

**Not I**

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## Irish Museum of Modern Art

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Neil Jordan  
**Not I**, 2000

An adaptation for film  
of the play *Not I*, 1972  
by Samuel Beckett



...

I never met Beckett. He's almost become a secular saint now, hasn't he? It's impossible to be an artist now without having some awareness of Beckett.

He's written some incredibly beautiful things. I always feel quite uneasy about Beckett in a way. I think the reverence in which he is held is at times almost insufferable. But there is an incredible purity to his work...when you reduce things to such essential elements, you know?

When I was doing the piece with Julianne, it was a strange thing that happened to me.

At times it seemed that everything became insufferably long to endure, because the reduction of the piece would be actually silence, yet it's only 12 minutes long. So there's a strange thing that goes on with Beckett but he creates these extraordinary images on stage.

Its about looking...that's what it's about...looking at somebody's mouth. I don't think people look clearly enough at things, you know? It was about finding out how many angles I could find on this woman's mouth. It's as simple as that. It's also about if you look at something long enough, what it becomes, weirdly sexual and elemental, it was just about that really.

...

Beckett commented in a note to James Knowlson - "Image of *Not I* in part suggested by Caravaggio's Decollation of St. John the Baptist".<sup>1</sup> Caravaggio depicted many severed heads; other paintings might seem more suggestive of the imagery Beckett uses in *Not I - Medusa* for example. However, maybe it is not the gaping mouth of decapitated St. John that suggested the image of *Not I*. Beckett is perhaps speaking of how the entire stage image is suggested by the painting - the all important empty space in Caravaggio's work suggesting the inky blackness obliterating all but the dimly lit AUDITOR and spotlit MOUTH.

Caravaggio signed this painting, which was not customary. Pointing to the artifice of the painting, he scrawled his signature in the blood pouring from St. John's severed throat. The exact spelling of the signature is disputed, one reading posits that in a vehement assertion of the first person Caravaggio signed not just his name - rather, he refers to himself directly and underlines his authorship, "I Michaelangelo di Caravaggio did this". Perhaps also confessing his guilt for the Murder in 1606 of Ranuccio Tomassoni following a dispute, reputedly over a tennis match.

<sup>1</sup> Cited in, Knowlson, James, *Damned to Fame, The Life of Samuel Beckett*, First Touchstone Edition (New York, 1997) pp. 521. Samuel Beckett is referring to *The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*, 1608, oil on canvas, 361 x 520 cm by Caravaggio (1571-1610). The painting is housed in the Oratory of St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta which was the conventual church of the Hospitallers (the Knights of Saint John).



...

With the invention of a hollow rubber ball that would bounce on grass, the game now known as Lawn Tennis, evolved from the game of Real Tennis. Many of the original Lawn Tennis courts were on Croquet lawns, which were appropriately flat and well surfaced. Real Tennis is an indoor sport played on a purpose-built court. The Real Tennis court at Earlsfort Terrace was built in 1885 by Sir Edward Guinness, and hosted the 1890 world championship. It was played on until 1939 and was subsequently used by University College Dublin, first as a gymnasium and more recently as a laboratory and offices. The court has a Commemara marble floor and glass roof to flood the court with natural light. The court is not currently playable.



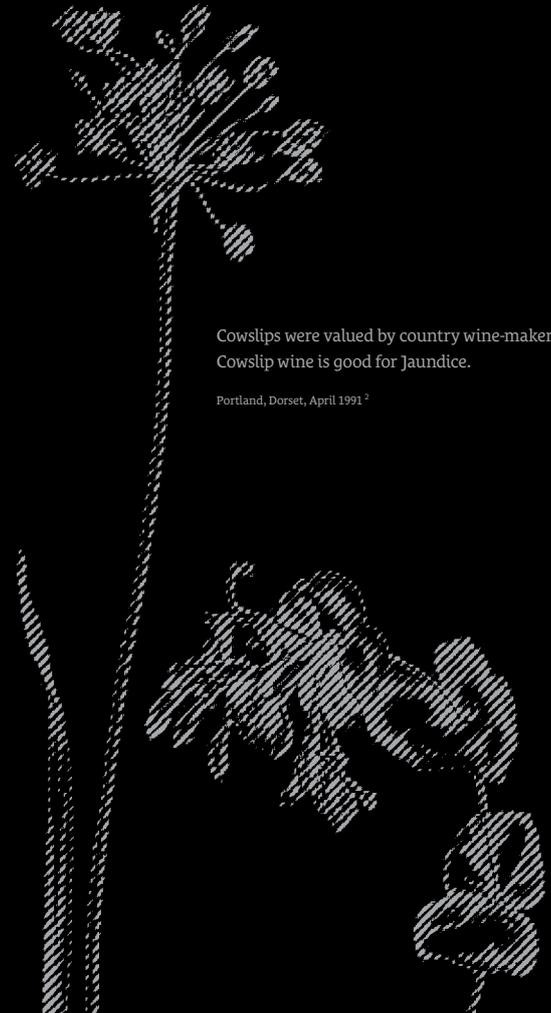
...

