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Performing Other Irelands:

'Race', Politics and Contemporary Irish Theatre

By

Julie Shearer

This is a thesis submitted to the University of Dublin (Trinity College) for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 2011.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work described in this thesis is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

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Julie Shearer

21 March, 2011

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Abstract

At a time of unprecedented economic upheaval and extraordinarily rapid social transformation, this thesis considers the representation of 'race' on the contemporary Irish stage during the Celtic Tiger years. The productions under consideration are not simply mirror reflections of an emerging multicultural society nor are they merely political protest in theatrical form. They rather explicate and challenge the racialised construction of both 'non-Native' and 'Irish' identity and, therefore, perform the possibility of an Other, more inclusive Ireland.

The thesis begins by considering the work of those most associated with advocacy theatre in Ireland, the actor, director, playwright Donal O'Kelly and the political theatre company Calypso Productions, in the light of their didactic purpose in the Irish public sphere and with regard to their ethical relationship with their stakeholders. The third chapter pursues a more thematic analysis, namely the phantasmatic intersection between sex and race in the racialised imagination, while the fourth chapter considers the conflation of Irish emigration and contemporary immigration in plays featuring Eastern Europeans. Returning the focus more specifically to race, chapter five addresses the productions of Arambe, Ireland's first African theatre company, and of its artistic director Olabisi Adigun. By turning their gaze back onto Irish society and reclaiming the right of self-representation, their work reinterprets both African and white identity. Finally, this study considers the theatre work of the Traveller artists Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins, who source

their powerful subjectivity from their celebration of too often submerged Traveller voices and experiences.

In deliberating on the overlap between theatre, culture and society, this dissertation examines the plays through three theoretical frames, broadly content, form and reception. Firstly, the representational strategies of the plays as literary and performance texts are explored using the methodology of postcolonial and critical race theory. Secondly, the materiality and ethical considerations of the theatre making 'process' is considered, through the theories of theatre theorists and the ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Finally, the public response to the plays becomes the focus of the argument, specifically, their relevance to their constituent communities and to wider critical debate in Irish society.

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Introduction

'Others' Amongst 'Us': Thinking Otherwise

The problem... is that 'race' does exist. It exists in much the same way that theatrical and other performances exist – as copies without originals. It exists as an alternative, hypothetical reality, which does not make its existence any less consequential.

(Roach, 2007: 137)

On 27 July 1994, opening night of Donal O'Kelly's *Asylum! Asylum!* (1996), the first black protagonist in an Irish play appeared on the stage of the National Theatre. The character was Joseph Omara, ("no apostrophe" is the joke)¹, a Ugandan asylum seeker, imprisoned and facing deportation. Written in 1993, when the economic boom was still pending and inward migration was yet to produce 'race' as such a significant social and political issue in Ireland, O'Kelly's play was a harbinger. A slew of productions with similar themes were to follow, particularly from theatre practitioners exercised by social justice concerns. The parameters of this study, from 1996 to 2008, mark the period between Ireland's migration turning points, from first becoming a net immigrantion nation in 1996 to the return to net emigration in 2008. This interval also covers the period referred to as 'The Celtic Tiger'² and includes the current economic recession, representing a time of unprecedented economic upheaval and the subsequent, extraordinarily rapid societal transformation. This dissertation takes as its focus the

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¹ O'Kelly is playing here with Irish identity; Joseph Omara sounds like an Irish name, but of course this character is specifically denied 'Irishness', (O'Kelly, 1996: 125). All subsequent citations in the text will refer to this edition and be delineated by page number. The play was first performed in 1994 under the direction of John Crowley. I am indebted to Mairéad Delaney the Abbey archivist for permission to view a performance recording.

² 1994, the year *Asylum!* was produced, is coincidentally also the first recorded use of the term 'Celtic Tiger' in a report for Morgan Stanley, an American stock brokerage firm, by Kevin Gardiner entitled "Ireland and the EMU: A Tiger by the Tail". This phrase is popularly used to refer to both the country of Ireland and to the period of rapid economic growth from the 1990s to 2007, also called the 'Boom' or the 'Economic Miracle'.

representation of race on the Irish stage during this time, particularly the emerging emphasis on migrant and refugee characters, and considers the racial specifics of Irish Traveller depiction in the theatre as a comparative study. In considering under the rubric of race the portrayal of the 'new Irish', both economic migrants and those seeking asylum from a variety of ethnic heritages, and also the racialised identities of indigenous Irish Travellers, this thesis contends with categories of 'race' defined not by skin colour or citizenship, but by 'difference' understood as a product of culture. The productions under discussion are more than just mimetic reflections of a nascent multi-ethnic society, an exploration of the "changing face(s) of Ireland" (O'Connell, 2003), or even simply political protest at the perceived injustices of the government's response to refugees and migrants. The use of racialised strangeness or otherness as a trope, whether 'black', 'refugee, 'non-national' or 'Traveller', explicates and challenges the construction of 'white', 'Irish' identity and society. Thus this thesis discusses the changing racialisation of Irish identity as portrayed in the theatre, as a consequence of and a response to immigration, and also seeks to place this in the context of an 'Irishness' already heavily constructed by experiences of colonisation and emigration and contingent on the formation of the nation. The theatrical projects of ethnic minorities who are taking representation into their own hands, such as Ireland's first black theatre company Arambe, founded by Olabisi Adigun, and the plays of Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins from the Traveller community, are also of crucial importance to the remit of this study. Empowered and restricted in unique ways, 'outsiders' creating metaphors of their own experiences within Irish culture offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding.

There had been other 'black' characters in Abbey³ plays before Joseph Omara, notably 'Bonnie Prince Charlie, a Coloured Gentleman' in Brendan Behan's Richard's Cork Leg (1972), who was played by the white musician Barney McKenna of the legendary folk band The Dubliners, but David Fishley as Omara was the first black actor on the Abbey stage and Asylum! Asylum! was the first Irish play specifically concerned with the lived realities of racially different immigrants. Omara's tragedy becomes a prism, however, through which the true subjects of the play, the Irish Gaughran family, will come to know themselves. Thus, this play is emblematic of many of the themes and arguments throughout this dissertation. Asylum! Asylum! was an ambitious, powerful intervention in the public sphere, occupying one of the hubs of Irish culture, the National Theatre, to articulate the concerns of a voiceless minority, asylum seekers, and to precipitate debate about what should constitute 'Irishness'. It makes the imaginative connection between Irish emigrant and immigrant experiences and interrogates mutual ambivalence to notions of 'home'. In prioritising its political efficacy, however, it also privileges the perspective of its Irish creators, audiences and characters, offering a somewhat objectified, if sympathetic, portrayal of its African protagonist as a victim and strategically embracing the dramatic potential of inter-racial sexual attraction. Similarly, many of the plays in this study feature racialised central characters yet, despite a politically progressive social agenda from the playmakers, often the representations are simplistic and stereotypical, their purpose pedagogical rather than psychological. Such difficulties are clearly manifest

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³ "The term 'The Abbey Theatre' is popularly applied throughout the world to all aspects of The National Theatre Society of Ireland, its building, situated on Lower Abbey Street in Dublin, its ethos, its, players, its repertoire, and the playwrights associated with this repertoire"; (Fitz-Simon, 1996, ix). In this thesis it is used synonymously with the Irish National Theatre and includes plays produced on both the main-house Abbey stage and the smaller Peacock stage.

⁴ Richard's Cork Leg premiered 14 March 1972 at the Peacock. Casting members of The Dubliners (a legendary Dublin folk band) as various characters in the play facilitated the vaudevillian/music hall quality of the play and, in particular, casting McKenna as a Negro is a farcical conceit in keeping with the plays non-realist, tongue-in-cheek style and could not be considered a realist portrayal of a black man.

in the persistent portrayal of refugee and black characters in these plays as either passive victims of violence or objects of sexual desire and often as both. Nor is it just the 'non-natives' who are essentialised in this manner. There is also a prevalence of reductive, self-conscious Irish caricatures. Homi Bhabha argues (1990b: 81):

As a form of splitting and multiple belief, the stereotype requires, for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes[...] – the same old stories of the Negro's animality, the coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish which *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh.

It is a key argument of this thesis that these stereotypical depictions, however tempting in a political theatre context, are unhelpful in dismantling totalising notions of race.

Without exception these are anti-racist plays, designed for a radically transformed Ireland wrestling with diversity and racism. However, although Ireland now finds itself in a position of power within the 'new world order' and neo-colonialism, the negative stereotypes in some of these plays remind us that Irish people are "between two worlds", in the words of Robbie McVeigh (1997:36), traditionally "both the perpetrators and victims of racism." The racialisation of the 'Other' in these plays is accompanied by a racialisation of the Irish 'Self', a vision of Irish diversity as 'Others' amongst 'Us'. Yet if, as Stuart Hall puts it (1992: 21), "Identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative," how is it possible for a cultural practice to side-step these adversarial binaries of difference? Some of the work examined in this study seeks to provide an opportunity for *agency* for those represented, where 'to represent' means both 'to speak for' and 'to stand for or embody', and it is here perhaps that the answer to the question of how to (ethically) represent the other can be found. Acknowledging that the other has a material reality independent of any particular

relationship and has the power to affect and be affected, recognises a positive otherness.

Agency is clearest in the work of Arambe, a black theatre company representing themselves, and the Traveller playwrights McDonagh and Collins, but the political theatre company Calypso's work with refugees in the Tower of Babel project, listening to (not just talking about) asylum seekers and their lives, offers another hopeful paradigm for side-stepping the Hegelian dialectic of Self/Other in favour of something more dialogic. If we accept, as the post-structuralist argue, that identity is entirely a cultural construction or fiction, constantly in flux and under negotiation, often contradictory and always situational, 'performative' in the sense of self-produced within discursive practices, then it must also be possible to re-imagine or 'perform' other possibilities and selves, the "changing same" as Paul Gilroy describes it (1994: 106). The aim of this investigation is to analyse the representations of identity in the plays under discussion in terms of their effect both on the theatrical products and on the didactic purposes of the theatre practitioners, and to consider the ethical position from which these theatrical processes operate.

It is important at the outset of this study to make clear what is meant by 'race' and 'racism', both politically charged and ambivalent words. 'Race' is entirely without basis in scientific or biological fact. Biologically, all men belong to the same species, *Homo*

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⁵ The terms *dialogic* and *dialogism* refer to concepts used by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). What is implied in the contrast between these terms 'dialectic' and 'dialogic' is the difference between a process whereby in the interaction and resolution between two paradigms or ideologies, one achieves primacy over the other (Hegel), and a comparatively co-existential and relativistic process, whereby both ideologies interact with each other but each holds more salience depending on the circumstances (Bakhtin).

Sapiens with more difference within the so-called racial groups than between them.⁶ "Race' is... a social myth", as the UNESCO 'Statement on Race' declares (1950: 8). What is more, as Ivan Hannaford's exhaustive historical study Race: The History of an *Idea in the West* shows, the belief that 'race' was real and socially important is a relatively new concept invented by nineteenth-century historians and scientists as the Western European nations consolidated and exploited their empires. His research contends with the assumption that the racialised delineation of people is a primordial, 'natural' part of the human condition, evident since antiquity. On the contrary, he finds that 'race' is fundamentally an Enlightenment notion and largely a distortion or "often deliberate manipulation of texts by scientists and historians abandoning earlier paradigms of descent, generation, and right order" (ibid: 6). The significance of Hannaford's study is that, if "ethnic tension is (not) some inevitable premodern remnant visiting itself upon the modern state like some syphilitic affliction," then it should be possible to organise society without racial distinctions and according to notions of non-violent legality and citizenship (1996: 398). Like class or gender, race as a category has no ontological or essential quality but operates as a marker of difference for normative definitions of identity, which explains the inclusive nature of this thesis, accommodating a diverse range of ethnic and indigenous cultural minorities and considering also the racialisation of the 'native' Irish.

Yet the seemingly banal but undeniable truth is, as Tzvetan Todorov notes in his seminal *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism*, "Human beings are at

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⁶ There is an enormous volume of scholarship on this issue. For example, E. Nathaniel Gates, editor of *The Concept of 'Race' in Natural and Social Sciences*, assembles an impressive array of scientific articles, all of which "argue that there is ultimately no such thing as 'race' in tself, only a politicized notion of 'race' reflecting prevailing societal arrangements, only concrete human relationships interpreted in 'racialized' terms" (1997: x).

⁷ See http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001282/128291eo.pdf, accessed 12 January, 2010.

once alike and different... The essential problem is to determine how far the realm of identity extends and where the realm of difference begins" (1993: 90). 8 'Race' matters because it is seen and treated as a key indicator of identity and determines or influences how people see themselves, how others define them and the communities they are presumed to belong to and, as such, has been valorised and embraced as a mode of organisation and collective identity for those engaged in anti-colonial or antidiscrimination struggles. Thus, within the context of the theatre examined in this study, that claim to a pre-existing racial identity as grounds for political activism is most apparent in the work of Arambe and the Traveller playwrights. However, 'racism' is also a dangerous and damaging trope that stereotypes and pathologises those deemed to be 'others' or 'outsiders' and denies them a common humanity in order to justify exploitation and discrimination. At its extremes, the discourses of racism were central axes for the projects of colonisation, slavery, genocide, apartheid and fascism. Self-racialisation also operates as a negative equation by interpolating identity according to closed categories of racial understanding and thereby excluding others based on the fantasy of an authentic Irishness. Such clichés can also recycle internalised anti-Irish sentiments, legacies of Ireland's colonial past and are manifest in the critical stereotypes of Irish identity that abound in these plays. 'Irish' is an identity which, in these plays, is as performative as the racialised identities of 'Traveller', 'African' or 'Eastern European' and those performances

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Todorov is a Bulgarian émigré living in France. As a foreigner, a "stranger within" to quote another Bulgarian French citizen Julia Kristeva, Todorov brings his experiences of exile and under Bulgarian communism to bear on profound questions of identity and alterity. He identifies two "universalist" approaches to human diversity. One is ethnocentrism, which generalises characteristics of one's own society into 'universal' values and too often leads to the assumption that we should rule others (ibid: 9). The other is "scientism", which while seemingly more benign, potentially treats human beings as merely the objects of study to the exclusion of notions of ethics, and has become such a dominant ideological force as to become totalizing (ibid: 32). Alternatively, there is the relativism and deindividualisation of theorists such as Barrés or Lévi-Strauss, which he considers "indefensible" because they fail to distinguish between good and evil (1989: 46). Instead, Todorov offers a position he defines as 'critical humanism' (ibid: 390), a celebration of plurality and liberty but in moderation, between the extremes of universalism and absolute relativism. Like Levinas, he insists on the fundamental importance of ethics in politics.

make political meaning. It is, therefore, the position of this thesis that all of the productions and artists examined below are *performing* race as a political statement rather than *expressing* an authentic racial identity. That is not to argue, however, that the performance of 'race' is invalid on the grounds that race does not exist, because racial discrimination and prejudice undoubtedly do exist. Rather this thesis contends, as David Lloyd argues in 'Race Under Representation', that "culture itself constitutes the formal principles of racist discourse" since racism is a function of the normative structures of the public sphere. It then becomes imperative to expose the intersection in discourses of political and cultural identity formation that construct individuals as racialised subjects and perform 'race'. At a time of unprecedented social upheaval when reified notions of Irishness are in flux and new Irish identities are emerging, the playwrights and theatre companies discussed below are engaged in this important cultural project and it is the aim of this study to provide context and analysis of their vital interventions.

It is also appropriate at this early point to declare my own cultural and political orientations and acknowledge their influence on my argument. I am a white, middle-class Australian theatre practitioner who has been living in Ireland since 1998. As a foreigner, I have experienced the rapid diversification of Irish society as one of the many newly arrived "strangers" and that sense of disorientation has, in part, inspired this thesis. However, as a white Australian of Irish heritage, I am conscious of the enormous distinction that is often made between my migrancy and that of people from other ethnicities. I have never experienced any racism and have rather been embraced as a member of the diaspora. Acknowledging this, wherever possible I have sought to mitigate this potential ethnocentricity in my evaluation and apologise for where it may yet remain.

Politically, I support a plural and inclusive multicultural society and am broadly in sympathy with the ideology and political objectives of all of the theatre artists considered in this dissertation. As such, whilst this thesis avails of the thinking of various theorists who might not always be in concord with each other across a range of issues, the argument is fundamentally based on critical liberal humanist presuppostions. This thesis is also indubitably influenced by my background in professional theatre in the form of performative assumptions, which constitute what Spivak might term my "stakes" in this thesis. Not all the productions in this study are professional, however, nor do they necessarily conform to the palette of culturally specific theatrical expectations that can be made of the full-time, funded work in the mainstream theatres. I have aspired to be cognisent of these differences and to contextualise wherever possible my own responses and those of the reviewers I have cited, who are also all white, middle-class and mostly Irish.

Context and Critical Framework

Representation is a hazardous undertaking and, as mentioned, even companies with a declared social justice agenda find it difficult to avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping and the vexed complications of subjecthood, of who is representing whom. While it is almost a truism, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge, as James Clifford (1986: 23) does, "that every version of an 'other', wherever found, is also the construction of a 'self'... and has always involved a process of 'self-fashioning'." There are, however, fundamental

⁹ Gayatri Spivak warns repeatedly of the necessity for academics to be mindful of their stakes in their fields of study. See for example her essay 'Echo' (1993b: 31), which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

philosophical and ethical problems in the appropriation and sublation of the other in order to constitute the self. If every attempt at understanding and representing must necessarily result in the implicitly violent reduction to essentialism and loss of alterity, is it possible, ethically, to know and to respect the other? Bringing these philosophical questions to bear on the productions under discussion, this study is conducted within three distinct theoretical frameworks and in conjunction with three socio-historical contexts. Firstly, an examination of the representational strategies of these plays as literary and performance texts, uses the methodology and language of post-colonial and critical race theory, particularly the work of Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and bell hooks. In this context Ireland's liminal post-colonial status is of particular significance, as both western and colonised, white and racially other, imperial and subjugated, by turns poor then prosperous then poorer once again, and it is necessary to place Irish attitudes to race and immigration and their implications for a sense of national identity in the context of its colonial and emigrant past. If this could be called an analysis of the 'product' of these plays, the second strand of inquiry concerns the materiality of the theatre-making 'process' and focuses on the implications that dramatic form have on content, medium has on message and particularly on the ethical considerations specific to this kind of work. Ethical reflection on the stakes and consequences of participation are especially significant where asylum seekers feature as performers or when their testimony is used in playwriting. Contextualising this theoretical enquiry is the recent past of Ireland's Celtic Tiger transformation, the demographics of in-migration and the reaction of the state and other institutions to these ethnic interfaces or 'encounters' between different ethnic groups. Emmanuel Levinas, who has come to be known as 'the philosopher of the Other', presents a complex and demanding call for an ethics that puts concern for the others before concern for oneself. His philosophical position begins with an interface too,

espousing the ultimate ethical relation as "face-to-face with the Other." In an examination of the work of theatre artists representing ethnicity and working with a political agenda, Levinas' objection to the violence implicit in the process of meaning-making that incorporates the other into the self and invocations to guard the Other against appropriation that would deny difference provides a particularly enlightening mode of enquiry. Finally, as many of the playwrights, directors and producers considered in this thesis aspire to influence the debate on race and immigration using their theatre practices to directly address the Irish public sphere, the reception, in terms of critical response, the types of audiences they attract and their relevance to a wider critical debate on race in Irish society, is the third line of enquiry, with the writings of Jürgen Habermas and his critics providing some theoretical structure. This is placed in the context of Ireland's recent economic downturn, the tightening of legislation to do with migrants and the role of the media in shaping public perceptions of Ireland's ethnic minorities.

Ireland's past – colonisation and its consequences

Historically, the Irish have dealt with 'Others' in three main ways – as a colonised people, including the subsequent bitter sectarianism generated by the conflict in the North, as emigrants and as 'benefactors' (as a traditionally charitable country and as a source of missions and missionaries throughout the world). ¹¹ In James Joyce's *Ulysses*,

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¹⁰ This image is fundamental to all Levinas' writings but he begins examining the idea in his first book *Totality and Infinity: an essay on exteriority* (1991).

¹¹ The nation's role in charitable missionary work in Africa creates another imagined sense of continuum between Irish national identity and representations of black people. Generations remember putting 'a penny in the box for black babies' as a central image of Irish missions. A magazine article in 1998 referred to black children in primary schools as 'black babies' commenting that, "all over the country the nuns who

Stephen Dedalus' uses the "cracked looking-glass of a servant" (1.65) as an analogy for Irish art, hinting at the fragmentation and self-estrangement of a culture perceived and perceiving through the borrowed representational strategies of the colonial other. The image, familiar in other post-colonial contexts, is of a self split, schizophrenic and ambivalent, a servant whose identity is contingent on the relationship with the master. And yet, having achieved nationhood, the ultimate goal of anti-colonial struggle, and indeed having entered into the post-national, resolutely First World of the European Union, the relevance of the post-colonial as a way of reading Ireland has come under question. Liam Kennedy in his article 'Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions?' (1992/93: 107-121), cites an overwhelming array of statistical indicators of poverty and development to compare Ireland with a range of Third World countries pre-decolonisation – GNP, percentage of the economy in agriculture, average calories per day, life expectancy, infant morality, adult literacy - making a compelling economic and historical argument that post-colonial theory, specifically as used by literary and cultural critics, is an inappropriate model for Ireland. "Like jackdaws to shiny objects, literary and cultural critics seem to be drawn to labels and packaging. Assertion becomes a low-cost substitute for evidence. Metaphors masquerade as theory" (ibid: 118). Speculating as to why this analytical framework is so in vogue with "homo academicus on the make?" he concludes that it is a strategy to "modernise" nationalist rhetoric and justify anti-English and anti-Unionist sentiment (ibid). Stephen Howe in Ireland and Empire (2000: 263) also takes issue with "post-colonial painting by numbers" as a simplistic, undifferentiated orthodoxy made fashionable by the Field Day critics. The theatre work and literary criticism of Field Day is also the focus of Edna Longley's The

Living Stream (1994: 28), in which she suggests that the reductionist representations of "a post-colonial never-never land" were an attempt to "throw theory at Ireland, hoping that bits of it will stick." However, the very fact that these critics need to take issue with the all-pervasive and unquestioned status of 'post-colonial Ireland' in nationalist rhetoric and literary and cultural criticism indicates the power of the metaphor. "Identities are," according to Hall (1996: 6), "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us." Thus, despite empirical evidence to the contrary, within Irish society and certainly within the plays in this study there is identification with an Ireland whose colonial heritage matters. 'Post-colonial' is a short-hand way of speaking to an audience, who by and large recognise themselves in that depiction. It is therefore part of the narrativisation of an Irish self, which is necessarily fictional and performative in any case, but no less effective in terms of its discursive, material or political influence, and thus provides a pivotal rubric for this study.

It is also significant that the subject matter under discussion here is not specifically the positioning of coloniser against the colonised, but the global phenomenon of transnational migration as represented in the theatre in one host nation, and as such theories on globalisation, on diasporas, social networking and cosmopolitanism may seem more germane. However, whilst these critiques are also explored, post-colonial methodologies remain the dominant frame because they more readily allow the argument to move beyond the familiar ideological divisions between Self and Other and into an examination of the ways in which the normative narrative of 'Irishness' has been constructed and has come to seem so self-evident, and of how empowered discourses prevail in the representation of Ireland's subaltern groups, particularly those who are

racially defined. In addition, Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, who provide much of the terminology for the discussion, with their particular focus on the ambivalent psychic legacy of colonialism in mimicry, ambivalence, fetishism and stereotyping are especially apt for scrutiny of theatrical representation. Theatre, which is concerned with making meaning from the live interaction between characters and an audience, already speaks a vernacular psychology. Thus both Fanon's clinical use of psychoanalysis to examine the pathology of colonial discourse and Bhabha's more analogous and theoretical use of Freud and Lacan provide a frame of ideas and language for reading these plays. The work of critics investigating Subaltern Studies, particularly the thinking of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, is also of value in that it moves the post-colonial argument beyond the attainment of independence and focuses on the excluded and dominated social groups within societies, challenging the critic to identify the agency of the subaltern as represented by others. Clearly such enquiries are fundamental to this project and are summarised below.

However asymmetrical or ahistorical, Ireland's imaginative link with other dispossessed people throughout the world and the idea of itself as a 'Third World', developing country arose from the exposure, through both emigration and colonisation, to deeply embedded and pernicious racism. Writing about early twentieth century Ireland, Fredric Jameson (1988: 60) describes a "national situation which reproduces the appearance of First World social reality and social relationships... but whose underlying structure is in fact much closer to that of the Third World, or of colonised daily life." From the time of the Protestant Ascendency after 1689, the racial oppression of the Irish shared the same principles that governed the subjugation of enslaved Africans in

continental Anglo-America; for both the Catholic in Ireland and the African-American there could never be social advancement because of their race, whether defined by ethnicity, culture, language or some other differentiation. Consequently, argues Theodore Allen in *The Invention of the White Race*, at the time when the idea of 'the white race' was being formed, Irishness constituted "the greatest breach in that concept" (1994: 90). The connection is clear when in 1690 the Barbados Colony Council sought to import 'white servants', but specifically excluded the Irish, "for we want not men of that Colour to work for us" (quoted in O'Toole, 1999: 20). The Irish were not black, but they could not be white either. "They were some other 'colour'" (O'Toole, ibid). The Irish, however, were racially indistinguishable from the English colonisers, which made segregation by law and the creation of denigrating narratives of identity necessary. Homi Bhabha (1983: 23) writes that "colonial power produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible". Luke Gibbons (1996: 50) very tellingly quotes the British historian Charles Kingsley describing the Irish in

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault [...] But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours.

In other words, in the brutal logic of colonisation, difference needs to be obvious to the eye in order to be effective, and a native population that happened to be white was very disconcerting to the English coloniser.

¹² "A Protestant boy," said Irish historian J. C. Beckett, "however humble his station, might hope to rise, by some combination of ability, good luck and patronage, to a position of influence from which a Roman Catholic, however, well-born or wealthy would be utterly excluded", (Allen, 1994: 82).

The Irish/Black association created very powerful stereotypes of stupidity, degeneracy and animality that stressed the inferiority and dependence of the colonised. Various plays in this study pit the stereotypes of blacks and Irish against each other in order to destabilise prejudiced notions of identity. Particularly when these caricatures are intended to be comic, the audience is encouraged to laugh at Irish self-critical identity constructs, yet the normalisation of the 'othering' process at work in stereotyping may remain concealed. After Freud's Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (1991) Bhabha notes that ethnic joke-work "explores the dream's central mechanisms – 'condensation, displacement and indirect representation' in the quotidian context of communal utterance, making it possible for us to hear the Unconscious speak in the psychopathology of everyday life" (1998: xvi). Political satire, Clown-comedy, spectacle and various other theatre modes are based on the play of caricature. This study considers whether such forms are necessarily complicit in racist myth-making or if their selfreflexivity exposes the construction and patholigisation of racist images. With regard to satire and caricature, Roddy Doyle's plays and the work of the Clown theatre company Barrabas in their production *Hurl* are of most relevance. Throughout this thesis a variety of other theatre forms, most particularly realism, are also examined for their embedded meaning making.

When contextualising Irish plays about refugees and migrants and contemporary attitudes to race, undoubtedly the Irish national experience of emigration, exile and return to a transformed homeland provides another salient point of departure. Until the recent past, Ireland was quintessentially a country of emigration. The Great Famine of the mid 1840s resulted in the deaths of approximately a million people and the migration of a

million more, a loss of twenty-five percent of the population (Ross, 2002: 226). For almost a century after this immeasurable collective trauma, the natural increase in population was significantly offset by outward migration far in excess of any other European country, leading to a continuous decline in population (MacÉinrí, 2001: 2). Recession in the 1980s produced dramatic unemployment and a return to high emigration rates. In the year 1988 to 1989, 70,600 people left the state, approximately two percent of the population (Ibid). While emigration slowed during the Celtic Tiger, emigration has always been a feature of the Irish experience, with the 2006 census calculating approximately 17,000 people, mostly under twenty-five, emigrating annually (CSO, 2006). By the time of writing in late 2010, however, net emigration was once more at 1989 levels as a consequence of the devastating economic recession, with 65,300 people leaving the state and a dramatic fall in immigration (CSO, 2010). Irish identity has thus been forged around the act of migration. "Emigration was a big sad Irish word in every sense," writes Polly Devlin (quoted in Logue, 2000: 47), "... We were all poised on the point of eternal emigration."

Various social histories have documented the effects of dispersal on the Irish and likewise thousands of works of Irish literature explore the same themes. Fintan O'Toole's supposition in *The Ex-isle of Erin* (1997: 160) is that,

it lies at the heart of Irish culture in the 20^{th} Century [...] - the contradiction between place and people, between the search for a fixed national space and the existence of an unfixed, mobile population, between a stable definition of Irishness and the unstable ambiguities that elude it.

O'Toole subsequently tracks the preoccupation with emigration in Irish theatre and emphasises the abstruse discourse between place and identity. He argues that, "Emigration

becomes[...] a relentless exposure of Irish society[...] emigration is not a solution to Irish problems but merely the sharpest indicator of how profound those problems are" (ibid: 172). The plays in this study follow these antecedents, but use the ironic contrast and complication of Irish emigration and immigration to challenge accepted notions of Irishness, uncoupling notions of 'home' and 'family' in particular to great effect and using the motif of the refugee or migrant rather than the emigrant. Thus in many of the plays in this study we find migrant and Irish characters doubling each other or the deliberate elision of past Irish emigration and current immigration. The familiar, transported into another context, becomes transformed and the imitation or reflection subverts the identity of that which is represented. Bhabha (1994: 91) gives this phenomenon the term *mimicry* and argues that, in its ambivalence, it becomes a form of agency for the colonised subject.

Representationally, Ireland's identification with 'blackness' serves positive as well as negative stereotypes and a way perhaps, argues O'Toole (1999: 18), for the emigrant's past to illuminate Ireland's present and future. Having learnt to adjust and accommodate difference and otherness is an experience that "allows us to re-imagine who 'we' are." Jimmy from Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* (1988: 9) provides a popular culture example of the appropriation of positive stereotypes of 'blackness', illustrating an Irish identification with Africans as their fellow honourable underdogs of history.

Say it once, say it loud, 'I'm black and I'm proud'. They looked at him – James Brown. They were stunned by what came next. 'The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads'. They nearly gasped it was so true.

Being black as he envisages it, has nothing to do with skin colour. "It is a function of culture rather than race", as Elizabeth Butler Cullingford puts it (2001: 158). This connection is hinted at in various plays in this study, such as Calypso's *Mixing it on the*

Mountain and Hurl, and made explicit in the program notes of O'Kelly's The Cambria.

To a certain extent, however, this well-meaning elision of difference is also an appropriation of subaltern¹³ identity that disguises the asymmetries of power and inequalities in the formation of those notions.

These plays also foreground the creation of hybrid ethnic identities which are the inevitable consequence of migration. Homi Bhabha is a key theoretician in the development of 'hybridity' as a post-colonial concept and provides a constructive vantage point on the complex interweaving of heterogeneous and heteroglossic contemporary communities, such as in Ireland today. The indeterminacy of diasporic identity, the liminality of the migrant experience, opens up a cultural space that potentially enables active forms of resistance. It is this space, the "Third Space of enunciation", he claims, which reveals the ambivalent process of identity formation and undermines the sense of culture as a homogenising, unifying force. It is from this space, Bhabha (2003: 208) hopes,

that we will find the words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of ourselves.

In the context of this thesis, Bhabha's argument for the political potential of intercultural encounters casts particular light on the work of Olabisi Adigun, especially in his reconception of Irish canonical works from a black migrant perspective, and in the work

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¹³ The term 'subaltern' comes from Gramsci's 'On the Margins of History: history of the subaltern social groups' in *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (1971), and is used interchangeably with 'subordinate', 'instrumental' and as a term for those of inferior rank who do not possess a general class consciousness. It is also used by the Subaltern Studies group to describe the "contribution made by the people on their own, that is, independently of the élite" as opposed to the dominant groups, both foreign and indigenous, who have dominated Indian nationalist histiography. Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in *Subaltern Studies* (1982: 3). Spivak also uses the term in her translation of *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida in the discussion of the 'supplement' to imply the subversive potential of the marginal example (1976: 145).

of Calypso with their mix of refugee, migrant and Irish young participants. The term 'hybridity' remains contested, however, despite its all-pervasiveness. Widely used to challenge essentialist thinking and practices, such as racism, the theory is sometimes merely propped up by alternative essentialist frameworks, becoming what Nederveen Pieterse (2004: 4) calls "multiculturalism lite." Such critiques are pertinent to the work under discussion here when hybridity becomes an end in itself, such as in some of Calypso's youth theatre work. If what is being postulated is a classic universal humanism, "we are held back at the surface of an identity," argues Barthes (2000a: 101), "prevented precisely by sentimentality from penetrating into this ulterior zone of human behaviour where historical alienation introduces some 'differences' which we shall here quite simply call 'injustices'." What is important, Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd remind us (quoted in Bhabha, 1994: 229), "is not a question of essence... but a question of subject position." An emphasis on subject-positioning draws attention to class and gender as well as race as factors that problematise the undifferentiated ethnic minority subject or subaltern.

In search of a new black subjectivity, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, whose title suggests the disavowal and fantasy of colonial identity, illustrates the psychic trauma of being black in a racist world. The Negro has been "overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance... I am *fixed*" (1986: 116). Elsewhere he describes it as being "sealed into that crushing objecthood" (ibid: 109). Identity, however, also becomes fixed and essentialised for the white person trapped in what Fanon refers to as a "Manicheism

delirium." ¹⁴ "The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation" (ibid: 60). As might be expected in an analysis of the psychopathology of bigotry, Black Skin, White Masks makes particular note of the fetishisation of black sexuality, the ambivalence of repulsion and attraction, fear and desire, and the subsequent fantasies of sexual violence evoked by the corrupt paring of race and sex. These insights are crucial to this discussion in that the mixed race romance motif dominates many of these Irish plays and there is a noteworthy incidence of violence directed at black characters. This thesis examines why the link between sex and race is so compelling, especially in the context of political theatre. Other theorists whose work sheds light on this issue include bell hooks, whose essay 'Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance' links the modern fixation with sexualised encounters with difference to the commodification of ethnicity as transgressively eroticised, "constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other" (hooks, 1992: 183). Despite its frequent use in the plays under discussion, only Christian O'Reilly's It Just Came Out overtly questions the subconscious comingling of racism and sexual desire, when an Irish man inadvertently calls a black woman 'Nigger!' in a supermarket and then falls irrationally in love with her.

Less concerned with reinterpreting post-colonialism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak engages with neo-colonial practices, particularly within the structures of academia, from a radically heterogenous Marxist, deconstructionist, feminist, psychoanalytical, anti-imperialist perspective. The fundamental task of the critic, she argues, is to ask who is

¹⁴ Fanon uses this expression in quotation marks after Dide and Guiraud, *Psychiatrie du médicin praticien*, (Ibid: 183).

represented, who is not and to illustrate the "mechanics of the constitution of 'facts'" whereby imperialism constitutes itself as subject and the subaltern as object (1985: 140). These questions are placed at the heart of the analysis of each production and theatrical process in this thesis, seeking to identify who is speaking to or for whom and how, and who is not in a position from which to speak and why not. Spivak's radical conclusions in her seminal essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1993a), is not that the subaltern woman cannot speak as such, or that no records of her subject-consciousness exist, but that "there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak" (ibid: 129). It is not possible to retrieve the lost subaltern subject and allow them an authentic voice to answer back with because the subject is only constituted as a subject from certain permitted positions; the subaltern cannot speak.¹⁵ For those theatre workers who seek to represent the voice of subaltern refugees and asylum seekers, most of whom have no position of enunciation in Irish society, Spivak's conclusions present an unacceptable impasse: "granting to the oppressed either that very expressive subjectivity which s/he criticises, or instead, a total unrepresentability" (1988: 209). She also warns against the essentialist dangers of reverse ethnocentrism, evident in some of the productions under discussion in various guises but especially in the situating of positive stereotypes of black people against negative Irish ones, which merely reproduces a Western fantasy about its own society now projected onto an Other. However, Spivak also advocates a deconstructionist

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This is a controversial view because Spivak, against her own injunctions to other feminist academics, seems to take such a specific incidence of female subalternity in the *sati* and to build from that, homogenising assumptions about Third World women's (lack of) agency. Benita Parry, for example, in 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse' cites examples where it is "possible to locate traces and testimony of women's voice on those sites where women inscribe themselves..." and notes that "Spivak's deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard is a variance with her acute hearing of the unsaid in modes of Western feminist criticism which, while dismantling masculist constructions, reproduce and foreclose colonialist structures and imperialist axioms by performing the lie of constituting a truth of global sisterhood...", (1995b: 40). In 'Subaltern Talk', an interview with editors Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, she addresses some of the issues raised by her essay and explains that when particular subalterns have emerged as 'organic intellectuals', in Gramsci's terms, or as spokespeople for their communities, they cease to be 'subaltern', their status has changed, (1996b: 287-292).

tactic she terms 'strategic essentialism,' which offers a way out of this theoretical Hobson's choice. Essentialism is not wrong fundamentally but in its application, she controversially argues. The goal of critiques of essentialism is not of proving their error but in interrogating the terms of use. Judiciously applied, she suggests, strategic essentialism can be effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering. Especially in their specificity as theatre, by its nature more preoccupied with quintessence than critical theory, this proves a valuable definition to posit representations against.

Finally, in her essay 'Echo' (1993b), Spivak outlines a formula for an ethical relation between a Self and Other through the myth of Echo and Narcissus. Again her usage of the term 'responsibility' is complex, implying both the act of response which completes the transaction between speaker and listener and also the ethics of making discursive room for the Other. Returning to the emblem of the subaltern's voice, *vox manet* ('the voice remains' (ibid: 30), referring to the original myth in which Echo remains as a disembodied voice) becomes an aphorism for an ethical dilemma: while it is impossible to ever 'know' the subaltern, it is also impossible to ignore the summons to challenge the conditions that maintain their exclusion, oppression and disenfranchisement. Actively engaged in changing the material reality of refugees and migrants in Ireland, particularly the specific individuals they work with, many of the theatre practitioners in this study are searching for that ethical relationship and it is here that ethics and politics meet.

The 'Celtic Tiger' transformation and racism – the interface of ethics and politics

Despite being an emigrant nation to a unique degree, for the first forty years of its existence the official culture of the Republic can be categorised as largely isolationist and insular, reflecting a hegemonic, monocultural concept of Irishness. This sense of an exclusive Irish national identity is perhaps best exemplified by Éamon De Valera in his 1943 Saint Patrick's Day speech, where Irishness is associated with an idealised rural landscape "bright with cosy homesteads... and the laughter of happy maidens", with frugal values, an adherence to the moral authority of the Catholic Church and the preservation of the Irish language (quoted in Christie, 1998: 114). In response to centuries of colonial oppression and as part of the struggle for independence, 'authentic' Gaelic cultural values came to symbolise political freedom. Piaras MacÉinrí, director of the Irish Institute for Migration Studies, argues that the changes that convulsed Europe through the twentieth century – war, decolonisation, inward migration and the ethnicisation of society – largely passed Ireland by (2002: 8). Consequently, the official culture of the State remained monolithic and conservative, privileging tradition and fearing change. Those at a social or economic disadvantage in society, meanwhile, made up the majority of emigrants, taking with them the energy necessary to change the status quo. 16 To argue that there was no racism in Ireland because there were no migrants is to ignore the virulent hostility and exclusion against those who fell outside the boundaries of accepted notions of Irishness, either cultural - Travellers, Protestants, Jews, Black-Irish - or 'moral' - unmarried mothers and the institutionalised poor. There have also been a number of groups of 'program refugees' accommodated within the state throughout the twentieth century, if not always

¹⁶ As a contributor to the mid 1950s *Reports of the Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems,* Alexis Fitzgerald, argued that emigration "releases social tensions which would otherwise be the subject of radical change"; (quoted in Piaras MacÉinrí, 2004: 94).

very successfully integrated, as Eilís Ward describes.¹⁷ Their treatment seems more accurately characterised by indifference, incompetence and what MacÉinrí describes as "a textbook example of a policy of containment" (2002: 96). The net effect was the preservation of apparently unitary but essentially archaic and coercive social norms. "Before asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants ever began to settle here in some numbers, we had already defined our own internal 'others'" (ibid: 8).

If an obsession with 'home' is Ireland coming to terms with its emigrant past, the phenomenon of globalisation challenges the present and the future. Edward Said in his *Reflections on Exile*, contrasts the romantic image of exile in previous centuries with the incomprehensible scale of the modern phenomenon. "Our age [...] – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (2001: 174) and certainly globalisation played its part in the striking transformation of Irish society and culture that began in the early 1990s. From 1994 to 2000, according to the Central Statistics Office (2000), GNP rate growth ranged between 6 and an astonishing 12%. Naturally, the Republic's dramatic surge in economic prosperity attracted a significant and exponentially expanding number of migrants, and many more were recruited to satisfy acute labour shortages. ¹⁸ 1996 was the migration 'turning point' when Ireland finally became a net

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¹⁷ The Hungarians fleeing Soviet oppression who arrived in 1956, despite being hailed as heroes fighting the Communist menace, were interned in a military camp, prevented from working, confined to their accommodation under threat of arrest and then vilified when they protested about their treatment and went on hunger strike. Most subsequently re-emigrated to Canada where they were more warmly received. Chileans arrived in 1973 and in 1979 Vietnamese 'boat-people' were dispersed throughout the country but then virtually abandoned with only the services provided by voluntary organisations like the Red Cross to assist them. Naturally most gradually drifted back to Dublin, forming their own communities. Iranian Bahaí were accommodated in the mid 1980s and Bosnians in the early 1990s and were also largely unsupported in their integration. See Eilís Ward, (1998: 41-48).

¹⁸ Steve Loyal refers to the Small Firms Associations survey of 2000, which stated "of the sixty-nine percent of companies which has vacancies, ninety-one percent were unable to fill them." He goes on to illustrate

immigrant nation. There were also substantial increases in the numbers seeking asylum. In 1988 Ireland received 30 to 40 asylum seekers and had net *emigration* of 42,000. By 1998 there were 4,626 asylum seekers and net *immigration* of 22,000. In 2002 people seeking asylum peaked at 11,632 and approximately 1,000 people were arriving a month, although it is worth noting that they still represented a relatively small percentage of overall migration into the state (Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, 2002). From being a remarkably homogeneous society, the face of Ireland literally changed in just a few years (Ruhs, 2004). O'Toole contends that the speed and scale of transformation on every level of society has "induced a sense of internal exile, a sense that Irish people feel less and less at home in Ireland" (1997: 173). Many of the plays examined here grapple with this most sensitive point of national consciousness, try to engage with the understandable anxieties caused by such rapid social change and examine the contribution this sense of disorientation makes to bigotry.

In terms of social policy, the scale of immigration also clearly overwhelmed the government, equipped initially only with the totally inadequate 1935 Aliens Act. The Refugee Act was drafted in 1996, but it too was swiftly overtaken by events and was not finally ratified until November 2000 (Irish Refugee Council, 2003). In fact Ireland still has no over-arching policies on immigration comparable to other European countries and the only way for citizens of countries outside Europe to migrate is by seeking asylum or by the temporary work permit and visa system. In response to growing numbers of asylum seekers, in April 2000 the government introduced various punitive measures including 'direct provision', whereby the state provided accommodation and meals and asylum

seekers received €19 a week for living expenses. Groups of asylum seekers were accommodated outside of Dublin in a 'dispersal' policy which faced widespread local opposition because of the perceived connection between asylum seekers, crime and disease. Anti-refugee comments such as those made in 2002 by Fianna Fáil TD Noel O'Flynn who claimed "the asylum seeker crisis was out of control" and that the country was being held hostage by "the spongers, the freeloaders, the people screwing the system" were initially chastised by the main political parties, ¹⁹ but were to become more mainstream as populist opposition to immigrants and asylum seekers grew. An Amnesty International study carried out in 2002 found that 44% of respondents said that asylum seekers were depriving indigenous Irish of Local Authority housing, 15% believed they could obtain grants to buy cars and 10% believed they were given free mobile phones, all erroneous claims (cited by Loyal, 2003: 88). John O'Donoghue, former Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, also described asylum seekers as illegal immigrants and as exploiters of the Irish Welfare System (quoted in Fanning, 2002: 103). Conor Lenihan TD was under pressure to resign after referring to Turkish immigrants as 'kebabs', but was to become, ironically, the country's first Minister for Integration in 2007 (ibid). This background of confusion and panic, not to mention the sometimes draconian measures taken to deal with the refugee 'problem' (mandatory fingerprinting, detention for long periods, deportation without appeal, etc.), and the xenophobic tone of certain media reports provide the context and motivation for much of the work under discussion.

One of the most consequential political responses to immigration, particularly in its implications for Irish identity, was the 2004 referendum amending the Constitutional

¹⁹ See for example Mark Hennessy's report in *The Irish Times*, 'Criticisms neither 'educated' nor 'tolerant' – Ahern' (2002:6).

definition of citizenship. Prior to this any child born in Ireland had a right to Irish citizenship. Since this amendment was carried by a margin of four to one in the electorate, automatic citizenship is now primarily defined by descent, or by race in other words. In contrast, on 1 May 2004, with the accession of ten former East-European states into the EU, Ireland took a far more liberal approach to immigration and was one of only three of the 15 existing EU states to grant workers from these new European countries unrestricted movement and full employment rights. Predictably large numbers of migrants from these countries came to service Ireland's booming labour needs. Between May 2004 and December 2006 approximately 300,000 PPS numbers (Personal Public Service numbers) were issued to accession state workers. When examining the reasons for such a generous approach to one group of migrants against the callousness shown to another, two key differences emerge. Judged according to cost-benefit criterion, Eastern European migrants were manifestly good for the economy, while refugees were perceived to cost more than they potentially benefit society. Secondly, public discourse has semantically associated asylum seekers with 'black people', while Eastern Europeans are commonly supposed to be white.²⁰ These two approaches taken together, discriminatory discourses and fear mongering fostered against asylum seekers while at the same time the migration of lowcost white labour is facilitated, could be interpreted as an attempt to regulate ethnic and cultural diversity. Migrant workers are not immune to racial stereotyping and

²⁰ If the top five nationalities of work permit and visa recipients are enumerated versus the nationalities of the majority of asylum seekers, it becomes apparent that there is a racial divide. In 2001 work visas, offered to skilled workers and entitling the recipients to change jobs in a specified sector, went to South Africans, Australians, citizens of the United States, Canada and New Zealand. Work permits in that year, which are usually for more unskilled workers and are issued to employers rather than migrants increasing the opportunities for their exploitation, were provided for Latvians, Lithuanians and Polish, three nations already on the verge of accession into the EU, and to Philippinos, South Africans and Romanians. In contrast the main nationalities of asylum seekers in 2002 were Nigerian, Romanian, Moldovan, Zimbabwean, Ukrainian and Polish. As the Department of Employment and Enterprise conducted recruitment drives and jobs fairs in the countries of those most in receipt of work visas and permits, there seems to be an implicit targeting of more predominantly white or, in the case of the Philippines, Roman Catholic populations, perhaps on the assumption that they will be more easily assimilated into Irish society. Statistics quoted in Steve Loyal, (2003: 80-81).

discrimination, of course, yet there are differences in the public debates on their role in Irish society as opposed to asylum seekers. The focus has shifted from issues such as welfare fraud, crime and 'citizenship tourism', to new concerns about the displacement of employment and the eroding of workers rights in the face of a more competitive labour market. Thus, in the plays examined in Chapter Four, which feature Eastern European migrants, class becomes as important an issue as race.

Any discussion of race in Ireland must also address the pervasive, systematic and normalised racism against Travellers, the ultimate Other within.²¹ 'Organic' racism is McVeigh's term for discrimination that was and is carried out by Irish people against other racialised Irish people, in contrast to racist ideology that could be described as 'imported', rooted in colonial contexts and then reworked into Irish experience (1996: 32). Although there are vociferous arguments about the suitability of defining discrimination against Travellers as racialised, particularly by those who seek to justify prejudice on the grounds of Travellers' antisocial behaviour, ²² it has come to be implicit

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²¹ While Traveller numbers are difficult to quantify because of their mobility, they are arguably Ireland's largest minority. They are also, significantly, the only ethnic group enumerated every year by the state. The Department of the Environment holds an annual count of Traveller families. In the 2006 census 22,435 respondents identified themselves as Travellers, whereas the annual 2006 count of Traveller families numbered 7,691, which when multiplied by the average number of people in each Traveller family according to the census figures, comes to a much greater number than those measured in the census: figures quoted in Brian Nolan and Bertrand Maitre's report *A Social Portrait of Communities in Ireland* for the ESRI (2008: 56).

For resistance to Traveller claims of a separate racial identity prior to the *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (Dublin: Official Publications, 1995) when such claims began to have political weight, see John O'Connell, 'Ethnicity and Irish Travellers' in *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity* (1994: 111). For more mainstream opinion see John Waters in *The Irish Times*, (2001: 16): "To place Travellers in the 'racist equation' is a mistake to begin with as Travellers are not an ethnic group." He goes on to argue that the ill-feeling towards Travellers is "ludicrously underestimated" in an Amnesty survey of the time and that, rather than being only the result of predjudice, was justified by Traveller anti-social behaviour. Farrell and McCann (2001: 16) in a reply article use the UNESCO definition of racism, "any theory involving the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently inferior" to highlight the anti-nomadic stereotypes at the heart of Water's argument. The also refer to the same Amnesty survey results whereby

since the 1995 Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community. The 2002 census for the first time asked Irish respondents to make a racial distinction by identifying themselves as Travellers or not, and in 2006 this question was expanded upon in the section on 'Ethnicity', where under 'White' the choices were 'Irish', 'Irish Traveller' or 'Other White'. 23 What is not in dispute are the serious material consequences of discrimination Travellers face, including much lower life expectancy, infant mortality more than double the settled rate, high illiteracy rates and low participation in education, discrimination with regard to accommodation, access to utilities and employment and exclusion from pubs and other social spaces. Five years after the 1995 Task Force had made its recommendations, the Progress Report found a "lack of real improvement on the ground" (2000: 8) and that the criticisms in a 1986 Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) report were still pertinent: the "circumstances of the Irish Travelling people are intolerable. No decent or humane society, once made aware of such circumstances, could permit them to persist" (ibid). 24 Anti-Traveller racism typically reflects sedentary cultures fear and envy of nomadism and involves the belief that it is a wilful rejection of modernity – it is 'uncivilized'. Just as Irish identity under British colonisation had to be construed as aberrant in order to justify bigotry, Travellers have long been stereotypically portrayed as a deviant and dangerous underclass to explain discrimination and their material deprivation. Thus representations of Travellers often function in the context of Irish identity politics, as a 'primitive' Other against which a modern, civilised Irish Self can be defined. What is striking for the purposes of this thesis is the colour-coding of those representations. In Ireland, where Travellers are indigenous

three-quarters of the respondents did not know any Travellers. The prejudice identified, therefore, was not based on "evidence" as Water claimed but on perceived notions.

²³ For more information on the ethnicity and the Irish census see Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, (2008).

²⁴ The more recent 2008 report found Travellers still exposed to "distinctively high levels of poverty and deprivation (Nolan and Maitre, 2008: 63).

and obviously as 'white' as the sedentary population, in folk songs, popular literature and theatre, they become 'yellow' or 'black' (McVeigh, 1996: 15). Such popular culture artefacts are also replete with stereotypical depictions redolent of the negative connotations of 'blackness': primitive, sexually aberrant, exotically attractive and fertile, lazy, dangerous, mendacious, cruel and dirty, to name just some, and with the addition of the emblematic Irish stigma of drunkenness. However, myths concerning Traveller identity have also proved a rich source of material for romantic, essentialist notions of an originary, authentic Irish culture, particularly for the Irish Literary Revival of the early twentieth century. Imbrued with unconventional sexual heterodoxy and often portrayed as only partly-human and part mythological creatures, such phantasmatic representation fostered the perception that Travellers were "sexually and (to all intents and purposes) humanely Other" (Delaney, 2001: 44).

These attitudes to Travellers, migrants and refugees have come to be called 'new racism', distinguished from familiar understandings of racism by its perpetrators' steadfast denials of racialised prejudice while pursuing exclusionary practices and policies based on race coded as 'culture'. Anecdotal and individual evidence is generalised and exploited to represent the imagined grievances of the native community against the outsiders. "It is assumed", explains Fanning (2002: 17), "within a pseudobiologically defined culturalism, that the qualities of social groups are fixed, and are in fact normal." The argument Fanning uses to criticise racism echoes that which Emmanuel Levinas levels at Western philosophy – the reduction of all reality, including the human, to a network of *a priori* ideas so as to neutralise and capture otherness. From

²⁵ For the use of 'Tinkers' as a trope and as stereotypes in Irish Literature, see José Lanters' *The 'Tinkers' in Irish Literature: Unsettled Subjects and the Construction of Difference* (2008).

the perspective of this study of theatre, Levinas' criticism becomes a warning against the 'objectification' of the Other, an issue pivotal to determining the ethical relationship to representations of race in the plays discussed herein:

The foreign being... becomes a theme and an object. It fits under a concept already or dissolves into relations... Cognition consists in grasping the individual, which alone exists, not in its singularity which does not count, but in its generality, of which alone there is science. And here every power begins. The surrender of exterior things to human freedom through their generality does not only mean, in all innocence, their comprehension, but also their being taken in hand, their domestication, their possession. (Quoted in Simmons, 2003: 20)

'Comprehend' is consciously used throughout Levinas' work with the reverberations of its Latin derivation, prehendere 'to grasp'. His central thesis proposes replacing ontology (knowledge) with ethics, where ethics is understood as concrete, asymmetrical and infinite responsibility towards the other person, a relationship he analogises with the image 'face-to-face'. Despite the impression this term creates of a perceptive or visual relationship, however, Levinas insists that it takes place in a concrete linguistic situation, a conversation, or in fact any other human aspect that reveals the Other, which is the relevance to theatrical performance that this essay invokes.²⁶ He is not, however, proposing overarching moral notions of good and bad that can then be used to evaluate specific experiences or representations. For political theatre practitioners the first sentence in *Totality and Infinity* requires significant introspection: "everyone will readily agree that it is the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality" (Levinas, 1991: 21). Ethical is rather used adjectivally to describe this relation to the Other, an active, lived, practical, responsible engagement with the person in front of me, who is always in excess of whatever idea I may have of him or her, an Other that cannot be reduced to the Same. For theatre that concerns itself with the real lives of the individuals it seeks to represent and that advocates for change in the societal and political

²⁶ For an explanation of 'face' in Levinas see Peperzak, Critchley and Bernasconi, 'Introduction' in *Emmanuel Levinas – Basic Philosophical Writings* (1996: xi).

relationship with those people, these considerations are pivotal with regard to the processes and methodologies of producing political theatre, especially in its use of testimony or vulnerable refugee performers.

The act of performance also requires the artist and the audience to attend to both what Levinas calls the 'said', the content and meaning of the play for example, and the 'saying'. Simon Critchley's definition of the 'saying' (2002: 18), "the performative stating, proposing or expressive position of myself facing the other," illustrates the importance of this term with regard to the political implications of theatrical form. Performance is an *embodied* and interactive exposure to the other person, an event between actors and spectators in real time. It is pertinent to note the preponderance of plays in this study, indeed Irish plays in general, that fall within the bounds of realism. Theatre, as mirror of 'reality' and illusion of 'truth, recalls Plato's condemnation of art as a bad copy in that the more 'real' it seems the more fraudulent it becomes. What is at issue is the expectations realism fosters in an audience, the confirmation offered to the status quo by the universalising of truth and the passivity enforced in the spectator by 'the fourth wall'. From the theoretical point of view offered by Levinas, realism's congruence between representation and represented conceals the frame in which 'truth' is constructed. Thus, despite realism's prodigious authority, the superficial empathy engendered by mimesis is rarely efficacious in generating agency. This argument examines whether choice of form can facilitate performances whereby otherness can more effectively be transitively communicated to an audience. Questions of theatrical form structure the argument most clearly with regard to the chapters on Donal O'Kelly and Calypso and to the syncretic post-colonial work of Arambe.

Ireland's public sphere – changing attitudes to race

If his concept of infinite personal responsibility for the other person seems too hyperbolic, idealist and abstract to be of use in the real world, Levinas introduces the idea of 'the Third', and a politics that begins with ethics. It is impossible to have a face-to-face relationship with everyone in humanity; the Third, who is all the others that make up society, opens up the dimension of Justice, mitigating an-archical responsibility with the concretes of language, justice and politics. Thus, rather than being apolitical which is a criticism sometimes levelled at Levinas' ideas, the ethics he argues for are ethical for the sake of politics and a more just society. Donal O'Kelly's reason for being in the theatre answers this call to justice: "There's got to be a reason to utter... To be live theatre. There's got to be a why" (1997: 133). If post-colonial theory provides the 'what' of this analysis, Levinas the 'how', Jürgen Habermas and his concept of the public sphere provides the 'why' that completes this conceptual framework.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas traces the emergence of the modern concept of a public sphere to the rise of mercantile and print capitalism in the eighteenth century (1989: 41-49), when a certain educated, bourgeois elite came to see themselves as not just the objects of state power but as its opponents in a rational-critical dialogue on political matters. However, there emerged a logical paradox at the heart of the public sphere between its principle of universal access and the realities of an elitist practice, which only enfranchised white, propertied men. The contradictory meanings of the word 'publicity' are emblematic of that conflict. In the eighteenth century

the notion of 'publicity' included the opening up of Parliament to scrutiny and the eradication of censorship laws, an idea which still underpins fundamental principles of democracy such as government transparency and freedom of the press. However, as the enlarged public came to be seen as a threat to the new bourgeois ruling classes, 'publicity' took on its modern meaning - the orchestration of 'public opinion' in order to garner public affirmation of decisions already taken using the manipulative techniques of the emerging mass media. This distinction between two definitions of 'publicity', between freedom of information and public relations, is crucial to the argument presented here. The imperatives of establishing counter antiracist publics through oppositional theatre works that directly engaged with hysterical and often inaccurate mass media portrayals of immigration issues provides the motivating impetus for much of the theatre examined in this thesis.

There is a great deal of evidence to support charges of scaremongering and antiimmigrant bias, especially by the largest and most influential group of newspapers, the Independent Newspapers Group owned by Tony O'Reilly,²⁷ and by various talk-back radio shows. The xenophobic tone of local reporting has also been supplemented by British tabloids popular in Ireland, specifically the *Daily Mirror* and *The Sun*. So blatant and damaging was this type of reporting, particularly in the first frenzy of 1997 and 1998, that *Irish Times* journalist Andy Pollack (1999: 34) argues,

The treatment of the refugee issue, particularly by newspapers in that group, did a considerable amount to change the benign, if ignorant, attitude of most Irish people

²⁷ The Independent Newspapers Group includes the largest circulation daily, the *Irish Independent*, the only Dublin evening paper, the *Evening Herald*, a major shareholding in the only national tabloid, *The Star*, and both the Irish Sunday newspapers, the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday World*, as well as a share of the *Sunday Tribune*.

to refugees into something much more volatile and potentially dangerous in the short space of less than twelve months.

Below are representative examples of headlines that demonstrate key xenophobic themes pursued by certain aspects of the media at the time. Firstly, numbers of asylum seekers are typically reported in alarmist terms as a 'flood' or 'tide', 'swamping' Ireland: '5,000 refugees flooding to Ireland', *Sunday World*, 20 May 1997, 'Refugee flood to spark homes crisis', *Irish Independent*, 12 June 1997; refugees are associated with begging, crime and anti-social behavior: 'Refugees: Police Act to Smash Gang', *Evening Herald*, 6 June 1997, 'Police Inquiry on Romanian Refugees', *Irish Times*, 4 June 1997; and allegations are made that refugees are 'bogus' and routinely exploiting the welfare system: 'Crackdown on 2,000 sponger refugees', *Irish Independent*, 7 June 1997, 'Free cars for Refugees: Cash Grants Buy BMWs', *Daily Mirror*, 16 December 2002.²⁸ Finally, there was the inevitable demonising of immigrants as sexually deviant and bestial. A clear example is provided by 'Refugee Rapists on the Rampage', *The Star*, 13 June 1997, which seeks to label all refugees as potential rapists:

Gardaí have warned women to stay away from refugees after a spree of sex assaults. Prostitutes and minors are the main targets of rapacious Romanians and Somalians, according to top Garda sources. (NCCRI, 2003: 15)

Other examples include *The Wexford People's* 29 July 1998 editorial which, after forty-seven Romanians were found in a freight container in Rosslare, fostered the urban myth that young male asylum seekers would deliberately impregnate local school girls in order to get residency status (quoted in Haughey, 2001: 138). What is at issue is not just the inaccuracies and defamation, ²⁹ the reliance on unrepresentative or unsubstantiated

²⁸ These headlines are sourced from 'Case Study: Media Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland', a survey conducted by the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism and the Equality Authority Ireland as the National Point (NFP) for RAXEN, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, April 2003.

²⁹ Allegations that asylum seekers are given assistance towards the cost of cars, mobile phones or for socialising, for example, are simply not true. The NCCRI in partnership with the UNHCHR and Know

sources³⁰ and the narrow, uncontextualised reporting,³¹ but the tendency to conflate the actions or perceived actions of a minority of individuals with the cultural tendencies of a group as a whole in racist stereotyping. What is more, the sustained nature of this type of reporting appears to be a deliberate editorial campaign by, in particular, the *Daily Mirror* and the Independent Newspaper Group. It is this, along with perceived governmental inadequacies, which galvanized political theatre activists O'Kelly and Calypso Productions in particular into their own campaign of productions in opposition to these views.

The importance of advocating for a more just and ethical society intensifies as resources become scarcer. At the time of writing, Ireland is facing into what has been described as a "financial tsunami" (Filger, 2009), a reversal as unexpected and extraordinary as the boom had been. From the highs of 6% growth in 2007 (National Treasury Management Agency), by September 2008 the Republic was officially in recession and by May 2009, an Ernst & Young report declared that Ireland was in a technical depression and predicted a decline of 8.9% of GDP for the year. Thousands of jobs were being lost every month along with unprecedented numbers of bankruptcies and mortgage foreclosures. As assessed by Brendan Lynch, an advisor on the report, "The island economy is in the eye of an unprecedented economic storm and collateral damage is severe" (quoted in Slattery, 2009). With the economy in free-fall and elections to face, mainstream parties have so far resisted anti-immigration rhetoric and have even fielded a

Racism, the government's public awareness program, published a leaflet in 2002 to challenge these myths partially in response to such media misinformation, 'Myths and Misinformation about Asylum Seekers'. ³⁰ For example, 'Refugee Rapists on the Rampage', quoted "top Garda sources" which turned out to be

one Garda at Fitzgibbon Street station. See Pollack (1999: 36).

³¹ Allegations of a 'flood' of refugees, for instance, are inaccurate if Ireland's asylum applications are compared with other European countries. See Pollack, quoting the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, (ibid: 39).

number of black and migrant candidates in the local sphere.³² The government, however, have introduced much tougher criteria for work permits,³³ making it almost impossible for non-EEA migrants who are made redundant to get another job. These changes reinforce the message that migrants are a disposable economic resource and if many are forced into illegal work, may well contribute to exclusion and exploitation. How this changing cultural environment may be reflected in the theatre remains to be seen, but already the tightening of resources allocated to the arts has contributed, along with its own accumulated financial difficulties, to the demise of Calypso Productions in 2008, and therefore to the loss of one of the most significant producers of socially engaged theatre. "Calypso's agenda has always held that the theatre is not isolated from the world around it, but its collapse now feels like a cruel irony" (Crawley, 2009a: 16).

To conclude this discussion of the theoretical perameters of this study it is necessary to acknowledge that this collection of theorists is rather disparate and used in a somewhat self-contained manner in order to facilitate my own analysis of this period of theatrical endeavour. Thus, the post-colonial and critical race thinkers are cited with regard to the productions as literary and performance texts, Levinas affords insights into the ethical dimensions of the performance process and Habermas' concept of the public sphere provides the framework for the political efficacy of the works under discussion.

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³² See for example Ruadhán MacCormaic's report from Mulhuddart where three of the twelve candidates are Nigerian, 'Local knowledge and timeless issues help new faces', *Irish Times*, 25 May 2009. John Gormley, leader of the Green Party, announcing his parties candidates for local election noted that they had a higher percentage of migrant candidates (at 8%) than any other party. See Harry McGee, 'Gormley Criticises FG over 'rezoning frenzy'' (2009:8).

³³ Changes include higher fees, excluding low-paid jobs (under €30,000 per annum) and particular professions (such as domestic work, HGV drivers), obliging employers to advertise jobs for longer before employing someone with a permit, and requiring spouses and dependants of permit holders to apply for permits in their own right. See Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, http://www.entemp.ie/labour/workpermits/revisedworkpermitarrangements.htm.

What I plan to argue, however, is that despite the undeniable divergencies between these theorists in terms of philosophical or ideological outlook, there is also significant convergence, providing the ground upon which the theoretical framework of this dissertation is built. Jürgen Habermas, for example, is famously committed to the "unfinished project of modernity"³⁴ and criticises post-modernism for being politically impotent and offering no genuine possibility of intervention in the injusticies of the world. While this criticism seems plausible in relation to many postmodern perspectives, it is certainly not applicable to the politically powerful post-colonial thinking of Bhabha and Spivak. Indeed, by recasting the modern/postmodern debate through the work of Bhabha and Habermas, notions of political communication are opened up to the unanticipated spaces of marginalised or subaltern discourse.³⁵ As Bhabha himself suggests, by "bend[ing] Jürgen Habermas to our purposes, we could also argue that the post-colonial project, at the most general theoretical level, seeks to explore those social pathologies – 'loss of meaning, conditions of anomie' – that no longer simply 'cluster around class antagonism, [but] break up into widely scattered historical contingencies" (Bhabha, 1994: 171). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak has demonstrated the value of Habermass' notion of the public sphere in her work on the use of English in creative writings from postcolonial Asia, Africa and the Carribean.³⁶ There is more obvious resonance between Spivak and Levinas on questions of responsibility and the conditions necessary for ethical dialogue with the subaltern, as discussed above, but it is important to note that their thinking on the ethical singularity of this discourse, while convergent, does not operate in

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³⁴ It is the title of the collection, edited by Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib, *Habermas* and the Unfinished Project of Modernity (1996b).

³⁵ For an excellent discussion the intersections between Bhabha and Habermas see Maria Hegbloom (2009) 'Bhabha and Habermas: Beyond the Impasse of the Modern and the Postmodern; http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p301212_index.html, accessed 27 February 2011.

