suits..." (6). Tyler is not as angry and hurt as Sam and her comments rather refer to the Man's sexual preferences: "You had your little ways, like me or anybody else. Things you liked, or wanted to try. Experiment." (24) In addition, she characterises him the following way: "I mean, no offence, but you weren't like some amazing person or anything, you were just this dude, we spent however long together, and yet...I do think about you. 'S crazy." (31). Lindsay, on the other hand, is certainly still upset and offended and does not hesitate to let the Man know what she thinks: "I think you're the kind of person who leaves a bunch of hurt in your boyish wake...all the time. I'll bet 'hurt' is your number one by-product" (51), "You like to mess things up...you're a mess-maker." (52) and "For a person like you...I mean a guy who usually just runs away from the shit

he makes [...]” (53). Also Bobbie is very agitated and when the Man suggests to be friends she does not show the slightest intention to accept this offer.

BOBBIE. Jesus, you always were this grandiose guy, but I had no idea – really, not until this moment – that it might actually be pathological. [...]

MAN. But, I ...*shit!* Bobbie, look, I’m...I always *meant* well.

BOBBIE. [...] that is *pathetic*. Oppenheimer meant well. Pol Pot *meant* well. It’s not about the meaning, it’s about the ‘doing’. Guys always mean well – right before they fuck somebody over...[...] You didn’t look back, and that...that one little brutal gesture...makes you more that just some ex-boyfriend. You are like a warrior. A killer. Some emotional terrorist who’s...(Beat.) No, you know what the truth is? This – all this *stuff* that you do – just makes you a not-very-nice person. [...] (79-80).

But not only the women make the audience aware of the fact that the Man has mistreated his ex-girlfriends, also the the Man himself is very conscious of his misconduct. This can be seen in numerous self-commentaries, as for example: “It was a mistake. I got nervous and I guess I just...I bolted. Ran off like some...and that’s the truth. I have a little bit of *history* there. Doing that.” (74). Moreover, his character is revealed through implicit figural characterisation. He simply left Bobbie from one day to the next without ever calling her and now gives the following reason for that: “I’d ring you but then I’d chicken out. (Beat.) I didn’t want you to not like me.” (74) This comment and the fact that he basically ran away from the other three women as well certainly emphasises that he is a character who tries to avoid any kind of conflict (implicit non-verbal figural characterisation). Furthermore, his emotional carelessness makes him not very tactful, which can be seen in various situations. When Sam admits that she had a daydream about the Man asking her to run off with her, he says: “That’s...Sam, that’s amazing, to, I mean, for you to tell me. I’d never do that, but – (Realizes.) – because of your *family*, I’m saying...”(20). This disposition is again emphasised in his conversation with Lindsay:

LINDSAY. Yes. A different era, at least. We all cared a bit more then, were all more committed, or something...

MAN. That’s what they say. In history, or on CNN and stuff. The sixties...

LINDSAY. I started in the senventies. Late seventies. [...] Seventy-nine. (44)

Also, he definitely has a highly erratic self-perception, as one can see in the scene where he tells Bobbie that he was slapped in the face by one of his ex-

girlfriends he visited: “[...] as I’m standing there, moving my mouth in, in utter surprise. It was completely *mutual*, our split, and that’s what I get when I go to see her...” (68).

Moreover, he is characterised through his language. When Tyler attempts to seduce him, he reluctantly stops her:

MAN. [...] I mean. You know...I’m supposed to be, what’s the word?

TYLER. I dunno. I don’t know what you’re supposed to be. Tell me.

MAN. ...Honest. That’s what. I need to display some fidelity here. (25-26)

It is highly improbable that he, as a teacher and writer cannot think of the words ‘honest’ and ‘fidelity’ This apparent linguistic incapacity is certainly illustrative of his character, particularly of his insincerity (implicit verbal figural characterisation).

Interestingly enough, the Man’s character is also illustrated by the women’s names (implicit authorial characterisation): “LaBute provides a hint of the Man’s narcissism by giving all the women names that could belong to a male” (Oney, 46). The aftertaste this character leaves with the audience is aptly defined by Oney:

Having witnessed the Man’s mistreatment of four women (a fifth refused to meet him, a sixth slapped him and slammed the door in his face), the audience, who have plenty of reason to detest him now, must straggle out of the theater wondering why some guy(s) get away with causing so much pain. (47)

In contrast to this detached character, the highly emotional female characters are perceived very differently by the audience. Sam is mostly defined through implicit figural characterisation. Many of her actions point towards her being very insecure and self-conscious. Years after the Man broke up with her she calls his mother and pretends to be someone else (8) and she comes back to the hotel room to ask for the name of the girl she has been left for, only to be able to look her up in the yearbook (19-20). Moreover, she is not in the least self-confident about her looks: “[...] I know that you’re looking at my face. I feel you doing that – it’s a skin thing. Sometimes after a baby your pigment can get all...doesn’t matter. Yeah.” (15). Even if she claims that “I wouldn’t trade what I’ve got for, whatever” (20), the viewers might have some doubts about that. The man admits that he ran away because she was “a girl that I could sort of

look at, you know, take a glance at and maybe...see her whole future. And I think, if I can say this... [...] ...history has proved me right.” (13).

Tyler is very unlike Sam: self-confident, seductive and independent. She seems happy to see him and when he tells her the reason of his visit, she claims to have quit the Man and not the other way round (35f.). She constantly tries to seduce him and, as Bigsby puts it, “appears wholly at ease with the idea of temporary relationships” (212): “It’s easy to fall out of favor, or just off somebody’s radar, you know? I’ve known a couple men that way – I’m mad about ‘em for a few months, then bam! Totally gone, just this tiny green blip on my screen...Guys are like that sometimes. And women, too, I’m sure.” (*some girl(s)*, 30) (explicit figural characterisation in the form of self-commentary). Even if she seems content with the present situation, the Man insists on this “‘hurt’ thing” (38) and finally finds out that his worries actually concern Bobbie, the woman he left for Tyler. She never appears resentful but at this point she admits that she was indeed hurt and knew that there had been another woman, although before and not after her (39-40).

Lindsay is a highly idiosyncratic character. She is the only woman who is older than the man and in this situation seems more powerful and appears to have more strength of character than he possesses. She does admit that she is angry and hurt and that she certainly was in a difficult situation when they were found out. However, she does not show any signs of self-pity but rather gives free reign to her anger and wants to take revenge. She wants him to feel the same guilt towards his fiancée as she had felt towards her husband she is still married to. She succeeds as the Man is so afraid of provoking any conflict that he agrees to sleep with her only to soothe her temper. Her figure is almost exclusively defined through implicit figural characterisation.

Bobbie is the female character in *some girl(s)* that is certainly most difficult to describe since apart from her outward appearance we can only go by implicit figural characterisation. We get to know about her looks through explicit figural characterisation by the Man, which is supported by the stage-directions:

[...] She really is something special.

MAN. [...] Geez, you look, well, you know...fantastic! (64)

At the beginning she seems a little nervous (63) but certainly curious (65f) about the Man’s visits. Their conversation, however, does certainly not

take the direction the Man intended. We cannot know this for sure since the Man vehemently denies it but what she accuses him of seems highly probable: “You’re making sure you haven’t missed out on something! That is *exactly* what you’re doing! You wanna know that this nurse of yours – isn’t that what you’ve said she studies? – that she’s the best deal you can get. The nicest, sweetest, prettiest of the...” (78). Even if she liked him back then, she is clever enough not to be blinded by his stories about suddenly wanting to be reunited with her and is strong enough to simply leave.

Bash is certainly one of the most interesting plays in terms of characterisation. Especially, *iphigenia in orem* and *medea redux* are unusual since we are confronted with only one single character. Consequently, there is no explicit figural characterisation by other figures and we can only interpret the characters according to their self-commentaries and their behaviour (implicit figural characterisation). Moreover, there are hardly any stage directions, let alone any which characterise any of the figures (explicit authorial characterisation).

The young man in *iphigenia in orem* explicitly says something about himself once, namely “i’m not a drinker” (14), which can certainly not be regarded as a very profound characterisation. Any other deductions we have to draw from his behaviour (implicit figural characterisation). He is not someone who can stand a lot of pressure, as he emphasises in the following comment: “[...] and the pressure’s real...well, just hot. day in and out. seriously, it is. we may play it like a game sometimes, but believe me, a day doesn’t go by in business that you’re not out for somebody’s blood...” (15). This is underlined by the fact that he kills his daughter when he is afraid to lose his job. He did not just fail to hear her struggling, as he first claims, but as he himself later admits, he “coaxed her down a bit” (27), so he actively killed her. After he exactly describes what happened though, we get the impression that he is not fully aware of his deeds and desperately tries to find excuses:

the point i wanna make, though, see, is that it didn’t have to happen that way. [...] if deb had just hurried a bit, if she hadn’t stop to look through *people* magazine or her mother hadn’t gone next door to fill a prescription, then who knows? maybe they would’ve got back in time and emma would still be...that sounds strange, doesn’t it, that way of thinking? but all i’m saying is, it was fate that took her [...]. (27)

As Bigsby puts it, what the young man tries to sell to the audience is “self-justification masquerading as revelation” (29). His reasoning is so absurd that one might even speculate that he is not certifiably sane. When he finds his daughter fighting for her life he says: “well, when i looked at it, i mean, *rationaly* [my emphasis], for even half-a-second there in the hallway, i realized that’s what it was. an opportunity [...]” (26-27).

Moreover, the young man can be characterised by his linguistic behaviour (implicit verbal figural characterisation) and his attitude towards women. The way he speaks about women at work is certainly characteristic of his problematic personality:

i’d made a mistake once, a board meeting where i’d grouped her in with a “you guys oughta...” meaning that side of the table and she called me out on it...first meeting, or maybe the second, she’d been to and she nails me out loud about my attitude, my limited “chauvinist lexicon” and all this other, just, crap that she fired off. (23-24)

When finally the woman loses her job and he keeps his, he finds it amusing to humiliate her.

another cliché, i know, but boy oh boy, what a great one it was...(BEAT) i even walked her to the elevator the day she left [...] well, she wasn’t looking so strong anymore, there in the open car, this box of stuff in her hands, as the doors were closing i said to them all, but staring straight at her, i said, “you guys take care now!” (28)

Another instance of his chauvinist attitude is the following remark about his wife. On the evening his daughter dies, they order pizza because “*deborah* [my emphasis] just couldn’t stand over the stove right then” (19).

In *medea redux*, on the other hand, we are confronted with a female character who also kills her child. The circumstances and also her character are entirely different though. Telling from the age of her son, who was fourteen when she killed him, she must be twenty-eight. Again, we have no descriptive stage-direction so we can only draw conclusions from her behaviour and a few self-commentaries. At the beginning of her confession she claims to be “an inward kind ‘a person” (77) and later on says about herself that she “wasn’t the smartest or remembered the most” (83). From the way she talks about her relationship with her teacher at the age of thirteen we can tell that she was certainly very naïve as a teenager: “we were starting to be friends” (82) and “we

started sort 'a hang out a bit" (83). Moreover, she says that they would only "kiss and things, not so much, but kiss and little hugs and stuff" (85) when suddenly she finds out that she is pregnant. She tells him and believes him when "he was all excited [...] and said he loved children, could think of nothing better than having a son" (87). Obviously, when he left town without telling her, this came as a shock:

i was standing there in that office, suddenly standing there, fourteen years old with a baby in me [...] and i was frozen in time. 's like the heavens had opened above me, at that very second, and all i could hear was the universe [...] and all i could make out was the howl of the cosmos...and you know what? it was laughing, it was. all it's attention was suddenly turned and it was laughing, laughing down at me... (89)

She does not seem to want sympathy for what had happened to her (89) or try to find excuses for what she did. Also, she does not blame her teacher for what happened. Until she meets her teacher again she keeps their secret and even finds it sad that the teacher's new wife is unable to have children. The moment she meets him again, however, it becomes clear to the audience that she never really recovered from her experience: "he was satisfied, i could see that, satisfaction on his face...because he'd gotten away with it all. that's what i saw, shining in his eyes, as he moved forward to kiss me. he'd beaten fate...and gotten away with it." (92) That she suffered some kind of psychological damage is emphasised by the simple fact that she kills her own son as well as by the following comment:

tell you what gets me through today, the next hour...it's him. my teacher [...] can't be consoled, right, the truth all spilled out now like it is, and all these tears running down, yelling up at the sky, these torrents of tears and screaming, the top of his lungs, calling up into the universe, "why?" "why?" "over and over. (BEAT) but you know what? in my fantasy, there's never an answer, uh-uh, there never is...(93-94)

As Bigsby points out, she "seems to show no sense of the catastrophe she has brought upon her own head" (33). She recounts the killing of her son in a very factual tone, just like the young man in *iphipenia in orem*. These two characters seem to be "detached from their own feelings, observers of their own actions" (Bigsby, 23). The thought that she has taken revenge seems to be more important to her than the fact that she has killed her own child.

In *a gaggle of saints* we are again confronted with murder, although in completely different circumstances. In contrast to *iphigenia in orem* and *medea redux* there are two characters in this play, a young couple. One might therefore think that there are more explicit commentaries on the figures. However, this is not the case, since the two figures are entirely superficial. The only aspect they comment on is their physical appearance and their love for each other (52, 54, 66, 68). John constantly assures the audience how pretty Sue is (42, 52, 53) and Sue in return describes how good-looking John is in his Perry Ellis suit (40, 53). Apart from these two aspects we have to interpret their character through their behaviour (implicit figural characterisation). The problem that arises with Sue is that she does not actually do very much that night so it seems difficult to determine her character. She is certainly religious, as we can see in the following comments: “he’d kind of left the church [...] and so it’s over” (46) and “i like sunday school at home so much better...” (67). This does not imply that she has a sense of right and wrong, however, as when a man beats his wife in their train compartment, giving her a bloody nose she refers to that as “no big deal” (68). Moreover, she does not seem to mind blood or violence, as has been pointed out in previous chapters.

John, on the other hand, gives the audience enough material to construct his character. At some points he seems like a loving fiancée but at others like a violent maniac (49, 63-64). Moreover, he can be described as exceptionally intolerant. When they see the two gay men in Central Park, he says: “[...] live and let live, whatever, but this, i figure, is flaunting it. i mean, as much our park as theirs, and we’re in town one night, that’s all, one...and we got ‘a witness this? [...] i start to feel sick, i mean it, nauseous.” (60-61) His brutal attack on the homosexual has been thoroughly analysed in previous chapters. However, it has to be stressed here again that he is convinced that what he did was right and he does not show the slightest sign of remorse. On the one hand, his deed seems even more absurd when we consider the fact that he let the man touch and kiss him. When asked by one of the other guys, he says about that: “but i didn’t know, didn’t have an answer, isn’t that strange?” (65). It is indeed strange and certainly leaves room for speculation. Does John have some hidden homosexual desires, which he tries to suppress with this violent attack?

