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WOODEN, WOUNDED, DEFACED — PERFORMING THE BODY IN IRISH THEATRE

1983-1993

An exploration of performance discourse within Irish theatre, through an analysis of the first productions of <u>The Great Hunger</u> by Tom Mac Intyre (1983), <u>The Saxon Shore</u> by David Rudkin (1986) and <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> by Vincent Woods (1992).

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2002



DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis <u>Wooden</u>, <u>Wounded</u>, <u>Defaced—Performing the Body in Irish Theatre 1983-1993</u> has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university. I declare that this is entirely my own work. I agree that the library may lend or copy this thesis upon request.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY

SUMMARY

Wooden, Wounded, Defaced—Performing the Body in Irish Theatre 1983-1993 uses a four-chapter structure to consider the issues of performance and representation in Irish theatre, the specific circumstances within which Irish theatre is performed and the theoretical possibilities for an Irish performance theory. I have chosen three plays produced between 1983 and 1993, each significant in terms of the performance idiom and the placing of body, incorporating issues of representation, transformation and the recovery of tradition. In each case I focus on the liveness of the bodies of the actors and on the performance moment.

Chapter 1 PERFORMING TRADITION explores cultural specificity to ask 'Is there an Irish body?' Irish performance traditions are investigated to find how the body has been sited within a broadly acknowledged literary tradition of theatre. In the third section of this chapter, 'Literally Theatrical', I consider marginalized stagings of the body in twentieth century Irish theatre that have set precedents for the three core plays of this thesis.

Chapter 2 <u>THE GREAT HUNGER</u>: STAGING A MASTERPIECE considers the significance of <u>The Great Hunger</u> by Tom Mac Intyre. First produced at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, in 1983, this production was revived and toured nationally and internationally throughout the 1980s. <u>The Great Hunger</u> proved to be a controversial, image-driven staging of the poem by the same name by Patrick Kavanagh and has been cited as a point of reference by a number of Irish practitioners. The staging of The Mother as an effigy, collaboration and documentation, and the dynamic created in performance by the 'interaction' of the live bodies of the actors and the inanimate effigy are the focus of this chapter.

Chapter 3 THE SAXON SHORE: PERFORMANCE—'AN ACTING PROBLEM'? interrogates The Saxon Shore by David Rudkin which was commissioned by Field Day Theatre Company, Derry, Northern Ireland, in an attempt to engage with the Unionist voice. The company found the resulting script too potentially contentious, and returned the copyright to Rudkin. Rudkin's play is set at Hadrian's Wall, as the Romans are about to withdraw from Britain, leaving the Saxons settlers behind. An obvious analogy for the Unionist community in Northern Ireland, the difficulty was with Rudkin's use of a transformation to werewolf to

describe the sectarianism of the settlers. This performance of transformation, and its reliance on the performer and an effective use of the performance moment are central to this chapter. The transformation is in Rudkin's words 'an acting problem' and needs to emphasise the human element of the transformation for its political resonance to be effective. To effect this transformation in the presence of an audience raises another series of issues, particularly when proposing to present to the audience a version of themselves. The play's first production at the Almeida Theatre, London, in 1986 is considered in the final section of this chapter.

Chapter 4 AT THE BLACK PIG'S DYKE: UNWITTINGLY INTERACTIVE examines At the Black Pig's Dyke by Vincent Woods, which was first produced by Druid Theatre Company, Galway, in 1992. Within the play, the performance tradition of mumming is utilised and detailed in a way that is almost a documentation. Mumming is recovered and incorporated into the action of At the Black Pig's Dyke and makes the play seem, on one level, a celebration of performance in the Irish folk tradition. This celebratory element is interwoven with a violence that plays on the ambiguity of the mask, as the mummers become killers. The performance implications of the recovery and dramatisation of a folk theatre tradition is one aspect of the play, and its production, which I address in this fourth chapter. Also considered is the staging of the female body as contested territory. I then examine an incident that occurred during the tour, when a group of Derry spectators staged a response to the play, and its Druid production, by intervening to perform their own epilogue to the play at the end of the performance on Friday 1 July 1993.

In conclusion I consider how the theoretical discourses used here can inform readings of the body in performance within the Irish context. Here I assess the influence of the above plays and performances, and the significance of their production histories. I also interrogate more recent stagings of the body in Irish theatre and identify any development of perceptions of the performing body in relation to the text.

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For my parents and for Terri.

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INTRODUCTION

'Ireland has literally eroded, in the sphere of representations that constitute social identity, a comfortable sense of the body' (Herr 1990: 6).

Do the conditions within which contemporary Irish theatre is performed merit an Irish performance discourse? Performance theory to date has been concerned with broadening the parameters of what is defined as theatre, and with analysing the theatrical events of many cultures, in order to explore different concepts and cultural contexts of theatre and performance. My aim here is to identify the Irish context without essentialising Irishness, and to find ways of reading the body in performance within that context. I therefore consider developments in the practice and perceptions of performance within and outside Ireland.

In Wooden, Wounded, Defaced—Performing the Body in Irish Theatre 1983-1993 I have chosen to explore three plays and their production histories that focus on the body in performance in Irish theatre. I believe that this time frame is significant in that it marks a period when international performance developments were beginning to influence the work of Irish practitioners as they emerged from a period of artistic conservatism¹. In recent critical studies of the Irish theatre canon—such as Contemporary Irish Drama from Beckett to McGuinness (1994) by Anthony Roche— Irish theatre discourse has begun to recognise the incorporation of alternative vocabularies in the creation of meaning on stage. Such vocabularies were not new in Irish theatre, but had been marginalized in practice and in the documentation of Irish However, in the 1980s a series of theatrical events, both within the theatre. mainstream and outside it, began to change this. Some are included in this study and are directly relevant to the re-interpretation of the body, of movement and of image, which continued to develop throughout the end of the twentieth and into the twentyfirst century.

The core plays and their productions analysed in this thesis are: <u>The Great Hunger</u> by playwright Tom Mac Intyre in collaboration with director Patrick Mason and actor Tom Hickey, first performed in 1983, <u>The Saxon Shore</u> by David Rudkin, commissioned by Field Day Theatre Company, Derry, for its 1983 season but first produced at the Almeida Theatre, London, in 1986, and <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> by Vincent Woods, produced in 1992 by the Druid Theatre Company, Galway. The plays I have chosen to consider here were 'written' by a playwright in each case,

¹ Although there a number of exceptions, a mood of conservatism pervaded as led by Ernest Blythe as the Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre, who according to Anthony Roche, 'from shortly after the

therefore, in considering the body in performance in Irish theatre it could be said that I have not chosen to move outside the literary. I counter this by suggesting that each of the plays in question, especially The Saxon Shore, has been suppressed in some way by the dominant discourse of dramatic, textual analysis. This thesis seeks to infiltrate the literary theatre discourse to find how representations of the body in performance have been sidelined. I chose each work after careful consideration of its respective place in theatre history and of its emphasis on the body as a site of meaning. By questioning perceptions of the body in performance within the Irish cultural frame of reference, I investigate the shaping of that dominant discourse and how that has affected critical and audience responses to the core plays of this thesis.

Each play affords me the opportunity to look at the process, the production circumstances and the influence of performance on the placing of a particular performance piece within the canon. The Great Hunger has been recognised as an atypical work. Published in 1988 by Lilliput Press, the play and its production are listed in recent critical texts and have been recognised as influential by a number of practitioners, but they have not been considered closely in terms of Irish theatre history. Indeed, Mac Intyre's work is still marginalized to an extent, perhaps because much of his work is image and movement driven and as yet the tools are not in place for this work to be read within Irish theatre discourse. Secondly his work is experimental and, as such, difficult to classify. He has employed a wide variety of theatrical tools throughout his work to date, and has written a number of recent plays in the Irish language².

The Saxon Shore was literally overlooked in that it was not produced by Field Day, neither has David Rudkin, (part English, part Northern Irish but based in Britain), found the place in British theatre history that the early performance profile of his work might have suggested. The text of The Saxon Shore was published by Methuen in 1986 and has not been anthologised or reprinted to date. At the Black Pig's Dyke is the most visible within the dominant discourse. It toured as widely as The Great Hunger but the published text is not the production text, nor is it a documentation of specific performance images to the same extent as the published

death of Yeats until well in the 1960's (...) ruled the Abbey with a tight fist and an equal lack of imagination' (Roche 1994: 3).

² Caoineadh Airt O'Laoghaire (1998) and Cúirt an Mheán Oíche (1999).

text of <u>The Great Hunger</u>. <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> raised many questions in relation to the existence of an Irish performance tradition, which have not been central to considerations of the play to date.

The first productions in each case were significant for a number of reasons. The Great Hunger was staged at the Peacock Theatre, the small studio space of the National Theatre Society (which also includes the Abbey Theatre). Playwright, director, and actors, working in collaboration, crafted the performance score. The finished result is shown here to have been an organic and evolving work that was successful because of the physical convictions of the performers, the wealth of the original poetry by Patrick Kavanagh and the ambitions of the central collaborators.

A consideration of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> is included by virtue of the absence of its production in Ireland³. In a review of Terry Eagleton's <u>Saint Oscar</u>, produced by Field Day in 1989, Joe McMinn wrote, 'One of Field Day's most effective projects has been to demystify and reinterpret an inadequate and impoverished understanding of history' (McMinn 1989: 9). Why have I chosen to include a play that was not in fact produced by Field Day? As I suggest in the course of this thesis, <u>The Saxon Shore</u> is a challenging play not least because of the performance demands it would have placed on Field Day actors and Field Day audiences. Also, its political stance, written from within and about the Unionist community, is an uncomfortable one. The play, set in Roman Britain, is an allegorical portrayal of the Northern Irish Unionists as Saxons who turn into wolves, cross Hadrian's Wall and lay waste to the 'native' Celts. Thus, <u>The Saxon Shore</u> is a physically and politically demanding piece, which Field Day felt unable to address.

At the Black Pig's Dyke encapsulated the growing significance of the regional theatre sector when it was produced at the Druid Theatre, Galway, in 1992. This play uses mumming, calendar festival and tradition and a shared history and culture, to sound resonances with the audience. The play is set across the frontier of the Black Pig's Dyke in the border counties of Ireland and questions political loyalties through its staging of performance tradition. Through their use of traditional music, mumming, folklore and storytelling, Woods and Druid Theatre Company interrogated

³ The play has not been professionally produced in Ireland to date.

Irish performance traditions and applied them in a way which foregrounded the act of performance.

THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter one 'Performing Tradition' explores issues pertinent to my readings of each play and the relevant performances. In section one I question cultural specificity, and whether there is a reading of the body particular to Irish theatre; if there is an 'Irish Body'. Irish performance tradition is then charted as distinct from a more formal theatrical tradition in section two. Here the influence of folk traditions is considered in relation to how we read performance today. The theatrical and dramatic contexts within which my chosen plays were performed are explored in section three and precedents sought for a foregrounding of the physical body of the actor. Therefore chapter one is distinct from the subsequent chapters in structure and here I aim to provide the performance and dramatic backdrop for what follows.

Chapter two 'Staging A Masterpiece', chapter three 'Performance—an Acting Problem?', and chapter four 'Unwittingly Interactive' focus on each of the plays and the first productions in question and all are structured according to a similar pattern of analysis. The first section of each of these chapters looks at the context of each production and the second considers the staging decisions made in each case. The third section explores how each production staged the female body, as they isolated one female character in a particular way. My analysis focuses on how the female body functions within the formal and symbolic structure of each play—I pay attention to these representations of the female body, not to replicate the identification of woman as different from the perceived norm, as in the male body, on stage but to give a reading of the effects of such a perception of the female body. The fourth section broadens previous concerns to consider aspects of the male and female body on stage and the manifestation of corporeal anxieties articulated through presence and absence, wounding and loss of face. Finally the fifth section of chapters two, three and four consider the performance demands particular to the texts in question and to the circumstances of their first productions.

Thus, chapter two places the original poem <u>The Great Hunger</u> by Patrick Kavanagh and the details of the 1983 stage production in their cultural contexts.

Section two 'Staging A Masterpiece' then uses the Abbey production of <u>The Great Hunger</u> to consider such issues as attitudes to the literary canon, and a reluctance on the part of the cultural and critical establishment to reinterpret such 'masterpieces'. Section three 'Woman as Object' explores the representation of woman in performance terms because the practitioners in question made the extraordinary decision of staging the Mother as an inanimate effigy. This chapter goes on to interrogate the body of the actor(s) in section four 'The Body in Contrast' and how the body can be read in the presence of, and in relation to, this inanimate body in effigy. Finally section five 'Performance—a Collaborative Process' considers the role of the process, how a collaboration feeds into the staging of the material and how this collaborative group continued to work throughout this period on <u>The Great Hunger</u> and on a number of other works scripted by Tom Mac Intyre. This work over a five-year period begs the question—does an image-driven staging of text necessitate an ensemble process?

Chapter three 'Performance—'an Acting Problem'?' considers issues of performance in theory and in practice as exemplified by David Rudkin's <u>The Saxon Shore</u> and places the play and its consideration of Northern Irish Unionism in the context of Field Day's other work. Section two 'Staging Transformation' investigates the play itself and its eventual production at the Almeida Theatre, London, in 1986, (recorded to an extent by the published text), and looks at ritual and the performance problem of transformation. Section three 'Divine Woman' analyses the portrayal of character Ceiriad as a representation of a feminised Celtic culture. Pain in relation to presence and performance is interrogated in section four 'The Body in Pain', when Athdark's wounded body allows Rudkin to comment on the very nature and ethical implications of performance itself. These considerations bring me to the fifth section of this chapter where I investigate the issues of transformation and performance and transformation as performance in 'Performance—'an Acting Problem'?' The play's production at the Almeida Theatre, London, in 1986 is considered here in an assessment of how the acting problems of the text were solved in performance.

The fourth and final chapter 'Unwittingly Interactive' considers the Druid Theatre Company production of the Vincent Woods' <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>. The play is contextualized in section one, section two 'Staging Tradition' interrogates the

staging of Irish performance tradition as an act of recovery. The depiction of the female body as territory, a particularly contentious issue in relation to representations of Ireland (as seen in the second chapter through the staging of the Mother as an effigy in The Great Hunger), is the subject of section three 'Woman as Territory'. The fourth section of this chapter 'The Body Defaced' addresses the performance and political implications of masking, of losing 'face'. Mumming and other masking traditions, as well as masking in relation to terrorist violence, meet here in At the Black Pig's Dyke which, like the play of the previous chapter, is set at a border, a human intervention in the landscape. When the Druid production of At the Black Pig's Dyke toured to Derry in Northern Ireland, members of the audience countered the politics of the play by interrupting the action with a staged response on the second-last night of the run. The final section of this chapter considers this moment as a performance issue, as the Druid Theatre Company production of At the Black Pig's Dyke became 'Unwittingly Interactive'.

In the conclusion I argue that the Irish cultural context suggests ways of reading the body in performance beyond the dangers of essentialism. A re-centring of the body and the process of physicalization may indeed be specific to the time frame of my thesis. An emerging re-emphasis on language, as exemplified by a number of significant productions since the mid-1990s, may point to either a reassertion of a literary-based performance idiom or a crisis in contemporary theatre practice. Nonetheless, general performance theory, an arguably postcolonial experience of language and culture, and the reading and staging of gender in the Irish context do suggest ways in which Irish performance can be read, analysed and interpreted.

In the appendices, I have included the production histories of <u>The Great Hunger</u> and <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>, a detailed biography of Tom Mac Intyre, and sections of interviews conducted as part of my research for this thesis. I have included the detailed edited transcript of the interview I conducted with playwright David Rudkin as a resource, as another interrogation of the live moment, and as a record or primary source in support of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> because there is very little primary material available on the Almeida production. As my research has been informed by my own performance practice, I have also provided a video and

description of practical research into the performance issues of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>. Finally, I list my own practice and performance work.

MATERIAL

As the production histories of the plays in question varied considerably, my interaction with the primary material was different in each case:

- The Great Hunger was performed over a five-year period, the changes in each production pointing to the role of performance as a *producer* of meaning. Through performing The Great Hunger the practitioners learned more about what they were producing through the audience response; their experience of performance informed later versions. I accessed performance material on a number of videos held in the Abbey archive and also accessed a copy of the early production text. This material facilitated my charting of the difference between the 1983 and 1986 productions, and in relation to the 1988 publication of the 'production' text.
- My experience of the performance of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> was as an audience-member encountering the play 'live', not only the original Druid production but also a recent Trinity College Players production (both attended by the playwright). This raised a number of questions, including: when the playwright, director, designer and actors of the original production have all been so much part of a play's development, what room is there for later interpretation? Can the play live on, without subsequent productions being mere facsimiles?
- What became most interesting to me, however, was my engagement with the performance issues of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>. Could I realistically include in an interrogation of Irish performance and an investigation of the necessity for an Irish performance theory a production that was not professionally performed in Ireland⁴? I include this play, and refer to its 1986 production at the Almeida Theatre, London, because I perceive as significant Field Day's failure to produce <u>The Saxon Shore</u>. But as I considered the performance implications of the wolfimage, the difficulties of what Rudkin himself described as 'an acting problem' (Rudkin 1986: 52), I realised that to fully engage with the live issues here I must

⁴ In 1988, I attended a production of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> in Northern Ireland by second year theatre studies students at the University of Ulster at Coleraine, directed by tutor and <u>Theatre Ireland</u> editor Lynda Henderson.

do so through performance. In May 1999 I directed the first year BA students of the School of Drama, Trinity College, in an outdoor interrogation of the performance issues within <u>The Saxon Shore</u> and refer to this in chapter three.

I encountered representation, presence and performance in a number of ways as my research continued:

- As a researcher studying video footage of The Great Hunger
- As a practitioner embodying the performance challenges of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>
- As an audience member at a number of different productions of <u>At the Black Pig's</u>
 Dvke

Initially frustrated by the lack of conformity in my primary research, I have since come to appreciate this as a useful element of my interrogation of performance, highlighting issues of documentation particularly.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this thesis emerged in response to the specific requirements of the material. A consideration of the body in performance in Irish theatre necessitated an overview of the construction of Irish theatre discourse and a questioning of the canon. Ireland is credited with a strong literary theatre tradition, which had to be taken into account and was unavoidable in terms of reference material. Literary theatre is documented through an almost exclusively literary criticism, and so a critical tendency to focus on language had to be considered. This investigation of Ireland's relationship with the word—in terms of the body in performance and a predominance of language on stage—led me to consider Ireland's postcolonial status which I address in chapter one.

