

Grieving Time, *A Radio Play*

Grieving Time, *uma peça radiofônica*

Rachel Fehily

Abstract: *This play called Grieving Time, was written from the personal perspective of Rachel Fehily, author and barrister, in 2020 as a response to the Irish Coronavirus lockdown, with a theme based around how small comforts during the lockdown affected people's grieving process. It was created through a process of collaboration and rehearsal between the author, actor, and producer within the constraints of the time. It was written in monologue for an actor with whom the author had worked previously. The completed radio play was broadcast on 17 August 2021 by the Irish public service broadcaster, Raidió Teilifís Éireann on the radio programme, Drama on One. It is available as a podcast on <https://www.rte.ie/radio/dramaonone/1241306-grieving-time-by-rachel-fehily>. The intended effect is to create a sense of communitas among listeners.*

Keywords: *Radio Play; Irish Playwriting; Monologue; Grieving, Creative Practice-Based Research; Communitas.*

Resumo: *Esta peça, chamada Grieving Time, foi escrita em 2020 a partir da perspectiva pessoal de Rachel Fehily, autora e advogada, como resposta ao lockdown irlandês devido o Coronavírus, cujo tema é baseado em como pequenos confortos durante o lockdown afetaram o processo de luto das pessoas. A peça foi criada por meio de um processo de colaboração e ensaio entre a autora, o ator e o produtor considerando as restrições da época. Escrita em forma de monólogo para um ator com quem a autora já havia trabalhado, a peça de rádio foi transmitida em 17 de agosto de 2021 pela emissora irlandesa Raidió Teilifís Éireann no programa de rádio Drama on One. Está disponível como podcast em <https://www.rte.ie/radio/dramaonone/1241306-griev-time-by-rachel-fehily>. O efeito pretendido é criar um sentimento de communitas entre os ouvintes.*

Palavras-chave: *Peça radiofônica; Dramaturgia irlandesa; Monólogo; Luto; Pesquisa baseada em práticas criativas; Communitas.*

Introduction

This short form radio play was chosen by RTE Radio 1, Ireland’s national broadcaster, as part of their “Long Story Short Season”.

It was written during the first coronavirus lockdown and, as part of the writing process, I met with the Irish actor, Joe Taylor, outdoors, so we could collaborate and rehearse safely. As lockdown ended, then re-began, he was unable to go into the radio studio for personal safety reasons, and its recording was delayed. Joe Taylor suggested I ask another actor to play the part of “Joe” but I wanted to wait for him to play his part as I felt he was the best actor for the role. He had the ability to voice all the characters in the play with veracity and integrity. The play was written in monologue form and its producer Gorretti Slavin, suggested the addition of some wild-track sounds and voices, which enhanced the production.

Its theme centres around how the Coronavirus lockdown, and small comforts, affect grieving time. The character “Joe” is a man struggling to process his grief over the death of his wife five years previously, and then his father, at the beginning of the Coronavirus lockdown. As he walks through an urban park with his dog and meets people along the way, he goes on an emotional journey of memories. He is pulled from the past into the present by the presence of his dog and casual encounters with other people. His grief is intense and vivid and his thoughts wander. As society opens up he reflects on how lockdown time has impinged on grieving time.

I chose to write the play in the male gender as I had previously worked with Joe Taylor on another play and our collaboration was creatively rewarding. Writing in a different gender to my own also gave me an artistic distance from the subject, as it was very close to me at the time of writing. I had experienced the death of my father on the first day of lockdown and my partner some years before in 2016. Having children, kind neighbours and access to an urban park for dog-walking in Dublin were essential to my own grieving process which also coincided with lockdown. Sharing this liminal experience during these unique constraints in the form of a national radio play heightened my sense of *communitas* with co-creators, family, friends, neighbours, and Irish radio drama listeners.

Introdução

Esta peça radiofônica curta foi escolhida pela *RTE Radio 1*, a emissora nacional da Irlanda, e a estação de rádio mais ouvida, como parte de sua “*Long Story Short Season*”.

A peça foi escrita durante o primeiro *lockdown* do coronavírus e, como parte do processo de escrita, encontrei-me com o ator irlandês Joe Taylor, ao ar livre, para que pudéssemos colaborar e ensaiar com segurança. Como o bloqueio terminou e começou novamente, ele não pôde entrar no estúdio de rádio por razões de segurança pessoal e a gravação foi adiada. Joe Taylor sugeriu que eu pedisse a outro ator para interpretar o papel de “Joe”, mas eu queria esperar que ele interpretasse, pois senti que ele era o melhor ator para o papel. Ele tinha a capacidade de expressar todos os personagens da peça com veracidade e integridade. A peça foi escrita em forma de monólogo e sua produtora, Gorretti Slavin, sugeriu a adição de algumas vozes e sons de natureza selvagem que aprimorou a produção.