5. THEMES

5.1. RELIGION

Bash is certainly the most important play in this context. A man who obviously belongs to some kind of church community, kills his daughter to keep his job and another young man beats a homosexual to death because he feels his religious principles are violated. Initially, these two men as well as the woman in *medea redux*, were explicitly characterised as Mormons. LaBute claims that he used Mormonism only “because I felt I knew the religion and I could use it” (Bigsby, 249). It appears that the Mormon Church was not pleased and so he was “disfellowshipped” (LaBute qtd. in Bigsby, 25). He agreed to remove the Mormon references, however, not only because of the Church’s protest. As has been discussed in previous chapters, LaBute always tries to make the audiences of his plays reappraise their own values and behaviour. By making these characters Mormons, however, he would let all of the non-Mormon viewers “off the hook” (Bigsby, 249). LaBute wanted to emphasise that going to church does not necessarily mean one has to be a good person and always make the right choices. (cf. Bigsby 25, 249). Very characteristic and definitely in line with his desire to stir up his audiences is also his answer to the question where the inspiration for *bash* came from:

I got the idea from the beauty of a flock of geese...when you see them from afar in a field, they look great, but if you go out in the field, it’s covered with shit. The geese are looking at that shit saying, ‘where did that come from?’ There is a lot of absurdity sometimes, not just in Mormonism but often other religions that want to pretend that no bad happens in their church, rather than taking care of what bad does happen. I think there has to be that willingness to say, ‘Hey, here’s our mess. Now what can we do with it?’ [...] (qtd. in Bigsby, 24)

LaBute is right in that it is entirely unimportant what kind of religion the characters have. In the edition used for this thesis the references to Mormonism have already been removed but this certainly does not make the atrocities that are committed in the name of religion less crass. In the first version of *a gaggle of saints* Tim not only “starts offering up a short eulogy” (*a gaggle of saints*, 64) but also “pours consecrated oil on their victim and offers up a blessing as if it were, indeed, a sanctified act” (Bigsby, 22). John’s religious principles are

entirely absurd since he regards homosexuality as a sin but happily goes to church the next day without any feelings of repentance after having committed murder: “and we saw our parents, stopped in sunday and even made it to church...that was really nice” (67).

Also in *iphiphenia in orem* there is a rather preposterous reference to religion. In the first account of the death of his daughter, in which the young man still speaks of an accident, he describes the hard times after the baby's death in the following way: “you just go on. you do. you thank your heavenly father for giving you strength to stand up to his trials and figure there must be a plan behind it all, a reason for so much pain and you just...go on” (21). He puts the blame on God and “thus stands absolved of all responsibility” (Bigsby, 29). Moreover, he perceives himself as “an agent of fate, destiny, a divine plan” (Bigsby, 29) when, in fact, the murder was his own design.

Another play where references to religion can be found is *the shape of things*. Apart from the characters' names, Adam and Eve(lyn), these references are not as straightforward and explicit as in *bash*. As LaBute himself puts it: “The Adam-and-Eve thing was obviously there from the beginning. But I made sure it was embedded, rather than on the surface.” (LaBute interview Istel)

Olson, who analyses the film version, sees the biblical story of fall, creation and redemption in *the shape of things*. (cf. Olson) The museum functions as the garden of Eden and Adam as its keeper. When Evelyn tries to spray a penis on the Fornicelli statue she disturbs the divine order of the garden. The serpent which leads Evelyn into temptation is “absolute art; art at all costs that demands a complete sacrifice for its creation and is not bound by any norms or standards.” Olson sees the parallel between the biblical story and Adam's fall in his sexual emancipation: “Adam's fall into the standards of surface appeal is simultaneously his sexual awakening”. This can be seen as a parallel, however, also as a contradiction. Whereas Adam and Eve, after having eaten the forbidden fruit, develop a sense of shame and cover themselves with fig leaves, Adam in *the shape of things* becomes sexually more uninhibited. However, Olson is certainly right, when he describes Adam's “fall into depravity” as a “cultural rise”, in which LaBute sees the contemporary obsession with physical appearance. Moreover, he regards Adam's fall as Evelyn's creation.

Interestingly enough, Evelyn does not metaphorically eat of the forbidden fruit to receive the “knowledge of good and evil” but in fact she denies that “good and evil have any validity”. Signs of redemption, however, cannot be found easily in the play. One step towards redemption is made by watching LaBute’s characters, above all, Evelyn, “who expose a kind of raw perversity” and remain unpunished. Through this observation the viewers’ conscience is activated. Olson sees the other sign of redemption in the scene where Adam and Evelyn tape their sexual encounter. She whispers something in his ear, the only thing, we get to know at the end of the play, that was true. What she said, though, remains unknown to us.

5.2. GENDER

One can definitely say that male characters in LaBute’s plays do not come off well. As Paul Taylor in the *Guardian* puts it: “An academic study of the chivalry shown towards women by the male characters in the work of Neil LaBute would be one of the shortest volumes in publishing history.” LaBute himself admits this:

I think I have been fairer to the women than I have to the men. I have probably grown up with a certain suspicion about men because the key male figure was one worth being suspicious of. He created a great deal of doubt in the other members of the family with respect to the behaviour when he was gone and the behaviour when he was at home. So I think I ultimately have a kind of general sense of worry about mankind. (qtd. in Bigsby, 236)

He usually rejects autobiographical interpretations of his plays, here, however, he admits the influence the difficult relationship with his father has on his work. We meet male characters who are portrayed very negatively in *bash*, *some girl(s)* and *This is how it goes*. Even Adam, in *the shape of things*, is not an entirely innocent character.

In *iphigenia in orem* we meet a young man who is desperate to fit in with the conservative male stereotype: have a (house)wife and children and be able to support them, be successful at work and have a loyal group of colleagues and friends, “guys” (24, 28) of course. Since his position seems to be rather mediocre and his success at work limited and endangered by various female colleagues, he displays quite “unabashed misogyny” (Becker, 111):

there's definitely an order to things in business, and the old boys at the top, the guys you never see, [...] they like things the way they've always been. So that's when a bunch of these women with their m.b.a.s and affirmative action nonsense would get the boot. (22)

Apparently, the young man is pleased with the fact that educated women who stand up for equality lose their jobs. When the woman who pointed out his linguistic political incorrectness really is dismissed instead of him, he insults her and "laugh[s] all through lunch about it" together with the "guys" (28).

John, in *a gaggle of saints*, displays physical violence on various occasions, which can be regarded as a male characteristic. In the first instance, he defends his girl against his opponent with his fists, a very archaic male behaviour. Whereas his girlfriend, Sue, does not consider two men as something suspicious ("it was just two men. walking along...no big deal.", 55), John immediately takes offence and feels the need to protect his values and principles with physical violence. In contrast to this dominant male figure, Sue appears like a stereotypical woman who tries to stay out of trouble: pretty, quiet, family-friendly, and religious.

In *This is how it goes* we witness more cases of physical cruelty. Cody once beats his wife when she tries to stand up to him. Interestingly enough, in their fight she actually comments on the antiquated ideals that govern Cody's behaviour: "...That's kinda *Victorian*, don't you think? 'I work.' Come on! We both work, I just happen to work here. In this house of yours." (34). Moreover, when Cody and the Man meet to close their deal, their mutual provocations nearly end in a fight, which can be seen in the following stage directions: "Cody moves to the Man and presses a finger into his chest" (71), "In an instant Cody is up in the Man's face" (73) and "Cody goes to hit the Man" (74). Cody embodies all of the stereotypical traditional male ideals and spares no effort to display them: he is physically strong as well as professionally successful and rich. He also parades his manliness in his language as he is very direct and blunt and uses a fair amount of swearwords. Mendell's description of LaBute's male characters is certainly highly appropriate for Cody: "The men in LaBute's plays and screenplays are the children and grandchildren of Stanley Kowalski. [...] Williams's appetitive he-men live in their genes, and

they are equally inclined to wound others as they attempt to gratify themselves” (87).

The Man, however, does not fully conform to this ideal. He is certainly not as successful as Cody and not as physically strong. We do not know the real reason why he is not a lawyer any more, but whether he quit or was dismissed is not important. What is relevant is that he has no job and is financially inferior to Cody since he has to earn money by doing the gardening for him. He was obese in high school and obviously had to endure a fair amount of bullying in which Cody was involved: “I did get a few bumps in my day, the occasional undies up the flagpole.” (27) Moreover, Cody got the woman the Man loved. To compensate for this inferiority to Cody he has to resort to overtly racist comments and highly insulting remarks about Cody’s mother.

Belinda occasionally tries to offer resistance to Cody, however, not very successfully. Consequently, even though she readily succumbs to the men’s plan and cheats on her husband, she can be seen as the victim of their manly fight for power, money and success.

Success is also the motivation for the Man’s use of lies and deceit in *some girl(s)*. He does not reveal such a brutish form of manliness as Cody, for instance, although he also strives for professional success and approval. A stereotypically male characteristic he shows is the avoidance of verbal conflicts. He would certainly never have visited his ex-girlfriends only to soothe his conscience, as he had initially left three of them without any kind of explanation or confrontation. He certainly displays a great fear of commitment, which culminates in his pathetic attempt to escape his marriage by trying to become reunited with Bobbie. It is a common stereotype presented in countless films and books that men are educated and clever. This is a quality he certainly has and shows by frequent allusions to works of literature. Women, on the other hand, traditionally speaking, neither need to be very educated nor witty. This cliché is represented especially by Sam, Tyler and Bobbie. Sam apparently married soon after highschool without any further education, Tyler does not understand any of the Man’s allusions to Don Quixote (33) or Bluebeard (34), and Bobbie admits, “No, I don’t read all that much. Except X-Rays...” (67). The only woman who does not fall into this pattern is Lindsay, who teaches at a

University and is able to give quick-witted answers. For instance, when he refers to his visits as a “pilgrim’s progress”, she counters: “Don’t you mean ‘rake’s’?” (53).

Interestingly enough, although the women were treated similarly by the man, the contrasting versions of femininity are striking. Sam embodies the classic traditional stereotype: a housewife with children who willingly carries out her duties but secretly dreams of romantic adventure stories. Tyler is the complete opposite: an independent and self-confident woman who says: “...and that’s why my friends have a bunch of kids and I have fun! [...]” (26). Lindsay, on the other hand, belongs to a more modern but still rather conservative category of the working woman who is successful but still married to a man in a professionally superior position. Bobbie is not as easy to classify since we do not know enough about her. What we can say though, is that she is, like all the other women, very emotional, which can certainly be considered as a stereotypical feminine characteristic.

In the three plays discussed we encounter various traditional stereotypes of femininity and manliness. In contrast, in *the shape of things*, we are confronted with inverted gender roles. In this play the woman is the deceiving character who acts irrespective of the feelings of others. LaBute himself says that her character “grew out of the discussion about how capable women are of deceit and lying and manipulation. [...] Everybody has the ability to be manipulative, to be hateful and deceitful.” (qtd. in Bigsby, 81) Olson, in his article on fall, creation and redemption in this play, sees the “typical sins of the genders”, reversed: “They [=feminist theologians] say hubris is typically a male problem, while females typically struggle with the opposite problem, with easy acquiescence to others and the failure to use their freedom to actualize themselves.” Evelyn certainly embodies the male ideals of strength, self-confidence and success. Adam, on the other hand, readily gives in to Evelyn’s seduction and her demands without any resistance. In contrast to the traditional views, Adam is more emotional and the weaker sex. Also, Evelyn does not hesitate to let others know of her superiority and often appears very condescending, especially towards Phillip and Jenny. The only domain in which Adam has an advantage over Evelyn is literature. He frequently makes witty

remarks which are never understood by Evelyn: “it’s a far, far better thing i do than i have ever done...” (69), “jesus, next you’re gonna tell me the handkerchief with the strawberries on it is missing...” (109) or “i got a little gregor samsa thing going right now...” (124).

All in all, one may agree with the reviewer in *The New York Times* who sums up the thematic concerns of Neil LaBute’s dramatic oeuvre on the occasion of the production of one his plays:

[...] "This Is How It Goes" is really about what almost all of Mr. LaBute's work is about: the theory that all men (he means men, not men and women) are animals, except that most animals are probably nicer. (Brantley, 28 March 2005)

In the light of this view the circumstance that LaBute denies several male characters in his plays a proper name and simply calls them The Man receives an almost sinister significance: Man, i.e. every man or Everyman, is a monster.

5.3. MORALITY

Morality and ethics can be considered as two of Neil LaBute’s core topics. However, he can certainly not be characterised as a moraliser who preaches ethics with a wagging forefinger. On the contrary, he portrays characters who do morally condemnable things but remain entirely unpunished and leaves it to the audience to judge them. Especially, in *This is how it goes* and *the shape of things* the spectator is left alone to evaluate, as Mendell points out:

But these plays are more complex than his other works because he confounds audiences with shifting and conflicting propositions about what is true and false. The moralist tells us what most people already know: that racism is evil; that we should try to be honest; that we are foolishly obsessed with appearances; that deliberate cruelty is a sin. The postmodernist, however, insists that a play is not a sermon. He wants to have fun and he wants audiences to be surprised by what he writes. (99)

The argument Neil LaBute himself provides for depicting “human fallibility” (Bigsby, 14) seems highly reasonable: “If we don’t evaluate and re-evaluate ourselves, we fall into patterns and believe that what we’re doing is right. You fall into movements where no one questions the company line. That’s how fascism began. We have to constantly look at the ways we deal with each other” (qtd. in Bigsby, 14). Together with egoism and capitalism such behaviour leads

to a certain indifference towards our neighbours. This effect is well described by the Man in *This is how it goes*: “We’re weak, that’s really what it is. We are lazy and pushy and we want it all today. Or sooner, even. Now. And as long as we get it, our fair share – or a pinch more – well, then, who really gives a fuck what happens to anybody else?” (80). This comment seems like a confession as this is exactly the principle according to which the Man and Cody act in the play. They overcome the antipathy for each other to best serve their own individual wants and needs irrespective of Belinda’s feelings. That their deal is unethical is out of the question; however, LaBute adds a very unsettling aspect to the story. Even though Belinda has been deceived, she never finds out, and what she gets in the end because of the men’s agreement seems to be exactly what she wanted. She escaped an ill-fated marriage and in the end is convinced that she is “going to be happy” (77). Can deceiving someone be morally corrupt if the deceived person is happy with the ultimate result? Moreover, Belinda herself is not in an untainted moral position. She does not divorce her husband because she is too content with her standard of living. Instead, she cheats on him and accepts the divorce as a result. Does the fact that Cody is not a loving and caring husband make cheating justifiable? It is for the audience to decide.

Further questions Neil LaBute poses to his audiences are “What is art” and “How far would you go to produce art?”. These are especially important in *the shape of things* and *some girl(s)*. Evelyn, in *the shape of things*, uses a human being as the object for her master thesis. Not a crime against morality as such; however, Adam does not know that he is being used. She pretends to be sincerely interested in him until he finally proposes to her. In the end, Evelyn publicly clarifies and explains her deeds and thus humiliates Adam. She claims to have created “moral ambiguity [...] often in the direct proportion to the amount of external change” (121). What she means is that the more attractive Adam became, the more ““morally questionable”” (121) his actions were. Interestingly enough, Evelyn considers Adam cheating on her as morally questionable but is convinced that she has done nothing wrong by deceiving him: “i have always stood by the single and simple conceit that i am an artist. only that. i follow in a long tradition of artists who believe that there is no such concept as religion, or government, community or even family. there is only art.

art that must be created. whatever the cost" (122). Adam, on the other hand, has a totally different opinion:

[...] you know, when picasso took a shit, he didn't call it a 'sculpture'. he knew the difference. that's what made him picasso. and if i'm wrong about that, i mean, if i totally miss the point here and somehow puking up your own little shitty neuroses all over people's laps is actually art, then you oughta at least realize there's a price to it all...you know? somebody pays for your two minutes on cnn. someone always pays for people like you. and if you don't get that, if you can't see that much...then you're about two inches away from using babies to make lamp shapes and calling it 'furniture'. [...] there's gotta be a line. for art to exist, there has to be a line out there somewhere. [...] (133)

Adam and Evelyn take up entirely antithetical positions in this respect. Even though LaBute articulates his own opinion on this question in an interview¹⁷, he leaves it open for the spectators to decide with which position they want to sympathise. This is certainly not an easy question to answer, since just as Adam says at the beginning: "they're both pretty subjective: 'art.' 'truth.'" (8). Furthermore, even if she lied and deceived, we have to admit that judging from the perspective of contemporary ideals and requirements she has certainly made him more desirable.

