

2015

Living by the Code: Authority in Gerard Stembridge's *The Gay Detective*

Kathleen A. Heininge

George Fox University, kheininge@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/eng_fac

 Part of the [Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Heininge, Kathleen A., "Living by the Code: Authority in Gerard Stembridge's *The Gay Detective*" (2015). *Faculty Publications - Department of English*. 65.

http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/eng_fac/65

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Department of English by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Living by the Code: Authority in Gerard Stembridge's *The Gay Detective*

Kathleen A. Heininge

Irish drama has few representations of police officers as anything but a trope for authority, tending to avoid any substantive character development. Likewise, it has few representations of homosexual characters, and when such representations do exist they are often caricatures. Reductive portrayals of police often arise from the complex relationship the Irish have with authority and with the legal system. But one of the few exceptions to this trend, and the only play to tackle the representation of a police officer and a homosexual at once, is Gerard Stembridge's play *The Gay Detective* (1996). The play offers up the character of Pat, a 'gay detective', a fascinating dramatic portrayal of the collision of two identities which, on the surface, contest each other. Alternately comic and tragic, poignant and gruesome, with an ambiguous ending, Stembridge's work defies attempts at easy categorization. He explores the comic possibilities in the tension between the codified identifiers of Irish police officers and of gay men, two codes which don't often 'speak' to each other, but he also demonstrates the tragedy in the misunderstanding between these two cultures. The collision provides a fascinating study of codified behaviour and the way different codes of identity recognition can clash in one individual. This paper will explore the implications of Pat's seemingly incompatible persona, implications that force a consideration of his adoption of these codes in terms of Judith Butler's concept of 'masquerade' allowing for a kind of interpellation.

At the start of the play, Bear, Pat's superior, dangles the possibility of promotion in front of Pat, but also hints he knows Pat is gay, implying Pat's successful future in the department hinges on Bear's will and on Pat's sexual discretion. Thus, when a case seems to involve homosexuals, Bear takes advantage of Pat's status by sending him undercover to investigate; Pat ends up catapulted into the treacherous secret world of wealthy and influential men, violent sex, and murder. Pat's sense of his own conflicted identities, in the meantime, is tested when he meets and begins a relationship with Ginger, the victim of a gay bashing incident being investigated by Pat.

Authority in Gerard Stembridge's *The Gay Detective*

The play is set at the moment in Irish history when the decriminalization of homosexuality, because of a 1993 court case, was being debated in Ireland. This liminal moment of debate is what Georg Lukács calls a revolution in thought, the result of a new class consciousness, and any possible change in law 'is the self-objectification of human society at a particular stage in its development; its laws hold good only within the framework of the historical context which produced them and which is in turn determined by them'⁷⁷⁹, the historical context here being that precise moment in time when the law was least definitive. Laws are, ultimately, human constructs that are made to be resisted or changed when they no longer suit the parameters of a given society. Lukács continues:

Now class consciousness consists in fact of the appropriate and rational reactions 'imputed' ... to a particular typical position in the process of production. This consciousness is, therefore, neither the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class. And yet the historically significant actions of the class as a whole are determined in the last resort by this consciousness and not by the thought of the individual – and these actions can be understood only by reference to this consciousness.⁷⁸⁰

Because of the uncertainty of whether homosexuality would continue to be illegal, Pat is both secretive about his sexuality at work and indiscreet about his sexuality outside of work. He cannot yet know how far a new consciousness might extend, and his tension remains that between work and personal identity. There are 'appropriate and rational reactions' expected of him because he has a very 'particular typical position' in the process of production of the law: as a police officer, in fact, he holds the most typical position, the most visible authority figure with which the general public comes into contact. A society works smoothly when those who are in charge of maintaining it function in predictable ways. The behaviour of such people is guided by the expectations put upon them, and not by individual choices or preferences. Revolution occurs when the expectations are violated by personal choice or preference, but only when that personal choice or preference becomes more than just an anomaly. Pat, in alternately 'masquerading' as police officer and gay man, violates the codes of both law enforcement and

homosexuality, which would seem to be an anomaly at any other given time in history. At the moment of change, however, he becomes the symbol of the tension, the symbol of revolution, of what may become a new class consciousness.