O tema da peça é sobre como o período de *lockdown* do coronavírus, e seus pequenos confortos, afetam o tempo de luto. O personagem “Joe” é um homem que luta para processar seu luto pela morte de sua esposa, ocorrida cinco anos antes, e de seu pai, no início do *lockdown* do coronavírus. Enquanto caminha por um parque urbano com seu cão e conhece pessoas ao longo do caminho, ele adentra uma jornada emotiva de lembranças. Ele é trazido do passado para o presente pela presença de seu cão e por encontros casuais com outras pessoas. Seu luto é intenso e vívido e seus pensamentos vagam. À medida que o bloqueio termina, seus turnos emocionais mostram como o tempo de bloqueio tem afetado o seu momento de luto.

Eu escolhi escrever a peça no gênero masculino, pois já havia trabalhado anteriormente com Joe Taylor em outra peça, e nossa colaboração foi criativamente gratificante. Escrever em um gênero diferente do meu também fornece uma distância artística do assunto, pois estava muito próximo de mim na época em que a escrevi. Eu havia vivenciado a morte de meu pai no primeiro dia de *lockdown* e de meu parceiro alguns anos antes em 2016. Ter filhos, vizinhos gentis e acesso a um parque urbano para passear cães em Dublin foi essencial para o meu processo de luto que coincidiu com o *lockdown*. Compartilhar esta experiência liminar durante o tempo singular do *lockdown* do coronavírus e seu final, na forma de uma peça de rádio nacional, aumentou meu senso de *communitas* com co-criadores, família, amigos, vizinhos e ouvintes irlandeses de teatro de rádio.

Grieving Time

SCENE I

FX: Outdoor sounds of park, kids playing

Joe: When my neighbour asks me:

Neighbour: How did you cope with the lockdown?’

Joe: Fine thanks.

Joe: I say. *[beat]* But I’m lying to my neighbour because I’m not fine; Because my Dad died the day after lockdown started and lockdown time has been my grieving time. I’m lying because my dog is about to relieve herself on the grass and I’m trying to concentrate on where she’s doing it so I can pick up her mess with my compostable plastic bag and I don’t want to talk about it.

Neighbour: Everyone well?

Joe: Yes. You too?

Neighbour: Thank God.’

Joe: She says crossing her fingers, deftly mixing religion and superstition.

FX: Wild track under

Joe: When my wife Caroline was diagnosed five years ago, I called home to tell Mum but she was out and for once in his life Dad answered the phone.

Dad: Is it bad news?’

Joe: he asked gently, he stayed on the phone listening while I cried,

Dad: Oh dear, Oh dear, dear, dear, I’m here for you, we’re all here for both of you,’

Joe: While Caroline was ill, I was busy, very busy, and when she died I had to get on with things. I made a list:

FX: Wild track Joe making the list

Joe: One. Collect death cert

Two. Call the solicitor

Three. Go to bank

Four. Sort out pension

Five. Pay funeral expenses,

Six. Do taxes

Seven. Send out letters of appreciation for condolence messages.

Eight. Don’t cry in front of the kids

Joe: My whole world shifted and there was so much to do. People were terribly kind around the time of the funeral but it was a relief to get back to work

two weeks later. Zack and Hannah needed a lot of attention; I was there for them as much as I could be.

FX: internal house TV sounds

Joe: Hey guys what do you want for dinner?
Indian' 'Again? Okay. Here's my card.

[beat]

Joe: No sorry I can't watch the match. I've some work to do, I'll be in my office on the computer if you need me.'

FX: Fade out on match on TV

SCENE 2

FX: External outdoor park

Joe: I'm letting the mutt off the lead so she can chase a squirrel, and within seconds she's barking aggressively at the base of a tree like she's a big dog. The squirrel sneers down at her. She will never catch one but she never gives up trying. I admire her tenacity. It's a family trait.

[beat]

Joe: The nurse said to me while I was waiting to see Dad:

Nurse: We've run out of PPE, So you can't go in to see him until we get more.'

Joe: I bet you didn't know what PPE was before all this, but now we all do now.

[beat]

Joe: Okay...So when...?'

Nurse: We can't let you in to see him until more gear arrives - I'm sorry.'
(officially)

Joe: It's obvious Dad isn't dying of Covid. He has a temperature but it's a tumour that's killing him. My mother shouldn't have to say goodbye to him through a mask, they should be able to see each other and hold hands without her being covered in plastic, but they are:

Nurse: . . . only following guidelines

Joe: After a respectable time because I'm afraid to annoy her, I ask her again:

Joe: When do you think the PPE gear will arrive?

Joe: She shrugs her shoulders.

Joe: Soon?'

Joe: My father is dying in a hermetically sealed in a room that's like a scene

from a Hollywood blockbuster. I was out at a very late dinner in the club the night before so I'm hungover and sweating inside the PPE gear. That should be in the Kubler Ross stages of grief shouldn't it? Anger, Hangover, Sweating and Depression.

He's 89, but still holds forth at every family dinner, he has a big birthday to look forward to in November. We haven't been on our trip to Istanbul yet to cross the Bosphorus Strait that divides Asia from Europe.