The other play where the moral responsibility of the artist plays an important role is *some girl(s)*. Here, the Man uses his ex-girlfriends for his success as a writer. He pretends that these women still mean something to him and wants to "make amends" (51). In fact, though,

It is his peace of mind he seeks, not theirs and even then this project is compromised by its utility as source material for his career. He is a teacher with a disturbing capacity to learn nothing except the American conviction that in every disaster there is an opportunity, that every moral failure can be retooled in the service of celebrity. (Bigsby, 219)

In this case the audience will most probably take the women's side. Ignoring the price he has to pay for it, in *the shape of things*, Evelyn at least does something positive to Adam, whereas the Man in *some girl(s)* only causes more pain by stirring up painful memories in all of the women. Sam's memories and painful

¹⁷ „[...] I do understand her. I understand her drives. I don't know if I could ever agree with the methods that she used, but I understand her feelings...[...] when i was a student [...] theatre was more important than, certainly all my other classes and maybe life in general...I don't know that I could personally create at the cost of other people's feelings or lives...but I don't feel comfortable in putting myself in a place to judge an artist who does that...I don't know if art is ever too much – is there ever too far that we go." (qtd. in Bigsby, 81)

thoughts about their break-up, for instance, culminate in her highly unrealistic daydream, “where I imagined you were asking me here because you wanted to tell me that I was her. [...] That you needed to say that and ask me to run off with you to , I dunno, an *island* or back to Manhattan (20).

Autobiographical writing is certainly not morally reprehensible as such if the writer uses his memories; however, in this case he actively “re-uses” human beings for his writing and fully ignores their feelings. Wood characterises *some girl(s)* as a “less violent play than LaBute’s previous work, but its relationship remains typical: they [the viewers] are still asked to identify with the characters, examine the behaviour critically, and endure the discomfort of choosing for themselves.” (81)

Wood argues convincingly that various forms of violence can be found in LaBute’s plays, from more subtle versions of verbal violence to portrayals of utter brutality. The most striking example is certainly the attack on the homosexual in *a gaggle of saints*. Steyn’s analysis of John’s motives appropriately indicates their paradoxical nature:

[...] in Hitchcock’s small-town America, the psychopath is charmingly amoral; when today’s dramatists wander down Main Street, the psychopaths are, au contraire, charmlessly moral – they kill out of clear moral logic. As the fresh-faced young gay-basher says in *Bash*, “I know Scripture”. [...] Nothing puts your moral compass out of whack more than...traditional morality.

This claim is supported by Wood, who characterises LaBute as a writer who focusses on “how archaic values become comic and violent responses to contemporary social realities” (81). This certainly applies to *iphigenia in orem*, where a father kills his child because he is afraid to lose his job. Suspension of staff is a common phenomenon in contemporary society and a father who cannot support his family is of little value according to traditional views. We do not know how hard or violent it was when the young woman in *medea redux* tells her family about her pregnancy but she indicates that she certainly did not get a lot of support: “no matter if my dad got really shitty about it – and he did, believe me” (87) and “so we’ll skip the hardship stuff about when i did tell my family, and being pulled out ‘a school, the move to my aunt’s house...” (89) It seems that the conservative family could not reconcile a thirteen year-old pregnant girl with their traditional moral values and so she was moved out of the

way. In the context of domestic violence, also *This is how it goes* has to be mentioned. Even if the narrator admits that Belinda gave a different account of the event, it seems quite possible that a husband who uses so much verbal violence would also resort to physical cruelty.

5.4. CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

Neil LaBute confronts his audiences with numerous universal human vices, which he embeds into settings in contemporary America. In this context, Wood claims that “LaBute believes that radical individualism and unrestrained capitalism undermine the sense of ethics in the United States” (78). We are not confronted with desperate individuals who abandon their moral principles to escape social injustice, for instance, but rather with “the hollow lives of the bored, usually white, middle class” (Wood, 103). With their crimes LaBute’s characters accommodate their capitalist greed or their individual desires and then try to justify them, to the audience as well as to themselves, with their twisted morals. In many of the plays we find ourselves in small American communities where everybody is concerned what others think of them and where people are desperate to fit in: “The characters in LaBute’s plays and movies yearn for true community but fail to grasp that community comes only with shared responsibility for one’s own actions and cannot emerge in a moral vacuum.” (Bell, 104) As Bell points out, none of the characters are willing to pay their price, though. Why especially smaller towns are depicted in LaBute’s plays is explained in the introduction to *This is how it goes*: “I appreciate the quality of life while remaining suspicious of the notion that everything is better in a small town. Often everything is just smaller, not better. After all, it’s hard to appreciate diversity in a controlled environment [...]” (viii). And with such an issue of diversity we are confronted in this play. Cody was “the only black kid around for, like, a hundred miles or so” (22) and now is probably the only wealthy black member of the community. This is also the reason why he is so concerned about other people’s opinion of him. When Belinda has a blue eye, supposedly from hitting it somewhere, one of the first things Cody says is: “Hey, I’m the one who should be grumpy...the person who’s gonna suffer is me. The shit I’ll get for this’ll be unbelievable. [...] ‘Cody Phipps, black man, goes on rampage,’ shit

like that.”(38-39). Even though sometimes we perceive his worries as exaggerated, like in the restaurant at the beginning when he is ignored by the waitress, they are most probably not unfounded. This assumption is also supported by the Man’s behaviour. Even though he insists that he means “no disrespect” (25) and doesn’t “really think in that way, use those terms very often, because the good side of me, the *educated* portion, says ‘Hey, no, don’t you do that, we’re all God’s *chillun*’” (81-82), the audience will not believe this since numerous racist comments on his side accumulate. As Mendell points out, “Man denies that he is racist, but LaBute makes him remarkably unconvincing; he insists that the audience recognize that Man is exactly what he seems to be” (99). Moreover, the fact that not only the Man reveals racist behaviour but many others in the community is supported by what he himself says after his racist rant: “But raised like I was, where I was – by *whom* I was – and that crap is always right up there, near the surface, waiting to bubble over” (82). However, the Man puts aside his racial discrimination to some extent to achieve his individual goal. Also Cody makes a deal with someone who he knows to be racist to get what he wants: his money and reputation. Another stereotype LaBute reconstructs with Cody and Belinda are relationships in American high-schools. The perfect couple, he a sports-star, she a beautiful cheerleader, get married to serve their own purposes: She wants to stand out and annoy her parents, whereas Cody needs her as a kind of trophy to show off in town. The fact that a mixed marriage is still something that causes attention in small communities is pointed out by Belinda:

And I still get some kind of thrill from it...walking into an Arby’s or through Wal-Mart, with these two gorgeous children in tow. My little *pickaninnies* – that’s what my parents call them – with their light-colored eyes. I do. I mean, it might be old hat in a place like New York or wherever, but around here...it’s still a pretty big deal. (*Beat.*) These faces turning round to get a look at us, the whispering, and me with this fat checkbook and my head held up. (53)

In a way, *This is how it goes* is also a play about class. Cody has to compensate for his being black by demonstrating his wealth and his belonging to the upper middle class: “I’m good at it, and it makes me happy. I *love* making more money than any other guy in this town , ‘cause it just pisses ‘em off.” (44) One could argue that LaBute shows a black business man living the American dream. Cody stayed in town to show the people how successful a black person

can be, whereas the Man in *some girl(s)* left his hometown to escape exactly this small-town provincialism: “back then, when I’m just this scared teenager staring eternity in the face, I could see *myself* with that produce manager’s vest on and I suppose I got nervous and backed out of the situation the best way I knew how...” (13) This though, was not exactly the best way for his girlfriend at the time, whom he left without explanation to pursue his own career.

Another play in which such provincialism is depicted is *the shape of things*. Set in a “little college town in the middle of nowhere” (34), “p.d.a. public display of affection” still causes a sensation and after Evelyn presents her thesis, Adam can’t “show [his] face in the streets” as everybody knows him. Moreover, after “complaints from local townspeople” (9) the museum covers the penis on a Fornicelli statue because it looks too “*life-like*” (9). This prudish and certainly very conservative attitude is pointed out by Evelyn: “it would be a huge statement...especially for a town like this” (33).

Even if such uptight attitudes and the opportunism of the characters is not only restricted to the United States, LaBute explicitly portrays them in an American environment. Therefore, when summing up his portrayal of morality and American society it seems appropriate to quote Bell: “The implication is that human beings need a moral compass, externally expressed and internally realized, or they will end up adrift on the American sea of selfishness, opportunism, and amorality.” (Bell, 107)

6. INTERTEXTUALITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The works of Neil LaBute feature parallels to various authors, film-makers and literary genres, plot-wise and thematically as well as structurally. Among these are Euripides, G.B. Shaw, Harold Pinter, Eric Rohmer and Restoration Comedy.

LaBute is a writer who frequently comments on his own writing and the processes and influences involved. That is the reason why most of the assumptions made in secondary literature can be supported or disproved by his own analysis of his work.

6.1. GREEK MYTHOLOGY

In *iphigenia in orem* and *medea redux* LaBute's allusions to Euripides' tragedies are obvious. Various parallels with regard to content and dramatic technique can be identified. In *iphigenia in orem* we are not confronted with Agamemnon who needs to save his political career but with a young man who needs to save his professional career. To achieve this he is ready to sacrifice his daughter, very much like his ancient counterpart. As Mary English puts it, "[i]n both cases, literal sacrifices on the home front become necessities in the pursuit of career advancement." (27) In Euripides' tragedy Agamemnon's intrigue is discovered and in the end Iphigenia's life is saved by the goddess Artemis. In LaBute's play, however, the young man is successful in his plan and kills his daughter without anyone finding out. Once again, like in so many of his plays, the character gets away with his crime.

Also the woman in *medea redux* shares many aspects with Euripides' Medea. Like Medea in the ancient tragedy, the woman in LaBute's play falls in love with a man who later betrays her. Medea helps Jason to obtain the Golden Fleece and then leaves her family to marry him. Years later, however, Jason is married to Kreon's daughter and abandons Medea. She takes revenge by killing their two sons. The story of the woman in LaBute's *medea redux* is very similar: the teenager falls in love with her teacher and becomes pregnant. She has to leave her home and is moved to her aunt's place. All the time, even after she finds out that her teacher abandoned her and left town, she keeps their secret.

Years later, however, when she becomes aware of the teacher's affection for their son, she takes revenge and kills him. In this play references to mythology and Euripides' tragedies are also embedded in the text. As English points out, "the devotion of Young Woman in *medea redux* is rooted in her nostalgia for the type of love that possessed Medea." (32) This is illustrated by her description of their first kiss:

jesus, he kissed me like, i guess, you imagine how it must've been when they first invented it, like back in the days of myths and shit, when, you know, men were heroes and you could get kissed like that and you'd wait a lifetime for him to return, you would, and you could still taste him on your lips, years later, because back then kisses still meant something [...] (84-85)

Moreover, her teacher gives her a "picture book of several greek stories, mostly of euripides" because he argues that "euripides was the most, what, "humanistic"...had, like the most humanity of the greek writers." (86-87) As in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in Euripides' *Medea* the ending is different from LaBute's ending: "At the end of Euripides' play, the audience sees Medea witnessing her victory against her defeated oppressors; here instead LaBute replaces the ancient sorceress with an incarcerated heroine who can only imagine her lover's torment." (English, 34)

In *a gaggle of saints*, Mary English sees parallels to Euripides' *Bacchae*. In this play, however, these allusions are not as direct as in the other plays, and, as LaBute emphasises himself in a interview, were also not intended: "And there isn't really any Greek root, necessarily, to the third piece, "A Gaggle of Saints"" (LaBute interview Welch).

However, the author refers to an important aspect of dramatic technique which he found fascinating in Greek drama:

Since being a student, I've had an interest in the Greek theater: I love not just the stories but also the conventions of offstage violence. Much of the Greek storytelling technique employs extensive dialogue to tell the story, to move it along, so I tried to apply that to some kind of modern context. (LaBute interview Welch)

Like in *a gaggle of saints*, also in *iphigenia in orem* and *medea redux* we receive reports of extremely cruel deeds but never actually see any of them on stage.

Moreover, as has previously been discussed in various chapters, LaBute intends to achieve a similar effect in terms of audience response, as is pointed out by English: “Neil LaBute embodies the dramatic spirit of Euripides in that he seeks at once to provoke his audience and to challenge their values and ethical judgements.” (English, 24)

Another analogy to Greek mythology can be found in *the shape of things*. Here it is the myth of Pygmalion, which has already been used by various authors, like Henry James in *The Last of the Valeris*, Thomas Hardy in *Barbara of the House of Grebe*¹⁸ or G.B. Shaw¹⁹ in his drama *Pygmalion*. As Krüger-Fürhoff points out, “[m]eist geht es um eine Frau, die schön ist, aber leblos, oder schön, aber ungebildet, die also erst durch die erotischen oder pädagogischen Bemühungen eines Mannes ihr materielles bzw. soziales Leben erhält.“ (120) In LaBute’s play Adam is neither beautiful nor socially esteemed in the beginning but transforms and “improves” through Evelyn’s efforts. That the gender roles in *the shape of things* have been inverted has already been discussed in the chapter on gender. There is, however, another difference to the ancient myth and its adaptations, which is pointed out by LaBute himself: “there is something of that Pygmalion sensibility in that desire to mould something. But while Pygmalion is driven by a kind of love, there’s far less of that here because...love is something other than the figure that’s being moulded. It’s the work that she does.” (qtd. in Bigsby, 87).

