5
Revenge of the Buckteeth Girl

5.1 Revenge

Maeve Higgins: Live at Vicar Street, 2010

Maeve Higgins walks onto a minimal stage set in Vicar Street, Dublin. The stage is flanked by floor-length black curtains and little else. A microphone and stand are centre stage, and a stool is obscured in the curtains on the right. In keeping with this setting, her entrance is also understated, she greets the audience and immediately starts to talk about her habit of over-ordering food in restaurants. She is dressed in a Laura Ashley-style floral print dress, a green cardigan, and I cannot see her shoes from my seat at the back of the venue, where I am attempting to film the performance. The delivery of her material in this performance is low-key and conversational. At times and in similar style to elements of the performance works of both Tiernan and Moran, the material can inflect into mimicry and ‘instant’ or ‘snapshot’ characterisations. Her tones are always playful, and the pace and rhythm is rapid. Higgins speaks quite quickly and at times her tempo is such that it is difficult to catch everything she says. Furthermore, some of her lines tend to be delivered quietly and in a ‘throwaway’ manner, meaning that the audience have to listen carefully to catch every word. So too, her physicality is quite contained. There is little movement about the stage and her gestures, facial expressions and personifications are animated, if not particularly flamboyant or exaggerated. In other words they flow, but they never flow too far from her centred physicality, at least in this performance. After talking about how she overeats in restaurants (throughout the show Higgins returns to issues related to food and weight loss), Higgins begins to share memories of her earliest years. Ideas of family and of childhood recur throughout Higgins's material and interestingly,
they change very little when she tours abroad. By way of example, at the *Comedy Gala Festival* in Auckland, New Zealand in 2009, Higgins spent a section of her performance talking about familial features, including a part in which she focused on two aspects of her mother’s personality: her fixation with the length of her own arms and the other of her amazing facility to count up random noises very quickly:

[My mother], she always shows off about her arms... she always says ‘haven’t I lovely arms, they’re a good length aren’t they... they’re great, they’re perfect,’ [and on counting quickly] she’s super cool because if there are loud noises made in rapid succession, she can count them quite quickly in her mind. So like if there’s a knock on the door... she’s like (mimes counting) ‘four, four, definitely, Dave get that.’ And only because my dad is such a kind man, he sometimes takes, like a fake minute to pretend to count up the noises himself... (feigned amazement) ‘How do you do that? That’s incredible, what is that, like a photographic sound memory or something’?!

The minutiae of ‘life’ in the Higgins household received a strong audience response in New Zealand, in recognition perhaps of those eccentricities that pervade all domestic existence when no one is looking. Broadly, Higgins’s material works very well as the comedy of identification and a good way to explore her use of that comic style is to consider the (self-entitled) *Bullies from Cobh* scenario. In this piece of work (filmed by the author at Vicar Street) Higgins shares with the audience her memories of a “chubster” youth and of having been bullied as a child:

*Bullies from Cobh*

But the tables turned in secondary school
That’s for sure
Then the bullies emerged
I can understand why I was bullied, ’cause I was very confident
Which is the worst gift you can give a child
And my parents had six daughters
And they would tell us all the time
Like my mother handled the brain side of things
And she’d be like (Mother’s voice)
“You’re brilliant – Look at this – Look at this maths”
“Look at this, you’re a genius”