These codes help to mark Pat's moment of identity, and he has so cleanly compartmentalized them that he has difficulty recognizing one in the context of the other. The concept of 'gaydar', 'that seemingly indefinable social skill ... that allegedly allows lesbians and gay men to identify each other in heterosexually dominated social contexts'⁷⁸¹ is well-known as a form of recognition, although the specifics of such recognition may change from culture to culture, and it is certainly not a perfectly reliable means of identification. What is less discussed in anthropological or social studies is the fact that other social groups also have indefinable cues, whether linguistic or nonverbal, often enabling members of that group to recognize each other. Motivated by a similar desire to 'pass' in a social setting that may not be accepting of their career, many police officers, especially off-duty, investigative or undercover officers, have internalized the same kinds of cues, and are frequently able to recognize each other through signals both verbal and physical. Joseph Hayes identifies the verbal markers as 'insider jokes, play on words, exaggeration in speech ... part adaptation to the need for secrecy, part defensiveness, yet at the same time a kind of assertiveness'.⁷⁸² While Hayes specifically defines 'gayspeak', the same markers apply as well to police officers, and for similar reasons. Whether the style is clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, speech patterns, stance, or some other 'indefinable' quality, the code allows for recognition. Pat's character functions in both of these two codes, able to recognize the way each one works. Homi Bhabha calls this interstitial position 'the ambivalent man'⁷⁸³, a mode of functioning between two conflicting forces of subjectivity that precludes fully aligning with either force. Pat's attempts to negotiate between the codes, here operating as the signifiers of the forces of subjectivity (i.e., gay man and police officer), are both amusing and painful, and his failures to recognize one code when he is operating in the other, stifling one side of himself as it were, suggest that the two identities are entirely incompatible, and one must win out over the other.

The dilemma for Pat is in trying to reconcile the secrets in his life and in trying to prioritize and identify the true elements of his

identity. As a police officer he is meant to uphold the law, while as a gay man he is breaking the law. The scenario of a police officer breaking a law is nothing new, but this goes further; for Pat, his homosexual identity is breaking the law at the same time his law enforcement identity requires him to force the lawbreaker to desist. His status as police officer is contested by the hierarchy above him, which threatens him with ever-increasing levels of authority and punishment. That punishment, however, can arise from either his public or his private life, and any 'authority' that he may have as a gay man is contested within the structure of police work. From the first scene in the play, the configurations of authority are subverted and confused. Pat himself seems to have only the vaguest understanding of which of his identities truly defines or authorizes him, and he seems to be masquerading in both, adopting the codes of being a gay man or a police officer according to the situation.

In her important work on the performance of gender Judith Butler describes this masked behaviour: 'Masquerade may be understood as the performative production of a sexual ontology, an appearing that makes itself convincing as a 'being''⁷⁸⁴. The performative aspect of Pat's behaviour is central to Stembridge's point: Does the masquerade slip into something more than a pose? In behaving as a police officer, or in behaving as a gay man, does Pat actually create a new reality for himself, or is the slippage between the two itself a deconstruction of that reality? In her later book, *Bodies That Matter*, Butler uses Althusser's concept of interpellation to illustrate her idea of the performative: when a police officer calls to us through the door, we are compelled by the law to obey, and it is more than a request. Something ontological is stipulated by the assertion of language; a reality is created through the use of language alone, which goes beyond mere description. Butler asks, 'Are there other ways of being addressed and constituted by the law, ways of being occupied and occupying the law, that disarticulate the power of punishment from the power of recognition?'⁷⁸⁵, a question tackled directly within *The Gay Detective* when we see the layers of masquerade required of Pat. Pat is being 'addressed' by the law when he is given an assignment that, as a subordinate and as a police officer, he cannot refuse; he is constituted by the law when he is reminded that his very being is illegal. He is occupied by the law when he is the subject of interrogation; he is occupying the law when he is performing his occupational duties. Whether,

however, that dual position manages to disarticulate the power of punishment from the power of recognition, whether this is a moment of successful 'revolution', remains to be seen.