In designing a theoretical framework, I searched for an appropriate critical discourse for an interrogation of the live moment and of presence and performance. I needed to consider the dramatic text in relation to its performance. The language of the playwright is only one element in a process that includes an almost dizzying number of variables: performance conditions, audience response and interpretations of the material by actors, directors, designers and each audience member. My starting point was the creation of a binary opposition of language and the body that proved unworkable. Language on stage is given voice; it passes through the body and is

dependent on the structure, texture and mechanics of the body to be created. Also the actor, fellow actors and audience members, through the body, receive language⁵. The implications of a sensory experience of language are far-reaching, especially in a culture where postcolonial emphases on education, and a mastering of the language of the coloniser, have gone hand-in-hand with a repression of the body as dictated by the state-sponsored identification with the Catholic Church.

The performance theories cited here are culturally specific and needed to be recontextualized when applied to Irish theatre. In questioning whether or not postcolonial theory was appropriate to my project, I soon realised that a postcolonial relationship to language created a different environment for performance and that needed to be taken into account. Also representations of gender, while there would be many points of contact with other cultures, needed to be considered here in relation to the specific cultural conditions. Questions arose such as how to read the body in performance, and perhaps particularly representations of the female body in performance, in a state where the role of motherhood is idealised in the constitution. My use of postcolonialism, gender and performance theories in relation to Irish theatre is detailed closely in chapter one, 'Performing Tradition'.

Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics (1996) by Gilbert and Tompkins became a central point of reference to my thesis; although it does not relate specifically to Ireland, it places drama within the realm of postcolonialism. More recently, the publication of Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama by Christopher B. Balme (1999) furthers the work of Gilbert and Tompkins to interrogate language, movement and, interestingly, the architecture of performances spaces, but again there is no significant consideration of Irish theatre as postcolonial theatre. An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theatre (1996) by Brian Crow with Chris Banfield does not include an Irish chapter but provided a context within which an 'Irish postcolonial theatre' could be placed. However, broader studies in postcolonialism have also informed this thesis, directly and indirectly: Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture (1988) by David Cairns and Shaun Richards, which considers Ireland's postcolonial position, and Anomalous States:

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⁵ Voice specialist Kristin Linklater has emphasized the physical sensation of language, and a need to be open to the sensual experience of the word: 'For safety's sake we have persuaded ourselves that print,

Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment (1993) and Ireland After History (1999) both by David Lloyd. Ireland and Cultural Theory: The Mechanics of Cultural Theory (1999) edited by Colin Graham and Richard Kirkland, questions the premise of authenticity and the role of decolonisation in the development of Irish critical discourse. Edward Said expanded his work on postcolonialism to include Ireland's position in Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature: Yeats and Decolonization (1988). Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society 1880-1935 (1995) by C. L. Innes looks at representations and perceptions of gender and is cited throughout and especially in chapter one.

Volatile Bodies, Towards a Corporeal Feminism (1994) by Elizabeth Grosz considers phenomenology in relation to feminism and—in its consideration of subject and object—provides a mechanism for reading the body in performance as used here in chapter one, in section 2.4 'The Body In Contrast' and in section 3.4 'The Body In Pain'. Cultural specificity and performance heritage, issues central to chapter one, beg the question as to whether there is an 'Irish body', 'Re-charging Essentialism' in The Domain Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the end of Print Culture (1996) by Sue-Ellen Case helps to address this issue. Ania Loomba's Colonialism/Postcolonialism (1998) is cited specifically in relation to the issue of 'Woman as Territory' in chapter four, and The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings (1999), edited by Donn Welton, informs the issue of representation in relation to the Mother as a wooden effigy 'Woman as Object' in chapter two.

Reading the body in performance and perceptions of the body in performance led me to a wide variety of sources, among them Judith Butler's <u>Bodies that Matter:</u>

On the Discursive Limits of "Sex" (1993) where, in the chapter of the same name, Butler interrogates the prescribed roles of masculine and feminine bodies, from Plato's to Irigaray's. Philip Auslander's <u>From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism</u> (1997) and <u>Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture</u> (1999) propose evaluations of performance and 'liveness', which are in dialogue, if not in conflict, with Peggy Phelan's work on the ontology of performance, published in <u>Unmarked: The Politics of Performance</u> (1993). <u>Mourning Sex:</u> Performing <u>Public Memories</u> (1997), also by Phelan, in particular her writing on

logic, intellectual ideas and the spoken word are one thing while our bodies and feeling are another'

wounding and the work of Carravaggio, informs my reading of Athdark's wound as a feminisation in section 3.4 'The Body in Pain'.

To All Appearances: Ideology and Performance (1992) by Herbert Blau is a seminal work and his writings on performance as transformation provide a framework for 'Staging Transformation'. Performance Theory (1988) by Richard Schechner also informs my reading of transformation and its relationship to ritual. Amelia Jones' Body Art: Performing the Subject (1998) might be a less obvious choice, but it does consider masochism and the male body in performance and thus enables my reading of character Maguire in section 2.4 'The Body in Contrast'. In Masked Performance: The Play of the Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre (1996) John Emigh interrogates the mask as an expression of self and other, and he is cited in section 4.4 'The Body Defaced'. 'The Erotics of Irishness' (Critical Inquiry, 1990) by Cheryl Herr called for a reading of the body within Irish culture; this article has contributed to my search for a performance discourse.

MY WORK IN RELATION TO OTHER WORK IN THE FIELD

I see this thesis as having a very specific place within the discourse of Irish theatre studies. I refer to a number of published literary and political analyses of Irish theatre, which contribute to the field of Irish theatre studies. Anthony Roche's Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness (1994) is notable in that it charts the emergence of a form where the conditions of performance have affected the historicisation of key texts. It is essentially a study of the dramatic texts, however, as is Christopher Murray's Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to the Nation (1997), which projects back further to the work of the Abbey founders. The Politics of Irish Drama (1999) by Nicholas Grene, as implied, focuses on the political circumstances as dramatised by Irish playwrights. Particularly useful to the question of performance heritage in the Irish context is Irish Folk Drama (1969) by Alan Gailey. Other texts touch on this area, such as E. Estyn Evans' Irish Folk Ways (1957 & 2000) but Gailey's text is particular to drama and has proven invaluable and it should, like Irish Folk Ways, be considered for re-publication.

Broader developments in literature, culture and society are identified in Declan Kiberd's <u>Inventing Ireland</u>: <u>The Literature of the Modern Nation</u> (1995) and Luke Gibbons' <u>Transformations in Irish Culture</u> (1996). I acknowledge the contributions of these publications but look to the periodicals <u>Theatre Ireland</u>⁶ and <u>Irish Theatre Magazine</u>⁷ for a documentation of theatre practice and performance, which is so central to my own work. <u>The State Of Play: Irish Theatre In The 'Nineties</u> (1996) edited by Eberhard Bort and <u>Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre</u> (2000) edited by Eamonn Jordan herald the incorporation of performance issues in the developing Irish theatre discourse.

Perceptions of the body are informed by experience, experience of the self and the other, and by the political and cultural frame of reference specific to an Irish context. In <u>The State of Play: Irish Theatre in The 'Nineties</u> Anna McMullan argued that:

Refocusing on performance may offer a new way of looking at the texts of the Irish theatre tradition, and at how this tradition may be opened up, regenerated, and made more inclusive (McMullan in Bort 1996: 31).

This work aims to address this tradition by refocusing on the performance of the body as 'wooden, wounded, defaced', and how we can read these bodies in the light of performance theories in general.

⁶ A quarterly published from 1980 until 1993.

CHAPTER ONE PERFORMING TRADITION

'Even though we know how hideously bodies lie, we want to retain some faith in the authenticity of the body's gestures' (Phelan 1997: 31).

1.1 CULTURAL SPECIFICITY—IS THERE AN IRISH BODY?

In 'The Erotics of Irishness' Cheryl Herr speculates on what she describes as Ireland's 'over-identity crisis' and questions the perceptions of the body in Irish society:

One feature that almost no one mentions is the relationship between the Irish mind and any kind of Irish Body. The identity-obsession marks a social repression of the body on a grand scale. As I see it, the loss occurs on both individual and collective levels (Herr 1990: 6).

That such a loss occurs on both individual and collective levels affects the individual actor or theatre practitioner and Irish audiences. The repression of the body is evidenced in the creation of meaning at all levels of the theatrical process in Ireland. The work of playwrights whose work (even unknowingly) subscribes to this repression of the body is more visible in the Irish theatre canon. Until recently practitioners who work to foreground the body in performance have had limited or sporadic success in this area of Irish theatre practice¹. Actors are constrained by a process that privileges language and has, for the most part, seen the actor as facilitating rather than materially creating meaning.

Although Herr is primarily concerned with visual art and archaeology she refers specifically to the material presence of the body and how it has been represented:

Ireland has literally eroded, in the sphere of representations that constitute social identity, a comfortable sense of the body; in tradition as well as in colonial and postcolonial Ireland, the body has frequently been associated representationally with danger and has been scrutinized with an intensity that *stills* (photographically) (Herr 1990: 6).

Here the problematic notion of the 'Irish Body' is introduced. Is there an Irish body? Herr is subscribing to the very 'identity-obsession' she identifies by speculating on the Irish body here, but it is perhaps necessary to take on this issue within its own parameters. Herr is also adopting a Cartesian standpoint in her opposition of the Irish mind and Irish body (an opposition that could also be termed essentialist). While I recognise that she is addressing the Irish context, cultural specificity is in danger of becoming essentialised in Herr's argument, a pitfall I am working to avoid with the 'Performing the Body in Irish Theatre' of my title rather than 'Performing the Irish

¹ See conclusion for work since 1992 by such companies as Barabbas...the Company and Corn Exchange.

Body'. Yet the issue of representation is central to a study of Irish theatre and Irish theatre practice. Herr's anxiety about the 'stilling' of the body can be applied to theatrical representation, the relationship between the body and the word, and how a playwright incorporates the performative into the play². And while it is important to qualify the 'Irish body' the questions raised in 'The Erotics of Irishness' are pertinent to an analysis of twentieth-century Irish theatre. What have been the ambitions of Irish theatre practitioners and the demands of Irish audiences? Does a repression of the body on individual and collective levels give rise to a specific theatre tradition—are we defined by a repression of ourselves?

Cultural specificity and the staging of a culturally specific condition raise the issue of authenticity as that which can be taken to define Irish theatre as distinct from its others. Colin Graham questions 'the persistence of authenticity' in Irish culture and links a striving for authenticity to the conditions of postcolonialism: '[a]uthenticity and claims to authenticity underlie the conceptual and cultural denial of dominance' (Graham and Kirkland 1999: 8). Graham quotes Golomb's definition of authenticity as 'the loyalty of one's self to its own past, heritage and ethos' (Graham and Kirkland 1999: 11). Authenticity, in Graham's terms, is therefore an exercise in, and dependent upon, cultural specificity and 'is thus constantly a cultural, textual phenomenon, defining, recreating and projecting. Authenticity may resist definition, but its materiality in textuality is undeniable' (Graham & Kirkland 1999: 11, [my emphasis]).

Recourse to authenticity is credited with being both a colonising strategy ('a signifier of the colonized's cultural incapacities' (Graham in Graham & Kirkland 1999: 7)), and a decolonising strategy ('on the basis of a return to principles' (Lloyd 1993: 54)). Irish authenticity has become an economic tool in creating a market for things Irish, a means of ironic self-reflection, and a seemingly limitless source of artistic inspiration, acted upon or reacted against, but ever-present. If authenticity has been an agent of colonisation and decolonisation, is Ireland then postcolonial? Are both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland postcolonial? What does 'Ireland' mean if there are two Irelands with very different experiences of the colonising process? Ireland's postcolonial status is problematized by counter-claims of British rule in

² It also suggests to me the 'stilling' or casting of the Mother as a wooden effigy in <u>The Great Hunger</u>,

Ireland as shaped by British domestic policy rather than colonial policy. Kiberd defines colonialism as the settling of land 'seized, for the purpose of expropriating its wealth and for the promotion of the occupier's trade and culture' (Kiberd 1995: 5). He goes on to apply the term in relation to Ireland's experience of British occupation and a continued resistance to the colonial project. However, a geographical proximity to, and the lack of an obvious physical or colour differential from, its coloniser left Ireland in a unique position:

Because of proximity, geography, race and religion the position of the Irish in colonial discourse was, and is, (...) liminal. Irish culture, at once Western and colonized, white and racially other, imperial and subjugate, became marginal in the sense of existing at the edge of two experiences, with a culture that epitomizes the hybridity, imitation and irony latent in colonial interchanges (Graham in Graham & Kirkland 1999: 14).

David Lloyd, in <u>Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment</u> (1993), interrogates Ireland's liminal position: geographically Western but politically 'of the decolonising world'³, while Edward Said addresses Ireland's postcolonial status by listing it as the one 'Western' colony in a list of historically colonised countries:

Even if we speak only about the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain and France, who dominate the history of European imperialism until World War Two (Britain especially), are to be found already present in those very territories that are later to become formally central during the hey-day of imperialist ideology. India, North Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America, many parts of Africa, China and Japan, the Pacific archipelago, Malaysia, Australia, North America and of course Ireland: all these are sites of contention well before 1870 either between various local resistance groups, or between the European powers themselves (Said 1988: 6).

In terms of Ireland's cultural specificity then, the assumptions made in relation to Western theatre practice cannot be made in the Irish context, as Irish theatre is created and performed within a different set of political and representational conditions. Kiberd sites the beginning of resistance literature at 'that very moment when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance' (Kiberd 1995: 6). This facilitates an accommodation of Northern Ireland within the postcolonial discourse, although circumstances such as the political status of Northern Ireland as

see section 2.3.

part of the United Kingdom could be perceived as a disqualification from post or, in this sense, after colonialism. Two of the three core plays of this thesis are set at the border between the Republic and Northern Ireland (directly in <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> and analogously in <u>The Saxon Shore</u>). The border region highlights that the term postcolonial does not necessarily mean after colonisation, but after the implications of colonialism, whatever the current status.

The striving for authenticity within one's own culture is an exercise in nationalism that becomes inscribed on the body. Gender roles, reproduction, social ritual and language all become agents of authenticity as the nation seeks to define and safeguard itself. The foundation of what are now the Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland (part of the United Kingdom) occurred in the early 1920s. This was followed in the twenty-six counties of the Free State (later a Republic) by a civil war that brought the political oppositions to a new level; the Irish were not united against the foreign or even the planted but were fighting the colonised self after colonialism.

The anomalous character of recent Irish history derives from the fact that, unlike most other Western European states, the moment of Nationalist victory did not constitute a moment of apparent national unification, but rather institutionalized certain racial and sectarian divisions (Lloyd 1993: 18).

The late twentieth-century performance of Irish plays and the work of Irish actors for an Irish audience brought the word, the body, and the image together in a shared space and before an audience which was not culturally homogenous, but had the shadow of a striving for a homogenous society in its recent history. This was reflected in the legislation of the new Irish Free State, which embraced a restrictive Catholic ethos as an agent of enshrining tradition. The civilising of the body was undertaken by the newly postcolonial, as the young nation worked to recreate itself in the same image and likeness of the coloniser—in the image of its maker.

Many compromises were made in the founding of the Free State, but the Irish language became central to the notion of national identity. The language revival was attempted through education, with few other measures taken outside the education system. Primary schools experienced the strongest measures; the first two years of school were taught entirely through Irish from 1922, and all classes underwent a

³ See Lloyd's introduction to <u>Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment</u> (1993), pp. 1-11.

massive exposure to the language⁴. Such a forced effort to re-establish Irish as a living language was ill considered and largely unsuccessful. In the language policy, as in other aspects of the new State's nationalism, was a failure to recognise the realities of Irish society at that time. To this day Irish language theatre is performed outside the mainstream.

Free State leader Eamonn De Valera's wholesome vision is often quoted in discourses on Irish society of the 1930s and 1940s. He hoped that Ireland would be:

the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens, whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age' (Irish Press 18/3/43).

These sentiments continue to provide a useful insight into the prevailing ambitions of the time. The ideal Ireland was identified as one peopled by contented farmers working closely with their land and free from any foreign oppression. Economic necessity, however, had a darkening effect on this vision. Financial imperative, when linked with the repressive teachings of the Catholic Church that had been adopted by the new state as an evidence of national cohesion, left a widening gap between the official truth and the reality of that which was being promoted as a more 'traditional' way of life. This has significant implications for the staging of the Irish condition, and especially Kavanagh's writing of the original poem The Great Hunger (1942) and the later staging of the poem by the Abbey Theatre (1983). Timothy Brennan investigates the national significance of 'native' traditions in 'The National Longing for Form':

The phrase 'myths of the nation' is ambiguous in a calculated way. It does not refer only to the more or less unsurprising idea that nations are mythical ...The phrase is also not limited to the consequences of this artificiality in contemporary political life—namely, the way that various governments invent traditions to give permanence and solidity to a transient political form (Brennan in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1997: 170).

⁴ The detrimental effect of this enforced language policy on the development and achievement level of the country's school pupils led to a report issued by the Union of National School Teachers, the INTO, in 1941 expressing their concern: 'The great bulk of evidence supports the view that a smooth and easy education process imposing comparatively little strain on the child and making his life in school a happy one, is extremely difficult in a language other than his home language—even with the brighter pupils, and next to impossible with those of average or slow mentality' (O'Connell 1970: 369-370).

If governments are responsible for the invention and re-emphasis of some traditions then they can also be responsible for the suppression or marginalization of others. Through educational policy, censorship, and the promotions of Church values, Irish theatre traditions have been defined alongside the nation.

However, is it possible to invent tradition? And does that question then pose another—what is tradition? Richard Kearney writes that tradition involves:

carrying or transferring the past into the present and the present into the past. Myths of tradition defy the historical logic of non-contradiction (either/or): they lay claim to a supralogical order where something can be both what it is and what it is not—the past can be present, the human divine, and so on (Kearney 1984: 7).

When this definition is considered in relation to Golomb's definition of authenticity 'the loyalty of one's self to its own past, heritage and ethos' tradition can then be seen as an acting upon authenticity or the encouragement of a loyalty to aspects of the past. There are, of course, versions of the past, and some have been promoted at the cost of others. Herr's identification of a repression of the body in Irish culture draws attention to its absence or lack of representation. Corporealization has given way to written and spoken language in the theatre, led by the colonised and postcolonial privileging of the work of the playwright as writer.

A writer in a free state works with the easy assurance that literature is but one of the social institutions to project the values which the nation admires, others being the law, the government, the army, and so on. A writer in a colony knows that these values can be fully embodied only in the written word: hence the daunting seriousness with which literature is taken by subject peoples (Kiberd 1995: 118).