6.2. ERIC ROHMER

Neil LaBute draws a parallel to the French film-maker Eric Rohmer in his introduction to *some girl(s)*:

I’ve always been an ardent admirer of the cinema of Eric Rohmer, that master chronicler of the nearly farcical sexual escapades of his fellow Parisians, and I suppose *some girl(s)* is my attempt to capture a bit of that gentle, wise, funny spirit on the theatrical stage. [...] His trilogy of perfect films from the late sixties-early seventies (*My Night at Maud’s*, *Claire’s Knee* and *Chloe in the Afternoon*) remain the benchmark by which stories of love and lust must be measured. (vii)

¹⁸ as pointed out by Krüger-Fürhoff

¹⁹ An allusion to Shaw’s *Pygmalion* can be found in the text when Adam comments on his development: “thank you... (cockney)...’enry ‘iggins.” (20)

The three films mentioned by LaBute are part of Rohmer's cycle *Six Moral Tales*, a title which certainly brings to mind LaBute's concern with morality in his plays. Moreover, these films,²⁰ also reveal a number of other parallels to the plays under discussion. In *My Night at Maud's* a Catholic man, who actually wants to marry another woman, spends the night at Maud's and has philosophical discussions with her. In *Claire's Knee* we are confronted with a nearly-married man who has desires for a teenager. *Chloe in the Afternoon* depicts a happily married man who develops a friendship with another woman, who then tries to seduce him. These films are concerned with such topics as love, lust, temptation, fidelity and the related moral implications. The correlation with LaBute's thematic concerns is striking. Moreover, in the introduction to *some girl(s)* LaBute refers to *Boyfriends and Girlfriends*, another film by Rohmer. He is impressed by the original title, which he falsely thinks to be *My Boyfriend's Girlfriend* (viii). In fact, though, the original title is *L'ami de mon amie*, which means *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend* and is also more illustrative of the film's content. In the film, four highly different characters are depicted. Two entirely dissimilar women become friends and a kind of partner exchange between them takes place. Here, one can find analogies to *This is how it goes* and also *the shape of things*. In the first play, one partner becomes the object of an exchange deal and in the latter the characters have short affairs with their friends' partners. Further thematic correlations can also be identified with Rohmer's film *A Summer's Tale*. Here, a man has relationships or rather affairs with various women, always taking the most convenient option that is offered to him. With his behaviour he hurts especially one of the women, although the man "evinces little regret for his actions" (Fuller). The man in Rohmer's film, called Gaspard, has many features in common with the Man in LaBute's *some girl(s)*.

In addition to thematic parallels one can find similarities in the dramatique technique of Rohmer and LaBute. Rohmer's description of his film cycle *Six Moral Tales* would also apply to LaBute's plays: "They aren't films in which physical action takes place, they aren't films in which there is anything very dramatic, they are films in which a particular feeling is analyzed and where even

²⁰ Cf. Internet Movie Database

the characters themselves analyze their feelings and are very introspective." (qtd. in Fuller) Also, in various of LaBute's plays not much action actually takes place on stage but is either reported or even wholly omitted in favour of the portrayal of the characters' feelings.

Likewise, with respect to the elimination of poetic justice in his plays LaBute refers to Eric Rohmer: "[...] I'm like the Eric Rohmer school of 'I'm going to stand here. I'm going to photograph this, and we'll watch it together later to see what it looks like.' I'm not here to judge these people. I'm here to present them." (qtd. Givens, review *Daily Mail*)

6.3. HAROLD PINTER

LaBute does not make a secret of his admiration for Harold Pinter, something he elaborates on in the introduction to *This is how it goes*:

I dedicated the play itself to Harold Pinter because, besides being a terrific writer, he continues to inspire me by his fearless examination of men and women while searching for answers, hoping for change, raging for equality – but never ducking for cover. Who can ask for more? What I really admire about Mr Pinter's work – and strive for in my own – is that the point is not merely to upset people, but that what he's addressing is worth getting upset over. His numerous plays and screenplays have also been extremely instrumental in teaching me a thing or two about structure, along with the cardinal rule of writing (and cocktail parties): be interesting rather than well liked. (viii)

This last aspect is definitely also true for Neil LaBute since he is an author who certainly polarises. As Bigsby points out, "[h]e disturbs in the same way as Harold Pinter, describing a familiar world but one in which motives are often obscured, relationships seldom what they appear." (8) This elusiveness of truth, which is especially prominent in *This is how it goes* can, for instance, also be found in Pinter's *The Collection*. The play is about two couples, Bill and Harry and Stella and James. It focuses on the question whether Stella and Bill had a one-night-stand and ends with James' words "That's the truth...isn't it?" (157). Like in LaBute's play we are left in the dark as to what really happened.

Moreover, one can find certain parallels in the settings of the two writers' plays. All of the four plays analysed in this thesis begin and end in "Silence. Darkness", a stage direction which can frequently be found in Pinter's plays: *The Caretaker* begins in silence (16) and ends with a "Long silence." (87), *The*

Collection and *The Room* end with a blackout (157, 126) and at the end of *Old Times* Pinter uses the direction “silence” or “Long silence” seven times (69-70).

However, not only structural and atmospheric but also thematic parallels can be identified. Milne describes Pinter’s plays as “a theatre of images involving domestic violence, territorial struggles and linguistic conflict.” (233) The first two aspects also apply to LaBute’s texts. For instance, domestic violence can be found in *This is how it goes* as well as in *a gaggle of saints* and implicitly in *medea redux*, and we are confronted with territorial struggles in *iphigenia in orem*, where a man has to defend his position at work. Another correlation can be found in Milne’s description of the effect of Pinter’s political plays, like *One for the Road* or *Party Time*:

These plays seem designed to make admirers of Pinter’s work uncomfortable by confronting audiences and readers with the politics of complacency and cynicism [...]. Scenes of explicit violence in the plays seem designed, moreover to show how the political abuse of power is not abstract or metaphorical but part of the micro-politics of everyday life. (238)

Even if LaBute’s plays are not as overtly political, many of them will also leave their audiences highly uncomfortable. Violence might not be shown on stage but is often reported; moreover, it is exactly these power relationships in everyday life that LaBute intends to disclose:

I am fascinated by small groups of people who are related through friendship, work, marriage. I like taking that group and trying to find some way to turn it on its ear, and that is often based on power. ‘I want the job that you have. I want the man or the woman that you are with. I want something different than we have now.’ It is a shift in the power dynamics and certainly in one of the traditional power dynamics of a relationship. (qtd. in Bigsby, 241)

6.4. RESTORATION COMEDY

Once again Neil LaBute refers to one of his influences himself: “Like the Restoration playwrights I so admire, I love the idea of criticizing my audience as I entertain them.” (*Your Friends & Neighbours*, vii) Moreover, he describes Restoration comedy as a genre which “gets down to the dirt of the way we live with each other and treat each other.” (qtd. in Lahr, 12) This can certainly also be said of LaBute’s works for the stage. Moreover, he characterises the Restoration rakes as “well-to-do people with time on their hands who go around

hurting each other, doing things that are pretty unpleasant, just because opportunity presents itself.” (qtd. in Lahr, 12) He said this in relation to one of his films, *In the Company of Men*, where two men deliberately trick and hurt a deaf woman. This aspect, though, is also true for his play *a gaggle of saints* where three young men exhibit highly brutal behaviour which was totally uncalled for.

In addition, LaBute refers to the time when “[t]here was still the sense that it was better to look good than feel good” (qtd. in Lahr, 12) This is especially important in the context of *the shape of things*. Evelyn tries to assure Adam of the fact that she only improved his appearance: “everything i did made you a more desirable person, adam. people began to notice you...take interest in you.” (128) As to the inverted gender roles in the play it seems appropriate to quote Gill’s analysis of the female villain in the Restoration comedy of manners:

But the closer female characters come to behaving like rakes – the more seductive their speech and duplicitious their actions – the more threatening they are to the traditional realms of masculine social and discursive power. Intelligent, sexually versed women comfortably inhabit these two masculine domains and so transgress cultural categories, calling gender and sexual boundaries into question in progress. (194-195)

If we ignore the temporal context of this critical comment it could also have been made with regard to LaBute’s character Evelyn. She is both of the above, intelligent and sexually versed, and does everything to achieve her aim. This is an analogy which is also pointed out by Oney: “Where LaBute’s characters most intersect with the Restoration rake heroes is their willingness to take whatever steps are necessary to gratify their needs.” (42) This is a feature which can doubtlessly be found in most of LaBute’s characters: the young man in *iphigenia in orem*, the woman in *medea redux*, Evelyn in *the shape of things*, the Man and Cody in *This is how it goes* and the Man in *some girl(s)*. It appears that there is a further connection between one of the best-known Restoration comedies, *The Country Wife* by Wycherley, and a LaBute play. The rake Horner pretends to be impotent to be able to have countless affairs with married women. One of these wives, Margery Pinchwife, falls in love with him and, as Corman argues, “the Horner/Pinchwife plot is unsettling in its providing Margery with a window of opportunity for a happier life before slamming that window shut. She will never again be the silly innocent we first meet.” (60) In this plot

one can find correlations to the Man's relationship with Sam in *some girl(s)*. Innocent as she was in high school she imagined a future with him and when meeting him again imagines running away with him, only to be entirely disappointed and brought back to reality twice. Another Restoration rake, Dorimant in Etheredge's *The Man of Mode*, shows some similarities to the Man in *some girl(s)*: "As cruel and vain as he is charming, he glibly seduces and abandons women who unwisely engage with him on his own terms." (Gill, 196)

Moreover, Corman adds a pertinent comment on the treatment of moral problems in Wycherley's plays: "Wycherley raises a number of difficult moral issues about private life and especially love and marriage [...] without offering comfortable solutions or resolutions [...]." Clearly, we find a very similar handling of ethical questions in LaBute's plays. A telling example is Horner, who is not punished for his behaviour, a feature which can also be found in numerous of LaBute's plays, where the audience is denied the comfort of poetic justice.

7. RECEPTION ON VIENNESE STAGES

In this section the reception of the texts analysed above will be dealt with, in what way audiences and critics responded to the plays and the productions of these plays on Viennese stages. A further issue will be the comparison of the results of the above analysis with the critics' understanding of the texts.

Moreover, it will be examined how the critics categorise LaBute's plays in respect to other writers or styles. Also, in the relevant plays, it will be examined whether the cultural artefacts (LaBute's theatrical texts) were successfully transferred or whether the critics had certain objections, for example whether they particularly resented the supposed Americanness of some of his plays. Where applicable, also the reception of the premieres of the plays, either in London or New York, will be compared with the reviews of the Viennese productions.

Before turning to the actual reviews a few interesting observations have to be made. Most of Neil LaBute's plays premiere either in London or in New York. Although the writer has gained widespread approval among critics and academics his plays usually premiere at off-broadway or non-West End theatres. *Bash* premiered at the Douglas Fairbanks Theatre in New York (24 June 1999), *the shape of things* at the Almeida Theatre in London (24 May 2001), *some girl(s)* at the Gielgud Theatre also in London (12 May 2005) and *This is how it goes* at the Public Theatre in New York (27 March 2005). In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* he explains why he prefers smaller theatres: "[...] My favourite kind of theatre rather is that theatre where you take away some of the...some of the safety from the audience by putting the audience close or breaking the fourth wall" (LaBute interview Jones)

In Vienna, the spectators made the acquaintance of LaBute in a much more prominent venue. The first production of one of his plays, which was *bash*, was staged in the Akademietheater (22 May 2001), one of the major national theatres. Also his further productions were staged in the Akademietheater (*the shape of things*, 6 September 2002, *some girl(s)*, 26 October 2006) or at the Theater in der Josefstadt (*This is how it goes*, 6 December 2007). Especially the latter production is striking since LaBute's plays do not necessarily seem to

be designed for the conservative and bourgeois audience the Josefstadt is known for. Also, his play *The Mercy Seat*, in German *Tag der Gnade*, was staged by the Burgtheater company in the small experimental stage, Kasino am Schwarzenbergplatz (2003). Moreover, various of his plays were staged with success in smaller theatres, also in the provinces. *Autobahn* was produced at the Landestheater in St.Pölten (2009), *Tag der Gnade* in the Salzburger Kammerspiele (2009) and *Fat Pig*, in German *Fettes Schwein*, in the Theater Phoenix in Linz (2007).

Another highly interesting aspect is the cast of the productions. The theatre in London is generally referred to as a writers' theatre, whereas the theatre in Vienna rather focusses on the actors. Neil LaBute's plays seem to be an exception in this respect. The productions in London and New York had an absolute star cast. However, these were not actors who became popular in the theatre, but primarily in TV series and films. In *bash*, for instance, Calista Flockhart, who is very well-known from the TV series *Ally McBeal*, starred as the woman in *medea redux* and also as Sue in *a gaggle of saints*. Rachel Weisz, familiar from various high quality as well as actoin movies, played Evelyn in *the shape of things*. In *some girl(s)*, David Schwimmer, a star from the very well-known series *Friends*, played the Man and Catherine Tate, a famous British comedian, Sam. Ben Stiller and Amanda Peet played the Man and Belinda in *This is how it goes*. Most of these actors are known from highly amusing but rather trivial series or movies. Most certainly, this then had an influence on the audience of the productions. The viewers were probably younger and less conservative than the Viennese audiences. Also, since many of these actors come from the genre of comedy, they may have taken away a bit of the heaviness LaBute's plays can sometimes develop. In the Viennese productions, there were few actors with a career on TV or in film. Apart from Dominique Horwitz, known from numerous productions for German TV, Johanna Wokalek, who lately starred in the film *Die Päpstin* and Ben Becker, only actors with a reputation in the theatre were cast. Therefore, the audience and their expectations were certainly different from those of the English and American productions. One has to take into consideration though, that in Austrian theatres, the tradition that TV- and film-actors play in theatres is not

much established. Moreover, one cannot compare international celebrities like David Schwimmer to actors from local TV series. Of course, this does not say anything about the quality of the actors, but it may influence the viewers' anticipation.

7.1. *BASH*

During the Wiener Festwochen 2001 *bash* was staged in the Akademietheater as a guest performance of the Hamburger Kammerspiele. The play was performed with Ben Becker as John in *a gaggle of saints*, Judith Engel as Sue and the woman in *medea redux* and Uwe Böhm as the young man in *iphigenia in orem*, and directed by the famous Peter Zadek.

Generally, one can say that the critics responded very positively to the production, although in some of the reviews the director and the actors received more enthusiastic comments than the play itself. In terms of the interpretation of the play, the review in the *Wiener Zeitung* corresponds to a fairly high degree to the conclusions reached in this thesis. The critic, Hilde Haider-Pregler, describes LaBute's technique very aptly: "Ihn beschäftigt die Frage nach der in jedem Menschen schlummernden Bereitschaft zu physischer und emotionaler Grausamkeit, ohne dabei das Publikum mit politisch korrekter Betroffenheitsdramatik zu konfrontieren." The portrayal of such cruelty is also commented on in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Pfoser) and in the *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* (Kitzmantel). The first describes the tone in which these atrocities are presented ("Alles wird in einem Ton vorgebracht, als ob es sich um lauter kleine, aber überlegte Bubenstreiche handelte.") and the latter focusses on the effect of this form of presentation („Die beiläufige Bösartigkeit in LaBute's Texten fasziniert, stößt ab, nimmt gefangen.“). Also the *Presse* mentions the casualness as well as the colloquial language with which LaBute's characters depict their crimes (Cf. Petsch). This style is also commented on by Zadek, who is quoted in the review of the *Standard*: *bash* has "den Ton einer schlechten Fernsehserie und den Inhalt einer griechischen Tragödie. Diese Kombination fand ich äußerst spannend." (Niedermeier) References to TV, not to series but talkshows, are also made by the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Pfoser) and the *Wiener Zeitung* (Haider-Pregler, 25/26 May 2001).

As LaBute has directed numerous films, as pointed out by the *Presse* (Petsch), this comparison suggests itself. In this context the review in the *Kronenzeitung* is worth mentioning. The critic, Thomas Gabler, claims that LaBute employs only clichés: “Die beherrscht jeder Fernsehfilmautor besser.” That LaBute depicts the cliché of the wealthy white middle class who has a clean record is out of the question. However, the critic seems to have missed that LaBute breaks with exactly this stereotype by making them murderers.