³⁶ See for example her essay 'How to teach a 'culturally different' book' on R. K. Narayan's novel *The Guide* in *The Spivak Reader* (1996a: 237-266).

the same way. Spivak suggests that this ethical singularity needs to be established by "painstaking labour" (1995: xxiv), whereas Levinas' argues that ethics and responsibility transcend the individual agency of the self (Lingis, 2000: xvii). Levinas and Habermas too have numerous points of contact, especially with regard to the role of language in constituting a moral point of view and as central to what it means to be human, and the imperative of social responsibilty, although they differ significantly in philosophical and methodological emphasis in that Levinas' ideas could be described as more utopian and conceptual, while Habermas is generally more pragmatic and administrative.³⁷ Where then can the common ground upon which this dissertation takes its theoretical stance be located? All of these theorists are motivated by a sense of social obligation and a notion of responsibility to the Other, particularly the subaltern Other. Each is committed to dialogue and mindful of the difficulties in establishing genuine, ethical communication with an unknowable, singular Other. By focussing on stereotyping or the a priori assumptions that constitute ontology, all of these theorists offer profound warnings about the tendency for the Same to consume the Other. Finally, in common with most of the theatre artists in this study, each of these theorists is concerned not only with ethics but also with politics, and with their point of conjunction in the pursuit of social justice. To that end, these thinkers express a common commitment to making enunciative space for the Other in public discourse and to facilitating their pursuit of political and cultural agency.

Apart from these global perspectives, this study is also indebted to numerous Irish scholars from an array of disciplines, with far too many contributors to cover

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³⁷ For further discussion see Steve Hendley (2000), From Communicative Action to the Face of the Other: Levinas and Habermas on Language, Obligation and Community.

comprehensively. Of particular note are the sociologists Robbie McVeigh and Ronit Lentin, who have both written widely on race in Ireland and are anti-racism activists, the geographer and Irish Centre for Migration Studies director Piaras Mac Énrí, and social psychologists such as Malcolm Mac Lachlan and Michael O'Connell, who also have consider the impact of migrancy in their fields. Nor is this study unique in considering the overlap between Irish theatre and society. On the contrary, Fintan O'Toole, renowned social and cultural commentator and theatre critic has written of this conjunction for decades and has long been an advocate for the work of Donal O'Kelly and Calypso Productions in particular. His writing has proved invaluable in the formulation of this thesis. More recently, Jason King (2005a: 23-41) argues convincingly that theatre, more than any other art form, has provided "imaginative space" for intercultural contact and "the perceived ideological contradiction that emerges between 'Ireland's historical experience of emigration over many years', on the one hand, and 'Ireland's current asylum and immigration laws', on the other." Olabisi Adigun, founder of Ireland's first African theatre company, Arambe, also engages in social commentary on race and theatre, as well as writing more personally about his projects and his experiences in Ireland.

However, this thesis examines the Irish theatre concerned with race from both macro (broader social and cultural context) and micro perspectives (detailed analysis of individual productions), endeavouring thereby to come to an understanding of how the racialisation of Irishness is being negotiated both in Irish society and in the theatre, a privileged forum in independent Ireland's identity fabrication. Apart from the concerns of nationalism that can consume the cultural attention of a relatively new nation state, I

would argue that political theatre as a whole is under-theorised in Ireland. Indeed, there is even a denigration, particularly by theatre reviewers, of theatre with a social agenda as somehow an inferior art form, which has left many of the theatre practitioners in this study relegated to the margins of theatre and of criticism. This thesis seeks to redress this imbalance and argues for recognition of political theatre's vital contribution both to Irish society and Irish theatre. Race, identity and the intersection of culture and politics have long been the subject of academic enquiry in other European countries such as the United Kingdom and France, where the intercourse of colonisation has dramatically affected their culture for centuries. Intercultural theatre is also something of a *cause célèbre*, particularly as it reflects the polyphony of modern diasporic society. Both of these precedents provide important theoretical insights on the work, particularly of Arambe and Calypso's Tower of Babel, but in the distinctive context of Ireland and its particular theatre ethos, this thesis aims to offer something new to the body of academia. Finally, where this dissertation most clearly departs from previous scholarship is in its privileging of the language and modes of theatrical expression, not just as literary but also as performance texts, which operate in a uniquely transient and face-to-face live environment, and whose representational strategies utilise the embodied, racialised actor and engage in a communal public ritual with society. Theatre is, therefore, uniquely equipped to negotiate a shared identity and future within a newly diverse Irish society. The subjects of this study have set about that engagement with some dynamism and categorically warrant this in-depth examination.

Theatre is a multivalent art form and, therefore, thorough analysis requires attention to be given in each chapter to the product, process and reception in the public

sphere as is set out in the theoretical positioning above, although some of the chapters focus the argument more specifically through one of these frameworks. In addition, particular themes such as stereotyping, the congruence of sex and race, and the ethics of representation are broadly pursued throughout the thesis. Thus, the organisation of this study into chapters predominantly centres around individual practitioners or companies. The first two chapters concern the work of those most associated with anti-racist theatre in Ireland, the actor, director and playwright Donal O'Kelly and the political theatre company he established in 1993, Calypso Productions. Their numerous original theatre productions, workshops, projects and advocacy activities represent a concerted fifteenyear campaign in support of rights for refugees and asylum seekers. Chapter One examines O'Kelly's three 'refugee' plays, Asylum! Asylum! (1994, produced at the Abbey), Farawayan (1998, Calypso Productions) and The Cambria (2003, Donal O'Kelly Productions). As the forerunner of this issue in Irish theatre, O'Kelly's explicit concern with generating and motivating an anti-racist public sphere and the mechanisms used to achieve this objective provide the hub of the argument. However, his skilful tailoring of an array of theatre forms to varying political aspirations, contexts and audiences, also provides a fascinating rubric for the analysis of his productions.

The work of Calypso Productions, from 2002 to 2008 under the artistic direction of Bairbre Ní Chaoimh, is the concern of Chapter Two. The productions under consideration include the popular *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner* for the Dublin International Theatre Festival (by Roddy Doyle, 2002), the youth theatre musical *Mixing it on the Mountain* (by Maeve Ingoldsby, 2003), produced in association with the Tower of Babel intercultural young people's project, and *I have before me a remarkable*

document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda, written by Sonja Linden (2005) in response to her work with refugees recovering from their experiences of genocide. As Calypso are a theatre company with an overt political agenda which impacts not just on their productions but also on their theatrical process, this chapter considers the ethical implications of their work with vulnerable young asylum seekers and their use of testimony as drama. To that end, the theories of Emmanuel Levinas provide a key line of enquiry.

Chapter Three pursues a more thematic analysis, namely the preponderance of the interracial romance motif in plays that deal with race on the Irish stage and the interplay between sexuality and racism. To that end the investigation examines the productions of a range of individual playwrights, including Christian O'Reilly's *It Just Came Out* (Druid Debut Series, 2001), Brian Campbell's *Voyage of No Return* (DubbelJoint for the West Belfast Festival, 2004), *Done Up Like a Kipper* (2002) by Ken Harmon commissioned by the Abbey, Jim O'Hanlon's *The Buddhist of Castleknock* (Fishamble, 2003) and *Hurl* by Charlie O'Neill for Barrabas (2003). While the intercultural love-story is a dramaturgical device common to almost all the plays in this study, the potency of this returning motif, whether operating as fetish and spectacle or as a metaphor for interracial reconciliation, is an important theoretical focus for this chapter. Choice of form, in particular the prevalence of realism in these plays and in Irish theatre in general, is another reoccurring issue.

The last three chapters test the limits of this thesis. Chapter Four separates 'race' from migration by considering the representation of Eastern Europeans, the conflation of past Irish emigration and contemporary immigration as a strategy for engendering identification and the influence of class in those portrayals. The chapter features the work of three playwrights Dermot Bolger (*The Townlands of Brazil*, 2006), Paul Mercier (*Homeland*, 2006 and *Native City*, 1998) and Joe O'Byrne (*It Come Up Sun*, 2000), and the geographical and cultural specifics of the companies they write for, namely Axis theatre in Ballymun, the Abbey and Passion Machine, formerly associated with the SFX theatre in Dublin's north inner-city. As such this chapter uses space as a key theoretical matrix, both within the fictions of the plays, in terms of the conflicts between place and personhood and the ambivalent notions of 'home', and in the contextual socio-geographic politics of the productions and theatre companies.

Returning the focus more specifically again to race, Chapter Five addresses the productions of Arambe, Ireland's first black theatre company, and of their artistic director Olabisi Adigun. In contrast to previous chapters, Arambe's productions are the work of African theatre artists representing themselves, albeit sometimes in intercultural dialogue with Irish collaborators. The analysis considers the productions from two distinct perspectives, their staging of African or Afro-Caribbean plays and their own devised work, as opposed to their reworking of Irish canonical texts. The first group includes *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (Ola Rotine, 2004) and *Once Upon a Time* and *Not So Long Ago* (2005 and 2006, both devised productions), along with a number of other classic African plays. The second includes Jimmy Murphy's *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* (2006) and Adigun and Roddy Doyle's version of John Millington Synge's *The Playboy*

of the Western World (2007 and 2008). The analysis deliberates on the representation of both African and 'white' identity in these works and notes the impact of the reverse perspective, the gaze of the 'Other' turned back to 'Us'. It also considers the influence of this black theatre company on the public sphere, particularly Adigun's high profile *Playboy*, and their insistence on addressing their uniquely intercultural audience in different ways and with different agendas. For African artists and audiences, they offer a unique forum for expression and a showcase of their culture; for their predominantly white Irish audiences, Arambe "shed[s] light on Africans", ³⁸ and lays down a challenge for social inclusion. In addition to his co-writing experience with Doyle, Adigun has been involved in various complex intercultural projects and these also offer an enlightening mode of enquiry.

Finally, Chapter Six examines the racially specific depiction of Travellers in Irish theatre as a comparative study. Envisaged mostly as an examination of Traveller self-representation, the chapter considers the work of two playwrights, Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins. These are contextualised by Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding* (1981b), whose Traveller characters both perform and challenge stereotypes of Tinker and Irish identity as part of the Revivalist politico-cultural project, and Charlie O'Neill's *Rosie and Starwars* (1997), a response by the settled theatre artists of Calypso Productions to the perceived injustices of Traveller life. Traveller playwrights

McDonagh and Collins both began writing and performing plays within the tradition of Traveller life-writing, with *The Babydoll Project* (2003) exploring McDonagh's experiences as a disabled Traveller, and Collins playing himself as a child in *It's a*

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³⁸ The sub-heading for the projects in development page on Arambe's website, see www.arambeproductions.com/development.html; accessed 21 March 2008.

Cultural Thing...(2005). However, they have since begun using fiction to address a wide range of social and political concerns that challenge perceptions of normative Traveller mores. For example, McDonagh's play Stuck (2007) and Collins' Mobile (2006) confront the pressure on young men within Traveller societies to engage in illegal activities and violence. They also contest more conservative and discriminatory attitudes towards sexuality and race in Traveller culture, with McDonagh's John and Josie (2005) featuring a gay relationship and Collin's Same Difference, Worlds Apart (2010) a relationship between an African man and a Traveller woman. Like many of the other plays in this study, these theatre productions are daring, polemic works, playing to diverse publics and carrying a multiplicity of messages. Nevertheless, Michael Collins, who has toured his plays to the U.K., New York and India, acknowledges that his work is most contentious when played to Traveller audiences in Ireland.³⁹ Representing themselves and speaking to and about themselves, these plays source their powerful subjectivity from their celebration of Traveller voices and experiences.

In conclusion, all the productions discussed in this dissertation participate in the anti-racist discourse in the Irish public sphere. Although sometimes trapped in archetypal and dialectical representations of 'Irish' and 'non-Irish', it is the argument of this thesis that this kind of provocative, utopian, critical and practical theatre is staging dreams of possible, better worlds that imagine an Ireland 'Otherwise' and affirm the right of drama to address critical cultural issues. It pursues the premise that identity does not just concern consciousness, or self-consciousness, is not constituted just in the psychic domain, but also belongs in the realm of *representation* and is transmitted through the

³⁹ Author's interview with Michael Collins, 12th August 2010.

material, objective forms of culture. This type of political theatre is an intervention in the way racialised identities are constituted in Irish society, in the way the Self and Other are produced as objects in the world. The 'endlessly performative self' has become something of a cliché in modern, deconstructing, anti-essentialist theories of 'post-': postmodernism, post-structuralism, post-feminism and, of course, post-colonialism. However, if concepts like 'identity' and the 'I' of the 'subject' have been placed "under erasure" then, asks Stuart Hall (1996: 2), is there a "set of problems... (to which) the *irreducibility* of the concept, identity, emerge?" For Hall the answer to this question lies in the centrality of 'identity' to questions of politics and agency. He advocates not an abolishment of 'the subject' but a "reconceptualization – thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm." Questions of politics and agency are central to this thesis too, as they are central to the theatre practitioners under discussion. Through the uniquely 'performative' medium of theatre, there is a real attempt being made to reconceive a more plural Irish identity in these plays.

When considering the transformative social agenda the theatre practitioners in this study envisage, the words of Marx and Engels (1974: 123) spring to mind: "The philosophers have *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it." This correlation between the descriptive and the transformative echoes the connection made by Joseph Roach, in the quotation with which this chapter begins, between performance and identity and thus between Irish theatre and Irish identity. It has long been argued that nations and communities are created in our collective imaginations; that identity, individual or collective, is "constituted, not outside but within representation" (Hall, 1993: 402). The theatre, as traditionally a very important quasi-public space in Ireland, is

a part of the broader cultural conversation we have with ourselves about who we are, how our society works and perhaps what our aspirations for the future may be. From the interventions of Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats at the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, Irish theatre has long been fixated with the forging and challenging of Irish identity, negotiating ideas of 'home' within the complexities of this concept for a post-colonial nation of emigrants. However, as Brian Singleton and Anna McMullan argue (2003: 3), at this time of great upheaval in Irish society, "The parameters of authorship in the theatre, and the very label 'Irish' are being renegotiated'. The artists under discussion are taking the representational challenge of re-presenting and re-imagining a racially inclusive and engaged Ireland. Thus 'performing' a more heterogenous Ireland and consciously positing this vision against a traditionally more homogenous and exclusionary one is, as the title of this thesis suggests, a political act.

Chapter One

The theatre of Donal O'Kelly: Contesting the Irish Public Sphere

[T]he intellectual is an individual with a specific public role in society... endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publically (sic) to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug.

(Said, 1994: 8)

Said's heroic concept of the intellectual emphasises the necessarily public nature of the role. Indeed he argues "there is no such thing as a private intellectual" (ibid: 9), in that his/her vocation is representation, presenting ideas to an audience or readership and also becoming a representative of those ideas. In a modern world dominated as it is by "mass-art and mass-thought" (Said quoting American sociologist C. Wright Mills, ibid: 15) intellectuals can become despondent in the face of their marginality and impotence, or they can choose to use their talents as the 'hired guns' of authority, institutions or corporations, or alternatively they can seek to change their world, becoming advocates for the weak and voiceless in society. This chapter examines the new phenomenon of refugee characters on the Irish stage, with particular reference to the work of Donal O'Kelly both as an individual artist and with the political theatre company he co-founded, Calypso. Although he would perhaps not relish the designation 'intellectual', in his passionate dedication to social justice and in his contestation of the Irish public sphere it is certainly possible to recognise in Said's definition, O'Kelly's theatrical and political project. This chapter utilises the concept of the 'public sphere', in the sense lent to it by

Jürgen Habermas, as a frame in which to examine how O'Kelly and his fellow theatre collaborators are attempting to create and then maintain an alternative and actively politicised antiracist public in his three productions concerned with the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, *Asylum! Asylum!* (1994), *Farawayan* (1998) and *The Cambria* (2003). Within that frame, an analysis of O'Kelly's strategic choices of theatrical form (realism in the case of *Asylum! Asylum!*, processional, interactive spectacle for *Farawayan* and melodrama for *The Cambria*) and search for diverse audiences in the very different production contexts of the National Theatre, Dublin's Olympic Ballroom and in various touring venues throughout the country, are particularly germane.

1.1 Asylum! Asylum!: Challenging the Identity of the Natives

A normative ideal central to the concept of democracy, argues Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, a historical-sociological study that charts the emergence, transformation and subsequent disintergration of the bourgeois public sphere, is the principle of 'publicity'. By this he means a process of rational-critical debate on issues relevant to society, open to all and free of domination, rather than the modern understanding of 'publicity', where powerful organisations and individuals manipulate 'public opinion' in order to orchestrate legitimisation of decisions already taken. Seeking to generate 'publicity' and critical debate on the treatment of refugees in Ireland in the early nineties, specifically their internment for long periods in Mountjoy

Prison for no crimes other than seeking asylum, ⁴⁰ O'Kelly wrote *Asylum!* Asylum!, which was produced in 1994 at the Peacock, one of the theatres that make up Ireland's National Theatre. In his choice of form, realism, which was uncharacteristic of his usual theatrical style, in his choice of venue, the Abbey, and of course in his placing of the first black protagonist on the stage of the National Theatre, O'Kelly was attempting to open public debate on the plight of Ireland's refugees.

I wanted it to be dead straight, almost like television [...] I wanted it to be a real, unambiguous portrayal of what's happening to asylum seekers in Ireland and to say that, "There *is* such a thing in Ireland [an asylum seeker] – did you know?" It was a flagraiser and playing at the National Theatre helped to raise it as high as possible. ⁴¹

The jailing of those seeking asylum, in the absence of any other legislation on what to do with them, was an issue that went underreported in the press and was without champions in the Dail (Irish Parliament). By choosing the Abbey and playing to the elite public of theatre goers, by engaging the press in debate, by running seminars on 'The Refugee Experience in Ireland' every Saturday through the run and even by setting up stalls in the foyer and handing out literature for the Refugee Council and Amnesty International amongst others, O'Kelly was undoubtedly trying to provoke 'publicity' in the Habermasian sense. We could think of Brecht's maxim concerning 'truth': that it is of no use unless communicated to someone who can do something with it.⁴²

However, more radically, *Asylum! Asylum!* also challenges Ireland's liminal postcolonial status, both western and colonised, white and racially other, imperial and

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⁴⁰ O'Kelly in an interview with Joe Jackson describes formulating the theme of the play after reading a *Hot Press* article about the internment of a survivor of Tiananmen Square for months in Mountjoy, 'Desperately Seeking Asylum', *Hot Press*, 3 August 1994: 26.

⁴¹ Author's interview One with Donal O'Kelly, 24 June 2003.

⁴² In 'Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties', Appendix A to *Galileo*, Brecht cites as the fourth difficulty that "the truth cannot merely be written; it must be written for someone, someone who can do something with it" (1966: 140). The fifth difficulty is to have "the cunning to spread the truth among the many" (ibid: 141), which is a concern of O'Kelly's, this paper argues, addressed in part by his choices of venues and theatrical forms.

subjugated and, as Fintan O'Toole noted in his review, "(O)ur view of ourselves as a morally pure part of the Third World, as belonging to the oppressed rather than the oppressors" (O'Toole, 1994: 8). Thus, beginning this thesis with an analysis of Asylum! Asylum! is ideal in that, not only is it the first play to deal with these themes chronologically, but it also provides a template of colonial discourses that recur throughout this study: the dislocation of the notions of 'home' and 'family', the discomforting mirroring and juxtapositions of oppressed and oppressor, barbarism and civilization, emigrant and immigrant and the fantasies and ideologies of the commingling of sex and race. It is important to note that although Joseph is the protagonist of Asylum! Asylum!, he is not the subject of the play. Thus, in the first of many subsequent examples, a black character's tragedy facilitates the true subjects of the play, the Irish Gaughran family, in their search for an identity that both the colonial hangover and the challenges of a burgeoning Celtic Tiger have obfuscated. As such, they are the dysfunctional 'Self', with Joseph as the 'Other', a catalyst enabling the family to contend with their dislocation from one another and from their lifeworld. O'Kelly's deliberate choice of realism as his theatrical form, in contrast to his usual methods and to the other plays discussed in this chapter, also facilitates a discussion, continued through subsequent chapters, on the implications and expectations for an audience that realism entails and to examine its efficacy as a form for political advocacy.

From its inception at the turn of the century, the National Theatre has been preoccupied with national identity, reclaiming or creating an 'authentic' Ireland and Irishness for the new, post-colonial nation. As Merriman argues (2001: 56), "one of nationalism's principal cultural goals is to communicate to its own people their homogeneity". Indeed to "initiate and participate in the national conversation... is still the kernel of what constitutes the artistic imperative of the Abbey Theatre in the twenty-first century," according to the Abbey's own view of its cultural role and value. 43 It is not surprising then to note, as Nicholas Grene does (1999: 53), the number and political significance of plays by Yeats, Gregory and Synge, which feature the trope of a "stranger in the house" as a tool for imagining Ireland as spiritually and socially whole. Following this precedent, Donal O'Kelly's Asylum! Asylum! uses the dislocation of the 'stranger', Ugandan Joseph Omara seeking asylum in Ireland, as a prism through which various societal forces on the Irish Gaughran family are revealed and, by extension, challenges the pillars on which Irish society as a whole is built: the State, the Law, the Church and the Family. Leo Gaughran is Joseph's immigration official, representative therefore of the Irish State, cynically using Omara's case to further his own career. Mary, Leo's idealistic sister, is a newly qualified solicitor, attempting to save Joseph from deportation and probable execution as a witness to a military massacre. She, rather improbably, becomes his lover and thus evokes liberal Ireland and the Law. Their father, Bill, who as a sacristan is indicative of the Church and the values of the past, is a widower and quite estranged from his children. Newly retired, he is starting to lose control of his life until he meets Joseph and invites him to stay. At the beginning of the play, the Gaughran microcosm is showing signs of severe disintegration, suggesting the fragmentation of the Family in a modern Ireland, where traditional bonds are undermined by the pressures of individualistic ambitions. Riven by old jealousies, self-loathing and bitter memories of an unloving childhood, Joseph's asylum proceedings become a war of conscience that both wracks the family and reunites them. In a cathartic ending Leo, arguably the real protagonist of the play, witnesses a racist atrocity in Germany when a guest-workers'

⁴³ See http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/behind_the_scenes/article/the_abbeys_cultural_role_and_value; accessed 10 August, 2009.

hostel is burned down by a racist mob while the local police look on, and is converted to an understanding of how the State's asylum laws promote racism. There can be no reprieve for Joseph, however, and he is brutally repatriated by the Irish authorities.

It is significant that O'Kelly has chosen to use two factual, contemporary events, the massacre in Bucoro Northern Uganda and the fire in the guest-workers' hostel in Rostock Germany, as the defining crises for the play's twin main characters, Joseph and Leo. 44 As both incidents were widely reported in the international media and by organisations such as Amnesty International, it is fair to assume that many in the audience would have been familiar with the two events. The true-life incidents provide the fictional story with immediacy and a sense of veracity and this device has accordingly become a popular contrivance in political theatre as is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Powerfully described reminiscences, these pivotal turning points are examples of the obsession with memory, specifically childhood memory, in a play which moves fluidly between timeframes. "There is... always the distracting presence of another temporality", writes Homi Bhabha (1994: 39), "that disturbs the contemporaneity of the national present" in post-colonial society. Periodically chanting a childhood rhyme his father taught him, "Short has been the life/ Many the vic-iss-it-udes/ Of the Ugandan Railway", Joseph is particularly haunted by memories of his father, "tall like a giant, thin like a leaf" (142). The plot gradually reveals that soldiers forced him to dig a pit in Bucoro and cover it with logs. His father and other men from his village were then burnt

⁴⁴ In 1991 in Bucoro Northern Uganda, five prisoners were put into a pit which was covered in logs and set on fire; and in Rostock, Germany in 1992, a Vietnamese guest-workers' hostel was burned down by a racist mob while the local police allegedly looked on. For more information see Kamil Taylan's documentary on the Rostock incident, *The Fire Trap of Rostock the Arsonist, the Cheering and a Nation Distraught* (ARD, 2002).

alive in it. Survivor guilt and the shame of betrayal, ('Do you know these men!?' [Pause] 'No, I don't know anybody here.' [143]), traumatise Joseph who describes himself as "the prodigal son" (143), returning on that day to Bucoro with gifts of paper and crayons for his father's school in order to make amends. Leo is also a 'prodigal son' and the parallels between them are heightened by his own recollection of a childhood train song, temporarily recuperating the lost harmony of his own parent-child relationship and metaphorically echoing the post-colonial schism. Although Leo is cynical, Joseph is predictably enthusiastic about the connection, "You see!? People are the same everywhere? Always trying to get their kids to go asleep!" (121).

The familiar post-colonial trope of the doubling or mirroring of Joseph and Leo is polysemic, its multiple significations used with great irony in the play. Many theorists, notably those such as Bhabha and Frantz Fanon who come from a psychiatric background, have noted the interdependence of coloniser and colonised in colonial (both post- and neo-) society. Bhabha (1986: xiv) describes it as,

Post-Enlightenment man tethered to, not confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being.

Initially Leo uses his mirror image, callously appropriating Joseph's stories and identity to gain advancement.

LEO: They made me act the part of an African trying to bust his way into Europe. I acted it so well they told me... this was unanimous... they told me they'd have granted me asylum on the spot. (135)

Cullingford notes in her critique of Neil Jordan's 1992 film *The Crying Game* a similar appropriation of a story and a black identity, when the white IRA man tells Jody's (the black soldier) story to impress Jody's girlfriend Dil, and she quotes bell hooks (2001:

133) on this phenomenon: "This paradigm mirrors that of colonialism. It offers a romanticized image of the white coloniser moving into black territory, occupying it, possessing it in a way that affirms his identity". The device serves both to problematise the imaginative connection between subaltern black and Irish identities and also highlights the contested nature of truth and the right to self-representation in the Irish asylum system that places the often impossible onus of proof on the refugee.

The things he has in common with Joseph, on the other hand, also repel Leo. Luke Gibbons (1998: 27) argues that, "Ireland is a first-world country, but with a third-world memory," and the contradiction between the two poles triggers a schizophrenic double vision in Leo. He is both a dominator as a white man and dominated by his own feelings of colonial inferiority. Leo's self-loathing, which is expressed partly in his furious hostility towards Joseph and in a hatred of Ireland, depicts the "subordinate privilege" described by Lentin and McVeigh in their attempt to locate contemporary Irish racism (2002: 24). It is an Irish identity constituted by *difference*, imagined both as inferior to the cultural hegemony of the metropolis but also as empowered within the current world hierarchy of 'race' and class, which "encourages Irish people to adopt racialised interpretations of the world order" (ibid: 25). Bill sees the irony of the situation.

BILL: Ah, God help him. He's banging to get in. You're banging to

get out.

LEO: Nope. I'm banging to get in.

BILL: What!?

LEO: Europe. The centre. No future here. We're only an off-shore rock.

Clinging on for dear life. A lump of wet moss. We're pathetic.

(118)

Arguing that the current vibrant presence of the immigrant Other somehow invokes the psychic trauma and sense of inferiority that are the product of Ireland's subjugated emigrant past, Ronit Lentin would term Leo's discomfort and unacknowledged racism the "national repressed" (2002: 233). For both Leo and Joseph, 'home' is a conflict between prison and exile, emphasizing the abstruse discourse between place and identity. This conflict, according to Una Chaudhuri, "pitches the humanist project of refashioning the self and the world against a reified notion of place as fate" (1997: 56). Home is a problematic location in that it is both determining and changeable. In a further twist Leo, as a separated husband and failed father, is as psychically homeless as Joseph is physically so. "There's no second chance" (137), no option for either man but escape to the utopia of Europe.

Just as the multiple juxtapositioning of Leo and Joseph help make O'Kelly's dramatic point, he also creates a dense dialectic between the images of the Jungle and Civilization. This play asks the audience in various ways, 'who are the barbarians?' and 'what is civilized?' The opening scene is set in a modern, Europeanised pub, "done up as if it was a clearing in the jungle" (114). Bill, who represents the old Ireland, is clearly disgusted and in a relatively short scene makes numerous references to his location, "You're in the jungle. Just pee against a tree?" (116), "The tom-toms are calling" (118), "bring your little alien into the jungle-pub [...] he'll be more at home than me" (118). Although not specifically mentioned, we recognise the cause of Bill's discomfort. It is the Celtic Tiger of modern Ireland lurking behind the palm fronds of the décor. Chaudhuri would term Bill's sense of dislocation 'geopathology'. She argues, "The problem of place — and place as a problem — informs realist drama deeply, appearing as a

series of ruptures and displacements in various orders of location, from the micro- to the macrospatial" (ibid: 55).

O'Kelly also interrogates the relative civility of European and Irish asylum laws. Mary is convinced that Europe will be more progressive than the Ireland "of Nod and Wink" (139), but Bill has a longer memory. The terrifying experience of witnessing the bombing of Dublin's North Strand during the Second World War, has seared images of fire and smoke in Bill's mind, echoing the burning and choking in Joseph's story of his father's murder. "The sky was lit by the flames [...] Next morning the smell of the black smoke was everywhere" (156). Much more vivid, however, is Leo's relating of the Rostock incident. Again the imagery is of mindlessly violent horror, roaring flames and smoke engulfing the innocent.

LEO: Then the petrol bombs flew. Whuh! Whuh! Blazing curtains hanging out of windows [...] Flames spread through the floors. I could see people running up the stairwell dragging children [...] Now the windows were packed with men, women, and children leaning out for air. The men on the roof pelted them with bricks. (166)

If the violence in Bucoro is the naked savagery of barbarism, O'Kelly asks, what then is this?

LEO: I asked the Chief why we let it happen. He sighed. He acted sad. 'Because fear is the only deterrent', he said. 'Fear is the only thing they understand!' (167)

The end of the play profoundly challenges liberal European notions of its own civility. Leo has "hit the road to Damascus with a big fucking bang" (168), but returns only in time to witness Joseph's enforced deportation. Out of deference to the family,

Pillar, Leo's colleague in the immigration department, has tried to persuade Joseph to leave without a struggle. He sees this as the 'humane' option. As the boss, however, Leo insists on the full extent of the law, including the body belt and gag, to expose the hypocrisy of neo-imperialism disguised as liberal social policy. Pillar angrily rejects this interpretation of his job and by extension his identity. His is a Darwinian argument that returns to the Jungle.

PILLAR: Survival of the fittest! That's the basis! Everybody knows it's a jungle! What you have you hold! That goes for anywhere! Here! Berlin! Or fucking Omaraland-Bucorganda! (167)

The 'law of the jungle' is Imperialism's "paranoid fantasy of boundless possession and its familiar language of reversal. 'They want to take our place'", argues Bhabha (1986: xv). The final image is a deliberate echo of Joseph's torture by the soldiers. In Uganda he was tied *Kandooya*, which means like a 'briefcase' with hands and feet joined together and hung from the rafters. In Dublin:

MARY: Pillar put the gaffer tape on Joseph's mouth [...] They tied his legs together with the tape. They picked him up like a rolled-up carpet that buckled and bent. (172)

Joseph, in his suffering and particularly in his dealings with Mary and Bill, also embodies the classic trope of 'Noble Savage', as developed by the French philosopher Rousseau (1987). It is an idealised and often eroticised notion of the colonised native as innocent, good by nature until corrupted by the 'civilizing' influences of European empires. Within the world to the play, the notion of Joseph as a 'Noble Savage' is evidenced by Mary, his solicitor's, rather unlikely compulsion to kiss him during her first asylum interview with him in Mountjoy and the sudden decision of the supposedly cumudgeonly Bill to invite him to move in. From the first Bill is profoundly moved by Joseph's anguish and love of his father, but the Irish man with colonial memories also

delights in Joseph's stories of the natives carrying a fat Winston Churchill through Uganda and defying him with their chant of "Burrulum! Huma!", which means 'iron and wood', which implies that the iron of Europe cannot get along without the wood of native labour (158). Kurdi (2000: 92) describes it as "the empire laughs back game", with the Irish man identifying with the natives rather than the colonial master and interpreting their cheeky defiance as heroic. Joseph, however, is not as distanced from the consequences of history as Bill and, although playing his part, his laughter is much darker.

BILL: It's a great story! Putting one over on Churchill! Four young

black lads.

JOSEPH: Bill! They were still carrying the bastard! BILL: Still. They were making a fool of him.

JOSEPH: 'Burrulum huma! Iron upon wood... tee-hee! How many

more miles must we carry the stupid fat bwana!? Churchill carved a wound through Africa on that journey, and it's still pumping blood. Funny!? It's like looking down and laughing at your own

disembowelment. (159)

More problematic is Mary and Joseph's romance. The fetishising of the black man as a sexual object will be critiqued in detail in Chapter Three as it is a common thread running through most of the plays in this study with a black character in them. (In this context it is interesting to note the element of sex appeal indentified in Kay Hingerty's review (1994): "Joseph, (Dave Fishly) has the power of story-telling, with eyes that ignite our response to him".) Dramaturgically, their relationship comes out of nowhere and is given no opportunity to develop beyond the titillation of a few stolen kisses. Donal O'Kelly justifies the motivation for Mary's very unprofessional embrace of Joseph in the Garda station:

It's my dramatic contrivance that Joseph and Mary are in the same room at the same time, both on parts of their journey that bring them together. Mary – what she's been looking for, for years, is a mission, a sense of purpose and she's pretty

drunk from being out celebrating. She's more open than she would normally be and things like that happen in life. (Author's interview, 2003)

In other words Joseph is Mary's Noble Savage, her 'mission'. As a dialogical writer naturally O'Kelly does not leave the significance of this relationship entirely unchallenged.

JOSEPH: Joseph the Innocent. Joseph the Noble Savage. That's what you

want, Mary. You don't want Joseph Omara the smalltime smuggler who makes his living out of what the fucking

department calls crime. (151)

In refusing to tell her anymore of his soft, comforting stories Joseph demands to be loved for more than what he represents.

Victor Merriman, who directed the play in Cork in 1997, described his attempts to make Joseph more multiple and complex by emphasising the ambiguous aspects of Joseph's character and doubts about his veracity (author's interview, 2003). While I did not see this production and these are certainly justifiable directorial choices, I would argue that as the object of this play rather than the subject Joseph is not constructed to be anything other than a sympathetic victim and that the character as written resists Merriman's interpretation. The dehumanising treatment he receives at the hands of the authorities facilitates the Damascene conversion of Leo, and it is O'Kelly's cultural project that the audience will be similarly converted to political action. "It [the objectification of the 'foreign' character] invites us to participate ritualistically – as witnesses, as celebrants – in the self-discovery of the Hero", writes Chaudhuri, but she goes on to question, "Is [the refugee's] entire terrible experience of dislocation not reduced to the status of a mere pedagogical device, an object lesson for the

complacent?"⁴⁵ Joseph's dramatic exit allows the subject, the Irish family, to get on with the real business of the play, their reconciliation. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford also examines the close relationships between an Irish character and a sympathetic black male in three highly successful 1990's cultural products and posits a very interesting theory. Jody in Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game*, Adam in Frank McGuinness's play *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and Charles Parker in Colin Bateman's novel *Divorcing Jack* are all killed well before the end of the narrative. "Evidently the authors could not imagine an ending that would incorporate a person of colour, especially one who exists more for analogical than for realistic purposes" (2001: 133).

It becomes necessary therefore to question, as Fintan O'Toole (1994: 8) does in his review 'Naturalism Hampers Real Intensity', whether the realist form of *Asylum! Asylum!* serves O'Kelly's polemic content. He argues that the play "is most effective [...] when it is most strange". O'Kelly's playful and powerful use of language, for instance, particularly when the characters are recalling life changing events (Joseph's torture, his father's Churchill stories, Bill's account of courting his wife), transcends the strictures of conventional realism.

In these moments, the play is not merely about the treatment of a refugee, it is itself an evocation of the nightmare of torture, of the strangeness of a strange land, of the way the world looks from the outside. By making familiar things strange, these passages of the drama don't just do what all art tries to do, but they also get to the core of the estrangement that Joseph is made to feel. The aesthetics and the politics reinforce each other. (Ibid)

O'Toole's caveat, unfortunately, is that O'Kelly's linguistic inventiveness and evocative dramatic metaphors are hemmed in by naturalistic conventions that impose expectations

⁴⁵ Una Chaudhuri is making an argument about the objectification of a refugee character in order to serve the white subject's self-discovery, but with reference to the play *Coming into Land* by Stephan Poliakoff, *Staging Place: the Geography of Modern Drama* (1997: 190).

of consistent cause and effect dramaturgy that the play cannot meet. "In the theatre, once you start to explain anything, you have to explain everything" (ibid). On the other hand, with regard to the form, by identifing the play as straightforwardly realistic, suitable for "a bleeding-heart BBC TV drama" (Roche, 1994: 12), and ignoring or mis-reading its heightened theatricality, other reviewers reveal the prejudices against political theatre that commonly prevail in theatre criticism in Ireland. Emer O'Kelly (1994: 16), for example, felt it necessary to point out that "writing a contemporary polemic is always a dangerous undertaking; pomposity, self-indulgence, and the obsessively blinkered view can seem to be hovering in the wings like the three most dangerous horsemen of the apocalypse." Consequently, there was considerable critical debate about the extent to which O'Kelly, the director John Crowley and the rest of the production team achieved a balance between art, entertainment and politics. Comments range from Jocelyn Clarke (1994b: 7), "a compelling, provocative and deeply affecting piece of theatre which blazes as much in the head as in the heart" to the *The Irish Times* review "Medium crushed by message", where David Nowlan (1994: 10) criticises the play for allowing its polemics to keep the audience's empathy at a distance. Patsy McGarry suggests, ludicrously and somewhat incomprehensibly, that political theatre is as reprehensible as social injustice. The last paragraph of the review reads, "Indeed the rage which inspires such tyranny ["telling the audience what to think"] is every bit as fearsome as the barbarity it attacks. Both violate truth with the same impunity" (1994: 15). While critics like Nowlan and McGarry appear to be arguing for greater emphasis on the dramatic and less on politics, 'empathy' and 'catharsis', are problematic terms for political theatre theorists. The theatre is political, Brecht argues (2001: 97), "if society, in the shape of the audience, is [...] able to look at what takes place in such a way as to be able to affect it." He suggests that the audience's capacity for action, for 'changing the world', is pacified by the 'naturalisation' of what

happens on stage which closes discourse and positions the spectators to verify rather than contest 'universal' notions of truth. However, Brecht himself was not necessarily opposed to realist representation; "he was opposed to *non-contradictory* representation" (ibid: 163). It is the contradictions which draw our attention to difference and it is 'difference' that requires a political stance. The politics of visibility are challenged merely in having a black-skinned actor playing a central role at the Irish National Theatre, for example. Indeed, the very purpose of O'Kelly's dramaturgy is the dislocation of Ireland's ideologically homogenous self-identity with the figure of 'difference', in this case the figure of the refugee, indissociable from notions of political struggle. However, as O'Kelly was himself to attest to with his decision to look for an entirely "non-Irish form of theatre... Farawayan theatre" (1997: 12) for his next production, there is an inherent passivity in the relationship between the realist play and its audience which is counter to the aspirations of polemical theatre.

Nevertheless, Donal O'Kelly's *Asylum!* Asylum! to a very real extent fulfills one of the most honourable functions of the theatre. It challenges the audience to think, not just about their politics and the running of society, but about who they are — what it means to be Irish. "The way I like to use the word 'political' is as a real, organic thing, which is in everyone," states O'Kelly (quoted in White, 1994: 10) and whatever our political affiliations may be, this play interrogates one of the most fundamental determinants of identity — home. In a world that is increasingly characterised by exile, migration and refugeehood, "Home [...] is that which we cannot not want" (Dorinne Kondo quoted in Richards, 1997: 64).

1.2 Farawayan: The Audience as Subject

As the 1990s wore on, the sheer volume and diversity of arrivals caused Irish society to suddenly become much more concerned about immigration, but increasingly this debate was conducted by the tabloid media. O'Kelly was strongly influenced by what he saw as a whipping up of public paranoia and it provided further impetus for his own oppositional theatre work.

Four or five years ago the newspapers were just unbelievable in their scurrilous headlines. It looked like a policy in *The Evening Herald* where at least once a week they'd have a headline which was very intimidatory for any asylum seekers coming into Ireland at the time. (Author's interview, 2003)

Control of public debate by the periodical press organised as large-scale commercial institutions and the commodification of mass culture by organized capital assuming public power, is termed the 'refeudalization' of the public sphere by Habermas and is the 'structual transformaton' referred to in his title. 'Public opinion', thus, comes to be devalued, implying a compulsion toward conformity rather than rational-critical discourse. Calypso's 1998 production of *Farawayan*, performed in the non-theatre space of Dublin's Olympic Ballroom, was written to directly address the impression being fostered by some newspapers and talkback radio programs that the state was being overrun with 'bogus' asylum seekers' and to counter the arguments of certain candidates hoping to take advantage of the 'race card' during the hard-fought 1997 general election. ⁴⁶

There was a real sense of urgency [...] Rather than a case of using the play to say what was happening here, it was a case of saying that unless we as the public get active in this we're going to produce a really oppressive society. (author's interview with O'Kelly, 2003)

⁴⁶ Joan Burton (Labour), for example, lost her seat of Dublin West after a campaign that alleged she was responsible for housing Bosnian refugees in the constituency.

However, these new circumstances required something completely different in terms of form to the naturalism of 'flag-raising' *Asylum! Asylum!* as O'Kelly sought to engage a different, non-elitist, non-theatre public than at the Abbey.

The key phrase in O'Kelly's statement above involves the use of the first person plural, "we the public". He goes on to say, "but I wanted the whole style of it to involve the audience as an actor, as an active part of it as well, which is why we chose the Olympic Ballroom" (ibid). It was perhaps a slip of the tongue, but O'Kelly's "actor/active" conflation encapsulates the most fundamental difference in form between Asylum! Asylum! and Farawayan. Where Asylum! Asylum! follows the logic of a timebased, linear narrative, Farawayan moves into the "communion of mythic time", as Octavio Paz refers to it, existing in many time frames at once and in none in particular (quoted in Crow et al, 1996: 162). It is simultaneously as contemporary as the evening news, an evocation of Ireland's own race memory of immigration and a nightmarish fairytale. This dialectic between different temporal and spatial entities, implies that history is a cyclical, continuous 'present' and creates equivalence between the Irish experiences of exile and refugeehood and the forced migration of modern seekers of asylum in Ireland. In its interrogation of geo-politics, the form of the play is required to match its content, where 'place' is the ordering concept of reality. Farawayan, therefore, pivots not around the axis of time but of space, questioning even the topography of conventional theatre. O'Kelly (1997: 12) finds a new term for this kind of the theatre - "it is... Farawayan theatre", highly participatory, sensory spectacle, whose objective is to implicate the audience in the fate of the refugee characters and echo their feelings of disorientation. As if to answer O'Toole's comments on Asylum! Asylum!, "the aesthetics and the politics reinforce each other" (1994: 8) and Farawayan becomes an "experience

of exile and otherness" (O'Kelly, 1997: 10, emphasise added). In *Asylum! Asylum!* and many of the other plays discussed in this thesis, the white Irish characters operate as subjects, providing the audience with the safety of cathartic identification. *Farawayan*, however, demands much more of its audience than easy empathy and the price of admission. They become players in this drama and the subjects of the play.

The experience begins with the audience's enrolment as 'legitimate' citizens. Queuing outside the Olympic Ballroom, they are issued with a programme in the form of an Irish/EU 'passport', which will be demanded throughout the performance by sinister functionaries to determine their eligibility for admission. In conventional theatre, the foyer space serves to prepare the spectators for their role as 'onlookers' by marking the threshold between the outside, real world and the inside, fictional world. By using this liminal space for interactive dramatic purposes, the production seeks to induct the spectators into the fiction and erase the boundaries between the stage world and the world inhabited by the audience. Granted admission onto the balcony, the spectators watch the opening scene, called "Hell's Mouth", from above. There is an eruption of sound and light as a huge, blood-red tunnel shoots across the Ballroom's parquet floor and the fleeing refugees are spewed out. Trying to clamber up to the balcony, they beg the audience to help them up, "immediately", according to O'Kelly, "putting the audience into participatory mode" (author's interview, 2003). Out of the battlefield emerges a fragile raft crowded with the survivors, echoing both the Irish famine ships of the nineteenth century and the 'boat people' of today, travelling between North Africa and Spain for example. These permeable boundaries between history and the present probe "the 'narratability' of the world", argue Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996: 139).

Deliberately clouding the immigration/emigration complexities from an Irish perspective, the port at which the boat docks seems to be Boston, where the harbour master offers a shilling to any man willing to unload the bodies, alive and dead, from the hold. In the heart-wrenching scene that follows, the dead, imaginatively represented by their clothes, are laid out tenderly on the shore by the only man desperate enough for the shilling, Despero the refugee. O'Kelly's intentions are clear:

What I wanted to do was have a piece of theatre that was saying two or three things at once. In terms of our own race memory and what we're becoming now in the world, which is part of the dominant minority. (Author's interview, 2003)

As a cello lament is played, the audience are led down to the Ballroom and invited to be participants in Queen Maud's "Glittering Ball" - Where Irish Eyes are Smiling is playing and everyone in the audience is encouraged to dance. O'Kelly envisaged it as "celebrating how wealthy we are, kind of thing" (ibid). Sweet-voiced Maud Gonne is a charming hostess, a figure of 'Hibernia' or 'Erin', embodying the nation in familiar female form. However, flanked by vicious dogs and the blank-faced instruments of officialdom, Maud will not allow the asylum seeker Farawaya, who has been discovered hiding in a suitcase, to stay. Bellowing her platitudes through a loud-hailer, the irony of Ireland's 'hundred thousand welcomes' cannot be missed.

I want to tell you how much I love you, how much I respect your humanity, how much I want to welcome you... But, however much I pity you I must think of the greater good... I have to send you home again.⁴⁷

This mocking contrast between the official, self-congratulatory rhetoric of dominance and the lived reality of the subaltern is a marked feature of post-colonial culture and of the discourses of belonging and exile in general. By satirising the myths Ireland has about

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⁴⁷ Donal O'Kelly, *Farawayan*, unpublished. Dialogue quoted from production video provided by Calypso Productions. All subsequent citations from the play are from this video.

itself, *Farawayan* questions the construct of Irish identity and, as a corollary, demands its Irish audience acknowledge the realities behind the *Céad Mile Fáilte* façade.⁴⁸

It is important to note that although the play is almost a third of the way through, this is the first scene in which Farawaya emerges from the ensemble as a central character. The plot now follows her terrors in "The Forest of Hatches and Flares", her dehumanising physical examination by a heartless bureaucracy, escape, brutal re-capture and deportation back to certain death. However, as her generic name suggests, Farawaya from Farawayan is not an individuated character in the tradition of realism but a kind of 'Everyrefugee', representative of the huddled masses suffering on our televisions night after night. The only other character who emerges from the refugee crowd is distinguished not by the fiction of the play, but by reality. The performer Vedran Smailovic, who plays Despero the cellist, really is

... known internationally as the incredible Cellist of Sarajevo, who played open air for twenty two days in Sarajevo in full view of the snipers to commemorate his twenty two neighbours who were killed when a mortar struck a bread queue.

This quotation is taken from Lorcan Roche's review of the play in *The Irish Independent* (1998: 25), but it is repeated almost word for word in over half of the reviews and publicity articles for the play. Smailovic's exceptional heroism must somehow be acknowledged so the production reminds us semiotically with his costume of black tie and tails, unlike the generic gypsy costumes of the rest of the cast, of his extraordinary reality. Yet, *Farawayan* cannot be his story because his is too specific. The production does not facilitate the audience's identification with this charismatic figure nor allow

⁴⁸ Céad Míle Fáilte is the Irish Tourism Board's slogan and means "a hundred thousand welcomes".

them to by emotionally swept away by his triumph over adversity. As Elinor Fuchs argues in *The Death of Character*,

No longer fascinated by the struggles of single organisms in their habitats - which translates here into individual characters in their theatrical settings - we pull back to scan... where the thing-held-full-in-view-the-whole-time becomes the measure of theatrical interest. (Fuchs, 1997: 107)

The spectator's focus is shifted from character to dramaturgy, and the pedagogical purpose of the play.

Fuchs' concern with the 'view'seems more relevant to film than to theatre where the director traditionally has a looser control over the audience's gaze. In some ways this production, like a film, is a maelstrom of images; Grania McFadden notes in the *Belfast Telegraph* (1998: 19), "There's so much to watch that, just for the briefest of moments, one wishes for a pause in which to absorb the brutal images, before the next surprise is sprung". Nevertheless, O'Kelly aims to direct the spectator's gaze with what he describes as "cinematic techniques". ⁴⁹ In other words, by using the phenomenology of the cinematic gaze, meaning is layered onto this quintessentially theatrical text. For example, by viewing the first scene "Hell's Mouth" the escape from Farawaya from above, the audience become distanced, objective viewers of the desperate confusion below. Their point of view mimics the broad perspectives of TV reports on international conflicts and catastrophes. In "The Forest of Hatches and Flares", on the other hand, the audience is surrounded 'Alice-like' by the giant, animate, exploding trees and feels/experiences
Faraya's terror and disorientation. As the tension of "The Hunt" episode builds, the noise, lights and chaos swirl upwards, as does the audience's eye, to the balcony where the

⁴⁹ O'Kelly uses this term in his interview with the author, with Louise East in an interview for the *Irish Times*, 'Faraway so close' (1998) and with Lorcan Roche, 'Play of the Week - *Farawayan*' for the *Irish Independent*, (1998).

climax will take place. O'Kelly describes how, instead of writing the play in a conventional sense, he drew it on big pieces of sketch paper, one for each of the eight scenes (author's interview, 2003). His focus right from the beginning was on the images and spectacle of the piece rather than word-based, intellectual argument. This conscious manipulation of the framing foregrounds the audience's gaze, drawing attention to the making of meaning. The audience also becomes a multi-positioned actor in the text, where competing notions of 'self' and identity are constructed by their changing 'point of view', as they transform for example from the authority of an 'overseer' to experiencing the myopic confusion of the refugee in "The Forest of Hatches and Flares".

However, it is not just the gaze of the audience, their sense of sight, upon which O'Kelly has designs. The music and soundscape create a visceral, complex score of overwhelming cacophony, poignantly beautiful Central European threnodies for cello and violin, pulsing African drumbeats, words turn into incantations and even silence. Moving through the dark shadows of the Olympic Ballroom or being startled by the bright flashes in "The Forest of Hatches and Flares," representative of land-mines and mortar explosions, the audience are placed in 'virtual' contact with the horrors of war and enforced exile. Light and dark, stillness and chaos, noise and silence, music and voice, O'Kelly's use of these powerful, sensual dynamics reflects his commitment to affecting the "gut" of the audience, which for him is "the very discernable difference between 'live theatre' and 'dead theatre'" (1997: 10).

It doesn't work if the audience treats itself as a passive consumer... The audience must rise to the challenge. They have to step aboard. Otherwise they'll be left in the dust. They've bought their ticket but they've missed the trip. In live theatre, the audience is more than a consumer. The audience is a partner in live theatre. (ibid: 11)

O'Kelly's appeal to the 'gut' of the audience seems to have been effective judging by the number of reviews that refer to it,⁵⁰ with Frances McDonnell of *The Mayo News* (1998: 28) having perhaps the most extreme reaction.

This is an amazing piece of theatre – lyrical, rhythmic, a sensory feast. With metaphors so painfully illustrative, that you hold your nose lest the stench of death waft up, so gut-wrenchingly graphic that you want to vomit, run away and scream.

The assault made by this production on the boundaries and divisions of traditional realist theatre recall Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, which "eliminat[es] the stage and the auditorium and replac[es] them with a kind of single site". As a result, his manifesto claims, "a direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle... because the spectator, by being placed in the middle of the action, is enveloped by it and caught in its cross-fire" (1958: 96). Likewise Richard Schechner advocates an 'environmental theatre' in which, with the exchange of space and roles between performers and spectators, "a sense of shared experience can be engendered" (1994: xxix). Following this argument with reference to this particular production, Ian Hill's use of the pronoun "you" throughout his review represents the apotheosis of O'Kelly's dramaturgy. The personalising of the audience's experience actualises the political agenda.

Now you may regard the Balkan refugees in Royal Avenue as structured gangs of beggars, ace pickpockets or clever opportunists. But witness *Farawayan* and you are immersed immediately, from the moment your false passport is stamped at the door, into the terror of state repression, the rattle of machine gun fire over your head below the trauma of close sweeping helicopter blades. Like the gentle Farawaya in her gypsy skirt, you're cast away on a drifting raft, manhandled by

⁵⁰ Many of the reviewers quoted O'Kelly as in "Music, sound and movement work to get people at a gut level about the way these people are being treated" (Murphy, 1998: 3). Others echoed him in their reviews. For example Emer O'Kelly, "And with its gut-wrenching commitment of passion, it has a power that shows up the juvenile blandness of offerings from certain other pageant-based companies" (1998).

soldiery and the instruments of the state until you reach Ireland of the Welcomes, your chosen destination. (1998: 3)

The audience is no longer a disembodied gaze, but an embodied, emancipated, performing coactor, the subject of the drama.

Other theorists, however, are unconvinced by the rhetoric of environmental theatre and argue that there is a contradiction between the audience as participant versus the audience as a semiotic element to be manipulated and inscribed within the play's discourse, especially if that discourse is overtly political. Chaudhuri notes that Schechner leaves unremarked his assertion that "the audience itself becomes a major scenic element" in environmental theatre and quotes Walter Kerr, who argues that "the demand that the audience be more active tends to make it more passive" (1997: 25). The corollary of this argument is that theatre which requires the active participation of the spectator only attracts an audience that has already to a large extent accepted its point of view. Such is the argument made by Maurice Newman in The Irish Independent, who admires the theatrical talents on display but dismisses the production for merely preaching to the converted: "So the play becomes an empty gesture: a superbly staged sermon aimed at the long-ago converted" (1998: 13). Donal O'Kelly finds this particular criticism, which has followed him throughout his career and which I will return to in the analysis of *The* Cambria, quite ridiculous, and the contradiction between being a theatre artist and an advocate spurious. "What can you do? You can't go into the street and say get in and see my play or else (laugh)!" He argues that "there's a very important role for preaching to the converted, bolstering people in their beliefs, especially when they're a minority belief, when they're trying to build up a challenge to consensus" (author's interview, 2007). Jean-Paul Sartre expresses this concept clearly in his essay Writing, Reading and the

Public (1990: 86), when he asks of "the great negro writer... To whom does Richard Wright address himself? Certainly not to the universal man." Universal man is merely an abstract. Obviously, Sartre continues, it is neither the white supremacists of the South nor the black, illiterate peasants who are his readership, but "the cultivated negroes of the North and the white Americans of goodwill. It is not that he is not aiming through them at all men but it is through them that he is aiming" (emphasis in original, ibid: 87). It is also disingenuous to suggest that mainstream commercial theatre is not also 'preaching to the converted' and that it too is not often formulated around political ideology. As Brecht notes, "for art to be 'unpolitical' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group" (2001: 196). All theatre is political, part of social discourse in the public sphere, even if, as is often the case with theatre that supports the status quo, that political viewpoint remains invisible because it is based on premises that are taken for granted by its audience of the 'converted'.

It is axiomatic of course that, unlike the logic of representation on the realist stage where "the spectator was, essentially, an obstacle, a hindrance, an inconvenience" (Chaudhuri, 1997: 9), the audience is the *raison d'être* for political theatre. Walter Benjamin described the orchestra pit in traditional theatres as the "abyss which separates the players from the audience as it does the living from the dead" (quoted in Fuchs, 1996: 140). Donal O'Kelly seeks to cure the passivity of the spectator by challenging this spatial arrangement and erasing the boundaries between the place of seeing and the place of action. *Farawayan* performed at the Olympic Ballroom inducts the spectator into the imaginative realm of the spectacle where they will be personally and viscerally affected by what happens around them. As Fuchs refers to it, the space itself "becomes the central

character of the spectacle" (ibid: 40). In addition O'Kelly's ironic deconstruction of Irish identity myths are an explosive, Brechtian *Gestus*, arousing the race-memories of enforced exile and exposing the hypocrisy behind the 'hundred thousand welcomes'. As Elin Diamond's explains with regard to the function of *Gestus* in political theatre, "The gestic moments in a sense explain the play, but also exceed the play, opening it to the social and discursive ideologies that inform its production... It gives us the key to the relationship between the play being performed and the public" (1997: 90). *Farawayan* is unashamedly political theatre, a challenge to Irish people to try and imagine what it must be like to be a refugee. Not just to experience vicariously for an hour or so the horror of being displaced and unwelcome, but to take up their role as protagonists in the real struggle for an inclusive Ireland. In the end it is the audience who must decide what action to take, as Farawaya, Despero and the other unnamed individuals on our television screens cannot. O'Kelly's frank objectives remind us of Habermas' argument that, in its modern transformation, the public has been depoliticised and thus passified. ⁵¹ For O'Kelly, however, it is not enough for theatre to merely express liberal ideas:

All the intellectual arguments are there, but this is more about converting that knowledge into changing something like the Department of Justice regulations... I want to make people think about what the hell they are going to do about it! (quoted in Carr, 1998)

Imaginative, passionate, committed, the dramaturgical strategies of *Farawayan* endeavoured to change the political landscape of Ireland and to a certain extent change Irish theatre. For his next production, on the other hand, he had more immediate and specific concerns as the Minister for Justice began the forced deportation of refused refugees. In response, O'Kelly crafted the melodrama *The Cambria*, in which the

⁵¹ See Habermas, "Individual satisfaction of needs might be achieved in a public fashion, namely, in the company of many others; but a public sphere itself did not emerge from such a situation... Rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption" (1989: 161).

distinctions between good and evil were clearly marked and there could be no doubt which side of that equation forced repatriation fell.

1.3 The Cambria: Creating a Legible Ethical Universe through Melodrama

"Why must Irish theatre continue to use melodrama to explore questions of otherness?" asks Patrick Lonergan in his review of Donal O'Kelly's 2005 production *The Cambria*, citing a number of productions that will be addressed in subsequent chapters in this thesis as examples, "*Done Up Like a Kipper*, *Guess Who's Coming To The Dinner*, *Hurl, The Buddhist of Castelknock*, and so on" (2005: 61). The virtuous are persecuted but ultimately vindicated, racist villains get their come-uppance, the genuinely ignorant are educated and the status quo restored, but racism is rarely approached with much complexity, remaining simply a plot device that facilitates the legibility of the political message. Certainly there are many familiar tropes of melodrama in *The Cambria*: ⁵² the disguised identity, false imprisonment and stoic, dignified endurance of prejudice by the hero, Frederick Douglass; the snarling, implacable hatred of the villain, slave-owner Henry Dodd, who uses his wealth and privilege to persecute innocence; the crises of conscience followed by conversions for Captain Judkins, whose father captained slave ships, and the steward Dignam, who in imprisoning Douglass is cast as a 'Dub' Pontius Pilate; the figure of the innocent child, Matilda, who precipitates the drama; the

⁵² Donal O'Kelly, *The Cambria*. Reference will be made to both the unpublished text, provided by the author, and to performances attended in Liberty Hall, Dublin, on 2 April and Draiocht, Blanchardstown, on 15 April 2005.

hyperbolic coups de théâter of the climax where Matilda, having followed Douglass up into the rigging, is about to fall to her death but instead drops her doll, which is caught by her father, Dodd. Remarkably all this spectacle is staged with just two protean actors, Donal O'Kelly and Sorcha Fox, a few boxes, poles and a white sheet. Lonergan has used the term 'melodrama' pejoratively and indeed it is used with implied criticism in a number of otherwise positive reviews.⁵³ However, the elements of the production deemed most praiseworthy, the excitement of the theatrical spectacle, the expressive physicality, the poetic language, the emotional power of the story and the actors, the use of music and tableau, are also all elements of melodramatic theatre form and exemplary of O'Kelly's virtuosic performance style. It is the exuberant theatricality of elements such as these that allows Eric Bentley (1998: 40) to argue for the importance of melodrama over naturalism, in that its heightened emotion and representation of the pure histrionic form of dreams are the quintessence of drama. The principal objection made to melodrama is the moral absolutism of Manichaean struggles between antagonists who personify good and evil. This intense, ritualistic struggle where conciliation or compromise is impossible, strikes the modern aesthetic as unrealistic and simplistic. However, argues Peter Brooks in his seminal work *The Melodramatic Imagination*, melodrama's very reason for being is the clear and legible delineation of the moral argument of the play.

The structural, thematic and expressive elements that we have noted belong to a dramaturgy conceived to prove the existence and validity of basic moral sentiments and their incidence on men's lives, to establish the field of force of the ethical universe. (Brooks, 1976: 49)

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⁵³ See for example Karen Fricker's review in *The Guardian* (2005): "This and other choices give the story a melodramatic edge, as the ship's population divides between pro-Douglass goodies and a closed-minded baddie (the rich slaveowner Dodd)." Also Rachel Andrews in *The Sunday Tribune* (2005: 28): "the ending appears somewhat neatly wound up, with everyone... good and bad... getting exactly what he deserves."

In other words, the dramaturgy demands that evil, in this case racism, be recognised, confronted and purged from the social order, both within the fiction of the play and, by extension, in the real world without. Thus the characters, plot and theatrical devices are essentially a play of signs deployed in such a manner "that the struggle of moral entities is visible to the spectator" (ibid: 28). Therein, to answer Lonergan's question, lies the appeal of melodrama for political theatre. Whilst obviously also intended as high voltage entertainment, The Cambria was written as an intervention in the citizenship debates of the time and was meant to be clearly read as such.

Written, "because I knew... Michael MacDowell was going to bring in forced deportation and I wanted to have a play ready when it happened"54 The Cambria, like Asylum! Asylum! and Farawayan, had its inception in a changing political landscape. Although most of the play recounts the journey to Ireland aboard the ship 'The Cambria', of the escaped slave and famous American author and activist, Frederick Douglass, this historical tale is framed by two contemporary scenes in which a teacher is looking for her pupil at Dublin airport on the eve of his deportation. As a play within a play, the story of Frederick Douglass is used as an allegory to advocate in support of present day Nigerians whose deportations began, coincidentally, the night before *The Cambria* opened at Liberty Hall. Like those asylum seekers, Frederick Douglass was travelling under a false name with false papers, "on a cock and bull story" as O'Kelly put it, using the evocative language of the Minister for Justice Malcolm McDowell (ibid). Imprisoned as an escaped slave, he also was the victim of unjust laws. As a non-citizen fleeing bondage in the hope of finding solidarity and freedom in Ireland, the enthusiastic welcome Douglass

⁵⁴ Author's interview with Donal O'Kelly, 18th June 2007.

received from Irish republicans provides an ironic precedent for the current less hospitable reception of those seeking asylum. Although it is reasonable to question how theatrically successful the two plot lines are integrated, O'Kelly was dismayed that some reviewers criticised the present-day narrative as unnecessary bookending. Without the context of the deportations O'Kelly argues, the story of Douglass' hero's reception under the auspices of Daniel O'Connell would be absurdly self-congratulatory. "(Sarcastically) Aren't we great! We gave Frederick Douglass a great welcome. Oh the good old Irish!" (O'Kelly, ibid). Rather the historical tale functions as a classic Brechtian parable, while the contemporary framing of the play reaches beyond the theatrical space, requiring a response of the audience. Collette, the former history teacher of Patrick, the young Nigerian asylum seeker being deported in the present tense opening of the play, makes the question explicit: "Frederick Douglass came to Ireland. On a ship. Called the Cambria. If Frederick Douglass came to Ireland NOW..." (5).

O'Kelly's decision to play the African-American Douglass himself also raised questions in the critical response to the play.⁵⁵ Considering this question in two ways, firstly theoretically and then theatrically, Spivak's delineation of the two meanings of 'representation' in her critique of Foucault and Deleuze's disavowal of the role of ideology in theory is very useful (1993a: 70): "representation as 'speaking for', as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation', as in art or philosophy." O'Kelly's portrayal of Douglass, I would contend, is representation in both senses. "Frederick Douglass ... is a living metaphor of the slave triangle. Now we seem to be providing retrospectively a third side to the triangle – deporting people straight back to Nigeria," he

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⁵⁵ See Patrick Lonergan's review in *Irish Theatre Magazine*, "What does it mean for the white O'Kelly to play an African-American?" (2005: 67).

argues (author's interview, 2007). Fionnghuala Sweeney in an article on the play for Slavery and Abolition suggests that, whilst as a post-colonial nation Ireland might exempt itself from culpability for slavery, its contemporary affluence and membership of the global elite require a more complex and equivocal assessment of that inheritance. She locates O'Kelly's play "on the interface between American slavery, Atlantic culture and the ethical implications of the Irish post-colonial political position," (2008: 280) a positioning that chimes with O'Kelly's use of "the slave triangle" metaphor above. The suggestion, however, that "the embedded contention of the play... (is) that any coherent post-nationalist narrative can only be imagined in conjunction with the Atlantic, and global, ethical complexities that have brought the state into being" (ibid), is rather tendentious. The Cambria is much more celebratory of O'Connell and, by extension, Ireland's abolitionist history than seeking "to insert one peripheral memory of slavery into a contemporary narrative of Irish republicanism" (ibid: 279). The play is rather "a well-aimed appeal to our better selves", as O'Toole describes it (2005a: A2), seeking to engender empathy with modern asylum seekers by associating their cause with the unequivocally moral position of Irish abolitionists in the nineteenth century. Just as the melodramatic form avoids complicating the characters of hero, Douglass, and villain, Dodd, there is no room in the play for the ambiguity of implicating the Irish in slavery or, conversely, drawing attention to Frederick Douglass' own often repeated prejudices against Irish-Americans.⁵⁶

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⁵⁶ See Richard Hardack, 'The Slavery of Romanism: The Casting out of the Irish in the Work of Frederick Douglas' in *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform*, edited by Alan Rice and Martin Crawford (1999: 114-140).

Instead, wherever possible, this production emphasises the reciprocal relationship between African-American and Irish human rights activists and freedom fighters, as for example in the programme notes entitled 'Tangled Roots' and written by Jim Vincent, an Associate Professor at Robert Morris University Pittsburgh. They include a liberal mix of historical fact, such as Daniel O'Connell's organisation of Douglass' visit to Ireland, and highly selective and utopian supposition as in, "Years later, when Martin Luther King Jr. organized his March on Washington we can feel the unbroken chords of solidarity between Nineteenth Century Irish Emancipation and (sic) American Civil Rights Movement." This positive take on the relationship between the Irish and African-American activists, including tenuous links between even such divisive figures as Bernadette McAliskey and the Black Panthers, is designed to help the audience connect these human rights struggles with "the third side of the triangle", the character who never appears in the play, Patrick, the deported asylum seeker. Even in its programme notes this production, returning to Said's definition of the intellectual with which this chapter begins, is representing the interests of those unable to speak for themselves.