On Whit Sunday you would go out, pick bunches of cowslips, and bring them back home. You'd have two chairs and tie a piece of string, about 12 inches long between them (like when you're making a cord). Then you would pick off the flower heads and hang them on the string with about half the flowers on either side – the more flower heads the better. Twist the string and tie the ends together to form a ball. Toss the ball backwards and forwards continually saying:

Tissty-tossty, tell me true,  
Who am I going to be married to?  
Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man,  
poor man, beggarman, thief.

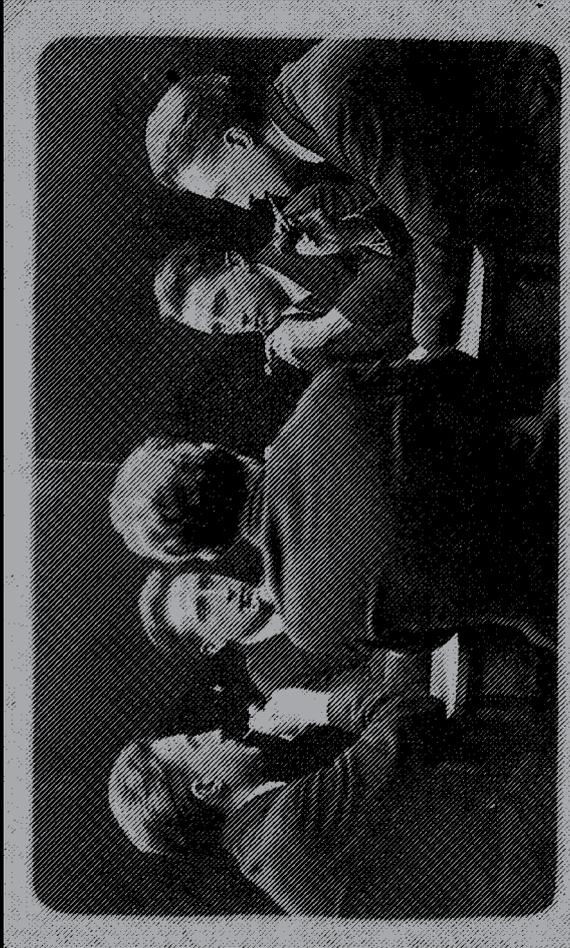
Thorncombe, Dorset, June 1976<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Vickery, Roy, *A Dictionary of Plantlore*, Oxford University Press (1995) pp. 92-93  
If you have memories of Cowslip balls you can upload them to [www.ouririshheritage.org](http://www.ouririshheritage.org) or email to [ouririshheritage@gmail.com](mailto:ouririshheritage@gmail.com)



Cowslips were valued by country wine-makers.  
Cowslip wine is good for Jaundice.

Portland, Dorset, April 1991<sup>2</sup>



...

In Samuel Beckett's play *Not I* there are frequent gaps in the telegram style delivery of text... pauses in writing that are marked by an ellipsis... which comes from the ancient Greek and means omission or falling short.

...a punctuation marking aposiopesis "becoming silent", a figure of speech wherein a sentence is deliberately broken off and left unfinished, the ending to be supplied by the imagination, giving an impression of unwillingness or inability to continue. This device often portrays its users as overcome with passion (fear, anger, excitement) or modesty.

Each installation presented here shares commonality. Each is a film *after* theatre. Each is an immersive site-specific experience. Each emphasizes the in-between. Each features a hooded figure; both present and absent. Each is loud and silent. Each is dark. Each lit.