Moreover, many of the other reviews bring up the references to ancient tragedy mentioned by Zadek. The *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Pfoser), the *Wiener Zeitung* (Haider-Pregler, 25/26 May 2001), the *Standard* (Niedermeier) and the *Kurier* (Kathrein) speak about the general allusions to Greek drama very neutrally. Only the critic in the *Kronenzeitung* (Gabler, 24 May 2001), who wrote the only negative review, and Karin Kathrein in the *Kurier* criticise the parallels to the Medea-myth. The first refers to *medea redux* as the “X-te Medea Version” and the latter says: “Das alles wirkt ein wenig eindimensional, plakativ und in den aufdringlichen Wasser-Metaphern der Medea-Paraphrase penetrant [...]” It seems that the numerous previous adaptations of this myth have oversaturated the market.

Another intriguing facet of the reception is the way the critics categorize LaBute, which schools or traditions they think he follows and to which writers they compare him. Haider-Pregler, in the review of the *Wiener Zeitung* (26/26 May 2001), states that LaBute is a master in the field of the well-made play. Aspects like the secret in the plot, the suspense and the turning point in the climactic scene are certainly elements which can be found in LaBute’s texts. The revelation at the end of a well-made play, however, is certainly not typical of LaBute.

In the *Presse* (Petsch), on the other hand, LaBute is placed in the Anglo-Saxon short story and crime tradition. This parallel seems plausible, especially, in view of the drastic turning point and open endings many short stories have. Moreover, the critic Barbara Petsch sees traces of the American Writing Labs Neil LaBute has attended. In addition, she compares him to two other authors: “Die Minidramen [...] wirken weniger witzig-“sophisticated” als die Kreationen seiner französischen Kollegin Yasmina Reza und nüchterner als die Werke der Britin Sarah Kane. Es ist ein gewisser Fatalismus, der die drei Schreiber

verbindet [...].“ That witty comments or episodes can sometimes be overshadowed by the serious undertone of LaBute plays is certainly a possibility. Thematically, various parallels to Yasmina Reza can be identified: verbal confrontations, escalation of conflicts or the question “What is art?”. Also, LaBute’s texts certainly have similarities to in-er-face theatre. Expressive language and the portrayal of violence are elements of his plays and his texts have strong effects on the audience as well. Cornelia Niedermeier, in the *Standard* review, compares LaBute to Mamet and the American film-maker Cassavetes: “Geschult an der präzisen Kühle, den exakten Spielregeln eines David Mamet, der psychologischen Genauigkeit eines John Cassavetes [...]“. The resemblance to Mamet seems very likely since LaBute himself characterises his relationship to this author as follows: “beyond fan – stalker perhaps. Psychological stalker.” (qtd. in Lahr, 15). John Cassavetes was one of the first who made independent films and also LaBute has had success with low-budget independent movies like *In the Company of Men* or *Your Friends and Neighbours*. In the review of the *Wiener Zeitung* (25/26 May 2001), Hilde Haider-Pregler sees a parallel between *iphigenia in orem* and Arthur Miller’s play *Death of a Salesman*. This is an interesting and definitely pertinent observation if one considers the pressure on this profession.

Another highly interesting aspect that is mentioned in various reviews is the Americanness of the play *bash*. When outlining the parallels to Greek drama, Karin Kathrein in the *Kurier*, says about the third monologue, *a gaggle of saints*: “Der dritte, in seiner absoluten Gewissenlosigkeit bestürzendste, kann vor allem auf Ahnherrn in Amerika verweisen”. Most probably, the critic hints at LaBute’s portrayal of the wealthy white middle class and their enforcement of their sometimes morbid morals. This is exactly the way the critic in the *Standard* (Niedermeier) sees LaBute’s characters: “Seine Protagonisten sind die netten, wohlhabenden, ausreichend situierten Männer und Frauen der Middle Class, [...] allerdings ohne die moralische Verklärung Hollywoods.” Moreover, Cornelia Niedermeier is certainly right in arguing that LaBute’s texts lack political correctness. In this context she also comments on the relationship the American public has to his plays and characterises it as “etwas neurotisch”. To illustrate this she tells an anecdote about a man in the audience who reacted strongly to a homophobic rant of a character in a New York production of LaBute’s play

Filthy Talk for Troubled Times. This spectator jumped up, shouting “Kill the playwright” (LaBute interview Istel). In this context it is interesting what LaBute has to say about the phenomenon of audience protests: “Years ago, plays used to cause riots in theatres all over the world, though you hear very little of such cases any more.” (LaBute interview Istel) He also emphasises that his plays are not controversial only to create attention but to convey a message (Cf. LaBute interview Istel). This message, however, seems not to have reached various US critics, if we consider various quotes from American reviews of the premiere of *bash* in New York: “The heavy-handed irony doesn’t justify the graphic description of violence” (O’Toole), “It is oversimplified and mean-spirited, aiming to shock the liberals who make up its audience” and “If you ask these vacuous wind-up toys- and their creator- “Why are you telling me this?” the only answer you’ll get is: “For cheap thrill”” (Hannaham). Some of these critics must have felt offended by the allusions to American society.

Although various critics reacted negatively to certain elements in *bash*, such strong affects prove that LaBute is able to provoke intense responses from his audiences.

7.2. THE SHAPE OF THINGS

Das Maß der Dinge had its first German performance in Salzburg as part of the the “Young Directors Project” of the Salzburg Festival in August 2002 and then moved to the Akademietheater with the same cast. It was directed by Igor Bauersima and featured Daniel Jesch as Adam, Johanna Wokalek as Evelyn, Dorothee Hartinger as Jenny and Raphael von Bargen as Phillip. As in the case of *bash*, the play was less liked than the performance of the actors, the director and the stage design.

In addition to that, other parallels to the reviews of *bash* can be found. Numerous critics comment on LaBute’s colloquial language and compare it to that of talkshows or sitcoms. In some of the reviews this is referred to as a merit, in others as a shortcoming. Both the *Kronenzeitung* (Gabler, 8 Sept. 2002) and the *Kurier* (Wiesauer) refer to the language of the play as “Talkshow-Gesülze”, whereas the *Presse* (Steiner) and the *Falter* (Cerny) consider the fact that LaBute meets the tone of sitcoms as a trivial but amusing element: “Soap-

geschulter Beziehungsboulevard" (*Falter*) and "Dialoge, [...] als hätte der US-amerikanische Autor bei der Sitcom "Friends" gelernt" (*Presse*). It is highly interesting that various critics comment on the translation of the text, a rather rare phenomenon. They all agree that the translator was not successful in conveying LaBute's tone: "die Sätze in der Übertragung Jakob Krauts klingen wie aus dem Sprachkurs" (Thuswaldner, 5 August 2002), "von Jakob Kraut in schnoddriges Deutsch übertragen" (Haider-Pregler, 9 Sept. 2002) and "Jakob Krauts Übersetzung hält sich mehr an deutsches Laisser-faire bei Wendungen und Endungen" (Gabler, 8 Sept. 2002).

Again, like in the review on *bash* in the *Wiener Zeitung*, Hilde Haider-Pregler (9 Sept. 2002) regards LaBute as an accomplished author of well-made plays. Also Caro Wiesbauer in the *Kurier* refers to *the shape of things* as a well-made play. Like Barbara Petsch in her review on *bash* in the *Presse*, Haider-Pregler (9 Sept. 2002) also identifies a strong likeness to the style that is taught in writing programmes at American universities. Other parallels are drawn by the critic in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Thuswaldner, 5 August 2002), who compares LaBute to Edward Albee: "Seit Edward Albee [...] ist diese Art, Stücke mit Dialogen zu schreiben, die geschmeidig ineinander greifen, bekannt. [...] Geredet wird über scheinbar Banales, doch die Sprache kann unversehens eine zutiefst verletzende Schärfe annehmen." The technique of writing dialogues employed in *the shape of things* resembles Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Interestingly enough, LaBute actually makes a reference to exactly this play in *This is how it goes*. No doubt, LaBute is aware which tradition he is part of.

Only one critic, that of the *Öberösterreichische Nachrichten* (Lindenbauer), comments on the American setting of the play and calls it a "zynische und drastische Breitseite gegen die amerikanisch-individualistische Ideologie der Machbarkeit." The setting of the play, in a small college town, is certainly very American although it has to be mentioned that the obsession with appearances and the almost pathological selfishness of many individuals is not solely an American phenomenon.

Most of the critics disliked the construction, especially the ending of the play and the artificiality of the characters. The *Wiener Zeitung* (Haider-Pregler, 9 Sept. 2002) and the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Thuswaldner, 5 August 2002)

speak of the characters as constructed. As regards Phillip and Jenny they have a point since these characters have not a lot of depth. In addition, the critic in the *Kurier* criticised the numerous allusions to writers and their works and considered them as gratuitous (Wiesauer). One has to bear in mind, however, that if these references are understood they can be very amusing and, moreover, this is the only domain in which Adam can show superiority to Evelyn. In other words the intertextuality in the play is employed as a technique of characterisation. Both the critics in the *Kurier* (Wiesauer) and the *Falter* (Cerny) complain that the ending is much too long and too moralistic. Nonetheless, they found the major part of the play amusing. Bettina Steiner and Ronald Pohl in the *Presse* (9 Sept. 2002) and the *Standard* share this view: the play is good until the serious ending ruins it all. Whereas the *Presse* puts it mildly, “[e]ine tolle Inszenierung eines zu witzigen Stücks, das leider auf einer tollen Idee beruht”, the critic in the *Standard* (Pohl, 9 Sept. 2002) does not mince his words: “Und was wunderbar leichtfüßig wirkte, als unter der unsichtbaren Androhung des viel zu großen Thesenhammers ein gliederzerrendes Postpubertätstückchen ablief, [...] zerfällt nun zu Staub: Argumente, Begierde, Sensationen.“ In contrast, notwithstanding of the fact that the reviewers of the original production at the Almeida Theatre in London were not entirely convinced of the quality of the play either, they agreed that LaBute deals with an important and “thought-provoking” (Spencer, 1 June 2001) topic: “What is art?” and “How far can you go to produce art?”

However, even if only a minority of the critics in Austria fully appreciated the play itself, they agreed that it was very well received by the audience in the Akademietheater.

7.3. SOME GIRL(S)

Like the other plays, *some girl(s)* was staged in the Akademietheater in October 2006. This production was directed by Dieter Giesing and had Christian Nickel as the Man, Sylvie Rohrer as Sam, Johanna Wokalek as Tyler, Petra Morzé as Lindsay and Mareike Sedl as Bobbie. Again, the audience seems to have liked the play more than the critics, who found fault with various elements.

Some of the reviews criticised the language of the play. “Der trocken-leichte Ton will nicht ganz glücken” opines the *Kronenzeitung* (Gabler, 28 Oct. 2006); likewise, the translation is described as having a „neudeutsche[n] Ton” (. The critic in the cultural magazine *Aurora* (Werndl) finds LaBute’s language uninspired. The critic in the *Presse* (Mayer) complains about the “gestelzte Redeweise halbintellektueller Amerikaner”.

Concerning the construction of the plot and the characters one can find only very few positive comments. Maria Klinger in the *Wiener Zeitung* considers *some girl(s)* perfect boulevard theatre and Norbert Mayer in the *Presse* emphasises that despite the repetitive character of the play it is never boring. Margarete Affenzeller in the *Standard* characterises the play as amusing; in her review LaBute is again compared to Yasmina Reza, as having the same standard or level but not the same “Gerissenheit” as the female playwright. Most of the other reviews, however, complain about various shortcomings. The critic in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Thuswaldner, 28 Oct. 2006) is very drastic in his portrayal of the Man’s character: “Er ist ein Würstchen, ein Nichts, nicht einmal in seiner Charakterlosigkeit ein bisschen interessant.“ Guido Tartarotti in the *Kurier* disapproves of the characterisation; he argues that the characters do not undergo any kind of development and that they are only personified clichés. With regard to the Man’s character he may be right, although this was most probably exactly what LaBute intended. He wanted to show that this character is not able to learn from his errors in any way and leaves it to the audience to judge this static figure and his offensive behaviour. As to the construction of the plot various defects are pointed out by the reviewers. The *Kurier* (Tartarotti) describes the ending as lame, the critic for *Aurora* (Werndl) laments that the play lacks a proper crisis and the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Thuswaldner, 28 Oct. 2006) finds the plot highly artificial.

The text does not allow any indeterminacies as regards the twist of the play, that is to say that the Man’s motivation for these visits is to collect material for an article to be published in *Esquire*. When Bobbie finds the microphone (why should he tape the conversations if he did not intend to use them?) he says:

[...] For *years* I tried to, you know, while I’m off teaching...and then suddenly I found my voice. I did. In my own romantic *foibles*! (*Tries to laugh.*) See, and now, all the sudden, I’m a writer and respected and,

you know, I got this taste...this *minor* taste of some celebrity. Okay? So I was, I just thought, you know, what the hell! I'd do like, a follow-up to it...a kind of non-fiction deal. I spoke to the *Esquire* and they're interested so I started taping all these...[...] (75-76)

He then makes a pathetic attempt to save the situation: "[...] but that's not why I had to come here. It *isn't*. What I've said about us was true, all my feelings for you." This is not at all credible since he has already admitted that he drew the names from a hat, i.e., chose the women randomly, so to speak. Moreover, he is not exclusively interested in Bobbie; clear evidence to the contrary are his visits to five other women before her.

However, many of the critics seem to have missed this speech of the Man. The review in *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Thuswaldner, 28 Oct. 2006) considers the Man's main motivation to make sure that he has chosen the right girl and not missed any better woman. This may be a side-effect of his visits but surely not his main intention. The critic in the *Presse* (Mayer) thinks that the Man visits the ex-girlfriends who meant the most to him, which is simply not true. Wolfgang Kralicek in the *Falter* (44: 2006) even argues that the playwright leaves open the Man's real motivation. Also, Thomas Gabler in the *Kronenzeitung* (28 Oct. 2006) seems to have missed the Man's explanation. Although we never actually see the Man's article in the *Esquire*, there cannot be any doubt about his motives. Only three reviewers do not miss the point and understand the Man's motives as spelt out by the text: Affenzeller in *The Standard*, Tartarotti in the *Kurier* and Reiterer in the *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*.

Another interesting aspect of the reviews is the critics' perception of LaBute's oeuvre and the effect of his plays on the audience. In the *Wiener Zeitung* Maria Klinger mentions the ambiguity of LaBute's plays and emphasises the quite drastic twists his plays often have. In the review in the *Standard*, Margarete Affenzeller also comments on this aspect and argues that one can never be sure about LaBute's characters since they are good and bad at the same time. Guido Tartarotti in the *Kurier* complains that the play does not have a twist at the end and that there is no catharsis. As elaborated in the above analysis, the play does have a twist, although not at the very end. In the conversations with the first three women the possibility that the Man really wants to right some wrongs is still there. The turning point is reached after his

visit to Lindsay when we get to know that he taped the conversations and when he explains his motive to Bobbie. In the *Falter* (Kralicek, 44:2006) LaBute's plays are characterised as "gute Unterhaltung mit schalem Nachgeschmack". This goes together with Tartarotti's comment about the lack of catharsis. The audience does certainly not leave the theatre purified and LaBute's plays often leave a bad taste in the spectators' mouths. This effect is achieved by the denial of poetic justice. His characters get away with their crimes and so the challenge to judge them is left to the audience. One does not leave any performance of LaBute's plays lighthearted. His plays may be amusing but they also deal with serious subjects that force the viewers to doubt and evaluate themselves and their own actions. The most interesting review in this respect comes from Kristina Werndl in *Aurora*: "Dass LaBute die Fragwürdigkeit dieses Mannes letztlich nicht angreift, ist das große Ärgernis von Some Girl(s)." The reaction of the critic clearly indicates that LaBute achieved exactly what he intended: he does not want to hand his moral view to his audiences on a silver platter but he wants them to understand and judge the ethical misconduct of his characters themselves.