Bear's confrontation of Pat at the beginning of the play is the first instance of tension between codes. Bear speaks as a representative of the law and as the authority within a hierarchy in which Pat participates, telling Pat, 'I'd have said now, you were the sort of fellow who'd be after promotion. Would you fancy that, promotion? ... I wanted you to see that we're paying attention.'⁷⁸⁶ The double meaning of 'we're paying attention' – noting both Pat's work and Pat's sexuality – is clear to the audience and to Bear, but not yet to Pat, who has not suspected Bear's authoritative subtext. Bear reads aloud from Pat's file, and the linguistic and lexical codes begin to clash: 'Logical – good concentration ... stylish approach, that's an unusual one – that's not a comment I often hear about young Gardai – stylish '(8). Bear is confused – or pretends to be – by the language of Pat's evaluator, as if a 'normal' police officer would never use the word 'stylish' in an official document, but he senses an underlying meaning; since he is privy to Pat's differently coded world, he seems to be mocking Pat, although Pat, still functioning in the code of police work, fails to recognize the distinction. Bear insinuates there is something different about Pat, regardless of the fact that Pat is not responsible for the language used by his evaluator. Stylishness is clearly cause for suspicion, according to Bear.

Bear continues to toy with Pat, making Pat guess what Bear's next questions will reveal; Pat becomes both interrogated and interrogator, though he has no idea of the purport of Bear's remarks and his confusion increases with his sense of threat. Bear finally reveals that Pat has been spotted at a gay bar by Cat, an undercover officer. In fact, Pat has made advances to the officer without recognizing him as a fellow officer; Pat was, however, recognized and reported. He is threatened when his identities clash, and he is forced to operate simultaneously in both of his worlds, a condition he finds confusing. He recognizes the codes of police work, the nature of interrogation and the positioning of authority, but is now the subject of it rather than the object, a position that bewilders him until he understands that his private life has just crossed over to his public life. Keeping him off kilter, just as Pat 'cops on' to what is happening

and is about to confess to his superior that he is gay, Bear assures him, 'You don't have to answer what you're not asked. Just be very, very careful Sergeant, won't you? ... You know the law don't you?' Bear's refusal to allow Pat to confirm his suspicion leaves himself free to later utilize Pat's status without 'abetting' Pat's crime of homosexuality. Furthermore, it allows Bear to assert the threat his superiority represents, while posing as benevolent mentor. Pat must balance between these two codes, these two worlds, until he can feel safe, but the safe position shifts continually throughout the play.

While investigating a report of a man having been beaten, Pat meets Ginger, the victim. As Pat conducts the interview, Ginger clearly assumes Pat knows what provoked the beating, finally announcing bluntly, 'We were queer-bashed Garda ... Are you afraid to say it out loud?'

PAT. No. No. I'm sorry. I didn't ... didn't ... know. I didn't know you were – GINGER. Really?

PAT. No really – it never occurred to me.

GINGER. Oh I know sure, it never happens.

PAT: I don't mean that either. I just wasn't thinking – So ... so ... you were attacked just because they thought you were –

GINGER. Thought? No they didn't just think it. I'd have to say that. – To be fair we were asking for it (16-17).

Pat is again surprised at the intersection of the codes: he hadn't been thinking as a gay man, and so he failed to see the signs which were already there, clues that would have helped in his investigation. Ginger, far more camp than Pat, assumes it is obvious, saying, 'You know why we were attacked so stop going round' – (16). Pat vows that he will find the attackers and Ginger doesn't believe him, seeing him as just another cop who would never investigate such a beating. Ginger's neighbour, Puppy (the only female in the play who speaks), is the one who called the police during the beating, and Pat takes her to the gay bar with him to see if she recognizes any of the men as the attackers. She does indeed, and Pat suddenly changes his clothes and behaviour, becoming very camp, to Puppy's surprise; he lures Bull after him and when Bull jumps him, he makes his arrest, beating the man viciously in the course of it. When Pat goes to tell Ginger about the arrest, Pat kisses him, to Ginger's surprise; they end up in bed together.

Authority in Gerard Stembridge's *The Gay Detective*

While Pat is clearing this case, Bear asks him to find a way to secretly warn the local closeted TD to be more discreet in his homosexual activities. Cat, the undercover officer who recognized Pat in the gay bar, has been following Rat, an informant on a drug case, and saw Rat and the TD together. Reputations are at stake. It seems as if Bear is sympathetic to the TD's situation (and perhaps to Pat's), since sending a cop to warn someone about his illegal activities is outside the purview of the police department. Pat 'poses' as a gay man, approaching the TD in the park as if he wants sex, and warns the TD that Rat is about to expose him. He earns his promotion.