In performance there are a number of bodies taking part in the process, from actors, designers, directors and playwrights to the body of the audience and the body politic within which the whole process takes place. Ultimately, it is embodied selves that are responsible for the representation of themselves and others, therefore, some representations of the body become privileged, or 'more authentic' than others. So, how do we place the body within the performance of authenticity?

In <u>Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories</u> (1997) Peggy Phelan reads a broad range of social and cultural forms, from legislation to fine art to psychoanalysis, and imbues each with an element of performativety. In a discussion

of 'The Incredulity of St. Thomas' by Carravaggio, Phelan includes the following in parenthesis but it is my central concern here, as she emphasizes the relationship between materiality and love: 'This is why touch is always necessary in the love relation and why non-consensual touch is so distortingly violent. It is also why the "essentialisms" that hood virtually all discussions of the body are so persistent. Even though we know very well how hideously bodies lie, we want to retain some faith in the authenticity of the body's gestures' (Phelan 1997: 31).

However, do we want to retain faith in the authenticity of the *performing* body's gestures? Performance, as a construct, problematizes the notion of authenticity in that the body's (bodies') movement is for the most part predetermined in the rehearsal process, and yet we hold on to a, maybe nostalgic, belief in corporeal expression. In so far as the body is staged it becomes the 'final' essential 'truth'. Thus, we reverse but conversely extend the typical privileging process by championing the veracity of the body over the word in the performance moment. A reading of Irish stagings of the body requires an acknowledgement of the culturally specific repression of the body and the marginalization of image or movement-led work within the theatre canon. The issues in question here have a political and cultural context, and a theatrical specificity; these issues coalesce in the performance moment.

If our faith in the body implies an essentialism of the body, what exactly does that suggest? If the body is capable of authentic or 'true' gestures, does it then follow that the more physical a performance is the more 'true' it is? And is there then a universal truth, or is each body's authenticity dependent on its cultural specificity? To perform the body in the Irish theatre context is to do so within a specific set of cultural conditions. But these conditions are in a constant state of flux and therefore to essentialize the Irish context is as dangerous as to essentialize the performing body within that context. In The Domain-Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the End of Print Culture (1996) Sue-Ellen Case claims that 'essentialism procures the metaphysical through a notion of Being as an essence' thus, according to Case, it follows that 'what is structurally or metaphysical in an argument is the claim that the system rests, finally, on some self-generating principle—that it cuts loose from outside dependencies—operates outside the historical, material conditions of change' (Case

1996: 11). In stating that the body has a broader frame of reference, a universality is implied that is rooted in more than 'mere' biology. The body is nonetheless responding to and existing within a culturally specific set of parameters, which are subject to change. To suggest, as Herr does, that there is an Irish body is to ignore continuing conditions of change—the rapid rate at which Irish society has developed throughout the twentieth century especially. Also globalisation and mediatization are not accommodated by the essentialism of the 'Irish body'. Economic and political circumstances, education, gender, and sexuality; these and other considerations shape our projections of and on the body within Irish culture and beyond. So while there is not an 'Irish body' on the Irish stage, the body performs within a culturally specific set of conditions that are subject to change.

We experience, observe, and perform the body as both subject and object. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological studies have situated the body within experience, and our perceptions of it. As the body is both subject and object, we relate to our surroundings through our material presence but can visualize our bodies moving through those surroundings, thus objectifying ourselves. The duality of self as subject and object (but never 'other') is heightened for the performer, and is especially relevant for readings of the body in the performance of the three plays considered in this thesis: the body in contrast with an inanimate object in The Great Hunger (section 2.4), the body wounded and in pain in The Saxon Shore (section 3.4), and the body defaced in At the Black Pig's Dyke (section 4.4). The placement of the body on stage relative to other 'objects', both animate and inanimate, emphasizes the body as object. The body as subject becomes more complex, especially when a performer is working with a character or characters; the self as subject is still in place but the body is also projecting an-other.

Merleau-Ponty also emphasizes the significance of experiences through which the body exists and perceives: 'in so far as I have a body through which I act in the world, space and time are not, for me, a collection of adjacent points nor are they a limitless number of relations synthesized by my consciousness, and into which it draws my body' (Merleau-Ponty in Welton: 156). This can be taken to dismantle an opposition of mind and body that does not accommodate the body as one of the architects of performance. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology informs performance by

implicating the actor and the experience of performance in the creation of meaning. This reinforces the role of the actor as part of a collaborative group, as in <u>The Great Hunger</u> (section 2.5), the search for ensemble solution to a performance problem, as in <u>The Saxon Shore</u> (section 3.5), and the relative roles of performers and audience members within the theatrical process, as in <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> (section 4.5). The audience is implicated here in that the physical experience of the actor is not that of each audience member; by evoking physical senses (and emotional states) the experience of performance can be recognised as other and yet evince visceral responses in the onlookers.

In relation to an analysis of Irish theatre, but also in general terms, one of the limitations of Merleau-Ponty's work is his failure to recognise gender-specificity, the experience of the female body as different from that of the male body⁵. For him the body transcends specificity: 'To have a body is to possess a universal setting, a schema of all types of perceptual unfolding and of all those inter-sensory correspondences, which lie beyond the segment of the world which we are actually perceiving' (Merleau-Ponty in Welton 1999: 174). But gender-specificity is central to representations of the body, and the performance of the body in Irish theatre.

An incorporation of the material presence of the body into the process raises a number of issues, not least of which is the blurring of roles within that process, and the unsettling of potential hierarchies: director, playwright, designer, actor. The documentation of theatre in Ireland and elsewhere results in a continuing triumph of the written text as a record and as an exchange mechanism. The process is eventually contained in the final, written document that more often than not is credited to the playwright exclusively. Directorial authority is recognised in recent theatrical developments; but there is a tendency to ascribe productions to either the director in 'auteur-ed' productions, or the playwright in more traditional works. The creative force of the actor within the process is rarely recognised beyond the performance moment and the initial reviews. Given the issues of documentation and the ephemeral nature of 'liveness' I am aware that I have replicated this to an extent in the research and writing of this thesis as a written document. I have worked to

⁶ See <u>Liveness</u> (1999) by Philip Auslander.

⁵ For a discussion of phenomenology and feminism see <u>Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism</u> (1994) by Elizabeth Grosz, pp. 103-107.

overcome this where possible, but admit that my researching and analysis of the body in performance in Irish theatre has become more of a conceptual task than an analysis of the work of specific actors. I note that a consideration of the body should not overlook the role of that body in the process.

Problems of representation within the process are matched by representations in performance; whose experience is staged? Sue-Ellen Case has noted in 'Towards a New Poetics' that the male has been far more visible than the female:

For feminists, gender is the crucial encoding of the subject that has made it historically a position unavailable for women to inhabit. The traditional subject has been the male subject, with whom everyone must identify. Scanning the 'masterpieces' of the theatre, with their focus on the male subject, one can see that women are called upon to identify with Hamlet, Oedipus, Faust and other male characters imbued with specifically male psychosexual anxieties. The idea that these are 'universal' characters represses the gender inscription in the notion of the self. Yet the dominance of the self as male has taken its historical toll on women (Case in Goodman & De Gay 1998: 145).

None of the above examples characterize the postcolonial male, which serves as another reminder of the imperial as well as patriarchal architecture of the 'universal' canon. Subjectivity in Irish theatre has been primarily political and postcolonial, and written from within the male experience.

Under colonial rule the role of the native or peasant male was feminised. Kiberd lays the blame for the feminising of the colonised Irish at the feet of Victorian imperialists who 'attributed to the Irish all those emotions and impulses which a harsh mercantile code had led them to suppress in themselves. Thus, if John Bull was industrious and reliable, Paddy was held to be indolent and contrary; if the former was mature and rational, the latter must be unstable and emotional; if the English were adult and manly, the Irish must be childish and feminine' (Kiberd 1995: 30). David Lloyd, however, offers an explanation for the general feminisation of Irish culture, which must call into question the status of the male within that culture: 'Irish Nationalist writings inaugurate a subtle but decisive shift from the recognition of the economic and political threat that Gaelic culture faced from British imperialism to the representation of that culture as lost, past, primitive, fragmented and, indeed, feminine' (Lloyd 1993: 45).

On attaining independence, or a measure of it, the male acquires a privileged status. In the Irish Republic masculine subjectivity assumed the privileges of the white western male and, although a rural ideal was being posited, it was the middle classes, property owners and educated professionals who could now set about countering the savage feminised representations as constructed by the coloniser. The countering of imperial representations occurred in Irish theatre as elsewhere, as illustrated by the founding of the Abbey Theatre (see section 1.3). In 'A New England called Ireland' Kiberd charts the Irish Republic's path to independence and an emergent self-image subscribed to and, in some cases, led by writers and artists of the late 1800s. This new self-image was a countering of previous versions of the Irish male, be they the constructions of Victorian imperialists as Kiberd suggests, or the self-imposed, or at least reinforced, image of the Irish Nationalist writer as Lloyd insists.

Cuchulain provided a symbol of masculinity for Celts, who had been written off as feminine by their masters. A surprising number of militant nationalists accepted that diagnosis and called on the youth of Ireland to purge themselves of their degrading femininity by a disciplined programme of physical-contact sports. The Gaelic Athletic Association had been founded in 1884 to counter such emasculation and to promote the game of camán (hurling) beloved of the young Cuchulain (Kiberd 1995: 25).

One way in which Irish male playwrights of the twentieth century have worked against this is by writing 'the other'; interrogating or, some would say, appropriating the female experience. Examples include Synge's Pegeen Mike in Playboy of the Western World (1907) or Maurya in Riders to the Sea (1903), O'Casey's Juno in Juno and the Paycock (1924), Beckett's May/Amy in Footfalls (1976), Murphy's Mommo in Bailegangaire (1985), Friel's Mundy sisters in Dancing at Lughnasa (1990), or Kilroy's Constance Wilde in The Secret Fall of Constance Wilde (1997). This tradition of male playwrights staging the female experience continues in the works central to this thesis, as the female body is staged as a wooden effigy in The Great Hunger, is divine in The Saxon Shore, and is contested territory in At the Black Pig's Dyke. Women have been staged but have not had the agency their position centre-stage might suggest.

However, contentious representations of the female body in Ireland pre-date the postcolonial condition and may have been absorbed by a cultural consciousness.

Artistic portrayals of the female body have been controlled and female sexuality has been corralled in the pursuit of an appropriate national morality. One contested example is the Sheelah-na-gig. These small stone figures are significant in that they evidence an acknowledgement of women as earthy, sexual, and unashamed. They appeared as such in the architecture of public spaces. They offer an, albeit overlooked, counterpoint to the later images of Irish womanhood as chaste, pure and imperilled. 'Sheela-na-gigs are carvings of naked females posed in a manner which displays and emphasises the genitalia. (...) The name sheela-na-gig come from the Irish language, although its meaning is uncertain. The most likely interpretations are *Sighle na gCioch*, meaning 'the old hag of the breasts' or *Sile-ina-Giob* meaning 'sheela (a name for an old woman) on her hunkers' (Kelly 1996: 5).

The origins of the Sheelah-na-gig are still under debate. There is conflicting opinion as to whether or not the Sheela-na-gig was a pre-Christian 'Irish fertility goddess' (Zaczek 1998: 128) and the sculptures were believed to have curative properties to combat barreness. The presence of Sheelah-na-gigs in church buildings has been taken to suggest that the sculptures were used as representations of the evils of lust (Kelly 1996: 45). Sheelah-na-gigs can still be found in walls and above entrances of a number of medieval churches and castles around the island of Ireland, especially in the midlands. There are also a number of Sheelah-na-gigs in Britain, especially around the Welsh-English border⁷.

Katie Donovan reported on how she encountered the following response to these medieval sculptures from National Museum director Pat Wallace in 1990: 'Sheela-na-Gigs are ugly and unflattering to women' (Donovan Irish Times 9/7/90). Recorded reactions to the sculptures as grotesque, and the argument that their presence in churches was as a representation of the evils of lust, underline the demonisation of the sexual self/other. This construction of a grotesque femininity has associations with witches, hags and the banshee as the harbinger of death. Binary notions of the female as grotesque or as divine can be read in the staged representations of women in The Great Hunger, The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke⁸.

⁷ See <u>The Sheela-na-Gigs of Ireland and Britain</u> (2000) by Joanne McMahon and Jack Roberts.

⁸ For a detailed analysis of associations of women with grotesque see <u>The Female Grotesque</u>, <u>Risk</u>, <u>Excess</u>, and <u>Modernity</u> (1994) by Mary Russo.

To safeguard the more 'acceptible' representations of women in the Irish context, sexualised representations had to be marginalized. Images of Ireland as martyred mother or imperilled young woman, as used in Irish resistance poetry and propaganda, are charted by C.L. Innes in Woman and Nation: Irish Literature an Society 1880-1935 (1993). One poster depicting 'The Birth of the Irish Republic 1916' features a beautiful dark-haired woman wearing a flowing dress, jewelled sandals, waving a tricolour in one hand and proffering a branch, possibly an olive branch, with the other. This figure, a mixture of religious and classic icon, is being assumed to heaven in a shaft of light over the shoulders of fighting soldiers and, as described by Innes, 'draws on the iconography of the assumption and transfiguration of the Blessed Virgin Mary after her death' (Innes 1993: 24). Here is an example of the conflation of religious and political idealism that appropriated the female form for a patriarchal postcolonial agenda. This informs a reading of the representation of gender in the Irish context, and representations of the gendered body in Irish theatre.

In 'Mother Culture and Mother Church' Innes links Irish women's loss of economic and social power with the rise in patriarchal Catholicism, the veneration of the Virgin Mary and the conflicting idealisation of the role of the mother⁹. How can women respond to a Catholic society's demands to be mother and virgin in one? The postcolonial construction of a national identity relied on notions of chastity and self-denial, especially in women:

feminity is inscribed and embodied as a product of the everyday discursive practices that comprise the devotion to Mary. Women are encouraged to represent and manifest the ideal of Mary in their own "essence"—in their behaviour, their motherhood and their relationships with others. In other words it is through their mimetic performance of Mary's model that individual Irish women come to embody femininity and, by extension, the Irish nation (Mayer 2000: 17).

Mayer gives an insight into the performance of identity here that is relevant to the representation of the body on the Irish stage.

⁹ The Famine of the 1840s drastically altered the power structures within the predominantly rural population, which, as Innes relates, resulted in fewer and later marriages and a greater disparity in the ages of husband and wife. Fifty percent of men were at least ten years older than their wives by the twentieth century (Innes 1993: 39). This disparity was one factor among others that increased the authority of the husband and father within the family. Catholic teachings became more repressive, especially in relation to sex, in a bid to safeguard against threats to the family unit as the social norm.

1.2 PERFORMING TRADITION

[T]he critical framework for Irish theatre is still predominantly based on the word as the language of the theatre rather than recognising the word as one of the languages of the theatre. Studies in postcolonialism are expanding. Ireland's status as a former colony draws certain parallels. Cultural colonies are much more susceptible to the literature of the parent country than are the inhabitants of that country itself, since plays and novels of manners have always been exemplary instruments in the civilising of the subject (Kiberd 1995: 115).

Kiberd cites the literary traditions of the coloniser as the formative influence on the Irish theatre's literary tradition. Ireland's civilizing project—as identified in representations of the idealized male Irish hero: Cuchulain, and the idealized Irish cailín: Róisín Dubh—recognises the power of British intervention by continuing to operate within the parameters of the coloniser. By interpreting the Irish literary tradition from this 'post'-colonial perspective, a privileging of the written or printed word by a colonised people can be seen as having had an ongoing influence on the dominant discourse; a triumph of the word over the image. Graham's recognition of authenticity's materiality in textuality, cited in the previous section, is key here, the matter is the written word—the word is what matters.

[S]everal of those arts which would normally be considered as essential to the self-expression of a comparatively civilized people did not flourish in Ireland—and one of these was the theatre. There are two interdependent reasons for this. The first is the very nature of the Gaelic literary tradition; and the second concerns the absence of a concentrated population. Gaelic literature, whether epic or lyric, directs itself to the single reader or hearer (Fitz-Simon 1983: 7).

Christopher Fitz-Simon, as quoted above, is not alone in his belief that Irish culture is an essentially literary one, and is thus projected towards the sole 'reader or hearer'. In his introduction to The Selected Plays of Brian Friel Seamus Deane wrote:

Brillance in the theatre has, for Irish dramatists, been linguistic. Formally, the Irish theatrical tradition has not been highly experimental. It depends almost exclusively on talk, on language left to itself to run through the whole spectrum of a series of personalities often adapted by the same individual (Friel 1987: 12).

Granted, theatre in Ireland does not have an ancient formal tradition, but the written or spoken word was not the sole signifier in the Irish performance tradition, such as it is, or in recent theatrical reinterpretations of Church and folk ritual.

A cultural dependence on Ireland's literary heritage has been attributed to the postcolonial condition, a need to define the nation as other than the former coloniser, while doing so in the cultural terms of the coloniser. Folk traditions and native language, seemingly obvious sources of 'authenticity', remain on the margins, their full potential unrealised. As considered earlier, the loss of the Irish language was not halted or reversed but in fact exacerbated by the educational policies of the Irish Free State (later Republic), and rituals such as keening as part of a funeral rite, and the oral tradition of storytelling, were marginalized.

A colonial and postcolonial emphasis on the power of the written word has limited the spoken word and impoverished the performed word¹⁰. In <u>Performance: A</u> Critical Introduction, Marvin Carlson confirms this:

Plays have been traditionally regarded as stable written objects, their various manifestations in different productions a more or less accidental part of their history, not really essential to their understanding, and when plays have been placed in a broader context of human activity, the context has been until quite recently only a literary one (Carlson 1996: 82).

Although making a general point, Carlson could be addressing the Irish theatre context here. Christopher B. Balme's <u>Decolonizing the Stage</u> (1999) seems to support Carlson's above point by suggesting that the play text is the most stable theatrical form:

Of all the theatrical sign systems language appears to be the most stable. The fact that the dramatic text is fixed by means of a form of notation, which in comparison to the other sign systems is highly developed and standardized, means that the linguistic component of theatrical production should remain relatively constant (Balme 1999: 106).

However, Balme's overall project is to chart "the theatrical" or performative' response to imperialism (an exercise pertinent to my consideration of stagings of the body), and he labels this response 'theatrical synchretism': 'the process whereby culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together' (Balme 1999: 1). Later in 'Language and the Post-colonial Stage' Balme acknowledges that dramatic

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¹⁰ This is not unique to the Irish experience however, Kristin Linklater, cited in my introduction, is one of many voice specialists who is working to make the connection between the word and the body, through the voice: 'The problem for us is that words seem attached to ideas and detached from instinct. Feelings, attached to instinct and experienced physically, have to struggle for verbal expression because words seem to belong not in the body but in the head. The mistake has been the banishment of words from the body' (Linklater 1976: 172).

language is subject to the effects of dialect, accent and intonation; therefore within language there are many variables which—when considered with architecture and stage configuration, movement, design—widen the gap between the dramatic text and its performance.