The nurse gives him more morphine and I know from the exact same experience with Caroline, that he won't wake up. Mum knows too and her being her she ignores the rules, pulls down her mask and kisses him goodbye. I'm feel like I'm intruding but it's okay, I'm his son, it's okay to be there.

Joe: There was a little hole on the very top of Dad's Judge's wig, and because he was so tall no one could see it unless he bent down. He used to say to Hannah:

Dad: 'It's there to allow the thoughts of god to flow down into my mind so I will always know to do the right thing'.

Joe: Then he would pretend to run away and hide.

FX: Wild track Hannah 'Come back!' Please let me look!

Joe: Please let me look! Hannah would say when she caught him, knowing he always carried sweets in his pockets for her. Their relationship healed something in me.

Being right was always so important to him, morally right rather than the: 'I know the name of the actor in the film' kind of way, that was fun until it was ruined by google.

SCENE 3

FX: Outdoor park

Joe: Where the hell has the dog gone? I don't know what I'd do if something happened to the dog. There she is, over there.

FX: Sound of distant barking

Joe: 'Kyla, come here! Stop begging that nice lady for treats.'

Kyla, Kyla that's not your ball. Give it back now...'

Joe: Sometimes it seemed as if we were having a good time during her illness, out together as a family, walking the dog, sunny day, the four of us, giggling together, almost normal.

Joe: Do you ever forget about your illness when we're out?

Caroline: No, I never do.

Joe: I wish I could do something.

Caroline: You are doing everything, there's nothing more you can do.'

Joe: When Caroline was near the end the dog would curl up next to her and I'd gently close the door leaving them together sleeping.

She was so driven, in control of everything, the house, the kids, her practice. She would have eventually become a judge, like Dad, the two of

them were genuinely interested in law, they never stopped talking about it. Unlike me.

I sort of fell into it. When I came out of Trinity in the 80s there were no jobs, I didn't want to go to London or the States, and it was only when someone said to me: 'Why don't you try the Kings Inns? It's easy enough to get into,' that I actually thought of it.

[beat]

Joe: Dad never got annoyed when people asked him things:

How do you defend someone when you know they are guilty?'

That question bores the hell out of me but he always had the time to start a discussion even with taxi drivers:

'If a defendant tells his legal team he's innocent then the presumption of innocence applies and it is the golden thread that runs through the whole legal system. It's something everyone is entitled to – there's a need for a high standard of proof and a proper balance between the prosecution and the defendant.....'

What a brilliant man, they said about him in the Law Library and I used to pretend that I'd read his books, he never discussed them with me and I'd really only dipped into them, they were full of obscure references, Latin phrases, words I'd have to look up, and honestly I'm more of a John Grisham fan. I wasn't in his league or Caroline's at all.

[beat]

Why them and not me?

SCENE 4

Dog owner: They're like children aren't they, without the heartache?'

Joe: The dog's owner says. I'm sitting on the park bench watching Kyla play with another Bichon. It must be a male dog because she's excited and jumping all over him.

Joe: I smile vaguely and look at my phone, afraid to look at a photo that's popping up as a Facebook memory from four years ago. It's the one where Caroline's drinking champagne with us the day Zack got his Leaving Cert results, swollen from the steroids that were delaying the inevitable spread of her disease but she'd dragged herself out of bed that day to celebrate.

I've been grieving and thinking about grieving during the lockdown. It's hard not to. There's nowhere to go to escape it.

My friend Peter who's knows everything about everything said to me:

'In some Buddhist traditions they don't socialise at all for 90 days after the death of a family member.'

Maybe the length of the lockdown gave me a chance to grieve like a Buddhist.

Almost post lockdown now my son Zack did his final exams online, he's out in our fragile economy, working as a delivery driver. He came into my office last week, smiling his shy smile. Half man, half boy. 'Dad I've got some good news'

'Is it....?'

Yes, the 4 year scholarship, to do my PhD - I got it.'

'That's great news, well done Zack, Wow, I'm so proud of you.'

'Thanks.'

We don't go overboard but we do celebrate with Zack's girlfriend and

Hannah that evening. I cook dinner for everyone, Steak and chips and a glass of red wine each.

The next morning I don't want to get out of bed. I ache all over, drag myself through the day, tetchy and jumpy.

I realise. What's wrong with me. [beat] I want to tell Dad and Caroline Zack's news

FX: Sound of dog whining

Joe: 'Come on Kyla, jump in, I'm not lifting you, you're not that old yet.'

Joe: She tilts her head sideways and I look into the dark eyes in her cute little face. I know they're bred to look sympathetic.

She jumps up and onto my lap, and paws at me impatiently, I can't drive off.

I take some time to stroke her and rub under her chin. There's no need to rush.

Joe: Love you. I whisper into the dog's silky soft ear.

She has my attention. For the first time in a long time, I'm not so impatient, I can pay her some real attention. It's okay to be still – and take some grieving time.

END