When the same TD is found murdered outside a gay bar, Bear is pressured to solve the case and he turns to Pat, relying on Pat's familiarity with the codes of the gay world, knowing his own authority is inadequate in this other code. Once again, Pat's two identities intersect. Pat again agrees to 'pose' as a gay man to find the killer; his first stop is the bar outside of which the TD was killed. Stembridge's use of the gay bar as the site of Pat's 'acting' gay reveals yet another layer of the tension between Pat's personae: while as a gay man he is comfortable frequenting gay bars, as a police officer he is there seen as the enemy. As Nancy Achilles demonstrates in her study of gay community, the gay bar is a most important symbol of social cohesion. 'If,' she argues, 'there is one particular issue which calls forth a unified protest from the homosexual Community, it is that of police activity. Many homosexuals remain passive until a favourite bar or close friend is threatened by the police.'⁷⁸⁷ The gay bar is the place where contacts are made, where information is exchanged, where assignations are scheduled, and it must be protected as a safe haven. It is the place where Pat's own identity is more obfuscated than ever: he is a gay man pretending to be a straight police officer pretending to be a gay man. The masquerade continues.

While posing as a gay man who is just curious about recent events, Pat pretends to the bartender that he is also disgusted by all the police running around. He learns that Rat has not been seen for some time, but he meets Snake at the bar, who seems to know something about the murder, and who invites Pat to join him and his friends at a secret hideaway; Pat can be their 'special guest'. The names of the friends – Snake, Pig, and Wolf – interpellate them for us. In fact, the names of most of the characters are a form of interpellation, as nearly everyone in the

play has the name of an animal and that animal's characteristics. Bear, the Superintendent, brooks no question to his authority. Ginger, who becomes Pat's lover, is flamboyant and charming. Puppy, Ginger's neighbour, is loyal to a fault, standing by Ginger even when Pat seems to abandon him, refusing to judge anyone. Bull is Ginger's attacker, the man Pat arrests in the bar. Rat is the informant. The murder of the TD, a man without name – and no identity except his political position – leads Pat to Snake. Snake is a brilliant musician whose proclivities are hidden behind his public display of Lizard, his female companion who does not speak in his presence but who provides cover for Snake's real interests (his 'fag hag,' according to Philip Core).⁷⁸⁸ Pig is a criminal lawyer, and Wolf, the owner of the hideaway, is prominent, married, wealthy, and gets carried away with violent sex. Mouse is Wolf's houseboy, mute because, it is implied, Wolf did something horrific to him; he is desperate to escape the hideaway and enlists Pat's help. For each of these personae, identity is 'created' through the use of names. They are effectively reduced to their animal types, and don't exceed those boundaries.

The only two characters who differ in this respect are Ginger and Pat. While the other 'animals' are named for their species, Ginger, in being named for a particular kind of cat, is allotted more character development than the others. Cat is the undercover officer who told Bear about his encounter with Pat, and he is also the man with Ginger during the gay-bashing, but he scampered away for fear of having his 'real' identity discovered. While Cat denies that he is gay to his superiors – Bear notes, 'As I'm sure you realize, he's not that way inclined himself ... In fact, he has three lovely children' (19) – Ginger comments that he and Cat were 'asking for it':

GINGER: That night we were the fairies from hell. If I was straight, I'd have beaten us up. Look picture the scene if you can, George's St. Two in the morning, two fine lads arm in arm, cheek to cheek, completely arseholes, and we are not by any stretch of the imagination being discreet. Rampaging queens in fact (17).

While he and Cat are the same species, Cat behaves as expected from a cat, somewhat sly and elusive when trouble arises, and Ginger gets further character development that allows us to see him as a human being rather than a type, more complex than simply a species.