As an actor playing a character, O'Kelly is clearly also 're-presenting' an historical figure from well-chronicled events, ⁵⁷ although once again it is important to distinguish between history as fact and history as narrative. Sweeney makes an

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The story has come to be known as 'the Cambria incident', when Douglass, travelling incognito and in possession of a first class ticket was forced to travel steerage because of his colour. His identity became known to some of the other passengers and, as his autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an America Slave, Written by Himself* had become a best-seller, they requested he be allowed to speak on board. The captain, Judkins, agreed but a riot ensued between pro-slavery passengers and Douglass' supporters and Douglass was threatened with being thrown overboard. The riot was subdued with Judkins threatening to jail the slaveholders in the brig. O'Kelly's play follows this story very closely. For more information see Alan Rice and Martin Crawford, 'Triumphant Exile: Frederick Douglass in Britain, 1845-1847' in *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform* (1999: 1-14).

interesting point in this regard in her emphasis on Douglass' own use of what came to be called 'the Cambria incident' in many of his barn-storming anti-slavery meetings across Britain and Ireland. Just as O'Kelly emphasises the positive role of the Irish in his version of the story, Douglass used the behaviour of Captain Judkins and other ship's passengers to "symbolise the moral authority of 'John Bull' in the abolitionist debate" (Sweeney, 2008: 283). What is significant for the argument of this thesis is that in Frederick Douglass *The Cambria* has a black protagonist who is not portrayed as a passive victim, which makes it almost unique amongst recent Irish plays featuring any kind of black character. He is an activist hero, an intellectual of great dignity and an important leader in the anti-slavery movement. There is even considerable stage time given over to long passages from his published work, of which many in the audience would have been unaware.

Yet, since the demise of black-face minstrels, there has been almost a 'representational' taboo that the white, Irish O'Kelly violates by playing the black, African-American himself. "What does it mean for the white O'Kelly to play an African-American liberator?" asks Lonergan although he does not posit an answer (2005: 63). This is an extension of the theoretical problem termed "positive exclusivism" by Edward Said, whereby whites cannot discuss racism, men feminism and so on. The argument assumes that all these political categories can only be understood through experience (1985: 25). What is at issue in 'racechange' performance, even within a putatively progressive, de-essentialising context, is the danger of reinscribing conventional categories of race or gender in stereotype and the privileging of the power-evasive tropes of the universally human. With these considerations in mind, what is the racialised

significance of the white actor O'Kelly playing the African-American hero, Frederick Douglass? Theatrically, it is the conceit of this production and much of O'Kelly's other work that one actor plays many roles. O'Kelly plays five characters including Douglass and the only other actor, Sorcha Fox, plays the six others. It occasioned no critical notice that Fox also plays an African man, Able Seaman Solomon, crossing both race and gender lines. It is a physical, storytelling form of theatre and being able to accept O'Kelly or Fox's re-presentation of racially-other characters is part of the imaginative challenge laid down to the audience. "One way of approaching the phenomenology of the actor," explains Bert O. States (1995: 23), "is to consider him as a kind of storyteller whose speciality is that he is the story he is telling." It is significant, however, that in his physical interpretation of Douglass, O'Kelly plays him with a non-specific American accent but without any trace of the stereotypical gestures, mannerisms or vocal choices that would distinguish him racially. This is in contrast to Fox's characterisation of Solomon which, while being no less respectful, identified him physically and vocally as a large, African man. This highly stylized metamorphosing into character, using all of the actor's tools, is more indicative of the performance style generally from both actors than is O'Kelly's reserved portrayal of Douglass. Yet, is it not the case that O'Kelly is deliberately *not* playing him 'black', perhaps, it could be argued, to further a humanist agenda that would appropriate Douglass' heroics for all 'mankind'. The specificity of Douglass' racial identity is of constant import in the play as is his refugee status. Douglass is played 'straight' because he is the hero of a melodramatic story, and it is his journey that the audience will identify with and learn from. O'Kelly and Fox's portrayal of racial difference is, I would argue, less about the performativity of identity outside of the essentialist specificities of the body, and more an attempt to once again turn the focus

towards a thematic engagement with the experiences of the story and the moral position of the play.

Indeed Donal O'Kelly himself has come to signify more than just the stories he tells. People who regularly attend his plays come with certain expectations of form and content. They have become part of his public. Having formed a company in 2000 to perform his own work, O'Kelly came to that realisation himself when looking for a name other than Donal O'Kelly Productions, which had just been a working title. "The people I spoke to said, 'Sure, why would you change it. It's what it says on the can, Donal O'Kelly Productions – you write the plays, you do the plays!' (laughs) That's what I do!" (author's interview, 2007). What is more, like every theatre company and every political activist, he endeavours to expand his public, seeking them out beyond the confines of traditional theatre spaces. The Cambria toured throughout the country to small theatres, town halls and courthouses and particularly to festivals, as do most of his productions. As O'Kelly explains, "the audience I was trying to get are not 'playgoers' because there's too much that just holds the experience back not drives it on. We try to get ordinary people, ordinary punters you know." However, as is evidenced by his decision to also allow his productions to be performed at the Abbey, sometimes "playgoers" are exactly the audience he seeks. At other times, it might be the more avant-garde audiences that would attend a spectacle at the Olympic Ballroom. What this analysis has shown is that O'Kelly's considerable theatrical talent is adaptable and inclusive of diverse theatre forms, theatrical contexts and audiences in the services of his social justice agenda and in pursuit of a developing anti-racist public sphere.

Connecting the admittedly daring political aims of a theatre practice with the 'real world' of politics could be a somewhat tenuous argument if power is viewed as a finite entity, emanating from a central point over which struggle is waged. However, the Foucauldian idea of power as a process where by multiple, interrelational forces and networks interact with each other like blood through the veins of the body politic allows for the plausibility of 'empowerment' emanating from alternative public spheres. Certainly there are a plethora of studies on alternative public spheres, both modern and historical, arguing for their emancipatory potential. Such scholarship includes amongst many others, Edward Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class (1991)⁵⁸, and the work of Nancy Fraser (1992) or Joan Landers (1988) on female public spheres. Jill Lane's examination of a black public sphere in colonial Cuba (2005), is particularly fascinating in that she looks specifically at how the theatre was used in the construction of black, anti-colonial Cuban identities. Likewise Paul Gilroy looks beyond literature and the press and considers the impact of music, particularly hip hop, as a global black public sphere.⁵⁹ And, from another global perspective, Arjun Appadurai's illuminating Modernity at Large (1996) charts the cultural developments generated by globalisation, large scale migration and the mass media, and notes the multitude, heterogeneity and considerable impact of diasporic public spheres. While it is true that theatre and particularly political theatre is often considered to be a marginal endeavour, to conclude I'd like to quote from Appadurai on the value and importance of imaginative practices, like those of O'Kelly and his collaborators.

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⁵⁸ First published by Victor Gallancz in 1963, this groundbreaking study looks at the impact of various social institutions amongst the working class and their collective impact. Following its publication many other works have been written on what Habermas termed the 'plebian public sphere', including recently *Live Working or Die Fighting: How the Working Class went Global*, by Paul Mason (2008).

⁵⁹ See particularly *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1992) and *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (2000).

It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape. (ibid: 7)

At the end of *The Cambria*, Collette, the contemporary school teacher character quotes Frederick Douglass, "Power cedes nothing without demand!" (56). Donal O'Kelly has taken Edward Said's representational challenge and, whether in the National Theatre or in small community venues around the country, his plays across a variety of forms demand more from his public than their passive spectatorship. O'Kelly is staging drama of the possible, imagining a more inclusive Ireland and using the theatre to summon it into being. It is an ambitious project but, for O'Kelly, it is the only reason for being in the theatre: "There's got to be a why" (1997:10).

Chapter Two

Calypso and 'Changing the World': Ethical Considerations for Political Theatre

The face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger; but this poverty and exile which appeal to my powers, address me, do not deliver themselves over to these powers as givens, remain the expression of the face. The poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal.

(Levinas, 1991: 213)

Committed to producing theatre that publicly intervenes in contemporary political and civil life, Donal O'Kelly and Kenneth Glenaan founded Calypso Productions in 1993. From 1999 until its dissolution in 2008 Bairbre Ní Chaoimh held the position of Calypso's first and only artistic director. The productions of this period concerned with raising awareness and generating resistance to the unjust treatment of refugees and asylum seekers are discussed throughout this chapter in the light of Emmanuel Levinas' radical concept of ethics. Levinas' ethical philosophy calls for an unconditional responsibility for the other, invoked by the epiphany of the encounter with 'the face of the other': "The face orders and ordains me" (ibid: 97). Calypso's mission statement of 1995 aspires likewise to response-ability for the voiceless in Irish society - the poor, Travellers, those interned in prisons and asylums, citizens of the Third World and, crucially for this study, refugees:

Calypso's mission is simple, practical and humble. We want to change the world ... the change we want to effect is small, significant and possible... (quoted in Merriman, 2000: 56)

This chapter posits the argument that 'response-ability', an ethical term inflected with a variety of interpretations, is manifest in productions which respond to various social justice issues, and theatre methodology which actively seeks engagement directly with

those who are the subject of the work in order to listen to, not just speak about, those affected by injustice. Ní Chaoimh and her colleagues' assumption of responsibility for the other by articulating and making space for their concerns in the public realm and attempting to provoke the assumption of responsibility in their audience also serves a vital function in the public sphere, according to Levinas, where it falls to "the press, the poets and the writers" to ensure that the liberal state remains self-critical: "There are cruelties which are terrible because they proceed from the necessity of the reasonable order. There are, if you like, the tears that a civil servant cannot see: the tears of the Other" (1996:23). Face-to-face, in Calypso's research and outreach work in communities, their extensive educational and creative workshop work, in ensuring access to the theatre and participation in performance for those usually excluded, there are many practical examples of a theatrical process which endeavours to remain ethical and interactive.

A brief analysis of Calypso's production history emphasises both their wide spectrum of concerns and their activism. It also charts many of the dilemmas and contradictions of Irish society during the 1990s and into the new century. Calypso's first three productions, *Hughie on the Wires* (O'Kelly, 1993) about a young Derry man caught up in an international incident in El Salvador, *Trickledown Town* (O'Kelly, 1994), a thriller which examined the consequences of World Bank debt and restructuring programs for local communities in the underdeveloped world and *The Business of Blood* (Glenaan and O'Kelly, 1995), on the West's responsibility for the arms trade, were all internationalist in their focus. Other plays concerned with injustices perpetrated by the Irish state include *Rosie and Starwars* (Charlie O'Neill, 1997) about the relationship between Travellers and settled people, *Cell* (Paula Meehan, 1998) which argues that crime and imprisonment must be seen in a social context, and *Stolen Child* (Bairbre Ni

Chaoimh and Yvonne Quinn 2002), which confronts the mistreatment and neglect of children in church-run industrial schools. In 2004 Calypso staged English playwright

Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence* about the effects of abuse on a family, and for the 90th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising in 2006 Donal O'Kelly wrote *Operation Easter*, which examines the legacy of violence in the birth of the state. There are also two plays about South Africa and apartheid and thus tangentially relevant to this study,

'Master Harold'... and the boys by Athol Fugard (2004) and Bones by Kay Adshead (2007). Finally in 2008, Scottish playwright Anthony Neilson's Wonderful World of Dissocia, a nightmarish play about mental illness with an Alice in Wonderland motif was staged in the context of Calypso's work with patients and staff in two Dublin mental hospitals and fairytaleheart by Philip Ridley was produced in association with Calypso's Tower of Babel project for young migrants. These productions, while fascinating and worthy of further consideration, fall outside the remit of this dissertation.

Despite their engagement with such a variety of issues, however, in the company's fifteen years of existence the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland became so pressing an issue for Donal O'Kelly and subsequently Bairbre Ní Chaoimh that it came to define their work. From 1998 the company had been initiating contact with people from refugee and asylum seeker communities in Ireland and looking for ways in which their experiences could be reflected in the theatre. Initiated and guided by Ní Chaoimh as artistic director, in 2001 Calypso undertook a six month research project. From this research, Ní Chaoimh envisaged "a popular, accessible play" (according to O'Kelly, author's interview, 2003) that would theatricalise this background material and have as wide an influence as possible. To that end Roddy Doyle, one of Ireland's best selling

authors, was commissioned to adapt a serialised story he had written for the multicultural newspaper *Metro Eireann*⁶⁰ and various popular actors were garnered from television for the production, which was a sellout success at the 2002 Dublin International Theatre Festival and on tour nationally. The plot of *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner* once more features an African stranger invited into an Irish home, with all the vexed questions of belonging and displacement inherent in this discourse. However, despite addressing the everyday, ingrained racism of even well-meaning Irish people, the play is replete with popular stereotypes of race, class and gender. By reducing the stranger and his blackness to "the network of a priori ideas, which [he] bring[s] to bear so as to capture it," (Levinas, 1993: 97) Larry and by extension the audience, for whom he is a surrogate, is allowed to remain entirely unaltered by this encounter with an African refugee other.

Nevertheless, something completely unique to Ireland was generated by the 2001 research. In their contact with various non-government organisations and social services personnel, Calypso identified 'Unaccompanied Minors' as the refugee group that encountered the greatest difficulties in Ireland. From these enquiries Ni Chaoimh and her collaborators began the Tower of Babel project with a mix of young people, asylum seekers living in Ireland without their families, other young refugees and Irish participants. For the young migrants involved the material benefits of the project were

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⁶⁰ Metro Eireann, Ireland's first and only weekly multicultural newspaper, was established in April 2000 by two Nigerian journalists, Chinedu Onyejelem and Abel Ugba. It is published in Dublin by Metro Publishing and Consultancy Limited. Roddy Doyle, Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner was first published in serial form in Metro Eireann, 1: 2-9, (May 2000- January 2001).

⁶¹ Unaccompanied Minors are defined by the United Nations' Refugee Agency as "a child under 18 years of age that is outside his/her country of origin and is separated from both parents or his/her previous legal/customary primary care giver". See 'Trends in unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum in industrialized countries', UNHCR, Geneva, 1 July 2004; http://www.unhcr.org/cgibin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=40f646444&query=definition%20unaccompanied%20minors http://www.unhcr.org/cgibin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=40f646444&query=definition%20unaccompanied%20minors, accessed 20 September 2007.

dramatic and easily quantifiable. Eventually the weekly classes became rehearsals for the 'showcase' production Mixing it on the Mountain. However, rather than using the refugees' own stories, Mixing it on the Mountain envisages Ireland's iconic Saint Patrick as a teenage African slave. Ní Chaoimh contends that the fictional tale maintains a necessary and ethical space between what might take place in the safer, contained environment of a workshop where the testimony and witnessing of emergency or trauma might be possible, and the 'self-othering' effect of performing ones own stories. Thus, as Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner is also a close reworking of another famous story⁶², both plays are essentially analogies which work in ambivalent ways. While the imaginative connections that made with iconic cultural products can be used to destabilise essentialist preconceptions about identity, they may also elide material or historical difference and appear falsely totalising or even racist. On the other hand, popular culture mobilises the forces of empathy and identification, which can be politically efficacious and serve Calypso's wider agenda more effectively than perhaps more complex engagement with the issues. My analysis questions the extent to which the popular appeal and the political advocacy of these productions are mutually supportive.

The final part of this chapter considers *I have before me a remarkable document* given to me by a young lady from Rwanda by British playwrights Sonja Linden (2005), based on the real testimony of a survivor of the Rwandan genocide. Examining the claims this play makes to 'authenticity' and the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, in this section I consider the danger of cultural colonialism in the artistic

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⁶² It closely follows the 1967 film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, starring Sidney Poitier and Spencer Tracy, which in turn examines the psychological fear and fascination black sexuality holds for whites.

appropriation of witness stories, when the voice of the author or artist remains unacknowledged or unexamined. Also of concern is the hegemony of narrative, whereby the inexorably natural or logical force of a 'good story' tends to organise testimony into a singular, essentialised version of events that obscures individual experiences.

Throughout this chapter there are a variety of political theatre forms utilised, with the dramatised narrative *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner*, the youth theatre musical *Mixing it on the Mountain* and the docu-drama *I have before me me a remarkable document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda* each precipitating ethical considerations such as the legitimacy of stereotyping, the use of testimony in the creation of drama and the implications of popular theatre forms for the subjecthood and agency of Calypso's stakeholders. Thus, the ethics of Calypso's social project is the key consideration of this chapter.

2.1 Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner: Black 'Otherness' and Popular Theatre

In *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner*, Roddy Doyle posits racist stereotypes of black people for critique by an audience through the character of Larry Linnane, who is shocked to discover that "he'd be a man who'd nod, 'Yes, I object to another man's colour", when his daughter Stephanie begins dating a Nigerian asylum seeker, Ben.

⁶³ Roddy Doyle, *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner*, p. 13. Unpublished rehearsal script provided by Calypso. All future references refer to this script and will be identified by page number.

Trying to discern the nature of his response, Larry wrestles with his concept of 'black' to determine if he is a racist. Certainly he has fetishised particular tropes of blackness (superior musicality, sporting ability and sexual attractiveness) and the heroes that embody those superior attributes.

LARRY: When he watched a footballer, for example, he didn't see skin. He saw skill. Paul McGrath, black and brilliant. Gary Breen, white and shite. And it was the same with music. Phil Lynott, absolutely brilliant. Neil Diamond, absolutely shite [...] And women too. Naomi Campbell – Jaysis. There wasn't a racist bone or muscle in his body. (20)

Doyle gently mocks such liberality, however, limited as it is to a highly selective, sanctioned minority of black people: "Phil Lynott was Irish! He was from Crumlin. He was fuckin' civilised!" (13).

Ben, on the other hand, is from the 'Dark Continent', a term coined by the explorer Henry Morton Stanley, ⁶⁴ which connotes all the hopeless savagery, disease and overwhelming chaos of a colonialist vision of Africa. Sigmund Freud (1947: 212) subsequently uses this term as a metaphor for the impenetrable enigma of feminine sexuality: "The sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent' for psychology". Returning the metaphor to its origin, it is apparent that contemporary Africa remains alien, almost unrepresentably Other, in the Western imagination. "Africa", as Simon Watney describes it, "has been effectively demonized, in a post-colonial discourse of perpetual catastrophe and *unnatural* disasters" (emphasis in original, 1990: 100):

LARRY: Why didn't he want a refugee in the family? Well, there was AIDS for a start. Africa was riddled with it. That was a fact. And then there was – it wasn't the poverty exactly. It was the hugeness of it.

there was – it wasn't the poverty exactly. It was the hugeness of it. The Live Aid pictures, the thousands and thousands of people, the

⁶⁴ Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), describes his journey across Africa in search of the sources of the Nile.

flies on their faces, the dead kids [...] And all the civil wars – machetes and machine guns, and burning car tyres draped around people's necks. All the savagery. (20)

Despite being an emotional, irrational answer to his own rhetorical question, Larry's response would resonate strongly with an audience accustomed to the undifferentiated apocalyptic 'Africa' of Western culture. For an Irish audience this is further compounded by the Catholic Church's extensive missionary efforts and the patriarchal compassion generated by decades of 'collecting for black babies in Africa'. As Doyle and Calypso's populist agenda seeks to portray Larry's racism as understandable and engender audience identification with this foolish but benign man, they offer no challenge to this reading of 'Africa'. Indeed the character Ben reinforces the horrifying implication with stories of his brother's imprisonment by the Nigerian government and the 'disappearance' of his sister, "My sister spoke her mind" (44). These images of a dangerous and desperate Africa serve Calypso mission by articulating to an Irish audience what is at stake for those seeking asylum in Ireland and counters the anti-immigration arguments that would paint all Nigerians, for example, as 'economic migrants', which has come to imply that they are charlatans. However, these negative images of Africa and Africans, however well intentioned, also operate on more ambivalent terms by perpetuating unhelpful notions of marginality, victimhood and incompatible 'difference'.

In addition, the idea of his daughter, a white Irish girl, being seduced by a black man deeply disturbs Larry in a way for which he cannot even find words.

LARRY: So, it wasn't that Stephanie actually brought home the black fella. It was the idea of him, the fact of his existence out there somewhere. The fact that she'd met him and danced with him and God-knows-what-elsed with him. (12)

There are recurring points of contact between the way these plays address race and sexuality and Frantz Fanon's psychological explorations of the pathology of interracial desire and its confluence with racism. "In what way," asks Fanon, "does a black son-in-law differ from a white son-in-law?"

Is there not a reaction of unconscious tendencies in both cases? Why not, for instance conclude, that the father revolts because in his opinion the Negro will introduce his daughter into a sexual universe for which the father does not have the key, the weapons or the attributes. (1986: 68)

What Fanon is alluding to with his somewhat facetious choice of metaphors⁶⁵ is that the white father's psychological distress when his daughter brings home a black lover is determined by hegemonic white culture's fetishisation of black men's sexuality, generating both fear and fascination. Fanon explains that, "For the majority of white men the Negro represents the sexual instinct (in its raw state). The Negro is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions" (ibid, 177). Circumstances have illustrated the potency of this stereotype for certain sections of Irish society.

Coincidentally, a month before Calypso performed the play at the Mosney

Accommodation Centre, a local man with a shotgun had tried to get past security threatening to kill the first black man he saw. The reason for this outburst was that his daughter had been seeing a Nigerian asylum seeker against his wishes. He came to the refugee centre brandishing his gun after someone in a local pub told him that his 34 year old daughter had begun dating the man again. ⁶⁶

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⁶⁵ The reference to 'key, weapon...attributes' implies the penis. Explaining the workings of the psychoanalytical term 'fetishisation' as the substitution of the part, the penis, for the whole, the black man and the subsequent reduction of the subject to an object as an effect of the trauma and pathology of colonialism, Fanon (ibid: 170) writes, "One is no longer aware of the Negro, but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis."

⁶⁶ See Richard McCullen, 'Meath Man Threatened Refugees with Shotgun', *Metro Eireann* (2002). I became aware of this incident through discussion with Bairbre Ní Chaoimh.

Homi Bhabha notes that "the sexual fetish is closely linked to the 'good object'; it is the prop that makes the whole object desirable and lovable" (1990: 82), meaning that it potentially creates a 'positive' stereotype that could be used to promote racial inclusion. This helps to explain the prevalence in recent Irish plays of black characters as the objects of sexual desire, an argument developed in the next chapter. The attraction of the 'black love interest' device for writers and theatre companies with politically liberal agendas is its utilisation of a powerful dramatic stereotype in an essentially positive way. However, as Bhabha goes on to argue,

... the point of intervention should shift from the *identification* of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse. (Ibid: 71, emphasis in original)

This fantasy of totalisation is part of the stereotype's violence; it translates and absorbs otherness into an eternal ideal which poses as a capturing of 'essence', when it is rather a constructed and constructing convergence of perception and meaning, of representation and being.

Another possible explanation for this preoccupation with interracial sexual relations, is far less 'positive' and concerns the emblematic relationship in traditional Irish theatre between women and 'Nation'. ⁶⁷ By taking over the affections and bodies of Irish women, the black men in these plays symbolically 'are taking over Ireland', to use the rhetoric of the tabloids. Represented as bearers rather than makers of meaning, comic

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⁶⁷ Arguing that the icon of woman as nation "seems to have been used much more frequently in Ireland than anywhere else" and was more than a literary device to many patriots, Georges Zimmerman quotes Patrick Pearse: "When I was a child I believed that there actually was a woman called Erin", (quoted in Zimmerman, 1967:. 54). Yeats and Gregory's play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* is probably the most famous and potent depiction of the woman/nation figure in Irish playwrighting. In Catholic Ireland in particular the image of Mother Ireland intertwined with the cult of the Virgin Mary and the 'Mother Church's' already strong emphasis on virginity and motherhood. For futher discussion on the depiction of women in nationalist rhetoric, see Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "Thinking of Her…as…Ireland": Yeats, Pearse and Heaney' (1996) and C. L. Inness, *Women and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935* (1993).

stereotypes Mona and Stephanie, Larry's wife and daughter, rush around cooking the dinner, bringing the tea, gossiping, rowing and bringing home the "black fella", that allows Larry to fulfill his hero-journey. Rather improbably Mona is portrayed as having no conflict with the idea of her daughter dating a Nigerian, although presumably she is a product of the same class and culture as Larry and might be assumed to have similar prejudices. Stephanie too is an entirely functional character and the audience learns almost nothing about her relationship with Ben. Ailbhe Smyth argues that 'Woman', in traditional discourses of nationalism, becomes an empty signifier and can be constructed to mean whatever the male gaze wants it to mean (1989: 7). In this play, I would suggest, 'Woman' is as objectified as 'Black'.

The ground upon which the play does try to confront preconceived notions of refugees is with regard to class. It makes this challenge, however, by the juxtaposition of a variety of other stereotypical counternarratives - the clownish, working-class 'Dub' and the sophisticated, middle-class African. Having dressed down for the occasion, Larry is very discomfited to meet Ben wearing an expensive, elegant suit. "He'd been expecting someone like Eddie Murphy [...] But this was more like meeting Sidney Poitier" (24). Everything about Ben is designed to charm a middle-class audience, his profession (accountant), his manners (bringing wine to dinner and Guinness bottled in Lagos) and his dignity in the face of racism, even if it disconcerts Larry's simple prejudices. In his critique of René Maran's novel *Un homme pariel aus autres*, which concerns a black Antillian in love with a white French girl, Fanon observes that Jean's class compensates for his colour. The girl's brother, Coulanges, gives his blessing to the union because "You behave as we behave [...] You have nothing in common with real Negroes. You

are not black, you are extremely brown" (1986: 69). Larry, on the other hand, is a classic comic figure transplanted from Doyle's most popular novels. Although we never find out his profession, his class is made very obvious from his first "Howyeh, Ben" (23). There is seductive appeal in the self-denigrating reduction of the ignorant Irishman who knows no better than to be racist. It will be argued throughout this thesis, however, that caricatures, both black and white, positive and negative, are unhelpful in dismantling totalising notions of race and counter-productive strategies against racism.

The style of the play with its spoken narrative also sharpens the focus on Larry as subject as only Larry's inner dialogue is of consequence and he, therefore, is the only character in the play allowed an interiority. The other characters tell us what they are doing but rarely what they are thinking unless, of course, they are thinking about Larry. The play, thus, becomes monovocal, offering only Larry's single perspective on the African character, or indeed on the women. Read through Leviniasian ethics, this stylistic device reduces the other to its shadow, a grasping 'comprehension' of alterity, whereby the other is integrated into the self. This is antithetical to an engagement with the figure of the refugee who remains infinitely and unknowably themselves within their own subjecthood. "The way the Other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the Other in me, we here name face" (emphasis in original,1991: 50). For Levinas, it is the face of the other who interrupts the possibility of the self's panoramic view, its totalising

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The majority of Roddy Doyle's writing is set on the 'Northside' of Dublin, traditionally the poorer suburbs north of the River Liffey, and written with an idiosyncratic dialogue-orientated style that attempts to capture the rhythms of the working class Dublin accent and idioms. His characters are warm, witty and well observed, charming even if not particularly admirable, both very specifically placed in terms of class and society, and also identifiably products of Doyle's imaginary world. His work set amongst these 'Northside' societies includes 'The Barrytown Trilogy', *The Commitments, The Van* and *The Snapper*, all of which were made into films, his 1993 Booker Prize winning *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha* and the work which follows the Spenser family, the BAFTA award winning *Family* and the two subsequent novels *The Woman Who Walked into Doors,* which also became a play, and *Paula Spenser*. His recent novel *The Deportees*, based on the serialized stories written for *Metro Eireann*, also features many characters who are identifiably part of his œuvre even while also written in the 'voice' (first person narrative) of migrants. The nature of these 'Roddy Doyle characters' will be expanded upon in Chapter Five in the discussion of Doyle and Adigun's *The Playboy of the Western World*.

comprehension, and articulates the entangled complexities of truth and representation. The face of the other is the exteriority of its own being, and face to face is an ethical relation because the other hails the attention of the Self, and then penetrates it by looking back (ibid: 79-81). *Guess Who's Coming for the dinner* reduces Ben to the 'signified', the thematised object of Larry's drama, but in order to be manifest as a possible subject of the play, and in order for Calypso's political agenda to be served, Ben the African other must also become the 'signifier', becoming "himself in speech by speaking of the world... by proposing the world, by *themetizing* it." (ibid: 97, emphasis in original). This play does not allow Larry or the audience to experience the challenge of the other's look or allow the dismantling of Larry's illusion of mastery. What that means in terms of the play's political message, is that it also eludes, in Leviniasian terms, "the call to responsibility" (ibid: 50).

With that in mind, the significance of the revelation that Stephanie and Ben at the time of the eponymous dinner are not even lovers but 'just good friends' becomes apparent. It is a plot contrivance that lets Larry and the audience palpably off the hook.

LARRY: He wasn't a racist. He was sure about that now. There was a black man sitting across from him and he wanted to be his father-in-law. He wasn't sure why, but that didn't matter. Larry was happy with himself. (51)

Doyle permits Larry's self-congratulations for having passed this test of character without necessitating any troubling sacrifices for his decision. "I'll show you off the premises", says Larry at the end of the play (53) and Ben is only too delighted to be gone. The last line, after the polite good-byes, is "And Larry shut the door" (54). It does not quite slam shut with the drama of Nora's exit in Ibsen's *Doll's House*, but there is a finality to it that indicates that Ben is gone for good. Anybody can agree to an anti-racist agenda with no consequences and with the nice, well-mannered black man 'off the premises', Doyle and

Calypso do not jeopardize the audience's pleasure by obliging them to take any hard decisions.

It must be acknowledged, however, that political theatre, while traditionally pedagogical and concerned with helping society's marginalised articulate and find alternatives for their current lives, must also be determinedly aimed at a wide public and thus populist. "From the first it has been the theatre's business to entertain people... It is this business which always gives it its particular dignity; it needs no other passport than fun, but this it has got to have," warns Bertolt Brecht, the leading light of theatre with a social purpose (2001: 108). Anne Ubersfeld, in her essay The Pleasure of the Spectator (1982: 136), likewise argues for political theatre with a populist outlook: "theatre is the most effective instrument for transgression – a superb and (relatively) safe instrument", and underlines, "the importance of the 'fantasy of triumph' as the backbone of comedy and as a subversive force as well". Nevertheless, Larry's easy triumph over his own racist complexities, "is a subversion that presents no danger" (ibid). Larry, the foolish clown, wrestles on our behalf the unlovable bigot within himself who "is the real unwanted guest at his dinner table" (O'Toole, 2002: 12). Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner, to return to Cullingford's comments at the beginning of this chapter, offers us a gentle, optimistic demonstration rather than an analytical interrogation of racism. However, while the easily digested stereotypes and agreeable answers to implacable questions may generate Ní Chaoimh's hoped for empathy, it is difficult to argue that they provide a potent mobilising force. Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner was intended to reach as wide an audience as possible and to be accessible to people at all levels of society. Playing not only to Festival patrons, familiar with the phenomenology and medium of theatre, but

also touring throughout the country and to the Mosney Accommodation Centre for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Calypso takes a policy of inclusiveness seriously and actively contests the charge of 'preaching to the converted' that is levelled against much political theatre. Declaring that "We are open to any form of theatrical expression that serves our purpose and is accessible to our audience," Ní Chaoimh, like O'Kelly, sees medium as a function of message and makes no apologies for populism.⁶⁹ "When speaking about the pleasure of identification with the hero", Ubersfeld reminds us, "this identification never takes place without first being an identification with the actor" (1982: 134). To that end, the cast included recognisable, popular actors from Fair City, Ballykissangel, Doyle's films and Tas Emiabata, "a former Neighbours' star". 70 It is chastening to note the unintentional publicity Emiabata received in an Evening Herald article, 'Dublin teens abuse black TV star' (2002), which alleged that he was racially abused in the St Stephen's Green Shopping Centre by a group of teenagers while on his way to rehearsals for the play. It is worth considering whether this racist incident would have made the paper if Emiabata were not identified as an actor from a popular soapopera.

For the refugee audience at the Mosney Accommodation Centre, on the other hand, the laughter elicited by the defused conflict seemed to offer important reassurance.

⁶⁹ Bairbre Ní Chaoimh responded by e-mail to interview questions, 5th July 2003

⁷⁰ There were actually two productions of the play, first in 2001 and then for the Dublin Theatre Festival and a national tour in 2002. In the first 2001 production, Larry was played by Gary Cooke, probably best known for his work in the television satire *Aprés Match* and the soap *Faircity*, and Ben was played by Maynard Eziashi, familiar from work in *The Bill* and Doyle's film *When Brendan met Trudy*. In the 2002 production, Joe Savino, a well know Irish film and television actor, probably most recognisably from his role in *Ballykissangle*, played Larry and Neili Conroy, who audiences would recognise from Doyle's *The Van*, played Stephanie. Barbara Bergin was Mona in both productions, another familiar actor from Doyle's films, *The Van* and *The Snapper*, and from *Fair City*.

Ní Chaoimh argues that the piece gives asylum seekers "an insight into the fears that very ordinary Irish people have, who aren't racist, but are afraid of change and afraid of difference" (quoted in Ring, 2002: 13).⁷¹ This communicative opportunity seems particularly imperative in the light of how the stakes of the play had been raised for the Mosney audience by the violent incursion of the incensed father the previous month. Again, in the words of Ubersfeld, "Theatre summons up and defuses another type of anxiety, that of human relations, of the relationship to the Other who can destroy and consume me" 91982: 134). Ní Chaoimh was also heartened to note that in encountering their own other in the form of likeable Larry, "the Nigerian audiences who saw it laughed at exactly the same things as the Irish audiences" (author's interview, 2007). The comments of refugees who watched the play at Mosney, as recorded on a documentary made about the performance by Vineger Hill Productions, 72 seem generally to support this claim. Many, especially the younger members of the audience, expressed their enjoyment of the piece and were fascinated by this look inside the head of an Irish bigot, although some were a little unconvinced by the speed of Larry's conversion. One Mosney resident who was interviewed after the production noted, "It'll happen but it'll take time. This was very fast. This was make-believe" (Vinegar Hill, 2002). While that is probably a perceptive assessment of Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner, popular political theatre legitimises its polemic content with its entertainment value. Just as Donal O'Kelly's productions had sought to do, Doyle's play became an effective part of

⁷¹ I would argue, contra Ni Chaoimh here, that Larry would have to be defined as a racist under most accepted definitions of the word. The *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines racism as "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority or inferiority of a particular racial group, and that it is also the prejudice based on such a belief." See http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racist.

⁷² A documentary about Calypso's performance in Mosney Accommodation Centre for asylum seekers in April 2002 was filmed by Vineger Hill Productions and included the reaction of members of the audience. I am grateful to Calypso for access to this video. On the evening the documentary was filmed, the audience laughed uproariously throughout.

the Habermasian sense for the emerging anti-racist public sphere. It is partly in response to the commercial success of *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner* that Calypso embarked on *Mixing it on the Mountain*, conceived of as a show-case for the talents of their multicultural youth theatre group from the Tower of Babel project and timed to co-incide with the Saint Patrick's Day. In this context, Calypso offered an alternative performance of 'Irishness' for the one day of the year dedicated to the celebration of national identity.

2.2 Mixing it on the Mountain: Politics and Youth Theatre - Process Versus Product

As with the performances at Mosney, the Tower of Babel project aspired to assist the young refugee participants "deal with another culture... giving them a sense of awareness of the Other" (Marguerite Bourke quoted in Andrews, 2003a: 30). Calypso's self-assigned responsibilities extended beyond merely putting on socially aware plays, or the publications and outreach work associated with those productions. They also had long-term commitments to groups like the young refugees in the Tower of Babel project, where workshops were designed to continue indefinitely with new young people joining as older ones leave.⁷³ What is more, as in youth theatre generally, the theatrical process whereby the production is formed is, in ethical terms, much more important than it is in conventional theatre where the play is judged almost entirely on what the audience sees

⁷³ The Tower of Babel continued until the demise of Calypso in 2008.

on stage. This is particularly true of the Tower of Babel, where the workshop process seemed to have been not only exemplary but also uniquely consequential to these young people's lives. However, Calypso's didactic agenda demands that with regard to the depiction of non-Irish characters and questions of racial representation, this production needs to be examined more closely. Calypso also has a commitment to the highest standards of professional theatre and it is worth noting that, while individuals have 'graduated' from the Tower of Babel to appear in Calypso's mainhouse productions, which does show an impressive commitment to inclusivity and offers a career path to the arts for those often excluded, ⁷⁴ *Mixing it on the Mountain* offers a career path to the showcase production. Calypso are not a community theatre as such and this anomalous situation, of a professional theatre company producing theatre with young people, is important in formulating a critical response to the play.

Having become aware through their research of the needs of one the most marginalised groups of refugees — young asylum seekers and particularly unaccompanied minors, Calypso set about contacting these children through social workers, various non-government organisations and O'Connell's Christian Brothers' school in Dublin's inner city where a number of them went to school. They proposed The Tower of Babel project, a pilot series of drama and music workshops with the separated young people, other young migrants who may be living with their families and young Irish people interested in a multicultural project like this one. Their proposal was enthusiastically

⁷⁴ The young people's play *fairytaleheart* by Philip Ridley (2008) was produced in association with Tower of Babel and featured Joanna Sieracka, a 15 year old Polish participant of the project. O'Kelly's *Operation Easter* and both 2007 productions, *Talking to Terrorists* by Robin Soans and *Bones* by Kay Adshead, involved previous Tower participants.

⁷⁵ Maeve Ingoldsby *Mixing it on the Mountain,* unpublished script provided by Calypso, produced by Calypso for the St Patrick's Festival at the Samuel Beckett Theatre, Dublin, 2003. All subsequent citations are from this script and will be referred to by page number.

received by the principal of O'Connell's CBS, Michael Finucane, who facilitated Calypso with a workshop venue and the co-operation of his staff throughout the project. At the time Calypso's research project began in 2001 they estimated there were about 250 'Separated Children' living in 8 hostels spread around Dublin's north inner city and that between two thirds and a half were under fourteen.⁷⁶ For unaccompanied children, the usual traumas of forced migration and the asylum system are magnified by the separation from their families. Many are troubled by dreadful memories of incidents that occurred in their home countries and experience intense feelings of loneliness, dislocation and isolation in Ireland. A lack of proficiency in English is a major barrier to social interaction and academic achievement, as is a lack of access to extra curricular leisure activities due to limited finances and difficulty making friends. In many cases, school attendance rates are low, dropout rates are high and a horrifying number of these isolated children go missing in Ireland every year.⁷⁷ Apart from having the usual problems associated with adolescence, these children also live in over-crowded hostels, sometimes sharing a room with up to 15 strangers. They often have to cook for themselves, manage their own finances and also negotiate the asylum process alone – interviews, applications, appeals. In Ireland, as in most other developed countries, the asylum application process forces them to reflect on and talk about traumatic experiences they have had regardless of whether they are emotionally or psychologically equipped to do so. In addition, when they are eighteen after having possibly settled in Ireland for years, made friends, grown up and become rooted in the community, they then face the real possibility that their

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⁷⁶ These figures come from Calypso's Evaluation Document, ibid. The number of Unaccompanied Minors in the state was actually much higher. This figure reflects only those who made asylum applications and lived in Dublin. See Corona Joyce and Emma Quinn, 'Policies on Unaccompanied Minors in Ireland' (2009); http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20090902092430/BKMNEXT145.pdf, accessed 20 March 2010.

⁷⁷ For the year 2009, five unaccompanied migrant children went missing every month. See Marie O'Halloran (2009) 'Number of missing migrant children up'; http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2009/1209/1224260354333.html, accessed 14 March,

applications may be turned down and they may be forcibly repatriated. O'Connell's school, where the Tower of Babel is based, currently has students from 37 different countries with the teachers often coping with issues of race, culture, language, prejudice. A project like this was perceived to be exceptionally useful as a social cohesive, as a solution to problems of racism and especially as a way of developing English language skills. Principal Finucane commented that, "it was the single most positive thing that has happened from the point of view of integration in the school". The support of the school and staff was to remain steadfast and enthusiastic throughout the project.

The first workshop phase was from February to May, 2002, with Bairbre Ní Chaoimh, Artistic Director of Calypso, Mojisola Adebayo, a British actress of Nigerian and Danish descent and Raoul Araujo, a Brazilian psychologist and youth theatre worker, as facilitators, all three of whom have backgrounds in the use of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. The aim of the initial set of workshops was to help the participants get to know each other as individuals, explore their sense of themselves and their ethnic identities and also how they related to people they regarded as racially other.⁷⁹ The facilitators soon came to realise the importance of music in the workshops. Many of the participants were highly talented musically and came from cultures where this was an important means of expression. As they often had trouble expressing themselves in English, it seemed only logical for the workshops to become more musically based.

⁷⁸ All testimonies provided by Calypso from their Evaluation Document, 5th July 2003.

⁷⁹ Forum Theatre is a Boal technique in which participants enact a situation where they felt oppressed, the group then discuss how things could be made better and this new version of the situation is enacted. See Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed (1979).

Phase Two of the project (September 2002 to June 2003) aimed to explore different ways of telling a story using theatre, music, mime and dance in preparation of a showcase performance. New facilitators were recruited, including playwright Maeve Ingolsby to write the script, David Boyd who became the musical director and a number of other theatre practitioners, mostly from music or dance backgrounds. For the five week rehearsal process and the eight night run of the show, four young professional Irish actors were also recruited to play principal roles in the production. Thus, within the high production values that are possible from established, funded professional theatre, there remained very clear distinctions between the skill levels of the professional performers and the young people from the workshops, who seemed to have been largely pushed out of principal roles. ⁸⁰ This sudden top-loading of a youth theatre project with professional actors for the performance raises troubling questions of agency and also creates an imbalance in aspirations and expectations which invited a deal of critical comment. Karen Fricker, writing for the *Irish Theatre Magazine* (2003: 75), found the contrast unacceptable.

Clearly audiences are meant to adjust their expectations and understandings to accommodate the special conditions behind the production's creation. This is a conservative and unprogressive tactic: we are asked to treat this show differently because its cast is different – to change the rules for the foreigners.

Jason King (2005b: 34-35) disagrees, arguing that "it is precisely the unevenness of the production... that the play is at its most politically progressive." He interprets the young migrants "un-professionalism" as "a manifestation of their categorical exclusion from the

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⁸⁰ The exception is the lead role of Patrick played by Solomon Ijigade. A very talented young Nigerian actor and drummer, Solomon has since pursued a career as a professional actor and musician in Ireland and has also appeared in other Calypso productions, *Operation Easter* and *Bones*. However, the young Macedonian actress Kalina Vanska for example, a graduate of the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts in Sofia, who had attended training workshops with Barrabas, the Irish Actors' Studio and Loose Cannon, might have expected a more prominent role in this kind of production. The key role of Natasha, an 'Eastern European' slave girl was instead given to one of the professional Irish actors. Obviously it would have been more difficult to cast the African characters from the available Irish professional actors.

mainstream... as a performative articulation and staged enactment of the right to work in Ireland, which is currently denied to asylum seekers like many of the members of the cast." While this is an interesting sociological and political observation, it is obviously a denial of the agency of these young people that they manifest the abject position of asylum seekers in Ireland by being excluded from key roles in their own project. From the point of view of the young participants, many expressed the view in the evaluation documents that having a showcase production gave the workshops a focus and that working with the professional theatre practitioners had been a positive learning experience, raising everyone's standards (Calypso evaluation document, 2003). However, considering that *Mixing it on the Mountain* was specifically written for these particular young performers, it seems unfortunate that there was not more space found in the production for the existing talents of the group. I would strongly suggest that this is against the spirit of not just Calypso's work but of youth theatre in general.

In terms of representation, there is a playful and potentially radical idea at the core of this play. What if, Maeve Ingoldby's script asks, Ireland's patron saint had been a black man? The accepted story is that Saint Patrick was brought to Ireland by the Romans as a slave and eventually converted the island to Christianity. In a reversal of the Catholic missionary image, in this play he is imagined as African. The plot concerns a group of black, Christian slaves, including a young Patrick, who is very devout and a dab hand at dealing with snakes. They are working on a mountainside for a tribe of Pagan Irish. (Conveniently, considering the usual gender balance of youth theatre, the Irish slave owners are mostly girls because the men are all off fighting wars.) One day a new group of slaves arrives, loosely portrayed as Eastern European although, without comment, they

also include the Vietnamese participant Thanh Chi Nguyen. While initially fearful and antagonistic towards each other, the three groups of young people eventually get to know each other and integrate, facilitated by lots of singing and flirting. Patrick and the Chieftain's ward, Fionnuala, fall in love, as do Adebori and Natasha who are African and Eastern European slaves respectively. When Adebori is to be sent to the mines, Patrick changes places with his friend in an act of selfless, saintly generosity. The play ends with the finale song 'Freedom' and all the slaves symbolically throwing off their chains. The message is that love and friendship will unite people across the divides of race and culture through their common humanity.

It could be argued that the play's emphasis on the interaction and interdependence of the three different cultures, the two slave groups and the Irish, depicts the cultural hybridity so idealised in multicultural societies. For Edward Said, there is great irony in modern global society's "extraordinarily complex fusion of interconnected experience between cultures at every level while, paradoxically allowing people to believe that 'they were only mainly, exclusively, white, black, or Western, or Oriental'". He goes on to argue that "the task now is to transcend static notions of identity and the orthodox insistence on the separation of cultures" (quoted in Crow, et al, 1996: 168). Homi Bhabha (1994: 163) also argues forcefully for hybridity's potential for agency. "Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of it presence." However, it would be a misrepresentation of Bhabha's argument to imply that hybridity, in and of itself, can be a site of agency. Utilising Derrida, Bhabha's definition of hybridity is an ambivalent 'excess' of colonial stereotypes, a "seizure of the sign" that "allows the articulation of

subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and reinscription" (ibid: 277). In Levinas' thought there is a similar emphasis on the ethical relationship with the other as an 'excess', an "overflowing" of the sphere of the same, "an idea of the infinite" (1991: 194-197).

Mixing it on the Mountain abounds in displays of difference, all the different faces of the participants from Angola, Vietnam, Nigeria, Albania, Kosovo, different musical styles including traditional African songs and rap, even different languages, yet the play idealises the sameness of all the characters on stage. In this vein various critics, Peter Crawley (2003b: 29) in the Irish Times and Karen Fricker in the Irish Theatre Magazine (2003: 75) for example, alluded to the "Benetton-bright" and "animated Disney movie" representation of difference in the play. The play's sentimental love stories, simplistic portrayals of cultural difference and reliance on saccharine power-ballads attracted criticism from reviewers on the grounds that they do not challenge static notions of identity but dissolve representations into an image of racial harmony that does not exist. Una Chaudhuri, describes the "semiotics of Disney" thus: "Parts of the world are isolated and double coded as different and yet at the same, their difference being a matter of spectacle, while their sameness is a matter of desire" (1997: 2). The playwright Maeve Ingoldsby reminds critics who might be inclined to take it all too seriously that Mixing it on the Mountain "is not some heavy-handed tract about the refugee situation. It's really about inter-racial and teenage relationships. It's a musical." She also goes on to maintain that its primary purpose "is to give these kids some entertainment, fun and release because God knows they need it!" (quoted in Brennan, 2003: 12). Argued on these terms the play serves its purpose admirably, but the real challenge of allowing these young

refugees to represent themselves in all their uniqueness has not been taken. This would also seem to be quite a departure from Calypso's own terms of reference and their social and artistic agenda.

Within the context of reductionist representational matrices, the elision of asymmetries of power that associate Africans with slavery in this jaunty musical melodrama are also of concern, especially considering the exploitation or oppression some of the participants may have actually experienced. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse warns, "Hybridity is not parity... the critical variable is power" (2004: 108).

Dramaturgically the 'slavery' element of the play is deeply unconvincing. Only one of the Irish slave owners, Malachy, shows any antagonism or prejudice against the slaves and even this is undercut because the character is lame, often drunken and easily tricked. The Irish girls by contrast are absolutely delighted to interact with the good looking slaves and there is no complicating racism depicted. When it services the drama to such a slight extent, Fricker questioned the use of slavery as a plot device at all.

What was the goal of the production's creators in reinforcing received ideas that these non-white young people have less cultural agency than the native whites? This might reflect the real-life power balance in these young people's lives, but would it not have been more empowering for audiences and performers alike, to mix things up for real: to show us a fictional world in which our expectations of oppression are played with, queried and overturned? (2003: 75)

One obvious question regarding agency is the decision to create an entirely fictional plot with only tenuous links to the young refugees lived experiences, especially considering the centrality of Augusto Boal's methodology in the workshop process which would presumably have generated dramatic material had that been its aim. For the

director, Bairbre Ní Chaoimh, the use of the material generated in the workshops would not have been appropriate "because their experiences are incredibly personal and private and there are [legal] reasons they can't speak about them anyway. In some cases, people have very traumatic reasons for being here. So that isn't open season for drama" (quoted in Crawley, 2003a: 12). Instead she and the writer Maeve Ingoldsby looked for a parallel story that would resonate but still be fun. Does this then imply that there is no space from which these subaltern young people can speak of their own experiences, to paraphrase Spivak (1993a: 129)? As an artist and educator working with refugee communities in Canada, Julie Salverson has encountered similar ethical dilemmas. She argues that creating theatre events which reflect the participants' "risky stories", by which she means "stories that include or embody acts of violence", necessitates a careful balance between theatre's powers of advocacy versus its potential to heal or to harm. "Taking responsibility", Salverson insists (1992: 182), and she uses the word within a Levinasian theoretical context, "should extend beyond an ongoing inventory of who we are as individuals to an understanding that there are stakes for those with whom we work stakes that exist, but are never more than partially knowable." What she advocates is a "gap", a dramatic or aesthetic distance between real experience and theatrical imagery, within which participants have the opportunity to "re-externalize" their traumatic personal narratives, a space from which to "articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside" (ibid: 187). However, the size and nature of the 'gap' between the "image of reality and the reality of the image" (Salverston quoting Boal, ibid) is crucial. If it is too large and there is no connection between the performers and their stories, it destroys the listening function of popular theatre. "If the gap is too small or nonexistent, there is no room for the Other, no space across which the familiar and the strange can gaze upon each other" (ibid: 188).

Salverson's image reflects the influence of Levinas and his balance of responsibility and separation, 'face-to-face'. In *Mixing it on the Mountain*, Calypso have taken their responsibilities to the young people they work with seriously, but they have not engaged them in the public conversation as separate entities. Thus the 'face' of the young migrants is masked and mediated, and no space has been found for them to speak.

Nevertheless, *Mixing it on the Mountain* was undoubtedly a successful production in terms of Calypso's broader promotion of diversity and inclusion in the public sphere. The production played to packed houses at The Samuel Beckett Theatre during the high profile St Patrick's Festival in March 2003. The cast also performed excerpts from the play on RTE's 'The Late Late Show' and 'Mono' for television and on 'The Vincent Browne Show' and 'Playback' on radio. They did special performances for O'Connell's school and were invited to perform for the Minister of Education and for Dublin's Lord Mayor at Mansion House. All of these appearances were generally enthusiastically received. In this way, *Mixing it on the Mountain* could be described as an exemplary production for the Saint Patrick's Day Festival, Ireland's celebration of nation. Through conspicuous displays of diversity as spectacle, the state seeks to pacify "the potential fissiparousness of all ideas of difference", writes Arjun Apadurai.

Typically, contemporary nation-states do this by exercising taxonomic control over difference, by creating various kinds of international spectacle to domesticate difference, and by seducing small groups with the fantasy of self-display on some sort of gloal or cosmopolitan stage. (1996: 39)

In a fascinating project that considers the power imbalances inherent in this production from a particularly materialist point of view, the sociologist Jason King began tracking the fate of immigrant participants in the Tower of Babel after they were 'aged out' of their status as minors and began to receive deportation notices. His argument becomes a critique of what he terms "the Janus face of Irish cultural globalization" (2007: 49), as he contrasts the fates two years later, on 15 March 2005, of one of the professional Irish actors, Lisa Lambe, and one of the Nigerian asylum seekers from the cast, whom he does not name at the request of Calypso Productions for fear of prejudicing his court case. On that date Lambe was performing in *Improbable Frequency*, a production which played to great acclaim and toured internationally. Meanwhile the Nigerian was awaiting deportation at Dublin airport, although he was eventually given leave to remain after an advocacy campaign. Struck by this obvious contradiction, King constructs an analysis of the lived experiences of the child immigrant actors as "reflective of a wider Hegelian master-slave dialect" (ibid). Hegel's philosophical tale, 'Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage' (1974: 111-117), sees the master subjugating the slave in order to achieve recognition of his dominance and mastery, but having achieved supremacy he is unsatisfied because the slave, having no value, cannot confer value to him. Following Hegel's analogy, King notes the approbation Mixing it on the Mountain received, especially in the more high profile contexts of The Late Late Show and as part of the St Patrick's Festival, combined with the performance of many of the same Tower of Babel participants for ex-President Mary Robinson in her visit to O'Connell school. The young immigrants, he argues, embody an ideal of a culturally diverse Ireland through their reinterpretation of iconic, globalised symbols that facilitate self-congratulatory rhetoric of Ireland as liberal and accommodating, but the citizenship implicitly conferred upon them during performance is spurious (ibid). Thankfully none of the Tower of Babel participants have yet been deported and a number have received leave to remain. Furthermore, although the immigration process is so complex it would be impossible to attribute their reprieve specifically to participation in the Tower of Babel

project and the concerted advocacy of Calypso, it seems highly probable that the public exposure offered by these projects was helpful to their cases. Ní Chaoimh and her staff's personal dedication and ongoing material assistance is also indicative of the practical commitment they have made to these individual young people in crisis.

Ultimately Calypso's aspirations in their manifesto to "change the world" are difficult to quantify and perhaps better evaluated through the objectivity of the social sciences, such as in the study King has undertaken. Never the less, the Tower of Babel and *Mixing it on the Mountain* had very specific but by no means modest objectives. They aimed first and foremost to be entertaining for an audience and for the performers because that after all is one powerful reason why people participate in the theatre. By utilising familiar stories and popular stereotypes, Calypso presented a positive vision of multi-ethnic Ireland striving for tolerance and inclusion. The on-going Tower of Babel project, with participants from a dozen different ethnic backgrounds, provided a model for the kind of integration Calypso believes is possible in Ireland. Ní Chaoimh is characteristically optimistic,

This is the first generation in Ireland, I think, that is genuinely multicultural. I know it's possible for people to live together with cultural diversity and it's so enriching. This group of people (Tower of Babel participants) represents it.

She regrets the lack of new writing that recognises Ireland's transformation into a culturally diverse nation - "They [Irish playwrights] haven't acknowledged that on the same bus you have all these people living parallel lives" - and she asserts that "we have to reassess what it means to be Irish and living in Ireland" (quoted in Crawley, 2003a: 12). By telling stories of refugees in Ireland, not just in their productions but in their publicity and publication materials, in seminars and workshops, they are articulating the pressures

towards social change. Frantz Fanon, recognised that "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (quoted in Crow et al, 1996: 4). They may not yet be speaking their own words, but Calypso is offering these young refugees an opportunity to positively exist for Irish audiences and at O'Connell's School and in the homes and hostels around Dublin where these young people are living happier lives because of having been part of this project, that really does change things.

2.3 I have before me a remarkable document by a young woman from Rwanda: Harnessing 'the Truth' to Theatre - authenticity and ethics

It remains a dilemma for a committed theatre company in Ireland that their political aspirations are often ahead of the artistic aspirations of playwrights.

Acknowledging that "it definitely makes it harder to find good pieces of work, than if the world is your oyster" (quoted in Heaney, 2006: 26) Ní Chaoimh's choice of plays about racial conflict for the five years following *Mixing it on the Mountain* were not Irish, nor were they specifically relevant to the Irish experience, although she would argue for their efficacy with regard to Calypso's ambitions nonetheless. *I have before me a remarkable document by a young woman from Rwanda* was written by the English playwright Sonja Linden, but is congruent with Calypso's programme of theatricalising asylum seeker's experiences as a means of helping audiences to understand their lived realities. Linden's plot has its genesis in personal narratives garnered from her clients while she was working as a writing facilitator for refugees. However, given that the play narrativises the life events and the spoken words and writings of a victim of trauma within a context that

theatricalises and shapes her story in a largely unacknowledged way, this section scrutinises how her subjectivity has been conceptualised and to what extent the production reveals the encounter with the other that is its source material ('the saying' to utilise Levinas' terminology), or allows the rhetorical and aesthetic objectives of performance ('the said') to consume that encounter. The following analysis also considers whether veracity aids or hampers the advocacy goals of political theatre.

Sonja Linden's *I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda*, ⁸¹ produced by Calypso for the Dublin Fringe Festival in 2005, is described as "written in response" ⁸² to her work with young Rwandans at the London based Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, where she runs a creative and testimonial program called Write to Life. For some of her clients, writing about their experiences is an act of witness or vindication, for others it is part of the healing process. One of the first clients she worked with in this way was Lea Chantal, a young woman from Rwanda who had been trying to write a book for two and a half years about the murder of her family and her experiences in the soldiers' camps. Writing became a 'purging' experience, according to Linden, although

the healing she achieved was done at enormous cost, since it meant confronting and expressing with full force the negative emotions that overwhelmed her in the years following the genocide...She reported that she felt 'clean' and that her nightmares and headaches had ceased... (She) affirms life with a remarkably positive spirit, still motivated by the need to work for her people. 83

In a similar way to the Tower of Babel/*Mixing it on the Mountain* project, however, the valuable process of a writing workshop for participants like Chantal does not obfuscate

⁸¹ Sonja Linden, *I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda* (London: Ice and Fire, 2003). All citations are to this edition and will be referenced by page number. ⁸² Programme notes for Calypso's production.

⁸³ Sonja Linden's blog www.openDemocracy.co.uk, accessed 6th June 2006.

ethical questions that must be asked of the product based on her experiences. The very name, *I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda*, is a daunting, belligerent title, clearly signaling that this is testimony theatre, but where is Lea Chantal in this play? She is not acknowledged as a co-author, nor mentioned in the programme, the character does not even bear her name. Perhaps this is at her request, but by erasing the specificity of Lea's story the character Juliette also loses something, becoming a hazy amalgam of the numerous nameless victims captured in the media. It is in the fusion of fact and fiction, history and drama that this play sources its power, but I would argue that there is loss as well as gain in this particular mix. The disappearance of Lea Chantal into Linden's play is examined below in resonance with Gayatri Sprivak's essay "Echo", her reading of the Narcissus and Echo myth in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Ovid's phrase, "vox manet" (the voice remains), becomes a kind of slogan for Spivak representing the impossibility of knowing the subaltern, the presence of an absence that alerts "us" (Spivak's inverted commas) to the dangers of "cultural narcissism" (1993a: 27).⁸⁴

Having come to see a play with this title, the audience is surely steeled for a harrowing eyewitness account of mass murder and terror. Calypso keeps that promise in the powerful opening sequence, which is simply Fergal Keene's iconic reportage on the genocide for BBC news projected onto a large screen. The images are horrific and the numbers overwhelming with nearly a million people slaughtered in one hundred days and the United Nations seemingly impotent. Using the news footage establishes the

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⁸⁴ The "us" referred to by Spivak are "the world-wide collectivity of conscientized feminists of color from bourgeois origins or in passive capitalist social relations", but I would argue that definition could be stretched in this context to include white theatre artists with a human rights focus, such as Linden and Ni Chaoimh, or white academics like myself.

significance of the historical context and when at the end of the play Juliette tells us her own shocking story, it also carries the authenticity of testimony. In between, however, there is the much more personal narrative of Juliette's grim, lonely life as a refugee in London and her struggle to write a book about her experiences. The resulting imbalance between indelibly real experiences so in excess of what is commonly understood as human reality, and fictional representations that can only faintly shadow such trauma, is the irresolvable aporetic situation of art that seeks to bear witness to such events.

Levinas, who lost most of his family in the Shoah, wrote 'Reality and its Shadow' in 1948 (1993: 12) to declare art a betrayal of testimony:

Revenge is gotten on wickedness by producing its caricature, which is to take from it its reality without annihilating it; evil powers are conjured by filling the world with idols which have mouths but do not speak. It is as though ridicule killed, as though everything really can end in songs... Myth takes the place of mystery. The world to be built is replaced by the essential completion of its shadow. This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility.

Likewise Theodor Adorno's often misquoted dictum that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric", contends with the necessity and impossibility of redemption through art. 85 He questions how,

turning suffering into images, harsh and uncompromising though they are, ... wounds the shame we feel in the presence of the victims. For these victims are used to create something, works of art, that are thrown to the consumption of a world which destroyed them. The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. (Adorno, 1990: 96)

Returning to the metaphor of a 'voice', however, Adorno argues that great suffering also demands the continued existence of art: "it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can

⁸⁵ See Joshua Cohen's *Interrupting Auschwitz: Art, Religion, Philosophy* which discusses both Adorno and Levinas on these topics in detail. He very helpfully reinterprets the Adorno dictim to mean that poetry after Auschwitz must recognise "the inescapable barbarism of its continuous existence" (2003:64).

still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it" (ibid: 95). Paradoxically, however, by seeking to authenticate the play with the real and evidential of the BBC reportage, in itself an impossible horror, the fictional in juxtaposition becomes suspect, less rather than more credible. This is exacerbated by Linden's choice of an implausible love-story as her framing plot device.

"I'm not into writing the state of the nation play and maybe... I'm doing it as a woman in very different ways", states Linden, whilst acknowledging that, "it's not fashionable to say that anymore" (interview with Breed et al, 2004: 8). In her focus on individuals Linden creates an intimate two hander, with the story following Juliette and her white, male, middle-aged, disillusioned writing tutor Simon as they gradually learn more about each other and overcome their mutual misunderstandings of one another's culture. Linden uses direct address to provide an insight into the characters' private thoughts.

Simon: We could have walked there really, it isn't far, only a few streets

away, but then I thought, maybe it's nice for her to be in a car for

once. A bit of luxury.

Juliette: His car is old. Not like my Dad's. He cannot be rich, Simon.

Simon: I'll put in a cassette.

Juliette: He doesn't have a CD player! (28)

This conceit allows Linden to challenge some stereotypical ideas about refugees, that they are all from impoverished backgrounds for example, and to show the reality of their new life in the countries where they are seeking asylum. By juxtaposing Juliette's present, full of familiar images of public transport, going to the park, doing homework and getting to know someone new, with her memories of the past, violent, unspeakable atrocities many in the audience would find distressing, Linden is doing what Simon advises Juliette to do when he suggests adding details about her family or the Rwandan landscape to her book.

"The truth is, it's the personal story that will make people really understand what went on, that's what will make it real for us." (15) There are many examples in the text, one of the most powerful being Juliette's emotional attempt to write 'A Description of My Room' for homework, which Simon had mistakenly thought an innocuous, rather boring exercise.

Juliette:

'A Description of My Room' I hate this room. I sit here all day and then I lie down to sleep. And it is like a prison to me because I'm frightened to go out... And when I look in the mirror to find myself, I see my mother, I see my little sister, I see my aunts, I see my grandmother, I see my father and my uncle. They are all there in the mirror. I see them clearly. Until they disappear... (19)

Subjectivity is undoubtedly enhanced in this way, the details constructing for the audience Juliette's *self* in her history.

However, despite the fact that Simon is significantly older than Juliette, married, her tutor and that she is obviously still very traumatised, Linden succumbs to the temptation to allow romance to blossom, as so many of the plays in this study do. Much of the play is then devoted to this anticlimactic, rather hackneyed contrivance. It is used as a short-hand way of drawing the audience into identification with the characters but, as these two have so little in common culturally or personally and the power imbalance between the tutor and his vulnerable student renders the relationship highly inappropriate, in this case it seems particularly inexplicable. Suddenly Simon is inspired to write poetry again after having been blocked and frustrated for a long time. Later, trying to make love to his wife, Simon says, "All I could see was Juliette, with her dangly silver ear-rings and her shiny pink lips and her perfect coppery sheen complexion... I couldn't do it, just couldn't (35)." Linden's description of herself as a "women's writer" has the unfortunate

connotation of romantic 'women's fiction' or 'chic lit'. This relationship between the young, sexually alluring, racially-other female and the older, worldly wise Western man also reflects an Orientalist trope in which Imperialism is normalised by being likened to the sexual act, as in the myth of 'virgin' land. Juliette, in providing inspiration for Simon's creativity, also figures as a passive, benignly exotic and erotic Muse, an extension of the Enlightenment fantasy of the Noble Savage. That these stereotypes lurk beneath so much of the play is symptomatic of wider inattention to consequences and ethics of representation in this production.

Indicative of the problematic nature of this love affair is Linden's decision to keep it one-sided and unconsummated. She seeks to harness the dramatic potential of the romance whilst trying to side-step the ethical question, but the effect is of a plot strand that peters out and is strangely uncommented on. In fact, although the script hints that Juliette is aware of his interest and that it is unwelcome as she often asks pointedly about his wife, in performance the actor Madeline Appiah seemed to be playing that she was unconscious of her affect on Michael Ford's Simon. As Linden's use of direct address allows the character to speak her thoughts, why does she not relate to the audience her confusion about Simon's sexual advances? It is as if even the playwright is unconvinced about this device. Indeed the juxtapositioning of the two characters' narratives suggests but does not address the notion that Juliette has more important matters to think about. As Simon describes not being able to make love to his wife, she recounts her arrival in England. Abandoned in London with no money or passport, knowing nobody, she

⁸⁶ For an extensive deconstruction of this stereotype see Patty O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse: Exotic Femininity an the Colonial Pacific* (2006).

⁸⁷ The performance referred to was at Liberty Hall on 28th September, 2005.

conspicuous. What marks this pseudo-romance out even more clearly for comment is that, in the midst of so much that is based on reality, this is clearly absolutely fictional. By choosing to include a writer character and foregrounding the writing process aspect of the story Linden is relating her own real relationship to and process with Chantal, but she has chosen to turn her own character into a man. The most obvious reason why is to facilitate the romantic plot thread. However, the 'cultural narcissism' of using her source material in the "construction of (her)self as object of knowledge" (1993: 23), as she does through the character of Simon, while Chantal's subjectivity remains excluded, pushed to the periphery of Linden's self-expression, raises ethically problematic issues of authorship and agency.