7.4. THIS IS HOW IT GOES

This is how it goes was produced at the Josefstadt in 2007. First of all, it has to be emphasised that this play, with its politically highly incorrect language and its rather unconventional structure, is a bold choice for the Josefstadt and its rather conservative audience, something the critic in *Österreich* (-hir) is entirely unaware of: "Die deutschsprachige Erstaufführung passt punktgenau ins Theater in der Josefstadt." Kralicek's argumentation in the *Falter* (50:2007) seems much more convincing. He aptly remarks that: "Seine *well-made-plays* werden gern gespielt, weil sie gutes Schauspielfutter bieten und dem Abopublikum das aufregende Gefühl vermitteln, einmal etwas echt Arges zu sehen."

The play was directed by Torsten Fischer and had Dominique Horwitz as the Man, Sandra Cervik as Belinda and Nikolaus Okonkwo as Cody. Once again, the reviews diverge considerably.

First of all, it will be analysed how the critics view the play and LaBute's writing in general as well as how the audiences reacted to the performance. The director Torsten Fischer characterised the play as follows: "Es ist auch Boulevard. [...] Und es ist vom Text her auch eine Gratwanderung zwischen Kömodie und Tragödie, zwischen Krimi und Psychogramm. Das ist reizvoll aber auch diffizil." (Jarolin) Like many of LaBute's texts *This is how it goes* bears the semblance of boulevard theatre at the first glance but in fact is much more multifaceted. This aspect, however, is ignored in the review in the *Kurier* (Schmitzberger): "Bei einer intelligenten, gut gebauten US-amerikanischen Boulevardkomödie mit Krimifaktor und einer überraschenden Wende." Also the critic in the *Kurier* emphasises the triviality of the play. Wolfgang Kralicek's analysis in the *Falter* (50:2007) arrives at a similar assessment: „Schauspieler glänzen in einem Stück, das besser aussieht als es ist: typisch Neil LaBute.“ In contrast to that, in the *Neues Volksblatt* (Wagner) the play is described as having a very high standard. Also, the critic in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Strobl) compliments LaBute's on his way of constructing plays: "[...] das ist auch die Kunst von Neil LaBute, der virtuos bei aller Drastik vieles offen lässt." Whereas in this review the ambiguity of his text is listed as an asset, other critics see this differently. Schmitzberger in the *Kurier* puts it as follows: "Dass die Kategorien Gut und Böse bloß eine Frage der Perspektive sind. Und alles auch ganz anders hätte sein können. Ein guter dramaturgischer Griff. Aber einer, der sich abnützt. Ungewissheit allein ist nicht abendfüllend." Indeed, Ronald Pohl in the *Standard* (11 Dec. 2007) thinks that the surprise effect of the play does not raise its quality. Also, the critic in the *Wiener Zeitung* (Urbanek) considers the turning points in the play to be grotesque and not really exciting. In addition, Kralicek in the *Falter* (50:2007) considers the twist in the play as a LaBute stereotype: "Drittens läuft, wie immer bei Neil LaBute, alles auf eine zynische Pointe hinaus [...]"

The ambiguity of the text is certainly enforced through the narrator figure, an aspect which most of the reviews refer to. *Österreich* (-hir), the *Wiener Zeitung* (Urbanek), the *Presse* (-norb), the *Standard* (Pohl, 11 Dec. 2007), the *Falter* (Kralicek, 50:2007), the *Kurier* (Schmitzberger) and the *Neues Volksblatt* (Wagner) all comment on the narrator's unreliability. Schmitzberger in the *Kurier* considers this technique to be a "guter dramaturgischer Griff" and the critic in

the *Presse* (-norb) describes the Man as follows: “Man weiß es nicht, denn der „Mann“ ist eine Art Westentaschenschurke in Shakespeare-Tradition, dem man nicht zu schnell vertrauen sollte.”

In contrast to the reception of the other plays, only one critic considers analogies between *This is how it goes* and plays by other writers. Ronald Pohl in the *Standard* (11 Dec. 2007) claims that LaBute uses Ibsen’s analytical technique in his play, although in a slightly confused manner. The only other allusion is made to Billy Wilder. The critic in the *Wiener Zeitung* (Urbanek) recounts the anecdote in which Billy Wilder had a dream about the perfect movie and, still dozing, took notes. When he woke up in the morning the sheet of paper read “boy meets girl”. The disillusioning effect this probably had on Wilder is compared to the effect *This is how it goes* has on the audience: “Und so wie Wilder wohl etwas ernüchtert aus seinem Traum aufwacht, tut man dies auch ein wenig als Zuschauer nach der 100-minütigen Premiere.”

Also LaBute’s proximity to TV is only mentioned in one review. In the *Kurier* (Schmitzberger) his language is defined as “realitätsnah und alltäglich. Zwischen Sonntags-Krimi und Sitcom.”

In terms of the play’s effect various other interesting observations can be made. Not only is it left to the audience to decide what is true and what is false, also judging the characters is left to the spectators. The former aspect is addressed in the review in *Österreich* (-hir): “[...] und überlässt es dem Zuschauer, zu urteilen: So könnte es gelaufen sein; es könnte sich aber auch ganz anders zugtragen haben!”. The latter is pinpointed by Ernst Strobl in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Strobl): “In dieser Dreiecksgeschichte rechnet LaBute auf seine Art mit der Gier und Doppelmoral seiner Landsleute ab, die sogar noch in ihrer Verklemmtheit verbissen sind, überlässt es aber dabei dem Zuseher, ob er einen moralisierenden Zeigefinger heben will oder nicht.” Strobl’s comment is certainly in line with the results of the analysis of LaBute’s plays in this thesis.

Not only Strobl’s review comments on the Americanness of the play and its portrayal of racism. Many critics find fault with these allusions to American society and with the politically incorrect language. Moreover, there is some criticism of the translation. Schmitzberger in the *Kurier*, for instance, puts it as follows: “Wogegen die Darsteller nicht ankommen, sind die US-Gemeinplätze

und Anglizismen, die die deutsche Fassung zum Holpern bringen.“ Also, Thomas Gabler in the *Kronenzeitung* (8 Dec. 2007) emphasises the Americanness of the play and claims that in Fischer’s production one can laugh about the “American Way of Life”. Schmitzberger’s comment addresses some relevant problems of intercultural communication. Who in Austria knows what Sears is and what life is like in an American small town? However, the fact that many people in provincial towns in Austria are certainly as much concerned about their reputation as Cody is and also as racist as the Man does not come to the critics’ minds. Regrettably, in the view of the critics Austrian audiences are let off the hook, which also implies that the play does not have the intended effect. This can also be seen in Renate Wagner’s remark in the *Neues Volksblatt*, who characterises *This is how it goes* as follows: “ein Teufelsstück, das sein Publikum auch hierzulande packt, wo die konkret angesprochenen Probleme in dieser Form nicht existieren“. However, where in the world are prejudices and racism not a problem?

As regards the theme of racism in the play, the director Torsten Fischer makes an interesting comment: “Dass der farbige Cody nicht als der übermäßig gute Mensch dargestellt wird, finde ich extrem wichtig. Denn dieses Stigmatisieren, dass Menschen mit anderer Hautfarbe grundsätzlich gut und Opfer sind, ist auch eine Form von Rassismus.” (Jarolin)

The critics’ opinion about the politically incorrect use of language in the play diverges. Whereas the *Standard* (Pohl, 11 Dec. 2007) and the *Kronenzeitung* (Gabler, 8 Dec. 2007) criticise this aspect, the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (Strobl) seem to understand LaBute’s black humour. Strobl sees comic potential in LaBute’s use of politically incorrect language: “LaBute lässt alles raus, was politisch („Nigger“) und moralisch inkorrekt ist, und das ist höchst komisch. So Leid es einem tut.“ Ronald Pohl in the *Standard* (11 Dec. 2007), however, describes the evening as follows: “Das Publikum [...] erlebt die planmäßige Durchsäuerung einer höchst durchschnittlichen Screwball-Komödie mit rassistischen Gesinnungspartikeln und zynischem Beziehungsgossip.“ The critic in the *Kronenzeitung* (Gabler, 8 Dec. 2007) disapproves of the use of the word „Nigger“: “„Nigger“ sagen ist zwar auch in Amerika politisch unkorrekt, aber man tut es trotzdem. Da flüchtet sich der honorige US-Bürger gern in den schon recht strapazierten Begriff Freiheit, auch in den literarischen!“ Here

Gabler addresses two aspects. On the one hand, he speaks about linguistic racism in general, on the other hand, he criticises LaBute's portrayal of political incorrectness. He condemns Americans for using the word "Nigger" but seems to forget that certainly many Austrians, most probably especially readers of the *Kronenzeitung*, use the word "Neger" without a trace of remorse. It is highly paradoxical that Strobl criticises the Americans as uptight in his review in the *Salzburger Nachrichten*, whereas none of the American critics seem to find fault with the politically incorrect language and the racist remarks of the characters.

8. CONCLUSION

Ben Brantley provides a pinpointed definition of LaBute's theatre in the *New York Times*:

To look at, they're the human equivalents of a glass of milk. But if you know anything about Mr. LaBute [...] you probably know already that the milk is laced with arsenic. The stories told in "Bash," [...] all begin with a comforting air of familiarity that goes down bland and easy. Then comes the moment when the taste turns sour, and you feel like gagging. [...] That's what Mr. LaBute does best, finding the acid in the blandest substances. (25 June 1999)

Considering the analysis of the four plays, this is certainly one of his qualities. However, he does not employ this technique as regularly and monotonously as some critics suggest. In various reviews one can find phrases like "typisch Neil LaBute" or "wie immer bei Neil LaBute" (Kralicek, 50/07). As becomes evident in the analysis of his plays, there are elements which are typical of Neil LaBute but they are used in multiple ways. Aspects like the twist, often towards the end of a play, or the portrayal of malevolent male characters can be found in all of the four plays. However, the plays are set in numerous thematic landscapes. LaBute addresses topics like professional pressure, religious values, abuse of naïve teenagers, the nature of art, racism, misogyny or the relationship between the genders. However, he does not present any conclusions or solutions in his plays, nor does he didactically point out an appropriate moral behaviour. He rather portrays people's failures and invites his readers and spectators to reappraise their own conduct. It has to be emphasised, though, that educating his audience is not his only aim: "I love the idea of criticizing my audience as I entertain them." (*Your Friends and Neighbours*, vii) He justifies his depiction of serious moral questions as follows: "Whether I'm in an organized religion or not, the moral structure that was instilled in me early has always been interested in those larger questions of good and bad, of sin and morality. I often grapple with them, and they often get swept aside today." (LaBute interview Welch) This aspect seems to have been misunderstood by various critics. As they perceive his theatre as boulevard, they expect to be entertained, and only entertained. The serious subtext then is either simply ignored, like in *some girl(s)*, or disliked, as in *the shape of things*.

Another aspect of LaBute's plays that has been identified is their particular Americanness. In an interview he admits: "Yes, of course, I'm speaking from an American perspective because that's all I really know, have been allowed or allowed myself to know." (LaBute interview Baitz) However, although he puts them into a very American context, he depicts universal human vices, a fact that has not been acknowledged by various critics and maybe also audiences.

A further important element in the reception of his plays is the translation of the texts. The colloquialness and everyday-character of the figure's speech has been pointed out on various occasion and is described by Brantley as "finding hypnotic lyricism in vernacular speech" (25 June 1999). LaBute's language is certainly very idiomatic and up-to-date and therefore difficult to translate. The translation of plays is hardly ever commented on by critics. The Northern German language of the translations of LaBute's plays, however, is criticised in various Austrian reviews as being "schnoddrig" (Haider-Pregler, 9.09.02) or as sounding like in a language class (Thuswaldner, 5.8.02). Also, the proximity of his language to talkshows or sitcoms has been criticised. As LaBute is also a film-maker, this parallel seems evident. However, one could also claim that this kind of language is very accessible and topical. With such a style LaBute is able to convey serious messages in an entertaining manner.

A further problematic issue in terms of audience reception is the highly complex structure in which the dramatic past plays an important role, a fact that the viewers often only realise very late in the play. His way of conveying information is defined as "a game of hide and seek" by Brantley (25 June 1999), and his relationship with truth is certainly too complex for trivial boulevard theatre.

Although he has a great comic potential, LaBute is certainly a writer who "is never afraid of leaving an audience with a nasty taste in their mouths" (Clapp review *Observer*). In summary, it seems appropriate to quote the playwright himself, who characterises his work as "dramatic entertainment that still has the courage to instruct" (*Your Friends and Neighbours*, vii).

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

9.1. PRIMARY SOURCES

Brecht, Bertolt. "Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater." *Gesammelte Werke in acht Bänden*. Bd. 7. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967. 262-272.

Brecht, Bertolt. "Über experimentelles Theater." *Gesammelte Werke in acht Bänden*. Bd. 7. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967. 285-305.

LaBute, Neil. *some girl(s)*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

----- . *Your Friends and Neighbours*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998.

----- . *the shape of things*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001.

----- . *This is how it goes*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

----- . *bash. three plays*. Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1999.

Pinter, Harold. "The Room". *Plays: One*. London: Methuen, 1976. 99-126.

----- . "The Caretaker". *Plays: Two*. London, Methuen, 1981. 13-87.

----- . "The Collection". *Plays: Two*. London, Methuen, 1981. 119-157.

----- . "Old Times". *Plays: Four*. London: Methuen, 1981. 1-71.

9.2. SECONDARY SOURCES

Allacher, Harald. "Crossing Borders: A Philosophical Take on Metalepsis." *Diplmoarbeit U of Vienna*, Mai 2009.

Becker, Becky. "No Simple Misogyny: The Shape of Gender in the Works of Neil LaBute." *Neil LaBute: a casebook*. Ed. Gerald Wood. New York: Routledge, 2006. 111-123.

Bell, Thomas L. "Place, Popular Culture, and Possibilism in Selected Works of Playwright Neil LaBute." *Neil LaBute: a casebook*. Ed. Gerald Wood. New York: Routledge, 2006. 101-110.

Bigsby, Christopher. *Neil LaBute. Stage and Cinema*. Cambridge: CUP 2007.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: UCP, 1961.

Corman, Brian. "Comedy." *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*. Ed. Deborah Payne Fisk. Cambridge: CUP, 2000. 52-69.

English, Mary. "A Modern Euripides." *Neil LaBute: a casebook*. Ed. Gerald Wood. New York: Routledge, 2006. 23-37.

“Eric Rohmer.” *IMDb. Internet Movie Database*. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0006445/>>.

Fludernik, Monika. "Defining (In)Sanity: The Narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and the Question of Unreliability." *Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*. Ed. Grünzweig, Walter and Andreas Solbach. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999. 75-95.