The other exception to this interpellation is Pat, who is not named for an animal: his traits don't fit any one type. In fact, his name suggests some ambiguity in his gender, as Pat could be short for either Patrick or Patricia. But as he self-identifies, 'Pat' is not central; rather, his rank as a police officer is, a rank that no one can seem to remember accurately. Bear refers to him as Sergeant, accurately identifying his rank, but suggests that he could become detective, that he is the one able to confer that status, that interpellation. Puppy calls him 'Inspector' until Pat corrects her with 'Sergeant' (12); Ginger calls him 'Garda' twice and Pat corrects him (16); when Ginger gets it right, finally calling him Sergeant, Pat has been promoted, and then Pat has to assert himself as Detective (32). Pat's opening line in the play, directed retrospectively at Ginger, is, 'I am the Gay Detective. Remember it was you called me that' (7). When Ginger gave him the name of the Gay Detective, however, Ginger meant it differently, before Pat reveals himself as gay: 'Can I call you the Gay Detective now? ... I just mean the detective that gays can trust' (33). The interpellation ends up being more accurate than Ginger knew, as Pat is not only a detective for gays, but is himself gay. The commentary on interpellation becomes part of the comedy of the play, then, as Pat seeks to reinterpret himself while others refuse to comply. The one time that Pat is likened to an animal is at the hideaway, after he has sex while he 'masquerades' as the new boy toy for the weekend, and Pig comments, 'Where does it come from? ... In you. The animal. What makes you like it this way? Don't misunderstand me. I'm not suspicious – you weren't faking or pretending' (68). In agreeing that he was not faking or pretending, Pat forces the audience to wonder again about his true identity, an identity clouded by the fact that he is 'pretending' to be gay while working 'undercover' as a police officer, a job he does while 'undercover' as a gay man. The truth seems to be obliterated in the masquerade. Is he, in fact, just as much an animal as all the others?

Even the physical interpellates self. The stage directions set up the doubling of characters, reinforcing the sense that the characters are only caricatures or types. Bear is also Wolf. Puppy is also Lizard. Bull is also Pig. The only two who do not double are Pat and Ginger. Pat changes his clothes on stage, effectively adopting a new identity with every change of clothing, 'becoming' the police officer when he dons his uniform or his anorak,

'becoming' gay when he abruptly dons his 'camp' clothing so he and Puppy can go undercover at the gay bar to find the man who beat up Ginger (29); he wears 'ordinary clothes' when he goes to the park to warn the TD and for sex (22); he turns in his uniform in exchange for an anorak when he is promoted to Detective (32). But in all these costume changes those around him fail to recognize the significance of the codes. Puppy understands the connection with the 'camp' clothing when they are hunting for Bull, but she sees it as a costume, assuring him that he will 'pass' as gay and not realizing he actually is (29). She is so convinced by his 'cover' that she demands that Pat kiss her in order to create a distraction when she sees Ginger's attacker (29). Ginger doesn't recognize the anorak as the uniform of new status and must be told of Pat's promotion. 'Ordinary clothes' do not mark Pat as 'different' (either as gay or as a police officer) in the park. The audience is reminded throughout the costume changes of the idea of masquerade, but are not allowed to see what lies beneath, leaving them to wonder at the effectiveness of the performative: can both aspects of Pat's identity be interpellated at any given moment, or does one cancel out the other continually?

The fact of this interpellation places the tension of identities beyond merely the binary of public versus the private, deconstructing them. The core elements of Pat's identity are incompatible given this social structure. He does not cease to be a police officer when he leaves work anymore than he ceases to be gay when he is at work. His masquerade is one of defence as well as assertion, and always must be. The superficiality of seeing public versus private as dichotomous is evidenced when we try to cleanly separate Pat's identities.

Refusing to allow the audience to consider the possibility that Pat is gay in name only, that his homosexuality is all just part of his 'masquerade' or 'pose', the audience sees him regularly having sex with men. Each time, the sex is in complete contrast to his official duties, becoming a violent rendering of his identity, taking place as it generally does at moments of stress in his work. Having sex with Ferret immediately after Bear has threatened him, he is distracted, swearing about Bear ('Bastard. Fucking bastard.') rather than focusing on sexual pleasure (10-12). He is again distracted while he is having a sexual encounter with an anonymous Man in the park, this time because he is delighted with himself for having success-fully warned the TD off Rat (24).

Authority in Gerard Stembridge's *The Gay Detective*

After he captures Bull, one of Ginger's attackers, he congratulates himself while he is being orally copulated by Badger:

PAT. I like my job. Do you like your job? I was getting to hate it. I was feeling you know – like a square peg in a round hole. But mmm – suddenly, suddenly, it's exciting, it's alive with possibilities – Oooh yeah – I can't believe it. It's as if –

BADGER. Do you want me to stop?