The role of the Irish playwright is then a curious one. If Kiberd is to be believed, the Irish writer cannot but work within a postcolonial context, and my examinations of The Great Hunger, The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke reference postcolonial theory. The postcolonial playwright like any other does not have autonomy over her or his work; the process of interpretation is first made in rehearsal and then on the stage instead of exclusively in mind of a reader. Further stages in the creative process are realised, often beyond the reach of the playwright, as in the rehearsal process where a work can move far beyond a playwright's intentions with input from designers, directors, choreographers, musicians and actors. Audience members bring their own interpretations and reactions to a play in the theatre. Participation in the process is not always an option for, or desired by, the playwright. The play can also live long after the playwright, which especially problematizes the playwright's role in the process!

The staging of performance rituals and traditions in a postcolonial Ireland raises many issues. Why have the playwright, director and/or actors chosen to do so? And what reactions, if any, are engendered in the audience? In considering the uses of ritual and tradition in the three plays considered here, I take a close look at Irish ritual and performance traditions: church and pagan rituals in The Great Hunger and The Saxon Shore and performance traditions, especially mumming, in At the Black Pig's Dyke. This study examines how such rituals and traditions have survived, been reinvented or appropriated by the church and or by the theatre in turn.

The *performance* of an Irish play is 'subject' to the implications of the condition of postcolonialism, one of these being censorship. In 'The Erotics of Irishness' Herr suggests that censorship in Ireland was not simply an indirect imposition by the Catholic Church, but the symptom of a suppression or a *self*-censorship more inherent to Irish society:

The Irish of the last seven centuries have always been the victims of some kind of censorship, finally extricating themselves in the south from English rule only to impose there a complex and repressive internal censorship code, one result of which is putatively the radical underdevelopment of visual art education in Ireland. To say that the Catholic church (in complicity with English Victorian mores) *produced* this aspect of Irishness, as most historical analysts of Irish censorship have, is to miss the main event; a reflexive and widespread resistance to *seeing* movement, to recognising its necessity, and ultimately to sanctioning radical changes of posture (Herr 1990: 13 [original emphasis]).

Censorship in Irish society has had a pervasive effect on Irish theatre. In the Irish Free State new legislation included the Censorship of Film Act in 1923 and the Censorship of Publications Act in 1929. Neither of these acts incorporated a censorship of theatre, but they created a climate of censorship within the arts community and many playwrights and practitioners were directly affected in their work outside the theatre. The Censorship of Publications Act replaced but did not depart significantly from laws enforced under British rule: the Customs Consolidation Act of 1876 and the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. George Bernard Shaw was an outspoken opponent of Censorship of Publications Act 11: 'we shall never be easy until every Irish person is permanently manacled and fettered, gagged and curfewed, lest he should punch our heads or let out the truth about something' (Shaw in Deane, 1991: 96). Shaw concluded 'The Censorship' by offering a very dark outlook for Ireland's decolonising process:

If, having broken England's grip of her, [Ireland] slops back into the Atlantic as a little green patch in which a few million moral cowards are not allowed to call their souls their own by a handful of morbid Catholics, mad with heresyphobia, unnaturally combining with a handful of Calvinists mad with sexphobia (both being in a small and intensely disliked minority of their own co-religionists) then the world will let 'these Irish' go their own way into insignificance without the smallest concern (Shaw in Deane 1991: 98).

The Censorship of Publications Act had far-reaching consequences, and many high-profile writers and publications fell foul of this legislation, among them playwrights Samuel Beckett with More Pricks than Kicks (1934), Watt (1953), and

¹¹ 'The Censorship' by George Bernard Shaw was originally published in <u>The Irish Statesman</u>, 17 November 1928.

Molloy (1954)¹², and Sean O'Casey with I Knock on the Door (1939), the first of six volumes of autobiography. One notable exception was Joyce's <u>Ulysses</u>, which was banned in both Britain and The United States¹³. In many cases an effective censorship of Irish theatre was in place: as illustrated by police action (in the response to the Pike Theatre production of <u>The Rose Tattoo</u>, see section 1.3) or by audience response (as seen in the Abbey riots, see section 1.3). In <u>Censorship in Ireland 1939-1945</u> Donal Ó Drisceoil writes:

The Theatres Act of 1843, which made all plays in Britain subject to prior scrutiny, never applied in Ireland. When the subject of censorship arose in the 1920s, and film publications fell victim to its grip, official censorship of the theatre was not debated. No provision for the censorship of stage plays was made in the emergency legislation either, but a theatre censorship did operate, albeit in an indirect and unofficial fashion (Ó Drisceoil 1996: 51).

Ó Drisceoil goes on to cite a number of specific incidents of what amounted to the censorship of the theatre during 'the emergency' when practitioners had to adopt a form of self-censorship¹⁴. Although this period relates to the political censorship during the 'emergency' or Second World War, practitioners would have been very aware of theatre's escape from the State's extreme censorship of film and publications, and the need to safeguard their privileged position¹⁵.

However, the censorship of dance in the early twentieth century gives a greater insight into the emerging nation's anxiety over what Balme describes as the 'kinetic body': 'In performance, because bodies are normally perceived in motion, the iconographic aspects of corporeal textuality are usually inseparable from the kinaesthetic effects' (Balme 1999: 201). Interestingly Balme identifies Western theatre as having removed dance almost entirely from the dramatic structure, and footnotes the dance experiments of Yeats, Wilde and Friel as exceptions to the rule of

¹² 'My own registered number is 465, number four hundred and sixty-five, if I may presume to say so.' Samuel Beckett, 'Censorship in the Saorstat', in <u>Banned in Ireland, Censorship and The Irish Writer</u> (1990), edited by Julia Carlson, pp142-146.

¹³ See Banned in Ireland, Censorship and The Irish Writer (1990), edited by Julia Carlson.

¹⁴ Micheál Mac Líammóir, co-founder and director of the Gate Theatre, Dublin, rejected <u>The Statue's Daughter</u> a new play by Frank O'Connor: 'Mac Líammóir (...) was now certain that O'Connor's play would cause more than a 'minor stink'; he told O'Connor that while raising a stink would have pleased him, he would not risk anything that could close his theatre or hasten a general censorship of the theatre in Ireland' (Ó Drisceoil 1996: 52).

¹⁵ See section 1.3.

Western Theatre, rather than arising from a postcolonial experimentation and incorporation of a less literary form ¹⁶.

The 'dancing body' was stilled by the new state as the Dance Hall Act of 1935 brought the practice of outdoor and domestic gatherings for dancing to an end. P.J. Curtis considers the origins of the Dance Hall Act in his 1994 publication Notes from the Heart:

The arrival, in the Twenties, of the modern dances, such as the Waltz, the Foxtrot and the Quickstep, served only to increase hierarchical blood pressure. The bishops and priests roundly condemned these imported dances and those of their flocks who were attracted to them. In 1924, the neurotic craze for these new dances was such that the then Bishop of Galway, Dr O'Doherty, declared, "The dances indulged in are not the clean, healthy national dances but importations from the vilest dens of London, Paris and New York" (Curtis 1994: 73).

Curtis continued: 'By the Thirties, the clergy, police and state were all in agreement. This whole business of dancing, both traditional and modern, must be brought under control once and for all'. The Intoxicating Liquor Bill of 30 May 1924 was 'introduced in the Dáil to reduce hours of drink trading, end mixed trading, and reduce numbers of liquor licences with compensation' (Curtis 1994: 73)¹⁷ and also had a significant effect on social gatherings of the early twentieth century. The effective censorship of dance practices did not suppress traditional or modern dance entirely, but both were affected by social conditions and the prevalent Catholic attitudes. While Gilbert and Tompkins suggest that 'in many cases transformations of the post-colonial body are theatricalized through rhythmic movement such as dance which brings into focus the performing body' (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 237), this was not the case in Ireland's postcolonial condition, as language was the favoured transformative tool. This policy has shaped the Irish theatre canon to this day, and although there was a greater acceptance of experimentation by the turn of the twentieth century, an emphasis on language has been responsible for the canonical marginalization of the core plays of this thesis.

¹⁶ Balme lists six playwrights in this footnote, three of whom are Irish, but he does not consider the implications of this: 'When dance appears in dramas of the 19th and 20th centuries, it is certainly an exception to the rule. In *fin de siècle* drama there are a number of experiments incorporating dance; however, the exponents are few and are easily named. Besides Strindberg, Wilde and Yeats (...) and in the contemporary period Brian Friel's <u>Dancing at Llughnasa</u>' [sic] (Balme 1999: 202 n2).

¹⁷ This became law on 19 December as the Intoxicating Liquor (General) Act, 1924 (1924/28, 62 [I.F.S]; amended by 1927/15[I.F.S]).

Dance has more direct transformative associations—the change in physical state has been linked to a change in the psychological and/or the emotional state. Shamans and other ritual leaders and participants use dance, sometimes augmented with an hallucinogenic, as an access to a heightened state. Dance is therefore associated with transgression, danger and excess. Theatrical interpretations of dance, as seen in At the Black Pig's Dyke among others, have been a very real evidence of the presence of the body in Irish theatre. Helen Gilbert writes in 'Dance Movement and Resistance Politics' 'reading/producing the dance as text provides an approach to drama that de-naturalizes notions of the self grounded primarily in language, and avoids privileging the performance of the mind over the performance of the body' (Gilbert in Ashcroft Griffiths & Tiffin 1995: 345).

In <u>Post-Colonial Drama</u>, Gilbert and Tompkins emphasize the distinction between ritual and drama:

Not all drama is ritual (...) and not all ritual is drama even though ritual usually employs elements of dramatic performance. A consideration of ritual in post-colonial contexts requires a reconsideration of drama itself. (...) Whatever performative tropes it uses, ritual is always efficacious for the community and enacted for a particular audience to preserve the order and meaning of anything from harvests to marriage, birth, and death. Unlike drama, which is mostly a re-enactment (even a 'true' story), ritual is never fiction (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 56-57 [my emphasis]).

This definition is further complicated by the incorporation of ritual in drama, whereby it becomes fictionalised to an extent but does not lose the power of association. Staged Irish rituals and traditions include the funeral rites of keening (*caoineadh*—crying) and waking (keeping a vigil over the dead), Celtic calendar festivals, religious ceremonies, storytelling, and traditional music and dance.

Frantz Fanon writes:

This persistence in following forms of cultures which are already condemned to extinction is already a demonstration of nationality; but it is a demonstration which is a throw-back to the laws of inertia. There is no taking of the offensive and no redefining of relationships. There is simply a concentration on a hard core of culture which is becoming more and more shrivelled up, inert and empty (Fanon in Williams & Chrisman 1993: 46).

The reduction of folk traditions to 'a set of automatic habits, some traditions of dress and a few broken-down institutions' (Fanon in Williams & Chrisman 1993: 46) was

perhaps inevitable as the population became a less rural one, but was there an indecent haste to this loss? By reclaiming performance traditions theatre practitioners have embarked on a powerful and emotive journey as can be seen clearly in the use of mumming, especially mumming as an assumption of otherness, in At the Black Pig's Dyke. This ritualistic transformation is matched by a transformation to wolf in The Saxon Shore. Calendar festivals feature in both The Great Hunger and At the Black Pig's Dyke, while church ritual is incorporated in the action of The Great Hunger and The Saxon Shore. In the following chapters I consider how the use of such traditions in the three plays, with reference to others, affect notions of performance and the role of theatre in a social, historical, and educational context. In the fourth chapter an analysis of At the Black Pig's Dyke shows how the use of traditional Irish music and dancing influenced the marketing potential of theatre as a product of Irish culture; a marketing strategy which can also be seen to be at work in the commodification of Irish writers.

How have these performance traditions, rites and rituals survived? The performance of contemporary Catholic Church rituals can be recognised as 'authentic' by some audience members, but the recording of traditions such as the oral storytelling tradition and the mumming tradition (not to mention the actual traditions themselves) has served to complicate rather than exemplify Irish authenticity. Frantz Fanon cites instances in which stories and ballads became instruments of change:

The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernise the names of heroes and the types of weapons (Fanon in Williams & Chrisman 1993: 47).

To remain alive and relevant to the very people who would ensure survival, traditions have had to be adapted to accommodate new trends. In 'Oral Tradition and the Printed Word' Caoímhin Ó Danachair notes that:

[a]bsence of objectivity was a marked feature of the historical writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The aim was political rather than educational, the more readily written and eagerly read for that. Thus we are never sure if a particular item of historical tradition is genuine folk memory or derived from some pamphlet, broadsheet or newspaper article (Ó Danachair 1979: 39).

Accordingly, the documentation of tradition has relied heavily on individual recollection. Details of Irish traditions are housed in the folklore library at University College Dublin. A great many of these were collected by the *Coimisiún Béaloideasa Étirinn* (Irish Folklore Commission) and are handwritten records of remembered folk traditions¹⁸. Conversely, the oral tradition was hugely influenced by the written word. Irish manuscripts were borrowed and transcribed; these were then read aloud. This was also done with English language texts, which made such material available to the illiterate, 'the last century and a half (...) may be regarded with some confidence as the period covered by folk memory, (...) during this period Irish oral tradition was deeply influenced by the written word'. (Ó Danachair 1979: 33-34). Ó Danachair's opposition of written and spoken word can be found elsewhere. The performance implications of an oral tradition are explored in the introduction to part ten of The Post-colonial Studies Reader 'The Body and Performance':

In most written accounts the oral is overdetermined even in the act of being recorded and celebrated by the written. This is what usually passes for an acknowledgement of the 'oral' and 'performative'. This inferior positioning replicates the larger positioning of the oral and performative within the economy of communication in the modern world. (...) The body, too, has become then the literal site on which resistance and oppression have struggled, with the weapons being in both cases the physical signs of cultural difference, (...) symbols and literal occasions of the power struggles of the dominater and dominated for possession of control and identity (Ashcroft Griffiths & Tiffin 1995: 321-322).

Writing on authenticity, Gareth Griffith considered the issue of cultural recuperation:

[A]uthentic speech where it is conceived not as a political strategy within a specific political and discursive formation but as a fetishized cultural commodity may be employed (...) re-enacting its own oppressions on the subjects it purports to represent and defend. (...) This is not to deny the vital importance for the various indigenous communities of recovering their own tongues and cultures as vital recuperative strategies (Griffiths in Tiffin & Lawson 1994: 76).

¹⁸ Ó Danachair draws the reader's attention to the word 'folklore': 'the word *folklore* with all its Victorian connotations of intellectual slumming among the lower classes and lesser breeds, with "lore" inferior to learning and "folk" as less than people' (Ó Danachair 1979: 31).

Mumming as staged in At the Black Pig's Dyke by Woods could be described as one such recuperative strategy. David Lloyd identifies 'authenticity' as a mechanism of the nationalist project in a postcolonial society: 'the dislocation of the colonized culture should not be thought of in terms of a loss of a prior and recoverable authenticity. Rather, authenticity must be seen as the projective desire of a Nationalism programmatically concerned with the homogenisation of the peoples as a national political entity' (Lloyd 1993: 100). So the recuperation of mumming could be an exercise in nationalism, but an Irish authenticity is difficult to ascribe in this instance:

What the origins of Mumming and the Mummers Play may be, we do not know. It is clear that most of the verses and action of Irish traditional Mumming are so closely related to that of England that the custom must be ascribed to English influence (Kevin Danaher 1972: 257).

Alan Gailey, author of <u>Irish Folk Drama</u> (1969), cites documentation that places the mumming tradition in Cork in 1685, and this predates any English source text:

In 1685 a group of mummers in the City of Cork was described in clear terms: Last evening there was presented the drollest piece of mummery I ever saw in or out of Ireland. There was St. George and St. Denis and St. Patrick in their buffe coats, and the Turke was there likewise and Oliver Cromwell and a Doctor, and an old woman who made rare sport, till Belzibub came in with a frying pan upon his shoulder and a great flail in his hand thrashing about him on friends and foes, and at last running away with the bold usurper, Cromwell, whom he tweaked by his gilded nose—and there came a little Devil with a broom to gather up the money that was thrown to the Mummers for their sport. It is an ancient pastime, they tell me, of the Citizens (Gailey 1969: 8).

Characters listed here appear in later mumming plays with a few variations, but there have been regional variations right up to the present day. Other, less specific, references to mumming activities date as far back as the twelfth century: 'Hamner's Chronicle, describing King Henry's celebration of Christmas in Dublin in 1172, tells of 'the pastime, the sport, and the mirth, and the continuall musicke, the masking, mumming and strange shewes' (Danaher 1972: 257). Here Danaher dates mumming to the twelfth century but also illustrates the difficulty of finding an 'authentic' source for the tradition. If mumming has been embodied in Ireland as a performance tradition from as far back as 1172, must it still be regarded as inauthentic because of its English, or non-native, associations?

Gailey credits the form of mumming and other performance traditions as being responsible for their survival: 'it should also be remembered that (mumming) was an oral tradition, dependence on written texts being rare' (Alan Gailey 1969: 16). The oral tradition of storytelling is an early example of the respect afforded to the imagination. The storyteller and the listener or listeners established the dynamic between performer and audience in Irish homes around the country. Stories were passed on and elaborated upon as they were passed by word of mouth (*béaloideas*). Gailey records both the details of the mummers' plays and the conditions in which local groups around Ireland performed them. When writing on the mumming in the north of Ireland he takes care to note that the enactments of the ritual battle between the two heroes in the course of the mummers' play was tailored to the loyalties of each household:

At a Roman Catholic home St. Patrick was seen to defeat St. George but in a Protestant kitchen, using the same words, King William always defeated King James. This sort of come and go within the acceptable range of characterisations in the folk plays was not uncommon...Indeed in mid-county Down one mummers' group included people of every shade of political and religious belief, and they visited all the homes known to all their members (Gailey 1969: 10).

Others characters varied from region to region, and included Miss Funny, a Fool or clown, a Butcher, Beelzebub and, as mentioned, Cromwell on occasion. Traditionally, mummers were believed to bring a blessing to the house, but the introduction of a collection of money at the end of the mummers play dismayed some commentators:

The idea that luck is being distributed is actually included in the rhymes of some plays in west county Tyrone 'We come not to your door to beg nor to borrow/We come to your door to drive away all sorrow.' By contrast, the more recent insistence on the collection of money is more like taking the luck of the house away (Gailey 1969: 14).