In the final scene of the play, Juliette is speaking at a conference. Firstly Simon introduces her, and then she begins reading hesitantly from a prepared speech but is overcome by emotion and cannot continue. "A long awkward silence ensues, as she struggles to re-find her voice... The paper with her prepared speech is now abandoned and gets more and more crumpled as she finds her own voice" (70). This scene is based once again on a real incident when, according to Linden, she was working with an Iranian woman whose prison memoirs were to be published in Farsi and she was to speak at a conference. Because of her hesitancy about speaking in English, Linden had coached her in a "cogent, punchy speech" and then had read out an extract from her writing translated into English.

It was very, very powerful... and at an interval everybody swarmed towards her. And that was a very interesting moment, because my little writer's ego came into play, you know it wasn't my piece of writing, but I'd certainly helped, I'd midwife

it, but of course, quite rightly, the audience was not interested in me but in her. (Interview with Breed et al, 2004: 4)

She describes herself as "a secondary witness", and her process as "hearing their voices" (ibid), but struggles to balance her voice and her clients in her writing. Giving another example from her work with the Iranian women Parvaz, she describes writing a fifteen page dramatic monologue from an incident in which Parvaz encountered one of her torturers in a local Tesco.

I don't need to refer to her 400 page book, I know it... I think that she will be pleased with this. I think I've got her voice, even though artistically it's my voice because it's heightened, literary English. (ibid: 5)

Gayatri Spivak in her essay 'Echo' emphasises the ethical challenges for the privileged feminist speaking for the subaltern (1993b). In Ovid's story Echo has been punished by Juno for her talkativeness by becoming unable to speak for herself, she can only echo others. A grammatical discrepancy within Latin allows Spivak a deconstructive as well as an analogical reading of the text. In English the exact echo of Narcissus's question "Why do you fly from me?" allows for Echo's answer "Fly from me" in an (ironic) imperative. Benied this possibility by the Latin conjugation of the verb 'to fly', Ovid has to intervene using reported speech to achieve the particular tragic irony. There is a gap between what Narcissus says and that which Echo would have been able to echo, a gap Linden also hopes to cover with her assumption, "she will be pleased with this", but it is this gap which provides Echo's deconstructive power, however

⁸⁸ Spivak's argument turns on this theme throughout the essay but the key pages where she explicates Echo's *difference* in 'fly from me' are pp. 24-27.

unintentional, to differ from Narcissus and to defer his question (she is not the right person to ask), thereby creating *différence* in the sense lent to the word by Derrida.

Under the broken rebus – legendary bones and paradoxically persistent absent voice, connected by nothing at all – that is her mark or guarantee that she will be around, the mastership of truth (Derrida's critique of the Lacanian analyst), *is* the experience of the impossible (Derrida's description of ethics). Echo will not have been dragged into the circuit of political imitations. (Ibid: 27)

This is also the gap which must ethically be observed when the feminist cultural critic takes on the role of Narcissus, asking the subaltern "why do you fly from me?" as she subsumes her identity. Spivak's usage of the word "responsibility" chimes with Levinas in that she insists that the 'response' must come from both sides. Siting the subaltern as Echo, she argues, "points to the risk of response... [An echo] has no identity proper to itself. It is obliged to be imperfectly and interceptivly responsive to another's desire, if only for the self-separation of speech. It is the catachresis of response as such" (ibid). With characteristic candor, Spivak condemns the recovery of the subaltern woman's voice as "useless" if it does not acknowledge the "internalized phallocracy" of the privileged feminist as Narcissus, such as is evidenced by the plethora of colonialist imagery at play in the 'romance' between Simon and Juliette. "Dishing out our personal pain in academic bestsellers serves women on the make or catharsizing voyeurs" (ibid: 30). Yet for Spivak, this double-bind, the "experience of the impossible," exemplifies her personal stake in this argument.⁸⁹ In stressing the impossibility of 'grasping' the experiences of the subaltern woman, Spivak rejects as unproductive either resignation, leaving the subaltern to her suffering because 'nothing can be done', or the scrupulous

⁸⁹ "What my stake is the reader will decide" (ibid: 31).

deconstructive critique of any effort to intervene in injustice, "a parade of irresponsibilizing destruction, whose surest effect would be to leave everything as it is" (quoting Derrida, ibid: 32). The path she offers out of this dilemma challenges ontology and embraces ethics as per Levinas. "Ethics are not a problem of knowledge but a call of relationship (without relationship, as limit case)" (ibid). Elsewhere she describes this response as "an embrace, an act of love" where "responses flow from both sides" (1996; 269-70). Women of conscience must not be deterred in their efforts to address the discrimination that disenfranchises the subaltern, but by exposing the limitations of such an embrace, the phrase 'vox manet' demands that the ethical, social, political and cultural differences and difficulties remain acknowledged. Such a difficulty is the mindfulness of consequences that is necessary when fictionalising the life experiences of asylum seekers. While for dramatic purposes it is important that characters are not two-dimensionally heroic and perfect, when dealing with real people whose lives can be greatly influenced by their portrayal, it is important not to reveal anything that would be detrimental to their right to refuge or damaging to their recovery from trauma. In the interview quoted here, Linden is also honest enough to admit if her subjects were not coming to see the play she would have more artistic freedom, whether to invent or to reveal she does not specify (quoted in Breed et al, 2004: 4).

There is, finally, another strand of meaning making that Calypso adds to all these plays with an outreach programme called 'Where is Home?' 'Playing a more challenging role' is Rosita Boland's telling title for her *Irish Times* piece on Calypso's preperformance workshops with transition year students. This is a pun on both Calypso's methodology and pedagogy, in that the workshop facilitators 'enrole' the students as both

asylum seekers and immigration officials and then, through a series of drama exercises, challenge the student's preconceptions about refugees in order to prepare them to better understand the themes of the play. While Calypso's position is clear, the workshops were designed to allow the students to express their own opinions even if they are contrary. In feedback, "We can't let everyone in," one girl states, "We have enough problems of our own" (quoted in Boland, 2006: 14). Anna Keogh's sociological study, Talking about the Other: a view of how secondary school pupils construct opinions about refugees and asylum-seekers (2000), would suggest that suspicion and antipathy towards refugees is quite common amongst Irish young people. Her research uses discourse analysis (analysis of the use of language) to locate transition year pupils' attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers and to explore why they have these attitudes, how they construct them and what source material they are using in that construction. The results suggest wide-spread ignorance about the circumstances which cause people to become refugees, fear of multiculturalism as "dangerous" or that "Ireland will lose its culture", and concern that Ireland will be "over-run". Interestingly, they do not associate prejudice with themselves personally, but to other members of society who are thought to be more ignorant or less privileged than they consider themselves to be (Keogh, 2000: 124). Keogh's argument that understanding is intrinsic to tolerance is in keeping with what Calypso was trying to do with its workshops and productions. "What the pupils think about refugees and asylum seekers is not just constructed by what they know, but also by representational experience" (ibid).

Using an exercise called 'Steps', the facilitators from Calypso sought to encourage the students to identify with the challenges facing new arrivals to Ireland. Each

participant was given a card with a specific identity, either Irish or refugee, then as the facilitator called out various statements, they stepped forward if it was true for their character – "You are not afraid of being harassed or attacked on the streets or in the media"; "You have decent housing with a telephone and a television". By the end, some have moved to the opposite end of the room while others have not even made one step. "It was the steps thing that made the most impression on me," says Tanya Govan, "I didn't realise life could be so bad for some people." For other students it was the play that allowed them to make connections with the workshop experience: "When Claud (Juliette's brother who is refused asylum) got refused, what came straight into my mind was the immigration officers role-playing we'd done," says Jonathan Brady (all quoted in Boland, 2006: 14). The value of the workshops to the theatre experience is also to help establish its relevance for an Irish audience. Ní Chaoimh tells Boland (ibid),

We wanted to stage a play that would reflect the day-to-day experiences of the new communities living in Ireland. Those plays don't exist yet, but they will. So we used Sonja Linden's Rwanda play instead. The outreach programme we're doing alongside it extends the life of the play.

In conclusion, what Calypso's work on 'race' offers their audience is politically committed theatre, often with an international perspective, that is unique in an Irish context. There are, however, some problematic contradictions inherent to political theatre, which Italo Calvino in his essay, *Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature*, explores in his explanation of two wrong ways and two right ways to use politics in literature. The first wrong way is for literature to "voice a truth already possessed by politics... to believe that the sum of political values is the primary thing" (1990: 100). Ní Chaoimh is very conscious of this danger stating that, "Didactic is a word I absolutely abhor. If it is not a good play, it just doesn't have any value" (quoted in Boland, 2006:

14) and thus, plays such as *Guess who's coming for the Dinner* show Calypso embracing the artistic and political potential of popular entertainment as opposed to the more overt moralising of agit prop. The other mistake according to Calvino is "to see literature as an assortment of eternal human sentiments... it assigns it (literature) the task of confirming what is already known" (ibid). These are the grounds on which Calypso's work is sometimes criticised, as by Mick Heaney (2006: 26):

But while the company's sincerity and dedication is evident, some may feel its subject matter is slightly beige in its consensual political correctness. In its shocking way, even genocide is uncontroversial – we all know it is wrong."

Ní Chaoimh answers that criticism by arguing that Calypso's pursuit of non-traditional audiences, away from the festival circuit and the middle-class intelligentsia, means speaking to a broader spectrum than the 'converted' and necessitates challenging consensus. Returning to Calvino (1990: 101), a right path for political art is "when it gives a voice to whatever is without a voice... especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude." To some extent Calypso were waiting to give voice to modern, multicultural Ireland, but the playwriting did not emerge to service their aspirations. Ní Chaoimh acknowledges the dearth: "Irish people are meeting Africans, living together having babies and you've got to address that. And who's writing about it?" (quoted in Heaney, 2006: 26). However, with projects like Mixing it on the Mountain or Linden's I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda, the company were able to pay public attention to young refugees and offer an insight into their ordinary adolescent dreams and aspirations and into the grim reality of their traumatised lives. Finally, Calvin sets political theatre the task of imposing "patterns of language, of vision, of imagination, of mental effort of the correlation of facts, and in short the creation... of a model of values that is at the same time aesthetic and ethical." Ultimately, the theatre artist can never assume a purely theoretical position, but must

contend with the conflicting demands of artistic imperatives, commercial pressures, political aspirations and the thousand other unforeseeable complexities that accompany any production. It is not an easy task, but one Ní Chaoimh believed she was attempting. "At the end of the day we are a theatre company and as Chekhov said, 'The function of art is not to provide solutions but to state the problem more clearly" (author's interview, 2007).

However, in his essay Myth Today, Roland Barthes (2000: 133) writes that,

In order to gauge the political load of an object and the mythical hollow which espouses it, one must never look at things from the point of view of the signification, but from that of the signifier, of the thing which has been robbed; and within the signifier, from the point of view... of the meaning.

In other words, although the political point of view (signification) of each of these plays is progressive, the totalising representation of the individual characters and their circumstances (signifiers), even if they are positive, can deny them their subjecthood in a way that undermines Calypso's message. There is a crucial disconnect between 'the saying' ("the non-thematizable ethical residue of language that escapes comprehension... and is the very enactment of the movement from the same to the other") and 'the said' ("the content of my words, their identifiable meaning") (Critchley, 2002: 18). This essay suggests that what was missing in Calypso's practice was the vigilance against essentialism, which is manifest in these plays in the uncritical use of stereotypies, in the demands of popular theatre forms and in the tendency for testimony to be subsumed into the needs of drama. As expressed by Levinas, what is required of artists and audiences who seek to intervene positively in the lives of others is an acknowledgement of their role as witness, "Here I am... a witness that does not thematize what it bears witness of, and whose truth is not the truth of representation, is not evidence" (2000: 179). This is the

key message of Spivak's interpretation of Echo, reminding the cultural activist of the impossibility of ever truly knowing the other and warning against the narcissistic appropriation of another's suffering to service voyeurism or to salve the consciences of liberal audiences in morally bankrupt catharsis. Yet she also rejects the fatalism that would do nothing to change an unjust world. There is a contradiction therefore, in Calypso's utopian aspirations and what was ultimately possible, but these are the limitations that are inherent to the search for ethical engagement with the Other. It is for this reason that Spivak terms "ethics the experience of the impossible" (1995: xxv). She goes on to argue, however, that, "This understanding only sharpens the sense of the crucial and contining need for collective struggle" (ibid). Levinas too acknowledges his philosophy is utopian, descriptive rather than prescriptive, but he insists that its power lies in its very impossibility: "There is a utopian moment in what I say; it is the recognition of something which cannot be realized but which, ultimately, guides all moral action" (1988: 178). Ní Chaoimh and Calypso, likewise, refuse to surrender to the contradictions and difficulties of ethical relationships and remain committed to an ethical politics. In their practical, specific commitment to real individuals living in difficult circumstances in Ireland, Calypso actually, materially changed lives, especially in projects like the Tower of Babel, in their workshops and advocacy for those in prisons and asylums and for Travellers, in their performances at Mosney Refugee Accommodation Centre and for other groups excluded from the elite spaces of theatre. For this kind of work and for their courageous and interesting productions, Calypso can be said to have 'represented' young refugees in Ireland, with 'represent' reflecting both its meanings; Calypso's work functions both as a dramatic portrait of the lives of others and as political advocacy for their human rights and place in society.

Chapter Three

Stereotypes of Sex and Race: the Other as Fetish

Racism is never a super-added element discovered by chance in the course of investigation of the cultural data of a group. The social constellation, the cultural whole, are deeply modified by the existence of racism.

(Fanon, 1980: 36)

There the passions cramp'd no longer shall have scope and breathing space; I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race... Fool, again the dream, the fancy! but I *know* my words are wild, But I count the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child... Mated with a squalid savage--what to me were sun or clime?

(Tennyson, 2007: 190)

While the work of Donal O'Kelly and Calypso Productions is crucial to this study in that their efforts to change Irish policy on and perceptions about refugees have been so concerted and conducted through such a variety of productions, venues and theatrical forms, what follows in this chapter is an examination of the work of other theatre artists in Ireland who have pursued similar themes if not necessarily such overt political objectives. What is immediately apparent is the centrality of sex and race in all of the plays discussed and the utilisation, either explicitly or implicitly, of racialised sexual stereotypes. Each of these plays is concerned with examining Irish identity in contention with racial prejudice, asking in other words the specific question - 'who are we that we are so racist?' This chapter considers why the image of a black African and a white Irish person joined in sexual union so occupies the Irish theatrical imagination, and how interracial relationships constitute an answer to questions of Irish identity. In order to answer these questions, the argument below contends with Homi Bhaba's concept of race and sex as the "polymorphous and perverse... mixed economy" of colonial discourse (1994: 98). It is this fetishistic desire, the ambivalent movement of attraction and revulsion, fear and fantasy, derived from cultural stereotypes, that is so evident in Tennyson's sulky

young aristocrat's decision to take a "dusky" mate. Similarly, while the quotation from Fanon draws attention to the connection between culture and racism, he and many other commentators also emphasise the collusion in colonialist discourse between race and power, with sexuality "as its third mediating term" (Young, 1995: 97). "One thing is certain", remarks Ronald Hyam, "Sex is at the very heart of racism" (quoted in Young, ibid). Beyond simple voyeurism, this chapter utilises Bhabha and Fanon's theorising of the fetish to examine how the fantasies evolved from colonialist stereotypes function in these plays, what they are allegorical to or indicative of in a contemporary Irish context, and what purpose these metaphors and metonyms are put to by the dramatists.

Of all the plays in this study, Christian O'Reilly's *It Just Came Out* (Druid Theatre Company, 2001)⁹⁰ wrestles with the ambivalence of the race-sex trope with the most complexity. His central character is Michael, a gentle, liberal Irish man who inexplicably calls an African woman 'Nigger!' in a supermarket. Horrified by his actions, he returns to apologise but mistakes another black woman for the one he has insulted. He then finds himself irresistibly sexually attracted to the second black woman. This play directly addresses the latent racism in Irish society and also examines the complicity of class prejudice in the reception of asylum seekers. Fundamentally, *It Just Came Out* links the fascination with the Other with a crisis of identity within the Self. Following bell hooks' essay 'Eating the Other', I argue that the character's desire for sexual congress with an exotic Other is a desire for transformation, "but a transformation that does not involve relinquishing privilege" (1992: 23). Brian Campbell's *Voyage of*

⁹⁰ It Just Came Out was first performed in the 2001 Druid Debut Series, a programme of new Irish plays by new writers. It was subsequently performed at that year's Dublin Fringe Festival and won an O. Z. Whitehead award at the annual Irish Playwrighs and Screenwriters Guild 'Zebbies' ceremony.

No Return (DubbelJoint for the West Belfast Festival, 2004), 91 is set on the Caribbean island of Montserrat in two time frames, present day and the 1760s, and follows two plot lines which seem to operate at either end of the desire/repulsion fetish spectrum. In the contemporary story, a Northern Irish Tourism bureaucrat falls in love with and marries a beautiful local woman, while the relationship in the colonial story is the predictably horrific domination by an Irish slave owner of his African 'favourite'. Considering the specifically republican context of DubbelJoint, the West Belfast Festival, and Brian Campbell himself, who spent fifteen years in the Maze prison for terrorism offences, this play is radical in its portrayal of Irish Catholics as both perpetrators and victims of imperialism, past and present.

The three other plays discussed, *The Buddhist of Castleknock* by Jim O'Hanlon (2002)⁹² for Fishamble theatre company, *Done Up Like a Kipper* (2002)⁹³ by Ken Harmon, commissioned by the Abbey, and *Hurl* by Charlie O'Neill for Barrabas (2003)⁹⁴, deploy inter-racial romance with less cognizance. In *The Buddhist of Castleknock* and *Done Up Like a Kipper* the relationships between Irish and non-Irish people are indicative of the societal upheavals of modernity in general and the 'Celtic Tiger' in particular, while in *Hurl* the obligatory romance serves as a baldly utopian metaphor for Irish and African integration. By the same token all three plays exploit

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⁹¹ Voyage of No Return was produced by DubbelJoint Theatre Company for the 2004 Féile an Phobal (West Belfast Festival). The play subsequently toured throughout Northern Ireland, including a season in 2005 at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast.

⁹² The Buddhist of Castleknock was first produced by Fishamble: The New Play Company at the Draiocht Arts Centre in Blanchardstown, Dublin. It then toured to venues throughout Ireland, "returning by popular demand" to the Andrew's Lane Theatre, Dublin, in 2003.

⁹³ Done Up Like a Kipper was commissioned by the Abbey and performed at the Peacock Theatre in 2002.

⁹⁴ Hurl was commissioned by Barrabas...the company, in 2003 for the Dublin Theatre Festival and the Galway Arts Festival.

stereotypical portrayals of Irish people in pursuit of their anti-racist agendas, most consciously in Barrabas' Theatre of Clown style of performance. The final part of this chapter considers the distinction between stereotype and archetype and whether the ambivalent use of fixed 'stage Irishmen' types operate within a Brechtian concept of *Gestus*. 95

3.1 It Just Came Out: Transformation and Desire

Despite the debunking of nineteenth century 'scientific' racism and the dismantling of much political racism, the cultural construction of race has proved persistently powerful and impervious to fact and logic. This is the 'cultural racism' Fanon identifies in the statement above, and it is the force O'Reilly is examining in *It Just Came Out* when Michael, a nice Irish man, commits the ultimate *faux pas*.

JULES, a black woman in her 30s, stands in the corner of a shop, selecting fruit and putting it in her basket. MICHAEL, a tired-looking, smartly-dressed man in his early 30s, enters the shop to buy some fruit. He and Jules go for the same banana. They each retract their hand and smile at each other by way of embarrassed apology. They reach for the same banana, but when their eyes meet this time, Michael fails to say 'Sorry' and instead...

MICHAEL: Nigger.

Michael, horrified by what he's just said, puts his hand to his mouth in shock. (2)⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Brechtian *Gestus* is the complex and often contradictory semiotics of the scene or the character. It reveals both a specific aspect of a character through a particular physical action and demonstrates the social significance of the action and the relationship between characters from a historical materialist perspective. Difficult to define, John Willet (1977: 173) refers to it as "at once gesture and gist, attitude and point... physically or verbally expressed."

⁹⁶ Christian O'Reilly, *It Just Came Out*, unpublished play script provided by the author. All subsequent citations are from this script and will be referred to by page number. Reference is also made to the production which I saw on 28th September, 2001.

This encounter illustrates the presence of a racism in Irish society that is not the transparently hateful ideologies of dominance that still exist, in tabloid journalism for example, but something latent that has become even more influential on a phantasmatic level for being repressed. That O'Reilly's play acknowledges this clandestine and suppressed prejudice makes it an important and unique addition to the body of plays on this theme. Indeed, I would argue that to a large extent the importance and distinction of this thesis is also its facility to illustrate the latent effects of 'cultural racism' and the persistence of racial stereotypes, even in the work of theatre artists with exemplary ethical intentions, in the hopes that Irish theatre might look beyond these arrested, sterile representations.

Homi Bhabha's theorising on the processes and purposes of stereotyping provide much of the methodology for this chapter. On the rationale for 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness, Bhabha is clear (1994: 96): "The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual." While stressing that the "economy of pleasure and desire" and the "economy of discourse, domination and power" are not to be unproblematically conflated, he argues that within stereotyping "a range of difference and discriminations" are bound "that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization" (ibid). With this in mind, an awareness of the material consequences of representation is crucial to the careful analysis of these plays. However, Bhabha also emphasises that it is, paradoxically, the *ambivalence* of the stereotype that is the source of its discriminatory social and imaginary power, which

facilitates its ability to morph and repeat itself across changing historical or discursive formats. Thus, for example,

The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; his mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces. (ibid: 118)

Ambivalence then becomes the key term in Bhabha's reading of stereotype as fetish, in the sense lent to the word by theories of psychoanalysis. Because "fetishism is always a 'play' or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity... and the anxiety associated with lack or difference" (ibid: 106:107), colonial stereotypes operating as fetishes construct identity by recognising difference and disavowing it through images of fantasy and defence. Stereotypical racial discourse becomes, therefore for Bhabha, a four-term strategy, "the metaphoric/narcissistic and the metonymic/aggressive positions" which "function simultaneously, strategically poised in relation to each other" (ibid: 111).

In *It Just Came Out* the ambivalence of racial stereotypes is exemplified by Michael's relationship with the two African women in the play, Jules an asylum seeker and a young student doctor, Ally. That they are both viewed stereotypically by the Irish characters in the play is emphasised by O'Reilly's ironic device of having them repeatedly mistaken for one another. They are interchangeable, split images of the same "stereotype-as-suture", to use Bhabha's descriptive allegory. Jules, to whom Michael's wife, Lisa, aggressively and repeatedly refers as "the nigger-woman", ⁹⁷ faces discrimination because of the metonymic association of racially-other foreigners with a plethora of racist fears - violence, contamination, competition for resources. Michael is

⁹⁷ Lisa refers to Jules as "nigger-woman" or "nigger" five times over two pages of dialogue, pp. 27-29, not in her presence but within earshot of the other black character, Ally. On p. 32 she refers to Ally as a "nigger".

conscious of an anxiety he cannot quite identify that has caused him to act so out of character: "I think I was conscious - you know, that there's so many refugees here, you know, with the economy so strong and everything - foreign nationals. I don't know" (6). On a more specific level in this play, Jules, the asylum seeker, is a figure of difference, indicative of the general anxiety generated by the Celtic Tiger transformation of Irish society. Certainly Lisa recognises that prosperity has changed the way people relate to each other. Trying to excuse Michael's racism, she says "maybe you can't control it... It's this place, Michael. This life. This lifestyle. Never having any time. The traffic. The aggression. People aren't nice to people any more" (8). Ally, the other African woman, also asks Michael why he insulted Jules and when he cannot explain himself, she articulates an answer for him: "people say bad things when they are afraid" (35). The exposure of Michael's psychic ambivalence is heightened because he does not identify himself as prejudiced. He gives to the Traveller woman who begs at his door (7), and expresses concern for the rights of asylum seekers:

Other countries have been so good to us - I think we should show a lead and welcome foreigners in. Let them work. Integrate them into our communities and spend some of that money on making them feel welcome.(7)

His own prejudice has been disavowed and projected onto 'racists': "I feel like punching people who are racist. They make me so angry" (7).

Meanwhile, Ally, a young, beautiful student doctor from Zimbabwe, serves the other half of the fetishist equation as the palatable face of difference. Using the psychoanalytical frame that Bhabha proposes, the 'good object' operates as a metaphoric substitute for lack or difference and a source of narcissistic identification. By falling in love with her, Michael can be reassured about himself, reclaim his anti-racist credentials

and allay some of his guilt, both for his personal behaviour to Jules and the more general 'guilt by association' felt by white liberals. bell hooks notes that longing and desire for the "dark Other" is often seen as an affirmation of cultural plurality by white liberals, who deny the irrevocable link with the fantasies of white domination.

The desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past, even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connection. (1992: 25)

By creating such an understanding character in Ally, O'Reilly facilitates that reassurance but does not leave it unmarked for the audience, although Michael seems to have somewhat missed the point.

ALLY: Michael, for all your talk, you still can't see me as a person. You

see me as someone to be helped or pitied. You don't see me as I am. Black people only become niggers when white people stop seeing them as human. I'm a human being, so are you. Let's start

from there.

MICHAEL: Okay. (Pause.) Can I kiss you again? (36)

Ally is also, as in all stories of adultery, a metaphor for all that is lacking in Lisa, Michael's wife, and in their marriage. Where Ally is kind and forgiving, Lisa is selfish and critical, Ally lets Michael kiss her, Lisa refuses his advances, Ally listens to him while Lisa cross-examines him until he confesses fault. When Ally holds Michael's hand to comfort him and he apologies for being clammy, she says, "It feels nice. Strong. Generous." He replies, "Lisa doesn't like holding my hand. Even when we're walking on the beach" (35). With her more traditional values 98 and her sexual approachability, the romantic fantasy of Ally is a projection of the Enlightenment ideal of the exotic 'primitive' as uncorrupted, sensual, passive and unthreatening, as opposed to the

⁹⁸ Ally expresses her shock at Lisa's attitude to Michael on a number of occasions. For example, "It's not my place to say it, but you deserve better treatment from your wife" (34).

complicated and demanding 'civilized' woman (Lisa), contact and intimate knowledge of whom provides an antidote or shelter from the burdens of modern life. Michael is clearly miserable in his marriage and his lifestyle and the encounter with Ally offers the promise of transformation. In a similar fashion, the young men seeking sexual congress with non-white women described in bell hooks' essay, "choose to transgress racial boundaries within the sexual realm not to dominate the Other, but rather so that they can be acted upon, so that they can be changed utterly" (1992: 25).

Yet, as Bhabha reminds us after Freud,⁹⁹ the fetish process allows for multiple, contradictory beliefs that function simultaneously. From Michael's first confession of having insulted an African woman in the supermarket, Lisa views this exotic Other as sexually threatening and dangerous.

LISA: Was that black girl attractive?
MICHAEL: What's she got to do with this?
LISA: Were you excited? Aroused?

MICHAEL: I was guilty.

LISA: Because you fancied her.

MICHAEL: I didn't fancy her.

LISA: So she was ugly because she was black.

MICHAEL: No.

LISA: So you did fancy her. (16)

Lisa jealously returns to this theme a number of times, developing it to include images of disease and contamination.

MICHAEL: I didn't want to get her into bed.

LISA: Why, were you afraid of catching AIDS. (31)

⁹⁹ See Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism', *On Sexuality: three essays on the theory of sexuality and other works*, (1981).

After she has goaded Ally into slapping her, she sees herself as a victim of black violence, thus displacing her own aggressivity, and demands justice.

LISA: Michael?

MICHAEL: What do you want me to do?

LISA: That nigger hit me!

Ally slaps Lisa again. Lisa attacks Ally and they fight. Michael gets embroiled and struggles to pull them apart.

MICHAEL: Lisa, stop it!...

LISA: Michael, that woman, in this house, in our house - that woman hit

your wife twice... I want justice! (32)

Even when attempting to apologise to Ally, the black woman remains so overdetermined that Lisa is unable to find common ground with her.

LISA: You don't have any need to apologise - it's me who should

apologise-

ALLY: If you'd just let me-

LISA: I wouldn't hear of it. You're a visitor to our country and it's the

least you deserve.

ALLY: (*Getting annoyed.*) It's got nothing to do with that.

LISA: It's got everything to do with that. (44)

Whilst the effort to acknowledge and explore difference in the context of desire in these plays is intended as a challenge to racism, what is of concern is, as articulated by hooks (1992: 39),

that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.

However, by bringing these issues to the forefront, O'Reilly is subverting and disrupting the stereotypical assumptions that inform latent prejudice. Furthermore, when Jules and Ally finally meet, O'Reilly makes it apparent that rather than transposable, multiply inscribed signifiers of black otherness, the two women are in fact incommensurably different.

ALLY: (To Jules.) Will you please stop giving these people such a hard

time? All they're trying to do is say they're sorry.

JULES: It's easy for you to say. You don't know what it's like.

ALLY: I'm as black as you are.

JULES: Judging from your shopping basket that's about all we have in

common...

ALLY: Then here. Take this.

Ally offers Jules a £20 note.

JULES: (With dignity.) I'll help myself, thank-you very much. (44)

Thus, as Ernesto Laclau argues, "the question of difference is no longer posed as a relation between subjects, but rather as a differential articulation of positions within social agents themselves" (quoted in Young, 2001: 335). By assigning a different subject position for Ally *vis-á-vis* Jules in terms of class and the material specifics of their lives, the play contests the stereotypical depiction of these characters by denying its fixity, crucial to the function of stereotypes as boundary maintenance that normalises the exclusion of the other. These later scenes also offer the character Jules an advocacy platform to articulate some of the concerns of asylum seekers and, as she is full of spleen from being called "nigger" again by the rather unlikeable Lisa in a botched apology attempt, the effect is comic rather then dauntingly polemic.

JULES: Do you think I want to be here? That it's some kind of worldwide

asylum seeker challenge?

LISA: Listen-

JULES: Come to Ireland and live on fifteen pounds a week. Leave your

home, your friends, your family, your life-

LISA: Please - everybody's watching!

JULES: Stare out your hostel window at the rain while waiting for your

visa application to be processed - while you're not allowed to

work.

LISA: I didn't mean-

JULES: But why would we want to work anyway? We're black and

therefore we're lazy. We're much happier dancing and singing

gospel songs all day and smiling through our perfect white teeth.

LISA: It's just a misunderstanding- (42)

For Michael and Lisa, their encounter with alterity enables a transformation of their identities, their relationship, and their lives. In the central representational matrix I have identified through most of these plays, the black women serve as objects in the quest for subjectivity of the white, Irish characters.

LISA: I wish you'd never met that black woman.

MICHAEL: Which one?

LISA: Both of them. Any of them. All of them. It's all their fault. MICHAEL: Lisa, it's got nothing to do with them. Our problems are our

problems. We're the ones who have to solve them. (39)

The phenomenon also underpins bell hooks' argument in 'Eating the Other'. She quotes Marianna Torgovnick in *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* to explain:

What is clear now is that the West's fascination with the primitive has to do with its own crises in identity, with its own need to clearly demarcate subject and object even while flirting with other ways of experiencing the universe. (Quoted in hooks, 1992: 32)

Torgovnick reminds readers that the fascination for the 'primitive' in western imagery is sourced from its focus on "overcoming alienation from the body, restoring the body, and hence the self, to a relation of full and easy harmony with nature or the cosmos" (ibid), and thus the constant reference to sex and its importance as a metaphor in *It Just Came Out* becomes clearer. Even the title is, of course, a pun on ejaculation and used pointedly in relation to Michael's racist comment.

LISA: Then how do you explain that wet dream that time?

MICHAEL: I can't explain it. It just-

LISA: Came out? Like what you said to that woman? (17)

Nor is it surprising that one of the problems with Michael and Lisa's marriage is that it is barren and sexless. After the upset and challenges of confronting their racist demons, they are released from their separateness and resume a passionate relationship, albeit with a gently comic twist from O'Reilly to rescue it from sentimentality.

LISA: I'm sorry... Would you like a blow-job?

MICHAEL: (Laughs with surprise.) What?

LISA: It's the least you deserve.

MICHAEL: Let's just hold each other for a moment. (39)

To summarise, this analysis has, to a certain extent, followed Bhabha's delineation of the strategies of racist stereotypical knowledge in charting Michael and Lisa's relationships with Ally and Jules. Bhaba describes the psycho-social currents of racism as,

an ambivalent text of projection and introjections, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, over-determination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse. (1994: 117)

What is interesting about O'Reilly's play is the specific attention he focuses on the fetishistic association between racist stereotypes and sexual desire, a powerful fascination which in many of the other plays in this study is indulged but also denied. As the fetish "allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs, one official and one secret, one archaic and one progressive" (ibid, 115), of wanting one thing and its opposite, it is a problematically ambivalent representational device when used in the context of political theatre, as has been shown. With his typical fondness for word play, Bhabha reminds us how the colonised, the marginalised, the displaced, the diasporic are "overlooked" in our society, with the double meaning of under surveillance and ignored/disavowed, and at the same time "overdetermined – psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic" (ibid: 339). *It Just Came Out* is a play concerned with exposing the alibi of voyeuristic desire in its frank and disarming engagement with the trope, shining a light on what is 'overlooked' in the representation of interracial romance.

3.2 Voyage of No Return: Colonisation and the Desiring Machine

In order to explain the role of collective fantasy in economic expansion and dominance, Robert Young, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their ground breaking *Anti-Œdipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2004), figures colonialism as a "desiring machine",

(that) with its unlimited appetite for territorial expansion, for 'endless growth and self reproduction', for making connections and disjunctions, continuously forced disparate territories, histories and people to be thrust together like foreign bodies in the night. (Young, 1990, 98)

Their argument is that the flow of desire, or the 'desiring machine' as they refer to it in their desubjectified model, has been repressed in our society through the Œdipus complex, which contrary to Freud is not a normal period of human psychic development, but rather the primary means of ideological repression under capitalism. Thus they refuse to differentiate, again contrary to much psychoanalysis, between the production of desire on an individual psychic level and social production in the general sense: "The social field is immediately invested by desire,... it is the historically determined product of desire" (2004: 28-29). Brian Campbell in his play *Voyage of No Return* likewise thrusts together the disparate histories of two subjugated peoples, two time frames and two very different 'love' stories, to make his point about the persistence and interconnectedness of racist and sexist discourses and the actual, material conditions of exploitation. It is a daring and timely play on many levels, in its condemnation of contemporary racism in Northern Ireland, in the parallels it draws between historical colonialism and modern capitalist manipulation and plundering, and particularly potent in its framing of Irish Catholics as both abusers and victims of colonialism in the explicitly

nationalist¹⁰⁰ context of DubbelJoint Theatre Company¹⁰¹, the West Belfast Festival¹⁰² and Brian Campbell himself.¹⁰³ Thus, ambivalence is once more a key term in the analysis of this play. Despite the seemingly simple metaphorical structure of alternating parallel narratives, this play utilises the phantasmatic links between interracial sexual desire and racist dominance to explode notions of Irish identity and authenticity. However, Campbell crucially avoids allowing the brutalisation of the two black women to merely voyeuristically service the identity struggles of the Irish men. Through both Briget, the rebellious slave, and Clarrisa, the Third World native and refugee, Campbell attempts not only to allow the history of the subaltern and the suppressed voice of the Other to be expressed, he is also exploring in an explicitly political way the subjective experience of colonisation and dominance, for victims and perpetrators alike.

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¹⁰⁰ In Northern Ireland, 'republican' or 'nationalist' refers to a political affiliation with those who advocate for an Ireland united North and South and governed independently of the United Kingdom as a Republic, as opposed to 'unionist' or 'loyalist' organisations who seek to keep Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom.

DubbelJoint was founded in 1991 by Pam Brighton, Marie Jones and Mark Lambert. Its name derives from Dub(lin), Bel(fast) and Joint, which is indicative of its nationalist political agenda and of its determination to produce theatre that has appeal throughout the island of Ireland. This prolific and award-winning theatre company has become internationally famous for the comedies of Marie Jones, particularly *Stones in his Pocket* and *Women on the Verge of HRT*, but is more well-known in Ireland for its provocative exploration of cultural identity, sectarianism and the history of the Troubles. Recent plays on the peace process, policing and the hunger strikes have been particularly controversial.

¹⁰² Féile an Phobaoil (The West Belfast Festival) was started in 1988 as a positive celebration of the Catholic community in West Belfast and as a counter-balance to the often violent sectarian conflicts precipitated by the summer Loyalist marching season.

DubbelJoint have produced all four of Brian Campbell's plays to considerable acclaim. Apart from *Voyage of No Return*, these include *Des* (2000) about the work of radical priest Des Wilson in West Belfast, and two plays written with Laurence McKeown, *The Laughter of our Children* (2001), a drama about the 1981 hunger strikes and *A Cold House* (2003), which explored issues to do with the peace process. In 1986 Campbell was sentenced to 15 years in Long Kesh Prison for membership of the IRA and possession of explosives but was released early in 1992 as part of the peace process. While in prison, he was the founding editor of *An Glor Gafa* (The Captive Voice), a magazine of prisoners writings and, after his release, editor of the republican newspaper *An Phoblacht* (The Republic). He also collaborated on a book about the hunger strikes and wrote for radio. He had been working on a new play for DubbelJoint when he died of a heart attack on 5 October 2005, aged 45.

The play begins with Irishman Gerard O'Neill's attempt to 'chat-up'

Montserratian Clarrisa Sweeney, with the connection between their nations and cultures made specific for the audience. Called the 'Emerald Isle' of the Caribbean, Montserrat is the only other country to celebrate St Patrick's Day as a public holiday, complete with children dressed as leprechauns. The people and the places have Irish names and the language and idioms of the people bear vestiges of Gaelic, just as "red hair and freckles" amongst their Caribbean descendents are the result of atavistic genetics. "We're Irish too - the black Irish," explains Clarrisa. Even the geography recalls Ireland and its history, according to Gerard:

Down there, right? Poor Irish farmers, religious persecution, that's Connacht... The English and the Anglo-Irish on their big estates, up there, right? That's Kildare or Meath. The capital, Plymouth, that's Dublin, where all the drink and debauchery is, there. And up there, the north, where it's windy, barren and miserable, that's Ulster. That's where I live. So there you are, Ireland, Montserrat, so alike, if you forget about the slavery, and the big mountain in the middle, and the beautiful weather and the hurricanes. And that one's a hundred times bigger than the other...The marketing man's a genius. (14)

By invoking the subaltern status of Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland and conflating

Black and Irish human rights movements, a familiar notion in popular Irish culture as has

been shown and also a feature of nationalist rhetoric, Gerard hopes to find a camaraderie
that might aid his seduction of Clarrisa:

GERARD: Right on, sister. We're not going to the back of the bus. We shall overcome. Yes, sir. Think about it. Yourselves, ourselves. Niggas and Taigs With Attitude.

He puts his arm around her shoulders. She is smiling but she stiffens and he withdraws it. It happened so quickly it could pass for a comradely hug, a 'me and you are so alike' kind of hug. (17)

With his colleagues from Northern Ireland Tourism, Gerard is in Montserrat to offer the local people advice about marketing this 'Ireland in Paradise' to American tourists, and

¹⁰⁴ Brian Campbell, *Voyage of No Return*, unpublished script, p. 3. While the play is unpublished, the manuscript was given to the Linen Hall Library in Belfast by his widow. All subsequent citations are from that script and are referred to by page number.

"leprechauns, green beer and shamrocks and all that" (3) are to be the hook. For the local people of Montserrat, however, Patrick is a slave saint and March 17 commemorates a failed slave rebellion. In the first of many betrayals, when Clarrisa asks that the African traditions and slave heritage remain part of the marketed celebrations, Gerard fails to advocate for her "African thing" (32).

In the parallel story, the relationship between former indentured servant, Alphonsis Daly, and his slave woman, Bridget, further exposes the incongruity between Black and Irish identity in a colonial context. Railing both against the English landowners as lazy, lascivious and prejudiced against him and the African workers, who he views as work-shy, untrustworthy and dangerous, Daly exemplifies what Robbie McVeigh and Ronit Lentin term the "subordinate privilege of Irishness" (2002:17). They argue that the specificity of Irish racism has been structured by the positioning of Irishness along colonial hierarchies of race and ethnicity in that, while Irish people have often benefited from their role within the British Empire, "they have also remained clearly subordinate within the imperial chain" (ibid). Excluded from access to wealth and power because of his racial identity, Daly plots to use information obtained from the slave Bridget, his "woman" (39), to move up the hierarchy by purchasing an English sugar plantation. Bridget is special to Daly, however, for more than just her espionage skills. When she is discovered plotting revolution with the other slaves, he is at great pains to keep her from English justice because, "I'd never find the likes of ya, Bridget" (45). Alternatively affectionate and brutal with her, Daly's ambivalence is indicative of the familiar fear/desire pendulum of a Hegelian relationship. By raping and beating Bridget into submission, Daly reinforces his mastery and domination, his sadism fueled,

Campbell suggests, by frustration and fury at his own forced submission to the English. Indeed Daly entertains the fantasy of returning triumphant to Galway with both wealth and Bridget, his exotic souvenir, proof of his success. "He-he, that would turn their heads. Me back with a darkie woman trailin' beside me. Would ya like that, Bridget? Round Eyre Square with you be me side and me buyin' a big farm a land" (31).

The character of Bridget, however, does not function simply as a Hegelian slave mirror in which Daly can recognise his mastery. Campbell, whose research for the play focused on the indigenous resistance to colonialism, ¹⁰⁵ is careful to emphasise Bridget's agency and her defiance of Daly, despite being doubly constrained by her race and gender. Rather than passively pursuing Daly's agenda as his eyes and ears, there are hints that Bridget is instead a go-between for the slaves plotting revolution. Although forced to submit to Daly sexually, she is steadfastly resistant, even going so far as to hint of a sexual preference for her African peers, describing Ready-man as "a mannish man" (22) and later, "Ready-man is a firmer man than you", because he refused to recant rebellion when tortured by the English, while Daly has just pledged allegiance and changed his religion in order to buy the sugar plantation (62). In response to Daly's offer to take her to Galway, she laughs, "Why go to Galway? Why not come to Africa with me?" (40). Despite threats of extreme violence, Bridget does not betray her comrades or their plans, preferring death to continued enslavement: "Sometimes fire is good. Sometimes death is good. Better finished than last a lifetime" (40). Finally when all is lost, she makes the last

¹⁰⁵ Brian Campbell's research was facilitated by Dr. Jonathon Skinner from Queen's University, Belfast, and author of *Before the Volcano: Reverberations of Identity on Montserrat* (2004). Dr Skinner discusses his process with Campbell in his article 'The 'PB' and the aestheticization of violence in Northern Ireland' (2008:403-414).

threat she is capable of executing: "I'll haunt you... Our spirits will be free and we will haunt you all. You'll wish we had risen up and killed you all" (55).

Most courageously, Bridget challenges Daly on his relative positioning as a racialised Irishman to hers as an African slave. He is so enraged he almost beats her to death and calls her an animal, needing to drag her further beneath him as he is forced to recall his own 'slave' status.

BRIDGET: You told me this. You were beaten. Many were sick. Many died.

"We were the white niggers, no better," you say. White niggers. White niggers... Can you remember back in that time? Can you remember sitting on that terrible ship? Can you remember the man beating you?

man beating you? ...

He raises the whip and strikes her.

DALY: Dún é!

BRIDGET: Always hungry. Always afraid.

He strikes her several times in a rage...

DALY: You monkey! You animal!

He strikes her several times and stands breathing heavily.

BRIDGET: White niggers. We will rise up against the English, you say...

DALY: Who was with ya?

BRIDGET: The English will feel pain (she imitates him) 'as sure as I have

the marks of their whips on my back.'

DALY: Damn you! You animal! You beast! You beast!

He beats her until he falls, exhausted. (47)

Bridget does not endanger herself simply to humiliate Daly. She is making the connection between the oppression of the Irish and the Africans in an attempt to engender identification and empathy for their cause. Realising that Bridget had hoped "That the black man could rise up and the Irishman would be beside him", Daly is full of scorn, for that would be "goin' against the natural order of things" (54). The play ends on St Patrick's Day, 1768, with Daly festooned in "green cocked hat", heading off to view the public hanging of the African leaders of the rebellion. He is full of mockery for Bridget's superstitions and futile resistance, "makin' spells for an end to slavery." The last line of

the play makes clear the premise of the play, that racism and slavery are part of colonial and capitalist discourse, in that both articulate the structures that enable the asymmetrical extraction of surplus and the execution of power. An end to slavery? "Hah! Not while there's money to be made. Not while there's money to be made, Bridget." (63)

Gerard and Clarrisa's relationship is, likewise, a metaphor for the paternalistic discourses that figure Western capitalism as the savior of a developing nation's economy, while actually, Campbell's play argues, enabling the maximum extraction of profit for imperial masters. While it begins as a genuine love story, albeit one infused with exoticism, as the play draws to a close it becomes apparent that Clarrisa's well-being has been sacrificed to Gerard's ambition and that he is determined to manipulate her into accepting his plans to exploit Montserrat through mass industrialised tourism. Although Clarrisa is initially wary of Gerard's advances, she is not portrayed as either particularly inexperienced, prudish or overly impressed with the idea of dating a white man. Gerard asks, "What sort of fellas do you go out with?" and she answers, "Black fellas" (19). Nevertheless, the attraction between them is based on mutual fascination with each other's strangeness. She is captivated by the "sophistication" and culture of places like London, Barcelona and Paris, "the theatre and the cinema, walking in the parks, looking in the shops, cafes on the street" (26). He is delighted when she teases him with the popular Montserratian dish of "mountain chicken"; "You eat frogs! You savages!" (30). After Gerard returns to Belfast, their holiday romance continues by email until most of the island of Montserrat is devastated by a catastrophic volcanic eruption. 106 Clarrisa and

¹⁰⁶ The events regarding the volcanic eruption in Montserrat are historical. On 18 July 1995 the Chances Peak volcano erupted for the first time in 350 years and thousands were evacuated. Then, after months of activity, on 25 June 1997 Soufriere Hills volcano erupted and destroyed two thirds of the island. Plymouth

her family lose everything and become refugees in London. Eventually Clarrisa and Gerard are married and return to live in Belfast.

While at first they are happy together, from the beginning of Act Two when the young couple return to Montserrat to complete a tourism deal with American financial partners, it is obvious that living in Belfast has not been the sophisticated European experience that Clarrisa had imagined. She feels abandoned by Gerard, and begins to feel like "a black trophy wife... a lifestyle accessory" (58). Moreover, Clarrisa has been the victim of repeated racist abuse and ill-treatment. She has been spat at, taunted and cursed at, and has had excrement put through her letterbox. Most devastatingly, when alone at the hospital because Gerard is too busy to accompany her, she experiences the heartbreak of miscarriage surrounded by hostility, because "they think, look at her, coming here so her baby can be an Irish citizen" (43). Gerard, desperate now to make her happy, suggests they move out of Belfast, with the money they will make in the tourism deal they can buy a bigger house in a better neighbourhood, but Clarrisa believes that racism is endemic and systematic in Northern Ireland, part of the culture after generations of conflict and that there can be no escape from it.

In the context of the Northern Irish audience for whom this play was written, it is important to stress that this dramatic reflection is very coherent with the experiences of some ethnic minorities living in Northern Ireland, particularly Belfast, which has come to

the capital was destroyed in August of that year and the island became virtually uninhabitable. For a timeline of events, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/3666590.stm, accessed 21 December 2009; or for a more anthropological perspective see Jonathon Skinner, *Before the Volcano: Reverberations of Identity on Montserrat* (Kingston, Jamaica: Arawak Publications, 2004).

be regularly and often uncritically referred to as "the race-hate capital of Europe." 107 While this is hyperbolic and there are many examples of fraught race relations throughout Europe, racism is a significant and growing problem in Northern Ireland and is strongly influenced by sectarianism. For insight into attitudes towards race in the wider Northern Ireland community, Neil Jarman from the Institute for Conflict Research in Belfast has conducted some revealing studies. In the mid 1990s only one in ten people in Northern Ireland described themselves as prejudiced. From 2007 onwards, one in three said they were "very" or "a little prejudiced". Between 90 and 93 percent of respondents thought there was "a lot" or "a little" prejudice against minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. Whilst Protestants acknowledge themselves most prejudiced at 41 percent from the 2008 survey, a significant 23 percent of Catholics and 24 percent of those of no religion have similar attitudes. Most concerningly, up to 15 percent of those who admitted being prejudiced also said that they would act on those prejudices. In order to establish tolerance to integration, respondents were asked whether they would be prepared to accept particular ethnic or religious groups as near residents, friends or inlaws. Significant resistance to integration was revealed, especially against Muslims and Travellers, with only around one in two willing to accept either a Muslim or Traveller as a relative by marriage, and just 41 percent would tolerate a Traveller neighbour (Jarman, 2009: 5). Considering the relatively low minority ethnic population, there is a very high and increasing incidence of racist crime in Northern Ireland revealed in studies which compare race hate occurrences in the British Isles, with Northern Ireland holding the UK record for the highest number of racist attacks (ibid: 2). There are various sociological

¹⁰⁷ For example see Angelique Chrisafis, 'Racist war of the loyalist street gangs', *The Guardian*, Saturday 10 January, 2004; http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/jan/10/northernireland.race; accessed 12 December, 2009; 'Racism in Northern Ireland', a report for BBC News, published online 17 June, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/nothern_ireland/8104978.stm; accessed 12 December, 2009; Fionola Meredith, 'An easy target for the hate mobs', *Irish Times* (2009: 39).

factors influencing this rise. Firstly, 'peace', economic growth and prosperity have resulted in increased numbers of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers moving into the province. Secondly, migrants generally move into areas with cheaper housing stock, which in Belfast is disproportionately in loyalist working-class areas. This is because nationalist working-class areas, such as in West Belfast where DubbelJoint's audience are predominantly from, are overcrowded already due to loyalist pogroms during the Troubles to enforce segregation, whilst the unionist working-class areas have been depleted as a result of deindustrialisation (McVeigh et al, 2007: 12).

Finally, there is the issue of sectarianism and segregation, rigidly enforced in every aspect of life in Northern Ireland, from which hospital people are born in, where they live, work, socialise, even where they are buried, and enshrined in the uniquely undemocratic parliamentary system. It is a political position circumscribed in the very foundation of the Northern Ireland state as "the largest possible area within which the Protestants could expect to maintain a safe majority" (Beckett quoted in McVeigh et al, ibid: 5), and many loyalist communities retain conservative, protectionist instincts that oppose anything which may threaten their majority. Whilst traditionally it was the Catholic community that bore the brunt of sectarian discrimination, ethnic minorities are now seen as a visible threat to segregation and unionist dominance. South Belfast, where almost a quarter of racist incidents in Northern Ireland take place (Jarman, 2009: 2), has some areas of gentrification and includes the university and hospital, but it also has unionist communities such as the Village, largely controlled by two paramilitary organisations, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association

(UDA), both of whom have links with British fascists. ¹⁰⁸ All three of these organisations, along with relatively unorganised groups of "local thugs", have been implicated in orchestrated "ethnic-cleansing" attacks on both Catholic and ethnic minority residents and businesses in the area, ¹⁰⁹ the most recent high profile incident leading to over 100 ethnic Roma from Romania being evacuated from their homes in June 2009 after rioting, house attacks and a terror campaign against them. ¹¹⁰ Thus, if former IRA man Brian Campbell, DubbelJoint and the West Belfast Festival, embedded as they are in the racialised nationalist community, had chosen to portray the "ugly minds" of loyalism ¹¹¹ as the source of racism in Northern Ireland, they would seem to have evidence enough for this argument. It is significant and quite radical that despite a prevailing 'victim mentality' in some nationalist rhetoric, Campbell's play makes no attempt to shift responsibility for either sectarianism or racism from his own community. On the contrary, although a rising middle-class, ambitious, educated "Taig with attitude" (4), Gerard is shown to be a product of his racist environment, unable either to empathise with his wife's experiences of abuse or to see the people of Montserrat as more than just a potential source of profit.

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¹⁰⁸ For a very interesting account of the relationship between unionism, paramilitary organisations, British fascist groups and race hate crime see Bill Rolston, 'Legacy of intolerance: racism and Unionism in South Belfast', *IRR News*, 10 February 2004, http://www.irr.org.uk/2004/february/ak000008.html; accessed 12 December 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Both "local thugs" and "ethnic cleansing" are terms used in Angelique Chisafis (2004), 'Racist war of the loyalist street gangs', which documents racist graffiti, attacks on the homes and death threats to Catholic students, dozens of attacks on Chinese people and vandalism of their businesses when they refuse to pay protection money, a plank hurled through the front window of a eight months pregnant Pakistani woman who had only moved in 12 hours earlier, attacks on Ugandans, Romanians and Zimbabwians;http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/jan/10/northernireland.race; accessed 12 December, 2009.

¹¹⁰ The terrorisation of the Romanians has been widely reported. See 'Racism in Northern Ireland', a report for BBC News, op.cit. and Fionola Meredith (2009: 39), 'An easy target for the hate mobs', and David Sharrock, 'Romanians hit by racist attacks in Northern Ireland 'want to go home', *The Times*, 18 June, 2009, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article6521774.ece, accessed 12 December, 2009.
¹¹¹ Martin McGuinness' description of the loyalist attackers of the Romanians in the 2009 incident. See Fionola Meridith, ibid.

Campbell's portrayal of Clarrisa, on the other hand, seeks to personalise for his audience the experiences of those who do not find refuge or welcome in Belfast, those who appear in the police incident reports and stories in the media. Although technically a migrant, what Clarrisa experiences is the psychic homelessness of the refugee, with her real home lost, buried under larva and ash. No longer financially independent, separated from her family and her culture, she feels like she has lost her identity, she is "trying to be invisible" (45). Fanon identifies this internalised racism and loss of self-confidence as a desire "to turn white or disappear" (1986: 100). In the throes of an argument, she asks Gerard, "Why do you hate me?" and he is puzzled because he believes he loves her (59). It does, indeed, seem to be a non sequitur, but what she is referring to is the wider relationship between the developed West and the underdeveloped world, between Fortress Europe and its refugees and between modern imperialists and their native others. For in Act Two Gerard has brought Clarrisa back to her ravaged homeland in order to complete the arrangements for a new luxury resort, complete with a hurricane-proof bunker from which to watch the devastation nature wrecks upon the local villages. He needs her signature on the investment documents and has therefore been lying to her about the nature of the deal. Rather than real investment in local infrastructure and jobs, as she believed it would be, the resort is entirely profit driven and exploitative. For Clarrisa it represents a return to slavery and it is the final confirmation that she and Gerard are from different worlds and cannot be reconciled.

This is my island. This is where history set me down to live. You in Ireland. Me in Mons'rat. I came from slaves. From Africa. Slaves who broke their backs in these hills. Sugar and cotton and indigo... And now you tell me that to develop the island we must make ourselves strangers in our own land. We must return to being the tillers of the soil and the carriers of water, this time for a minimum wage. (52)

Clarrisa refuses to countenance Gerard's plans because she recognises that the reduction of everything, including the suffering of her people, to the abstract value of money ensures the "deterritorialization" of the people of Montserrat, to use the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari. They describe the operations of capitalism as a territorial writing machine in terms that neatly encapsulate the violent occupation of territory and the deculturation and reinscription of indigenous society by both colonisation and its engine, capitalism.

There is the twofold movement of decoding or deterritorializing flows on the one hand, and their violent and artificial reterritorialization on the other. The more the capitalist machine deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatizing flows in order to extract surplus values from them, the more its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their upmost to reterritorialize, absorbing in the process larger and larger share of surplus value. (2004: 34-35)

The people of Montserrat have been deterritorialized and their society dissolved in recent times by natural disaster rather than by conquest, but the manipulation of that disaster to ensure the transference of their land and resources to the service of globalised capitalist industries, in the form of foreign owned mass tourism projects in this case, requires their reinsciption as people dependent upon and subservient to the needs of an occupying power rather than partners in enterprise. While aware enough of Clarrisa's opinions to try to hide the real nature of the deal from her, Gerard is also genuinely unable to understand her objection when there is so much money to be made. She is "emotional... not rational" (50), she needs to "get real. This is the real world" (49). This insistence on rationality is part of the myth of progress so integral to the authorising discourse of capitalism which, as Homi Bhabha puts it, "normalizes its own history of expansion and exploitation by inscribing the other in a fixed hierarchy of civil progress." However, the control that 'rational' discourse maintains cannot be sustained, Bhabha goes on to argue,

"once the colonial supplementary, or excess of their address is revealed" (1994: 136).

Despite his mendacity, for an audience from the developed world, Gerard is a sympathetic character and his argument makes rational sense in that investment of any kind in such a devastated country must be positive. However, Campbell uses the character of Clarrisa to reveal the ambivalence or gap "between the civil address and its colonial signification" (ibid: 138), whereby the multi-national companies figure as paternalistic saviour and rapacious exploiter, "the father and the oppressor" as described by Bhabha (ibid: 136), leaving the local people inscribed as children and servants.

While the end of the Daly and Bridget scenes reminds the audience that slavery is always with us, Campbell imagines at the end of Clarrisa and Gerard's story that the colonised might one day be free. As she walks away from him along the edge of the volcano, Clarrisa says, "And to think I went with you because I was attracted to your world - I thought I needed your world. I thought I needed you" (62). Clarrisa's rejection of Gerard and his world is an image of decolonisation in tune with Frantz Fanon's revolutionary manifesto *The Wretched of the Earth*, which also rejects the myth of Western progress and the concomitant values of Western humanism, paradoxically used as justification for the dehumanisation of the colonised native. His advice to Clarrisa might be:

Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe... today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind. (1967: 251)

What is unique about *Voyage of No Return*, especially in the context of most of the other plays examined in this work, is that Campbell has not written an 'anti-racist play' as such

Montserrat. He has rather attempted to reposition and refigure two inter-racial love stories that an audience might think they know so as to demonstrate the hold colonial thought still has over modern systems of knowledge and notions of identity. Like all of the plays in this study, *Voyage of No Return* is addressed to an Irish audience and is about Irish identity in a post-colonial context, but contrary to what might be expected from the nationalist context of the production, the English are peripheral figures. This play is about decolonisation, but it declines to figure the Irish as the subordinate, victimised products of British colonial aggression. Instead, Campbell's juxtapositioning of past and present stories, a familiar post-colonial device, focuses attention on the Irish as ambivalent, liminal, "between two worlds" and "between two racisms" (McVeigh, 1997: 5) and challenges his audience to accept their privilege as well as their subordination.

3.3 The Buddhist of Castleknock, Done Up Like a Kipper, Hurl:
Politics and the Theatre of Clown - Stereotypes, Archetypes and 'Stage'
types

What has been illustrated in this thesis so far is the authorising power of stereotype for racist discourse. In order to rationalise discrimination, it is necessary to construct a fixed and totalising representation of a particular racial group as inherently inferior and degenerate: Africans are primitive, Jews avaricious, the Irish are stupid and Travellers dishonest. However, the stereotype operates in what Bhaba refers to as a "regime of truth" (1994: 96). In order to be productive, it must be plausible and, thus, the

constructed nature of the stereotype or myth becomes invisible. The theatre however, frames myth in a quite particular way. Roland Barthes in an article entitled *Theatre and* Signification, writes that "the theatrical sign is not self-determined" (1979: 29); Umberto Eco on the same theme describes it as "a sign of a sign" (177: 111). Thus archetypical characters and narratives are everywhere in drama, pivotal to the decoding of meaning in the theatrical gesture, yet also manifestly constructed, partial and exaggerated and therefore, to an extent, revealed to be unreal. Indeed, very often in political theatre and parody, archetypes, 'stage types' or stereotypes are used to provoke questioning in the audience of the very naturalness and inevitability of societal myths, becoming what Berthold Brecht conceptualised as Gestus. While this thesis is essentially about the representation of racially-other characters in contemporary Irish theatre, in these three plays it is the Irish who have been reduced to 'stage types' in various guises.

To a certain extent Jim O'Hanlon's *The Buddhist of Castleknock* and Ken Harmon's Done Up Like a Kipper present tangential angles on this thesis, in that the black girlfriend character in The Buddhist of Castleknock is a British visitor to Ireland rather than a migrant, while the 'black' boyfriend character in Harmon's play was born and bred in Cork and, in the 2002 Peacock production, was not even played by a black actor. 112 Both plays thereby avoid the more complex social issues associated with multiculturalism and distil the question of racism down to whether or not an Irish family

¹¹² The character of Nathan was played by the Caucasian actor Chris Kelly. The character proved difficult to cast as he is repeatedly described as "black" but with a strong Cork accent. In the published version of the script, the character is described as "solid, black, with a strong Tallaght accent," with Tallaght being a low socio-economic suburb of Dublin. Ken Harmon, Done Up Like a Kipper, Abbey Theatre Playscripts Series (London: Nick Hern Books Ltd, 2002), p. 2. All subsequent references are to this edition. Colm Tobín, panellist on the review program The View for RTE 1, made the obvious comment, although tentatively: "Did anyone else notice that the black guy wasn't black? Or was it just me?" "He was 'tanned'" replied fellow panellist Paul Feaney in agreement, 15 October, 2002.

can tolerate a racially-other in-law. Multiculturalism, integration and 'race' are, therefore, diversions or alibis for what is truly at issue for the characters in these plays. These plays are about Irish people either resisting or embracing the 'new' Ireland and the disorienting societal transformations of the Celtic Tiger. The permeation of society generally and the Irish family specifically by people of different races, cultures and religions has become merely a signifier, amongst a plethora of other markers in each play, of that change. Although the interruption of Ireland's supposed homogeneity by recent migration is a legitimate source of drama, with Dublin theatre in 2002 producing Roddy Doyle's *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner*, Harmon's *Done Up Like a Kipper* and O'Hanlon's *The Buddhist of Castleknock*, all of whom feature the introduction of a son or daughter's black partner into an Irish family as a catalyst for the release of their internal tensions and an exposure of wider social prejudice, it is easy to sympathise with the impatience of reviewers like Emer O'Kelly in the *Sunday Independent* (2002: 19). Referring to O'Hanlon's play she writes,

It uses the gimmick that is already tiresomely ubiquitous in local drama, the intrusion of a black partner... to point up social attitudes. That writers feel the need to use it so frequently, and that it provides a frisson of identification with its 'disturbing' message, is an appalling indictment of our society.

That drama which aspires to "authenticity" and attempts to "articulate the consciousness of the nation," as these plays do, seem so riveted to one metaphor for integration is revealing. Irish society by 2002 had become noticeably more diverse at every level, in neighbourhoods, schools, churches and social clubs, in commerce and the

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¹¹³ Much is made in publicity for *Done Up Like a Kipper* of Ken Harmon being "born and bred in working class Dublin" (Brennan, 2002b: 16). See also Roberta Gray (2002a: 6), who writes of the language that it is "so recognisably everyday... in a post-show discussion, Harmon noted that he made a rule for himself not to use any word or phrase that he'd never heard himself on the streets" Authenticity was less of an issue for *The Buddhist of Castleknock*, but it was described by Roberta Gray (2002b) as "very true to life".

114 Patrick Brennan writing about *Done Up Like a Kipper* as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, 'Truth, lies and consequences' (2002b); on a similar theme Roberta Gray writes audiences will "be gently nudged into looking at the prejudices of Irish society" by *The Buddhist of Castleknock* (2002b).

professions, in every public place and even in the story lines on television soap operas.

As has been argued previously, however, the story of racial intermixture has a primitive appeal. It conjures the fear and fascination of miscegenation associated primarily with colonial racism, but evident in contemporary sexual stereotypes and, in a time of uncertainty about cultural identity, it provides a simple form of self-definition in demarcation against the limits of others.

Thus, *The Buddhist of Castleknock* is a play about the identity of those who seem most sure of their place in Irish society, the suburban middle-class. As the play nears its climax, John, the middle son with a black girlfriend called Rai, constructs a fable about "a normal, run-of-the-mill, middle-class family". "Like ourselves!" interjects the boorish, racist Uncle, "- from Castleknock, say," elucidates John for those audience members who were not paying attention. It is a story about "an outsider, an interloper, a queer and dangerous influence" (132), he explains, who ruins the "Castles from Castleknock's" Christmas because "she wasn't like them" (131). While new prosperity, holidays abroad, integration into a more globalised economy and the fading influence of the Catholic church may have obscured more conventional markers of Irishness, Rai's arrival at their Christmas table clarifies for the Sullivans of Castleknock that they are not Buddhist, not British and not black. The story opens with Eddie Sullivan, the mother, desperately trying to hold a traditional Christmas with all the trimmings together. She wants "everything to be... perfect" (5), but the tide of change is against her. Apart from John's conversion and his relationship with Rai, O'Hanlon has charged the play with myriad

¹¹⁵ Jim O'Hanlon, *The Buddhist of Castleknock* (Dublin: New Island, 2007), p. 128. All subsequent citations are form this edition and are referred to by page number. Castleknock is a gentrified, expensive suburb of Dublin near the Phoenix Park.

Irish social issues to further threaten Eddie's equilibrium: Sean, the father, has cancer and is concealing it from the children, Tara, the sister, has a broken marriage and is losing custody of her child because of her alcoholism, DJ, the youngest, is a resentful, uncooperative teenager, obsessed with materialism, John is, of course, an emigrant, and, finally, the play hints at but does not pursue the eldest son, Edward's, homosexuality. O'Hanlon's writing credits include work on television serials and soap operas such as *Bad Girls* and *Coronation Street*, leading many reviewers to criticise the play for its resemblance to soap, specifically in the density of issues. For example, Ellen Cranitch on *The View* argued that the play was written assuming an audience had more 'episodes' to find out about each character's problems. Certainly the beginning of the play dutifully follows the formula of the family Christmas gone wrong, familiar from television programmes of the season. For example, when every character who enters in the first scene discusses the lean on the Christmas tree, much of the audience must surely anticipate its inevitable collapse and obvious metaphoric function as the family celebrations disintegrate in acrimony.

However, after the interval the play has a marked change in tone, becoming more serious and political. Rai, who has repeatedly been held responsible for "ruining Christmas" (93), decides to go for a walk to allow the family some space to recover from all the upsets. Eighteen hours later she has still not come back. Although John is naturally anxious, Eddie is able to persuade him to stay and entertain his uncle Jimmy and

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When Sean and Tara are joking that "Rai is a fella", the stage directions suggest that Tara "adopts a pose and a camp, lispy voice. Daddy, this is my extra special friend Rai – Rai, my pater Sean!" In response, "they all laugh raucously, except Edward" (12).