PAT. Sorry?

BADGER. Look, if you're not into it just say so.

PAT. Oh no sorry – no it's great – it's all great.

BADGER. Well, will you shut up so. Or if you have to talk, cries of ecstasy would be nice (30).

In each instance, the sex is impersonal, violent, physical, without emotion or even apparent engagement on Pat's part. It is as if the physical act itself helps to remind Pat of who he is when he feels lost in the job, and he can reassert himself somehow through sex. Audience discomfort is at least partly due to the recognition of the ineffectiveness of such a ploy: he is disconnected, so why should we take it seriously? Jeff Nunokawa claims that 'Sex invokes an urge to get away from others as much as an urge to join with them.'⁷⁸⁹ Only when he and Ginger are together is there intimacy rather than brute sex, as the only 'sex' the audience sees between them is given in the stage direction: 'They get into bed together and disappear under the sheets' (36). It is clear that this is different, that Ginger is 'a real lover' (40), someone with whom Pat can have a relationship, and with whom perhaps he can now become whole.

Pat's deepest frustration is his inability to read the codes of the one when he is operating by the codes of the other. If he is at work, he seems unable to distinguish the codes of gay life; if he is not at work, he seems unaware of the codes of police work. When he meets Cat at the gay bar, he does not recognize him as a policeman, and his failure to do so puts him in a vulnerable position with Bear; when he meets Ginger at work, despite Ginger's innuendoes, he is unable to put together the fact that Ginger is gay, a fact that could have helped him with the investigation had he known it right away. While Bear assumes that Pat's familiarity with both codes would be an asset in the murder investigation, he does not realize the lengths to which Pat must go to keep his two identities compartmentalized.

Stembridge seems to imply that audiences would also expect a greater level of awareness of codification from Pat; some of this lack of awareness is a source of the more amusing moments in the play, such as the *double entendres* when Ginger is flirting with him to which he is oblivious. Stembridge also clearly marks the other characters as unaware: Puppy, for example, seems to be completely unaware of the most basic of codes. While trying to describe Ginger's attackers, she announces that she is 'hopeless on men's clothes ... I just never notice what fellahs wear ...' (14). All she can remember is that the attackers were big. She later has a flash of memory and pictures the attackers in her head, claiming she could recognize them if she saw them, but she cannot describe 'colour of eyes, or hair, or, or, you know things ... I can't think like that' (25). And yet, she has learned to distrust the police, living by the code taught by Ginger that keeps homosexuals and police as far away as possible from each other. She insists that she is not responsible for identifying the men in the way that Pat demands, telling him she is not the police, and she will not be one who mixes her identities: 'I didn't interrogate him you know – Jesus – the poor guy is – beaten and and bleeding and ... and God knows what – and I'm just trying to make things easy – I mean I'm not the police' (13). Until he convinces her that he is willing to help, she assumes the police would be uninterested in investigating a 'queer-bashing', and is surprised to learn that he has no intention of arresting Ginger for his homosexuality (18). The code that Puppy has learned is, oddly enough, a code that doesn't really apply to her since she is not homosexual; the seemingly obvious dominant cultural code that might help her to identify her friend's assailants is beyond her.

Bear, on the other hand, recognizes the existence of the varying codes, but is unable to convincingly operate outside of his own authoritative code of police work. He attempts to manipulate the codes of the gay world, as he tries to manipulate Pat, but he misunderstands them, either deliberately or because he does not care enough to learn. Bear's obstinate misreading of the gay codes reveals that the apparent sympathy for Pat's plight which he feigned in the beginning, when he was actually threatening Pat, was part of his own masquerade, though one that was consciously adopted. When he gives Pat the order to find and warn the TD about Rat, effectively giving him permission to 'be' gay, he tells Pat, 'Discretion. Just because you're legal doesn't mean you can go round like a nancy. No arriving to work in

mascara and funny perfume – right?’ (32) Whether his conflation of homosexuals and transvestites is deliberate or simply a misunderstanding of the codes, the audience can sense his disingenuousness. Later, when Bear learns of the TD’s murder, he tells Pat, in frustration and anger, that ‘queers are either sad or bad. They fuck up their own lives first, and then everyone else’s lives after that’. When he allows that Pat could be ‘the exception to the rule’ (39), he also notes that the TD probably thought that too; clearly what we earlier mistook for sympathy was part of Bear’s own pose.