Miss Funny was used primarily to collect money (As in At the Black Pig's Dyke):

MISS FUNNY: And the money
Don't forget the money:
That's what I want,
That's what I crave,
And if I don't get it,
You're all for the grave (Woods 1992: 20).

She seems, in the mumming of county Fermanagh, to have served the function of wit or commentator; a role taken by Johnny Funny in County Derry, and Tom Fool in the north Dublin mummers' plays.

Mumming is a central image of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> by Woods, the straw masks and costumes of the mummers are invested with a sinister element of terrorism, a reminder of the costumed agitators for land reform of the nineteenth century such as the Whiteboys. 'Agrarian protest based its legitimacy on its intricate associations with peasant ritual (...) and was interwoven with important seasonal festivals in the cultural calendar such as Mayday, Halloween (*Samhain*) and the aftermath of Christmas' (Gibbons 1996: 18) (see also section 4.2). Gibbons goes on to recognise 'the almost imperceptible shifts between masquerading in the festive costume of mummers and Wrenboys, and dressing up in the menacing garb of Ribbonmen' (Gibbons 1996: 18). Terms such as Ribbonmen or Whiteboys were a direct reference to the nature of the mummer costumes worn by these secret societies whose violent activities were in reaction to forced labour, tithes and an unjust land system¹⁹.

Sympathetic readings of the grievances of these secret society members, if not their methods, are contextualized by the tone adopted by some agents of British Rule in Ireland. H.B.C. Pollard documents the history of such groups in <u>The Secret Societies of Ireland</u>. The Ribbon Society emerged in 1805 after the suspension of the British forces night curfew policy, in the wake of the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion. Members were described by Pollard, himself 'a member of the Staff of the Chief of Police at Dublin Castle in the latter days of British Rule' (Pollard: 1998, cover), as 'uneducated savages, but a sprinkling of merchants, schoolmasters and priests were a leavening of the whole' (Pollard 1998: 24-25, [my emphasis]).

Although Gailey does not consider the political associations of the mummers in <u>Irish Folk Drama</u> (1969), he does give some insight into the performance of gender by the mummers:

A most important and traditional feature of the Wexford mummers must be mentioned. In most of the earlier groups there were two individuals over and above the twelve regarded as being there by right but who had no known specific function to fulfil. They remained silent and might occasionally join

¹⁹ This historical connection informed Woods' <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> (as seen in his portrayal of Frank Beirne, see section 4.4) and could be read as an attempt to lend legitimacy to the violence of the play.

in a dance. Sometimes the male fool was given the job of presenting the whole performance. The female was played by a man or youth, as, indeed, all females are in folk drama in Ireland and Britain, but women's clothing was worn in order to identify her as the fool's wife (Gailey: 1969: 35).

This illustrates the presence of women within the text but the absence of women within performance in the mumming tradition. However, Gailey's blanket statement in relation to the overall absence of women in folk drama is contradicted by a recent study by Alan J. Fletcher: <u>Drama, Performance and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland</u> (2000). Granted, Fletcher is concerned with an older time but he does supply evidence of some female performers in Irish folk drama:

The entertainment business in Gaelic Ireland was not altogether a male monopoly, even though the balance of the evidence for it weighs far more towards male than female involvement. The few glimpses afforded of female performing artists suggest that the sort of entertainment they offered, though possibly reduced in scope, did not markedly differ from that of their male counterparts. Considering they had the difference of sex to capitalize on, this may seem a little curious: it may be that gaps in record survival have robbed our picture of completeness, and to be sure, entertainment from women must have had a gendered piquancy peculiar to itself (Fletcher 2000: 34).

Fletcher goes on to note references to the *bancháinte* (she-satirist) as simply a female version of a male satirist, and the *banairfidech* (she-musician) as far less evident than her male counterpart (Fletcher 2000: 336). The above section is written very much from the perspective of a potential male spectator. Fletcher does not suggest that both male and female performers could have capitalized on the difference between them but that the female performer would have had novelty value as 'other' in relation to the male. The final comment on entertainment from women having 'a gendered piquancy peculiar to itself', begs the question of reader response here. However, his speculations on the lack of, or gaps in, evidence may suggest a censoring of material portraying women in a less than pure light, something like the fate of the Sheela-na-gig: women's place in tradition was either rewritten, erased, or as was often the case where they were cast in stone, removed²⁰.

In <u>Ordinances for the Government of Ireland 1534</u>²¹ Fletcher found an early specific, but scant, reference to the *óinseach* ('giddy woman') as the female version

See The Sheela-na-Gigs of Ireland and Britain (2000) by Joanne McMahon and Jack Roberts, p.24.
 From State Papers published under the Authority of His Majesty's Commission, Volume 3. King Henry the Eighth (Fletcher 2000: 337).

of the *drúth* (court jester). Fletcher also cites Edmund Spenser and Thomas Smythe on other female performers—*mná siubhail* (walking women)—itinerant satirists who were denounced by both as blasphemers and whores, much as the *picara* was in Spain (as documented by Sarah Bryant Bertail in On the Road: The Picara and the Drama (publication pending)).

There was always that potential for violence in a lot of the folk traditions, like Strawboys who came to weddings, like the mummers who came around Christmas and to a lesser extent the Wrenboys. With the Strawboys, who came to weddings, there was the belief in some areas that they were almost like official folk gatecrashers, they had to be allowed entry. And if they weren't; if they weren't given food, drink, and made welcome, there was the idea that they could curse the wedding. (...) Wrenboys, who came around on Stephen's Day with the wren; (...) there was a belief that if they weren't made welcome, if they weren't given sufficient in the way of reward for whatever they performed that they could bury the wren beside the house and leave bad luck (Woods interview: 285).

Descriptions of Strawboys in the Irish Folklore Commission manuscripts correlate with Wood's description of them as 'official folk gatecrashers': the following is a local's recollection of a wedding feast along the Black Pig's Dyke: 'There is a feast held in the bride's house. There are Strawboys who visit the house. They are dressed in comic clothes and their faces are blackened. They stuff the chimneys and light fires, block up the way, tie the door, do their best to rush to the house and take away the bride's cake' (Sherry 1993: 53). Other recollections, such as the following by Elizabeth Byrne from county Wexford, suggests that the Strawboys, known locally as 'fools', could be quite aggressive: 'the 'fools' would arrive anytime after dark and there might be upwards of three hundred of them. (...) They entered without any invitation and the people of the house would be afraid to refuse them admittance for fear they would become unruly and do damage, as it was known for them to do. They were always unwelcome' (MS 1399: 81).

Byrne's recollections, as recorded by J.D. Delaney of *Coimisiún Béaloideasa Éirinn*, also give an insight into the performance of gender by the Straw*boys*:

Mrs. Byrne heard a man named Larry Caulfield of Corrigeen, Grange, Rathnure, tell the following story about a marriage in that townland. Four people turned up at this wedding disguised as fools—four among many others, of course. The four kept together all night and did not dance very much. Larry Caulfield was curious to find out who they were. (...) The four went outside and Larry followed them (...) but when he saw that *they had to sit*

down, when they went outside, he knew they were four girls (MS 1399: 81 [my emphasis]).

Wrenboys dressed in a similar way to the Strawboys 'in the old fantastic attire of pyjamas, window curtains, straw hats and antiquated feminine apparel'²², but they performed as they moved from house to house on St. Stephens' Day (26 December).

Calendar festivals are another source of folk tradition and ritual, and have been documented in detail by Kevin Danaher, E. Estyn Evans, Seán Ó Súilleabháin, and Alan Gailey. The Irish calendar festivals, like others, revolved around seasonal events such as harvest time; and there is evidence that these were pre-Christian festivals that became key dates in the Church calendar. February first (*Imbolc*) became St. Brigid's Day; Gailey gives an account of a St. Brigid's Day festival in Irish Folk Drama:

In Ireland the traditional onset of spring was 1st February, St. Brigid's Day. In many places the Eve of the saint's day was marked by a processional, luck-bearing ceremony. (...) Almost everywhere the performers were called 'biddy-boys' or *brideogí*, although the latter word could often refer specifically to an effigy that was carried in the procession of performers (Gailey 1969: 85).

Although Gailey associates the significance of the first day of February with Saint Brigid, Seán Ó Súilleabháin finds an earlier pre-Christian aspect to the ritual in Irish Folk Custom and Belief: Nosanna agus Piseogana nGael (1967): 'St Brigid's Feast (February 1) was originally an important prechristian festival, occurring as it did at the time of the start of agricultural work.' He goes on to describe a typical effigy, '[y]oung boys (Brideoga: 'Biddies') went from door to door carrying a churndash dressed as a woman and asked for some gift' (Ó Súilleabháin 1967: 66). May First (Bealtaine) was a time to welcome the summer. E. Estyn Evans writes of the May festival in Irish Folk Ways: 'there were public ceremonies, the lighting of bonfires and parades of May Babies, of May Boys and the May Queen. (...) The May Baby parades link the festival with the fertility of the family as well as the fields' (Evans 1957: 273). Flowers and posies are still gathered for May altars in honour of the Virgin Mary. August first (Lughnasa) was a harvest festival, which has been conflated with Feile Mhuire 'sa bhFomhar, the Feast of the Assumption, (15 August)

²² This description is from the South Carlow notes of the <u>Nationalist and Leinster Times</u>, 2 January 1943.

when patterns are held at local shrines, again to the Virgin Mary. And November first and its eve, a period associated with death and spirits (*Samhain*), is now All Saint's Day.

Patterns, on the brink of extinction like other folk traditions, are religious rituals with pre-Christian associations. A pattern is a pilgrimage with a set route to and/or from a holy shrine, with particular points along the way where pilgrims kneel or stand to pray or make offerings. I mention the Pattern because it is performative, the pilgrims embody their devotion, and it has a set structure, often demanding extreme physical discomfort as a show of devotion. Many local Patterns were discouraged by the clergy as it was difficult to suppress a carnivalesque energy: 'Although it is true that many of these local celebrations had degenerated into debauchery, it is also unfortunately true that in the course of the nineteenth century, when Victorian 'respectability' had for many of both clergy and laity assumed the sanctity of moral law, many quite harmless customs were discouraged or forbidden because they offended the sanctimonious' (Danaher 1972: 184).

There are many folk rituals, superstitions and traditions that have performative elements, far too many to mention here, but some, like the calendar and performance traditions mentioned above, have direct relevance to how tradition is staged in The Great Hunger, The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke. Irish theatre has staged folk ritual in a way that, ironically, echoes Church appropriation of pre-Christian ritual and representation. Synge twinned a creative use of language with the dramatisation of ritual funeral rites and keening in Riders to the Sea. The tradition of waking the dead was treated ironically in The Playboy of the Western World when Pegeen Mike's father sees it as an opportunity to get a free drink, while in In The Shadow of The Glen, Dan Burke stages his own wake to confirm his suspicions of his young wife's infidelities. This was a darker application of an almost melodramatic device as used by Dion Boucicault in The Shaughraun, first produced in 1874, when Conn the Shaughraun also staged his own death. Here Boucicault included a version of keening verse as used by the mourners in the funeral ritual.

When we come to consider religious traditions, moral tales, lives of saints and holy people, usages of local shrines, popular devotions, death, judgement, hell and heaven, we are confronted with the fact that Christianity and the written word came into Ireland together and have been associated ever since. For most of our people down to comparatively recent times their

only frequent contact, often their only contact with the written word, was through the spoken work of the preacher. Thus stories from the Bible and the apocryphae, parables exempla, and wonders worked by the saints, which the priest read in his books and passed on orally, were easily absorbed, remembered and retold even by the illiterate (Ó Danachair 1979: 37-8).

Traditional music and ballads and traditional dance, as seen in Woods' At the Black Pig's Dyke, have been used elsewhere, as has the oral tradition of story telling. Tom Murphy constructed Bailgegangaire around the central image of the *seanchaí* (storyteller) with the powerful figure of Mommo. The rhythmic and repetitious nature of the Mommo's story recalls the nature of the tradition and lends an urgency to the need to resolve the story, to finish the telling of it.

Staged rituals and traditions that could be considered in relation to At the Black Pig's Dyke include the ritual of war as staged in Observe the Sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme (1985) by Frank McGuinness and O'Casey's The Silver Tassie (1928). Calendar festivals, as staged in The Great Hunger and At the Black Pig's Dyke, have also been staged elsewhere. The conflict of opposing ritual and belief is a central element of Rudkin's The Saxon Shore where Roman Christianity confronted Celtic paganism in the year A.D. 401 (see chapter 3). Talbot's Box (1977) by Thomas Kilroy and Michael Harding's Sour Grapes (1997) include details of Catholic ritual, as does The Great Hunger. In O'Casey's Juno and The Paycock (1924) Johnny has an almost superstitious devotion to the Virgin Mary. The traditions of theatre have also been staged, in plays such as The Old Lady Says No! (1929) by Denis Johnston and Northern Star (1984) by Stewart Parker.

Irish ritual and performance traditions complement and complicate the literary in Irish theatre. The literary has perhaps ensured the safeguarding of certain aspects of Irish culture and has evidenced the effects of a postcolonial condition on a disparate society. Conversely, elements of the literary tradition, such as poetry, survived in ballad form so performance could also be said to have safeguarded a literary heritage²³. The staging of such traditions and rituals has many functions: educational, marketing, an exercise of nationalism, and an appeal to the senses. The performance of ritual and tradition as a theatrical construct ensure a vibrancy of form

²³ See 'Oral Tradition and the Printed word' by Caoímhin Ó Danachair in <u>Irish University</u> Review volume 9 number 1 (1979), and <u>Remembrance and Imagination</u> (1996) Joep Leerssen, pp.173-177.

as they take full advantage of the mutual presences of audience and performers. Staging of Irish performance rituals and traditions bring precedents of corporeal representation before an audience who would recognise written and spoken language as having been the dominant postcolonial discursive tool.

1.3 LITERALLY THEATRICAL—THE IRISH THEATRE CONTEXT

The three core plays of this thesis were first produced between 1983 and 1992. Prior to this period the innovations of a number of playwrights, companies and theatre managements had set various precedents of form and content. The Great Hunger, The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke were conceived and produced within this context and contributed to its further development. A number of representational and performance innovations are included here and in the conclusion. A study of the representation and performance of the body in Irish theatre from 1983 to 1992 must acknowledge the precedents set by earlier twentieth-century practitioners. Here I consider some significant developments and their relationship to more recent practices but the corporeal elements of the work of playwrights and companies is, by necessity, sketched only.

A realisation of the performance potential of the actor has concerned theatre practitioners throughout the twentieth century; many of the solutions to the problem of form have been proposed at the centre of Irish theatre practice within the author-centred mainstream. A perceptible and well-documented textual bias in Irish theatre has resulted in the privileging of the playwright within the theatrical process. McCully argues that in Ireland and 'at the Abbey in particular, the realm of experimentation has remained consistently, from its founding moments, the playwright's language' (McCully in Bort 1996: 25). Nonetheless, an overview of exceptions leads me to question the 'rule' of Irish theatre as literary theatre. Playwrights' experimentation with language was often part of a larger project: '[t]he Irish dramatic heritage has a strong tradition of realist plays but it has an equally strong tradition, to which most of Yeats's plays and a large number of O'Casey's belong, which is determinedly non-naturalistic' (Cave 1990: 24). The work of such playwrights as W.B. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, Sean O'Casey and J. M. Synge has been documented as strongly theatrical, as they were influenced by a variety of

cultural practices and traditions²⁴. Noh theatre, dance and design influenced Yeats' work as a dramatist; Synge's plays borrowed heavily from Irish performance rituals and traditions, as did Lady Gregory's; and O'Casey's work became increasingly imagistic as he worked towards an ideal of total theatre.

Part of the remit of Abbey founders Gregory, Yeats and George Martyn was to counter perceptions of the colonised Irish as feminised and uncivilised:

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism (Gregory quoted in Harrington 1991: viii).

These sentiments informed the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1898, the Irish National Theatre Society in 1903 and its Abbey Theatre in 1904²⁵. I believe that this extract is worth quoting in full as it gives an insight into the construction of a national self-image that they had undertaken. Gregory, Martyn and Yeats invoked the Irish 'passion for oratory' and linked it to 'deeper' thoughts and emotions that were, by implication, beyond the understanding of English audiences. All of this was done while the island of Ireland was still under British rule; the National Theatre Society was intended as an example and perhaps a spur for the founding of a nation.

The word is indeed the central site of signification in Yeats' theatre, but as a poet these words are rich and decidedly non-realistic. Rhythm and pace in language are to be facilitated by the body and Yeats, with Nanette de Valoise (who later founded Britain's Royal Ballet), was instrumental in setting up the Abbey School of Ballet in conjunction with the establishment of a second, smaller stage, the Peacock theatre, in the late 1920s. Why would Yeats, an acclaimed poet, devote so much of

²⁴ For detailed analysis on the theatrical ambitions of these practitioners see <u>Players and Painted Stage</u> (1984) by Karen Dorn; <u>Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett</u> (1978) by Katherine Worth; <u>Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays</u> (1975) by Nicholas Grene; <u>Lady Gregory Fifty Years After</u> (1987) edited by Saddlemyer and Smythe and <u>O'Casey and Expressionism</u> (1988) by Nesta Jones.

²⁵ For detail on the early Abbey Theatre see <u>W. B Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre</u> (1976) by James W. Flannery and <u>The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999</u>: Form and <u>Pressure</u> (1999) by Robert Welsh.

his time and creative energy to writing for the theatre when his dramatic efforts received, and continue to receive a mixed reaction? According to James Flannery:

By plunging literature into social life through the drama (Yeats) hoped to achieve a unity of those forces that warred within him: the struggle between self and anti-self; the disparate claims of mysticism, aestheticism and nationalism (Flannery 1976: 100).

In 1906 a growing dissatisfaction with the performance of the Irish players at his disposal led Yeats to persuade the Abbey board of directors to bring the English actor Florence Darragh to play the title role in his play <u>Deirdre</u> (1907). This move proved unsuccessful as her acting style clashed with that of the others on stage, but it was Yeats' opinion that 'it is almost impossible for us to find a passionate woman actress in Catholic Ireland' (Flannery 1976: 220). Yeats had reverted, however briefly, to the colonial practice of importing players from England for the Irish stage. However, an exposure to the pace and ritual of Noh theatre deepened Yeats' sense of the theatrical, he then combined this awareness with a growing interest in dance and the staging of language and the body.