Fuller, Graham. "French cinema's sinking." *FindArticles.com*. July 1998.

Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1285/is_n7_v28/ai_20870212/>.

Gill, Pat. "Gender, sexuality, and marriage." *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*. Ed. Deborah Payne Fisk. Cambridge: CUP, 2000. 191-208.

Grice, Paul. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1989.

Grundy, Peter. *Doing Pragmatics*. 2nd ed. London: Arnold, 2000.

Istel, John. „Who is Neil LaBute and why is he saying those terrible things about you?“ *American Theatre* 18:9 (2001): 38-41. Accessed: 16 January 2010
<<https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+dh756767633A2F2F7676636E2E70756E716A6C70782E70627A++/citations/printCitation.do?QueryType=articles&ItemID=iipa00189946&ResultsID=1259CBC01941AF3BEF&ItemNumber=2&FormatType=raw&journalID=JID87503255>>.

Krüger-Fürhoff, Irmela Marei. "Sadly Disfigured. Schönheit, Verletzung und pygmalionische Gewalt in Henry James' *The Last of the Valerii*, Thomas Hardys *Barbara of the House of Grebe* und Neil LaButes *The Shape of Things*." *Von schönen und anderen Geschlechtern*. Ed. Genus - Münsteraner Arbeitskreis für Gender Studies. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004. 119-135.

LaBute, Neil. Interview by Jon Robin Baitz. *BOMB* 83 (2003). Accessed: 16 January 2010. <<http://www.bombsite.com/issues/83/articles/2560>>.

LaBute, Neil. Interview by Rosalynde Welch. *Times and Seasons* 19 January 2005. Accessed: 16 January 2010.
<<http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2005/01/an-interview-with-neil-labute/>>.

- LaBute, Neil. Interview with Chris Jones. *Chicago Tribune*, 2007/2008.
 Accessed: 16 January 2010.
 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t358A048EBE>>.
- Lahr, John. "A Touch of Bad: Why Is the Director Neil LaBute So Interested in Jerks?" *Neil LaBute: a casebook*. Ed. Gerald Wood. New York: Routledge, 2006. 11-21.
- Mendell, Dean. "Neil LaBute, Postmodernist in the Pulpit: Search for Truth and Decency in a Sinful World." *Neil LaBute: a casebook*. Ed. Gerald Wood. New York: Routledge, 2006. 87-100.
- Milne, Drew. "Pinter's sexual politics." *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*. Ed. Peter Raby. 2nd ed. Cambridge: CUP, 2009. 233-248.
- Nichols, Ashton B.. "Monologue." *The new Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993. 798-800.
- Nünning, Ansgar. "Unreliable compared to what: Towards a Cognitive Theory of *Unreliable Narration*: Prelogomina and Hypothesis." *Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*. Ed. Grünzweig, Walter and Andreas Solbach, eds. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999. 53-73.
- Nünning, Ansgar, ed. *Unreliable Narration*. Trier: WVT, 1998.
- Olson, Duane. "Fall, Creation and Redemption in Neil LaBute's *The Shape of Things*." *Journal of Religion and Film*. Vol. 8 No. 1 April 2004. Accessed: 16 January 2010.
 <<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol8No1/ShapeThings.htm>>.
- Oney, Jay. "Jeremy Cillier Answered: Shifiting Poetic Justice from the Playwright to the Audience in the Works of Neil LaBute." *Neil LaBute: a casebook*. Ed. Gerald Wood. New York: Routledge, 2006. 39-49.
- Pfister, Manfred. *The theory and analysis of drama*. Cambridge: CUP, 1991.
- Rubik, Margarete. "Provocative and Unforgettable: Peter Carey's Fiction – a Cognitive Approach." *European Journal of English Studies* 9:2 (2005): 169-184. Accessed: 16 January 2010.
 <https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+00756767633A2F2F63717366726569722E76617362657A6E6A626579712E70627A++/761808_731416766_723644286.pdf>.
- Steyn, Mark. "Desensitized Beyond Belief." *New Criterion* 18:1 (1999): 38-42.
 Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+00756767633A2F2F6A726F2E726F667062756266672E70627A++/ehost/detail?vid=7&hid=106&sid=6fd519a1-2f46-46b5-a1fe-37cc9a169f0b%40sessionmgr111&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=mzh&AN=2000056130#db=mzh&AN=2000056130>>.

Stockwell, Peter. *Cognitive Poetics. An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Wilhelmus, Tom. "Morality and Metaphor in the Works of Neil LaBute." *Neil LaBute: a casebook*. Ed. Gerald Wood. New York: Routledge, 2006. 61-71.

Wood, Gerald C. "Latter-day Capitalism: Religious and Corporate Violence in the Films and Plays of Neil LaBute." *Neil LaBute: a casebook*. Ed. Gerald Wood. New York: Routledge, 2006. 73-83.

9.2.1. REVIEWS

Affenzeller, Margarete. "Ein Super-Ex macht richtig Schluss." *Standard*, 28/29 October 2006: 41.

Als, Hilton. "The Critics: The Theatre: Shades of Black" *The New Yorker*, 81:8 (2005): 84-85. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+dh756767633A2F2F7676636E2E70756E716A6C70782E70627A++/citations/printCitation.do?QueryType=articles&ItemID=iipa00293097&ResultsID=1259D6E00E816EA12C&ItemNumber=1&FormatType=raw&journalID=JID0028792X>>.

Billington, Michael. "Some Girls." *Guardian*, 25 May 2005. Accessed: 16 January 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/may/25/theatre>>.

Brantley, Ben. "Interracial Triangle at Odds With Truth." *New York Times*, 28 March 2005. Accessed: 16 January 2010. <http://theater.nytimes.com/2005/03/28/theater/reviews/28publ.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=labute%20interracial%20triangle&st=cse>.

Brantley, Ben. "The Face of Evil, All Peaches and Cream." *New York Times*, 25 June 1999. Accessed: 16 January 2010. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/25/movies/theater-review-the-face-of-evil-all-peaches-and-cream.html?pagewanted=1>>.

Cerny, Karin. "Spielplan" *Falter* 37 (2002): 54.

- Clapp, Susanna. "Low arts, high camp." *Observer*, 3 June 2001. Accessed: 16 January 2010.
 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2001/jun/03/features.review47>>.
- Gabler, Thomas. "Alles Frauenliebhaber." *Kronenzeitung*, 28 October 2006: 35.
- Gabler, Thomas. "Der Meister und der „Way of life“." *Kronenzeitung*, 24 May 2001: 20.
- Gabler, Thomas. "Machos machen Geschäfte." *Kronenzeitung*, 8 December 2007.
- Gabler, Thomas. "Wahrheit oder Kunst?" *Kronenzeitung*, 8 September 2002: 28.
- Givens, Ron. "LaBute gets nasty in 'bash' a likeable guy, writer gives his characters flaws & all." *New York Daily News*, 24 June 1999. Accessed: 16 January 2010.
 <http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/entertainment/1999/06/24/1999-06-24_labute_gets_nasty_in__bash__.html>.
- Haider-Pregler, Hilde. "Die Mörder von nebenan...." *Wiener Zeitung*, 25/26 May 2001: 9.
- Haider-Pregler, Hilde. "Ein Kunstexperiment im Konversationston." *Wiener Zeitung*, 9 September 2002: 9.
- Hannaham, James. "Theater: Missing Persons: "Bash"; "The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek"" *The Village Voice* 44:27 (1999): 127. Accessed: 16 January 2010.
 <<https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+dh756767633A2F2F7676636E2E70756E716A6C70782E70627A++/citations/printCitation.do?QueryType=articles&ItemID=iipa00126023&ResultsID=1259CF65622D3C5C8&ItemNumber=30&FormatType=&journalID=JID00426180>>.
- hir (pseudonym). "Sicherheit ist nirgends." *Österreich*, 10 December 2007: 9.
- Jarolin, Peter. "Gratwanderungen und Spiegelbilder." *Kurier*, 6 December 2007: 33.
- Kathrein, Karin. "Beichtstunde der Bestien." *Kurier*, 24 May 2001: 29.
- Kitzmantel, Silvia. "Im Beichtstuhl mit drei Mördern." *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, 25 May 2001: 7.
- Klinger, Eva Maria. "Was von Liebe übrig ist." *Wiener Zeitung*, 28 October 2006: 15.

Kralicek, Wolfgang. "Vier Frauen." *Falter*, 44 (2006): 66.

Kralicek, Wolfgang. "Wie es so läuft." *Falter*, 50 (2007)

Lindenbauer, Christoph. "Naivität zertrümmert." *Oberösterreichische*

Nachrichten, 5 August 2002. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<http://www.nachrichten.at/dcarchiv/index.php?query=-shlyc:client/ooenalt/ooen/j2002/q3/m08/t05/ph/s008/005_001.dcs&ausgabe=H/Hauptausgabe&datum=05.08.2002&seite=008&set=2&key=76d13ae4728fbe5643fcb83381ce1d0c>.

Mayer, Norbert. "Besuch der alten Flammen." *Presse*, 28 October 2006.

Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/news/92626/index.do?from=suche.intern.portal>>.

Niedermeier, Cornelia. "Herrn Nachbars kleiner Mord." *Standard*, 25 May 2001: 32.

-norb (pseudonym). "Wärmend ist nur die Neonschrift", *Presse*, 11 December 2007.

O'Toole, Fintan. "In an uneven 'bash,' Calista has real punch more than medium cruel: LaBute brings savage tales from a civilized land." *New York Daily News*, 25 June 1999. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/entertainment/1999/06/25/1999-06-25_in_an_uneven__bash__calista.html>.

Petsch, Barbara. "Menschen-Tautropfen in einem dunklen Universum." *Presse*, 25 May 2001: 10.

Pfoser, Manfred. "Mord den jeder begeht." *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 25 May 2001: 13.

Pohl, Ronald. "Campus-Skulptur mit „Jacko“-Nase." *Standard*, 9 September 2002: 22.

Pohl, Ronald. "Hilfe, wir sind ganz anders." *Standard*, 11 December 2007:

Reiterer, Reinhold. "Sexuelle Akte im Hotelzimmer." *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, 30 October 2006: 13.

Rooney, David. "Legit Reviews: Off Broadway: "This Is How It Goes"" *Variety*, 398:7 (2005): 72-73. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+dh756767633A2F2F7676636E2E70756E716A6C70782E70627A++/citations/printCitation.do?QueryType=arti>>

cles&ItemID=iipa00290340&ResultsID=1259D70BF971CA64D2&ItemNumber=2&FormatType=raw&journalID=JID00422738>.

Schmitzberger, J.. "Ein ganzer Fernsehabend im Theaterplüschi." *Kurier*, 8 December 2007.

Smith, Neil. "The art of being cruel." *BBC News online*. 1 June 2001. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/entertainment/1364292.stm>>.

Sommer, Elyse. "This is how it goes." *CurtainUp*, 28 March 2005. Accessed: 16 January 2010. <<http://www.curtainup.com/thisishowitgoes.html>>.

Spencer, Charles. "LaBute stages a gripping debate." *Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 2001. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4723840/LaBute-stages-a-gripping-debate.html>>.

Spencer, Charles. "With friends like these." *Daily Telegraph*, 25 May 2005. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3642603/With-friends-like-these.....html>>.

Steiner, Bettina. "Manipulation als Parabel: Schade ums Kunstprojekt." *Presse*, 9 September 2002: 10.

Strobl, Ernst P.. "Amüsante Doppelmoral." *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 10 December 2007.

Tartarotti, Guido. "Beinahe Schnitzler für Arme." *Kurier*, 28 October 2006: 32.

Taylor, Paul. "Some Girl(s), Gielgud Theatre, London." *Independent*, 25 May 2005. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/some-girls-gielgud-theatre-london-492017.html>>.

Thuswaldner, Werner. "„Some Girl(s)“." *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 28 October 2006: 9.

Thuswaldner, Werner. "Das ist die sexuelle Hörigkeit." *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 5 August 2002. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<http://search.salzburg.com/articles/1621573?highlight=labute+>>.

Urbanek, Julia. "Neuer Mann trifft alte Liebe." *Wiener Zeitung*, 11 December 2007.

Wagner, Renate. "Eine Dreiecksgeschichte, die Purzelbäume schlägt." *Neues Volksblatt*, 13 December 2007.

Werndl, Kristina. "Er behält die Hose an." *Aurora*, 3 December 2006. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<http://www.aurora-magazin.at/medien_kultur/werndl_labute_frm.htm>.

Wiesauer, Caro. "Ein nervöses Manifest." *Kurier*, 8 September 2002: 26.

Wolf, Matt. "Feel free to applaud – but you'll find the cast propping up at the bar." *Observer*, 10 June 2001. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2001/jun/10/featuresreview.review2>>.

Wolf, Matt. "LaBute's New 'Shape' Fans Flames of Conflict." *Variety*, 383:4 (2001): 24. Accessed: 16 January 2010.

<<https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+dh756767633A2F2F7676636E2E70756E716A6C70782E70627A++/citations/printCitation.do?QueryType=articles&ItemID=iipa00160610&ResultsID=1259D39B3AC1E9F061&ItemNumber=1&FormatType=raw&journalID=JID00422738>>.