¹¹⁷ Cranitch was a panellist on *The View* for RTE 1, 12 November, 2002; http://www.rte.ie/arts/2002/1114/buddhist.html; accessed 12 January 2010.

aunt Kathleen on their traditional St Steven's Day visit. While it could be argued that many of the characters in this play are broadly types and specifically Irish types - the fussy, controlling Mammy, the long-suffering, phlegmatic Dad, the unmanageable, loudmouthed adolescent, the bitter alcoholic daughter and failed mother - Uncle Jimmy is signalled as a buffoon stage Irishman from his entrance, singing "Jingle bell, Santa smells/Robin flew away/Kojak lost his lollipop/And called the IRA – hey!" (118). Although twice referred to as a bigot (35, 132), there is no real evidence initially that he is anything other than inappropriately jovial, christening John "the Buddhist of Castleknock" (123). In fact he is soon prevailed upon for his party piece, a long, convoluted 'Irish' joke about a stupid Paddy and the Pope, which every character on stage has heard before, as have, conceivably, many in the audience. John responds with his illhumoured, and again long, occupying four pages of playscript (128-132), fable of the intolerant Castle family of Castleknock. Jimmy then replies, in what has come to be an odd polemic duel, with four intense verses of a nationalist poem, For What Died the Sons of Rósín? After this recital John quietly says, "I'm going out to look for Rai" (135). While much else in this play is signalled so clearly and follows dramatic formulas so closely, this nationalist poem is an obscure choice for the climax of the play and difficult to interpret. While racism is often disguised in the rhetoric of patriotism, it is entirely tangential to the conflicts of this play. Rather than working through the issues raised, the family's intolerance to Rai's race and religion, O'Hanlon has instead staged a stand-off between Uncle Jimmy, representing traditional Ireland with its appropriation of 'anti-Irish' jokes and misplaced nationalist lyricism, and John as modern Ireland, selfimportant and disdainful.

Meanwhile Rai has been attacked by young racist thugs and beaten unconscious. As has been previously discussed with regard to *Asylum! Asylum!*, Rai's role as sacrifice forces the Sullivans into reconciliation with each other and a guilty acceptance of their own role in her persecution. A palatable ending is provided by Rai's unusual capacity for forgiveness, perhaps as a result of her Buddhism, allowing everyone in the family to begin to heal and Sean to make the dubious prediction that "maybe we'll look back on this as our best Christmas ever" (155). However, whatever the optimistic Sean means by that remark, Rai will certainly be in no hurry to return. The Sullivans of Castleknock have spectacularly failed the diversity challenges of 'new' Ireland this Christmas and, despite replacing their tree angel with Kuan Lin, "a sort of Buddhist Mary" (150), they return to their lives and troubles largely unchanged. There is no place for black, British, Buddhist Rai in this version of Ireland or even for John, now so foreign, and they hurry to catch their plane home.

In *Done Up Like a Kipper*, Nathan, the 'black' boyfriend's, ethnicity is even less of an issue. It is more misdirection than anything, in that it primarily functions as a lengthy set up for a well-worn joke, whereby his being a "culchie" from Cork turns out to be the problem for his potential father-in-law, not his being black (86). ¹¹⁹ It could be argued, therefore, it is a question regarding culture as opposed to race, but it is not serious enough to warrant this. It is actually just an anti-climactic joke that rather undermines the daughter character, Kim, whose concern throughout the play that her father is racist, when he is not, seems ridiculous in retrospect. To feature race as such a prominent issue and

¹¹⁸ Sean suggests Rai will "be glad to see the back" of Ireland and Rai politely replies, "It'll pass. One day. One day I might even want to come back" (145). The implication, however is that it will not be soon. ¹¹⁹ A 'culchie' is a pejorative term from someone from rural Ireland, but it could also refer to anyone who is not from the capital, Dublin. The opposite pejorative is a 'Jackeen', or a 'Jack', for someone from Dublin.

evoke the by now familiar trope of a mixed race relationship, but to not cast a black actor in the role is indicative of a failure to engage with the political significance of this image. This decision is also symptomatic of other dramaturgical choices that deny the audience closure, such as the decision to leave unresolved the main storyline of whether or not the needle-stick injury Gino, the taxi-driver protagonist, has suffered will result in serious infection. It is a strategy which was heavily criticised and resulted in most reviewers declaring the play "unfinished". 120

Apart from the non-issue of the 'black' love-interest, this play, like *The Buddhist of Castleknock*, is issue packed and teeming with references to a changed Ireland. Gino's wife, Dolores, thinks he's having an affair, when it is actually his best-friend Bugsy who is sleeping with "Soo Lin... yer one from the Chinese" (32). His volatile, disdainful son, Eugene, is better educated than him. They mutually terrorise one another, with Eugene taking drugs, wetting the bed, practicing Voodoo and threatening Gino with a switchblade in revenge for being grounded and harassed. His daughter Kim's ex-husband used to beat her, until Gino took a golf club to him, and now she's dating "the invisible man", Nathan (5). Gino spends the play in a comic frenzy of frustration and rage at his life and society, where the new stresses of prosperity meet the old pressures of crime, drug abuse and poverty amongst Ireland's underclasses. This is exemplified by the constant vigilance he

This was certainly the response of all the panellists on *The View*, Paul Freaney, Paddy Woodworth and Colm Tobín, and they laid the blame on the Abbey for allowing the play to be put on in that condition, RTE 1, 15 October, 2002. The Abbey and its quality control, especially as this play was produced for the Dublin Festival, were also a theme of many other reviewers. See also James McMahon, RTE Entertainment, http://www.rte.ie/arts/2002/1011/doneuplikeakipper.html; Kevin Casey on *Rattlebag*, RTE Radio 1, 10 October, 2002; Karina Buckley, *Sunday Times* (2002: 6); Luke Clancy, 'Cast slips on this shabby soap', *Evening Herald* (2002: 28).

must exercise over his taxi to protect it from "the guy from Dalkey". Who parks his Mercedes in the space outside Gino's front door (11, 17), and from "the little tracksuit bastards" (5) who would deface it. His car, incidentally, is also a Mercedes, the same model and year as the man from Dalkey's, his washing-machine is a top of the range Dyson and his friends have just returned from Mexico where they were holidaying while waiting to move into their big new house. Harmon needs to reiterate the characters' wealth, their conspicuous consumption and brand consciousness a product of the boomtime economy, in order to distinguish them from the traditionally poverty-stricken figures from working-class Dublin dramas from which they are fashioned. This world is well-established in popular Irish culture and Harmon's characters are vividly and iconically class identified by their jobs, their gaudy terraced home and especially by their dialogue, liberally embellished with recognisably north Dublin inner-city expressions and profanities.

Done Up Like a Kipper is described in its publicity as a "darkly surreal" acerbic satire of modern Irish life. 122 Apart from the set design by Robert Ballagh, which is festooned with lava lamps and wall-paper from the 1970's and warped slightly into Expressionist angles, there is little in this production that would set it apart from more realist drama and there is no satiric engagement with the political issues to which it refers. Multiculturalism, materialism, Gino's war on those above and below him on the social ladder, family breakdown, all these problems in the play are simply parodic markers of

¹²¹ Dalkey is the most upmarket suburb in Dublin. What is alluded to here is the difficult traffic and parking conditions in Dublin during the Celtic Tiger, which could conceivably see someone from Dalkey parked outside a terrace house in a dubious inner-city area.

This is the description on the back cover of the published playscript, *Done Up Like a Kipper* (Harmon, 2002).

change, just as Ballagh's set design lampoons stasis. The classic defence of stage types and stereotypes is that they are 'true', exaggerated but authentic. Certainly, it was Ken Harmon's authentic voice, found in the wit of the Dublin idiom, that initially made his name for him and contributed to his winning the Stewart Parker award for his previous play, *Wideboy Gospel*. Unfortunately, *Done Up Like a Kipper* was less well received, depicting a caricature of working-class Dublin that many read as "hackneyed and clichéd" (Brennan, 2002b: 16). A crucial aspect to stereotyping is the power ratios between those who produce and consume the images and those represented, and thus context is all important. In the securely bourgeois environment of the National Theatre, this play appears to exploit the accepted antagonism between the classes in Irish society, only made more apparent by the prosperity of the Celtic Tiger years, and reinforces prejudiced stereotypes. Ironically, considering the social role of the National Theatre, this play facilitates identity formation by othering Irish people, defined by their class.

Barrabas... the company was established in 1993 by Veronica Coburn, Raymond Keane and Mikel Murfi and has since produced nearly thirty productions in their trademark 'Theatre of Clown' style, many of which have toured internationally to great success. While all of the productions are imbued with the sensibility of the clown, manifest in a physical, visceral performance style, a playful approach to themes, an emphasis on collaboration with the audience and the creation of magical, imaginative *mise-en-scénes* that blend theatre and spectacle, not all involve the actors performing in red nose clown persona. Barrabas' productions include versions of classics, such as *Cyrano*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*, theatre for young people, site-specific performances and street spectacle and their numerous original works, many of

which are reflective of the specificity and diversity of Irish society. Even those productions which ostensibly present a traditional vision of Ireland, such as the award winning The Whiteheaded Boy (1997), a unique take on the 1916 Abbey play by Lennox Robinson, or 40 Shades of Green(2007), "a musical celebration of all things 'Oirish'", 123 become surprising and interrogative through their interpretation by or interaction with the anarchy of clowns. Barrabas' 2003 production of Hurl by Charlie O'Neill follows these antecedents in that it is both a physical celebration of one of the more iconic aspects of Irish culture, hurling, and an exploration of the diversity of human experience in Irish society. Described as "a hurling fantasia through multicultural Ireland," 124 the play tells the story of the trials, tribulations and ultimate triumph of a multi-racial hurling team in rural Ireland, with witty use of puppetry, miniatures and the fast, furious physical performance Barrabas are renowned for. In the construction of many of the characters and the arc of the story, Hurl follows more realistic theatre paradigms than some of their other more specifically clown productions. Nevertheless, there is a strong clowning influence, evident amongst other things, in the use of types in the portrayal of rural Irish people.

The sport of hurling is itself highly iconic of Irish culture at its most heroic, ancient and unique. In the Guinness advertisements, for example, modern hurlers are portrayed as giants striding over the landscape of Ireland, connotating the mythological beginnings of the game as played by ancient heroes such as Fionn MacCumhaill and Cú Chulainn, described in the legends as literally giants. *Hurl's* director, Raymond Keane, claims that, "Hurling is the most ethnic game imaginable, it could only be from Ireland"

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¹²³ http://www.barabbas.ie/archive-40songs.htm accessed 06 June, 2008.

http://www.barabbas.ie/archive-hurl.htm accessed 06 June, 2008.

(quoted in Gorman, 2003: 13). Going on to describe the play as, "a eulogy to this most majestic and theatrical of sports" (ibid), the decision to portray this hurling team, these 'giants amongst men', as not only multi-ethnic but even multi-gendered, explores how "an Ireland of difference has made a different Ireland" (Lonergan, 2003: 120).

O'Neill's consciously diverse characters challenge many of the stereotypes of 'non-nationals' that are found in racist discourse. The hurling team features a cast of individuals, some native born Irish, others asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants and Irish children of immigrants, all of whom are often conflated in cultural products that deal with this theme into the one 'stranger' figure. It also posits these 'non-native' characters as talented sportsman, which in itself is a welcome change from their usual representation in socially progressive contexts as victims, or as various types of menace in more conservative milieu. In addition, when poignant aspects of the immigrants' lives need to become part of the drama, O'Neill provides devices to disrupt essentialist notions of difference. There is Musa, an ex-child soldier from Sierra Leone, for example, who has instigated the team to combat the boredom of waiting for his application to be processed. He tells of being ordered to perform long sleeve or short sleeve assaults, which is to hack someone's arm off with a blunt machete either above or below the elbow. It is a story most people would be familiar with from documentaries and the news, but here the pathos is undercut when the audience hear his story and a number of similarly disturbing others told to opposition players in the middle of a hard fought match as an intimidation strategy (32). Unbelievably, this framing allows the audience to laugh at his story. This "debasement of suffering and fear" is carnavalesque as described by Mikhail Bakhtin, and its purpose is that "laughter must liberate the gay truth of the world from the veils of

gloomy lies spun by the seriousness of fear, suffering, and violence" (1984: 174). It is a consciously didactic device, designed to avoid a sense of preaching the political message. "We want to open people's eyes rather than drive them closed in horror", explains Keane (quoted in Gorman, 2003: 13). Then there is Bosnian immigrant Miroslav, who describes himself as a "county ethnic minority in Dublin" because he supports Tipperary. On the night Tipp wins the All-Ireland final, he ends up in a lap dancing club with the lads from the building site he works on and meets an old school friend, Katerina. "Me in furry hurling hat. Her in furry g-string" (6). The Irish-born Vietnamese character whose parents misguidedly changed his name from Dong to Mickey (both euphemisms for 'penis' in Ireland), describes himself as a "feckin culchie", using the derogatory slang term for someone who lives in rural Ireland (16). The team even features internal migrant Sylvie, "from the independent republic of Fatima Mansions in Dublin. Ah...on a rural resettlement scheme down here in the bog y'know" (15). 125

The performance style also heightens the portrayal of diversity with female performers playing men, African or Asian actors playing white characters, Irish actors playing various other nationalities and all the performers sharing the role of 'Yarnspinner'. The narration and role sharing are features of other Barrabas productions such as *The Whiteheaded Boy* and constitute part of their 'house style'. As a more obviously political piece of theatre than some of Barrabas' other productions, however, devices like the commentary were received differently by the critical response. In *The Whiteheaded Boy*, which is a conventional three act comedy of manners, the actors spoke the stage direction, giving voice to the very distinct authorial presence of Lennox Robinson, who

¹²⁵ 'Fatima Mansions' is a group of social housing tower blocks in Dublin with a reputation for social problems.

became like another character on stage. While providing lashings of 'attitude', they were not used expositionally as they were not intended originally as part of the performance text. Conversely, Hurl's heavy dependence on story-telling was considered problematic on aesthetic grounds, "there was too much talk, not enough action" (Conley, 2003: 26), and because it was perceived to specify how the action was to be interpreted. Helen Meany in *The Guardian* (2003b: 28) writes, "Like many hurling performances, this one would have been better without the commentary". The use of narrative and other performance devices that shift the audience's perspective from first person portrayal to third person description and thereby clarify the contextual frame of the play are classic tropes of both satiric clowning and political theatre more generally. Virtuoso actors who perform in the Theatre of Clown style, such as Dario Fo for instance, take delight in physically illustrating an almost cinematic montage of perspectives on the action. Likewise, in Barrabas' work the use of puppetry, miniature sets, tableaux and dance also tell the story from multiple perspectives in order to heighten the parody or comment. For example, the flash tableaux representing the photographs in the newspaper illustrate how the drama of the game is framed in the media, while the little remote controlled chip vans that trundle across the stage before each match make gentle fun of the ubiquity of chips at every outdoor event. By shifting the viewpoint from the psychological to the sociological, Keane's direction and the Barrabas performance style act as alienation devices, the Verfremdungseffekt at the heart of Bertholt Brecht's dialectical theatre. 126 Brecht argues (2001: 195) that "the spectator can then have the whole situation and the whole course of events set before him" and can see the potential for things to be

¹²⁶ "A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognise its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar." Bertholt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre' (2001: 192). Alienation techniques, which defamiliarise social situations and relationships so that their constructedness becomes evident, and the idea of 'Not...but', whereby the audience sees that the character or situation could have been different, are pivotal to the Brechtian theatre project of allowing an audience to see how society is transformable.

otherwise in society.

In his advice to 'Epic' actors, however, Brecht also suggests that, "to achieve a character rather than a caricature, the actor looks at people as though they were playing him their actions, in other words as though they were advising him to give their actions careful consideration" (ibid: 196). While there is a celebration of diversity and many challenges to perceived ideas in *Hurl*, those stereotypes deemed positive are used without such interrogation. The clearest example is the Irish love interest for the principle African character, Musa, and the familiar valorisation of the Black Man as sex symbol. Towards the end of the play when Musa is at the airport awaiting forced repatriation, he remembers the last time he was there and met Cora from Cork. The one and a half page of script and less than five minutes playing time (in a show that ran for over 90 minutes) that deals with their romance is thick with pigeonholing detail. Cora is a rebel and a single mother; Musa says, "I could tell she was troubled... she still had a dangerous smile" (38). Musa is sexy; Cora: "My new fella was a black fella. The girls were going to be fucking ragin like" (39). And their relationship is destroyed by racism; Musa: "Her landlord didn't like darkies coming around he had told her... But the flat meant security for her and Jessie. Then one day he put up her rent. We knew why. She had to leave. Go back to Cork" (39). Dramaturgically O'Neill's brief inclusion of this device seems gratuitous in that Cora is a completely ancillary character, appearing only in this tiny scene towards the end of the play, and there is no opportunity for the relationship to develop beyond this brief sketch of a stereotype. Possibly the appeal of a love story for so many writers producing plays that advocate for an inclusive, multi-racial Ireland lies in what Gayatri Spivak terms "a strategic use of positivist essentialism" (1988: 205). She does not use this term

without reservation, however, "You pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side, and what you are throwing away by doing this is your theoretical purity" (1994: 123). In addition, the term mostly refers to self-representation by the subaltern in resistance literature, rather than the appropriation by activists of positive subaltern stereotypes to further a progressive agenda. Musa and Cora's relationship is simply a bald metaphor for inter-racial harmony, 'why can't we all just love each other and get along?' It is not, however, the only exploration of this theme in the play, and the love affair not articulated is far more interesting than the one that is. The flirtation between the principle female character Fatmata, another asylum seeker on the team, and Lofty the defrocked priest turned manager, is much more subtle and does not come to fruition, perhaps because a priest having a relationship with anyone may have become too significant a story line and overpowered the antiracist themes. Fatmata is also disconcertingly powerful in her interplay with Lofty. When she calls to the priest's house for the first time she remarks, "The place is a pigsty. Irish Men!" (9). This blatantly racist and sexist statement elicits a frisson of uncomfortable laughter and shock from the audience. 127 Elsewhere, there is a brief mention of a character, not making it to training because, "He was modelling underwear in the community centre for Stray Katz manshop" (30), which it could be argued is a more ambiguously ridiculous treatment of the myth.

More controversially, *Hurl* also features the strategic use of negative stereotypes of the Irish, with almost every white character in the play, even those that are sympathetic, reduced in some way to a type: Lofty is a charismatic, inspirational leader

¹²⁷ I attended the 3rd October, 2003 performance at the Tivoli Theatre and viewed the production video recorded October 4th, 2003. At both performances this line elicited a marked response from the audience.

but also a hopeless alcoholic and ex-missionary, Sylvie the Dubliner is innately aggressive, inarticulate and violent, Cora is a single mother and as for Rusty Cox the local club chairman of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the actor playing Rusty embodies him by donning a plaid cap with mad red hair poking out from under it, similar to the oversized joke hats you can buy in souvenir shops, and adopting an outrageous accent as specified in the script. Patrick Lonergan in The Irish Theatre Magazine describes this as "the Irish version of blackface" (2003:122). Gilbert and Tompkins draw attention to how "clothing can be foregrounded as a representational sign with particular biases... as a marker of difference to designate levels of 'humanity' whereby the 'civilised' can be distinguished from the 'savage' by the clothes they wear" (1986L 244). Rusty's costume offers a representational matrix that others him as an "ignorant muck savage" (34). Many of the other white Irish characters are similarly broad in stark contrast to the non-white or non-Irish characters, who are in general played in a more realistic style. This is obviously a strategy to manipulate the audience into relating more to the non-Irish characters and to parody and destabilise the racist arguments espoused by some aspects of Irish society. Rusty is a version of the Foolish Bully stage Irishman, whose modern antecedents appear on D'Unbelievables or Kilinascully, popular Irish television shows which lampoon rural caricatures. It is interesting to note the frequency terms like "ignorant muck savage" or "culchie toe-rags" or "gombeen" are used. What is more, the function of Rusty in the plot is as uncomplicated 'bad guy', the stupid, malicious, racist. He is even a cheat. Advocating dirty play against our heroes, the 'Freetown Slashers', he snarls "- winning isn't enough lads – I want terrorism" (18). Rusty is, undoubtedly, a type of Clown and therefore intrinsically exaggerated and crystallised into a parodic type. "In simple effect", writes Keane, "the red nose heightens or makes bigger... In the heightened reality of the Clown world we are allowed to view

our more extreme selves at a safe distance" (2004: 96-97). He and his cohorts are meant to be funny and, to my observation, were perceived to be so by a significant portion of the audience. However, I would argue that the imbalance created by the reduction of the Irish characters reduces the impact of the didactic message. Recent sociological studies into how Irish society has responded to immigration identify what is termed 'modern' or 'covert' racism as opposed to 'old fashioned' or 'overt' racism. MacLachlan and O'Connell in *Cultivating Pluralism* refer to "the use of denials of prejudice as a necessary precursor to expressions of modern racism, such as 'I'm not a racist but...'" (2000: 7). The overt prejudice portrayed in the Rusty caricature allows Barrabas' audience to deny racism's relevance to themselves. It is something that is found "in the arsehole of rural Ireland. The third world but with more clothes on" (1). It is something that afflicts "ignorant muck savages" not the sophisticated, theatre going audience that attended the performances at the Galway and Dublin Theatre Festivals.

Returning to the question of subjecthood, the playwright Charlie O'Neill writes in the programme notes that, "the protagonist in this play – this yarn – is our new diverse Ireland". He imagines "this protagonist proactively goes on a fantastic journey and as a consequence creates intercultural waves in this lovely little country we've built for ourselves". Technically in terms of the dramaturgy, although the image the audience is left with is of Musa crying in his prison cell in Sierra Leone after deportation, the

129 Charlie O'Neill in the programme notes for Barrabas' production of *Hurl* at the Dublin Theatre Festival

¹²⁸ See Malcolm MacLachlan and Michael O'Connell, 'A State of Diversity?', *Cultivating Pluralism: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives on a Changing Ireland* (2000: 5); also Anna Keogh, 'Talking about the Other: a view of how secondary school pupils construct opinions about refugees and asylum seekers', pp. 123-136 and Philip Curry, '..."she never let them in": popular reactions to refugees arriving in Dublin', pp. 137-152 in the same book; and Michael O'Connell, *Right-Wing Ireland?: the rise of populism in Ireland and Europe* (2003: 51).

individual subject of Hurl's arc is Lofty. Once again, the refugee Musa provides the sacrificial catalyst for the priest's redemption from drunken failure to inspirational manager. Lofty also delivers the play's message in his final speech, which exalts in the differently wonderful hurling styles we have just seen in the final game: "On one side, the best of what we've learnt in the hundreds of years of passionate play... on the other, the fearless taking up of permission that difference offers" (50). The true subject of this play is, however, as O'Neill suggest, not an individual character but this imaginary hurling team of multicultural misfits as a whole, including Lofty, and their rise against the odds to Provincial Champions and their journey does represent a vision of Ireland as it might be. O'Neill calls the play a "tall story" because, as Fintan O'Toole writes in his review, he "is far too politically astute not to insist precisely that this is a fantasy" (2003: 16). Hurl is at times an uneven balance between challenging and reinforcing racist types precisely because it is trying to offer its audience both an alternative, more utopian image of an intercultural Ireland and some insight into the reality of life for refugees and other immigrants. As Patrick Lonergan very perceptively notes, Hurl "has the courage to point out that asylum seekers in Ireland are given only nineteen euro a week, to audiences who have spent twenty euro per ticket to see a play" (2003:122). What Barrabas, Calypso, Arambe, Donal O'Kelly, Dermot Bolger, Rosaleen McDonagh and others producing these kinds of plays are doing is providing a counter-narrative to more conventional understandings of 'Irish' and 'Ireland'. Homi Bhabha writes that such,

counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities. (1990: 300)

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¹³⁰ Programme notes

While I would assert that offering essentialist images of the white Irish characters as an anti-racist strategy is counter productive, by challenging negative stereotypes of an inclusive Ireland, Barrabas' entertaining, playful fantasy hopes to imagine into being a more positive society.

On the topic of love and desire between the Same and the Other, it is pertinent to return to Emmanuel Levinas, where the contradictions between ethics and *Eros* in his work may prove enlightening. "For we speak lightly of desires satisfied, or of sexual needs or even of moral and religious needs. Love itself is thus taken to be the satisfaction of the sublime hunger," he writes at the beginning of *Totality and Infinity* (1991: 33-34). However, while

...I can 'feed' on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor. The metaphysical desire tends toward *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*. (emphasis in original, ibid)

There is a fixation with sex as a function of race and a corresponding tendency to reduce the racially-other characters to easily consumable stereotypes which is exposed in its ubiquity throughout the anti-racist plays of this decade and a half. It is not surprising perhaps, considering that desire and sexual relationships have always been pivotal content in drama on whatever themes and are also prone to delineation in terms of archetypes and absolutes. Levinas' own thinking and writing on sexual love, for example, has attracted much critical attention, especially from feminist interpreters who find his idealism of women conservative and limiting. Simone de Beauvoir in her influential *The Second Sex* comments that woman in Levinas' *Time and the Other* "is defined and differentiated with references to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential.

He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – She is the Other" (1997: xxii). Thus Beauvoir's erudite criticism of Levinas also summarises what is often at issue in some of the plays in this study which figure the Stranger, the Foreigner, the Non-National as an Other whose alterity defines the Irish. Likewise, Luce Irigaray engages with Levinas' depiction of "the caress" between lovers in 'The Phenomonology of Eros' in Totality and Infinity, whereby the woman facilitates man's transcendence without achieving her own and her sensuality is sublimated to her fecundity. "While he, the lover, is sent back to the transcendental, she, the beloved, is plunged into the depths" (2001: 121). This is congruent with the tendency to portray non-white characters as victims of oppression, whose suffering facilitates the Irish characters' transcendence of their petty troubles and disharmonies. While Levinas representations of femininity often epitomise inassimilable alterity within traditional tropes, as muse, as mystery, as mother, Tina Chanter argues in her introduction to Feminist Interpretation of Emmanuel Levinas that it is philosophically and politically significant that Levinas privileges alterity over the one, in opposition to the Western philosophical tradition from Parmenides on, and that alterity is systematically marked as feminine (Chanter, 2001: 3). His notion of the ethical relationship, the 'faceto-face encounter, is one that confers identity on its own terms rather than presupposing identity that is already consolidated. Why it is important to note that the sexual, romantic relationship is the defining metaphor for integration in so many of these plays, despite the myriad of other possible relationships between migrants and Irish people in society that could be explored, is because it grasps the other, closes down their infinity and confers on them a consumable, knowable identity. 'To know' is, after all, a word which implies that sexual intercourse and comprehension are congruent. Essentially, the boy meets girl love story functions as a metaphor for a new encounter, the introduction of racial otherness into an Irish society that is imagined as unitary and homogenous. In this way, even when

the aims of individual theatre makers and their companies are ethical and progressive, the obsession with this one love story reflects and contains the more conservative fears of invasion and cultural dilution, rather than exploring an Ireland that is already and always diverse. Luce Irigaray's essay refers to "a subject that already knows its objects and controls its relations with the world and with others." When it enters 'the caress' with its lover, it is

[a]lready closed to any initiation. Already solipsistic. In charge of a world it enjoys only through possession... A consumer who consumes what he produces without wonder at that which offers itself to him before any finished product occurs. (2001: 120)

It is not that inter-racial or inter-cultural romance is not an appropriate subject for drama, or even that it is the only type of relationship explored in these plays as it is clearly not. That it should be such a dominant context, however, is a significant limitation. The rich variety of Irish society deserves to be reflected in a theatre that takes responsibility for embodying other relationships, where identity can be negotiated without preconditions and a communion with or acceptance of the givens in Irish society might take place, which might in fact be face-to-face as Levinas would understand it, rather than stuck in the duality of the Same and the Other and corralled into the clichés of romance.

Chapter Four

Migrants as Metaphor: Mirroring the Other within and without

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

(Foucault, 1986: 22)

What follows in the next chapters performs three limit tests of this thesis so far. Hither to, the focus has been on the representation of racial difference primarily through the figure of an African refugee, whereas this chapter decouples race from otherness in examining the portrayal of Eastern European migrant workers, chapter five considers the theatrical representations African theatre artists are making of themselves, while chapter six looks at the racialised depiction of Irish Travellers in the theatre, long the epitome of the 'other within' in Irish society. As these chapters further investigate the interaction between race and identity through discourses of 'home' and the mutually constructive/deconstructive relations between place and personhood, inspiration is drawn from those critical thinkers who have elaborated on the implications of geography on people's lived experience, specifically Michel Foucault, who argues in 'Of Other Spaces', quoted from above, that "the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space" (ibid: 23). While not specifically addressing the geographical concerns of modernity such as mass migration, urbanisation, climate change, competition for resources or the transformative practices of technology, Foucault's thinking pursues the strategies of emplacement, delimitation, demarcation and exclusion which chart the "configuration" or

spatialisation of power and the interpretative significance of space. Similarly, the provocative emplacement of characters and events becomes a key mode of enquiry in this and subsequent chapters, as the conflicts between notions of belonging and exile are mirrored in Irish emigrant and immigrant experiences, as Arambe creates new places from which to speak about themselves and as the identity implications of radical homelessness are examined in the depiction of Travellers.

This fourth chapter examines plays about migration, both into and out of the state, by three Irish playwrights, Dermot Bolger, Paul Mercier and Joe O'Byrne, and the theatre companies that produced their work, Axis theatre at Ballymun, the Abbey and Passion Machine. What these plays and their contexts yield in analysis is a deeper relationship to space and place than description or metaphor. Rather, they emphasise the signification and political potency of specific places, notably a familiar and beloved Dublin imagined anew in ways that accentuate its dislocating strangeness. *The Townlands of Brazil* is the second play in Bolger's Ballymun Trilogy and was commissioned and produced by Axis theatre in 2006. Envisioned as both a prequel and a sequel to his award winning *From These Green Heights*, which told the story of the towers from when the first families moved in to the eve of their demolition, Bolger juxtaposes stories of 1960s' Irish emigration from the rural townlands just as the apartment blocks that came to symbolise Ballymun and all its social problems are to be built, with the contemporary experiences of immigrant workers living in Ballymun as the towers come down and the community is rebuilt forty years later. Utilising Foucault's concept from 'Of Other Spaces' of

¹³¹ This argument and others pertaining to space and geography are further elucidated in Michel Foucault, 'Questions on Geography' in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (1980: 63-77). This chapter is also indebted to Foucault's 1964 essay 'The Language of Space', *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* (2007: 163-168).

heterotopias, heterogenous and relational spaces that are unique and yet contain many other places within them, I examine both the iconic Ballymun Towers, as portrayed by Dermot Bolger, and also the goals and praxis of Axis theatre, as administered by Artistic Director Ray Yeates, and its unique relationship to the community in the heart of Ballymun. Paul Mercier's plays too matrix place and politics. Homeland (commissioned and produced by the Abbey, 2006) and Native City (for Passion Machine, 1998) are, as their titles suggest, homages to Dublin, riffing on its very recognisable social geography, but also challenging 'state of the nation' plays. In both plays Mercier takes the audience on a chaotic roller-coaster ride through a specifically Dublin urban experience, made strange in *Homeland* by writer/director Mercier's engaging play on spatial perspective and in Native City by tumbling through centuries of Dublin history and the lives of over one hundred and fifty characters. The immigrant characters, however, remain outside the maelstrom in both plays, ancillary to the main plotlines and concerns of the protagonists, functioning instead as choral figures, whose outside perspective provides a prosaic touchstone for Mercier's epic take on Dublin identity. By comparison, Joe O'Byrne's It Come Up Sun, also produced by Passion Machine (2000), is still, taking place over a night and set in one liminal place on the border of the city, between the global and the local, "a container yard in the Dublin docks." Nevertheless, this play, like Mercier's reinterpretations of history and legend, also references a mythic framework in order to universalise its themes. Joe, the night security guard, is imagined as king of this lonely domain, Billy, an insomniac who has snuck out for the night from the local mental institution, is his fool, and Ana, the smuggled illegal immigrant, is his princess. Once the sun rises, however, they will all return to their true forms as outcasts from the

¹³² Joe O'Byrne, *It Come Up Sun*, unpublished script provided by the author, p. 2. All subsequent citations are from this script and will be referred to by page number. The production was directed by Paul Mercier and staged at the SFX theatre.

centre, dislocated and homeless. O'Byrne's setting reflects the characters' positions on the margins of society and their fantasies create another type of heterotopia which, like a mirror, both reflects the world and shields the characters from it within an alternative non-place reality.

In considering the complex spatial politics of habitat, these plays interrogate identity in a changing Ireland and the utopian/dystopian tensions that constitute the concept of 'home', a thematic through-line of this thesis. To that end, each play juxtaposes the experiences of Eastern European migrants with those outcast from Irish society at precise time and place junctures, such that their mutual abjection is emphasised. While cultural racism and discrimination are identified as social problems within the dramas, the argument primarily pursued is as elucidated upon by Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves*. After Sigmund Freud, Kristeva argues that,

by recognizing *our* uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners. (1991: 92)

It is the irreducible strangeness of the other within ourselves that must be understood in order for an ethical space to be made for the foreign other. Both the Eastern European and the native Irish characters in these plays suffer from displacement and homelessness. They belong neither 'here' nor 'there' but elsewhere; they are *unheimlich*, uncanny, strange. 133

¹³³ Unheimlich is a term used by Sigmund Freud to explore the effects of repression on the unconscious. He uses a semantic study of the German adjective Heimlich, 'friendly, comfortable', which contains within its etymology a reference also to its opposite, 'concealed, kept from sight, deceitful, malicious'. Thus the unheimlich is the strange within the familiar, "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." Freud's term and concept are key to Kristeva's concept of the 'stranger within' (1991:182-3).

4.1 The Townlands of Brazil: Reflections of Culture in Location

Distinguishing between geographical Ireland, "a place that can be read", and demographic Ireland, "a nation that cannot be read but must be written", Fintan O'Toole in *The Ex-Isle of Erin* argues that more space must be found in notions of Irish identity for Ireland's emigrants and, by extension, immigrants. Advocating characteristically for greater social inclusion he continues, "[a]nd because it must be written, it could be written otherwise. Existing, as it does, imaginatively, it is always open to the possibility of being re-imagined" (1997: 161). Dermot Bolger has mapped the territory for that re-imagined nation throughout his career, writing poetry, fiction and drama about those who have been excluded from the grand narratives of Irishness, such as emigrants, the urban poor, women and foreigners. Ballymun, a low socio-economic suburb on the Northern fringes of Dublin, is the subject and setting of Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy*, and a place that geographically, socially and metaphorically has become synonymous with exclusion and deprivation. Created in the 1960s as a solution to dangerous over-crowding in Dublin's inner-city, Ireland's only high-rise public housing development was initially imagined as a shining beacon of modernity and opportunity, "a gleaming New Jerusalem." 135

However, while tens of thousands of the urban poor were transplanted to the tower blocks

¹³⁴ High Germany, in which a young Irish emigrant's only contact with friends and 'home' comes from his attendance at Ireland's international soccer games, is perhaps Dermot Bolger's most high-profile play on the topic of emigration. Many of Bolger's plays are set in Dublin and concern those normally not the subjects of Irish drama with its traditional emphasis on rural life, the middle-classes and nationalistic concerns. Apart from emigrants, he writes about the urban poor (*The Lament for Arthur Cleary, April Bright, The Ballymun Trilogy*), the unemployed (*Blinded by the Light*), heroin addicts (*One Last White Horse*), factory workers (*Nightshift*), women (...She was Wearing, The Holy Ground, The Woman's Daughter) and Irish soldiers serving with the British in World War I (*Walking the Road*). His novels and poetry likewise explore similar themes, the narrowing horizons of poverty, lives blighted by class and Catholicism, emigration and the subsequent dislocation from 'home' and identity. His work often spans generations and depicts pivotal intersections in Irish history in a way that emphasises the interconnectedness of time, space and human concerns.

¹³⁵ Dermot Bolger (2006), *Townlands of Brazil*, unpublished performance draft provided by the author, p.

"appearing in fields like... alien spacecraft" (Bolger, 2005: 3), the services, facilities and enterprises of their old social environment did not follow. By the mid eighties endemic unemployment, urban decay, drug addiction and general social disaffection had turned Ballymun into one of the most stigmatised and stigmatising communities in Ireland, a dumping ground for social problems. Yet from this nadir, the people of Ballymun have been able to take possession of their own place and destinies. In 1997 Dublin Corporation took the decision to demolish the flats and build an entirely new town and, while there has been frustration and controversy at times, the community has been uniquely involved and empowered in the redevelopment project. Axis, a theatre company, arts centre and community resource centre all in one, was founded in 2001 by various community development organisations and sees itself as both a product of that regeneration and a contributor to the area's social and cultural rebirth, a part of the story as well as the medium by which that story is told. 136 Away from the geographical, cultural and historical centre of Irish theatre, exemplified by the National Theatre in Abbey Street, Axis and Bolger have developed a mutually beneficial relationship. Bolger gives powerful voice to Axis' community, while the theatre and its artistic director Ray Yeates have become valuable collaborators for the playwright, premiering his last five plays. 137 Moreover, Axis provides two-way access, to invoke the pun that is surely intentional in the theatre's name, access for a community, traditionally excluded, to professional theatre that concerns them and access for Bolger to the audience his plays were written for. "There was often a certain dichotomy between the audience I wanted to

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¹³⁶ "Axis is a centre for excellence with the community at its heart." Its mission is "to promote participation in the arts, to fuse professional and community practice and involvement, and to create a space where art really does contribute and make a difference to people's lives." See http://www.axis-ballymun.ie/about_axis/.html, accessed 10 October, 2008.

¹³⁷ 1st June, 2010, Axis' fifth world premier of a Bolger play, *The Parting Glass*, opened while his *The Passion of Jerome* was also in performance. Other premiers include the three parts of the *Ballymun Trilogy* (2004, 2006, 2008) and *Walking the Road* in 2007.

reach and the audiences who actually go to the theatre," he states, articulating one of the main dilemmas of political theatre. He compares the polite passivity of mainstream audiences with the more difficult to engage but "very, very real and very alive" response of those outside of the theatre tradition. "Often in conventional theatre, the play is forgotten before people leave their seats" (quoted in Crawley, 2006b: 22). While there is no denying that Axis is a marginal space in terms of Irish theatre in that Ballymun remains a suburb many middle-class theatre goers would still perceive as dangerous, somewhere they would fear to park their cars, Bolger argues that for himself, for Axis and Ballymun and, indeed, for the characters in his plays, being on the edge opens up creative possibilities that are unavailable at the centre: "If you're on the margins you can see a bigger picture. And I actually quite like standing at a particular angle to the universe" (ibid).

While *The Townlands of Brazil* is a stand alone play, it is also meaningful to consider it in the context of the trilogy. The first play, *From these Green Heights* (2004), was conceived as an elegy to the Ballymun flats, whose demolition began just a few months before opening night. The play chronicled the history of the iconic buildings and their residents over forty years and won the *Irish Times/ESB* Best New Irish Play award for that year. The third play, *The Consequences of Lightning*, performed and set in 2008 as people began moving into their freshly built homes, is also a memory play to some extent. As Sam, a former alcoholic and figure of the old Ballymun, is dying in hospital, his family and friends begin to face up to and be reconciled with the past so as to leave it behind for a new beginning. The middle play, *Townlands*, is accordingly a prequel and a sequel to *From These Green Heights*, with the first act set in 1963 as "the seven tower

blocks sprang from the soil" (7) and the second act depicting the "building site" Ballymun of 2006, with "everything half-built or half-pulled down" (43), a place on the cusp of transformation, between the destruction of *Green Heights* and the rebirth of *Consequences*. Bolger thus positions 'new' Ballymun over 'old' Ballymun to create an equivocal mirror image, incarnating both sameness and difference in a tale of Irish emigration and immigration, thereby equating the social exclusion effected by class and by ethnicity. The mirror is a powerful tool with which to challenge identity in that, as described by Foucault (1986: 24), it

...exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.... I begin to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am.

The mirror functions, therefore, as a heterotopia, a place that is absolutely real and connected to all the spaces around it and yet also absolutely unreal, a mere trick of the light, a virtual place, and it is in the space between ourselves and our image that subjectivity can be negotiated. It is significant that, unlike the characters in *From These Green Heights* and *The Consequences of Lightning* who are all urban, Irish and residents of the towers, *Townlands of Brazil* charts the lives of those who were there before the flats and those who inhabit the new, multicultural Ireland of their demise. Both the rural townlanders and the migrant workers are outsiders to the world of urban Ballymun, but it is that very 'other' experience Bolger emphasises. These characters represent both Ireland's fading past and its evolving future, pluralising the narrative in a way that uncovers the strange within the familiar. As Bolger explains,

I have seen the towers go up and I've seen them come down, and now the new buildings are almost finished. I find the idea fascinating that all these people are moving in to these new houses, new apartments, new lives, with no real concept of the lives that went before. So I wanted to tell that story, as well as the story of Ballymun today. (Quoted in Keating, 2006: A6)

The distortions of the mirror also, however, allow Bolger to challenge the sanctification of place as arbiter of identity and destiny and to accentuate the social processes whereby difference is constructed and people, both within and without, are turned into 'others'.

Bolger's mirror images create what Jason King describes as a "contact zone", using Mary Louise Pratt's term, an "imaginative space of sympathetic relation: of potential inter-relations, commonality of experience and overlapping memories of migration" (2005: 23). Undoubtedly this production seeks to engender sympathetic identification for present day immigrants by retrieving the memory of those Irish people forced by poverty and circumstances into lives as outsiders abroad, to use the past as a means of learning about the present. Analogising past Irish emigration to justify present immigration is, likewise, the prevailing rhetoric of pro-immigration discourses according to Breda Gray (2004), whose study charts opinion pieces and editorials in broadsheet newspapers from 1997 to 2003. She argues that these commentaries appeal "to popular memory and sentiment... framed in terms of 'our' national inherited duty and obligation given 'our' experience of emigration" (ibid: 417). Gray also references Ronit Lentin's more pessimistic take on the association of emigration with immigration and her argument that Irish culture needs to attend to "the powerful past of emigration, a wound still festering because it was never tended, and which is returning to haunt Irish people through the presence of the immigrant 'other'", a phenomenon Lentin refers to as "the national repressed" (2002: 228). While politically both rhetorical strategies may be effective, Gray takes ethical issue with each argument's incorporation of 'other' into a homogenized 'us', which either occludes or excludes the specificity and difference of many immigrant experiences, or indeed of those who fall outside of 'our' collective

narratives of emigration. She offers Kaja Silverman's term "idiopathic identification" to describe this argument, a "mode of identification", she argues, which "can perpetrate the violence of 'appropriation in the guise of an embrace'" (quoted in Gray, ibid: 425). Alternatively, Silverman's "heteropathic identification" involves the recognition of the incommensurable separation between self and other and envisages the relationship as an "encounter" rather than an assimilation (ibid, 423). Ethical relationships for Emmanuel Levinas, similarly, are located in exteriority, whereby the Self and Other maintain their transcendence, neither subsumed into each other nor into a totality, such as when all migration stories become the 'same story'. "Correlation", cautions Levinas, "does not suffice as a category for transcendence" (1991: 53). Gray asks in her essay, "What is at stake in the call to remember emigration as a means of developing a more ethical and just relationship to immigrant others?"(2004: 421). It is a question highly pertinent to the project of this analysis which also considers the extent to which Bolger maintains the asymmetrical, irreducible separation between Irish emigrant and immigrant whilst furthering a liberal political agenda based on identification and empathy. While assimilations and objectifications are undoubtedly present in this production, Bolger's interrogation of the imagined Irish self produces conjunctions and commonalities that allow for revelation of both the self and other. What is posited in Townlands in the reflections between Ireland of today and the mirror images of the past is, as articulated by Kristeva: "By recognising [the foreigner] within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself" (1991: 1). Similarly, the central image of Levinas' philosophy, two irreducibly other beings face-to-face, is also resonant of reflections in a mirror. "Reflection can, to be sure, become aware of this face to face," Levinas acknowledges, "but the 'unnatural' position of reflection is not an accident in the life of consciousness. It involves a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is itself produced in face of the other and under his authority" (1991: 81). Like so many of the plays in this study, *The Townlands* of *Brazil* offers a challenge to the homogenised self of Irish identity, by bringing it face to face with the immigrant other.

Bolger's intention to draw connections between Irish emigration and immigration could not be missed by an audience. The reflections between the two acts and timeframes are layered thickly, the symmetry of the stories perhaps too neat to convince. The plot follows two women: Eileen the pregnant Irish teenager in act one set in the '60s, and in act two Monica the contemporary Polish migrant. Both are forced to migrate for the sake of a child that will be raised by someone else, both widowed tragically by accidents abroad caused in part by the determination of their men to make a success of migrant life, neither woman can return 'home' and yet neither can find belonging in the place of exile. Beyond the broad sweep of the plot, Bolger's poetic turns of phrase repeatedly echo words, images and finer details, such as the abuse painted outside the women's homes or references to internecine conflicts in Ireland during the Civil War and in Poland under the Soviets. Nevertheless, it is the nature of mirrors to both confirm connections and undermine those similarities, suggestive as they are of reproduction, mimicry and alterity. Bolger's canny invocations of place remind the audience that it is the contemporary second half of the play which is the original image, while the first act is the mirror, reflecting a mythical past Ireland of authoritarianism, intolerance and victimhood. "Poppintree, Santry Woods, Meakstown cottages, Balbutcher Lane, the forge at Dubber Cross" are all places that have frozen in Eileen's mind, "suspended in 1963" (3), and come to exist only in the imaginary landscape of games with her small son in exile: "Over here by the bed, this is Belcurris. Silloge is underneath the chair" (67). The cheeky pun

on titular Brazil, whereby a chilly, Irish backwater contrasts with its South American namesake, synonymous with exoticism and tropical abandon, emphasises how identity in narrow, repressive Ireland of the past was defined in terms of what it was not. Brazil is "beyond Brackenstown wood, with not a black man in sight nor any brazen carnival hussies shaking parts of their bodies that God never intended for shaking" (14). Eileen's mother is the border keeper of the play, vigilantly guarding the boundaries of her imagined identity from the challenges of difference, strictly delineated by matrices of class, location, religious mores, blood-lines, even historical events. Class, for example, a function of location, is immutable. "You can never be Carmel O'Rourke's friend and equal," she tells Eileen, "because she has land and we have none" (15). Sometimes the polemic resonances clang out of the play, such as when this character from rural sixties Ballymun uses racist rhetoric, familiar from contemporary tabloids, to describe the residents of the Corporation tower blocks.

I've nothing against Dubliners, a few at a time... but we'll be swamped by outsiders. Dubliners aren't like us. They'll bring headlice and God knows what germs, sleeping six to a bed. They'll never belong in Ballymun. (7)

Eileen's relationship with Michael could never be tolerated because of his "seed and breed" (15) and grudges held since the murderous Civil War. When she is discovered to be pregnant with Michael's child, her mother cries "I always knew that family would take their revenge" (26). Eileen's pregnancy is perceived as a tragedy for the family, in some ways worse than a death, an unforgivable transgression that must be punished with expulsion. She does not just leave her home, her family and her community, however, like an economic migrant. She must be expunged even from memory.

I've joined the Ballymun girls who've disappeared from history, like Mary McCarthy who got carted off to the nuns after a Finglas delivery boy delivered only trouble... Girls who have ceased to exist except in whispers about sluts. (6)

Heather Ingman notes how those who fell outside the stereotypes of acceptable female behaviour were divested of their identities even of their Irishness: "The sexually loose woman was not only shocking, she was seen as anti-Irish or 'foreign'" (quoted in Ryan, 2009: 103). Thus, Eileen becomes a stranger, even to her own mother, who says of her daughter, "I no longer know who I'm looking at" (24). As Julia Kristeva writes (1991: 1),

Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder... A symptom that precisely turns 'we' into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible.

Eileen is unable to be accommodated with the narrow scope of identity constructs permitted by her society. The unwed mother, the strangers from the city, the family who supported the wrong side in the war, all exemplify the incoherencies, insecurities and variegations in unitary notions of 'we' in the Ireland of 1963 as drawn by Bolger.

The perennial conflict for migrants between where they feel at home and where they actually reside also resonates through both time frames, emphasising the characters' 'strangeness' in their location and their social world. The men who return to Ireland from working in England in the first act are psychically homeless, "every year... this place felt a little less like home for them," and they disrupt the sense of home of those who remain behind: "People looked forward to them coming home but felt an unspoken relief when they left again" (15). Oscar, the Turkish construction worker in Act Two, understands the dangers of too great an attachment to homeland: "Being abroad changes a man. If all he thinks about is home, he can wind up like me with a foot in both worlds and his arse in no man's land" (53). 'Home' can also be a heterotopic concept, both sanctuary and prison, and migration literalises that disconnect. Michael, Eileen's young lover, delights

in the freedom he has in Liverpool to determine his destiny on his own merits: "There I'm judged on my hands alone and not who my people were... I'm free to become whoever I want to be" (17). When she runs away to England with her unborn child rather than surrender him to the nuns, Eileen too invokes 'freedom'. In England, she believes, "we'd be lost among streets teeming with foreigners and yet free" (6).

Such utopian imaginings, however, where Dublin or Liverpool feature as "a wondrous chance to wash away the sins of the past, a new start" (3), leave Bolger's characters unable to cope with the realities of dislocation and the problems that follow them. Anna, Monica's Moldovan flatmate and fellow mushroom picker, suffers acutely from what Una Chaudhuri terms 'geopathology', "the painful noncongruence between the literal dwelling place and a feeling of being at home" (1997: 49). She feels so rootless and insubstantial in her new environment it is as if "a gust of wind will sweep me away with nobody noticing" (49). Under constant racial harassment by a gang of young girls, Anna has internalised their jibes until she "feels foreign even to [her]self" (57). Her breakdown, symptomatised by shoplifting shampoo, comes from the dissonance between the privitations of totalitarian Moldova, the home she has escaped, and the schizophrenic, split-self experience of dystopic Ballymun.

I just wanted to be in control. I wanted peach smelling hair. I kept remembering that toilet attendant staring through me when I asked for a second square of paper. I wanted her to see me in this city with no queues, able to fill my handbag with shampoos. "Stupid foreign bitch". (57)

Going home is not an option for Anna either, however, with her horror stories of a cousin trafficked into prostitution and an unforgiving, demanding family desperate for

remittances. "I just want to go home," she pleads after her arrest, "The trouble is, I don't know where home is anymore" (60).

It is also Bolger's contention that those who are natives, who do literally belong, can suffer from feelings of radical dislocation. The unhomeliness of Ballymun is a major thematic throughline in all parts of the trilogy, its communities constituted by displacement, uprooting and loss. From These Green Heights highlights the alienation and sense of abandonment experienced by the residents of the towers as the promised services failed to materialise and the social problems spiralled out of control. Both surrounded and isolated, the characters find it impossible to make the necessary connections with their neighbours, assume their social functions, find work and build meaningful lives. The central dramatic conflict in both From These Green Heights and The Consequences of Lightning is between those who try to make a life and home for themselves in Ballymun, versus those who run from their dystopic home only to find there is no escaping the consequences of where they are from. In *The Townlands of* Brazil none of the characters are from the flats, but even those who are 'locals' can experience feelings of displacement when their homes are irrevocably altered by social change; they suffer from what Fintan O'Toole refers to as "internal exile" (1997: 173). Carmel O'Rourke, owner of the farm where Monica and Anna pick mushrooms and where Eileen picked fruit as a girl, is distinguished and othered by her class in both acts of the play. Her foreign employees mockingly refer to her as "Just-call-me-Carmel" (36) because they recognise that her false familiarity and superficial friendliness are actually designed "to keep us at bay" (45). Her hypocrisy is exposed when Anna is arrested and phones 'Carmel' for assistance. Although she posts bail to get Anna released, she also

fires her and revokes her work permit. Anna begs, "Carmel... please...", but Carmel replies, backing away from her, "Sorry, dear, but the name is Ms O'Rourke" (59).

Whether the fruit pickers are local girls in the sixties, such as her childhood friend Eileen, or those from Ballymun "who saw a country bumpkin with lacquered hair", or the new migrant workers "chatter[ing] in double Dutch", Carmel is trained to be suspicious and to keep herself distinct: "Watch them," Mother would say, "or they'll rob us blind" (58).

Now with her face hardened into her mother's likeness, Carmel knows she is "the true foreigner" (58).

Belonging, who does and who can not, is a theme Bolger elaborates on through another kind of mirror image, the figure of a child lost or separated from its mother. At the end of the first act Eileen has refused the cruel charity of the nuns and fled to England, "steal[ing] God's child" (32). As she boards the boat, her optimism for exile is sourced from the baby inside her, "every day that I manage to wake up alongside you will be a fresh and precious dawn" (33). The beginning of the second act, however, introduces us to her grown son, Matthew, a demolition expert working on the towers, who has come to Ballymun looking for traces of his lost mother. Taken from Eileen at four by social services because she became too poor to care for him, he feels an Irishman in England yet a foreigner in Ballymun. His relationship with the natives is mutually abusive. "Feck off, Mister," yell thugs in shiny tracksuits, "back to where you belong. We bombed your sort out of Ireland," (35) and he responds with provocative arrogance, boasting that as the buildings come down he'll be playing "God Save the Queen" (35). Monica's crushing grief and sense of dislocation are also partly a product of her separation from Teresa, the daughter left behind in Poland. She feels "a ghost" to her child, "I only exist to her as a monthly cheque" (54). She calls Teresa weekly, but is conscious of her in-laws

resentment of money squandered on phone cards rather than sent home. The uprooting of the bond between parents and children, disseminated into remembrances, suggests identities become polymorphic and unstable, lost mothers symbolic of lost land, lost language, lost self. The climax of the play is brought about by the search for a missing Irish child. A young Ballymun mother phones the police claiming she has abandoned her baby in a tower set for demolition and the community, as one, reacts. "How many of the men are here?" asks Oscar, and Matthew replies, "Every father who got a text from a work-mate. They keep arriving out of the dark" (60). Likewise, Carmel searches "every cranny of [her] kingdom of glasshouses, haunted by a fear that the abandoned baby was somehow hidden out here in Brazil" (61). The deserted tower is dark and dangerous, however, even for Oscar, who has eyes like a cat and knows the methodical layout. He falls to his death searching for a baby who was only ever a figment of a lonely girl's imagination. In interview with Dermot Bolger I asked how this reiterated image of the lost child could be interpreted. ¹³⁸ He described it as "found poetry", when an image "arises from things that are simply true." ¹³⁹ In this case the story was inspired by a real life incident whereby a young woman sparked an intense police search after claiming she had left her newborn in a derelict Ballymun flat. 140 He also acknowledged that his own mother's death when he was nine has often influenced his work, and indeed there are dead mothers in both From These Green Heights and The Consequences of Lightning, but he resisted further hermeneutic analysis. Nevertheless, this image and its refrains, further examples include Anna's abortion and Carmel's sterile spinsterhood, are pivotal to the dénouement and interpretation of the play. After Oscar's death Matthew takes Monica

¹³⁸ Author's interview with Dermot Bolger, 30 October 2009.

¹³⁹ 'Found poetry' is actually a poetic device whereby words, phrases or lines are taken from other prosaic sources and constructed as poetry.

¹⁴⁰ See two *RTE News* stories 'Gardaí in house to house search for baby' and 'Baby calls not genuine – Gardai'; respectively Tuesday 28 http://www.rte.ie/news/2003/1028/ballymun.html and Wednesday 29 October 2003 http://www.rte.ie/news/2003/1029/baby.html, accessed 21 November 2009.

into the tower and they write their stories on the wall: "Oscar Kemal died searching for a child here". "Eileen Redmond conceived a son here". "Monica Markowska yearned for her daughter here" (70). Monica phones her daughter to tell her that she's bringing her to Ireland. "I don't know how we'll manage", she says, then echoes Eileen, "but every morning that I manage to wake up beside you will be a precious new dawn." Monica and Matthew, in reclaiming what they have lost, find that they have not been exiled *from* where they belong but *to* where they belong and begin to imagine a "new life", a "new home" for themselves and their families, "[i]n this place called Ballymun" (71). Thus, the reclaimed child serves as a figure of recovery, of hope, of rebirth and of homecoming.

Similarly, the Axis Arts Centre is emblematic of Ballymun's regeneration.

Indeed, the *Ballymun Trilogy* is in some sense site-specific theatre in that audiences experienced the transformation of Ballymun in an immediate visceral sense at each visit to the theatre. In 2004, when *From These Green Heights* opened, Axis still lay under the eerie shadows of derelict Pearse Tower, but by 2008 and the opening of *The Consequences of Lightning*, audiences crossed a spacious municipal plaza to enter the theatre. Axis describes itself as both literally and figuratively at the heart of the community in Ballymun¹⁴¹ and provides an extraordinarily accessible and multifunctional space, more so than any other theatre in Ireland. The building houses ten community organisations, dance studios and a recording studio, art galleries, rehearsal spaces, cinema facilities, a café, a crèche, offices and meeting spaces. Ray Yeates, both Artistic Director of the professional theatre company and General Manager of the centre, sees his mission as "creating a bridge between participation and practice", between "inclusion and

¹⁴¹Axis is described on its website as "a centre for excellence with the community at its heart", http://www.axis-ballymun.ie/about_axis/Default.86.html, accessed 12 May, 2010.

excellence." ¹⁴² As part of that mission, Yeates has maintained the stage as a heterotopic rather than an elitist space, where "there are many ways in and many ways out" he says, invoking the planners' analogy. Aside from the imaginary worlds brought into the space through various performances, most of Ballymun's big community events also occur on the stage. Incredibly, considering there is no tradition of theatre attendance in Ballymun, Axis has the highest return audience of any theatre in Ireland, with fifteen percent seeing more than three shows. 143 What Yeates and Axis hope to offer their community is a renegotiation of the relationship between people and places at Ballymun, by "creatively confronting the problem of place," to quote Una Chaudhuri, "regarding it as a challenge and an invitation rather than as a tragic impasse" (1991: 15). Axis celebrates Ballymun identity, both local and migrant, by offering genuine practical and material access. All three plays in the Ballymun Trilogy, for example, featured local actors, most notably Kelly Hicks who made her professional debut as Eileen/Anna in *The Townlands of Brazil*. Julia Krynke, on the other hand, an established, professionally trained Polish actor, was head hunted in Poland to play Monica and pregnant mouthy Dublin girl, Theresa, to the delight of audiences who found the incongruence of her accent and the idiomatically Irish dialogue very comic. 144 For Peter Crawley, "hearing Irish colloquialisms delivered in a Polish accent is a[n]... arresting symbol for the transformative potential of place" (2006c: 2). Yeates' decision to double roles, with each actor playing Irish and non-Irish characters, creates a deliberate disconnect that throws Bolger's somewhat overwrought parallels into relief. Townlands was also part of a cultural exchange, touring to Poland while Teatr Polski Wroclaw (the National Theatre of Poland, Warsaw) premiered their

¹⁴² Author's interview with Ray Yeates 29 October 2009. All subsequent quotations by Yeates are from this interview unless otherwise stated.

¹⁴³ Figures provided by Ray Yeates from Axis' own research, 29 October 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Audiences at the performance I attended, 8 pm Thurdsay 30 November 2006, laughed at Krynke's Polish inflected rendition of lines like, "I've been scared ever since a teddy boy with big promises and small feet put his yoke inside me and then took the devil's own time about taking it back out again" (31).

production of *Smycz* by Bartosz Porczyk at Axis before appearing at the 2007 Dublin Fringe Festival, providing access to theatre in their own language for Poles living in Dublin.

While Bolger has no pretensions to write "the great Irish-Polish play", 145 he does believe that writing about Ballymun "is a chance to explore the whole nation." As a suburb in the throes of complete transformation, a perpetual building site, "[i]t's like a speeded-up microcosm of Ireland" (ibid). If so, then the vision Bolger offers of Ireland in the trilogy is a disorientating one, where the associations between space and place have been ruptured. Ballymun as it appears in *Townlands* is a place that has been 'deterritoralized,' with familiar places made strange wherever possible and the local people making only occasional appearances in stereotypical guises. Many scenes are set in crowded, anonymous places that emphasis the loneliness of the characters amongst so many strangers, Eileen on deck on the boat to England (33), for example, Monica and Oscar at the greyhound races (50), Anna in the police station (56) and scenes set in Ballymun's desolate public spaces. The dramatic 'no man's land' spaces suggest an emptiness at the heart of Celtic Tiger Irish society. Nevertheless, while in the other Ballymun plays Bolger's evocations of height are vertiginous, the towers a place to fall or jump from, the people trapped out of their element by broken lifts and terrifying stairwells, in *Townlands* the view from the balconies offers perspective, the point of view of the outsider. Monica leans over the edge of the deserted tower and says, "You can see the whole world from up here" (64). She too sees Ballymun as a microcosm of something

 $^{^{145}}$ In Peter Crawley, 'Searching for home from home' (2006a: 2) Bolger is quoted as saying, "Hopefully, in the next five to 10 years a Polish person in Ireland will write the great Irish-Polish play, which I cannot pretend to do."

else, herself, and perhaps hints of something more hopeful: "Ballymun is a mess, like myself. It doesn't know if it's coming or going... Maybe that's the sort of place where someone might start a new life. Maybe we're all foreigners here" (68).

Dermot Bolger's *The Townlands of Brazil* does belong entirely to Ballymun. Its story, its landscapes and spaces, its characters, its audience and even some of its actors are products of its place. Axis, theatre and community centre, also belongs to Ballymun, not just literally in terms of being built and funded by the Ballymun Regeneration Limited, but actually in the sense that the community has access to the centre and ownership over what happens there, and both Axis and its ten community tenants offer Ballymuners a place to belong to. In fact Ballymun, its topography and social environments, its history, its inhabitants and all that the suburb signifies, is the protagonist of all three plays. Particularly in the context of the Celtic Tiger's relative prosperity, Bolger's plays identify contradictions and hypocrisies in notions of Irishness that exclude the kind of stories that happen in Ballymun. "It is about a forgotten part of the nation," according to Ray Yeates,

Nobody else is writing about Ballymun except Dermot...And he follows Homer in the sense that a small story of someone in a family becomes an epic... And he gives it that honour. That people in this area have those relationships, just like anybody else. That makes it more national and more political than people realise. (Author's interview, 2009)

Thus, despite the intimacy of plays ostensibly written about and for a specific Dublin community, these plays engage in discourses of place and personhood that resonate globally in the modern diasporic world. That said, it is a significant caveat that when *The Townlands of Brazil* toured to the National Theatre of Poland, the Polish audiences did not see their own specific experiences in Ireland reflected in Bolger's bleak, alienated

depiction. "But we are happy!" was their objection according to Yeates. ¹⁴⁶ There are many reasons why these predominantly educated, middle-class audiences may not have recognised themselves, notably the significant socio-economic advantages conferred by European Union membership as opposed to, for example, the situation of Moldovan or Turkish workers in Ireland. It is also fair to surmise, however, that perhaps their class and nationalist identifications did not allow them to recognise themselves in characters who live in a place like Ballymun. Likewise, some negative Irish critical response remonstrated with the "unrelenting misery" and "clichés" of the play. Alan O'Riordan's review in the *Irish Examiner* (2006: 19) is a case in point.

The first act touches all the basis of old Irish victimhood: "No blacks, no Irish"; fallen women; "prying eyes of small towns"; unsympathetic nuns; American wakes; and all with traditional music interspersed.

He finds the second act similarly replete with "new" immigrant clichés, asserting "[t]here are no characters here, merely vessels for the social history they so cumbersomely represent." It is certainly fair comment to find a play formulaic with nothing further to add to discourses already in circulation, however, O'Riordan's opening to his review is revealing:

Given the amount of media attention turned on the neighbourhood and its consequent self-aggrandising, it's no wonder Ballymun assumes the public finds its story as fascinating as it does itself. But that is a dangerous assumption. (Ibid)

O'Riordan was unable to reconcile his identity or image of Ireland with a story from Ballymun. It is on this question of identification and its implications for discursive practices and the politics of subjectification that this argument sources its conclusions. In his introduction to *Questions of Cultural Identity* entitled 'Who needs 'Identity'?', Stuart Hall briefly traces the semantics of 'identification' (1996: 3-6). Ostensibly identification

¹⁴⁶ Yeates draws his conclusions from discussions with Polish theatre professionals and general audience members who attended the play. Nevertheless, the theatrical execution of the production and Bolger's poetic language were well-received; interview with author, ibid.

entails the perception of common origin, characteristics or cause with another person, group or ideal and the subsequent closure of solidarity and allegiance between them. The centrality of identification to Bolger and Axis' antiracist social justice agenda is obvious. As Diane Fuss argues, "there can be no politics without identification" (quoted Gray, 2004: 422). It is also pivotal to the very nature of theatre in the relational processes by which actors embody characters who in turn invocate human conditions that an audience recognises and can find communion with. In addition, however, the discursive approach emphasises the contingent, conditional, relational nature of identification, "it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned" (1996, 2). Significantly, identification, as an act of relationship, maintains difference rather than assimilating or subsuming it. Thus, since it operates within the constructs of difference, identification also involves the marking of symbolic boundaries and the exclusion of what constitutes the outside of the consolidation process. If identity is, therefore, understood as a product of these performed clusters and tensions of positionalities, strategic and contingent, often multiple or antagonistic, rather than a marker of cultural 'oneness' and belonging, it is possible to imagine it as a "process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become" (ibid, 4). That is the project undertaken by Bolger in his Ballymun Trilogy and by Axis more generally in the community, to reimagine and renegotiate the relationship between place and personhood, to create networks and juxtapositions of interconnecting subjecthood for those such as the socially excluded residents of the towers and the new ethnically excluded migrants who have not previously had a place within discourses of Irishness, to perform a different, 'other' Ireland, such that they might effect an ideological transformation, a reevaluation and rejuvenation of Ballymun and of those who live there.

4.2 Legendary Dublin: in Space (*Homeland*), Time (*Native City*) and Social Being (*It Come Up Sun*)

Christopher Murray in 'The State of Play: Irish Theatre in the 'Nineties' structures his analysis of this period through four themes which he argues are recurring and significant for playwrights of a certain generation, Dermot Bolger and Paul Mercier amongst them. "Those themes are: home, history, identity and intertextuality" (1996: 14). As in Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy*, Paul Mercier's *Homeland* and *Native City* are plays that set up a dialogue with history in order to explore present-day notions of Irishness.