Yeats' experimentation with Noh form coincided with his (temporary) departure from Ireland and the Abbey, and his disappointment with the Abbey's move towards realism and 'a theatre of the head' (Murray 1997: 25). Yeats' time in England resulted in his dance plays, which were staged in the drawing rooms of high society. This voluntary exile to the wealthy 'margins' of artistic society, allowed Yeats to explore outside the pressures of a voluble marketplace, such as the Abbey Theatre. Dance features in The Land of Heart's Desire (1894) but the Four Plays for Dancers (1921) incorporate movement more fully, and consider the relationship between dance and consciousness²⁶:

The main point about <u>Four Plays for Dancers</u> (published 1921) is that they are dream plays. In each, <u>At the Hawks Well</u>, <u>The Only Jealousy of Emer</u>, <u>The Dreaming of the Bones</u> and <u>Calvary</u>, the story is at one remove from the audience, persuaded that all is taking place in some space beyond the real, in

²⁶ For example The Only Jealousy of Emer (1919) includes the following stage direction: 'Enter Musicians who are dressed and made up as in At The Hawk's Well. They have the same musical instruments, which can either be already upon the stage or be brought in by the First Musician before he stands in the centre with the cloth between his hands or by a player when the cloth has been unfolded' (Yeats 1974: 121).

This stage business is followed by 'Song for the folding and unfolding of the cloth'; the folding of the cloth at the end of the song reveals the bodies of the actors onstage. At the end of the play the cloth is again unfolded and folded to the accompaniment of the song.

'the deeps of the mind' (1961a, p.224). In a sense, these plays are plays-within-plays, and should not be considered naturalistically (Murray 1997: 26).

Despite the playwright's visions of both an ideal theatrical form and an ideal Ireland, his literary legacy has proved paramount, an indication that his use of the body on stage was ultimately to facilitate the language of the play.

It is difficult to identify an Irish playwright since Yeats who has so directly and so consciously woven a specific concept of theatrical design into their work, and it has traditionally been an arbitrary matter whether the other elements of production, beyond the playwright—such as direction, design, sound, lights—have fully explored the potential of the language the actor speaks. (McCully in Bort 1996: 25)

Yeats did work to incorporate the body of the actor in an early instance of theatrical experimentation that reached new heights in the mid-1980s, as evidenced by the productions of <u>The Great Hunger</u>, <u>The Saxon Shore</u> and <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>, and by the Yeats International Theatre Festival (detailed later in this section).

Both Gregory and Synge incorporated folk ritual and traditions into their work. Gregory has been credited with keeping the Abbey afloat in its early years with her management skills and her numerous popular dramas including Spreading the News (1904), The Gaol Gate (1906), and The Rising of the Moon (1907). Her research of Irish myths and folk customs shaped her use of language and dialogue; her input and influence on Yeats' plays is now being acknowledged as some critics and publishers now attribute Cathleen ni Houlihan (1902) to both Yeats and Gregory²⁷. Gregory has not escaped criticism for her incorporation of folk life, however, as observed by McDiarmid and Waters in the introduction to Lady Gregory: Selected Writings (1995): '[o]ccasionally this aspect of Abbey production has been condemned as either an exoticizing of peasant life or a parochialism that forfeited opportunities for growth' (McDiarmid & Waters 1995: xxx).

The social and cultural experience of the audience also shaped Synge's work. Like Yeats, Synge came from a privileged background but on Yeats' advice went to the Aran Islands to get in touch with the seemingly unspoiled vigour of island life. Synge wrote that he did not believe in 'the possibility of "a purely fantastical unmodern ideal, breezy springdayish Cuchulanoid National theatre" (...) and that

²⁷ See <u>Lady Gregory: Selected Writings</u> (1995) (eds.) McDiarmid & Waters.

Ireland will gain if Irish writers deal *manfully*, directly and decently with the entire reality of life' (Synge quoted in Greene & Stevens 1959: 156-157 [my emphasis]). However, having lived among a remote rural Irish community Synge used his experiences to create a people of a wild and often violent disposition, who used rich heightened language. His plays The Shadow of the Glen (1903) and The Playboy of the Western World (1907) were greeted by public outrage. Appalled by what they interpreted as a reflection rather than a creative vision of themselves the public organised disturbances to disrupt the Abbey performances. This response presaged the audience intervention at the Druid Theatre Company production of Vincent Woods' At the Black Pig's Dyke in Derry 1993 (see section 4.5). Often revived and widely studied, these original controversial pieces have given Synge's work an unforeseen authority with Irish theatre (see conclusion).

O'Casey left behind a substantial body of work which spanned a time of great political and theatrical change. His political commitment, and desire for a total theatre of music and colour, resulted in plays which were often controversial and were marginalized both in terms of production and publication, despite the fact that the Berliner Ensemble included <u>Purple Dust</u> in its 1966 repertoire. O'Casey and Yeats arrived at the middle ground of the Abbey stage, from the 'upper' and 'lower' extremities of cultural endeavour; but the forms of theatre they proposed had many similarities. Irish playwright Tom Kilroy, exploring the concepts of 'High' and 'Low' art, describes himself as 'part of an Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-American, Anglo-Irish, a kind of anglic-tradition'²⁸. He believes that this position has given:

particular weight and value to terms such as Imagination, Taste and Culture, a weighting which tends towards exclusiveness in that it arbitrates between the possessor and the dispossessed. It further promotes an idea of literature as a pristine, unitary expression which tends to guard its preserve, firstly from other forms of intellectual activity, secondly, from other art forms and, thirdly, from human expressiveness which fails to meet the literary criteria of established taste. The idea of High Art and Low Art is deeply rooted within this tradition, a symptom of social presumptions which this country, like each one anglicised through colonization, has inherited (Kilroy in Connolly 1982: 178).

²⁸ Tom Kilroy, 'The Irish Writer: Self and Society, 1950-80', published in <u>Literature and the Changing Ireland</u> (1982) edited by Peter Connolly.

O'Casey's theatrical imagination led to a fate similar to that of Yeats—he too was marginalized by the very institution whose position he had helped to secure, a marginalization that, ironically, was initiated by Yeats. O'Casey was not responsible for the founding of the Abbey or for its ambitions for the shaping of national identity; he worked instead with distinctions within Nationalist Ireland, urban Ireland, working-class Ireland, an unheroic Ireland. His success with the Dublin trilogy The Shadow of a Gunman (1923), Juno and the Paycock (1924) and The Plough and the Stars (1926) are contextualized by his later rejection by the Abbey as his staging and vision moved away from his recognised style²⁹. Now a well-respected and much vaunted member of the Irish literary hall of fame, O'Casey's later theatrical innovations were unwelcome. It may be that O'Casey was writing ahead of his time, and that developments in design and staging were insufficient to capture his vision. His use of light, song, music and dance confounded many critics who judged him by his Dublin trilogy and found his subsequent work lacking³⁰.

In <u>The Plough and the Stars</u> O'Casey directly challenged his audience by staging the prostitute Rosie Redmond against the shadow of the Speaker, whose words were recognisable to the audiences of the day as those of executed patriot Pádraic Pearse. Objections to the play during its first run were on both Nationalist and moral grounds and were taken up by the national press. However, the production continued to attract good houses. Subsequent productions include the 1991 Abbey production directed by Garry Hynes; here the stark expressionistic staging was strongly reacted against by traditionalists, but served to cast the play in a new light. Hynes' experimentation with the play suggests a reinvigoration of O'Casey's vision,

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²⁹ The Abbey management's decision against the staging of <u>The Silver Tassie</u> in 1928 resulted in a well-documented rift between O'Casey and Yeats. The play was produced by Charles B. Cochrane at the Apollo Theatre, London, on 11 October 1929 and directed by Raymond Massey. <u>The Silver Tassie</u> illustrates O'Casey's attitude to the exploitation of the working class, especially during World War I. In the second act, which was designed for the first production by artist Augustus John, O' Casey offers an expressionistic rendering of the battle scene, in which a damaged, life-size crucifix dominated the shelled ground and ruined monastery.

In Within the Gates (1934) gates close and open between each of the four scenes, framing the action in a ritualised fashion. Light is used to wordlessly convey political change in The Star Turns Red (1940) and Red Roses for Me (1943). The forces of nature literally flood the stage in Purple Dust (1943) in an ominous counterpoint to the 'wayward comedy in three acts'. Oak Leaves and Lavender (1946) includes a "Prelude of the Shadows" and an epilogue in which dancers in eighteenth century dress and The Son of Time frame the action of the play. Cock-a-Doodle Dandy (1949) is a theatricalized exploration of the tensions of Irish society in the 1940s. A brightly-plumed cock appears throughout, symbolizing a supernatural presence and a life force at odds with the repression of the people as embodied by the aptly-named Fr. Domineer.

but some negative reactions to this production highlight the sacrosanct position of the text over the exciting potentials of the stage. Hynes effectively took <u>The Plough and the Stars</u> out of the literary 'heritage centre' and back into the realm of performance.

A period of theatrical conservatism was led in the Abbey by Artistic Director Ernest Blythe (1945-1967) who worked to shore up the literary reputation of the theatre. Departures from the text were not encouraged, and some innovative steps were retraced, such as the production of the work of playwright Teresa Deevy: 'Deevy had remarkable success at the Abbey during the 1930s, yet her name is rarely mentioned in critical histories' (Cathy Leeny in Bort 1996: 41). This lack of recognition for Deevy's work is detailed in 'Teresa Deevy and Wife to James Whelan' by Martina Ann O'Doherty. Here O'Doherty examines the extraordinary career of Deevy and her association with the Abbey Theatre, which produced six of her plays between 1930 and 1936. However, in 1942 Deevy submitted Wife to James Whelan (initially a comedy entitled All on a Sunny Day), which was rejected by Blythe who had 'no further use for any of her work' (O' Doherty in Murray 1995: 25-28).

The founding of Dublin's the Gate Theatre (1928), the Pike Theatre (1953) and the Project Gallery (1966—later Project Arts Centre and now simply Project) and the Lyric Theatre in Belfast (1951), indicates a broadening theatrical imagination in twentieth century Irish culture³². While not promoting a national culture like the Abbey, each of these theatres had a specific remit and contributed to a growing theatre context. Of particular relevance here are the Pike and Project.

The Pike Theatre on Herbert Lane was founded by Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift. Although it did not last for more than a decade it had a profound effect on the staging and thereby the creation of the canon, and highlighted the issue of theatre censorship. Simpson outlines the intentions of the Pike Theatre founders in Beckett and Behan and a Theatre in Dublin (1962):

Our first task was to find [the theatre] a name. It must be short, we decided realistically, because that would keep down newspaper and advertising costs.

³¹ See 'Teresa Deevy and <u>Wife to James Whelan</u>' by Martina Ann O'Doherty as published in 'Teresa Deevy and the Irish Women Playwrights', <u>Irish University Review</u> Silver Jubilee Issue volume 25 number1 Spring/Summer 1995 pp.25-28.

³² For a detailed history of the Gate Theatre see <u>The Boys a biography of Micheál Mac Liammoir and Hilton Edwards</u> (1994) by Christopher Fitz-Simon. The establishment of the Lyric Theatre is documented in chapter seven of <u>The Theatre in Ulster</u> (1972) by Sam Hanna Bell.

(...) we fixed on 'The Pike', meaning the long pole used by the Irish insurgents of 1798 to discomfit the slick English cavalry. In other words, we wanted our theatre to be a revolutionary force of small means which, by its ingenuity, would stir up the theatrical lethargy of post-war Ireland (Simpson 1962:1)³³.

Here is another instance of a revolutionary response to the standard Irish theatre fare that seems, in fact, to comprise of one attempted revolution after another. With the Pike Theatre, Simpson and Swift stirred up a perceived 'theatrical lethargy' in more ways than they could have imagined at the outset. In its short life, the Pike Theatre staged the Irish premiere of Beckett's <u>Waiting for Godot</u> in 1955, the premiere of Brendan Behan's <u>The Quare Fellow</u> in 1954 and brought the censorship of the arts and of theatre into the public arena with its staging of <u>The Rose Tattoo</u> by Tennessee Williams in 1957.

Although Beckett and his theatre lived in 'exile' the Pike Theatre's Irish premiere of Waiting for Godot produced Beckett's work before Irish audiences, and the Pike production ran for over a year³⁴. Waiting for Godot was a successor more of Yeats' marginalized drama than of any received, accepted notion of Irish theatre. It seems significant that Beckett had removed himself and his work from the main tradition and context of Irish theatre, and that it was the Pike rather the Abbey as a self-professed monument to Irish writing, which brought the work of this eminent Irish playwright home from abroad. Beckett's work grew from and through practice, his role as director was such that his description as playwright seems somehow inadequate. Although Beckett's work—detailed by Jonathan Kalb and Anna McMullan among others³⁵—has suffered from a recent commodification of Irish writers, it problematizes presumptions about the definitions of roles in the theatrical process, staging the body of the actor, and the definition of an 'Irish' playwright.

The Pike Theatre's production of <u>The Rose Tattoo</u> in 1957 had serious ramifications for the theatre management and, in a broader sense, highlighted the need for a continuing revolution against cultural complacency in Ireland. <u>The Rose</u> Tattoo was the Pike Theatre's production for the Dublin Tostal Theatre Festival and

³³ Through his terminology Simpson gives an intimation of his other vocation or 'day-job' as a member of the Irish army.

 ³⁴ See Contemporary Irish Drama from Beckett to McGuinness (1994) by Anthony Roche pp. 44-46.
 ³⁵ See Beckett in Performance (1989/1991) by Jonathan Kalb, and Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama (1993) by Anna McMullan.

the initial responses to the production led Simpson to imagine that 'little Herbert Lane was on the way to becoming as distinguished a thoroughfare as Abbey Street [home of the Abbey Theatrel or Cavendish Row [home of the Gate Theatrel' (Simpson 1962: 139). However, during the rehearsal period theatre festival director Brendan Smith had received a letter from the League of Decency 'complaining that the Rose Tattoo 'advocated the use of birth control by unnatural means' (Simpson 162: 142). Prior to the production's transfer to the larger Gate Theatre, the police came to the Pike Theatre with a demand that the show be cancelled. A lengthy battle ensued that resulted in Simpson's imprisonment and trial and a loss of support for the theatre. Simpson was eventually cleared of having presented 'an indecent performance' (Simpson 1962: 164). In retrospect Simpson believes that '[t]here are reasons to believe that none of the persons responsible for the initiation of police action were in possession of any copy of the script, and that all those dealing with the affair were working simply on second- or third-hand information, provided by people prejudiced against the Theatre in general, and Tennessee Williams in particular' (Simpson 1962:143).

The effective censorship of <u>The Rose Tattoo</u> reflects the lack of artistic freedom in the Irish Republic in its prescription of postcolonial morality. The cultural conservatism that led Beckett to write 'sorry about all your trouble over <u>The Rose Tattoo</u>. Bastards, bastards,...' (Simpson 1962: 168) to Simpson in August 1957, would also affect the Tostal Theatre Festival of the following year. The Dublin Tostal Theatre Festival had planned to stage O'Casey new play <u>The Drums of Father Ned</u> in 1958 as well as <u>Bloomsday</u> based on Joyce's <u>Ulysses</u> and three mime plays by Beckett. The influence of the Church continued throughout this period and O'Casey was the victim of the effective censorship of <u>The Drums of Father Ned</u>, as was <u>Bloomsday</u>; Beckett withdrew his mime plays in protest. The Dublin Tostal Theatre Festival of 1958 was cancelled.

The Pike Theatre's function as a house for marginalized work was then taken up by Project. The founding of Project and its ambitions as an actors' cooperative were as follows:

Project began as a three week festival at the Gate Theatre in November 1966. The initial impetus was to produce a single play but this soon evolved into a season of experimental music, visual arts, seminars, children's theatre and a

hot debate on censorship with special guest, writer, Edna O'Brien. Theatre practitioner/administrator Colm O Briain initiated the event with Jim Fitzgerald. Project's first exhibition showed the work of four visual artists John Behan, Charlie Cullen, Michael Kane and John Kelly (www.project.ie).

The Project Gallery evolved into an actors' and artists' cooperative, The Project Arts Centre, and occupied a number of spaces around Dublin before moving to East Essex Street, Temple Bar, Dublin, in 1972. Artists and practitioners whose work was staged or shown at the Project throughout the 1970s and 1980s include Peter and Jim Sheridan, Neil Jordan, Robert Ballagh, Alan Stanford, Tom Murphy and actors Gabriel Byrne and Liam Neeson. Although no longer a cooperative, Project has recently staged the work of independent companies such as Rough Magic, Barabbas...the Company, Bedrock, and dance companies CoisCeim Dance Theatre and Daghda Dance. On 12 June 2000 the new purpose-built Project opened on the Essex Street site, incorporating a gallery and two theatre spaces and describing itself as 'a full-time artist-driven company' (www.project.ie). Project's significance, in its various histories, is in its incorporation and intersection of visual and performance arts. Project's production history identifies it as a space that has fostered work that has not been accommodated within the mainstream.

Throughout the eighties and nineties there were a number of theatrical developments outside the mainstream, working as if in direct opposition to the position accorded language within Irish theatre. Innovations that, unlike the three plays considered here, did not take language as a point of departure, did not begin with a script and then journey *through performance* to the final product, but took performance as the first step, in response to a literary bias that remained at the centre of the discourse. Two companies, Operating Theatre and Co-Motion³⁶, came to prominence during the 1980s at Project. Their work merits detailed documentation but this process would be impeded by the sporadic visibility of the work and their inconsistent production histories. Actor Olwen Fouéré founded Operating Theatre in 1980 with composer Roger Doyle, having worked together on Thalia at the Project

³⁶ For detail on Co-Motion see 'Co-Motion' by Derek West in <u>Theatre Ireland 25</u> Spring 1991 pp.22-24.

Arts Centre in Dublin (1978)³⁷. Their work interrogated the relationship between music, sound and performance; and early work included two singles <u>Rapid Eye Movements</u>, and <u>Blue Light</u> and <u>Alpha</u>; and productions <u>Ignotum per Ignotus</u> (with James Coleman), and <u>Switch</u> (text by Philip Morgan). In 1984 Operating Theatre produced <u>Diamond Body</u>, written by Aidan Carl Matthews, which interrogated sexuality by staging split-sexuality in Fouéré's performance as Greek hermaphrodite Stephanos and 'his' lover.

The company then explored the sound of gender difference with <u>Pentagonal Dream</u> in 1986. Using a text by Sebastian Barry, Fouéré and Doyle distorted Fouéré's voice to sound like five different male voices. After considerable time <u>Angel/Babel</u> (directed by Leon Ingulsrud) was staged at Project in 1999. <u>Angel/Babel</u> brought the company to new technological heights as Fouéré embodied the comparison between the internet and the human nervous system, while suspended in air. Fouéré wore electronic sensors attached to the sound system, and described the project thus:

On <u>Angel/Babel</u> we used an interactive set. Interactive performance actually works in that moment where you see the exchange happening. It could still work with conventional text but the emphasis is on this moment. And you find when you start working that there are whole sections when nobody would know that there is interaction going on there, you might as well have it recorded, and there is no point in that. (...) If you are working with that type of technology you've got to let it lead you, and try and make it do what you want it to do (Fouéré interview 1/8/01).