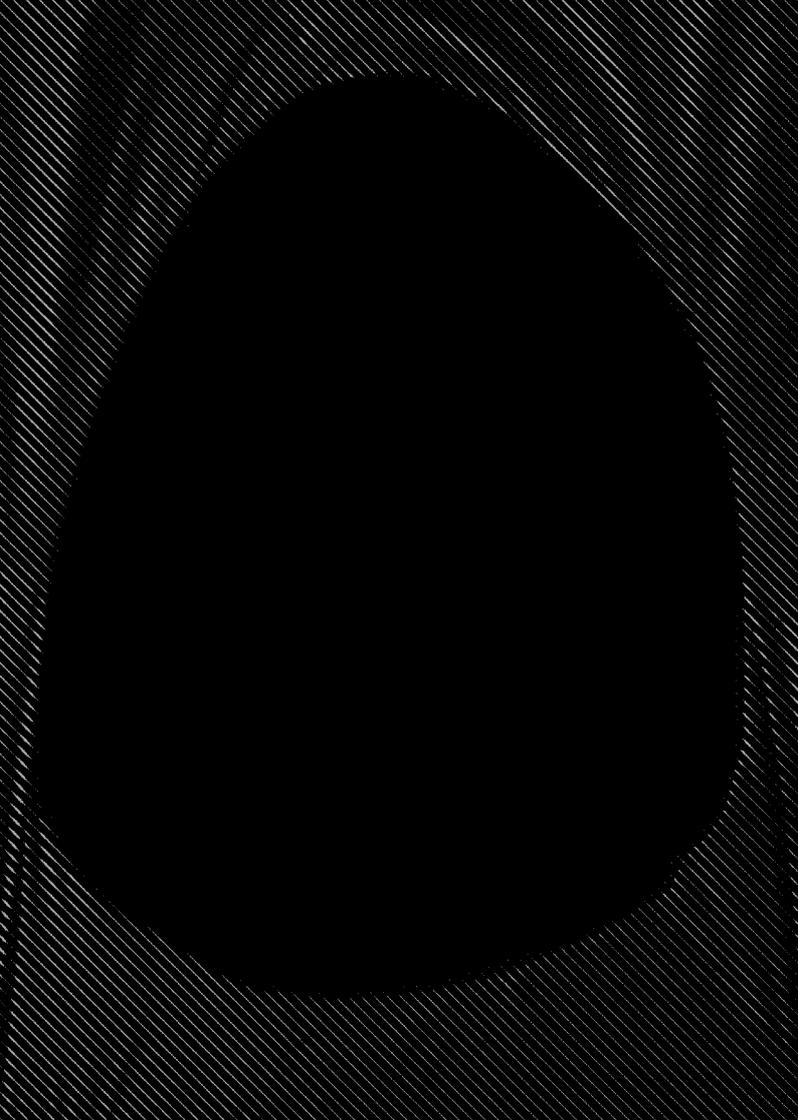


While the text or script of a play may be read privately, it is intended to be presented in a theatre to an audience. Private reading does not allow for the aural, visual or other sensory experiences that a public performance offers. The piece only reveals itself through the pressure and physical demands of the uninterrupted performance of the text.



Clodagh Emeo's film installation *Parodos* is a sensual spatial environment where visual aural and olfactory combine. *Parodos* is part of a larger body of work commissioned by Project Arts Centre, Dublin in 2009, which was subsequently donated to IMMA. The project comprises three works, *Parodos*, *Azimuth* and *The Approach* - together they are titled *Cult of Engagement*. This is the first showing since it was donated to IMMA in 2010.

*Parodos* means "passageways" in Greek. In Ancient Greek tragedy, the *Parodos* were long ramps or gangways used by the chorus section of the play when approaching the stage. The word *Parodos* can refer to the chorus itself and is the name of the song they sing. In Greek tragedy this particular choral passage served to introduce the action that would unfold on stage.



...  
 In the IMMA installation in the Annex at Earlsfort Terrace, an entrance ramp leads to a *theatron* or "viewing place" allowing the spectator to pass into the space of the performance. However, the action viewed is not live. *Parados* is a record of a staged event, filmed, looped, repeated. Thirteen hooded figures approach slowly and deliberately in crepuscular light, their passage lit by torches.

*They are silent.*

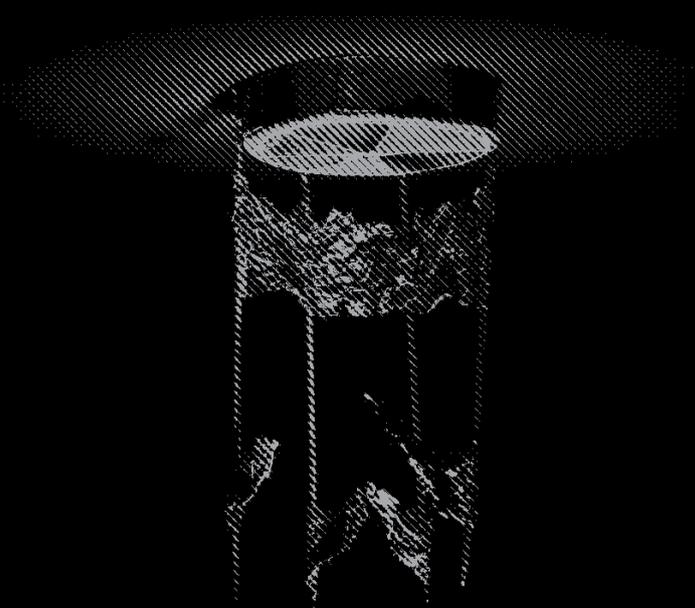
These masked figures recall a community particular to an artistic tradition from a previous era - the chorus - whose role in Greek theatre was to disclose the action on the stage. The jeans and runners they wear situate this chorus in a more contemporary time, folding different temporalities into an eternal procession.

*They are looking at us.*



Clodagh Emoe's practice springs from communities – the filmed event in *Parodos* is a coming together not of actors but rather of participants gathered together in the spirit of creation, the spirit of making something unique happen collectively. Not I, We.

The ancient Greeks had two words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. While the former refers to chronological or sequential time, the latter signifies a time in between, a moment of indeterminate time in which something special happens. While *chronos* is quantitative, *kairos* has a qualitative nature.





Clodagh Emoe  
**Parodos**



**Parodos**