While Pat is at the hideaway, he discovers that it was Mouse who murdered the TD, having been ordered to do so by Wolf, Pig and Snake because the TD was going to turn Wolf in for the murder of Rat, the result of Wolf’s violent sex fetish. Pat feels sorry for Mouse and allows him to escape, certain justice would still be served when Wolf, Pig and Snake are prosecuted for Rat’s death. Bear’s response to Pat’s elation at having solved the crime situates Bear clearly as entirely within the law enforcement code, with no further attempt to negotiate the code of homosexuality or to placate Pat:

Are you being deliberately stupid? Do you seriously think we’re going to arrest three distinguished citizens for the murder of a little shit, a little pansy rent boy do you? For Christ’s sake get sense – we have to get them on a real murder (76).

Bear’s unwillingness to consider that the murder of a homosexual constitutes ‘real murder’ reveals what is no longer a surprise: he has no interest in reconciling the two codes, and any effort he made at sympathy for Pat was a calculated game of manipulation. Despite knowing Pat as a law enforcement colleague, Bear clearly disregards that status in light of Pat’s homosexuality, which, for Bear, overshadows everything else. Everything for Bear is a matter of spin, and he only feels compelled to spin for those who, like Snake and Wolf and Pig, and certainly the TD, uphold the society in which he believes, even if those people are leading what he considers to be a despicable private life. His attitude here puts his earlier sympathy for the TD in a new light, and therefore he is able to take the details of the TD having been found murdered in the alley behind a gay bar and conclude that, ‘He was obviously innocently walking around the streets of Dublin at four in the morning, when suddenly – ooh – the heart goes and without

knowing it he staggers thirty yards up a lane and falls dead' (38). Bear's entire position of authority is engaged in behaving as though there is no 'revolution' of class consciousness, and he must first deny and then denigrate any other possibility. For him, the police code is a refuge that protects the status quo.

Engagement with and failure to understand various codes seem, in these other characters, to be expected. The failure of either of these codes to truly help Pat when he needs it the most implies the binary nature of the codes, a binary that does exist where the binary of public and private does not. The codes do not seem to overlap for Pat in the way that Bear expects them to. It is as if while he is functioning by one code, the other code is obliterated. Pat has stifled his instinct so that his two worlds will not intersect, and doing so interferes with his ability to do the job. He manages so well that Ginger tries to set Pat up with Puppy before Pat kisses him, despite Ginger's obvious flirtation with him at the same time (29). Pat's career and his love life seem to be on parallel tracks to success, but his disconnect interferes. While pursuing leads in the TD's murder, he talks to Ginger about the case, even relying on Ginger's more finely-honed senses to identify possible suspects from the TD's funeral: 'You're an old scene queen – sniff 'em out for me' (47). He doesn't trust his own ability to know who might be involved, and it is Ginger who leads him to Snake. But at the same time he becomes so wrapped up in the case that he fails to see the clues that Ginger is leaving about his health, as though the success of his police identity stifles his ability to read the codes in his personal life. The audience is not shocked to find that Ginger's symptoms, ailments that he has taken little care to hide or to explain away to Pat, are signs that he has AIDS, and yet Pat is deeply shocked when he realizes it. Puppy has known all along, and is infuriated that Pat, the detective, could have missed the signs; she accuses him of being selfish, but it seems that the problem is that he is of two selves, only one of which can operate at a time. His distraction is made clear by the juxtaposition of his lives: when Ginger is coughing, clearly in distress, and Pat is comforting him, Pat is thinking only about the case, failing to read the signs of his personal life (46). When he does realize the enormity of what he is facing, he leaves Ginger and retreats to his other reality, his police work, immersing himself instead in the case, nearly killing himself in the performance of his duties as he uncovers the truth about both murders while he also 'performs' his gayness.