Fouéré has been a creative force in Irish theatre, bringing a keen physicality to her work inside and outside the mainstream. She serves as an example of how Irish actors have worked in a theatre community so intimate as to necessitate diversity in performance. Fouéré played the title role in a version of Wilde's <u>Salomé</u> directed by Steven Berkoff for the Gate Theatre in 1988. This seminal production (for which Doyle composed the music) brought the necessary physical idiom to a canonically exceptional text.

Fouéré also performed in The Cuchulain Cycle at the Peacock Theatre, which was staged at the Yeats International Theatre Festival (1989-1993). James W. Flannery, author of <u>W. B Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre</u> (1976), founded the Yeats Foundation in 1988 and was executive director of the Yeats International Festival at

³⁷ For detail on Operating Theatre see 'The Doctor Is In' by Willie White, <u>Irish Theatre Magazine</u>,

the Abbey. Flannery came to Dublin from the U.S. in the mid 1960s to research a doctoral thesis on the Abbey acting tradition. He was disillusioned by the performance of that tradition, and set about countering his strong responses to the state of Irish acting at that time by staging The Green Helmet in 1965: 'we persuaded the Players' Theatre at Trinity to sponsor a production of Yeats's Calvary and The Resurrection with a mix of professional actors from the Radio Eireann Rep as well as amateurs and students from Trinity and UCD [University College Dublin]. Tom Hickey, from the Focus Theatre, played Christ in both plays' (Flannery in Griffin Theatre Ireland 21 December 1989: 14).

Flannery's practical interrogation of Irish performance standards continued and in 1989 the first season of Yeats International Theatre Festival opened at the Peacock, with a production of the Cuchulain Cycle. The Cycle comprised of At the Hawk's Well, The Green Helmet, On Baile's Strand, The Only Jealousy of Emer and The Death of Cuchulain, as directed by Flannery. There were mixed reactions to the Festival's first production, which was sponsored by Coca Cola Atlantic. Some felt that the sponsorship would have been better invested in training Irish and especially Abbey actors in the skills necessary to perform Yeats' work: 'after the inaugural production, it is clear that the Abbey should use the endowment to ensure Yeats's careful prescriptions for the performance of his works are fully met in future years' (Cave 1990: 24). Richard Allen Cave suggested that the problem of staging the Cuchulain plays as a cycle is that they do not share a uniformity of style, and that the actors' treatment of the verse was uneven in performance. However, despite the difficulties, this was a timely staging of Yeats' work. During its five-year period the Yeats International Theatre Festival highlighted the possible rewards of a search for a physical vocabulary for Irish theatre, the potential benefits of professional training for all Irish actors and—with other innovations such as the work of the collaborative group that staged The Great Hunger (see section 2.5)—had a strong influence on practitioners and audiences.

The Great Hunger, The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke were commissioned and/or produced by three geographically various companies, the Peacock as part of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Field Day Theatre Company in

Derry, and Druid Theatre Company in Galway. This diversity exemplifies the growing regionalisation of Irish theatre throughout the 1980s especially. Druid was founded in Galway in 1975 and paved the way for Field Day in Derry, Northern Ireland (1980), Red Kettle in Waterford (1985), Island in Limerick (1988), Macnas in Galway (1986), Meridan in Cork (1989) and, in the early 1990s, companies such as Blue Raincoat in Sligo (1991) and Bickerstaffe in Kilkenny (1992).

Playwright Brian Friel³⁹ established Field Day Theatre Company with actor Stephen Rea in Derry, Northern Ireland, in 1980 (see section 3.1). The company's objective was to 'contribute to the solution of the present crisis by producing analyses of the established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation' (Roche 1994: 243). Field Day had an exhaustive touring schedule during the 1980s showing a genuine commitment, not only to new writing but also to the overall endeavour of theatre, reaching new audiences through the accessibility and consistent standards of their work. The company's productions included Translations (1980), a version of Chekhov's The Three Sisters (1981), The Communication Cord (1982), and Making History (1988) all by Friel; Boesman and Lena by Athol Fugard (staged in 1983 instead of the planned The Saxon Shore by Rudkin, see chapter 3), The Riot Act (a version of Sophocles' Antigone, 1984) by Tom Paulin, High Time (1984) by Derek Mahon, Double Cross (1986) by Tom Kilroy, Pentecost (1987) by Stewart Parker, Saint Oscar (1989) by Terry Eagleton, The Cure at Troy (1990) by Seamus Heaney and Madam Macadam's Travelling Circus (1991) also by Kilroy. Field Day had also planned to produce Frank McGuinness' Carthaginians in 1987 but the playwright withdrew the play for fear that the company was overstretching its resources.

On 14 November 1998 Field Day Theatre Company returned with a production of Stewart Parker's Northern Star at the First Presbyterian Church in

³⁸ Hickey later played Maguire in <u>The Great Hunger</u> (1983), see chapter 2.

³⁹ Friel has been credited with initiating the modern Irish theatre movement in the 1960s with an Edwards/MacLiammóir production at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. Philadelphia Here I Come! (1964), Friel's fourth play, had considerable impact as Friel split his central protagonist in two, allowing the audience an insight into the inner discourse in the mind of character Gar. Two actors played the character, one Gar public and the other Gar private. This split-subjectivity was an innovation from within the mainstream and stretched the boundaries of a particularly Irish realism, making room for further experimentation.

Belfast, directed by Stephen Rea⁴⁰. This was a joint production by Field Day and Tinderbox theatre companies. The detailed programme for this production evidences Field Day Theatre Company's focus on history and identity that has had an undoubted influence on the company's reliance on language and on general perceptions of drama given their extensive audience base.

Other Northern Irish companies followed in Field Day's wake, including Charabanc (1983), Tinderbox (1988), Out and Out Theatre (1990)⁴¹ and Ridiculusmus (1992), all in Belfast, and Big Telly (1987) in Portstewart, Co. Derry. Marie Jones functioned as playwright in the collaborative work of Charabanc, a female theatre company based in Belfast, which was prominent in the 1980s. Charabanc did not work exclusively on political issues, but strove to voice the female experience while trying to place women securely within Northern Ireland's theatrical tradition⁴².

Macnas was founded in Galway eleven years after Druid Theatre Company and took a very different approach to theatre. Macnas developed a reputation for specializing in street spectacle, bringing a carnivalesque element to the tired Irish parade, incorporating narratives such as those found in Irish myth and legend with an international outdoor performance idiom. Their work became the centrepiece of the annual Galway Arts Festival. The company was influenced by the work of Catalan company Els Comediants and Footsbarn, a company of English origins based in France. Macnas's emphasis on design, puppetry and scale was unprecedented within the Irish performance tradition.

Macnas brought language into their work when they moved indoors, initially taking the 'pantomime' and broadening it with a continuing emphasis on spectacle. The company created the set within the entire space, audience members then moved within the environment of the piece among the actors. These indoor 'Christmas shows' or 'pantomimes' such as <u>Alice in Wonderland</u> (1989), <u>Treasure Island</u> (1990) and, to an extent, <u>Circus Story</u> (1991) took well-known children's stories and invested

⁴⁰ See 'Northern Star' by Bernadette Sweeney in <u>Irish Theatre Magazine</u> volume one issue two, Spring 1999, pp.56-57.

⁴¹ See 'Mancruel' by Lynda Henderson in <u>Theatre Ireland 31</u> Summer 1993 pp. 85-86 and appendix (ix) for Out and Out Theatre.

⁴² See 'Re-inventing Women: Charabanc Theatre Company' by Claudia W. Harris in <u>The State of Play:</u> <u>Irish Theatre in the 'Nineties</u> (1996) edited by Eberhard Bort.

them with a theatricality and a physical accessibility that appealed to both young and adult audiences. In 1992 Macnas' work took a new direction. The Táin premiered at the Galway Arts Festival and marked the company's move into the mainstream but this was mainstream theatre with a difference as, except for at one significant moment, there was no spoken language in this piece.

Founder member Páraic Breathnach cited a resistance to the indoor reliance on image among the cast in the initial stages of rehearsal: '[a]t first people didn't fully trust the idea and found it hard to express themselves without words. So in the early stages of rehearsal we used a basic script but then as the music was added and integrated with the action the words were removed bit by bit' (McBride 1992: 70). Here is evidence of the fact that practitioners can often find it difficult to allow the body and the image to carry meaning outside language. In this rehearsal process the word was literally the point of departure, as the company slowly moved away from it. Breathnach explained, 'Macnas shows emerge out of a complicated collective process and it's hard to facilitate someone who goes off alone to a room to churn out reams of words. We can't find a writer who can create a language for us so we have to evolve our own. To some extent our approach represents a frustration with conventional Irish theatre' (McBride 1992: 70). Macnas was responding to a European theatre tradition and contributed to it by touring work throughout Europe, appearing regularly at Expo and international festivals.

This section 'Literally Theatrical' is a brief overview of developments in the Irish performance tradition. Although this is not an attempt at a comprehensive or comparative study, there are a number of points of innovation and departure that are worth noting. From the plays of Yeats and the heightened versions of Irishness of Synge, to the re-imaginings of an Irish theatre canon by the Pike Theatre, Project, Operating Theatre and Macnas, an appreciation of theatricality grew throughout the twentieth century. Authenticity, appropriateness and censorship, the incorporation of folk traditions, the shaping of the canon—all of these issues have informed the constant need of practitioners to depart from the departures of their predecessors. The key plays of this thesis The Great Hunger (1983), The Saxon Shore (1986) and At the Black Pig's Dyke (1992) were first produced during this period of regionalisation, experimentation and change.

CHAPTER TWO THE GREAT HUNGER: STAGING A MASTERPIECE

'A man is what is written... a man is what is written...' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 52).

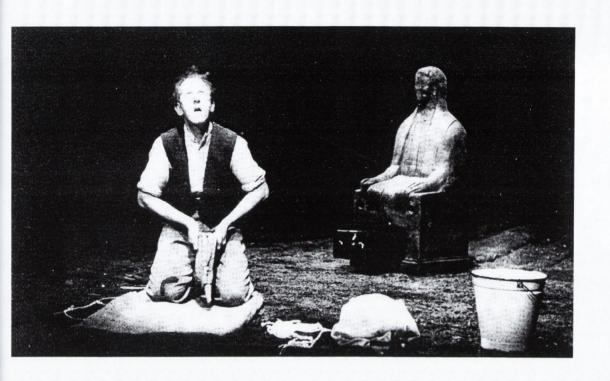


Fig. 2.1 Tom Hickey as Maguire downstage of The Mother as effigy, (scene three) <u>The Great Hunger</u> 1983.

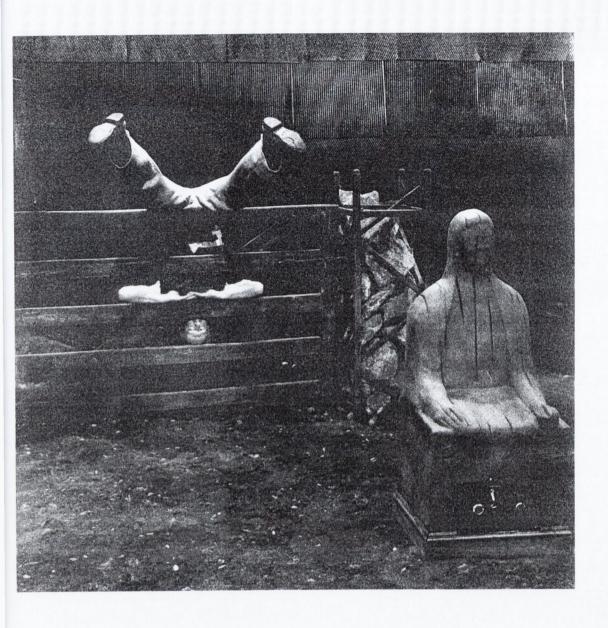


Fig. 2.2 Tom Hickey on the gate, behind The Mother as effigy, (scene thirteen) The Great Hunger 1983.

2.1 CONTEXT OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION¹

The Great Hunger was a theatrical interpretation of the poem of the same name by Patrick Kavanagh, collaboratively devised by playwright Tom Mac Intyre, director Patrick Mason and actors Tom Hickey (who played the central character Patrick Maguire), Conal Kearney (Malone), Bríd ní Neachtain (Mary Anne), Vincent O'Neill (Priest), Fiona MacAnna (Agnes) and Martina Stanley (Schoolgirl). Expectations were for a staged but close response to the widely acknowledged literary wealth of the poem (first published in 1942). Such expectations were confounded by a sparse and very physical production. The physical nature of the performance of the play was remarkable in and of itself but particularly so given that it was an Irish production. An investigation of the play begs many questions—how to react to the text made up predominantly of stage directions? How to interpret the many and varied reactions to the production of the play, from the enthusiastic to the hostile? How to reconcile the original poem, hailed as an example of the richness of Ireland's literary heritage, with the far from literary nature of the play?

To take an established work by a poet such as Kavanagh and transfer it onto the stage was in itself a brave step, but the creative nature of its staging further identifies The Great Hunger as a landmark in Irish theatre history. Just as Kavanagh had dismantled the prevalent image of idyllic rural life with the original poem, Mac Intyre used The Great Hunger to challenge the prevalent image of Irish theatre in the 1980s. Mac Intyre chose a vibrant physical form of theatre to act as a vehicle for Kavanagh's 'masterpiece'. The Great Hunger reached its audience through the staging of movement, image and association. Given the many questions raised by the production of The Great Hunger, the creative forces of poet, playwright and other practitioners, the social reality of Kavanagh's Ireland and the reinterpretation of it in the 1980s, I have titled this chapter The Great Hunger: Staging a Masterpiece.

The body had not been absent from Irish theatre; rather its presence had not been accounted for and work which privileged the body was marginalized. Such conservatism reflected that of the state². However, by the early 1980s international developments in dance and theatre were beginning to affect Irish theatre artists. On 9

¹ As the published text of <u>The Great Hunger</u> also represents the production text there is little distinction between the performance details and the 'dramatic text'. Therefore, unless I make a time-specific reference, all references to <u>The Great Hunger</u> are in the present tense.

May 1983 <u>The Great Hunger</u> premiered on the Peacock stage, the studio space of the Abbey, Ireland's national theatre.

As the National Theatre and the first state subsidised theatre, the Abbey was at that time a curious mix of state-institution, with all the civil-service resonances that that implies, and a showcase for Irish drama, with an emphasis on being a writers' theatre that continues to this day. In what might initially seem to reflect this, <u>The Great Hunger</u> was based on a poem of the same name by renowned Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh, but the subsequent controversy and eventual influence of the production stemmed from its departure from a literal interpretation of this literary masterpiece.

The first stage in the process was Mac Intyre's submission of a script written in response to Kavanagh's poem to the Abbey Theatre, then under the artistic direction of Joe Dowling. Mac Intyre had already approached the Project Arts Centre, where The Old Firm³ had been produced, but the script was eventually accepted by Dowling who brought together a collaborative group who would work on a series of productions at the Peacock until 1988. The Abbey had already produced two of Mac Intyre's plays. Jack be Nimble opened 10 August 1976 and Find the Lady opened 9 May 1977; billed as 'Peacock Workshop productions', both were directed by Patrick Mason. Dowling once again matched Mason with Mac Intyre, and with the addition of Tom Hickey (who had already been approached by Mac Intyre), the central collaborative core was established⁴. Hickey credited Dowling as being instrumental in establishing the collaboration:

I don't think that Joe was ever one hundred percent convinced about this type of work, but what he was convinced about one hundred percent was that it should be done. (...) And that was always his position, even in the face of the most awful flack later on (Hickey interview: 233).

Mason described the project as having had an ostensibly typical beginning:

One of the understandings about the collaboration with Tom Hickey, Tom Mac Intyre and myself was that the initiator was Tom Mac Intyre. Tom Mac Intyre as a great theatre poet, writer, had a certain vision of this material, The Great Hunger, and he brought it to Tom Hickey as the actor he saw in the lead role and he brought it to me as the director he wanted to work with and we started from traditional positions (Mason interview: 240-41).

² See section 1.3.

³ The Old Firm by Tom Mac Intyre opened on 25 September 1975 at The Project Arts Centre, Dublin, directed by Alan Stanford.

⁴ See Hickey interview appendix (ii).

Mac Intyre worked closely with director Mason and the actors, as led by Hickey to develop, as writer and critic Gerard Stembridge observed, 'a sense of striking images, which attempt to recreate the pain, innocence and repression of Irish rural life, as Kavanagh saw it' (Stembridge Irish Press 11/5/83). These images were the product of an all-embracing creative process, which accommodated the artistry of playwright, director and actors. Kavanagh's The Great Hunger had, according to the Abbey press release for the play's opening in 1983, 'evoked a unique and highly individualistic response from the playwright' (Abbey Theatre Press Release 26/4/83). Mac Intyre created a non-linear image driven text (described by the playwright as a score), which evidenced not only his 'individualistic response' to Kavanagh's poem, but also the playwright's exposure to the work of Meredith Monk, Merce Cunningham and Pina Bausch. Mac Intyre had spent the early 1970s in New York and discovered what he described as 'a gloriously contemporary idiom. The fragmentation of narrative, the power of the image, the poetry of movement—these elements had an ability to reach the audience, to burn in a way that traditional narrative couldn't' (Harron Observer 30/11/86).

The language of The Great Hunger performance score was taken directly from the poem but, through rhythm and chant, the lines became a fluid living part of the process, rather than a faithful recitation of Kavanagh's work. These rhythms were worked into the performance during the rehearsal period, involving director, actors and the playwright. The continuous presence of Mac Intyre facilitated the reworking of The Great Hunger, both during the original run and, to a greater extent, for the subsequent production in 1986. Discussions were held after the previews of the 1983 production in the Peacock Theatre after the performances, when Mac Intyre and Mason had the opportunity to assess the audience's reaction to the play. This direct contact with the audience following an indirect theatrical appeal to their senses through sound, image and movement gave an added dimension to the organic nature of the piece. The audience was a very real part of this endeavour. The choice of Kavanagh's poem was an initial play upon the general social frame of reference of the Peacock audience. Although the Irish society of the 1980s was shaped by De Valera's policies, by this time audiences were sufficiently distanced from the national image making of De Valera, and familiar enough with its social ramifications, to appreciate

the inadequacies of the rural idyll. Also, the audience of the 1980s would have recognised Kavanagh as an acknowledged and respected figure in Irish literature. Thus Mac Intyre's play both included the intellectual expectations of the audience in the process and worked against them.