We see here how 'home' can easily slide thematically into 'history'. Indeed, so prevalent is the preoccupation in Irish literature with the configuration homeidentity-history that one could be pardoned for thinking that all Irish plays are history plays. (ibid: 17)

Paul Mercier was commissioned to write and direct *Homeland* for the Abbey in January 2006 by the incoming Artistic Director Fiach Mac Conghail, who was appointed to become a 'new broom' after the financial and structural crises of the Ben Barnes era. Mercier's play was his first commission in a programme that sought to reorientate the Abbey towards what Mac Conghail perceived as its original mission, a politically relevant National Theatre. He finds inspiration in the theatre's founding principles,

What differentiates the Abbey is that it has a responsibility to interrogate the political status quo... The Abbey was an intellectual debating chamber for revolutionaries. There's no theatre in the world that can replicate that. It's what Yeats called offering a mirror to its citizens. 148

¹⁴⁷ 2004, the Abbey theatre's centenary, was a crisis year for the company. Despite an extensive programme and intensive marketing campaign for the centenary celebrations, box office figures were low. A vote of no-confidence in Artistic Director Ben Barnes was precipitated by announcements that cutbacks necessitated a loss of 30% of the staff. Initially Barnes temporarily held his position, but when it was revealed that the €1.85 million deficit was vastly underestimated due to chaotic financial mismanagement he was forced to resign. See Brian Lavery (2004), 'Deficit, Cutbacks and Crisis for Abbey Theatre at 100'; http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/16/theater/newsandfeatures/16abbe.html?_r=1&oref=slogin; accessed 21 May 2009

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Brian Lavery (2006), 'The Abbey Theatre's Fiach Mac Conghail Takes a Cue from Yeats'; http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/25/theater/newsandfeatures/25abbe.html?_r=1&oref=slogin, accessed 21 May 2010.

The classic plays of Synge and O'Casey, however, that have traditionally represented the cultural expression of the nation, were to be eschewed in favour of plays that take the present-day pulse of the nation. Evidence of Mac Conghail's approach are apparent in the most recent season at the time of writing in 2010, which featured a powerfully confronting season of documentary plays on the clerical abuse of children in state institutions and a one man show by economist David McWilliams about Ireland's financial meltdown. Similarly, *Homeland* is a quintessentially contemporary morality play about the implosion of the Celtic Tiger economy as a consequence of greed, corruption and hubris, and references identifiable contemporary events. Its central character, self-described as "the protagonist", is Gerry Newman, part publicist, part lobbyist, part bag-man for the corrupt property developers and public officials. Having fled the country after giving evidence in a bribery case, Newman returns to Dublin from his villa on the Mediterranean to do one last service for his corrupt patron. His legal difficulties mean that he must not leave the no-man's-land of the airport hotel. Soon, however, he is sucked into the city's dark underbelly, land of the dispossessed, lost in the disorientating suburbs and urban blight he is responsible for. The character of Newman was read by many commentators as based on Frank Dunlop, former journalist and lobbyist, who was a key witness in the Mahon corruption tribunal at the time of the play's production. 149

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¹⁴⁹ References to Frank Dunlop were made by many reviewers. See, for example, "He is a kind of exaggerated version of Frank Dunlop", Fintan O'Toole (2006:2); or "...circumstances which bear a striking resemblance to those of Frank Dunlop", Emer O'Kelly (2006). In interview with the author 15 October 2009, Paul Mercier stated that he had deliberately based Gerry Newman on Frank Dunlop in order to create a character "you would not be sympathetic with".

Yet, as references to "archetypes" suggest, Homeland is also founded on myth and thereby follows another paradigm associated with the founding plays of the Abbey such as those by Yeats, Gregory and Synge which reworked Celtic mythology in order to fashion an independent Irish identity. Referencing contemporary social upheaval, Fintan O'Toole remarks in his review that "[j]ust as it was a century ago, Ireland is a country in search of a national myth," although what myths provide at this time, he argues, is not so much "inspiration" as "a sense of location" (2006: 2). The framing myth in Homeland is that of Oisín, an Irish hero from pre-Christian legend, whose exile from Tir na n'Og, a land of eternal youth, interrogates the notion of Ireland as 'home' or rather what kind of 'home' it aspires to be. 150 While Mercier's utilisation of the Oisín myth is considered and nuanced, "intertextual" to reference Murray's fourth thematic cornerstone, it is also deconstructive, parodying the whole process of myth-making and the modern psychobabble notion that greatness is self-actualisation: "I am the hero of my own story!" (16) What Oisín's doomed return from Tir na n'Og symbolises for Mercier in this play is a returned emigrant character grappling with a society in transition and the consequences of being out of sync with the world. Yet, Mercier's sardonic reworking of mythic parallels also serves to undermine the triumphantalist myths about Celtic Tiger society. Oisín's immortal lover, Niamh of the Golden Hair, is a heroin-addicted prostitute in a garish blonde wig, her gangland world peopled with junkies and pimps; Oisín's encounter with Saint Patrick becomes Gerry's conversion to the cult-like Church of God's Gospel; and

¹⁵⁰ Oisín was a great warrior hero amongst the Fianna and there are many tales about him. Mercier's story reworks the tale of Oisín's death. After falling in love with the fairy princess Niamh of the Golden Hair, he goes to live with her in *Tir na n'Og* (Land of Eternal Youth), where no one gets old or dies. Missing his comrades, however, he returns to Ireland on horse-back, but falling from the saddle he touches the earth and his three hundred years catch up with him all at once. Before he dies of his great age, however, he meets Saint Patrick, is converted (some tales suggest reluctantly), and narrates the stories of the Fianna to him.

the fall from his horse that drags Oisín back into the mortal world is reimagined as Gerry's entrapment in disorientating surburbia, "this urban hell they call home" (47).

Dramaturgically, the episodic structure and sweeping scope of legend also reinforces Mercier's directorial style, renowned for its furious pace, witty, inventive staging and fluid ensemble playing, with each actor, except Liam Carney as Gerry, playing numerous characters. A consequence of such ensemble work, however, is that often characters become caricatures, mere functionaries to the plot. Accordingly, the migrant workers in the play are portrayed as a succession of deferential, mostly female, Eastern European service industry employees, operating as a recognisable signifier that Gerry has returned to a changed Ireland. "The country is being staffed [by Eastern Europeans]!" says Mercier's acknowledging the deliberate use of this image. "(Laugh) I was playing with the idea that since he [Gerry] went away, they all moved in. [It is] like another country... These are the workforce of the boom. The people doing the ordinary menial jobs that we all used to do at one stage" (author's interview, 2009). Reiterating his point, the ubiquitous Eastern European employees are the only workers depicted in the play. "The foreigner is the one who works," declares Kristeva, who "still considers work as a value... as if it were the chosen soil, the only source of possible success, and above all the personal, steadfast, non-transferable quality" (1991: 17-18). The Irish characters are otherwise engaged, in controversy and scandal, in religion, in political protest, or else they constitute the unemployable criminal underclasses as Mercier deploys yet more stereotypes. Homeland is, self-consciously, a piece of theatre about national identity. By deploying caricatures, either of Irish 'self', foreign 'other' or as with the urban underclass, an internal 'othered self', in order to negotiate identity, Mercier insists his audience remain self-reflexive and conscious of the narrow divide between myths and

lies. Gerry's sketchy encounters with the 'non-nationals' in the play are a case in point. He demands of each foreign worker that he meets, "You like this country, yes?" (6), or "You care about this land of ours, Martha?" (8), or the more threatening, "Katrina, this country has been good to you, yes... You wish to stay here?" (23). Gerry's self-constituted sense of national identity, in this case 'Ireland of the hundred thousand welcomes', requires the polite reaffirmation of the migrant others for recognition and reflection. As Stuart Hall expresses it 91991: 21), "[Identity] has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself." Mercier mocks Gerry's performance of 'friendly Irishness' in the scene in which he breaks into his old Dublin home looking for money and encounters the Italian house-swap family who are living there. Considerably disenchanted with Gerry's "happy go lucky country" (31) and not obliged to tolerate his self-aggrandisement as the hotel staff were, when he asks "you like this country, yes?", they have a barrage of reasons why they "are not happy" (30). Gerry, predictably, takes refuge in comparison: "Well, you don't exactly come from paradise yourselves" (31).

If *Homeland*, as it was produced at the Abbey in 2006, is understood as a play about where Irish subjectivity and identity speaks from as much as who it speaks for, then director Paul Mercier's dynamic conceptualisation of space makes political as well as theatrical meaning. In this play, as in *The Townlands of Brazil*, identity is understood as a network of spatial relations or affiliations with others, variations of entanglement and separation. Starting from the opening scene, therefore, where Dublin is laid out like a map before the protagonist looking down from an aeroplane, Gerry is portrayed as a god-like character with power over everything he sees but no attachment to it: "There it is,

everyone!... Where it all began. Deerpark... Where the world came into my life... I put that there." (3) In the liminal borderland of anodyne airport hotels, Gerry is serviced by a Chorus of immigrant workers, outsiders who can observe and comment on the protagonist's fall, and Ireland's, but are unable to intervene. As the pace of the play intensifies and Gerry's viewpoint shrinks, he turns from immortal to human, one man amongst many, disorientated in rabbit warren suburbs, scrambling over backyard fences, evicted from supermarket carparks, disregarded in call-centres amongst the babble of foreign voices. Thus, Mercier's impressively physical staging and use of perspective attempts to convey Gerry's fall to earth and also challenges the modes and vectors of spatial existence that constitute the politics of Irish identity. For all the protagonist's manic mobility, Dublin is portrayed as a world of largely predefined and defining enclosed spaces and the population as demobilised by both their geography and their identities, constituted by both class and ethnicity. It is an ambitious and ambivalent project in that this play simultaneously elevates and satirises governing narratives of Irishness, sourced from mythology, in order to stimulate national debate in theatrical form. The Abbey, the founding site of culturally constructed identity, is a privileged site for such 'state of the nation' plays.

Eight years previously, under the auspices of his own company Passion Machine, Mercier's *Dublin Trilogy*, another ambitious project, was coming to conclusion with the third play *Native City*. In 2006 Ireland's Celtic Tiger boom was in the last stages of its hubristic excess, but in 1998 the country had only begun its transformation. Mic Moroney's article for the *Irish Times* supplement on that year's Dublin Theatre Festival captures the hint of change in the air, as he strolls outside the SFX theatre (in the St

Francis Xavier hall) in north inner-city Dublin where Mercier's new play for the festival is in rehearsal. Moroney notes, "as ever", the mixture of faded Georgian grandeur with modern offices and flats, and the intermingling of "extraordinary pockets of human and architectural dereliction... homeless junkies trailing out of doorways." But now, he finds, there is new building activity everywhere, "leaving a tang of brick-dust and solvent in the air". There is, however, something else "new in recent years, very evident on the busier, traffic-choked streets: exuberant, upbeat, multi-ethnic colour!" (1998: 1).

Passion Machine was founded by Paul Mercier and John Sutton in 1983 and would produce almost 30 original Irish plays over the next two decades, most directed by Artistic Director Mercier and twelve also written by him. The work of Passion Machine would be described by critics such as Fintan O'Toole as "constituting the most important movement in the Irish theatre of the 1980s" (1988: A5), and Mercier and his fellow writers for the company, such as Roddy Doyle, Aiden Parkinson and Brendan Gleeson amongst others, were hailed as part of a new Dublin literary Renaissance. Dermot Bolger, poet, playwright, novelist, and Raven Press publisher, is obviously a significant figure on this literary scene as well. Ferdia Mac Anna in his essay on the 'Dublin Renaissance' (1991: 14-30) considers the most important aspect of this new writing to be its revelation "that the myth of a single Ireland is no longer true." Emerging from the two dominant themes in Irish writing, rural Ireland and its repressive folklore and 'The North' with its dramatic divisions, comes "the city and environs of Dublin with its urban sprawl and modern plagues and flock of young writers" (ibid: 29-30). Passion Machine's stated aim was "producing entertaining, contemporary and original theatre that appeals to and attracts a broad audience" (quoted in Moffatt, 1989: 8). Their defiantly non-literary plays caused a stir in critical debate because, not only did they speak for and about the lives of young, urban Dubliners, so disregarded in traditional theatre, their plays and staging were inventively and excitingly fashioned around the rituals of popular culture that their audiences could relate to, such as rock music (*Drowning*, Mercier, 1984), football (*Studs*, Mercier, 1986), television (*Brownbread*, Doyle, 1987) or the pub quiz (*War!*, Doyle, 1989). As part of their mission they also deliberately set about enticing into the theatre an audience from Dublin's north inner-city, where the company had its base in the SFX hall and where Mercier, Doyle and Gleeson had been working as high school teachers. In this they were incredibly successful. Sean Moffat writing in 1989 uses statistics to illustrate the Passion Machine audience:

77% of their audiences are aged between 12 and 24, 46% between 15 and 25; one third of their audiences are unemployed, two thirds are single, 20% of the audiences come from within walking distance of the SFX centre; and perhaps a particularly important statistic, 33% of those surveyed said they only go to Passion Machine shows; considering that by the end of February nearly 90,000 people will have attended shows that's a lot of new faces in the theatre. (1989: 9)

As Mic Moroney expresses it, "Mercier [was] rebuilding the north inner-city with wood and paint and actors" (1998: 1). *Native City*, however, reflected not just the class of Passion Machines social world, but also its ethnic diversity and the ensuing conflicts of identity.

While Passion Machine productions were always intrinsically political, there was a shift in emphasis from the overt comedies of the early years to more serious plays that directly addressed urban social justice concerns. Mercier's *Buddleia* (1995), *Kitchensink* (1996) and *Native City* (1998), which playing as a trilogy received the *Evening Herald*/Dublin Theatre Festival award for Best Production in 1998, could be seen as a culmination of that development. As a trilogy, Mercier describes the plays as "about a

city and what the city means; it's about living in the city today" (author's interview, 2009). Buddleia is the inner-city play, set in the basement flat of a terraced house with a cast of twenty-nine who play the various occupants over decades. The play's title refers to a shrub that grows particularly well on waste ground and Mercier uses that as a symbol to ask whether any community can grow healthily and be productive in such a blighted social environment. Kitchensink combined soap-opera and masked Greek tragedy to tell the story of 'development' in a Dublin housing estate. Set in the half-built shell of a suburban house, the play traversed three decades and the cast of four played various characters. Mercier describes *Native City* as his 'history play': "This time I'm dealing with a public Dublin, a bigger social, political and historical picture... revising ground which is part of the psyche and consciousness of the city" (quoted in Moroney, 1998: 4). The play kaleidoscopes through centuries of Dublin history with a series of satiric, fictional episodes mixed with echoes of real events. An irreverent take on the first thousand years or so features a band of self-absorbed actors in a 1988 Millennium production as rampaging Vikings, Huguenot refugees, Strongbow, Talbot, Emmett, Swift and other historical heroes. 151 Then the play changes tone, surging through time to the 1974 Dublin car-bomb, protests against 'development' in the sixties, the Emergency, the Civil War, 1916, the Dublin Lockout and Queen Victoria's visit at the turn of the century. Each scene pivots on questions of belonging, producing historically contingent 'immigrant' or native 'outsider' figures who challenge notions of an authentic Irishness. Just as Buddleia and Kitchensink maintained the same setting through decades of time, Native City too is all set in the same dilapidated church, a symbol this time of Dublin city itself, the protagonist of the play. According to Mercier, "[t]he church is the central character. In a city that has more churches than cinemas or theatres. I want it to be seen

¹⁵¹ Paul Mercier, *Native City*, unpublished script provided by the author, p. 8. All subsequent citations are from this script and will be referred to by page number.

as a public space. It's the city itself, the citadel, or a symbol of it" (author's interview, 2009). Thus, when played consecutively as they were during the 1998 Dublin Theatre Festival, the connection is clearly made between those excluded by wealth, class and geography in *Buddleia* and *Kitchensink* and those deemed other by nationhood, religion or history in *Native City*.

Mercier acknowledges this conflict between national identity and ethnic identification as his central theme:

History, as it goes, tends to crystallise particular stages, but a city is really its people. We're such a mix and we don't realise it. I mean, what's a Dublin Person? Whose native city is it at the end of the day? It's a city that you can walk around and meet everybody in one day, but it's so divided in any respects. There are so many traditions in this city, and its diversity is its magnificence." (Author's interview, 2009)

He is determined, however, that the politics of the play do not merely become a historical lesson. In 1998 inclusion and diversity were live issues in Dublin, a point Mercier highlights by bookending his sweeping epic with present-day scenes set in a hackney office where two Bosnians are waiting for a cab. When a mob of drunken football fans enter, the Bosnians are tangentially caught up in an urban *fracas* they do not understand, although the racism is easy enough to fathom.

BOSNIAN 2: (speaking Bosnian) What is he saying?

BOSNIAN 1: He's drunk that's all, ignore him.

BOSNIAN 2: What's he talking about?

PARKIE: Speak English, will ye. You're in Ireland now.

BOSNIAN 1: Would you shut up. Taxi, please.

PARKIE: Tony, where the fuck am I?

TONY: I know, I know.

PARKIE: It's a fuckin' invasion this. I mean if it isn't them it's the fuckin'

blacks. Turning my bleedin' home into a campsite. And as for those fuckin' Mullahs out there... (*Referencing the Kildare fans*

outside.)

BOSNIAN 1: We do not want to cause any trouble. (5)

Native City posits the idea that identity is often a historical construction and, thus, by placing the contemporary Bosnian's on a continuum that includes Viking and British invaders, Huguenot refugees, Civil War enemies and others, these contemporary migrants can be viewed as the latest manifestation of an accumulation of immigrant experiences that constitute the Dublin Self. "If you look at it, this city is full of people who came to this city from other countries, other worlds, and made their home here and contributed," asserts Mercier, "This city's character, its DNA, its make-up, its personality, its outlook is as a result of the influx of different influences" (author's interview, 2009). Mercier's fictional church setting could be described as a heterotopia, as could Passion Machine's multifunctional use of the SFX hall, but Native City also creates what Foucault terms "for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies", an accumulation of slices of time in an immobile space (1986: 26). It is an interesting idea in the context of theatre, a quintessentially transitory art form with its valorisation of 'the moment'. Yet, as Foucault explains, the experience of a heterochrony is of "the recovery of time, it is as if the entire history of humanity reaching back to its origin were accessible in a sort of immediate knowledge" (ibid). Mercier's play makes the history and symbolic memory of Dublin accessible and understandable, which lends weight to his claim that it is "not just the tenth generation Dubliner" who is native; the city "belongs to the people who live there" (author's interview, 2009).

In 2000, Mercier directed Joe O'Byrne's *It Come Up Sun* for Passion Machine at the SFX theatre. Like Bolger's 'found poetry' this play too was based on real events.

During the summer of 1998, Romanians started arriving at Rosslare port in significant numbers, stowed away in sealed cargo containers from mainland Europe. Initially there

was widespread concern for the asylum seekers' safety on such a hazardous journey, ¹⁵² but as hundreds continued to be found at the rate of ten a week, ¹⁵³ some politicians and media began campaigning against them, alleging their arrival was linked to Russian organised crime, inciting racism against them as Roma gypsies and claiming Wexford was in danger of being "swamped". ¹⁵⁴ O'Byrne recalls the story of an elderly woman who died in transit whilst being smuggled to the West in search of her son as the impetus for his story (author's interview, 2009). ¹⁵⁵ He was also inspired to write about the sector of Irish society that was not benefiting from the Celtic Tiger, who "lived on the margins, stayed on the margins and got poorer" (ibid). As in the other plays featured in this chapter, what *It Come Up Sun* imagines is that between the uncertain and excluded selves in Irish society and the subaltern, foreign other, there is congruence and potential for alliance.

In O'Byrne's play, Joe, the night security guard in a container warehouse in Dublin's docklands, and Billy, his friend and inmate of the local mental institution, discover smuggled refugees, Ana and her terminally ill mother, stowed away in a container. In the second act, Joe, Ana and Billy create a 'wake' for Ana's mother and fantasise about possible new lives. But as the sun comes up in the morning, the

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¹⁵² The first group of 30 Roma Romanians were discovered in a container at the Intel freight forwarding depot in Thomastown, county Kilkenny, 18 May 1998. See Catherine Cleary In the *Irish Times*, 'People being smuggled into sealed containers at French ports' (1998a: 6).

¹⁵³ The story was widely reported on by most of Ireland's media with varying degrees of balance, but Catherine Cleary follows the story for the *Irish Times*, 'Romanians braving the hazardous journey to Rosslare for Irish Refuge' (1998b: 7).

¹⁵⁴ See Catherine Cleary, 'Services 'stretched by asylum-seekers'' (1998c: 1); also Richard Balls, 'Wexford braced for further influx of Romanian refugees' ((1998: 1). Eventually, a year after the arrivals began and despite a campaign by Alderman Padge Reck and the *Wexford People*, Chris Dooley was able to report that 'Controversy abates as Wexford is praised as perfect host' (1999: 2).

¹⁵⁵ Joe O'Byrne interview with the author, 15 October 2009. This story is perhaps an urban myth rather than a true story, but O'Byrne recalls it as true. It was certainly a story in circulation because of the true events at Rosslare.

constraints of reality take over again. All three characters are refugees in some way: Joe from an unhappy marriage and the expectations of boom time prosperity which make him a disappointment to his wife and daughters (25), Billy from the asylum and also from the reality of his tragic upbringing with a dead mother and violent, alcoholic father, Ana from the dangers and poverty of her homeland. Thus, both Billy and Joe experience the anguish of feeling out of place, of being "uncannily strange" in the place that should be 'home'. In the warehouse at night, however, they are able to escape into childish fantasies, such as being a football star (2-3), a detective (4) or a DJ (22). O'Byrne in our interview described this mythical realm as an "underworld", making connections with both the term 'underclass' and ancient mythology.

When Joe and Billy meet Ana, "an angel" (14), "a princess" (16), she inspires a different kind of fantasy altogether. As the night watchman, Joe is the gatekeeper and benevolent "king" (45) of this liminal place between the hell Ana is escaping and the paradise she imagines in Ireland. Although Joe is uncomfortable with the notion, Ana realises he has the ultimate power over her happiness.

ANA: You ... very important man. Now. You ... very important.

Joe shakes his head.

ANA: Yes, you ... you the most important man in world.

Joe laughs, a little flattered again.

JOE: If the wife heard you saying that ... she'd laugh, I can tell you.

ANA: You ... God. (15)

Billy's role is that of court jester, telling stories and jokes to keep Joe entertained during the long night, but he is also the wise fool who tells the truth. Billy and Ana decide to get married because, as he says, "If you want to stay here, you're going to have to get hitched, them's the rules", and as Joe is already married, "you don't even have to choose" (41).

Ana is agreeable, unromantic about the need for an Irish husband: "I need husband, stay here. We marry, maybe it no work, then we go ... (she makes the gesture of separate ways)." When Joe objects, she denigrates herself, reflecting a stereotype of Eastern European women as sexually compromised, as 'fallen': "I ... Joe, I no innocent. I no better than football. I to be kicked. I to be kicked forever. You wrong, Joe, I do bad things. I trouble. I sleep with bad man." (42) But after they have enacted the imaginary ceremony, with Joe as priest, and Billy has kissed 'the bride', he tears off in a manic panic attack and Ana realises, "it no good idea" (48). Ana represents an attainable utopia the two Irish men can only just bear to imagine, and Billy's distress comes from knowing he does not really belong to a world where he and Ana could be together. It is only a fantasy, which the play's archetypal framework acknowledges.

O'Byrne uses a plethora of folktales, urban and classical myths, jokes and riddles¹⁵⁶ for both comic and didactic purposes, to the extent that when Ana and Billy describe their tragic life-histories, they also seem like somewhat clichéd fairytales. For Paul Haughy writing in the *Irish Theatre Magazine*, "to reduce the very pressing and immediate reality of refugee/asylum seeking immigrants into diffused iconography weakens rather than strengthens our engagement and understanding of their very human experiences" (Haughy, 2001: 80), but according to O'Byrne the "games, roleplay... heightened reality" is "the core idea of the piece". For his characters, "salvation, utopia only exist in a fictional world" (author's interview, 2009). There are other plays, novels

¹⁵⁶ Billy has endless one liners but also a folktale about brothers who made the universe and bought Night for a pig (19-20), a joke/story with a moral about a bird in a pile of excrement and various apocalyptic tales about the local shopkeepers; Joe tells the story from Plato's *Republic* about the men living in the cave who think reality is the shadows on the walls; Ana, when describing her father, relates his story to folk tales about the devil stealing the moon (43).

or documentaries, he argues, that explore the reality of asylum seekers' lives. This play operates in the boundary land between imagination and reality, which changes the value of stereotypes as such and their specific logic. As Kriseva writes with reference to Freud's interpretation of the uncanny, "on the one hand, the sense of strangeness is a mainspring for identification with the other, by working out its depersonalising impact by means of astonishment" (1991: 189). On the other hand, "artifice... neutralizes uncanniness and makes all returns of the repressed plausible, acceptable, and pleasurable" (ibid: 188). While theatrical or fictional devices and political efficacy are by no means incompatible, O'Byrne and Mercier deny the dangers of strangeness in this play. Despite the contemporary events in Rosslare that inspired it, there is no hint of the Roma in the portrayal of Ana, who is rather a prototypically beautiful, blonde Polish actress, Malgorzata Kozuchocska. Despite the clichés of her past liaisons with unscrupulous men, the character remains unequivocally innocent and desirable. There are none of the material realities of people smuggling or life as a displaced person that might challenge the audience's composure or compromise their preconceptions. The folktale structure emphasises what Ana has in common with Billy and Joe, what universalises their stories rather than what distinguishes them. Beautiful Ana, tragic-comic Billy and noble Joe exist in a 'behind the looking-glass' dream world that shields them from reality for the duration of the night, but also shields the audience from engagement with the issues under discussion by organisations like the Refugee Council and the Wexford Area Partnership contesting the editorials in the Wexford People. At the end of the play Joe begins to cry, for himself and his children with "no love in the[ir] house", for Billy and his father "raining fists", for Ana and her dead mother (50). Joe's inclusive compassion makes the imaginative connection many of the plays in this chapter make between his own and Billy's internal social isolation and inability to belong, with the more literal homelessness of the refugee. "You cry for us all," says Ana (50), but Joe also cries *instead* of us, the audience. Unlike other Passion Machine productions which used theatrical devices to blur the boundary between what happens on the stage and what happens on the streets, *It Come Up Sun's* tragedies disappear into the imaginary realm as the sun comes up and the lights come on in the theatre. This play operates as an illusion, that disseminates the social reality of both the other within and without into archetypal stories of universal humanity.

Nevertheless, it would be difficult to emerge from a performance of *It Come Up* Sun without perceiving O'Byrne's case for a more welcoming and inclusive response to asylum seekers. In fact all three playwrights, Bolger, Mercier and O'Byrne, and the companies that produced their work, Axis, the Abbey and Passion Machine, pursue overtly political discourses with these productions. In common with many of the plays in this study, these pieces of theatre offer audiences a simultaneous historical and geographical materialism that reaffirms the potential for imagination to inspire political change. In the congruence they create between Irish emigration and contemporary immigration, these plays are part of the reconfiguring of Irish identity as diasporic rather than simply native, and multicultural as opposed to singular and homogenous. Thus, the figure of an Eastern European migrant worker, identifiably familiar for an Irish audience in terms of race, class, colonial history, even religion in the case of the Poles, is exemplary. However, as James Clifford points out (1994: 308), "the term diaspora is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement." These plays articulate socially created, plural notions of 'home' and renegotiate the local (Ballymun

for example), the regional (Dublin), the national (Ireland) and even the international (Europe) in terms of a network of spatial and temporal relationships and an understanding of 'belonging' as identification. As political geographer Jim MacLaughlin writes (1997: 197),

'home' today... is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the constructions of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become.

There is in these plays an exploration of identity in terms of difference, not so much in terms of difference from an-other, on the contrary the Self and Other are mirror images of each other, but as difference from ourselves across time and space. These plays reimagine Irish subjectivity as positive and inclusive, as the people who actually live here and who they might become.

Chapter Five

Arambe and the work of Olabisi Adigun: Representing Themselves, "Between You and Us"

Agency as a human problem is defined by the articulations of subject positions and identities into specific places and spaces – fields of activity,... on socially constructed territories. Agency is the empowerment enabled at particular sites, along particular vectors.

(Grossberg, 1996: 102)

The... hybrid is not only double-voiced and double accented... but it is also double-languaged; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two-voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs... that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance... It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms:... they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words.

(Bakhtin, 1981: 306)

In 1994 when Joseph Omara, a Ugandan refugee, appeared as the first black protagonist on the Abbey stage in Donal O'Kelly's *Asylum! Asylum!*, he exemplified an archetypal 'stranger in the house' figure, whose suffering and objectified otherness crystallises the identity struggles of the Irish characters. In 2007, when the Abbey were persuaded by Nigerian theatre artist Olabisi (Bisi) Adigun to produce a new version of John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* which imagined Christy Mahon as Nigerian asylum seeker Christopher Malamo, it was clear an African migrant had entered the 'house' of Irish theatre under very different circumstances. Adigun had been pursuing the idea of producing a black *Playboy* to commemorate the 2007 centenary of the first iconic production for some time, first writing about it in the essay 'An Irish Joke, Nigerian Laughter' published in 2004. Eventually he secured funding from the Arts Council to commission a new version through his company Arambe Productions, co-wrote

the play with Irish writer Roddy Doyle over ten months in 2006 and then shepherded it through production at the Abbey under the direction of one of his regular collaborators, Jimmy Fay. Thus, an African theatre artist can surely claim real ownership over the representation of Africans in this project. Christopher Malamo still suffers in the new Playboy, of course, as does Christy Mahon the 'outsider' in the original, his presence still precipitates a crisis of identity in the locals and similarly challenges the identity constructs of the audience, although not with the same riotous effect as in 1907. This time, however, it is through the stranger's eyes that the audience view an imaginary Ireland and it is with the "double voice" and "double consciousness" of African and Irish co-authors that the black protagonist speaks, "pregnant with potential for new world views" (Bakhtin, 1981: 306). It is deeply regrettable, therefore, that at the time of writing Adigun felt compelled to initiate court proceedings against Doyle and Fay, both of whom had been involved with Arambe since its inception in 2004, and against the Abbey theatre over issues of authorship, ownership and the rights of representation. While the specific circumstances which lead to the litigation are beyond the parameters of this study, what is of significance is not only the identity politics of Adigun and Arambe Productions but the transformation Adigun has wrought on the symbolic space of the national narrative. Claiming the territory of the National Theatre stage for a cross-cultural, hybrid version of one of the most beloved and well-known of Irish plays is an act of agency, an ideological intervention in the public sphere and in contemporary debates concerning racism, migration and what it means to be 'Irish'.

This chapter considers the theatre of Bisi Adigun and of his company Arambe Productions, the first African theatre company in Ireland, through the lens of post-

colonial and intercultural theatre theories. "[O]pening up an enunciative space between you and us" is how Homi Bhabha describes the work of Frantz Fanon (emphasis in original, 1994: 339), and the argument below contends that, similarly, Adigun's work reframes the Manichean pronouns of 'us' and 'them' and reverses the gaze of otherness, looking back at Irish society (you) from the point of view of the African migrant outsider (us) and thereby articulating and authorising theatrical representations of identity that interrogate notions of white Irishness as universal and normative. The main aims of the company, according to Adigun, are to provide an opportunity for Ireland's African community to "express themselves through the art of theatre" and to be the means by which African artists can "identify, nurture and showcase their... talents." ¹⁵⁷ In other words, Arambe offers African theatre artists in Ireland, who would otherwise be isolated from the mainstream, a place from which to speak creatively and the opportunity to exercise agency over the discourses of representation. The name, 'Arambe', is derived from the Yorubu saying "ara m be ti mo fed a" meaning "there are wonders that I want to perform" and from the Swahili word "harambee" meaning "work together." These two aspirations, emphasising alternatively individual and collective achievement, are also suggestive of the two ideological models that often predicate the production or performance of identity. The first assumes an intrinsic, 'authentic' content to identity that in a minority cultural context may need to be recovered from negative stereotyping, often with replacement by equally reductive positive images. The second model insists that all identities are relational, incomplete and multiple, constituted by differences from and connections to others (Hall, 1990: 222-237). This chapter, after providing contextual discussion of the company, teases Arambe's productions into separate threads of enquiry that echo these two models, namely the devised work and canonical African plays, which

¹⁵⁷ Olabisi Adigun, Arambe Production's website, http://www.arambeproductions.com/, accessed 12 June 2009.

celebrate innate African cultural and performance traditions, and the refiguring of classic Irish works, which emphasise relational notions of identity through African embodiment and interpretation of Irish source material. Although, under the directorship of Adigun, Arambe's productions often operate through both ideological frames simultaneously and are inherently cross-cultural in the context of an African company performing in multicultural Ireland, there remains a tension between insistence on African cultural specificity and engagement with hybridity and intercultural practices.

Starting from a premise that "to cross is not only to traverse, but to mix (as in cross-breed) and to contradict (as in to cross someone)" (Jonathan Dollimore quoted in Gilbert et al, 2002: 32), this essay utilises Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert's model of intercultural exchange as a dialogical matrix, which accommodates mutual transformation, the potential for loss as well as gain, the possibilities of power disparity and contestatory activity, in order to theorise Arambe's somewhat antithetical theatrical objectives and to demonstrate both the cultural empathy and culture clash in their theatre praxis. The value of Gilbert and Lo's model to this discussion is its critical matrixing of both interculturalism and post-colonialism, particularly the influence of Bhabha on issues such as agency, hybridity and 'authenticity' in theatrical praxis. Their model is thus sensitive to the articulation of power relations within sociopolitical relations and the impact of the cross-cultural artistic encounter on the public sphere. There are undoubtedly, for example, difficulties of cultural (mis)translation, particularly in the comic realm and the portrayal of women, where 'authentic' African dramatic situations resist coalescence and fusion in a contemporary Irish context. Similarly, I argue that, in the Irish reinterpretations, Adigun and his Irish co-creators sometimes collaborate with as well as contest stereotypes of both black and white identity. This can result in a form of mutual exotification that contributes to a disarming of political ideas. Thematically, on the other hand, there is great sympathy between both the 'African' and 'Irish' classics chosen for production, and indeed with many other contemporary Irish plays dealing with migration and racism. Adigun's 'repetition' of familiar ideas about migrant dislocation, intercultural relationships and hybrid identity from the racially 'other' perspective, displaces and estranges them, making meaning from the cultural contradictions. These contradictions, between exclusion and fusion, between whom or what is 'outside' or 'inside', highlight the performativity and plurality of Irish and African identity. What is argued below is that Arambe's cross-cultural theatre sources its agency from its interstitial nature, between two source cultures and two target audiences, both distinct from each other and differentially hybrid in multiple and even opposing ways, in the space "between you and us" (Bhabha, 1994: 339).

5.1 The African Canon: "seizing the apparatus of value coding"

In his Preface to Myth, Literature and the African World, Wole Soyinka writes,

We black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonialism – this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of *their* world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems. (1976: x)

Bisi Adigun has also written extensively of his disquiet at the representation of Africans in contemporary Irish plays. While he acknowledges that many of the portrayals are

"well-meant" (2007: 54), he also describes them as "ethnocentric", pandering "to the expectations of the predominantly white audience" (ibid: 52) and featuring a stereotypical palette of black characters as "asylum seekers, rapists, prostitutes, and the wretched of the earth" (ibid: 64). Arambe's productions, in contrast were conceived as a counter-balance to such simplistic negative images, a celebration of "Africanness" and an attempt "to present the way we, Africans, see ourselves and not the way other people perceive us" (ibid: 52). It is an unapologetically identitarian agenda, a strategy of "reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding" (1990b: 228), to use the terminology of Gayatri Spivak. In creating his own theatre company and producing African plays, Adigun has seized the means of production, providing performance vehicles for black actors in plays richly endowed with African theatrical expression, traditions and reference points by playwrights of distinction and international renown. Apart from their inherent value as works of art, these plays provide cultural recognition and enjoyment for Arambe's 'initiated' African audiences, cultural insight perhaps for the 'uninitiated' Irish audiences and a challenge to pejorative or patronising representations of Africans.

Yet, as might be expected in the cross-cultural context of a migrant theatre company like Arambe, an emphasis on the 'universal-humanoid' themes and aesthetic forms is also an important aspect of the cultural transfer. Apart from the devised pieces *Once upon a Time* and *Not So Long Ago* (2005), Arambe's African productions are undoubtedly representative of the African canon, understood as having 'universal' value. It includes the work of two Nobel laureates, Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* (2009) and Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* (2008), along with other influential writers and theatre directors, specifically *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (2004) by Ola Rotimi, *The*

Dilemma of a Ghost (2007) by Ama Ata Aidoo and Joseph Coleman de Graft's Through a Film Darkly (2008). All these plays were written in the period immediately postindependence in their respective countries, ¹⁵⁸ are reflective of Western theatre influences in their form and of the legacies of colonisation in their themes. All were originally written, produced and published in English. ¹⁵⁹ They are post-colonial works, part of what Biodun Jeyifo's terms, in a Hegelian argument, an "Afrocentric counter-discourse" (1996: 156), always already speaking back to the former colonial 'you' as well as to the newly liberated African 'us'. Inherently cross-cultural in their original context, therefore, they are amenable to cooption to Arambe's political purposes and readily interpretable by a multicultural audience. That is not to argue, however, as Jeyifo does, that in taking their methodological and thematic cues from colonial culture, these plays remain "basically reactive" (ibid). All drama is reactive in that it responds to its society, in this case an African society that has experienced colonisation. As there can be no true 'outside' in the colonial relationship, no 'authentic' pre-colonial or completely de-colonised point of reference, these playwrights assimilate Western and African cultural paradigms in response to a world that resounds to the clash of alien and traditional influences, as do Arambe's African and Irish interpretative artists in globalised contemporary Ireland.

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¹⁵⁸ Nigeria achieved independence in 1960, the same year Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* was first performed. Nigeria's Civil War was from 1967 to 1970 and provides a context for Ola Rotimi's 1968 production of *The Gods are Not to Blame*. Ghanaian independence from Britain was won in 1957 with Coleman De Graft's *Through a Film Darkly* produced in 1962 and Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* in 1964. St Lucia was an associate state of the United Kingdom from 1967 until full independence was achieved in 1979. Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* was first produced in 1978.

¹⁵⁹ While it is perhaps obvious for an African theatre company performing in Ireland to favour Anglophone work, the issue of language remains highly political in post-colonial Africa. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), for example, argues that language is a major tool of imperialism and that African artists must return to working in their indigenous tongues.

The formation of Arambe had its genesis in early 2003 when Willie White, then artistic director of the Project Arts Centre, and Dominic Campbell, director of that year's Saint Patrick's Festival, approached Adigun to co-ordinate a one-off performance based on African oral traditions as part of the endeavours of the Saint Patrick's Festival to become more inclusive and more accurately reflect the new diversity of Irish society. This show became African Voices in Ireland, with performers from Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa and Senegal. Thus, from the beginning Arambe has sourced its performers and its material from different parts of Africa, although as Nigerians make up the majority of Africans in Ireland they also constitute a larger percentage of Arambe's company. This project also marked the beginning of Adigun and Arambe's beneficial relationship with both White and the Project where many of their plays were performed. African Voices seemed to generate momentum and Adigun was asked by Vellejo Gantner, Director of the Dublin Fringe Festival, to produce a play for the festival in September of that year. He suggested Ola Rotimi's The Gods Are Not to Blame, which he had previously tried unsuccessfully to produce with white actors for the 1997 Fringe Festival, but by late 2003 Adigun was sure there were enough Africans in Ireland to recruit an all black cast (Adigun, 2007: 55). Jimmy Fay, artistic director of Bedrock Productions, was asked to co-direct as Adigun was also to play the lead role of Odewale, and the play ran at the Project Arts Centre for five nights. In February 2004, when Arambe Productions was officially launched, the production was remounted for another five night season at the O'Reilly Theatre, Belvedere College. Rotimi's play is a reworking of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, set ostensibly in fifteenth century Nigeria, but written in 1968 as a response to the Nigerian-Biafran civil war that was to claim the lives of millions. Structurally, the play reflects its mixed parentage. A sense of ordained doom hangs over the protagonist as the plot closely follows the Greek

original through an elegant use of *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*. Odewale, a 'foreigner', has been elected leader of a war-stricken tribe and married the widowed queen. But the tribe is cursed with plagues and sickness, which the soothsayers attribute to the unresolved murder of the previous king. In graphic flashback, we learn that Odewale unknowingly killed the king in a hot-headed tribal dispute over land and that he is in fact the king's eldest son, abandoned to die as a baby because he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother, the woman who is now his wife and the mother of his children. Yet the play is also suffused with African cultural and religious references, such as the Ifa divination, charms, sacrifice, rituals associated with the god Ogun, and the use of songs, drumming and proverbs to elucidate the themes. Another Yorubu theatrical tradition is the interplay of contradictory comic incident and characters as foils to tragedy, ¹⁶⁰ a familiar neo-Shakespearean device a Western audience would also recognise. In this play, much of the comic relief comes in the form of Alaka, the clownish farmer who rescued baby Odewale from the bush, who now becomes the hilariously terrified interloper caught up in a ghastly dynastic prophecy, understandably crying "Let me eat in peace." ¹⁶¹

Where there is not always an easy fit, however, is between the religious beliefs of the ancient Greeks and an African world view, an incompatibility Rotimi uses creatively to emphasise the political dimensions of the play. In Yorubu cosmology the gods might be harsh but they are also just, ill-fortune is viewed as retribution for wrong-doing and

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¹⁶⁰ For more information on traditional Yorubu travelling theatre, see Kacke Götrick, 'The Actor, the Art of Acting and Liminality' in *Culture in Africa: an Appeal for Pluralism*, Seminar Proceedings No. 29, The Scandanavian Institute of African Studies (1993: 145-172).

¹⁶¹ Ola Rotimi, *The Gods are Not to Blame* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 57. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be referred to by page number.

they can be appealed to through sacrifice. 162 They are not the unyielding, malevolent, capricious beings of the Greek parthenon. Rotimi ensures that Odewale is seen as responsible for his own doom; due to his legendarily bad temper and tribalism the 'Gods are not to blame'. Hence, the play excoriates the stupidity and waste of a civil war that mindlessly repeats colonial aggression in the excesses of tribal jingoism. "In the idiom of the play", writes Rotimi, "...Odewale's tribulations can be seen as drawing attention to that most obtrusive of African national evils: ethnicism" (quoted in Adigun, 2007: 59). For Adigun and Arambe in the context of contemporary Dublin, *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is about identity and 'otherness'. "The fundamental question *The Gods* asks is: what determines one's identity?" explains Adigun, "Is it our language, accent, parentage, colour of our skin, or place of birth?" (Arambe website). For Arambe's migrant performers and their multicultural audiences, both Irish and other, the play not only emphasises the tragic consequences of ethnic othering and prejudice in an African tribal context, but also articulates a contingent notion of belonging that suggests Irish identity too should be able to accommodate the 'stranger'.

Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson's book, *Crossroads in the Black Aegean*, notes the preponderance of adaptations of Sophocles in African post-colonial theatre and considers why the characters Oedipus and Antigone are so resonant in African tragedy. Their premise is that these ancient Greek plays illuminate three of the most charged post-colonial themes: identity, the grounding of civilization over barbarism and the transmission of culture over time and space. These three themes also articulate the response to Adigun and Fay's production. The palpable excitement around Arambe and

¹⁶² For further discussion of Yorubu religious beliefs see John A. I. Bewaji, 'Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil' (1998).

The Gods Are Not to Blame at the festival in 2003 and the launch a few months later is that they signalled something absolutely new in Irish theatre. The Irish Theatre

Magazine's Sara Keating felt she had witnessed something significant: "This large-scale production, performed by an ensemble of African actors... who live in Ireland, is perhaps the most impressive embodiment of Ireland's multicultural reality that Dublin has seen" (Keating, 2003: 77-78). Katrina Goldstone in the Irish Times described the emergence of Arambe with The Gods Are Not to Blame as "a small revolution" (2004: 10). Roddy

Doyle too, in a speech inaugurating Arambe in 2004, hailed the play as "the most exhilarating and exciting thing I have seen in a long, long, long time on the Irish stage," and saw its importance in terms of identity: "I just thought this is Irish, this is what the new Ireland is about." From an African perspective, Nigerian journalist and academic Abel Ugba, a board member of Arambe at the time and also speaking at the launch, the play was about cultural retrieval and contested the distinctions between civilization, understood as European, and barbarism, associated with Africa.

Contrary to what we have been made to believe and what you have been made to see everyday about Africa, tonight has more or less given us a different message, a different impression about the continent. Does Africa [have] literature? Does Africa [have] theatre? Does Africa [have] energy? (ibid)

Doyle was also alert to the cultural transfer that the play was making with Western tragic theatre traditions.

It will remind us that tragic heroes and tragic heroines don't have to wear grey or don't have to wear black. It will remind us for example that we can laugh during a tragedy, it will remind us that music does not necessarily have to be in the background it can come to the front and play a vital part in the production.

He predicted that this kind of exchange would act as a renewal, "send[ing] Irish theatre swerving on a new track" (ibid).

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¹⁶³ Roddy Doyle, speaking at the launch of Arambe Productions, unpublished, February 2004. I am indebted to Bisi Adigun for access to his video of the launch and the speeches cited.

Doyle's aspirational vision that Irish theatre would be able to accommodate, indeed assimilate and be rejuvenated by, multicultural influences from migrant theatre companies such as Arambe, implies the framework of 'intercultural' theatre. It is a term that resists a straight forward definition, but, as a place to begin, Patrice Pavis offers this definition: "In the strictest sense, [interculturalism] creates hybrid forms drawing upon a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas" (1996: 8). Arambe's work, however, does not sit easily within this definition as it predominantly utilises conventional Western theatre forms. Nor does Arambe perform in the round, the traditional model of African performance advocated by theatre practitioners such as Ola Rotimi because "it is essential in African theatre that the audience feel the heat of the actors and sense their vibrations" (1992: 71). Gilbert and Lo, however, provide a useful critical framework for understanding Arambe's African productions with their division of post-colonial theatre into "syncretic" and "nonsyncretic" categories, distinguished by the use of form. 'Syncretic' theatre generally incorporates Western and indigenous dramaturgical practices, which "tends to highlight rather than disguise shift in the meaning, function, and value of cultural fragments as they are moved from their traditional contexts" (ibid: 36). 'Nonsyncretic' theatre, on the other hand, uses either imperial genres, such as Western-style realism, or, less often, wholly indigenous aesthetics to voice post-colonial themes. Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott are well-known practitioners of syncretic theatre and the plays of Ola Rotimi and Ama Ata Aidoo could also be aligned with this approach, whereas J. C. De Graft's *Through a* Film Darkly, a conventionally realist play with Pirendellian overtones, adheres more closely to the nonsyncretic end of the spectrum. Under Lo and Gilbert's schema, while the African texts are categorised as "post-colonial", Arambe's productions and Adigun's

work more broadly would be classed as "multicultural migrant theatre", in that they are the cultural products of an ethnic group within a multicultural society (2002: 33-34). Adigun himself rejects the description 'multicultural', which has socio-political connotations he resists, and asserts his work is 'intercultural'. He differentiates his work with Arambe from both Irish plays about Africans in Ireland, such as those discussed in the preceding chapters, and also his own previously African-centred work. "One is a superficial display of multi-culture. People come and watch it and think 'oh very nice; and then go back to their lives. Inter-culture is where multi-culture interacts with the dominant culture" (quoted in Andrews, 2003c: 38). Adigun's distinction emphasises his ideological approach and foregrounds critical engagement with Irish society, which is particularly germane to migrant theatre as a counter-discursive practice.

Arambe's next project explicitly sought to carve out a cultural identity space for African performers in Ireland and also to engage "the dominant culture" in critical discourse, but it drew on the creativity of its own participants rather than a classical text. In 2005, once more with the assistance of the Irish Arts Council, Adigun initiated a development project with sixteen African actors working with the professional directors, Jimmy Fay of Bedrock and Raymond Keane of Barrabas from Ireland and John Martin from the London-based Pan Centre for Intercultural Arts, over twelve weekends. This project eventually became the performance piece *Once Upon a Time*, a dramatised selection of African 'moonlight stories' performed on 25 May as part of the Africa Day celebrations. With funding from the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR), a further development project with the African ensemble joined by four white Irish actors resulted in *Not So Long Ago*. Eventually both plays were performed as a double-bill in

May 2006 at the O'Reilly Theatre. 164 The theme that links the two pieces is the consequences of cross-cultural interaction, with the final part of Once Upon a Time illustrating how modernity, in the presence of the television brought home by a returned emigrant, has displaced traditional storytelling in Africa, while Not So Long Ago focuses on cultural misunderstandings between Irish people and African immigrants living in Ireland. Both pieces are constructed didactically with a narrator (played by Yemi Adenuga) guiding the audience's reading as the storyteller in *Once Upon A Time* and as the guest on what appears to be an Irish chat-show in Not So Long Ago, contextualising, interpreting and commenting on the sketches with her Irish host. Once Upon a Time is a celebratory piece dramatising traditional stories from the "four corners of Africa" interspersed with evocative music, drumming and chant singing. Most of the tales illustrate a message, as in the Ethiopian story 'Justice' in which the misunderstandings between a woman and a deaf man are humorously magnified when their conflict is decided by a deaf, blind magistrate. Others are delightfully absurd, as when a series of villagers are terrorised by inanimate objects such as a rock or a stool speaking to them. The final tale is tragic, confirming the importance of communal values in the story of a woman who sacrifices her only son for the tribe. Rather than overtly political, Once Upon a Time is a performance of African identity, a re-iteration and re-creation of the native self in the foreign world of the migrant that expresses a desire for recognition and demands the right to signify itself via indigenous cultural traditions. This production and, indeed, all Arambe's African plays, create for their African audience an "imaginary homeland", 165 or as Bhabha notes, a way "in which cultures recognise themselves through

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¹⁶⁴ I am deeply indebted to Bisi Adigun for permission to view a video recording of this 2006 performance and all subsequent references are to this performance video.

¹⁶⁵ The phrase 'imaginary homelands' is Salman Rushdie's, the title essay from his collection *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (1992: 9-21). I am using the term, however, more in the

their projections of 'otherness'" (1994: 17). Perhaps this explains the strangely essentialist final images of *Once Upon a Time*. Interrupting the final tableau in which the woman who has sacrificed her son becomes a goddess, a young man in western clothes bounces onto the stage in a burst of hip-hop music. He opens his suitcase and the others crowd around, delighted with the clothes and gadgets he has brought back. Then they sit on the floor as they did in the first scene to listen to the storyteller, but now they are watching television. Projected onto a large screen on the back wall, they watch nearly five minutes of a BBC wildlife documentary in which a pregnant gazelle has to cross a river full of crocodiles. Perhaps Adigun means to satirise the association of Africa with wildlife and its implications of 'survival of the fittest' savagery, but the effect is rather to emphasise the connection, particularly as the cast cheer on the gazelle in a naïve, child-like fashion. By focusing so narrowly on 'authentic' African identity and mourning its dilution in modernity, the final images of this piece undermine the authority and force of the more sophisticated and analogical traditional stories we have just witnessed.

Not So Long Ago, on the other hand, is more adversarial than celebratory, constructing white Irish people as 'the other' through oppositional counter-myths. The note of stridency is obvious in an early scene in which an Irish woman asks an African shop assistant if she went home for Easter. Aggressively coming out from behind the desk, the woman demands,

SHOP ASSISTANT: And what is your business if I went home for Easter or

not? What about you, did you go home for Easter?

EMILY: But Ireland is my home. Here.

SHOP ASSISTANT: (Losing her temper) There you go. Is it because I am

black that you think this is not my home?

EMILY: I am sorry, I d-didn't mean that at all.

(Cited in Adigun, 20007: 61)

The commentary contextualises the shop assistant's overreaction by explaining that 'where are you from' is a question Irish people routinely ask each other and it is generally not intended maliciously, but for Africans who are constantly portrayed as 'alien' in the media it can be difficult not to read an attack into the question. Other scenes also make uncomfortable viewing for Arambe's non-African audience. In an expensive restaurant, a white Irish man and his African date receive the bill. He says, "Now let me see. Phew, a hundred and twenty-five euros! I had water, rice, the curry, coffee. You had oysters, steak, two glasses of champagne, a glass of wine..." Then he offers her forty euros as his share. While it may be common for younger Irish men and women to 'go Dutch', this scene would rankle with the self-image most Irish have of themselves as generous. Arambe lays down a powerful challenge to an Irish audience with their repeated assertion, re-iterated by Yemi Adenuga's narrator character, that these stories of prejudice are 'true', the 'real-life' experiences of the participants fashioned into drama by the devising process. Adigun's contention that this show "was arguably the first time that Africans represented their personal experiences on the Irish stage themselves" (ibid: 62) is persuasive and significant. Why then the inclusion of apocryphal urban legend when there are so many real incidences of cultural intolerance to dramatise? A case in point is as the scene in which a white woman refuses to sit in her allocated seat on an aeroplane next to a black man. She complains to the flight attendant who eventually upgrades the black passenger to first class, to the chagrin of the racist. In the parenthetical commentary the Irish talk-show host expresses his surprise that this could really happen "in this day and age" and, indeed, a brief 'Google' of this story throws up numerous versions, mostly on 'humorous' or urban legend sites, that compromise its veracity. 166 Whether it is or is

¹⁶⁶ For just the top few examples in a Google search see 'Cabin Tales of Untruth', http://www.pprune.org/archive/index.php/t-416159.html; 'Flight Attendant Put-downs and Check-in Wisecracks', http://www.messybeast.com/dragonqueen/flight-attendants.htm; 'How rude! 10 times

not something that 'really' happened, it is certainly not the 'real-life' experience of any of the participants, nor is it plausible as such.

Nevertheless, the longest and most powerful piece, which concerns the death of a baby boy after a botched traditional circumcision, is manifestly based on a 'true' story, widely reported in the Irish media. 167 Contextualised by the narrator's insistence that it is important for any civilised society to make space for the traditions and beliefs of other cultures, there was plenty of scope for drama in this tragic story. The mimetic staging of the scene, however, with a baby doll splayed out downstage centre while the improvised circumcision is performed with a razor blade, would challenge an Irish audience's empathy with the Nigerian father and his decision not to wait until the baby was old enough to have the procedure done in an Irish hospital as had been advised. Finally, the play ends with a scene in which a mixed race actress (played by Donna Nikolaisen), who has previously been denied a part because she is not 'white', is deemed not 'black' enough to play an African. Adigun has long argued the case for 'colour-blind' casting and the issue is partly the reason why he set up an African theatre company (Andrews, 2003c: 38). It is somewhat ironic then, considering that Nikolaisen is one of the only trained 'black' actors in the company, that her roles in these two productions are all ancillary, 'white' characters. Apart from the mixed race actress, in Not So Long Ago she plays an Irish girl out to dinner with a black man who insists on paying her share, the air stewardess and the doctor who tells the Nigerian couple their baby is dead, while in *Once*

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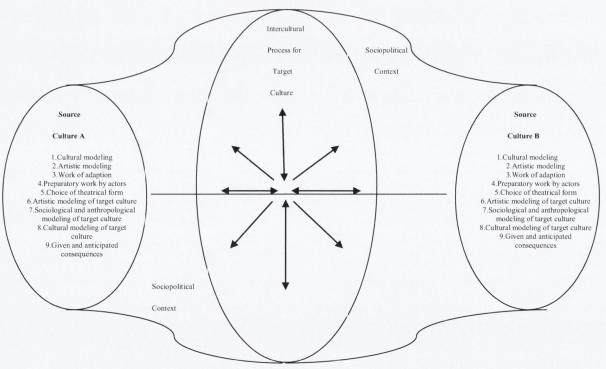
when being impolite doesn't pay', http://www.tripso.com/columns/how-rude-10-times-when-being-impolite-doesnt-pay/ accessed 23 August 2010.

¹⁶⁷ See Jim Cusak (2003), 'Circumcision Quack Sought';http://www.independent.ie/national-news/circumcision-quack-sought-494133.html; or Damien Tiernan on RTE 6.01 news and on website (2004), 'Man in court over death of baby';http://www.rte.ie/news/2004/0114/baby.html, accessed 23 August 2010.

Upon a Time she has no speaking role but serves as a member of the chorus and as a drummer. Not So Long Ago is a piece of political agit-prop, a cultural act of "negation" rather than "negotiation" to use Homi Bhabha's terms. Rather than keeping "forever separate the terms of the master and the slave", he argues that in order to be politically efficacious, discourse must "open up the space of translation" (1994: 37). In all their productions Arambe assert the right to represent themselves, their specific concerns and their perspectives on Irish society to their own multicultural audience. They claim agency over representations which may offend Irish notions self-identity or make for difficult viewing in that they reveal the complexity of cultural interaction and sometimes deny the comforting closure of easy answers. If, in Levinasian terms, we accept that ethical, face-to-face engagement with the Other must allow for the return of their gaze, then it is also necessary to listen to what they may have to say about us. However, what Adigun set out to do in Not So Long Ago is to explain how cultural difference can lead to misunderstandings and limit the opportunities for integration. It is on this basis that project was funded by NAPAR. (Adigun, 2007: 62). It is the contention of this analysis that by employing a series of black/white polarities and insisting on the differences and distances between the cultures, this production does little to assist the project of integration.

Even so, if intercultural theatre practice is imagined as a "border art" which, as Mexican performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña argues, must trespass, bridge, remap and redefine the limits of culture (1996: 12), than Arambe's antagonist approach in *Not So Long Ago* offers a valuable critique of more politically neutralising images of seamless multicultural fusion. Quoting Bhaba who insists that "Hybrid hyphenations emphasise the incommensurable elements [...] as the basis of cultural identifications", Helen Gilbert

and Jacqueline Lo propose a model that endeavours to illustrate the potential for antipathy or resistance to synthesis as well as the more harmonious theatre making experiences traditionally associated with cultural-exchange. Their model is inspired by a children's toy, a plastic disc with a piece of elastic through it, that travels spinning from end to end as the elastic is tightened and released between the child's two hands (see diagram below). Depending on the tension, the disc, imagined as the target culture, moves closer to either the left or the right hand, which represent the cultures involved in the project, both considered autonomous source cultures. It is a model which emphasises the mutuality of intercultural practice, however limited or nonreflexive, with both source cultures feeling the centrifugal and centripetal impact of each other and various artistic, sociological and reception influences.



Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo's proposed model for Interculturalism (2002: 45) 168

¹⁶⁸ Gilbert and Lo derive their artistic, sociological and reception filters from Patrice Pavis' 'hourglass' model of intercultural theatre. See Patrice Pavis, 'Toward a Theory of Culture and *Mis En Scène'* in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992: 1-23).

The notion of 'intercultural' that this model explores highlights the 'inter' space between polarities and points of view that are not necessarily assimilable, and of theatre and performance as inherently heterogeneous, as cultural negotiation rather than cultural expression. How that balance is managed becomes crucial in the context of the political efficacy or otherwise of a theatre piece as adversarial as Once Upon a Time and Not So Long Ago. The asymmetry of the model illustrates power disparities, such as Adigun may have experienced in his collaboration with the Abbey as opposed to his autonomous work with Arambe, or for heterogenous target cultures to exert greater or lesser attraction, as when Arambe productions oscillate between addressing their African and non-African audiences as is discussed below with reference to *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. After the devising projects that resulted in Once Upon A Time and Not So Long Ago, Arambe staged an all black version of Jimmy Murphy's The Kings of the Kilburn High Road, which is discussed in more detail below. Adigun then returned once more to canonical African works for his source material, The Dilemma of a Ghost and Through a Film Darkly by Ghanaians Ama Ata Aidoo and J. C. De Graft, Pantomime by Afro-Caribbean Derek Walcott and The Trials of Brother Jero by Wole Soyinka, Nigeria's most famous Like The Gods Are Not to Blame, these plays are thematically concerned playwright. with the narratives of migration and cross-cultural interaction. They are post-colonial in their original sociopolitical contexts and use mostly syncretic dramaturgical forms. They therefore speak eloquently to a contemporary multicultural Dublin audience of the dilemmas of what Gilbert and Lo refer to as "cultural in-between-ness" (ibid: 34), in a theatrical language that is accessible and readily appreciable. What is argued below is that Arambe's African productions, thereby, both stage culture and difference and also construct alternative cultural identity spaces which open out the discursive constructs of race and migration in a multicultural Irish context.

Arambe staged Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Ghanaian independence in 2007. The plot follows the rubric of the interracial romance/culture clash story so prevalent in Irish drama, but this time from the perspective of a Ghanaian family in the sixties, whose 'been-to' son, ¹⁶⁹ Ato Yawson, returns home from university in the United States with his African-American wife, Eulalie Rush (Merina Milsapp). Eulalie, an orphan, fantasises about returning "to the very source" ¹⁷⁰ of her African identity. Yet the Prelude, in which the audience hears a disembodied Ato and Eulalie imaging what life will be like in Ghana, hints at the multifarious conflicts to come. The most obvious dilemma posed by such a 'mixed' marriage is the possible cultural incompatibility. Eulalie's Western prejudices are signaled by her nickname for Ato, "Native Boy" (9), while Ato's criticism of her "dripping-tap drawl" (10) and his "harsh" admonishment to "keep her mouth shut" (8) suggests he too has preconceptions about Americans and the role of women that will challenge the happiness of their marriage. Indeed, the young couple's materialist values and pleasure seeking and Eulalie's disdain for traditional ceremonies, food and social mores sparks conflict with the Ghanaian in-laws. At the heart of this discord is the primacy in African society of communal and family priorities versus Eulalie's insistence on her individual rights and choices. The climax of the play is thus precipitated when Ato and Eulalie fail to produce children, a shameful situation that the family assumes could only be caused by Eulalie's barrenness. Because Ato has felt unable to explain that they are using contraception, the family attempt to treat Eulalie by "washing her stomach" with a traditional cure (43). She is outraged and the bitter quarrel that results reveals the

¹⁶⁹ A 'been-to' refers to those in a post-colonial society who have been to the West (Europe or the USA) to be educated and have returned with changed perspectives on their own culture.

¹⁷⁰ Ama Ata Aidoo, *The Dilema of a Ghost*, in *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa* (Harlow: Longman, 1987), p. 24. All subsequent citations to the play are from this edition and will be referenced by page number.

couple's mutual contempt for each other's cultural values. Ato wants to accede to Ghanaian social norms, but Eulalie is contemptuous of his family's ignorance. "Shut up! What does the American Negro know?" snarls Ato, and she rages back, "Do you compare these bastards, these narrow-minded savages with us? Do you dare..." Then he strikes her and storms off to his mother (48).

Eric Weitz, in his essay 'Who's Laughing Now? Comic Currents for a New Irish Audience', uses a phenomenological study of the audience response on opening night to argue that the play serves its two distinct audiences, African and non-African, in different ways (2009: 225-236). To a certain extent both audiences were able to respond to the play on the level of a comedy of manners, with the American wife's cultural transgressions clearly signalled by the Ghanaian family's overt reaction and by the African audience's response, such that an Irish audience would understand the problem even if they could not relate to the cultural specifics. In addition, Eulalie's brash manners, particularly as portrayed by Merrina Millsapp, are recognisable as a humorous stereotype of the "American Other" for both the African and the Irish audience (ibid: 233). There are also numerous examples of where by addressing two distinct audiences, what Weitz refers to as the "in-group" (in this case the African audience) and the "outgroup" (the non-Africans) (ibid: 226), Arambe's social agenda is profitably served, opening to question presuppositions about race and culture. For example, in act one when Ato's uncle, anticipating his nephew's arrival, asks "But where is our master, the white man himself?" (14), the laughter of the Africans highlights their perception of Ato's reinscription as 'white' through the acquisition of culture, whereas for most of the Caucasian audience for whom Ato's skin categorically determines his 'race', their

laughter is perhaps at the incongruous 'racism' of the jibe. In this way, the play neatly unhitches racism from the 'black/white' or even an 'African/Irish' binary and foregrounds its tribalist construction in discursive and cultural processes. Both an Irish and an African audience, immersed as they are in a Western worldview, would also be able to understand if not necessarily agree with Eulalie's individualistic ethos, and the play is careful to emphasise that she rejects the African rituals not just out of cultural arrogance but also because she finds them genuinely frightening (25). On opening night, as I sat in an audience that was markedly more diverse than the average Irish audience, ¹⁷¹ the different reactions to the play necessitated a consciousness of alternative world views, other senses of humour and an appreciation of marginalised values.

With this in mind, it is regrettable that the production was not able to better utilise the play's alien dramaturgical conventions in order to elucidate the complex themes of the play. For *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, as the title suggests, is not just a comedy of manners, but also framed within the Ghanaian oral tradition of a dilemma tale. Gerry Colgan's review in the *Irish Times* is an example of a response to what is lost in translation.

Colgan interpreted "the simple story" as "an analogue for immigration into Ireland today" and contends that the play was both too dated and too foreign to be relevant, with its "presentation of characters still mired in primitive superstitions." He also finds the resolution of the play "illogical" (2007: 69). What is missing from Colgan's review is an understanding that a dilemma tale in Ghanaian culture is designed to facilitate discussion of a problem, rather than the neat drawing to a conclusion of Western dramaturgy. Just asking, 'who is the ghost in this play, whose dilemma is it', reveals how multi-positional

¹⁷¹ There is no empirical evidence of the make-up of the opening night audience, but it appeared to be approximately evenly divided between Africans and non-Africans.

and impartial the drama is and also, I would argue, exposes a crucial weakness in Adigun's interpretation. In Arambe's production, Ato, the husband, is the protagonist, positioned both as the comically indecisive moral coward between his wife and his mother and, more seriously, as the 'neo-colonial', alienated from his indigenous culture but still in search of 'authentic' identification. Yet, on the most literal level, it is Eulalie, figure of the diaspora, who is the real 'ghost', representative of the repressed and forgotten past who returns demanding recognition. From the first Prelude scene onward, questions of race and class complicate each other. Eulalie riles at the suggestion that "I am not as good as your folks" (9) and, indeed, the social stigma attached to Eulalie's slave heritage is significant. She is "the wayfarer", whom the village women describe as "this Black-white woman/ A stranger and a slave" (22). As Thérèse Migraine-George argues through her insightful use of the Orpheus myth, neither Ato nor Eulalie can actually "re-turn" home; Ato because he has been irrevocably altered by his experiences abroad and his 'home' is now unfamiliar and strange to him, and Eulalie because the African "source" she longs to be part of was always imaginary (2003: 86). As this inability to create a sense of 'home' is at the crux of migrant dislocation, both these dilemmas are relevant to contemporary Irish society. It is the third dilemma of the play which concerns the mutual compromises necessary for a community to accept and adapt to a migrant presence, however, which seems to offer a way out of this political and cultural impasse. It is through the figure of Esi Kom, Ato's mother that Ato's family makes this transition as she takes Eulalie into the old part of the house to mark her acceptance of her now more humble daughter-in-law, while Ato is left outside with his own dilemma pointedly unresolved (50). It is a resolution of sorts but, as Aidoo's vision of cross-cultural relations is quite radical, it is also not surprising that for some it was unsatisfactory. Rather than the celebratory fusion of different cultures that

multiculturalism seems to promise, the play suggests that integration is a difficult and confusing process that involves uncomfortable compromises on both sides and a reciprocal submission of ourselves/themselves to question and to change. It is, as the Gilbert and Lo model suggests a process of "transculturation" that necessitates a relinquishing as well as the acquisition of culture (2002: 39). In this uncertain, negotiated space Arambe facilitates the coming together of two distinct audiences, who like Esi Kom and Eulalie have decided to hopefully and generously engage in a crosscultural embrace, the sharing of a play together.