Pat's back-and-forth efforts to interpellate self at the same time that he masquerades culminate in the moment when Bear tells him the truth of his job: no police investigation will ever seriously focus on a crime committed on a gay criminal, a 'little pansy rent boy' (76). The fate of a gay man will not take precedence over the fate of a distinguished citizen in this social structure. Pat realizes, 'So I've gone into the gutter for nothing – I raped myself of my own dignity for nothing' (77). The lost dignity is in both of his identities. He allows Bear to manipulate and subvert his identities in order to solve a case when the solution will never be acceptable within the current system. He allowed his private life, his love for Ginger, to suffer in his effort to try to reconcile his work with his sexuality. His own dignity, his ability to avoid being merely animal, is betrayed. He announces that he is done with the case, that there is no more to be learned, and that he is going home to be with his sick friend. Bear is bewildered, feeling his authority slipping, again threatening Pat with suspension and a denial of promotion. Pat states: 'I'm just going to be with my friend. If he'll have me. That's all I want to be now – his best friend if I can, that's more than good enough. I'm not the Gay Detective anymore' (78). In rejecting the paradigms of either Detective or Gay, but adopting one belonging to all of humanity – best friend – Pat becomes the rounded character so long absent in Irish drama. He is neither only authority figure nor homosexual, but is all of the above and none of the above. He exemplifies here what Mary McIntosh insists when she urges that 'the homosexual should be seen as playing a social role rather than as having a condition'⁷⁹⁰. He is beginning to let his roles become fully integrated.

This would be true if the play ended there. But in the last scene, Ginger and Pat reunite affectionately. Ginger tells Pat that he will always be the Gay Detective, with which Pat concurs. They speak of unravelling 'the big mystery', and Pat insists that at last he is on the right track, that they will have to keep looking for at least a few years for a solution to the mystery. And then Ginger returns to calling Pat 'Sergeant', inviting the question of what exactly has been interpellated.

Throughout the play Stembridge allows the characters to be interpellated at the same time as they are resistant to that interpellation, so the codes that make up identity, those of language, costume, relationships, and mannerisms, constantly

shift and require reinterpretation. Context is not even enough. When Ginger thanks Pat for having found his attackers, he admires Puppy's courage, saying that he would never do the same. 'I mean sneaking out on a cold night, hanging around dark alleys chasing after big brawny men – although now that I think of it...And dressing up – Yes it's sounding better and better ...' (34). The comic moment is the way the same language changes its code when the context changes. That which is frightening given the context of police work sounds enticing to a gay man. Is the ending, then, in its context, an interpellation of Pat's private life or his public life? Is the stipulation that he is always going to be perceived and derogated as gay? Or as a detective? Does one self necessarily always betray the other? Is 'detective' here only metaphorical? And in calling Pat 'Sergeant', has Ginger acknowledged Pat's demotion, and implied that he will never be successful in detecting the 'big mystery'? Or is it possible that Pig, the criminal lawyer, is the only one who is able to fully interpellate himself, an interpellation that could apply to many of the characters but most especially to Pat: 'I am an enigma, wrapped in a mystery, tucked neatly into a contradiction' (61)?

The roles, for Pat, of public and private, gay and straight, police officer and citizen, are ineffectively performed because for him they are not the dichotomies they seem to be for others. In refusing to allow for one public and one private persona, each separate, Stembridge forces the question about what real identity is. The fact that Pat is homosexual does not stop when he is performing his police duties; the fact that he is a police officer does not stop when he goes home at night. The two identities are uniquely pervasive in all situations, and Pat must make a decision about identity that disallows a performative masquerade, thus creating a new 'reality'. Stembridge refuses the clean solution to the questions. Can the two identities, police officer and gay man, effectively intersect, developing into (finally) a well-rounded, complex character? Can a gay man be the figure of authority in a culture that presumes homosexuality is illegal? Can a police officer ever be afforded the right to a private life that does not interfere with his public one? Or does Pat have to choose between one and the other, reinstating the same familiar tropes about homosexuality and about police officers? The ambiguity of the ending, the ambiguity of the very genre of the play (is the audience supposed to laugh or cry at the ending?), allows Stembridge to leave the audience at the liminal moment in

Authority in Gerard Stembridge's *The Gay Detective*

history when these answers might become relevant to all, not just to those who operate within these particular codes.

Extract From: *Deviant Acts: Essays on Queer Performance*, edited by David Cregan (2009)

Cross Reference: Project Arts Centre, Rough Magic

See Also: *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices By Women In Ireland*, edited by Miriam Haughton and Mária Kurdi