10. INDEX

A

a gaggle of saints 4, 9, 10, 17, 22, 24, 31, 35, 38, 40, 45, 52, 53, 57, 60, 77, 78, 81, 87, 92, 96, 97, 100, 101, 103
A Summer's Tale 94
 act 4, 6, 15, 35, 39, 78, 85
 Adam 14, 15, 16, 20, 24, 27, 29, 33, 34, 37, 38, 40, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 79, 80, 83, 85, 86, 90, 93, 97, 104, 106
 Affenzeller, Margarete 107, 108, 119
 Agamemnon 91
 Akademietheater 2, 99, 101, 104, 106, 129, 130
 Albee, Edward 105
 alienation 44, 50
 Allacher, Harald 42, 43, 116
Ally McBeal 100
 Als, Hilton 119
 America 3, 87, 88
 analytical drama 6
Aurora 107, 109, 123

B

Bacchae 40, 92
 Barga, Raphael von 104
bash 2, 4, 5, 9, 16, 17, 21, 24, 31, 32, 33, 38, 39, 40, 45, 52, 53, 78, 79, 80, 99, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 116, 120, 121, 129
 Bauersima, Igor 104
 Becker, Ben 80, 100, 101, 116
 Belinda 7, 8, 9, 16, 19, 23, 28, 29, 36, 38, 41, 47, 48, 53, 55, 57, 62, 68, 69, 82, 85, 88, 100, 109
 Bell, Thomas L. 88, 90, 116
 Bigsby, Christopher 4, 21, 22, 24, 32, 54, 63, 64, 65, 69, 73, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 83, 84, 86, 93, 95, 96, 116
 Billington, Michael 119
 Bobbie 5, 11, 14, 21, 44, 53, 56, 58, 61, 71, 73, 82, 83, 106, 107, 108, 109
 Bohm, Uwe 101

Booth, Wayne C. 46, 116
 boulevard 2, 3, 107, 110, 114, 115
 Brantley, Ben 84, 114, 115, 119
 Brecht, Bertolt 44, 50, 51, 116
 Browning, Robert 36
 Burgtheater 2, 100

C

Cassavetes, John 103
 Cerny, Karin 104, 106, 119
 Cervik, Sandra 109
 characterisation 32, 52, 59, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 106, 107
Chloe in the Afternoon 93, 94
 Clapp, Susanna 115, 120
 closed ending 22, 23, 24
 closed figure conception 57, 59, 61
 Cody 5, 7, 8, 9, 16, 19, 28, 29, 33, 36, 38, 41, 43, 47, 48, 49, 53, 55, 57, 58, 61, 68, 69, 81, 82, 85, 88, 89, 97, 109, 112
 cognitive frame 26
 contextual frame theory 26
 Corman, Brian 97, 98, 116
CurtainUp 122

D

Daily Telegraph 122
Death of a Salesman 103
 dialogue 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 21, 32, 33, 39, 64, 69, 92
 discrepant awareness 16, 18, 20, 24
 dramatic aesthetics 2
 dramatic monologue 9, 10, 36
 dramatic past 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 41, 115
 dramatic present 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15
 dramatique technique 2, 10, 94
 dramatis personae 4, 39, 52
 duologue 35, 37, 38, 52
 Dürrenmatt, Friedrich 18, 19
 dynamic character 56, 57

E

Engel, Judith 101
 England 3, 129
 English, Mary 40, 91, 92, 93, 100, 116, 117, 118, 131
 epic theatre 44, 50, 51
Esquire 107, 108
 Etheredge, Sir George 98
 ethics 84, 88
 Euripides 40, 91, 92, 93, 116
 Evelyn 14, 15, 16, 20, 23, 25, 27, 29, 30, 35, 37, 38, 40, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 64, 65, 66, 67, 79, 83, 85, 86, 90, 93, 97, 100, 104, 106
 exposition 6
 expository strategies 4, 6
 external structure 5, 39

F

Falter 104, 106, 108, 109, 110, 119, 121
 figure constellation 56
Filthy Talk for Troubled Times 104
 Fischer, Torsten 109, 110, 112
 Fludernik, Monika 46, 117
 frames of reference 46, 47, 49
 Freytag, Gustav 15
Friends 96, 100, 103, 105, 114, 115, 116
 Fuller, Graham 94, 95, 117

G

Gabler, Thomas 102, 104, 107, 108, 112, 120
 gender 3, 53, 54, 83, 93, 97
 Giesing, Dieter 106
 Gill, Pat 97, 98, 117
 Givens, Ron 95, 120
 Grice, Paul 27, 28, 30, 117
 Grundy, Peter 27, 117
Guardian 80, 119

H

Haider-Pregler 101, 102, 103, 105, 115, 120
 Hamburger Kammerspiele 101
 Hannaham, James 104, 120
 Hardy, Thomas 93
 Hartinger, Dorothee 104
 Horwitz, Dominique 100, 109

I

Ibsen, Henrik 111
 implicature 27, 28, 30, 31
 implied author 46, 63
In the Company of Men 25, 97, 103
 Independent 122
 inferior awareness 19, 21
 informational discrepancies 23, 24
 initial situation 15, 16, 17
 internal structure 4, 11
iphipenia in orem 4, 9, 17, 21, 31, 35, 36, 40, 45, 52, 57, 59, 74, 76, 77, 79, 80, 87, 91, 92, 96, 97, 101, 103
 Istel, John 79, 104, 117

J

James, Henry 93, 95, 117, 120
 Jarolin, Peter 110, 112, 120
 Jason 91
 Jenny 15, 34, 38, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 64, 66, 67, 83, 104, 106
 Jesch, Daniel 104
 Jones, Chris 99, 118

K

Kane, Sarah 102
 Kathrein, Karin 102, 103, 120
 Kitzmantel, Silvia 101, 120
 Klinger, Eva Maria 107, 108, 120
 Kralicek, Wolfgang 108, 109, 110, 114, 121
 Kreon 91
Kronenzeitung 102, 104, 107, 108, 112, 120
 Krüger-Fürhoff 93, 117
Kurier 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 110, 111, 120, 122, 123

L

LaBute 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 15, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 32, 33, 34, 35, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 52, 54, 56, 58, 59, 63, 64, 67, 70, 72, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 110, 111, 112, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 129

Lahr, John 26, 96, 97, 103, 118
 Lindenbauer, Christoph 105, 121
 Lindsay 5, 11, 13, 20, 33, 40, 44,
 53, 56, 58, 61, 70, 71, 73, 82, 83,
 106, 109
 London 23, 99, 100, 106, 116, 117,
 119, 122

M

Mamet, David 103
 Man 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 19, 20, 23, 25,
 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38,
 40, 41, 42, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 53,
 55, 57, 58, 61, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72,
 73, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86, 89, 90, 94,
 97, 100, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111,
 112
 Mayer, Norbert 107, 108, 121
 Medea 10, 40, 91, 92, 102
medea redux 4, 9, 17, 22, 24, 31,
 35, 36, 40, 45, 52, 53, 57, 60, 74,
 75, 77, 78, 87, 91, 92, 96, 97,
 100, 101, 102
 Mendell, Dean 25, 44, 65, 81, 84,
 89, 118
 Miller, Arthur 103
 Milne, Drew 96, 118
 monologue 10, 17, 21, 32, 35, 36,
 37, 103
 morality 3, 85, 87, 90, 94, 114
 Mormon 54, 78
 Morzé, Petra 106
 multidimensional character 59
My Night at Maud's 102

N

narrator 5, 19, 36, 40, 42, 44, 45,
 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53, 55, 57, 68,
 69, 88, 110
Neues Volksblatt 110, 112, 123
 New York 4, 18, 39, 84, 89, 99,
 100, 103, 114, 116, 118, 119,
 120, 121
New York Daily News 120, 121
New York Times 84, 114, 119
New Yorker 119
 Nickel, Christian 106
 Niedermeier, Cornelia 101, 102,
 103, 121
 Nünning, Ansgar 46, 47, 49, 118

O

Observer 115, 120, 123
 Okonkwo, Nikolaus 109
Old Times 96, 116
 Olson, Duane 67, 79, 83, 118
 Oney, Jay 23, 25, 26, 49, 72, 97,
 118
 open ending 22, 23, 24, 102
 open figure conception 59
Österreich 109, 110, 111, 120, 129

P

Peet, Amanda 100
 Petsch, Barbara 101, 102, 105, 121
 Pfister, Manfred 4, 5, 6, 16, 18, 19,
 22, 23, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, 52,
 53, 56, 59, 63, 67, 118
 Pfoser, Manfred 101, 102, 121
 Philipp 64
 Pinter, Harold 42, 91, 95, 96, 116,
 118
 poetic justice 2, 22, 23, 24, 95, 98,
 109
 Pohl, Ronald 106, 110, 111, 112,
 121
 point of attack 8
 point of view 7
 polylogue 32, 35
Presse 101, 102, 104, 105, 106,
 107, 108, 110, 121, 122
 primary text 5, 53
 prologue 6
 Pygmalion 93

R

Reiterer, Reinhold 108, 121
 religion 4, 78, 79, 85, 114
 Restoration comedy 96, 97
 Reza, Yasmina 102, 107
 Rohmer, Eric 44, 91, 93, 94, 95,
 117
 Rohrer, Sylvie 106
 Rooney, David 121
 Rubik, Margarete 1, 26, 118

S

Salzburg 104
 Salzburg Festival 104

Salzburger Nachrichten 101, 102,
 105, 107, 108, 110, 111, 112,
 121, 122
 Sam 5, 11, 12, 20, 30, 34, 44, 53,
 55, 58, 61, 70, 71, 72, 73, 82, 83,
 86, 98, 100, 106
 scene 4, 7, 12, 13, 16, 27, 34, 39,
 41, 47, 48, 62, 64, 68, 71, 80, 102
 Schmitzberger, J. 110, 111, 122
 Schwimmer, David 100
 secondary text 4, 39, 45, 63
 Sedl, Mareike 106
 setting 54, 55, 105
 Shaw, George Bernard 91, 93
Six Moral Tales 94
 Smith, Neil 122
 soliloquy 6, 35, 36
some girl(s) 2, 4, 15, 20, 24, 25, 27,
 30, 32, 33, 34, 37, 44, 52, 53, 55,
 58, 61, 70, 73, 80, 82, 85, 86, 87,
 90, 93, 94, 97, 99, 100, 106, 107,
 114, 116, 129
 Sommer, Elyse 122
 Spencer, Charles 106, 122
 stage-directions 4, 39, 44, 45, 69,
 73
Standard 101, 102, 103, 106, 107,
 108, 110, 111, 112, 119, 121
 Stanley Kowalski 81
 static character 57, 58
 Steiner, Bettina 104, 106, 122
 Steyn, Mark 25, 87, 118
 Stiller, Ben 100
 Stockwell, Peter 26, 119
 Strobl, Ernst P. 110, 111, 112, 122
 subtext 3, 114
 superior awareness 19, 21
 surface text 3

T

Tartarotti, Guido 107, 108, 122
 Tate, Chatherine 100
 Taylor, Paul 88, 122
The Caretaker 95, 116
The Collection 95, 96, 116
The Country Wife 97
The Room 96, 116
the shape of things 2, 4, 14, 15, 16,
 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38,
 40, 45, 52, 53, 54, 58, 60, 61, 63,
 67, 79, 80, 83, 84, 85, 86, 90, 93,

94, 97, 99, 100, 105, 114, 116,
 129

Theater in der Josefstadt 2, 99,
 109, 129, 130

This is how it goes 2, 4, 5, 6, 14,
 15, 16, 20, 23, 27, 28, 32, 33, 36,
 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 44, 47, 48, 50,
 52, 53, 55, 57, 61, 67, 80, 81, 84,
 85, 88, 89, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99,
 100, 105, 109, 110, 111, 112,
 116, 122, 129

Thuswaldner, Werner 105, 107,
 108, 115, 122

title 4, 39, 40, 41, 94

Tyler 5, 11, 12, 14, 20, 33, 44, 53,
 55, 58, 61, 70, 72, 73, 82, 83, 106

U

unreliable narration 45, 46

unreliable narrator 19, 46, 47, 50

Urbanek, Julia 110, 111, 122

V

Variety 121, 123

Vienna 2, 3, 99, 100, 116, 131

Village Voice 120

violence 4, 54, 77, 81, 87, 88, 92,
 96, 103, 104

W

Wagner, Renate 110, 112, 123

Weisz, Rachel 100

Welch, Rosalynde 2, 3, 92, 114,
 117

well-made play 15, 102, 105

Werndl, Kristina 107, 109, 123

Wiener Festwochen 101

Wiener Zeitung 101, 102, 103, 105,
 107, 108, 110, 111, 120, 122

Wiesauer, Caro 104, 106, 123

Wilder, Billy 111

Wilhelmus, Tom 52, 119

Williams, Tom 81

Wokalek, Johanna 100, 104, 106

Wolf, Matt 123

Wood, Gerald C. 26, 87, 88, 116,
 118, 119

Y

Young Directors Project 104

Your Friends and Neighbours 103,
114, 115, 116

Z

Zadek 101, 102

11. ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Diplomarbeit widmet sich dem zeitgenössischen amerikanischen Dramatiker Neil LaBute, der zu den meistgespielten Autoren in England und Amerika gehört. Auch in Österreich wurden bereits einige seiner Stücke aufgeführt. Oftmals werden LaButes Stücke von Kritikern als Boulevardtheater abgetan. In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird allerdings gezeigt, dass seine Texte viel komplexerer Natur sind. Die Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit den Stücken *bash*, *the shape of things*, *some girl(s)* und *This is how it goes*, da diese an prestigeträchtigen Wiener Theatern (Akademietheater, Theater in der Josefstadt) aufgeführt wurden.

Im ersten Teil der Arbeit wird eine genaue Analyse der vier Stücke vorgenommen. Es werden Aspekte wie die Struktur und Präsentation der Texte, die Charaktere und die thematischen Schwerpunkte der Stücke beleuchtet.

LaButes Texte weisen oft strukturelle Besonderheiten auf, vor allem die dramatische Vergangenheit spielt in vielen seiner Texte eine große Rolle. Des Weiteren ist oftmals der Unterschied zwischen wahr und falsch lange nicht klar ersichtlich; die Effekte dieses Spiels mit der Wahrheit auf das Publikum beziehungsweise den Leser werden untersucht. Ein weiteres zentrales Element seiner Stücke ist die textuelle Aussparung der poetischen Gerechtigkeit. Es sind die Zuschauer, die angehalten sind, das Verhalten der Figuren moralisch zu bewerten.

In einer Reihe von LaButes Bühnenwerken machen die Charaktere anfangs einen relativ biedereren Eindruck, nur um dann ganz beiläufig von den grausamsten von ihnen begangenen Verbrechen zu berichten. LaButes Figuren haben verschiedenste Laster; ein immer wiederkehrendes Motiv ist jedoch ein äußerst negativ dargestellter männlicher Charakter. Die Konzeption und Konstellation der verschiedenen Figuren der vier Stücke wird in einem der Kapitel im Detail analysiert.

In einem weiteren Abschnitt werden die verschiedensten thematischen Schwerpunkte von Neil LaBute beleuchtet. Seine Stücke setzen sich beispielsweise mit Themen wie Kunst, Beziehungen, seelischer sowie körperlicher Grausamkeit, Religion oder Moral auseinander. Ein weiterer

interessanter Aspekt ist der amerikanische Hintergrund seiner Texte, der auch bei der Rezeption auf den Wiener Bühnen eine Rolle spielt.

Im abschließenden Kapitel werden schließlich auffällige und repräsentative Aspekte der Kritiken seiner Stücke herausgearbeitet. Drei seiner Texte wurden am Akademietheater und einer im Theater in der Josefstadt aufgeführt. Vor dem Hintergrund der genauen Textanalyse der vorangegangenen Kapitel wird schließlich die Rezeption der Stücke anhand der Kritiken einer breiten Palette österreichischer Zeitungen analysiert. In gegebenem Fall werden bestimmte Elemente auch mit den englischen beziehungsweise amerikanischen Kritiken verglichen.

Die Analyse der Texte und der Rezeption der ausgewählten Stücke von Neil LaBute zeigt, dass die von manchen Kritikern vorgenommene Kategorisierung als Boulevardtheater viel zu kurz greift. Vielmehr erweisen sich LaButes Dramen als äußerst komplex, als Bühnenwerke, die Zuschauer und Leser herausfordern, indem der Text erst aus der Zusammenschau von Oberflächentext und Subtext konstruiert werden muss.

12. CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL DETAILS

Date of Birth: 7 August 1986

Place of Birth: Vienna, Austria

EDUCATION

1992-1996	Primary school, Vienna
1996-2004	Grammar school: Stubenbastei, Vienna (graduated with distinction)
from 2004/05	Vienna University: English language, literature and culture and German language and literature, teacher's diploma
April 2006	grant awarded for excellent grades in first year of study
September 2006 – January 2007	Erasmus exchange student: University of Manchester
February 2009	grant awarded for excellent grades

WORK EXPERIENCE

August 2005, July 2006, July 2008	course leader and teacher for EF Language Travel on the Isle of Wight
July 2007	course leader and teacher for EF Language Travel in Torquay
June – August 2009	course director for EF Language Travel in Bournemouth (overall responsibility of the organisation in the coursetown)
March 2008 – June 2009	tutor at Vienna University for pronunciation courses (PPOCS British English)