Ever committed to this discourse in Irish society, in the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue Arambe produced two plays, Joe Coleman De Graft's *Through a Film Darkly* in April and, for the Dublin Fringe Festival in September, Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*. While the drama in both *Through a Film Darkly* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost* is precipitated by an inter-cultural romance, De Graft's play deals specifically with the pathology of racial prejudice. The story follows English-educated Ghanaian John Owusu on holidays with his wife Sewah and young child, visiting his friend Addo. Their holiday good humour is shattered, however, when Addo's white neighbour Janet Wilson drops around and John begins behaving abusively towards her, much to the shock and disgust of his wife and friend. Developing the motif of the love/hate, fear/desire nexus of interracial sexual attraction, it transpires that John's vehement racism stems from his time as a student in England and his relationship with a white woman, who he was madly in love with until he discovered she was using him as "a guinea pig... for her thesis in

anthropology". ¹⁷² Adigun, somewhat undersells the complexity with which the play deals with the theme in this extract from a pre-publicity interview and he is perhaps being flippant rather than patronising in his assumptions about an Irish audience:

I don't think anybody knows that a black person could be racist. It's usually called reverse discrimination. And what that pre-supposes is that for you to be a racist, you must be on a superior level. So the question here is, do you know that a black person is capable of racism? Oh, that's a good question! A white person on the receiving end of racism? [Laughs] Come on! (Quoted Conley, 2009: 9)

In fact, John's racism is a result not of his feelings of superiority but inferiority, a pertinent distinction in the context of post-colonial Irish racism, where the victim of discrimination becomes the perpetrator. The baldness of the 'reverse discrimination' motif is also leavened and interrogated within the play by the internalised anti-black racism of various characters and the diffusion of issues of race through both class and gender. When John's old flame Rebecca (Elizabeth Shuh) appears, for instance, we learn that she was devastated but able to accept being abandoned for a white woman. However, when she discovers that he has married another African, she reacts with disdain: "And when did you marry this – this thing?" (45). De Graft also makes subtle use of the enigmatic houseboy, Adamu (Segun Akano), whose social standing marks him out as a 'foreigner', just as Janet's race also, differently, implies class in a post-colonial context.

However, while the relevance of the play's themes was generally acknowledged in the critical response, there is repeated criticism of *Through a Film Darkly* and of Arambe's African classics more generally, that they are "dated". With regard to

¹⁷² Joe Coleman de Graft, *Through a Film Darkly* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 55. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be referenced by page number.

¹⁷³ Peter Crawley wrote that "the play's form rather than its theme make it difficult to deliver from its time", 'Reviews/*Through a Film Darkly*' (2008: 16); For Niamh O'Dea "quite a lot of this play feels dated and stilted" (2008: 15).

Through a Film Darkly, the dramaturgical form with its 'Pirandellian' disruptions of the 'fourth wall' illusions was felt to betray its age and to bear the brunt of responsibility for the play's overt didacticism. For other critics, the problem is John's unnuanced racism and misogyny, which appear to belong to a different generation (Hazel: 208: 15). There is also criticism of the "stilted" dialogue, with Niamh O'Dea bemoaning Adigun's decision not to "give it a Playboyesque update" (2008: 15). Adigun has certainly considered producing more contemporary plays. In an article for Spectrum, the journal of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, in association with whom Arambe produced *Through a Film Darkly*, he writes about being approached to produce a contemporary Nigerian play, The Estate by Oladipo Agboluaji, a farce about a dysfunctional polygamous family disputing the estate of their deceased patriarch. After giving the play considerable thought and a read through with actors, Adigun rejected the play because, although it was "entertaining" and had been "a big success" when produced in Britain, "it was not in anyway 'intercultural" (Adigun, 2008: 28). This key consideration, it could be argued, is what continues to direct Adigun's attention towards post-independence African works. Despite the danger that the passage of time may have diluted their potency, these plays are inherently hybrid, polyphonic, engaging with a dual consciousness a diverse cross-cultural audience. Their message is, therefore, transferable, as Bakhtin intimates in the epigram that begins this chapter, across epochs and contexts, and speaks to a culture such as Ireland's in the process of social transformation.

Such a specifically post-colonial, polyphonic and hybrid play is *Pantomime* by the Caribbean playwright Derek Walcott. The two characters are Harry Trewe, a former English actor and owner of the run-down hotel in Trinidad in which the play is set, and Jackson Phillip, former calypso performer and hotel employee. Lonely, depressed and

bored, Harry is rehearsing a pantomime version of *Robinson Crusoe* for the tourists he hopes to attract and wants Jackson to perform with him, with the "heavy twist, heavy with irony" of Phillip, the black man, playing the coloniser and Trewe playing the native. The conceptual leitmotif of the play is its exploration of hybrid (Creole) identity through genre, language and culture. Artistically it is both intertextual, a reworking of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and metatheatrical, as Jackson and Harry compete to interpret the story through their respective theatrical traditions, calypso and English music hall, with the dialogue a mix of English, the Creole dialect of the islands and the songs, rhymes and puns of the two performance styles. While ostensibly the plot follows the reverse racial discrimination trope of previous Arambe productions, "With Crusoe the slave and Friday the boss" (117), in Walcott's play the use of this trope in the context of a 'pantomime' emphasises the performativity and thus mutability of the post-colonial identities of the "boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahb" and his colonised "shadow" (112-113). ¹⁷⁵

The play's foregrounding of theatrical genre also reiterates another of Arambe's central tenants, that non-Western artforms may differ from the hegemony in manner but not in value and validity. Harry claims to be liberal and makes a number of attempts to interact with Jackson "man to man" (134), but when Jackson challenges his authorship and his artistic control by reinterpreting the story through calypso aesthetics, he insists on

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Derek Walcott, *Pantomime* in *Rememberance and Pantomime: Two Plays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), p. 100. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be referenced by page number. I saw Arambe's production of the play at the 2pm matinee on 13 September, 2008, T36@ the Teacher's Club.

¹⁷⁵ Phillip uses these terms in a highly ironic way when describing the three hundred years of colonialism and its outcomes both for the Caribbean and for Britain. His argument echoes Frantz Fanon on the mutual pathological dependence between the coloniser and the colonised, summarised by Homi Bhabha in his introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks* as "the image of Post-Enlightenment man tethered to, *not* confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonised man" (1986: xiv).

a return to their neo-imperialist master-servant relationship. Having so reluctantly agreed to perform, however, Jackson is now unwilling to release the performance of 'boss' and resume his real life role of 'servant'. He challenges Harry's intervention, 'actor to actor', in a way that makes the analogy between politics and performance explicit: "May I say what I think, Mr Trewe? I think it's a matter of prejudice. I think that you cannot believe: one: that I can act, and two: that any black man should play Robinson Crusoe" (125). Very powerfully, this play concerns itself with the rights of representation, authorship, cultural ownership and authenticity, all concepts which form the crux of the argument of this thesis, and all of which are at issue in the binary of 'original' versus 'copy'. Walcott puts a comic spin on this trope through the figure of the hotel parrot, an innate mimic, who repeatedly heckles Jackson with what sounds like "Hey, Nigger!" Harry's explanation that the parrot is really just calling for his former German owner, "Heinegger!", with a Creole accent, fails to convince Jackson. "Language is ideas, Mr. Trewe. And I think that this pre-colonial parrot have the wrong idea" (99). Eventually he strangles the parrot and Harry taunts him for his lack of originality.

You people create nothing. You imitate everything. It's all been done before, you see, Jackson. The parrot. Think that's something? It's from *The Seagull*. It's from *Miss Julie*. You can't even be original, boy. (156)

In his essay 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?' (1974), Derek Walcott carefully dismantles the assumption that all post-colonial culture is necessarily derivative. "Mimicry is an act of imagination", he claims, just as in nature it is "endemic cunning" and "design". Carrying this analogy further, he wonders, "What if the man in the New World needs mimicry as design, both as defense and as lure," with the alternative an immutable 'originality' that results in genocide, as was the fate of the Aztec and the American Indian (ibid: 10). Thus, Walcott, like Homi Bhabha as is further discussed in

the analysis of Arambe's Irish works below, finds in the ambivalence of mimicry and hybridity a site for strategic resistance and agency.

Nevertheless, whose agency and resistance to what, are questions which arise when the political messages of a play like *Pantomime* are evoked in a context so different from its original socio-political environment. Based on Gilbert and Lo's model, there will be both congruence and divergence from whatever reception Walcott may have initially imagined. For example, Irish culture, however 'white', would traditionally self-identify with the figure of the colonised (Jackson) rather than the English coloniser (Harry). It is this shared post-colonial experience that Lucy Gaffney, Chair of the sponsoring organisation, National Action Plan Against Racism, is referencing in the programme notes when she writes that the themes Walcott "addresses (colonialism, ethnicity, and identity) are extremely familiar to Irish people." Yet the context of this production, as produced by a 'black' migrant theatre company in Ireland, draws the issue of race more sharply into focus. In repositioning the play and its multicultural Irish audience, Adigun "dedicates th[e] production to every black person who has the audacity to dream and follow that dream in a white man's country." 177 Pantomime accommodates different perspectives and allows the play to translate to other historical circumstances and other socio-geographic spaces because of its dialogic nature, in the sense given the word by Bakhtin, as a textual space in which a variety of voices, styles, languages or "speech genres" (1986) offer competing, contradictory but equally valid versions of 'truth' and

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¹⁷⁷ Bisi Adigun, 'Appreciation' in the programme notes for *Pantomime*.

¹⁷⁶ Lucy Gaffney, 'A message from NPAR' in the programme notes for *Pantomime*.

visions of the world. The potential insurgency of 'Carnival' play-acting, ¹⁷⁸ of reversing the dualities of racial hierarchy and of exposing the 'insider' to the perspective of the 'outsider', resonate with Arambe's oft-stated objective "to explore the 'unfamiliar' through the familiar" in Irish society. 179 With regard to the relevance of this postcolonial Caribbean play for a contemporary multicultural Irish context, Bakhtin's theories also emphasise the pivotal and active role of "the addressee", or the audience in this case, in providing the framing context as each utterance is constructed (1986: 91-99). In other words, Arambe's relationship to an Irish audience as an African migrant theatre company shapes the reception of their production of *Pantomime*, just as that context has a reciprocal influence on Arambe's creation of meaning, as Adigun's dedication attests. With each of the African plays selected for production, meaning has to be constructed through inference, analogy and transference rather than directly, as is the case with their devised works or Irish interpretations. Nevertheless, it could be argued that through these cross-cultural interrelations, on the artistic boundary between cultures, it is possible to catch a dialogic glimpse of one world from the standpoint of another. Adigun's production of *Pantomime* asks an Irish culture that views itself as a benign fellow victim of colonialism, to see itself from the 'outside', not just as implicated in the European First World domination of global politics, but also in the specific inequalities and internalised prejudice of a monocultural Ireland coming to terms with its new diversity.

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¹⁷⁸ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1984a). See also Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Characteristics of Genre and Plot Composition in Dostoevsky's Works' in *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984b: 101-180).

¹⁷⁹ Adigun uses this phrase, after Brecht, repeatedly, specifically in this case in 'A Note from the director' in the programme notes for *Pantomime*.

Most recently, Adigun staged Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* at the Samuel Beckett Theatre in February 2009 with Arambe, and also returned to Nigeria that May with an Arts Council Training and Travel grant to direct a production of the same play for the Nigerian National Theatre with Creative Arts Department students from the University of Lagos. He had intended to produce Soyinka's masterful anti-colonial tragedy Death and the King's Horseman for Arambe's fifth birthday, but with the difficult economic environment the company did not have the resources to do the play justice. Instead, Soyinka's earlier satiric work, The Trials of Brother Jero, was chosen "to bring a smile to the faces of our audience and a laugh to their bellies" at a time of increasingly desperate economic news. 180 The play features the adventures of Brother Jero, an evangelical preacher and sham prophet, who over the course of the day strives to outwit his creditors and competitors, con his gullible acolytes and sidestep the temptations of the "Daughters of Eve". 181 For the production in Ireland Adigun updated the play, turning Jero into a spiritual 'banker' with his congregation now his "customers" and his manipulation of their woes his "investments" (215-16), clearly striving for an analogy with the flagrant confidence tricks of the Irish financial sector during the boom. Elsewhere, Jero steals the gloss off a real life 'sainted prophet' when his self-aggrandising title becomes "Barack Obama of God's Democratic Party" in Adigun's version (223). However, it is Jero's difficulties with women, "the Daughters of Discord" (203), that are at the heart of the plot and Adigun's 'modernisation' (quoted in Nwakunor, 2009) makes no attempt to alleviate or contextualize the misogyny of Soyinka's text or pander to the

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¹⁸⁰ See 'Developmental Projects' on Arambe's website where Adigun discusses the change of programme; www.arambeproductions.com/development.html, accessed 12 January 2010. Adigun also discussed changing plays with Nigerian journalist Gregory Austin Nwakunor (2010), where he is quoted as saying that he "opted for something lighthearted" in response to the "economic meltdown"; 'Bisi Adigun's Flip of *Trials of Brother Jero*', http://nigerianbestforum.com/generaltopics/?p=7727, accessed 14 May, 2010,.

¹⁸¹ Wole Soyinka, '*The Trials of Brother Jero*' in *Five Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 203. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be referenced by page number.

feminist sensibilities of a contemporary Irish audience. Indeed, blatant and provocative, the biblical quotation, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands", hangs from the rafters. Chume is Jero's most loyal disciple, a timid, hen-pecked man, who begs his spiritual leader for permission to beat his nagging wife, Amope (Nole Liberty). But Jero denies him, not because of any moral reservation or consideration for the wife, but because if he allows it, Chume will "become contented" and have no more need of religion (211). Meanwhile, the prophet has been driven out of his home by a determined female creditor who has threatened to sit outside his house until she is paid. When he realises his nemesis and Chume's fierce wife are one and the same, he 'relents' and demands Chume take her home and beat her (222). The difficulty with this play for a contemporary audience is the same one that has almost eradicated *Punch and Judy* shows (when they are not rendered somehow 'politically-correct') and made productions of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* so infrequent. However clownish and harmless Chume appears or to whatever extent Amope is played as caricatured harridan, as Peter Crawley writes in his review, "it doesn't dilute the violent intention or deflect the aura of misogyny" (2009b: 18). Just as Adigun has written of his own difficulties in decoding Irish humour that transgresses his cultural mores, laughing at older people for example, ¹⁸² this play requires more than allusions to iPods and bankers to translate its cultural reference points.

More to the point, in contrast to all of Arambe's other productions, *The Trials of Brother Jero* was not exclusively addressed to an Irish context. Adigun selected this play

¹⁸² Adigun is here referring to the character Mag Folan in Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*: "I...found it extremely difficult to partake in laughing at a helpless old woman, not simply because I am not Irish, but because in my culture... such an act is considered taboo" (2004: 78).

by Soyinka, the quintessential Nigerian playwright, for performance at the Nigerian National theatre, where it speaks to the audience it was written for. The nature of the intercultural exchange here is not just of Soyinka's play performed for an Irish audience, but also the interpretative artist, Adigun, returning 'home' to share experiences and insights gained from his time abroad and perhaps also to be inspired or enriched by interaction with his cultural 'source'. 183 The Trials of Brother Jero articulates some themes more clearly in a Nigerian context, namely its satire of commercialised evangelical religion and "Nigerians pinning everything on God and miracles" (quoted in Nwakunor, 2009). In an interview about the Nigerian project with journalist Gregory Austin Nwakunor, Adigun is careful to assert that he "is not attacking religion neither am I endorsing domestic violence" (ibid). While it is true that the play does not attack religion per se, but rather satirises its commercialisation and the gullibility of those who imagine it can cure all ills, it presents only the most objectified images of women as either harpies or harlots and offers no moral or social challenge to wife-beating. If it was Adigun's intention to challenge Eurocentric notions of the roles of women, the play required more reflexive engagement with the issue in order to provoke debate. Left unmarked, the misogyny undermines the capacity of this 'modern' adaptation to speak to a contemporary Irish audience.

This final African production provokes a line of questioning that considers the relationship of identity to agency in a minority or subaltern context, or more specifically the type of agency marginal identity enables. How reasonable is the postulation that

¹⁸³ See for example the comments of Professor Yerima, Director General of the National Theatre of Nigeria, quoted on Arambe's website: "It is not good enough you stay outside and propagate your name and person. If you've gained so much affluence, influence and knowledge come here and display it"; http://www.arambeproductions.com/development.html accessed 20 June 2010.

every ambiguity or discordant element should be resolvable in cross-cultural exchange? Arambe's claim to agency is constituted not just by their claim to represent themselves and to constitute their own identity in relationship to Irish culture, but also by the positivity of their otherness, their speaking specifically to Africans about themselves from the perspective of a world view that will not always be compatible with or translatable by the Irish majority discourse. The cultural capital of Arambe's African classics, even postcolonial ones inflected with Western theatre paradigms, offers validation and selfrecognition in works of creativity that construct multivalent and multidimensional responses to identity for an African audience. Rather than the black character serving as objectified 'other' in the white subject's drama, shaped by reductive or pejorative racial myths, these plays create ambivalent, irreducibly human characters, in charge of their own explicitly African destinies. Conversely, as Gilbert and Lo suggest, Arambe's Irish audience exerts both centripetal and centrifugal forces on these African productions. The company critically engages with issues of race and racism, migration, dislocation and belonging that are so potent in the newly cosmopolitan Irish context from the perspective of an alternative, migrant public sphere within. However, they also enunciate a counterdiscourse that is unabashedly partisan, occasionally countering black stereotypes with simplistic white caricature and resorting to essentialisms that undermine the force of their arguments more generally regarding the performativity of identity. Arambe, as Ireland's first African theatre company, is undoubtedly articulating concerns from the margins, but paradoxically, as bell hooks argues (1990: 341), in our modern globalised world the margins have become a powerful place to speak.

Marginality [is a] central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse... [It is] a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

While Arambe sources its potency from the margins, however, Adigun's insistence on the 'intercultural' nature of his work is indicative of his determination to also voice alternative perspectives in the mainstream. As is discussed below, Arambe's productions of Irish canonical plays lay claim not just to an 'authentic', marginal African identity, but also to a contestatory, hybrid, protean Irish identity and the right to a place to speak of that identity at the centre of Irish society.

5.2 (Re)citing Irish Classics: "Exposing a Town to Itself"

Right from the inception of the company, Adigun's project was to place Arambe at the centre of public discourse by interacting directly and publically with Irish culture and the Irish theatrical canon. The first production, *African Voices in Ireland*, featured a performed extract from Jimmy Murphy's *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* with an African cast. Four months after the launch of the company in 2004, Arambe participated in and Adigun co-directed the street theatre spectacular *The Parable of the Plums* based on the 'Aeolus' episode in James Joyce's *Ulysses* for the Bloomsday centenary. In 2006, Arambe produced a full length version of Murphy's *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* about Irish emigrants in London, which played to acclaim at the Dublin Fringe Festival and was revived the following year. In 2007, Adigun achieved a long held ambition and had his and Roddy Doyle's version of J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* produced at the Abbey for the centenary of the first incendiary production. After a sell-out season the play was remounted in 2008, unfortunately with Adigun having

disassociated himself from that production. Ulysses, The Playboy of the Western World and Murphy's vision of displaced Irish emigrants, each of these cultural products has become a defining signifier of Irishness, central to the performance and understanding of an imagined national identity both at home and internationally. By reinterpreting, reenacting, or in Bhabha's terminology "mimicking" these iconic images of Irish subjectivity from a position outside their ethnic identity paradigms, Adigun looks back at Irish culture with "a gaze of otherness" (Bhabha, 1994: 127). His productions simultaneously seek to set up points of identification which analogise and valorise Irish and African states of being, while they also undermine the stability of 'Irishness', staging a doubling, liminal, racially ambivalent representation or "rearticulat[ion of] 'reality' as mimicry" (ibid: 130). Yet it is not simply through the incongruity of black actors performing quintessentially Irish characters, and therefore quintessentially 'white' as Diane Negra reminds us, ¹⁸⁴ that Arambe subjects the notion of national identity to scrutiny. On a thematic and structural level, the original works of art already contain within them profound challenges to homogenous and exclusionary notions of Irish selfhood, as is evidenced by the controversy that greeted Synge's work in particular, making them ideal for cooption to Arambe's cultural and political purpose. With The Parable of the Plums the multicultural participants claim their right to belong to Dublin through ownership of Dublin's definitive story; The Kings of the Kilburn High Road matches the 'new' Irish to the 'old' Irish, re-positioning an Irish subaltern identity in reflection, even within the triumphantalism of the Celtic Tiger; and as the director Jimmy Fay expresses it, Adigun and Doyle's version of *The Playboy of the Western World*, like the original archetypal masterpiece, "is still about exposing a town to itself" (quoted in O'Sullivan,

Diane Negra, in her titular introductory essay to *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture* states that, "whatever else it may be, Irishness is reliably, invariably, a form of whiteness" (2006: 1).

2008: 22). Bisi Adigun and Arambe's cross-cultural Irish theatre stages counternarratives of nation, to co-opt Bhabha once again, "uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them" (1994: 128).

Bloomsday, named in honour of the character Leopold Bloom, is a literary festival of all things Joycean that takes place every year in Dublin on 16 June, as the action of Ulysses takes place over this day from 8am till the early hours of the next day in 1904. For the centenary of the day of the novel in 2004, the celebration expanded over five months to become the ReJoyce Festival, with large and small scale events taking place from April to August mostly funded by Dublin City Council and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. Performed at 8pm on the day itself in the centre of Dublin under the Millennium Spire with 170 professional and amateur performers and several thousand in the audience, The Parable of the Plums was the largest performance in the history of Bloomsday and the center-piece of the centenary celebrations. Conventional Bloomsday shows typically privilege Joyce's text, whereas The Parable of the Plums contained very little dialogue and only a few lines from the novel. It was primarily a non-verbal visual theatre spectacular in which enormous puppets or actors in over-sized masks acted out incidents in the episode through exaggerated gesture and choreographed movement, with a great deal of music and dance. Traditionally, the performances specifically summon up an Edwardian past. Instead, this production mixed historical and contemporary reference points, such as the playful juxtaposition of a turn of the century tram and the modern Luas, scheduled at the time of the performance to be in operation past the Spire in the coming months. Crucially, Bloomsday also usually performs a Dublin cultural identity that is prototypically 'white', while *The Parable of the Plums* invited participants from the Asian, West African and Brazilian communities to participate in the celebration, both as citizens of Dublin and via their own performance traditions. The Brazilians played

Edwardian newspaper boys in the first scene, crying out the headlines before performing Capoeira, a dance created by Angolan slaves in Brazil to conceal their martial arts training. Fifty members of the Chinese community performed a traditional Lion dance, complete with costumes and music, and were designated the "East Parade". Arambe's fifty performers, both African and non-African, were the "West Parade", dressed in feather laced batik costumes and performing a Togolese rain dance to West African drumming. The commitment to diversity was also evidenced by the "North Parade"; performers recruited from Dublin's inner-city neighborhood youth groups dancing traditional waltzes and hip-hop. Their inclusion was notable in the context of Bloomsday's mostly middle-class appeal. For the finale, all the various dancers, puppets and performers wove in amongst each other as an actor dressed as James Joyce flew above them on a crane, suggesting, Mathew Spangler argues, that not only would Joyce have approved of this celebration of racial diversity, but "were he alive today, he might have written *Ulysses* with an Asian or West African protagonist" (2007: 58).

For those more accustomed to the usual Bloomsday fare, it was not so easy to find a rationale for the multicultural parades in a chapter about Bloom's failure to sell a newspaper advertisement or Stephen's fable of two old women spitting plum seeds from the viewing platform in Nelson's pillar. Sean Latham, for example, described it in an editorial for the *James Joyce Quarterly* as "perhaps the most surreal experience of the week's festivities" (2003: 237). If there is little connection to Joyce's novel, it might also be argued that such a cosmopolitan spectacle remains tokenistic when the cultural performance of citizenship is not recognised by the material realities of the legal system. Such is Jason King's argument, which identifies a betrayal of sorts whereby the African

performers "acted as agents for Irish cultural renewal... [but] have enjoyed few benefits... from the intercultural Irish nation they have helped to define" (2005b: 55). Mathew Spangler, however, makes a very good case both for the relevance of *The* Parable of the Plums' cross-cultural interpretation of the "Aeolus" episode and for the political efficacy of the "ground breaking and transgressive work of Irish street theatre." With impressive scholarship, he traces numerous threads from Joyce's famously multivalent prose, justifying all aspects of the performance, from Arambe's costumes to the image of the 'East Parade' and 'West Parade' as lungs breathing life into the centre of the city. Nevertheless, it is the status of both Bloom and Stephen as refugees from their lives and the novel's oft discussed condemnation of racial prejudice that is the nub of Spangler's political argument. He posits that the episode is primarily concerned with rhetoric, Aeolus being the god of winds, and the timing of *The Parable of the Plums* just five days after the passing of a referendum that designated citizenship on the basis of race, was thus crucial. The whole production functioned as a kind of non-verbal parable "which publicly celebrated the racial heterogeneity of contemporary Dublin... [and] symbolically conferred citizenship on [the participants] at a time when many are struggling for equal rights" (Spangler: 2007: 60-61). From Bloom's view that "a nation is the same people living in the same place" (Ulysses 12.1422), it follows that Dublin belongs as much to its immigrants as it does to the natives. Through its rhetoric at the very least, therefore, *The Parable of the Plums* depicted immigrants as quintessentially part of the Dublin story, conferring on them an inclusive notion of Irish identity.

If *The Parable of the Plums* placed Arambe at the geographical and cultural centre of Dublin, then *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* placed them within a central

paradigm of Irish identity. As with *Parable*, the right to an Irish identity and to call Ireland 'home' is a pivotal rhetorical strategy in Arambe's Irish productions. Peter Crawley relates the story of a publicist who contacted Adigun looking for 'non-national' performers. The assumptions implicit in the statement "got Adigun's back up". "I've been here for ten years," he is quoted as saying, "What if I don't want to be a non-national any more? I don't feel Nigerian. I feel Irish now." He goes on to suggest that if Crawley's readers want to understand the African experience in Ireland, they should "go and see *Kings of the Kilburn High Road*. Emigration is a universal experience" (quoted in Crowley, 2006a: 14). Jimmy Murphy's play, originally mounted by Red Kettle Theatre Company in 2000, draws together five Irish emigrants in the back room of a London social club to wake their dead friend and to drown their disillusionment and despair in drink. Having abandoned a home that offered them no prospects decades earlier, they are trapped between an England they can not belong to and an Ireland they rarely visit because they can only perform a fantasy relationship with it.

- GIT: S'right there Maurteen, have to put on a good show... Bit of a performance...
- JAP: Per-fuckin'-formance! That's the word Git, performance... Save for about three months, plenty of overtime, cut down a bit on the drink. Scrimp an' save till I've about a grand in the bank. I puts me good suit on, draws the grand out an' next thing yeh know I'm Lord Muck, King of the Irish sea. 185

This play is full of prototypical indicators of Irishness: the homosocial compulsive drinking, language festooned with expletives, the rituals of a wake, the singing of rebel songs and songs about home and the anguish of loneliness and displacement. While Arambe's 2006 Dublin Fringe Festival production was entirely faithful to the text, the incongruence of black actors playing Irishmen destabilises the 'authenticity' of these characters and renders the signifiers of their ethnicity culturally transferable. In

¹⁸⁵ Jimmy Murphy, *'The Kings of the Kilburn High Road'* in *Two Plays* (London: Oberon, 2001), p. 17. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be referred to by page number.

correspondence with Gilbert and Lo's matrix model, Arambe's recasting of national identity emphasises both the commonalities and divergences between the Irish characters and the African performers, and addresses its culturally diverse audience in different ways. As Adigun's comment to Crawley attests, the production 'universalises' the experience of migration in order to make politically explicit the contention that, just as modern Celtic Tiger Ireland has failed to provide a home for its 'native' emigrants of the past, it does not include the immigrant 'others' of its present and future either. This notion of future failure is accentuated by the relative youth of the actors playing these middle-aged men; the character Shay, for example, who makes reference to being a grandfather (57), was played by Gabriel Akujobi, an actor in his late twenties. The impression that we are somehow seeing into the future of these young Africans is also suggested by the ambivalent ethnicity of Yare Jegebefume, born in Ireland of Nigerian descent. In marked contrast to all the other actors whose dialogue is inflected with strong African accents, Jegebefume plays the central character Jap in his native Dublin accent, intimating that social integration may take generations. As the play laments the selfdelusion, self-destruction and drunken emptiness of these familiar Irishmen, it also "played like an up-to-the-minute cautionary tale for African-born spectators," argues Eric Weitz (2009: 228). The African/Irish characters in Arambe's production perform or 'mimic' an Irish identity through the destructive social rituals of excessive alcohol consumption and suffer the consequences to their relationships, economic failure and inability to belong. The production reads therefore, not just as a critique of Irish culture's relationship with alcohol, but also on the dangers for a migrant culture of assimilating this overreliance in response to their own 'geopathology', to return once more to Chaudhuri's term. "The effect of mimicry is camouflage", notes Bhabha quoting Lacan. "It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of

becoming mottled" (1994: 121). The value of Gilbert and Lo's more nuanced model allows these difficult questions to be asked about what is lost as well as gained in the cross-cultural transfers essential to integration.

Mimicry, however, is also "the sign of the inappropriate", argues Bhabha, recalcitrant, potentially insurgent, returning "the displaced gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alientates it from essence" (ibid: 127). For of an Irish audience, the characters in Arambe's Kings remain most definitely African however they may assume the markings of Irishness. In a play full of music, the rebel songs metamorphose into full throated, harmonious chant song and the drunken dancing takes on the shuffle of African rhythm. Rather than the reserved physical expression of Irish men, the characters greet each other, celebrate and grieve with their whole bodies. Git, for instance, is so distraught when revealing that Jackie's death was not an accident but suicide, he is prostrated on the floor. In fact, Adigun's cast make no attempt to mimetically impersonate Irish cultural behaviour but rather explore the truth of the characters from within their own African subjectivity. Quoting Lacan again, Bhabha asserts that "mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind" (ibid: 121). It is these cultural signs, even more than the visible marker of the actors' black skin, which most clearly signal the ambivalence of the characters' identities and contribute to the production of political meaning.

Along with misogyny, homophobia and class prejudice, what is particularly exposed by the strategic mimicry of the performance is racism and the racialisation of identity. There is the casual chauvinism in Jap's boast about being foreman over the "darkies" (44), and the more serious bigotry evidenced by his assumption that Shay's advice that he settle down with his black girlfriend is a jibe.

JAP: You tryin' to be funny?...

SHAY: Hey. Alright? Didn't mean nottin', okay?

JAP: Ain't no racist me but... yeh know... yeh know, want me kids to

look like me. (21)

The slippage between the racial assumptions of the character and the racial identity of the actor lend ironic meaning to the "Ain't no racist me" line. Then the calculated offence of Murteen's attack hammers home the message.

MURTEEN: Sorry Jap... didn't mean to call her a coon. (*Beat.*) Meant the big black nigger bitch you're ridin'. (30)

It was a line that was nearly cut from the production because Adigun was concerned that the power and resonance of the word 'nigger', and the obvious dissonance when spoken by a black actor, would break the fourth wall frame and destroy the audience's connection with the world he was creating. Working through the idea in rehearsal and in consultation with the cast, however, he decided to keep the original wording, allowing the rupture in 'reality' to generate its own powerful meaning. Speaking more specifically to its Irish audience, Murphy's play also examines anti-Irish racism, both externally limiting the characters' lives and internalised in their own self-loathing, and the Irishmen's prejudices against the Scots and the English. Very powerfully, Murteen's anti-English sentiment, matrixed with his insecurity, self-hatred and misogyny, is expressed in the abuse of his wife.

 186 Bisi Adigun described this decision process in interview with the author, 14 November 2007.

MURTEEN: I'm the King in my gaf, got that Jap, King! An' if she as so much opens her mouth, opens her fuckin' mouth, or looks crooked at me! Jaysus!... English fuckin' bitch! She that kept me here, she that got pregnant... I'll break her fuckin' neck! (64)

Bhabha makes a distinction in his discussion of mimicry, between 'resemblance', a similarity, and 'semblance', which exposes the pretence of exterior forms and accentuates difference. Arambe's Kings of the Kilburn High Road reaches beyond the familiar conflation of emigrant and immigrant experiences in rhetoric that emphasises resemblance, to rearticulate a contemporary African/Irish "us" and a racialised, deliberately clichéd Irish "them" that authorises a hybrid performance of 'different' Irish identity. Edward Said claims that "[s]eeing 'the whole world as a foreign land' makes possible originality of vision" (Hugo of St Victor quoted in Said, 2001: 186), which partially explains the saliency of the production. Perhaps more powerfully, however, Arambe's reversal of "the gaze of otherness" places Irish identity in the role of 'foreigner', but crucially without assimilation, without narrowing the gap between the familiar and the strange. In Levinasian terms, the production "think[s] the Other-in-the-Same... without thinking the Other as an other Same... The in does not signify an assimilation: the Other disturbs or awakens the Same" (Levinas, 1998a: 80). In other words, it maintains a separateness, an asymmetry, an 'otherness' in its depiction of African identity within an Irish identity that remains untranslatable, but which disturbs essentialist assumptions about both cultures. It is this that reveals in Arambe's *The Kings* of the Kilburn High Road an original theatrical vision.

Despite the unfortunate circumstances that lead to him disassociating himself from the 2008 remount, Adigun has described his experiences of co-writing a new version of The Playboy of the Western World with Roddy Doyle as "a perfect synergy of creativity rooted in two distinct cultures" and "my greatest achievement by far since arriving in Ireland in 1996" (2008c: C6). It is certainly culturally significant in that the production stages prominently in the mainstream the counternarratives of race and identity that Adigun and Doyle had been constructing at the margins of Irish culture. 187 Like *The* Parable of the Plums and The Kings of the Kilburn High Road, the production intervenes in the "narrative of nation" by conscripting the 'authenticity' of an iconic cultural product to their notions of an inclusive and plural Irishness. Apart from Adigun and Doyle, this project obviously also credits a third author, John Millington Synge. As The Playboy has become so defining of the Abbey and of the 'Irish play', this argument considers what the recasting of Christy as a Nigerian asylum seeker and the transporting of the play to present day gangland West Dublin has been made to mean, and whether Synge's play still resonates under Adigun and Doyle's faithful modernisation with any of its original insurgency. Famously about the limitations of representation masquerading as reality, The Playboy of the Western World sources much of its strength from turning stereotypical discourses against themselves. Adigun and Doyle's version, likewise, knowingly and strategically deploys a range of stereotypical depictions of both race and class that facilitate the comedy and encourage sympathetic identification with contemporary African migrants. They also, however, somewhat exoticise and commodify both Nigerian and working-class identity for the predominantly white, middle-class

 $^{^{187}}$ Apart for Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner for Calypso, Roddy Doyle has been actively engaged in encouraging an inclusive Irish society through his writing. On the subject of race, he has recently published The Deportees and Other Stories (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), gleaned from short stories first published in serial form in Metro Eireann.

¹⁸⁸ The notion is Homi Bhaba's. See, for example, the introduction 'Narrating the Nation' in *Nation and* Narration (1990: 1-7).

Abbey audience, arguably thereby disguising and diluting the self-reflexive political power of the play to "expose the town to itself" as director Fay has expressed it.

Nevertheless, despite its failure to provoke controversy, this new version of the play undoubtedly widens participation in cultural discourse and publically extends ownership of notions of 'Irishness' to a migrant creative artist.

The opening stage directions for Adigun and Doyle's rewrite read, "A modern, suburban pub, on the west side of Dublin. There is evidence of an invented form of Irishness. Guinness signs; photos of Michael Flatley, Roy Keane, and Mary Robinson." The play is self-consciously referential, to notions of 'Irishness', to its own contemporaneousness and most specifically to Synge's original. As is perhaps natural in a reimagining of such a well-loved canonical play, Synge's work remains remarkably present in the critical reception and a great deal of 'ownership' over the production is presumed by commentators through their interpretation of the original. Whole passages of dialogue from Synge's version are often quoted in the critical response, particularly Pegeen's final lines, 190 reference is made to stage business that does not happen or which has been altered, and the likelihood of the play to provoke "shock" or "riots" is regularly

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¹⁸⁹ Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle, *The Playboy of the Western World*, unpublished script provided by authors, p. 1. All subsequent citations are from this edition and will be referenced by page number. ¹⁹⁰ Synge's lyricism and distinctive use of dialect give his dialogue a power and quotability that seems irresistible for many commentators. Christy's wooing of Pegeen, for example, is quoted in Alex Moffatt amongst others, 'Spruced-up Playboy bursting with comic life' (2007: 29). Sara Keating compares the violence in Synge's play to the gangland setting of the new version, citing the man who knocked the eye from a peeler", the one who "got six months for maiming ewes" (2007: A9). Pegeen's last line, "I've lost him surely. I've lost the only playboy of the western world", is repeatedly cited and compared with the rewrite's, "Fuck off!" (67). See Eithne Shortall, 'Abbey raises a riot with new Playboy' (2007: 23), Mick Heaney, 'Cheap talk from a grubby Playboy' (2007: 22) and the uncredited review in *The Phoenix*, 19 October 2007. Peter Crawley actually begins his review for the *Irish Times* with a Synge quote and the corresponding line from the new play, and then goes on to reference back and forth between the versions to elucidate his argument that "the sacrifice of lyricism for funny yet disposable punch lines" diminishes the production (2007: 16).

evaluated as if it is only to be expected in a *Playboy* production. ¹⁹¹ The *Playboy* of the Western World is arguably the most well-known of Irish plays and a larger percentage of the audience than usual could be assumed to be familiar with the text. Apart from the theatre critics, most scholars in the audience would have encountered the play on high school and university curricula. It is also by far the most frequently performed play at the Abbey¹⁹² and the subject of many revivals recently, most notably in 2004 when the "allbut definitive" DruidSynge production ¹⁹³ and the Abbey's own poorly received centenary revival were staged. Indeed in his article 'A decade framed by playboys', Peter Crawley (2009c: 1) argues that "you could be forgiven for thinking that the defining play of this decade was actually written in 1907." Then there are other recent deconstructive or translational readings, such as *Play-Boy* by Desperate Optimists (Young Vic Studio, London and project @ the mint, Dublin, 1999), or Pan Pan Theatre Company's version performed by a Chinese cast in Mandarin with Synge's original text displayed in the surtitles (Beijing Oriental Theatre, Beijing and the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2006). Gavin Quinn's intercultural production for Pan Pan was set in a present day China in a "whore-dressers", a multi-purpose hairdressing salon and brothel. In a stirring echo of the 1907 'shift' incident, this production managed to incite controversy and police intervention in China after the actress' short skirts provoked complaints from audience members 194

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¹⁹¹ It is obviously such a defining moment in Irish theatre that almost every press release and review mentions it.

¹⁹² I am indebted to Mairéad Delaney, the Abbey archivist, for this information.

¹⁹³ This production is the benchmark production for example in *Playboys of the Western World: Production Histories*, edited by Adrian Frazier (2004).

¹⁹⁴ See Clifford Coonan's front page story, 'Pegeen Mike evokes a blush in Beijing' (2006: 1).

Given that while Adigun and Doyle's version modernises the language and the circumstances it remains a close intertextual reflection of the original, it thereby illustrates Bhabha's concept of the "sign of double articulation" (1994: 122). The play speaks with a "double voice", becoming not just about its own context but able also to be read through the multifarious themes of Synge's original. Thus Adigun saw the opportunity in his initial concept for the play of using Christy's experience as a fugitive in a turn of the century Mayo village as a metaphor for the experience of asylum seekers in Celtic Tiger Ireland who are likewise forced to balance the truth versus the demands of a good story. He explains that, "The power to fabricate stories, tell them convincingly or even exaggerate them, are all important skills for many to have in order to strengthen their asylum applications. Is that not what Christy did?" (quoted in Murphy, 2007: 6). That the political intent of this metaphor is clear is evidenced by the tabloid press' representation of this connection to asylum seekers as "radical" and "shocking", ¹⁹⁵ or by the more sympathetic arguments of Joseph O'Connor who reverses the analogy, suggesting that John Millington Synge was also a lonely outsider from his class and society and "an eternal migrant" (2008: 9). In addition, the "double vision" that allows the original and the adaption to be viewed simultaneously accentuates Synge's critique of Irish society by reiterating those themes in Adigun and Doyle's present. Both plays depict an anarchic world that glories in gratuitous violence and excessive drink, and that values celebrity and materialism over real achievements and genuine feeling. There is also, however, a celebration in both plays of what is imagined as a specifically Irish propensity for passion and abandon, and a lyricism evident in the potent use of idiosyncratic language, in Synge's case via a distinctive Gaelic infused English and in

¹⁹⁵ The *Evening Herald*, for instance, designates the play "a radical modernised version set to shock audiences all over again" (2007: 16); likewise the *Irish Daily Star* heads their article 'Playboy of the West Suburbs: Radical twist on legendary Irish show', with a subheading 'Asylum' in bold type (2007:18).

Adigun and Doyle's use of Dublin wit. In addition, the riotous reception and nationalist outrage that greeted the play's premier in 1907 mean that the play is always read through the prism of its challenge to Irish identity. It is this preconception that Adigun and Doyle seek to utilise in a version that rehearses alternative Irish identities with regard to race and class.

By relying on Synge's inherent insurgency, however, Adigun and Doyle's intervention in notions of Irishness remains determinedly populist. Director Jimmy Fay, in particular, is at pains to emphasise the 'universal' aspects of the story and to minimise the political implications of Christopher's race. Contrary to Adigun's comments that connect Christy to migrants seeking asylum, he stresses in an interview with Colin Murphy that it the play "is not about asylum seekers per se, but about the arrival of the stranger and how that shakes up the existing community" (quoted in Murphy, 2007: 6). Irish society then remains the subject with the trails of the stranger, black or otherwise, servicing their self-reflection. "What it's about is letting society see itself as something fresher, through someone else's eyes." Indeed, he goes further, denying that the play has anything at all to do with race or with politics:

Nobody in the play makes a comment in relation to blackness. The play doesn't talk about that (asylum). It's not pushing any political agenda. If there's anything political about the play, it's about shaking up a classic of Irish drama. (Ibid)

There are actually numerous references to Nigeria and the protagonist's race but they are inevitably coded as harmless rather than critical. The first scene in which Pegeen, her father and his cohorts try to discover why Christopher has fled Nigeria is a case in point. They run through the gamut of clichés about refugees: war, tribalism, starvation, polygamy, terrorism, Aids, even "genital mutilation" (11). Discovering that he has

escaped arrest for some criminal act, however, their prejudices connecting Nigerians with crime are confirmed. "I heard somewhere that fraud was a subject in Nigerian schools," says Philly, to which Christopher responds indignantly, "That is not correct; that is not true." Yet, there is no malice in their interrogation, only comic ignorance and the type of friendly banter the Irish call 'slagging'. This scene directly echoes Synge in terms of the content and rhythm of the banter. Christy too faces questions and the villagers' list of possible reasons for his escape mark their ambivalent attitude to the law as resistant colonials (Synge, 1981a: 181-183). One moment hints of genuine racial abuse, but as it comes from the gormless Sean, Pegeen's former fiancé, there is no frisson of danger. Unable to believe Pegeen would prefer Christopher to himself, Sean exclaims, "And you'd prefer to be with him?! He's nobody, Pegeen. He's black. He's a Nigerian, for the love of God" (58). Outraged, Christopher offers to fight him but Sean refuses, whimpering, "I'd prefer to stay a bachelor than face that savage." The inferred racism of the slur is interpreted as a grave offence by Christopher but, realising he has transgressed a boundary, Sean immediately retracts the racist intent: "I didn't mean-" (60). In the context of how the character's race affects the story, it is notable that this reference too is precedented in Synge: Shawn at the same point in the plot says, "I'd liefer live a bachelor, simmering in passions to the end of time, than face a lepping savage the like of him has descended from the Lord knows where" (Synge, 1981a: 221).

Rather than racial discrimination, in fact, Christopher's blackness and alleged criminality elicit only approbation and fetishised excitement. "You're not a prince, are you?" asks Pegeen, "This African fella I met in a club once, he said he was a prince" (19). When Sarah, Honor and Susan, three local girls, come to the pub, eager to see the

"African fella... that killed his da" (31), they shriek with excitement over the chance to feel his exotic hair (32). While there is, perhaps rather implausibly, little comment made about Christopher's race, Synge's plot, faithfully transposed here, lays emphasis on Christy's powerful corporeality that Adigun and Doyle are able to use both to evoke and to parody stereotypical connotations of 'blackness'. On the strength of his story, Christopher comes to represent what Bhabha (1994: 104) describes as "those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire", if we accept patricide in the place of cannibalism. It is Sean, once again, who makes the connotation explicit between "immigrant... head cases" and "ritual killing" (3). Considered capable of anything, the female characters in particular identify Christopher as hyper-masculine and sexually alluring. However, by the end of the play the fetish pendulum has swung from fear and desire, dangerousness and hyper-masculinity, back towards disdain and disgust, derogation and the feminisation of the racialised body. When Christopher's decidedly not dead father turns up, the community disavow their former hero as a coward and a liar. He then 'kills' his father once again to regain their respect, but while they may have delighted in a hypothetical patricide, the difference between a "gallous story and a dirty deed" (Synge, 1981a: 227) turns them into a vengeful mob. In order to escape, Christopher is persuaded to disguise himself as a woman, and it is in Sarah's hot pink, velour tracksuit with 'Bitch' printed across the bottom that he is captured, bound and tortured by Pegeen, who burns his leg with her lit cigarette. Christopher's oscillation from hyper-masculinity to racialised feminity, both identities constructed to serve the white characters' fantasies, mirrors the representational strategies of Orientalism. Thus, this West Dublin world "vacillates", as Bhabha expresses it, between "contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in – or fear of – novelty" (1994: 105). However, the extent to which

Adigun and Doyle's deployment of such Orientalist images either exposes the commodification and fetishisation of racial difference or exploits them for their dramatic saliency without questioning their political implications, is debatable.

It could be argued that as the valorisation of savagery and criminality, the fetishisation and disavowal of the main character's otherness and even his feminisation and transvestism are all in Synge's original play, both plays have less to do with race than with the power of representation. Indeed, it is Synge's parodic representation of the rural peasantry and Irish women, which had been appropriated by nationalist rhetoric as courageous, honourable, chaste, non-materialistic and pious icons of Irishness, which caused so much offence and provoked protests in 1907. Christy, the inept murderer antihero who is hailed for his imaginary violence and then castigated for his real deeds, makes a mockery of the demands for martial heroes in plays such as Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Most of the characters are venal, pleasure loving and self-serving, particularly the female characters who are also scandalously sexually forward, while all references to the priest and his proxy, Shawn, are mocking. This insurgency still influences the inscription of all subsequent versions of the play, despite Synge's recuperation by the 1920s as a "stable signifier for classic Irish Revivalism" (Mathews, 2009: 7). Accordingly, just as Synge has come to be read as an 'authentic' representative of Irish peasantry at the birth of the nation, Adigun and Doyle, as artists from the margins associated with political advocacy, are interpellated not just as 'authentic' representers of cultural difference but also as representatives of African migrants and the Dublin working-class respectively. Viewed thus, two problems become apparent. Firstly, as Gilbert and Lo suggest, the 'cross-breeding' of race and class issues does not necessarily

result in convergence, but rather contradiction and unintended consequences such as their mutual exotification. Secondly, with their cooption into the mainstream as authors of a commercially successful Abbey production, there is a danger that the political agency of Adigun and Doyle is compromised, that they become in the process "culture brokers" rather than cultural translators, meeting the demand for culturally 'other' goods. ¹⁹⁶

Certainly a very clear distinction is made between Christopher, the son of a wealthy Nigerian businessman, and the inhabitants of the corner of West Dublin he stumbles into. Christopher's class, indicated by his education, his privilege and by his gentle manners, religious deference and lyrical speech (his dialogue most nearly reflects Synge's language), distinguishes him as 'foreign' for the Dubliners as clearly as his skin colour. Christopher's exotification is magnified by the entrance of his father in full traditional costume, the disjunction between his ostentatious garb and the dingy pub emphasising both his higher class and his racial-otherness. Old Malamo's costume establishes an aesthetic otherness, his difference channelled into preset cultural codes which allow him to be apprehended and described in familiar terms. In contrast, the Irish characters are inscribed as working-class by definition, just as Synge's rural peasants were understood to represent 'Irish' by being ignorant, coarse and profane. Whilst the excitement Christopher generates is in part a product of his race, there is similarly an element of fetishisation of the working-class characters, particularly in the portrayal of sexuality and violence. The play references "gangland killings" on the radio (2) and features criminal characters whose nicknames, as in "the Viper and the Rattler and that" (3), signify their glorification as 'celebrities'. There are broad hints that Michael is in the

¹⁹⁶ This formulation is Kwame Anthony Appiah's. See *In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (1992: 149).

drugs business; when offering Christopher a job he says, "And you can do a few messages for us as well. The odd package, just" (16). As in Synge's play, the female characters are sexually voracious but in this production their costumes and language also mark their class: the local girls traipse around town in their pyjamas, calling each other "slapper" (30) and the vampish Widow Quinn in her black velour tracksuit is suggestive of Catherine Nevin, dubbed the "Black Widow" by the tabloids after she was convicted of killing her husband. 197 Doyle and Adigun convey a world that seems 'authentic' because, while this underclass Dublin of drug wars and the generationally unemployed who wear leisure wear like a uniform is a 'world apart' from the city the Abbey's middle-class audiences reside in, it has been fetishised, sensationalised and commodified by the media, providing the playwrights with a suitably backward and morally questionable urban Ireland to work as an analogy for Synge's rural version. However, there is little satirical content in this portrayal in that Doyle and Adigun offer no real challenge to the stereotypical depiction of these genuinely intractable social problems and, unlike Synge's play which offended its audience because of their identification with the rural characters portrayed, the contemporary Abbey audience are not implicated in the machinations of Doyle and Adigun's gangland Dubliners. Even the end of the play, which threatens Christopher with murder in the mountains and hints of "torture" (65), struggles to convey menace when Christopher is so clearly revelling in his newly designated "hard man" role (66). Nor are thorny issues such as the lived reality of refugees or the social consequences of immigration explored. Christopher is not a legitimate asylum seeker, of course, and his wealth, class and circumstances keep him well buffered from the realities of refugee conditions. Likewise, despite Adigun's emphasis in press interviews on the analogy between Christy and asylum seekers, Christopher Malamo and his father go back

¹⁹⁷ See Niamh O'Connor, 'How the Black Widow Spun a Web of Lies in the Joy', *Sunday World*, http://www.sundayworld.com/columnists/sw-irish-crime.php?aid=4542#top, accessed 10 October 2010.

to Nigeria at the end of the play, discharging the potential social consequences of his 'migration'. Thus, as director Jimmy Fay asserts the play "is not pushing any political agenda" (quoted in Murphy, 2007: 6) because the exoticist imagery of the play is part of an essentialist discourse which allows the dominant middle-class, white Irish culture to attribute 'value' to the margins while continuing to define them in their own self-privileging terms.

In some ways it could be argued that it is the very 'authenticity' of this production that compromises its political valency. Adigun and Doyle's 'authentic' African and working-class voices respectively, contained within the iconography of the classic 'Irish play', seem to overwrite and overdetermine the community identities they represent. On the other hand, Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* is also a populist and accessible promotion of cultural diversity and tolerance aimed at a broad section of the public and deploying the powerful advocacy platform of the National Theatre. In terms of its political efficacy, this intervention carries more cultural cache and generates more 'publicity' in the Habermasian sense than any of Arambe's other productions. Adigun's ownership of the project is also radical in the access it provides ethnic minorities to cultural expression in the Irish public sphere, the recognition it garners for the cultural capital of disenfranchised groups and the participation it enables in the symbolic space of the national narrative.

Through a variety of productions and collaborative working arrangements, Bisi

Adigun has become a committed advocate for the power and productivity of intercultural

exchange, even coining the term "wow" to describe the resulting phenomena in his own essentialising terms.

Having realized when an Occident is asking 'why', and African is asking 'how', I have learned how to initiate 'wow' projects by facilitating a creative collaboration between artists from the why and how cultural backgrounds (why + how = wow). (2008c: C6)

The term 'wow' and the intercultural methodology it stands for are what Bhabha describes as "hybrid hyphenation", an approach to cultural identification which he claims is a potent source of possible agency.

Such assignations of social differences – where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between* – find their agency in an interstitial 'future' where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. (1994: 313)

However, it is not just from their intercultural work, blending African and Irish cultural forms and collaborating with Irish theatre artists that Adigun and Arambe engage politically with Irish society and culture. Their productions also quite often speak for and from their own distinctly African view of the world. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* asks, as we might ask when analysising Arambe's cultural project, "What does the black man *want*?" (1986: 10). It is a question which recognises the agency of black subjectivity 'looking back' at the coloniser, "meeting the white man's eyes" (ibid: 210). In his forward to Fanon's book, Homi Bhaba posits an answer to this loaded question on three fronts, each of which offers a useful way of considering the work of Arambe (1986: xv-xvi). The first desire is for "the look", Bhabha suggests, an exchange of looks between racial others that intimates of renegotiated subject positions and a dismantling of dangerous stereotypes. Arambe challenges the invisibility of African migrants in Irish culture, attempts to satisfy their desire for culture they recognise and can relate to, and claims the right to signify not just Africans and their experiences but also Irish people and society. Bhabha's second condition concerns "the very place of identification". Consider

Adigun's determination to produce his black *Playboy* on the Abbey stage for the production's centenary in this light. Cornel West in 'The New Cultural Politics of Difference' stresses the desirability of those whom he describes as "Critical Organic Catalysts" to "simultaneously position themselves within (or alongside) the mainstream while clearly aligned with groups who vow to keep alive potent traditions of critique and resistance" (1999: 266). Adigun and Doyle's Playboy helps to redress the unequal or uneven focus of representation by the dominant Irish culture, by offering a representation of Africans by an African at the heart of the Irish public sphere. Thirdly, Bhabha emphasises the "the demand of identification", the desire "to be for an Other". This is surely a mantra for political theatre, concerned not just with being and the human essence but in using culture and the imagination strategically to affect social change. In this regard Arambe's cultivation and multivocal address of a diverse audience, both African and non-African, is crucial. By forming his own company and seizing the right to represent himself and his fellow Africans from their own perspective, Bisi Adigun has also provided opportunities for other black theatre artists to develop their crafts, to express themselves creatively and to work professionally in the theatre. It is because of these opportunities that a number of Arambe's company have been able to pursue a career in the arts in Ireland. Not only does Arambe create theatre images that speak of a contingent, negotiable Irish identity, and engage in hybrid theatre practices that negotiate the give and take of an intercultural encounter, but their audiences experience the plays in culturally heterogeneous ways. As the epigram from Lawrence Grossberg with which I began this chapter suggests, "Agency is the empowerment enabled at particular sites, along particular vectors" (1996: 102). Arambe Productions are an important intervention in Irish theatre practices and in the public sphere, reflecting and critiquing 'Irish' identity and enabling the symbolic empowerment of one of Ireland's ethnic minorities.

Chapter Six

Irish Travellers and 'Race': a Comparative Study

Interviewer: Councillor Cahill, when you say that you've had decent and genuine people

with you looking for loans, are you suggesting Travellers aren't?

Michael Cahill: I am not suggesting that for one moment. But what I am saying is that it's in

their nature to cause trouble. It's their nature to steal, you know, quite simply. And that, you know, is not something that I alone state from time to time. It's in their nature to cause trouble. It's in their nature to try and do the system, as

you and I well know.

Interviewer: Is that something of a generalisation?

Michael Cahill: I do believe that, yes the general public is of that opinion.

Interviewer: No, I'm asking is your claim that they cause trouble and they steal, is that not a

generalisation?

Michael Cahill: That claim is based on fact. I mean just go to Puck Fair, for example, any day

or during the three days, and just stand there with your hands in your pockets and you can see it all happening around you it's all itinerants. Who's stealing

from the elderly people?

(Quoted in MacLacklan and O'Connell, 2000: 1)198

This is an extract from an interview by Niall Madigan on Radio Kerry's *Kerry Today* with Michael Cahill, Kerry County Councillor and Chairman of the Southern Regional Health Board from March 2000. What it illustrates is the continued saliency of pejorative stereotypes of Irish Travellers as by "nature" aberrant and the widespread acceptability of this particular racist discourse in the mainstream, as is evidenced by Councillor Cahill confidently expressing opinions which would not be tolerated about other more clearly racially-other minorities, safe in the knowledge that the "general public is of that opinion". It is the insidious process of racist myth-making which, as Roland Barthes writes,

transforms history into Nature...Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. (2000: 116)

¹⁹⁸ Malcolm MacLachlan and Michael O'Connell use to extract from the transcript of the interview that was printed in *Irish Times*, 24 March 2000, p. 5, in response to Councillor Cahill's complaints that he was misrepresented.

Until recently, Travellers have predominantly functioned as an ultimate Other to normative notions of Irish identity and were historically represented as the convenient scapegoat for the settled community's fears, desires and transgressions. As Robbie McVeigh argues in 'The Specifics of Irish Racism', many of the problems and weakness of the settled community, the trauma of forced migration, the inequalities of colonial land distribution and social problems such as violence, sexual repression and alcoholism, have been "symbolically transferred", becoming instead the defining indicies of Traveller identity. It is a process whereby in "pathologising" Travellers, the settled community "depathologises" themselves (1994: 22-23). Thus, Travellers, depicted as "a licentious, secretive, immoral, and crudely violent people" notes Paul Delaney, became "sexually and (to all intents and purposes) humanely Other" (2001:55). What is more, until comparatively recently, disproportionate levels of non-literacy and social exclusion have meant that Travellers have been denied access to the means of self-representation, both politically and in terms of artistic expression. However, since the establishment of organisations offering political leadership such as Pavee Point and the Irish Traveller Movement and the emergence of Traveller academics, social activists and artists, some of whose work is featured in this study, Travellers have begun to defend and to define themselves, to forge for themselves an enunciative space from which to speak other-wise. Fundamental to the emergence of a politicised Traveller community is their decision from the 1960s onwards to identify themselves as an ethnically distinct community, transforming their imposed exoticism into the empowering rhetoric of cultural difference. It is this self-definition, now widely acknowledged, which provides the reasoning for the inclusion of Traveller theatrical representation in this thesis, and the expressly dual 'Irish' and 'Other' nature of Traveller racialised identity is the central axis upon which this comparative study is structured.

For that reason, while this chapter initially investigates how Traveller difference has traditionally been constructed in the Irish theatre, specifically with reference to John Millington Synge's The Tinker's Wedding, and also considers how pro-Traveller cultural advocacy in the form of Calypso Production's Rosie and Starwars can be interpreted, its primary concern is the work of two Traveller performer/playwrights, Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins, and the important intersections they make between their Traveller identities and issues of race, gender, sexuality and disability. As this chapter is envisaged as emblematic of the study as a whole, it follows themes pertinent throughout: namely colonial and post-colonial representative tropes, the imaginative connection between sexualised or exoticised identity and race, the production of stereotypes and the contestatory practice of self representation. Naturally some post-colonial theoretical models, specifically those of Homi Bhaba and Gayatri Spivak, provide a frame to the discussion and help to explicate the complications of Ireland's own ambivalent postcolonial positioning through the submerged and silenced Traveller subalternity. Nevertheless, there is a specificity to anti-Traveller prejudice beyond post-colonialism, which Robbie McVeigh has usefully theorised as 'sedentarism', defining it as the ideology and practices which reify sedentary society while "pathologis[ing] and repress[ing] nomadic modes of existence" and yet which also fetishise the supposed 'freedom' of Travellers (1997: 9). As Travellers, therefore, experience nomadism as both a celebrated marker of cultural distinction and as imposed spatial exclusion, a consequence of discrimination, the plays considered grapple with a radical notion of 'homelessness' that throws into sharp relief the volatile motif of 'home' that threads

throughout this thesis. Finally this chapter considers the political implications of self-representation for the liberated Traveller voices of Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins in dialogue with two discrete audiences – their sedentary 'others' and their Traveller 'selves'.

To begin, in the context of this thesis on race, it is necessary to clarify the notion of Travellers as ethnically 'other'. Travellers are an historically nomadic indigenous minority who have been documented as a marginalised part of Irish society for centuries. They refer to themselves as *Mincéir* or *Pavees* in their own language or in Irish as *an* Lucht Siúil, meaning literally "the walking people" (Ní Shuinéar, 2004: 18), while to most sedentary Irish people before the 1960's they were known as 'tinkers' or 'itinerants', both terms now considered to be derogatory. The community's preferred English referent, 'Travellers', emphasises the pivotal role of nomadism to their sense of shared identity. The 2006 Census, which for the first time included Travellers as a separate category, reports their population as 22, 435 in the Republic of Ireland, approximately 0.5% of the population (CSO, 2009), while the most recent 2001 census for Northern Ireland records 1,715 Traveller respondents, or 0.1% of the total. However, it is likely that the numbers are higher as their peripatetic lifestyle challenges the data gathering methodology of the census. 199 The issue of ethnicity, whether or not Travellers constitute a culturally and anthropologically separate group and should be recognised in legislation and policy as ethnically distinct, remains controversial and contested. While from 1995, when the first Task Force Report on the Travelling Community was published, the government appeared to implicitly acknowledge "the distinct culture and identity of the Traveller

¹⁹⁹ For further information on the difficulties of population estimates see NCCRI/Equality Authority Ireland, 'Case Study: The Task Force of the Travelling Community' (2003: 4).

community" (DJELR, 1994: 25) a report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2004 stated categorically that Irish Travellers, "do not constitute a distinct group from the population as a whole in terms of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin" (DJELR, 2004: 90). This is in contrast to the United Kingdom where the Race Relations Order (Northern Ireland) specified Irish Travellers as a 'racial group' in 1997, extended to the United Kingdom as a whole in 2000.²⁰⁰ Although most academic discourse now endorses Traveller ethnicity based on anthropological, socio-linguistic and historical evidence, ²⁰¹ it is not necessarily a self evident truth and remains controversial in the wider public sphere. 202 Although the realities of Traveller discrimination are rarely contested these days, what remains essentially at issue is the reasons for this prejudice, whether it is a consequence of a sedentarist, racist society or is a function of their inherently antisocial itinerant lifestyle. In their determination to name the discrimination and exclusion experienced by Travellers as a form of Irish racism, Traveller ethnicity has become the central premise of those involved in Traveller human rights and community development advocacy. It is also the contention of this thesis that the racialised representation of a distinctive Traveller culture elucidates and contests both normative notions of 'Irishness' and the reception of racially other migrants in Irish society.

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 $^{^{200}}$ See http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/index/equality/race/race_relations_order/race-relations-oder-intro.htm; accessed 10 March 2010.

See the Equality Authority Report, 'Traveller Ethnicity' (2006) for a thorough discussion of the academic debate. This report summarises the remarkable consensus on the issue, but for the contrary argument see Dymphna McLoughlin, 'Ethnicity and Irish Travellers: Reflections on Ní Shúinéar' in M. McCann, S. Ó Síocháin and J. Ruane (eds.), *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*, (1994: 78-90).

²⁰² For mainstream opinion see John Waters in the *Irish Times* (2001: 16), "To place Travellers in the 'racism' equation is a mistake to begin with as Travellers are not an ethnic group"; or Helen Lucy Burke in the *Sunday Tribune* (1995), "For years the Travelling People gave us to understand that they are exactly the same as the rest of us, but with caravans. Now some claim that they are a separate race and ethnic group. This is incorrect: their names, race, features are Irish. Their language, Shelta, is a form of backslang or Theives Cant, done through the medium of Irish. They say little about respecting the culture and sensibilities of their settled neighbours."

6.1 The story of a priest and a tinker: Synge's The Tinker's Wedding

José Lanters in her comprehensive The 'Tinkers' in Irish Literature deliberately employs the derogatory term 'Tinker' in her title to reveal the gap between the creation of the 'Tinker' figure and the trope of 'tinkerishness' in Irish literature according to sedentary norms, and Travellers as real people with a role in Irish society.²⁰³ Her roughly chronological study illustrates how the depiction of Travellers oscillates between demonisation and valorisation as it reflects the preoccupations of settled literary artists and their cultural-political contexts from the pre-Famine period, through the Revival and into the twentieth century. The Traveller characters are invariably presented as variations on the 'rogue' archetype of the period with particular emphasis on dishonesty, and they often meet violent ends or serve as sacrifices or scapegoats for the social conflicts portrayed. Alternatively, the tinker is idealised as a heroic 'pure' Celtic identity, free, passionate, 'otherworldly' and the antithesis of bourgeois 'Englishness', a figure which the Literary Revivalists sought to harness to the discourses of cultural nationalism. From the mid-century, nomadic characters become part of the discourse on modernity, representing both the attraction and the peril of a decent into primitivism. In popular crime fiction, on the other hand, they take up their stereotypical positions as sensationalised victims and/or the perpetrators of unbounded savagery and murder. As metaphoric figures for social transgressions, of what is or has been repressed and disavowed in Irish society, or as exoticised figures of desire for a mythologised past, "what's going on" in these portrayals "is not really about travellers at all", as Fintan

²⁰³ In the study below, I also use the term 'Traveller' to refer to actual Traveller people and their culture, 'tinkers' to refer to the characters as depicted in Synge's work to identify them as a literary construct distinct from the identity of contemporary Travellers and 'itinerant' to refer to a range of nomadic cultural groupings including traders, beggars, travelling entertainers and Travellers.

O'Toole asserts about anti-Traveller prejudice more generally, "but about the rest of us, the 'settled' people" (1995: 16). Travellers are the ultimate other against whom the Irish self define their own respectability, distinct ethnicity and rootedness.

It is in this context that I examine two dramatic works, one canonical and one relatively contemporary, which could be regarded as contestatory of these more conservative depictions of Traveller characters, even as they utilise certain stereotypical tropes: John Millington Synge's The Tinkers Wedding (published in 1907 but not performed in Ireland until 1963) and Calypso Productions Rosie and Starwars by Charlie O'Neill (1997). I have selected these settled artists' plays for examination with the Traveller playwrights work discussed below, partially because works by Synge and Calypso are examined elsewhere in the thesis, but also because their deployment of stereotypes in pursuit of broadly pro-nomad objectives sets out the paradigms of identity that the Traveller artists also work within. The premise of *The Tinker's Wedding* is that Sarah Casey, a young Traveller woman, wishes to be married to Michael Byrne, her common-law partner and father of her children, by a Catholic priest. She is portrayed as having no real reason for seeking to legitimise her relationship other than that it is spring, which has given her "queer thoughts," ²⁰⁴ and a general desire for respectability, so that no one will be able to call her a "dirty name" (122). Her desire is thwarted, however, by the trickery of her mother-in-law Mary Byrne and the greed of the dissolute priest. Rosie and Starwars, written in the immediate aftermath of particularly violent clashes between Travellers and settled communities during the mid-1990s, follows the scenario of crosscultural romance as hurling champion Seanie Whelan (Starwars) falls in love with Rosie,

²⁰⁴ John Millington Synge, 'The Tinker's Wedding' in Synge: the Complete Plays (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 109. All subsequent citations will be to this edition and be referred to by page number.

a settled Traveller. Set during the summer of 1995 when County Clare won the All-Ireland Hurling Championship for the first time in 81 years, the play is a loose collage of documented incidents of anti-Traveller violence from that period and the fictional romance. While O'Neill's play is more overtly political than Synge's, both make concerted interventions in the public discourses about Travellers. Yet written as they are from the perspective of sedentary artists, they are indeed as much about the 'settled' people as the nomads. As such the historical-cultural contexts and production circumstances of both plays are pivotal.

The Tinker's Wedding needs to be positioned within the nineteenth century "Irish Tinker" fad, which Mary Burke (2004: 205) describes as "the late and localized flowering of an eighteenth century European craze centred on the investigation of Gypsy origins," with the addition of the liberal writers of the periods' own bohemian penchant for "sexual heterodoxy" and "self-conscious unconventionality" (Nord quoted in Lanters, 2008: 44). Certainly Synge's valorisation of tramps, beggars, 'tinkers' and other unsettled subjects in most of his plays²⁰⁵ is part of a contemporaneous anthology of diverse literary works in which the 'Irish Tinker' had come to be overwhelmingly associated with an 'authentic' notion of Irishness, becoming what Burke describes as the "exemplary indigenous exotic" (2009: 58). Those from the Irish National Theatre Society utilising the theme include W. B. Yeats' Where There is Nothing (1902), Douglas Hyde's An Tincéar agus an tSídheóg

²⁰⁵ Apart from *Riders to the Sea*, all of Synge's plays centre on characters who are homeless by choice or necessity: at the end of *In the Shadow of the Glen* the young wife evicted from her home for suspected infidelity leaves with a Tramp; *The Well of Saints* concerns an old blind beggar couple living on the road who are cured against their will by a Saint; in *The Playboy of the Western World* the protagonist is wandering homeless after supposedly killing his father; and in *Deidre of the Sorrows*, Deidre and Naisi live idyllically for a time in the woods of Alban.

(1902) and Lady Gregory's *The Travelling Man* (1910). ²⁰⁶ Paul Murphy (2003: 126) argues that Synge and his fellow Revivalists fetishised peasant and itinerant characters in order "to create a feudal dramatic fantasy space as the alternative to modernity based on Catholic bourgeois nationalism," which as Ascendency Protestants they found unpalatable. While lauding Synge's critique of repressive sexual politics and the materialism of the rural middle-class, Murphy censures the depiction of the socially excluded as "based on an aesthetic rather than ethical investment in the social groups he represents," as celebrating their heroic iconoclasm, vibrant insurgency and "attractiveness" while disavowing the brutal realities of their homelessness (ibid: 138). Nevertheless, by arguing that Synge's tramps and tinkers "represent the trauma of the landless labourers and evicted small-holders who were forced into a desolate reality outside the settled community of peasant proprietorship and *embourgeoisement*" (ibid: 132), Murphy's insightful class-structured exegesis betrays the assumption that all Travellers were forced into nomadism by poverty and denies the potential culturally empowering embrace of mobility for its own sake. Synge's romantic notions of picturesque poverty and the unfettered freedom of the road may very well be the product of his own anti-establishment political leanings, fostered by the subversive bohemian discourses absorbed during his time in the Parisian cultural scene. 207 There is further evidence of his fantasy relationship with nomads in his personal appropriation of the 'outsider' identity - he used to sign himself in correspondence to his fiancé Molly Allgood with the valediction "Your Old Tramp" (O'Connor, 2008: 9). Yet this play is also insurgent, as is evidenced by its unstageability in Synge's life time and for numerous decades after. Part of its undoubted controversy lies in its explicit celebration of

²⁰⁶ For a more complete list of Revivalist literary works featuring Traveller characters see José Lanters (2008: 44-46).

For further discussion see Mary Burke, 'Performing the tinker: Synge and the Parision bohémein' (2009: 98-106).

nomadism as an alternative way of life in a way which directly confronts the prejudices of conservative, sedentarist Catholic nationalism for whom Traveller culture was an aberration of wholesome 'Irishness' and an anachronism incompatible with independent modernism (MacLaughlin, 1995: 9-11). Stereotypes of Travellers redefined and displaced pejorative colonial stereotypes of 'Irishness', a propensity for drunkenness, savagery and criminality for instance, attributes which Jim MacLaughlin notes had "no place in modern Ireland" (ibid, 66). Antipathy towards Ireland's nomadic others reflects the majority culture's insecurities over territoriality and landownership and about cultural identity in the formation of the de-colonising state. Synge's endeavours to find a place for this underclass on the stage of the National Theatre are, therefore, significant.

That is not to assert, however, that it is appropriate to read *The Tinker's Wedding* as a realistic portrayal of actual early twentieth century Traveller culture. The play is, rather, a carnavalistic satire, with multiple parodies and reversals, juxtaposing the tinker woman Sarah Casey's quest for respectability with the acquisitiveness and debauchery of the priest. In fact the tinker characters and the priest have a lot in common despite embodying the imagined binary between the immoral, impious nomads and the virtuous "holy father". The opening stage directions place their encampment, "a sort of tent and ragged clothes drying on a hedge", cheek by jowl with the "chapel gate" (109), undermining the assumption that there is a cultural and moral abyss between the profane world of the Travellers and the sacred world of the priest. Similarly, when demanding his exorbitant fee for performing the wedding, the priest makes no moral distinction between the legal or criminal means by which Sarah might come by the money.

SARAH: Where would the like of us get a pound, your reverence? PRIEST: Wouldn't you get it easy with your selling asses, and making

cans, and your stealing east and west... (113)

Mary Burke (2009: 71) notes how Synge's use of language emphasises the construction of both the tinkers and the clergyman as morally ambiguous. In the opening scene when Sarah introduces herself and Michael, the priest sarcastically replies, "A holy pair, surely!" (112), an adjective that becomes the insistent, almost ironic "holy father", used by the tinkers nineteen times in the short play. The connection between the stereotypes of dishonesty associated with Travellers and the greed of the priest is made throughout the play, but is overt in the last scene when he accuses them of various villainies including "robbing", while Mary Byrne once she has him bound in the sack, scolds him with "you'll not be so airy again going to rob poor sinners of their scraps of gold" (128). There is also a carnavelesque relationship forged between Mary, the tinker 'mother-in-law', and the dissipated priest through their mutual thirst, another allusion to a 'tinkerish' vice that he shares. She flirts with him, alluding to him as a "single man" (115) and seemingly jealous of his "making whisper-talk" with Sarah (117). Apart from the aborted nuptials between Sarah and Michael, Mary King (1985: 88) suggests that the mis-rule bonding through drink of the celibate priest and the widow tinker is actually the profane wedding referred to in the singular title, with Mary Byrne as both celebrant and bride, while Lanters finds a third ceremony in the end of the play when Sarah puts her tin ring on the priest's finger, symbolising his marriage to himself in priestly celibacy (2008: 56). As King suggests, Synge's depiction of "the potentially dangerous theme of the close, nonhierarchic, human relationship between priest and tinkers" is "essentially subversive of any attempt to divorce [the characters] from each other" (1985: 93). The cleric too expresses envy for the imagined pleasure-seeking life of liberty of the nomads, as opposed to his own pious self-sacrifice:

I'm thinking it's well for the like of you that do be drinking when there's drouth on you, and lying down to sleep when your legs are stiff. (*He sighs gloomily.*) What would you do if it was the like of myself you were, saying Mass with your mouth dry, and running east and west for a sick call maybe, and hearing the rural people again and they saying their sins? (115)

Finally at the end of the play, while the tinkers have reverted to violent type, bundling the priest into a sack to prevent him calling the "peelers" (police), the image the audience is left with is of the priest cursing 'like a tinker' in Latin as the roguish Travellers make their getaway (129). According to Richard Dyer (1993: 16), "the role of stereotypes is to make visible the invisible, so that there is no danger of it creeping up on us unawares" and to "make fast, firm and separate what is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value system cares to admit." The notion of Traveller identity as something fixed and immutable but also deviant and readily distinguishable from majority settled behaviour is thus profoundly challenged by the human relationship forged between the priest and his tinker nemeses, even if it is adversarial and unorthodox.

With the notion of a 'tinker's wedding', however, Synge also invokes the salacious cultural fantasy of the inverted rituals and sexual freedom of the heathen 'Irish Gypsies' popular in the literature of the time. Paul Delaney's 'Representations of the Travellers in the 1800s and 1900s' evidences the "pseudo-anthropological studies" of the period, which confirm "the performance of unsanctioned marriage rituals (popularly known as 'jumping the budget'), as well as the widely suspected practice of adultery, promiscuity, and wife-swapping" (2001: 54). As is argued previously in this thesis, sexual fascination is strongly enmeshed in the imagining of a racialised other. Exoticised Sarah Casey has a palpable sexual presence and is a product of that stereotype, with much

made of her attractiveness and her potential promiscuity. She is "the Beauty of Ballinacree" who "peelers" followed ten miles along the road "talking love to [her] in the dark" (111), and who threatens to leave Michael for the wealthier Traveller "Jaunting Jim" if she does not get the wedding she wants (110). In radical contradistinction to the majority community's taboo on female sexual incontinency in particular, Mary reminds Michael that it is not a wedding that "would make a woman stop when she's a mind to go" (123), a statement of female empowerment that seems strikingly modern. While initially the play may not have been staged because of its offensive rendering of the Catholic priest, it remains difficult to produce today because of its adherence to a range of stereotypes about Traveller culture that still have purchase in contemporary Irish society. As one reviewer remarked about Gary Hyne's celebrated production for the Druid/Synge cycle in 2005 when the characters where costumed as unmistakably present-day Travellers, "I found it discomforting to sit amongst a contemporary cosmopolitan audience laughing at travellers given that the problems of bias against travellers and their living conditions persist in Ireland today" (quoted in Fricker, 2005b: 28). Yet, Synge utilised this stereotype in complex and often potentially empowering ways. The elderly Mary Byrne in particular represents an archetypal trickster character concomitant with a Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque, who disrupts the hierarchical assumptions of power and provides liberating alternatives to the repression and inequalities of orthodox society. However, this image of liberty requires to a certain extent the reaffirmation of stereotype, of Travellers as irreverent drunkards and thieves, as promiscuous, insurgent and prone to casual violence. 208 Nicholas Grene suggests in his analysis of *The Tinker's* Wedding that the play is an unsatisfactory drama because it claims liberation for "the lives

²⁰⁸ It is significant that contemporary images of Travellers would more likely portray them as chaste and god-fearing in the extreme. Whether that marks a shift in settled values or a change in Traveller culture is debatable.

of a people who were already liberated" (1975:109). However, as a community routinely discriminated against, vilified and excluded, without the means of self-representation to counter their construction as other to all normative values of Irish society, the notion of Travellers as 'liberated' becomes yet another stereotype. The stereotype, notes Bhabha (1994: 94-95), "is an ambivalent mode of knowledge... that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated." *The Tinker's Wedding* proffers no challenge to an assemblage of negative stereotypes of Travellers, but what it anxiously repeats exposes the link between discourse and politics. Viewed in this light the play becomes a satire about repressive, materialist, Catholic bourgeois Ireland, with the tinker characters analogising a counter-vision of an independent nation formed under more bohemian, liberal ideals. What it is not, however, is a realist portrait of actual Travellers lives in this period, for all Synge's aura of 'authenticity', nor is it advocating intervention in the political circumstances which enforce their social exclusion.

6.2 "Identity... the difference is – ours is real and yours is made up": Calypso Production's *Rosie and Starwars*

Charlie O'Neill's play *Rosie and Starwars* for Calypso Productions, on the other hand, is such an intervention and does aspire to more 'docudrama' credentials.²⁰⁹ Once again the social circumstances of the production provide essential contextual information

²⁰⁹ Charlie O'Neill, *Rosie and Starwars*, unpublished script provided by the author. All citations are from this script and are referred to by page number. Calypso's production of the play was directed by Garret Keogh and premiered at Meeting House Square, Dublin, in March 1997, before touring nationally.

for analysis. In the mid-nineties, when many people in Irish society were still recovering from the long recession and the exuberant prosperity of the Celtic Tiger had not yet begun to take effect, a number of angry clashes took place between settled and Traveller communities and some very controversial statements were made in the public sphere. While evictions, resident protests and routine discrimination were and are commonplace, along with random acts of violence against Travellers, the mid-1990s were characterised by more organised local protests against halting sites and individual Traveller families. In an incident which is reflected in Rosie and Starwars, a family with twelve children who had been refused a site in Bray after residents' objections, were then burnt out of their caravan parked on the edge of a housing estate (Cummins, 1994: 10). In June 1995, Travellers in Moate, County Westmeath, became the focus of anti-Traveller racism. Locals held public meetings and blocked the main Galway to Dublin road in protest against the Council's decision to provide a family with public housing on the grounds that they were "inferior people" (quoted in O'Morain, 1995: 14). Similar "strategies of social closure, including violent anti-traveller crusades... and vigilante-type attacks", took place in Bantry, Glenamaddy, Navan, Tuam and Enniscorthy (McLoughlin, 1995: 6). Likewise the public rhetoric on Travellers changed in tone as what McVeigh (1998: 162) termed the "moral panic engineered around Irish Travellers and crime" began to take root. McVeigh gives a number of examples but Mary Ellen Synon's contribution in the Sunday Tribune under the banner headline, 'Time to get tough on tinker terror 'culture' captures the essence of the commentary. This is her response to notions of Traveller identity:

It is a life of appetite ungoverned by intellect... It is a life of money without production, land without cost, damage without compensation, assault without arrest, theft without prosecution, and murder without remorse. It is a life worse than the life of beasts, for beasts at least are guided by wholesome instinct. Traveller life is without the ennobling intellect of man or the steadying instinct

of animals. This tinker 'culture' is without achievement, discipline, reason or intellectual ambition. (1996: 160)

Written in response to these real events and the resulting public debate, *Rosie and Starwars* by Charlie O'Neill was produced by Calypso Productions as their main contribution to the 'European Year against Racism' in 1997.

The play focuses on the collision of two distinct 'ethnic' cultures, the settled community of Ennis in County Clare for whom hurling is their metaphor for life, and a group of Travellers on an illegal halting site who also consider themselves locals.

Emblematic of this cross-cultural encounter is the 'love-across-the-divide' story of settled Traveller Rosie Joyce, estranged from her family after becoming a single mother, and minors hurling star Seanie Whelan, the son of a prominent local businessman and developer, Tom, who is engineering the corrupt rezoning of the halting site Rosie's parents live on. While the plot is rather clichéd and melodramatic - it will culminate in Tom rescuing Rosie's son from a burning caravan after the vigilante attack on the halting site he is responsible for - the writing is poetic and theatrical, elevating the clash of cultures story to something epic and symbolic. Note for example the significance given to the game of hurling, specifically in terms of an ethnically distinct, post-colonial Irish identity:

Hurling is ballet for Paddies... Hurling is freedom fighting. The perfect fucking game for a colonised nation. For another freedom. An everyday kind... Hurling is ethnic identity gone apeshit. Hurling is a secret society... Hurling is a liberation front for body fluids... Hurling is orgasms for mullahs. Hurling is the mother of all games... Hurling is group therapy. Hurling is perfect... (12-13)

Similarly, the play presents nomadism as an immutable cultural determinant, the defining characteristic of the Traveller identity, but the tone is less celebratory, more elegiac, as expressed by Rosie's alcoholic father Paddy.

Life. *Beat.* Life. We travel for it. You settle for it. It used a mean getting along. Bein better than nown else. Travellin and stopping in the cauld time a the year. People don't understand. Our place... Skills. *Beat.* Skills. We travel for it. You settle for it.... The years a skill in me hands was a blessin. Now it's a disease. I can't use it no more. It's festerin. Family. *Beat.* Family. We travel for it. You settle for it... Survival... (34)

Rosie makes the "identity" connection overt for Seanie and for the audience:

ROSIE: All that bog stuff that you were goin on about. It's a bit like

Travellers really, only different... The difference is – ours is real

and yours is made up. (31)

The hurling motif serves also to expose the workings of prejudice at one remove through the irrational tribalism of the Clare supporters, while, as Victor Merriman notes (2000: 285), the "discourses of excess... and drunkenness" more commonly associated with Traveller antisocial behaviour, in this play denotes the hurling fans' performance of identity. It would be fair to say, however, that the tropes of drunkenness and excessive passion would be associated more generally with sporting fans such that this does not clearly read as a challenge to specifically Traveller stereotypes. Elsewhere the play is less metaphorical and more didactic, assuming that potential misconceptions about Travellers and the racism they face need to be spelt out to their audience.

ROSIE: Look... Travellers suffer racism. 'A course *nobody will admit

this -

SEANIE: *Ah, come on –

ROSIE: — That's the truth av it.

SEANIE: That's a bit over the top man – ROSIE: Well what would you call it?

SEANIE: Being sensational 'bout it is stupid. Everyone knows there's

problems with Travellers. Anyway how can you be racist against

your own people? I spose ye're all black now as well.

ROSIE: We're not your people. We're Irish but different Irish. (32)

(* indicates the characters interrupt each other)

While for some reviewers, these scenes were propagandistic (Colgan, 1997: 11) or "merely affirm[...] a nagging sense of guilt" (Kehoe, 1997) without offering anything new to the debate, the assumption in Gerry Colgan's review that the "great majority" would "espouse or sympathise with the traveller's cause" is also not necessarily the case (1997: 11). Calypso's mission involved leaving the comfort zone of playing to the liberal theatre elite and touring to some of the very towns which had experienced Traveller/settled community conflict in the recent past, specifically Ennis where the play is set and which Bryan Fanning's study asserts had a particularly active anti-Traveller council. In this context the productions didacticism reads more potently.

O'Neill and Calypso take their relationship to their source material very seriously, particularly when the play is based on real events and the stories of specific individuals. O'Neill carefully acknowledges in the programme and in publicity material the assistance of various Travellers, including Michael Collins whose own plays are examined below, and the individual upon whom the character of Rosie was based. Mindful of the dangers of appropriating the subaltern other's stories, he clarifies that "she had written a diary that had been destroyed in a fire, so I knew that in some way she wanted her story heard." It is the ethical dilemma discussed in previous chapters of whether, as Spivak asks (1993a: 271-313), the subaltern can ever speak for themselves or is condemned always to be

²¹⁰ Bryan Fanning chapter 'The Politics of Traveller Exclusion' in *Racism and Social Change in Ireland* (2002: 112-151), deals specifically with the machinations of Ennis Urban District Council (UDC) with regard to Travellers from the late 1960s to recent times.

spoken for in a mediated fashion. She also argues, however, that sometimes the objective must be not "to recover a lost consciousness, but to see... the itinerary of the silencing" (1990a: 31). To that end, O'Neill's decision to portray the burning of Rosie's diary as an act of silencing perpetrated by her father indicates how the character is doubly constrained by her ethnicity and her gender. What is more, O'Neill describes as epiphanic the challenge made by one of the Traveller contributors to his research about whether he had also interviewed settled people. He realised he "assumed [he] knew what settled people thought," an assumption reflected in the often stereotypical portraits of the settled characters, such as the 'gombeen' developers and the drunken Clare supporters (quoted in Donovan, 1997: 12).

Nevertheless, although the play's proximity to real events and the company's research with Travellers gives it 'authenticity', dramaturgically it remains a political melodrama, designed to provoke its audience into a legible moral response as was previously discussed with regard to Donal O'Kelly's *The Cambria*. It requires, therefore, readily identifiable heroes, villains and victims. Larry Hartigan, the corrupt councillor who makes the "injudicious" remarks that the residents of the halting site "should be quarantined into reservations and the male Travellers... clinically castrated" (2), is a clear candidate for villain. So too is Seanie's dad, Tom Whelan, who, while more Machiavellian, is as unrepentantly hateful, although O'Neill provides him with some redemption through his rescue of Rosie's child. For her part, Rosie assumes the Traveller woman's customary role of victim. While I do not mean to imply she is anything less than a complex, rounded character, Rosie exemplifies many of the negative stereotypes associated with the Traveller lifestyle. She speaks of a miserable loveless childhood, full

of hardship and violence (7). She is maimed, her prosthetic leg the result of a drunken accident while in the care of her father (11-12). She is a single mother, cast out of the family for her transgression of Traveller moral boundaries (20), and yet sexually assertive enough to take control in her relationship with Seanie.

ROSIE: Shut up - we don't have much time.

SEANIE: Why?

ROSIE: My life expectancy is only 80% a yours.

They kiss. (34)

Yet, Seanie does not prove adequate to the role of hero, and it is here that O'Neill diverges from the formula. At the end of the play, although Seanie knows what his father has done and its consequences for Rosie and her family, he insists "this has fuck all to do with me" (45). In disavowing his own responsibility for and complicity in the racism of his communty, he must reject Rosie. He chooses loyalty to his tribe over his relationship with her, and in doing so he "settle[s]... for less" (46).

Whether it would be more politically efficacious for Rosie to take on the role of hero in her own drama or whether the optimism of that choice would imperil the play's 'truthfulness' is debatable. Undoubtedly the Travellers lose out in the end - they are beaten and burned out of the caravans and the site is rezoned by the council. In the concluding scenes, Chrissie, Rosie's mother, voices the mutual incomprehension between communities imagined as incompatibly separate. "Country people" she says,

...is the Traveller's word for Settled people... Knackers is the Settled people's word for Travellers...Itinerants used to be the Council's word for Cream Crackers. Even if ya couldn't spell if off the forms. Sir. *Beat.* Sir used to be the Travellers' word for the Council men. Even if some of them weren't gentlemen.... Settled people in an unsettled country. *Beat.* Unsettled people. (44)

Victor Merriman has defined Rosie and Starwars as "a cultural intervention with limitations" since, as is the nature of melodrama, the performance does not "contextualise and problematise . . . the range of possible audience positions it may evoke" (2000: 287). It could also be argued that this play is not going to attract into the theatre those with anti-Traveller views, such as Councilor Martin Cahill quoted at the beginning of the chapter, but that is to misunderstand the nature of Calypso's project. They aimed to provide a 'voice for the voiceless', to offer an advocacy platform to those disenfranchised from the majority discourse. In addition, through their seminars, workshops, literature and concerted efforts to bring excluded audiences such as Travellers into the theatre, they sought to bridge the gulf that seems so insurmountable in the play. As such, like Arambe, Calypso also addresses a multicultural audience and those residents of Dublin, Tuam, Ennis, Cork, Ballybofey, Derry and Monaghan who saw the play may well have experienced it alongside neighbouring Travellers. Considering that emplacement is such a loaded question in nomad/sedentary encounters, drawing Traveller audiences into the theatre negotiates boundaries of acceptance in more than merely symbolic ways. In towns where Travellers are excluded from the public sphere of shops, laundries, pubs, where they are segregated in schools and when accessing public services, where they are routinely evicted and ostracised, making space for them and ventriloquising their concerns in the theatre is an important intervention, even if they are still being 'spoken for'.

6.3 A nascent Traveller canon: the work of Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins

In the last decade, however, Traveller theatre artists have begun to emerge who refuse to be silenced or sidelined, who speak in their own voices about their own concerns and to their own communities. The most prominent and prolific of those artists are the performer playwrights Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins, both of whom have had three plays produced and are presently working on other projects: McDonagh on an adaption of a novel and a new play with a Traveller women's group, Collins on film scripts. They are at the forefront of what could perhaps be described as a nascent Traveller dramatic canon. While both McDonagh and Collins and their dramatic oeuvre are worthy of a much longer study, this chapter considers their plays from the perspective of themes that have shaped the thesis as a whole: agency, the construction of racially-other identity, sexuality and race. McDonagh's plays, *The Baby Doll Project* (2003),²¹¹

John and Josey (2005)²¹² and Stuck (2007),²¹³ explode sexual stereotypes to do with Travellers, confronting a variety of sexual taboos and gender roles in traditional Traveller culture. Michael Collins likewise deals with internal tensions within Traveller communities in It's a Cultural Thing... or is it? (A Traveller in Progress) (2005)²¹⁴ and

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²¹¹ The play was originally staged at the Project Arts Centre as a work in progress in November 2002 and then presented at the inaugural Dis/Cover National Arts and Disability Festival in December of that year. The play then officially premiered at the Project Arts Centre, 13-15 June 2003, directed by Vici Wrenford-Sinnot.

²¹² First presented as a reading at the Project Arts Centre as part of Traveller Focus Week, 4 December 2005; I saw a performed reading of the play at the Project as part of the 2009 International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival, directed by Declan Gorman in association with Upstate Theatre Company, 24 October 2009.

A staged reading of 'Stuck' took place as part of the 2006 Traveller Focus Week and it was then produced at the Project Arts Centre, directed by Jason Byrne, to coincide with the 2007 Traveller Focus Week. I saw the production on 15 December, 2007.

²¹⁴ First performed publically at the Teachers' Club, T@36, Dublin Fringe Festival in September 2005, directed by Mick Rafferty, and on tour throughout Ireland, the U.K. and New York. I am indebted to the author for permission to view a recording of the performance at the Teachers' Club.

Mobile (2007)²¹⁵, while Worlds Apart, Same Difference (2009)²¹⁶ is about a Traveller who discovers his sister is married to an African. Thus, while contending with genuinely controversial issues within their own communities, both McDonagh and Collins also interrogate concerns which affect wider Irish society, such as gender and sexual identity and the discourses of race and difference. As artists who have experienced significant impediments to writing, McDonagh has cerebral palsy and was instutionalised for most of her childhood while Collins was illiterate until he became an actor in his early twenties, both playwrights began their careers using their life stories as source material and performing their one-person plays themselves. Accordingly, The Baby Doll Project relates Rosaleen's personal journey from her childhood in an institution for the disabled to her growing acceptance and celebration of herself as a disabled Traveller woman, and in It's a Cultural Thing Michael plays himself from childhood, moving with his family from a traditional nomadic life to a halting site in Finglas. José Lanters suggests that Traveller life writing shares many characteristics with immigrant writing, being predominantly about writing back to the majority community as "a counter measure, as a disclosure of self that seeks to correct the negative stereotypes encountered in the public realm," but argues that as a defensive, dialectic strategy it is politically inefficacious (Gullestad quoted in Lanters, 2008: 190). I would argue that McDonagh and Collins' self-representation, while pivoting on the question of Traveller difference, is more celebratory than essentialist, and is addressed as much to their own community as to the settled others in the audience. Considering the difficulties both face in obtaining access to the physical and cultural resources necessary to create theatre, their productions and careers in the theatre evidence a remarkable degree of both agency and political potency.

²¹⁵ First performed publically at the Teachers' Club, T@36, Dublin Fringe Festival in September 2007, directed by Mick Rafferty, and on tour throughout Ireland, the U.K. and New York.

²¹⁶ First performed at the Project Arts Centre, directed by Mick Rafferty, November 2009; I saw the play at the Project 29th May, 2010.

Finally, as mobility is the defining ethnic identifier of Travellers, these plays are also fundamentally about a relationship to place and notions of 'home'. It is a preoccupation that is hinted at in the titles - *Stuck*, *Mobile* and the sub-title (*A Traveller in Progress*) - and which is made clear in the imagined topography, most of the plays being set in "well-kept trailers" or behind the walls of halting sites. In contrast to the 'unhomeliness' of the migrant characters discussed elsewhere in this study, however, for whom 'home' is a dystopic sanctuary, these plays portray a profound sense of entrapment, of what socially, culturally and physically constrains them.

Born into a large Traveller family in 1967, Rosaleen McDonagh is a playwright, performer and activist for Traveller, disabled and women's rights. While born with cerebral palsy and forcibly taken into institutionalised care as a child where she was educated in a special school for the disabled, she went on to gain an Honours Degree in Biblical and Theological Studies and a Masters of Philosophy in Ethnic and Racial Studies at Trinity College, Dublin, becoming the first Traveller to obtain a postgraduate degree in the history of the state. She has twice stood, in 2002 and in 2007, as a candidate in the Seanad Éireann (Irish Senate) elections for the Dublin University (Trinity College) constituency on issues of equality, generating widespread publicity in both the Irish and British media. Her current position is as coordinator of the Violence Against Women Project at the Pavee Point Traveller Centre. McDonagh's uniquely matrixed identity as a disabled, Traveller, feminist artist is the emphatic subject of her theatre, her writing and her activism, with each element of that identity influencing the others. She elucidates on

²¹⁷ Rosaleen McDonagh, *Stuck*, unpublished script provided by the author, p. 1. All subsequent citations are from this script and will be referred to by page number.

the impact of both racism and sexism on Traveller women, for example, in this interview for the *Observer* conducted during her 2007 campaign for the Seanad:

'It's "acceptable" in pubs to tell "knacker" jokes [derogatory slang for a traveller], while, quite rightly, it is regarded as out of bounds to tell racist ones,' she says. 'Racism against travellers is still endemic in the Republic. Women in Irish society often complain about a glass ceiling in business and careers. Well, I can tell you that as a female traveller we aren't even able to look up and see that ceiling. We are locked on the outside looking in.'
(Quoted in McDonald, 2007: 11)

McDonagh is a political theatre artist, committed to changing the social conditions of those she identifies with and represents.

How she does this in *The Baby Doll Project* is in a delightfully flirtatious, frivolous, comic way. While the programme notes for the show indicate that the play will be about an impressive itinerary of serious issues, "identities and histories; ... the impact of the Church; ... consumerism and poverty; and ... the personal journey of thousands of people whose identities are not given equal status" (quoted in Burke, 2009: 228), the opening image is of 'Baby Doll' entering "on a scooter, wearing a pink helmet with loads of fancy shopping bags." Baby Doll' was McDonagh's own pet name and becomes her 'diva' alter ego in the story, told in a luxurious, garish bathroom, loaded with expensive cosmetics, her "haven, [her] sanctuary" (1). Baby Doll's obsession with shopping and titivating are a defensive response to the degradations of her childhood on a halting site with no toilet facilities or in the humiliating shared bathrooms of the institution. The production juxtaposes Baby Doll's cheeky comment that "the day has yet to dawn when *Hello* magazine does a colour spread on 'Traveller bathrooms'" (6), with

²¹⁸ Rosaleen McDonagh, *The Baby Doll Project*, unpublished script provided by the author, p.1. All subsequent citations are from this script and are referred to by page number.

remembrances of seeing another disabled girl having her face rubbed in excrement by the staff in the institution toilets as a punishment for soiling herself: "They rubbed her nose in it. Isn't that what they do to train animals?" (21). As the *Irish Times* reviewer notes, however,

McDonagh defies you to see her as a victim. The pitiful details of her early life in and out of institutions... are not presented tear-jerkingly but as a necessary prelude to her inevitable politicisations. Now, she says, after years of various therapies, all she's interested in is retail therapy. (Dixon, 2003: 12)

Unlike the figures of difference that so often feature as victims in the plays in this study, McDonagh's self-representation, Baby Doll, refuses to solicit the pity of the audience, preferring instead to inspire anger at social injustice.

Baby Doll's vanity also allows McDonagh to celebrate an idiosyncratic Traveller sartorial sense, to 'reinvent the Traveller woman's aesthetic' [as]...an alternative ideal of beauty" (Burke, 2009: 230). Thus, the glory of frothy pink clothes, her "long, Traveller hair" and the country and western music she and her sisters dance to are all part of Baby Doll accepting her Traveller identity and, by extension, the beauty of her disabled, female body. "I want to tell you about my body", she tells her audience,

I like my body now, I really do... I like it because I know who I look like... I can see my sisters and they have legs and hips and shoulders and head as me. I also like my impairment... we have our own elegance... I challenge the aesthetics of what it is to be a woman. (37)

Baby Doll's sensuous corporeality challenges both the stereotypes of the overtly sexual Traveller woman, as depicted in Synge's play, and the image of a disabled person as desexualised, even disembodied. She is a sexual being, capable of acting on her desires, contrary to the strictures determining female sexual behaviour in Traveller culture and

limiting disabled sexuality. "I have loved and been loved by men", she tells her overprotective mother (39) and forges a relationship with "a male Traveller who wasn't her brother or family member" but her "equal" (31).

The Baby Doll Project is a funny, empowering, courageous portrayal of growing up as a disabled, Traveller woman in the care of the Irish state in the 1970 and '80s. It is also a furiously angry piece of theatre and an act of witness. As described in a publicity précis for the show, "A time-bomb is ticking in Baby Doll's bathroom;" the bomb is the potential psychic damage of not coming to terms with an abusive past and the drama centres on whether she will "replant it where it belongs - under the surface of institutional care and racism in Holy Catholic Ireland – or will she take the brunt of the blast herself?" McDonagh, in a piece she wrote for Face On published by Arts and Disability Ireland, describes her doubts about the play in the month before it was performed, doubts that would be natural for any first-time writer/performer, but which were exacerbated by her personal stakes in the project. She goes for a walk and finds herself outside the institution where she spent so much of her early life, "remembering the other Traveller boys and girls who didn't make it."

I made a list of the funerals I'd been to. I took a note of how many of us had spent time in psychiatric care. I found courage... My story was my story, but we have to bear witness to our friends and dear ones' struggle and history. (2007: 86-87)

What distinguishes McDonagh's work from the advocacy theatre of companies such as Calypso and others in this study is the responsibility she assumes as witness and what is personally at stake for her in this process. As Levinas writes, "Ethics... as responsibility

²¹⁹ See http://www.boards.ie/vbulletin/showthread.php?t=75931, accessed 17 January 2010.

toward the other... far from dissolving you with generality, singularises you, posits you as... unique... as an I' (quoted in Eskin, 2000: 19). Rather than speaking of the generalities of Traveller racism or the suffering of those in state institutions, McDonagh takes the ethically singular responsibility of telling her own story.

As in *The Baby Doll Project* where there is an obsession with bathrooms, *John and Josey* too follows the motif of 'dirt' and contamination, both signifiers associated with the racist depiction of Travellers. For as Paul Delaney writes (2001: 56), 'dirt' makes the connection between "the visible and the discursive modes of representation", signifying Travellers' "supposedly physical and moral uncleanliness". This time, however, the brother and sister protagonists are considered 'unclean' by their own culture because of their contravention of the strict moral codes that determine sexual behaviour: John is gay and Josey is separated from her husband. The play is about the characters coming to terms with themselves and their choices in conflict with their identity as Travellers. When after their mother's funeral Josey lets slip to her family that John is in a long-term relationship with a settled man, his brothers beat him almost to death and then burn his trailer. Kathleen, their elder sister, voices the prejudice of the community, speaking of shame, the spectra of Aids and the 'contamination' of the young.

KATHLEEN: ...You shamed us, you shamed this family.

JOSEY: All he did was fall in love

KATHLEEN: It's not love, it's sex! Just dirty queer sex! You're red rotten,

you're an Aids carrier...The pair of ye! Carrying on, wanting things, shaming the whole family. One's a faggot and one's a

druggy whore!²²⁰

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²²⁰ Rosaleen McDonagh, *John and Josey*, unpublished script provided by the author. All subsequent citations are from this script and will be referred to by page number.

John must not be allowed to see Josey's young sons again, declares Kathleen, the assumption of paedophilia overt (39). Both John and Josey are considered to have chosen their deviance, both need to just "be normal like everyone else" for the problem to be solved (41). Earlier in the play it is evident that John has internalised the imposed characteristics of 'dirtiness' and violence, and that these constitute his "rough trade", exoticised sexual appeal. He taunts his middle-classed, settled lover, "I'm mad, I'm crazy, I'm dirty and *you want me*" (32), and later snarls, "I'm not exotic enough for you. Not black enough. Not ethnic enough" (33). Conscious of the stereotype, however, McDonagh is able to ironise it rather than sensationalise it through the character of Barry, John's lover, who dismantles John's self pity and makes the connection between conservative Irish intolerance and the specificity of Traveller homophobia:

What is it, have you lost your identity again, is that it? Am I gay? Am I Traveller? Oh my God! We don't do gay Travellers! No, we're the perfect culture - man and woman, woman and man. Jesus, anyone would think you're *Irish*. Get down off the cross Good Friday is a week away yet. (32-33)

It is also through Barry, whose father is yet another racist councillor figure, espousing the eviction of Travellers in the area on the grounds that "we have our quota" (14), that McDonagh posits anti-Traveller racism and homophobia as equivalences. Barry knows his father "is an arsehole" but queries how John's family "are any better - he hates Travellers and yours hate queers" (30).

The relationship between Traveller John and settled Barry is, of course, another example of an intercultural romance used as a metaphor for wider societal interaction and the negotiation of common ground between cultures. It is a motif McDonagh returns to

repeatedly: *Stuck* also features a Traveller/settled person romance, as does her new play *Arrangements*, which deals with sex, domestic violence, cultural norms and gender roles as she tells the stories of five Traveller women and their relationships. In an interview I conducted with the dramatist, she wondered self-critically if her fascination with crosscultural love stories was a type of "chick-lit", but eventually strenuously defended "the whole idea of racism in the bedroom." She argues, "The truth is, our relationships are the very juncture where we meet ourselves... I like people trying to work their shit out in a passionate and difficult way." Indeed McDonagh's use of the trope can be distinguished from its deployment in plays discussed previously because she pluralises the metaphor and uses it to address not just racism against Travellers, but also intolerance and intransigence in her own community, especially with regard to gender and sexual norms.

She ended our conversation on this question of romance with a playful reference to her recent play, "Maybe it is just me. Maybe I'm stuck!" (author's interview, 2009). There is a deep and powerful irony at work in McDonagh's title *Stuck* in that it is a play about nomads and a mobile culture where the central tragedy is the characters' entrapment. The fact that it has been written by a Traveller woman in a wheelchair subject to her own not inconsiderable constraints heightens the incongruity. James is full of rage at his lack of choices as a young Traveller man. His father, Bernard, wants him to study for his exams, but for what benefit he wonders, "security or factory work?" (4). Bernard too is trapped, firstly by what McDonagh perceives as his passivity to discrimination and subservience to the authorities (author's interview, 2009), and as an

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²²¹ Interview with the author, 7 September, 2009.

outcast from his own tribe in Sligo because of his contravention of marriage traditions and for almost killing his wife's brother. On Wayne Jordan's simple set, a platform representing Bernard's tiny trailer, the two large men bounce off each other and bicker, James feeling the pressure of his father's constant worry and cloying proximity. Then the council build a barricade around the halting site to quarantine the undesirable social influence of the Travellers from the respectable community. For the Travellers, the wall is an unequivocal symbol of imprisonment: "What's that? What is it? What the fuck? They've built a fucking wall! We're trapped!" (5). With their backs to the platform the actors scuttle around the edges of the stage, evocatively summoning up a world that is literally and figuratively closing-in. Mairin Kenny has written about the contradiction between the pathologising of nomadism by the sedentary community and the constant threat of eviction that necessitates the Travellers' constant exile:

... the dominant sedentary group has taken nomadism – this core of Traveller culture and turned it into a key instrument of their oppression, ensuring that forced movement is the only experience of nomadism that Travellers have. (1994: 180)

Similarly the fiction of the Traveller lifestyle as free of the constraints and responsibilities, as portrayed in Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding*, contrasts sharply with the policies of containment and exclusion that govern the authorities' management of the 'Traveller problem' in communities all over Ireland. This is the irony McDonagh is emphasising when her play ends with the protagonist, James, locked in a tiny prison cell for a murder he did not commit (35).

Nevertheless, what McDonagh radically suggests in this play is that James' problems come both from within and without his insular community, and it is with these

issues that she controversially addresses her own community. Firstly, James is constrained in his choice of partner, unable to be with his settled girlfriend Aisling now that an engagement has been arranged for him within his community. "It's different for Travellers", he explains, "once we get engaged we'll probably go on a few dates" (23). As a talented boxer, he is also being moulded for a life of crime by Seanie, leader of a gang dealing in drugs, guns and other contraband, who wants him to sell drugs in his high school. James resists being controlled by Seanie and in the process is accused of cultural betrayal, of siding with the buffers (settled people) against his own people. It is this conflict that will lead to his eventual arrest. While Seanie is portrayed as a very unsavoury character who could be viewed as a stereotypical Traveller villain, McDonagh argues that his attitude is "empowering" in its own way. She contrasts James, whose fight for 'Traveller's rights' becomes physical against the construction of the barrier wall, and Seanie, whose criminality ensures his own access to status and resources despite his exclusion from the mainstream economy. Completely indifferent to the fate of the 'buffer' drug addicts he services, he says "I just want my kids to be well-dressed and not looked down on" (29). Seanie represents the irreconcilable tensions that exist between the Traveller and sedentary communities, which McDonagh insisted to director Jason Byrne "has to be an ever present force" in the play, "because that is how it is in reality" (author's interview, 2009).

Michael Collins is another theatre artist engaging both the Traveller and the settled public spheres on issues of race and culture. Collins was an actor for ten years on the RTE soap *Glenroe*, playing the part of Traveller Johnny Connors. He relates in an interview with Colin Murphy how in the show he was always filmed outside the

character's mobile home, but never inside. Fans of the show would often ask him, "Why do they never go inside the trailer? We'd love to see inside." Michael Collins sees his plays as a way "of bringing people inside my trailer" (quoted in Murphy, 2009). It is a fitting metaphor for his dramatic work which interrogates the demarcations of Irish culture, which place Travellers firmly on the outside, and the border maintenance of his own culture, whose strictures keep Travellers equally as firmly in place within. He wrote and performed his first play It's a Cultural Thing... or is it? (A Traveller in Progress) in 2005 and has been touring it ever since, mostly in Ireland and the U.K. and often playing to Traveller audiences, but also to the 2008 New York International Theatre, Film and Art Festival and to India on a cultural exchange. The cumbersome title hints at the connection between politicisation and the assertion of distinct cultural identity that underpins most of the plays in this chapter, but Collins' drama is less a theoretical argument than an autobiographical history story, or anthropology told in the first person. In telling his own life story from travelling the midlands with his extended family by horse and caravan, to living in a halting site in Finglas and discovering Traveller activism, he also charts the social history of Travellers from the mid-sixties to the present day. This is the story that has not been accessible previously in the othering representation of Travellers which, as Paul Delaney writes (2001: 55), rendered them "discursively mute." Thus, Collins' performance records his grandfather's rituals for making tinware and minding the horses, his father's canny methods for catching eels, the way they packed the tent or begged in the houses, the games the children played and so on, all delivered in fascinating detail by a talented comic actor and mime. Not only are these stories filling the gaps for settled audiences between the stereotypical images and the lived reality of Traveller experiences but, as Murphy (2009) notes from his observations of a performance, "it was clear from the reactions of a group of teenage girls who happened to

be in the front row that Collins' stories... were as foreign to their urban Traveller lives on a halting site would be to any settled teenager." Nor are Collins' remembrances of this time dominated by tales of discrimination and conflict with the settled people. Instead we hear of the Garda who collected firewood and water on his bicycle so Collins' mother would not have to leave her toddlers unattended, tied to the tent poles. It was a time, Collins suggests, when Travellers had an acknowledged role to fill in society, when they were "often the only *national* institution", as Jim McLoughlin has argued (1995: 19), "provid[ing] the social cement which bound isolated communities together.

Life in the city was different, however, when modernisation forced the Travellers into giant, unserviced halting sites such as the one in Finglas where the Collins family ended up. There were no toilets on the site and hundreds of people were forced to use the "long wall" as a toilet. (The archival photograph of the wall in question projected onto a screen against the back wall of the stage elicits a gasp of shock from the audience.) He tells a long, hilarious tale about the lengths he and his brother went to for privacy at the wall, ironically ashamed to be seen by any of the other Travellers who shared their predicament but completely indifferent as to whether settled people saw them or not. His story involves lots of sight-gags with his pants round his ankles, getting stung by nettles, that had the crowd laughing hard, but when he asks them to imagine the plight of the boys' often pregnant mother at the long toilet wall, the mood darkens. Contrasting Collins' tale of the public toilet 'long wall' with the fetishised private space of Baby Doll's bathroom exemplifies how the 'homelessness' of Travellers erases the boundaries between the public and private realms. Unlike settled society, they are forced to live much of their lives in public, denied access to private space.

While still told in the chirpy persona of himself as a child, Collins' experiences in the segregated 'special school' for Traveller children under the care of cruel, bigoted nuns where they were never taught to read carry a much greater sense of outrage. Speaking to his daughter about education in a framing sequence at the beginning, he declares, "I was robbed of my education, daughter, and every Traveller family in every county was robbed, daughter, robbed, robbed, robbed, robbed!!"²²² This section of the play with its regular humiliations and exclusions, the characters refused service in barber shops, pubs, laundries and cinemas, forced to access segregated social services, racially abused in the street, bear witness to the structural inequalities manifest as the "forms of apartheid historically experienced by Travellers" (Fanning, 2002: 172). This social history is given a personal "face-to-face" relationship, in the Levinasian sense, by Collins' tale. He explains that he never knew any settled people nor had any interaction with them except as representatives of an oppressive state, Gardai and social workers, until as a teenager he became involved in a Traveller football team that played in a local tournament. During the competition their skill as footballers garnered respect from the other players and invitations for individuals to join various settled teams. This opportunity for integrations was lost, however, when having been invited to the local pub for the medal ceremony, the teenage Travellers were refused entry, with the manager offering to award their trophies outside. "Outside!" It is a radicalising moment for the young Collins, as he realises that all the discriminations he has faced, in the segregated school, in cafés and other public spaces, the conditions in the halting site, all are designed to keep Travellers 'outside' of settled society.

²²² Michael Collins, *It's a Cultural Thing... or is it?* (A *Traveller in Progress*), unpublished. I am greatly indebted to the author for permission to view a recording of the play and, as he does not have a written copy of the script but works primarily from structured improvisation, all citations are from this recording without reference to page number.

Throughout the production, there is a tremendously vivid sense of place conjured up, especially in the early part when Collins intimately describes the topography of the places the family camped, such as Prosperous Hill with its vertiginous slope and 'Blind' Canal in Kildare with the shape of an eye at the end. What Collins is engaging in is the geographical discourse common to nomadic people, a concept of territory occupied rather than property owned. This serves as a possible reason for the rising antipathy to nomadism from sedentarist society as property ownership and rootedness became so valorised in a post-colonial Ireland. Travellers undermine the territorialism of nationalism because their lifestyle dissolves cultural and geographical boundaries and, thereforethey are inherently subversive, their way of life resistant to the assertions of hegemonic control. Both McDonagh and Collins in the imaginary geography of their plays, explicate and celebrate a nomadic sense of space and territory, displacing the desire for 'home' so pivotal to the migrant diasporic experience with the Travellers' radically 'unhomed' state. Thus, whether 'stuck' or 'itinerant', marginalisation is not just an imaginary spatial position outside of society but a vector defining access, mobility and the opportunities for agency, understood as the potential for participation and moving into particular sites of activity and power.

What is also apparent is that even when immobilised, as the Collins family are when they move to the halting site, a Traveller remains culturally a nomad even when he or she does not travel. Despite the Equal Status Act of 2000 which made it illegal to discriminate against Travellers in the provision of goods and services, social exclusion is still relatively commonplace, as when Collins' elderly father-in-law is refused service in a

pub on his wedding anniversary.²²³ It is these experiences which have politicised Michael Collins. However, as he describes in *It's a Cultural Thing*, his own experiences of prejudice have made him determined to intervene wherever he sees discrimination, even if, as is exemplified by his next two plays, the discrimination is perpetrated by his own community. *Mobile* and *Worlds Apart, Same Difference* court more controversial territory and specifically address the prejudices within Traveller culture. *Mobile* deals with internal Traveller feuding, which is explained in the play as a traditional method of settling disputes that has been debased by modern living conditions which force warring families to live in close proximity to each other. There is anger in this play too at Gardai indifference to the Traveller community's safety and well-being. A woman in the play asks the police for help when she fears her family are going to be attacked in their caravan:

The guard in the front seat said no don't ye knackers sort out your own trouble this is a public road once ye keep the trouble on the knackers side of the wall that's grand. When they finish killing one another then we'll come in and pick up the pieces and the three guards started laughing and drove off.²²⁴

Collins' message to his settled audience is that this lack of access to law enforcement and justice fuels the feuds because Travellers have no choice but to take the law into their own hands. Thus, the play complicates the 'civilised/savage' dichotomy that, as elsewhere in this thesis, castigates the racially-othered characters for their innate barbarity and inability to abide by the dictates of 'civilised' society. For his own community, his message avoids patronising injunctions to behave, evoking rather "community pride" as opposed to "family pride" (20). It is a difficult debate to initiate and playing to Traveller audiences he is conscious of resistance to his message, but by presenting the issue in all its complexity from the perspective of an insider he hopes to make clear their need to

²²³ As related in *It's a Cultural Thing*.

Michael Collins, *Mobile*, unpublished script provided by the author. All citations are from this script and will be referred to by page number.

protect each other from the corrosive influence of internecine conflict.²²⁵ Collins places his drama in the context of social intervention, as Calypso did, following each performance of this play with open forum sessions in which Travellers and settled people have the opportunity to voice their opinions.

In Worlds Apart, Same Difference Collins contends with similarly difficult and potentially provocative material. Collins plays Miley, a Traveller confronted by an African man, Tiga, who has a photograph and a letter from his sister, Winnie, long estranged from the family. She fled a violent arranged marriage twenty years ago and has, it transpires, been living in England and married to Tiga with whom she has children. "But your kids", exclaims Miley, "They're going to get called dirty gypsy, knacker, nigger, black bastards!"226 The abrasive tone of this comment is consistent throughout the play as Collins confronts the theme of racism with little subtlety. As it pertains, however, to a community for whom overt racial prejudice is a regular fact of life, Miley's directness takes on an authority that would be denied a character from the majority community. Just as McDonagh makes the connection between anti-Traveller prejudice and homophobia, Collins identifies the parity between anti-Traveller racism and the more obviously 'racial' hostility in his own community against Africans. The play is also replete with stereotypical responses to both Africans and Travellers, often intended as comic. For instance, Tiga has been mistaken for a doctor by the Traveller women who visited Winnie in hospital and, when he comes to Miley's trailer on the halting site, they refuse to be dissuaded from sending round their children with sore throats to be examined (26). There are also some rather overt connections drawn between traditional Traveller

²²⁵ Interview with the author, 12th August 2010.

Michael Collins, Worlds Apart, Same Difference, unpublished script provided by the author. All subsequent citations are to this script and will be referenced by page number.

and African culture - Tiga too has run away to England to escape an arranged marriage, for example. As Miley eventually acknowledges, "where you have come from and who we Travellers are, (Pause) it is worlds apart but it's the same difference" (39). While in previous chapters the argument questioned the political expediency of such obvious connections and the use of racialised caricature, maintaining that these strategies are often unhelpful in dismantling essentialising notions of race, ultimately Collins' play proffers a mutable, hybrid notion of Travellerhood that could come to include the African Tiga and his "knacker, nigger" children. While it is undoubtedly a somewhat utopian image, it is also powerfully deconstructive in the context of a Traveller identity already highly determined and constrained both from within and without. What is more, Worlds Apart, Same Difference not only challenges his own community to embrace a more inclusive concept of race and racism, but in parodying the attitudes in mainstream society towards Travellers, he also probes where the limitations of his settled audience's liberal humanism lie.

For someone like Rosaleen McDonagh, disabled, feminist, Traveller playwright, and Michael Collins, activist, Traveller performer, questioning whether their plays are political or about 'identity' seems redundant. They are Travellers, by definition peripheral, marginal and nomadic. As Kobena Mercer writes, however, "There is nothing remotely groovy about difference and diversity as political problems" (1992: 33). McDonagh readily acknowledges that her work expresses a "rage" against what she perceives as the caricatures of Traveller identity that abound in settled cultural products and the assumptions made that her culture is "over" (author's interview, 2009). She instead insists on the relevance of Traveller stories to the wider community, "Our stories

about ourselves are about the country we live in." Like Bisi Adigun, she resents not being able to "read literature or see plays where I wasn't the second-rate character or the villain or the fool" (ibid). Michael Collins's work likewise wrestles with notions of 'race' understood as a product of culture and defined by difference. He envisages himself working in alliance for social change with all those who experience discrimination (author's interview, 2010). Without taking from the specificity of the racism that oppresses Travellers, both McDonagh and Collins recognise that the prejudices within Traveller culture against homosexuals, women who opt for alternative gender roles or those who are racially different must be combated in the same way as those hegemonic forces that delimit Traveller opportunity and engagement in society. In addition, Collins and McDonagh see themselves at the vanguard of a Traveller dramatic movement, potentially a Traveller canon. In 2005, when he first started to produce his own plays, Collins, like Adigun, set up his own company, Traveller Wagon Wheel, in order to take control of his own means of production. Although small at present and constrained by limited finance, ultimately he aspires to bring in young Travellers he can train as actors and theatre technicians, and to work with other Traveller writers such as Rosaleen McDonagh. She too is conscious of her privilege in terms of education and speaks of creating opportunities for the next generation of Travellers for whom theatre may present opportunities for personal and professional development, just as it has for her. Theatre for McDonagh is not "therapy", but something "more personal, more dynamic, more political; I see it as an instrument of taking back power!" (author's interview, 2009). What the theatre of McDonagh and Collins offers is a celebration of the long silenced Traveller voice and the too often marginalised or exoticised Traveller experience. They speak to and about an Irish society they unequivocally demand a stake in and their work legitimises Traveller culture as an important aspect of that society. As part of the canon

of Traveller literature emerging at present, Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins and their fellow Traveller artists are celebrating what has previously been vilified, speaking back to the stereotypical images that have traditionally silenced and sensationalised their culture, and renegotiating the boundaries of the sedentary-nomadic interface as both Travellers and Irish people.

Conclusion

Performance and Politics

If theatre changes the world, nothing could be better, but let us also admit that this has not happened so far. It would be wiser (and less euphoric) if we accepted that it is possible to change our own lives through theatre.

(Bharucha, 1993: 10)

This thesis is about the representation of 'race' on the contemporary Irish stage and, by extension, in the Irish public sphere. Paul Gilroy has argued convincingly of the way in which 'race', primarily a discursive construct, produces 'racism', by "making 'race' meaningful and keeping it an obvious, natural and seemingly spontaneous feature of ordered social life" (1998: 292). It is not just an epiphenomenon, a matter of skin, nor fundamentally is it a question of power and prejudice. Because 'race' remains so connected to notions of culture and identity, particularly the ideas of nationality and patriotic belonging, while antiracism is likewise predicated on the "absolute nature of ethnic categories and a strong sense of the insurmountable cultural and experiential divisions ... of racial difference," then many antiracism strategies, Gilroy controversially argues, are unfit for purpose (1992: 50). It is a challenging idea and from the perspective of this study of antiracist theatre two points arise in response. The first is to acknowledge that in these plays some of the representations of culture or racial identity, both Irish and 'other', are stereotypical and reductive, and that, even when well intentioned, the racially other being can remain fixed and objectified, defined by difference and consumed in the totalising regime of the Same. The second is to argue in defence of 'identity' and its corollary 'identification', in that the performance of racial difference while fictional is,

nevertheless, significant discursively, materially and politically. There is, for instance, a celebration in many of these works of often-silenced, invisible or overdetermined cultural identities. In claiming their own positive subjectivity in the 'face-to-face' embodied space of the theatre, these creations of alterity expose the gaps or excess between binaryproducing stereotypes such as sedentary/Traveller, or native/refugee. By emphasising the construction of Irish identity, primarily through the experiences of emigration and colonisation, but also in response to a changing Ireland, these plays reveal its narrativisation and undermine the notion of 'Irishness' as homogenous and 'closed'. There is a commitment to politics in all of these plays, fundamentally to an 'identity politics', and therefore to the potentially enabling processes of identification. Companies such as Calypso, Axis, Arambe and Traveller Wagon Wheel also offer ethnic minorities the important material opportunities of making their own theatre and accessing career paths in the arts. Thus, fundamentally, many of the theatre makers in this study are exercising agency over their representations or their vision of an inclusive Ireland and the discursive practices by which reality is transformed and power enacted. There are 'other' voices making these plays, claiming the right to speak about themselves, their 'identity' and 'culture', in conversation with their Irish society. Contemporary theatre in Ireland has offered a platform for that dialogue, at the heart of the public sphere.

It is with the notion of the public sphere that this thesis began, considering the vanguard theatre work of Donal O'Kelly and his mission to instigate a debate in Irish society about the fate of refugees and asylum seekers. O'Kelly's work has a sense of historical consequence about it, even when set primarily in the present day, and evidences the dislocating effects of post-coloniality. It is an unsettled Ireland he envisages, with

characters unable to create a sense of 'home', a society in the process of becoming rather than being, and O'Kelly challenges his audience to take responsibility for the kind of Ireland in which they wish to live. O'Kelly was also a co-founder of Calypso, set up to serve a specific social justice agenda. The company under artistic director Bairbre Ní Chaoimh continued that undertaking, most significantly in their long and uniquely beneficial relationship with the young migrant participants of the Tower of Babel project. Avowedly political, Calypso also aspired to forge an ethical relationship with all their stakeholders, performers, participants and audiences, and while sometimes the struggles to combine ethics and politics were not always ideal, Calypso's creativity and committment made real, practical differences to many individuals' lives. While operational, Calypso Productions were an important voice for social justice and inclusion in Irish society. Apart from the concerted efforts of O'Kelly and Calypso, a number of other individual Irish theatre makers have contributed to the debate about Ireland's greater diversity. Christian O'Reilly's insightful It Just Came Out tackles the complex issue of latent racism and the phantasmatic intersection between sex and race. Brian Campbell's Voyage of No Return considers the collusion between global capitalism and racialisation, and interrogates the rigid segregation and prejudicial assumptions of his own racialised Northern Irish nationalist community. The production Hurl, from the Clown theatre company Barrabas, playfully imagines a multicultural team of hurlers playing Ireland's iconic game as a metaphor for a multiracial Ireland. There is also a reoccurring imaginative connection often made between Irish emigrant experiences and contemporary immigration. The plays of Dermot Bolger and Paul Mercier allow for consideration of the use of the Eastern European migrant figure as a mirror self for those Irish 'others' excluded from society on the basis of class, poverty or for transgressions against the moral boundaries that defined Irish identity. Finally, this thesis addresses the

work of those from minority communities who are representing themselves in the theatre, specifically Olabisi Adigun and his African theatre company. This analysis considers Arambe's production of African plays as an expression of specifically African and also post-colonial culture and traditions, in conjunction with their interpretation of Irish canonical plays. These productions, in contrast, emphasise the hybrid nature of Arambe's Irish migrant identities and utilise iconic Irish cultural products to contest unitary notions of Irishness. The final chapter considers the racialised representation of the Irish Traveller in dramatic works by settled and Traveller artists, in comparison with the representation of race in the rest of the study. Although Travellers have traditionally been considered sedentary Ireland's ultimate 'other', generating a polarity between the normative, rooted, civilised Irish and their marginal, homeless, barbarous opposites, Travellers are also Irish, and historical memory recalls the racialised Irish as the colonial 'white' other of someone else. Traveller representation by the majority community has oscillated with this double vision of a submerged Other that is also the Same, but recently there has emerged from the Traveller community theatre artists such as Rosaleen McDonagh and Michael Collins who challenge their previously silent and symbolic status. They are now telling their own stories, forging their own myths of identity and exercising political agency over their own culture on their own terms.

While this dissertation takes as its rough temporal parameters the period between the migration turning points, 1996 when Ireland first became a net immigrant country and 2008 when the tide turned and emigration again became the fate of so many, Ireland has not ceased to be a multicultural society simply because the Celtic Tiger has fled. There have been impressive and interesting theatrical responses to diversity from both Irish and

migrant artists produced recently and that are worthy of more in-depth scholarship than is possible here. Of particular interest is The Gombeen's production of Stories of a Yellow Town, first produced in April 2009 for the Cúirt International Literary Festival. The Gombeens are Irishman Jonathan Gunning and Spaniard Miquel Barceló, two Clown performers who met at the Jacque Le Coq School in Paris. Stories of a Yellow Town is a physical theatre performance constructed entirely from their interviews with Irish and Brazilian residents of Gort, County Galway, where the population almost doubled from 1,776 in 2002 to 2,646 in 2006 mostly due to an influx of Brazilian migrant workers. Although the characters are interpreted through The Gombeen's Clown aesthetic, the simplicity of the portrayal using just a few suitcases and hats and the participants' own words, allows the story to speak for itself.²²⁷ Arambe is also no longer the only migrant theatre company, nor even the only African company since the establishment of Camino De Orula Productions by Kunle Animashaun in 2007. 228 Polish Theatre Ireland was also established in 2007 by Anna Woolfe and producer Helen McNulty, producing Polish plays in Polish and showcasing the large pool of Polish theatre artists living in Dublin. Scent of Chocolate by Radoslaw Paczocha is their most recent production, which was performed as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival at the Focus Theatre in September 2009. Arambe's most recent production, also premiering at the 2010 Fringe Festival, is one of their most contentious and is certainly deserving of further scholarly attention. The Butcher Babes, both written and directed by Bisi Adigun, imagines the circumstances that lead to the death and dismemberment of Kenyan immigrant Farah Swaleh Noor at the hands of two Irish sisters, dubbed the 'Scissor Sisters' by the tabloid press. African actresses play the three female Irish characters in 'white-face', a technique which both

For further information see Sharon Ní Chonchúir, 'When the Celtic Tiger danced to the Samba beat', Irish Times (2009: B5). I saw the show in Cavan town hall on the 18 September, 2010.

²²⁸ See http://www.hushbay.com/pages/viewListing.php?id=86 for more information; accessed 12 August, 2010.

intensified the political impact of the reversal of the white gaze and produced some controversial stereotyping. In a further addition to the active Traveller theatre scene, June 2010 saw the first performance of a fascinating intercultural project, *The Trailer of Bridget Dinnigan*, adapted from *The House of Bernarda Alba* by Federico Garcia Lorca and written by settled theatre artist Dylan Tighe and Traveller Catherine Joyce with the assistance of the cast, members of the Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group. Sticking fairly closely to the original plot facilitated an examination of the custom of arranged marriages and the role of women in Traveller culture as might be expected. Yet, the translation of the script into the distinctive Traveller idiom, interspersed with words from their own language and delivered at almost incomprehensible speed made for a disorientating and intriguing experience. The cast of non-actors did not act their parts in a realistic manner but seemed rather to recite them as if removed from the action. The effect was something like a Brechtian alienation effect and yet the play remained very moving. Tighe and Joyce hope to tour the production nationally and this too would merit much further scrutiny.

To conclude, this thesis began with the work of Donal O'Kelly and Calypso Productions and their mission to "change the world", and ends with Rustom Bharucha's arguably less utopian proposition of changing merely "our own lives through theatre." The subject matter of this study is the representation of 'race' and of racialised identity in contemporary Irish theatre, but the plays analysed here are not merely proffering a mirror reflection of an emerging multicultural Ireland in its Celtic Tiger flux. These theatre artists rather are engaged in the utopian act of imagining into being an Other more

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²²⁹ I saw the production, directed by Bisi Adigun, at the New Theatre, 25 September, 2010.

l saw the production, directed by Dylan Tighe, at the Project Arts Centre, 19 June 2010.

inclusive Ireland and making enunciative space at the centre of cultural life for those precluded from 'Irishness'. Their work challenges mainstream cultural assumptions, tries to shake its audience into consciousness of their place in the world and hopes to incite a public and political response to social injustice. It is reasonable, however, to ask of political theatre, why theatre? Why not just political activism? Jill Dolan in her essay 'Performance, Utopia and the 'Utopian Performative' asks herself a similar question: "How can performance, in itself, be a utopian gesture?" (2001: 455). Dolan's answers reiterate many of the themes of this study and its framing questions in terms of content, practice and reception. She argues that theatre has a "communitarian" appeal, that it "engage[s] democracy as a participatory forum" (ibid: 456) arousing or confronting the public sphere as so many of the artists in this company specifically set out to do. Her emphasis on the performative subjectivity of theatre, the dangerous "power of presence" (ibid: 469) likewise recalls the various articulate embodiments of difference that populate the plays in this study: Joseph O'Mara, for instance, the first African protagonist on the National stage; or the young migrant Tower of Babel performers, publically and symbolically participating in the story of Ireland; or Christy Malamo, the black 'playboy'; or Baby Doll, a disabled Traveller woman celebrating herself. Speaking personally, Dolan writes as part of a "passionate audience", someone who seeks out transformative theatre, who desires to participate in the "world-making" of the "utopian performative" (ibid: 478). From the perspective of this thesis, she seems to speak of Donal O'Kelly or Calypso's 'converted' audiences for whom the theatre gives strength to their own oppositional ideas, of the Africans and Travellers who find their culture legitimised in the work of Arambe or McDonagh and Collins, of the Ballymun audience who take such active ownership of Axis. This thesis argues that for those audiences and their theatre makers utopian theatre impacts on how they see themselves in relation to their culture and that potentially 'changes' individual lives, to paraphrase Bhuracha. Concluding her essay, Dolan acknowledges that she is at risk of being sentimental, "that community and theatre, like utopia, can be coercive, that nothing is outside of ideology" and, yet, she insists that it is important to "performatively hint at how a different world could feel" (ibid: 478). This thesis argues that not only does this theatre potentially transform artists and their audiences, as utopian performances they also make a vital contribution to the public discourse about who and what the 'Irish' should be, and to the vibrancy and potency of Irish theatre in general.

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