Mac Intyre's aim was to connect with <u>The Great Hunger</u>'s audience on another level. He believed that '[t]he immediacy of the pictorial of the imagistic by contrast with the verbal, relates essentially to what we call sensory impact: you *look*, you *see*. In the verbal theatre, the energy hasn't got that directness' (Holmquist 1984: 151[original emphasis]). Mason was also committed to the search for a means of communicating with an audience that would challenge any preconceived notions of theatre. In his opinion:

[t]he specific problem of the Irish audience is to get them to trust their own responses. The image is primal and people's response to it—provided it's compelling, is instinctive... We're all so predominantly verbal—our education is geared to the word—that there is a moment of panic when the word is not present. (...) This perhaps is the biggest problem; how do you get people to stop saying "what does it mean?", and simply say to them "look forget about what it means, what does it feel like, what does it do to you?" (Holmquist 1984: 150).

Mac Intyre saw in the staging of <u>The Great Hunger</u> 'adventure and some kind of dignity' (Holmquist 1984: 150). Drawn by the disturbing qualities of the poem, by what he identified as the 'the constriction' and 'the fear of the sensual, the fear of life which is a baleful inheritance for people on this island in 1983 as in 1933' (Byrne <u>In Dublin 6/5/83</u>), Mac Intyre set about staging <u>The Great Hunger</u>. Given the status of the poem as a 'masterpiece' of Irish literature and the almost mythical status afforded to literature within Ireland's cultural consciousness, Mac Intyre's plans for the poem could be seen as foolhardy, if not downright arrogant. In a review of the 1986 production of <u>The Great Hunger</u> for the <u>Sunday Independent</u>, Colm Toibín wrote, 'Tread softly Tom Mac Intyre you tread on our masterpieces' (Tóibín <u>Sunday Independent</u> 20/7/86). Although he then went on to discuss the specifics of the play itself, Tóibín's observation was a canny one. The original script comprised of a selection of lines and images taken from the poem and reordered by the playwright. Language was sparse, and it was during the subsequent collaborative rehearsal process that the physical nature of the piece began to emerge.

As Anthony Roche noted in his introduction to <u>Contemporary Irish Drama</u> from <u>Beckett to McGuinness</u>, 'the past has always exerted a particular presence on and in Ireland. The best contemporary Irish playwrights are engaged in a search for dramatic means to reinterpret by re-imagining that past. All offer alternative narratives whose aim is liberation, a setting free of ghosts' (Roche 1994: 12). Mac Intyre, however, was proposing to 're-imagine' a work which had become sacrosanct, to 're-interpret' a poem with its own inherent artistic worth. Mac Intyre's 're-imagining' of the poem was in a different language from that of the original and it was this that made the production a worthwhile theatrical exercise.

Tom Mac Intyre has for long been the lone major Irish playwright fully aware of the visual and physical languages of theatre and working to develop a form of theatre whose expressive energies focus on these rather than on the verbal (Henderson 1983: 130).

Mac Intyre had turned from the literary in search of a new means of communication for Irish theatre. Born in Cavan in 1931, Mac Intyre studied English in University College Dublin and worked in America periodically from the mid-1960s to 1980. As mentioned, while in New York in the early 1970s Mac Intyre was deeply influenced by the developments in dance theatre, and his subsequent work throughout the 1970s and 1980s sought to marry his mastery of the word with a theatre of image, where his presence in the rehearsal process was central⁵. Here he could combine language with the immediacy of movement, an appreciation of the physical presence of the actor and the implied 'language' of image. The playwright came to realise that 'you can say it in a split-second in the image. In the verbal theatre it would take you a paragraph and you couldn't come anywhere near making the same weight of statement' (Holmquist 1984: 150). The full experience of theatre was what Mac Intyre was hoping to encapsulate in his 'theatre of image'.

It is perhaps significant that he chose the literary weight of Kavanagh as both his starting point and his point of departure.

I was brought up on the Irish literary mode but eventually, for my work the idiom had nowhere to go. I spent the next ten years seeking a solution to a stylistic problem—goodbye to the literary discursive as a satisfying mode. But what to replace it with? (Taplin <u>Guardian</u> 24/11/86).

⁵ See Tom Mac Intyre biography appendix (iv).

Mac Intyre found his solution in the various rehearsal venues of the Peacock in Dublin in 1983. Together with Mason and the actors he puzzled over the 'stylistic problem' and found a palpable solution, as staged in The Great Hunger. This open exploratory way of working was a challenging one for all concerned. Mason thought highly of the playwright's work: '[Mac Intyre] has an extraordinary energy and an uncanny feeling for the Irish psyche, a way of hitting the wound. And he has courage. a wonderful recklessness' (McGreevey Stafford Sunday Independent 13/7/86). This pre-occupation with the 'Irish' psyche sited the work of Mac Intyre, Mason and actor Hickey as Maguire within its Irish context, but their theatrical exploration of the 'Irish psyche' evidenced an emphasis on the male psyche (see section 2.3). Mac Intyre would need a 'wonderful recklessness' to sustain him on his journey from the point of play-writer, provider of a literary text, through the collaborative rehearsal process to-where exactly? Mac Intyre's destination was unknown in 1983, but his original rehearsal script contained many elements of the final staged piece. Christopher Murray wrote that 'the burden will always be upon the experimentalist playwright to justify his departures from convention' (Murray 1988: 56). Mac Intyre was aware of this 'burden' and welcomed it in that it gave him the opportunity to promote this image-driven style of theatre.

Having opened on 9 May 1983, <u>The Great Hunger</u> ran until 4 June. In 1986 it was reworked; changes included the removal of an initial image of Maguire as the poet/farmer, the three good fairies became the other-worldly character Packy and a recorded soundtrack was replaced by noises created by the actors. This revision of the original production then toured to the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annamakerrig Co. Monaghan, (Kavanagh's home county). After touring to the Assembly Rooms at the Edinburgh Festival where it won a Fringe award, it returned to the Peacock for a four week run in October, after which it played the Grand Opera House, Belfast and the Almeida Theatre, London. In 1987 it played the Theatre Royal Waterford before a very well received tour to La Maison des Cultures du Monde in Paris, resulting in a reappraisal of the production in the Irish press. John Finegan of the <u>Evening Herald</u> reported from Paris:

"With the Abbey Theatre, Ireland has invaded Paris," proclaimed the Parisian daily <u>Le Figaro</u> in its banner headline over a long, enthusiastic review by its critic Maron Thebaud of <u>The Great Hunger</u>, staged here last night by the

Abbey company. (...) The Figaro critic describes Tom Hickey's performance in the central role of Paddy Maguire as "astonishing and irresistible" (...) The critic of <u>Le Monde</u>, Odile Quirot, in another long review, called <u>The Great Hunger</u> a play of wonderful movement, filled with illusions. "On the face of Tom Hickey, one could see all the shadows and all the light of an Irish sky" (Finegan Evening Herald 17/9/87: 9).

The Great Hunger was revived again in 1988 for the first Abbey tour to Russia where it played the Moscow Arts Theatre and the Gorky Bolshoi Drama Theatre in Leningrad. It toured to the United States the following month playing Philadelphia and New York.

Early reactions to Mac Intyre's <u>The Great Hunger</u> were guarded and some reviewers believed that the playwright would have been better served by a more rigid adherence to the text, staged in a more conventional way. John Finegan reviewed <u>The Great Hunger</u> for the <u>Evening Herald</u> in 1983, and suggested that the play was 'a free ranging impression by Tom Mac Intyre of Kavanagh's long poem of the same name, one of the great Irish poems of this century'. He continued, 'attention is well held, visually, but missing is the marvellous word pictures embedded in the poem, and missing also is the sense of the souls' loneliness and of wasted lives'. Finegan concluded regretfully that the production was 'more Mac Intyre than Kavanagh' (Finegan <u>Evening Herald</u> 10/5/83).

In this chapter I consider the original poem, 'one of the great Irish poems of this century' (Finegan Evening Herald 10/5/83). I investigate how such a bleak, damning portrayal of Irish rural life came to be recognised as 'a masterpiece of modern Irish literature' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 28) and how this became translated into a performance idiom particular to a postcolonial practice before a postcolonial audience. A reading of the staging of The Mother as an effigy, the 'wooden' body of my title, is followed by an examination of the 'interaction' between the effigy and the live body. Finally this chapter considers the process and how the development of this Irish performance idiom claimed for itself a previously unacknowledged collaborative element during the rehearsal and production of The Great Hunger over a five-year period.

2.2 STAGING A MASTERPIECE

The 1983 production of Tom Mac Intyre's The Great Hunger was a departure from the theatrical practices in Ireland at that time, thereby re-echoing the part played by the original poem on its publication in 1942. Patrick Kavanagh's poem The Great Hunger depicted a brutal alternative to De Valera's countryside 'bright with cosy homesteads'⁶. Kavanagh was writing from within the Irish rural experience, as he was born the eldest son of a small farmer and cobbler near the town of Mucker in County Monaghan. Although he left school at thirteen, his sister Lucy, who attended secondary school, fed his interest in poetry. The poetry of Milton, Pope and Byron were strong influences on him, as can be seen from his early poetry. Kavanagh was also influenced by the Anglo-Irish literature of the Celtic Revival, but he would later condemn the 'so-called Irish literary movement which purported to be frightfully Irish and very of the Celtic soil' as a 'thorough-going English-bred lie' (Peter Kavanagh 1986: 185). Kavanagh came to believe that 'a national literature being based on a convention, not born of the unpredictable individual and his problems, is a vulnerable racket and is protected by fierce, wild men' (Patrick Kavanagh 1967: 266). But Kavanagh would also earn the reputation of being a 'fierce, wild' man as he joined the other Anti-Revivalists such as O'Connor and O'Faolain in their attempts to illuminate the truth of the Irish condition as they saw it. Kavanagh found his own voice in the stuff of his own experience. In 1939 he left the land and moved to Dublin to live with his brother Peter. Kavanagh moved to nurture his role as poet; conversely the distance helped him to form a clearer image of himself as farmer.

Patrick Maguire, the beleaguered small farmer of <u>The Great Hunger</u>, is a lonely, frustrated man, living under the tyranny of the Church, the land, and, perhaps most interestingly, his mother. Kavanagh uses Maguire's mother to explore the combination of circumstances that have left Maguire trapped.

Religion, the fields and the fear of the Lord
And ignorance giving him the coward's blow
He dare not rise to pluck the fantasies
From the fruited Tree of Life. He bowed his head
And saw a wet weed twined about his toe (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 9).

⁶ See section 1.1 on De Valera's vision of Ireland as 'a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads...'.

⁷ See section 1.3.

Kavanagh draws an unsympathetic picture of Maguire's mother, who, with 'a venomous drawl, And a wizened face like moth-eaten leatherette' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 7) had 'praised the man who made the field his bride' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 4). Kavanagh is unequivocal as he lays the blame for Maguire's fate at the Mother's feet:

Maguire was faithful to death:
He stayed with his mother till she died
At the age of ninety-one.
She stayed too long,
Wife and mother in one.
When she died
The knuckle bones were cutting the skin of her son's backside
And he was sixty-five (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 5).

Although in some senses the villain of the piece, Maguire's mother is also the product of Ireland's rural reality. With little or no social standing outside the home, the Mother has, upon widowhood, attained a level of power and autonomy that she is unwilling to relinquish; by defining women's place as being within the home, the newly independent Irish Free State had reduced the realms of potential for women to such an extent that defensive territorialism set in. Maguire's life is shown in The Great Hunger to be stunted by the control of his mother but, by drawing her as embittered and defensive, Kavanagh shows us that the Mother's life too is frustrated and defined by a cruel ideal.

The land that provides Maguire's livelihood offers little comfort. His life is an endless round of drudgery, the presence of fertility in nature joins with the presence of Maguire's mother to emphasize his impotent God-fearing existence:

The cows and horses breed,
And the potato seed
Gives a bud and a root and rots
In the good mother's way with her sons;
The fledged bird is thrown
From the nest—on its own.
But the peasant in his little acres is tied
To a mother's womb by the wind-toughened navel-cord
(Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 22-23).

Maguire is also tied to that which has become synonymous with national identity, the Catholic Church. Although the role of religion in society is portrayed with some humour by Kavanagh 'Maguire knelt beside a pillar where he could spit/Without

being seen' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 8), it provides Maguire with both solace and torment. On encountering a girl in the Yellow Meadow, Maguire 'saw Sin/Written in letters larger than John Bunyan dreamt of./For the strangled impulse there is no redemption./And that girl was gone' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 9).

Maguire's repressed desires found an unheroic outlet in Kavanagh's poem:

But his passion became a plague
For he grew feeble bringing the vague
Women of his mind to lust nearness,
Once a week at least flesh must make an appearance.
So Maguire got tired
Of the no-target gun fired
And returned to his headlands of carrots and cabbage
(Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 6).

As he grew older Maguire 'cried for his own loss one late night on the pillow/And yet thanked the God who had arranged these things' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 18).

Kavanagh's treatment of the land, the Church and the truth of Maguire's Ireland directly challenged the isolated state of the day, which remained resolutely neutral in the face of World War as it attempted to define itself. Kavanagh made a swipe at the rhetoric of his time that sought to idealise the life of the farmer. Kavanagh portrayed such idealists in The Great Hunger through the creation of an unspecified 'other', city-dweller maybe, or Anglo-Irish Celtic-revivalist, who travelled into the countryside to look on and marvel at such a simple life:

The travellers stop their cars to gape over the green bank into his fields:—
There is the source from which all cultures rise,
And all religions,
There is the pool in which the poet dips
And the musician.
Without the peasant base civilisation must die,
Unless the clay is in the mouth the singer's singing is useless (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 22 [original emphasis]).

The suggestion of the car, and particularly the steering-wheel, lends a materiality and material wealth to this unspecified onlooker, which is clearly outside the lived experience of Patrick Maguire. Variously throughout the poem, Kavanagh spoke of the onlooker, or the audience member, enabling the reader to join the poet at a remove from the petty details of Maguire's life. Such a use of the image of theatre seems to be almost an invitation from Kavanagh to stage the poem: 'come with me,

Imagination, into this iron house/and we will watch from the doorway the years run back' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 5). 'Applause, applause,/The curtain falls./Applause, applause' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 23). Kavanagh also equated the reader or potential spectator with the gaping travellers who have put Maguire's life under scrutiny, 'The travellers touch the roots of the grass and feel renewed/When they grasp the steering wheels again' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 23). Having been invited to 'watch the tragedy to the last curtain' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 3) we do not escape censure for having done so.

A farm gate upstage centre, a tabernacle downstage right and a rough wooden effigy of a seated woman downstage left defined the performance space of the Abbey's 1983 production, which was designed by Bronwen Casson. From the beginning, the audience was confronted by the controlling forces on the life of central character Patrick Maguire, namely, the land, the church and his mother. The presence of The Mother on stage as an inanimate object resonated throughout the play. 'She' was an icon in every sense of the word, but the effigy does raise the question of whether a flesh and blood actor playing the part of The Mother would have made a difference to the collaborative process. Perhaps the focus on Maguire and his hunger would have been blurred, distorted; for although the other women-Maguire's embittered sister Mary Anne, the sexually vibrant neighbour Agnes, the innocent Schoolgirl—each offer an insight into the frustrated potential of women in Kavanagh's rural Ireland, the tension between Maguire and The Mother is central. Had an actor physically played The Mother The Great Hunger, written, shaped, and directed from within the male experience, would undoubtedly have been different.

The Church is represented both by a tabernacle and an actor playing The Priest. This Priest is seen at various points throughout the play performing card tricks. This device of The Priest as illusionist neatly underlines his motivations; he does not deal with the real needs and concerns of his congregation but works to suppress and distort them. The Church confronts the exuberance of nature in scene five. The characters brandish branches of greenery as they move about the stage with abandon. Their individual reactions to the greenery give the audience a succinct measure of their attitudes to life. Agnes lies down and strokes her body sensually with her branch; Maguire chooses one of the biggest branches and moves about the

space ecstatically until his sister takes the branch from him and gives him a smaller one instead. As they all dance wildly to the surging music, The Priest enters dressed in his vestments. They all stop abruptly, put aside the fertile greenery and kneel in regimented order before him; all joy suppressed.

The repetitive backbreaking nature of working the land is highlighted in scene two when Maguire and his neighbours Malone and Joe are 'potato-picking'. With the deliberation of dancers each actor moves down the neatly ordered potato drills. Rhythmically delivered lines from the poem, interrupted and overlapping as they gained momentum, are punctuated by the sound of potatoes landing in metal buckets. Scene nine is an energetic representation of ploughing. As Maguire leads the 'horses' Malone and Joe, the three women, with Packy, a young, almost otherworldly character, add to the general mayhem; two of the women flap white cloths to suggest wheeling seagulls. The scene collapses in laughter, but Maguire moves to the gate upstage and kicks it as he repeats savagely 'It's not a bit funny. Not a bit funny...not a bit funny' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 53).

Declan Kiberd wrote of the poem in <u>Inventing Ireland</u> that 'Patrick Maguire fails to become himself because he cares too much for the dictates of mother, church and society' (Kiberd 1995: 478). In Mac Intyre's play we meet a Maguire who is all too aware of this failure as he literally hits out against those controlling forces. Some, who felt that the play's form had proven to be a poor vehicle for a poem of such literary weight, condemned such a physical interpretation of Kavanagh's poem, which grasps all that the medium has to offer. In 1988, the Abbey toured to Russia for the first time with <u>The Great Hunger</u> and <u>The Field</u> by John B. Keane as directed by Ben Barnes. The decision to bring <u>The Great Hunger</u>, which had been well received at the Edinburgh Festival in 1986, was unpopular with many who believed that traditional Abbey fare would be more suitable for The National Theatre's debut in Russia. Indeed, Niall Toibín, who played The Bull McCabe in Barnes' production of <u>The Field</u>, was very direct when expressing his reservations with <u>The Great Hunger</u>: 'I don't think it should be staged. It's not theatre at all; it's a lot of wasted effort' (O'Cleary Irish Times 12/2/88).

Others believed that any success enjoyed by the play was ultimately due to the calibre of the original 'masterpiece':

It is possible that <u>The Great Hunger</u> worked not just because it placed unusual demands on an Irish audience, nor because Mac Intyre recognised the potential dramatic power of the poem (...) but because underneath all of this there was always the genius of Patrick Kavanagh (Moffat 1987: 46).

Kavanagh's 'genius' was revealed in <u>The Great Hunger</u> through his determined undermining of the preoccupations of the day. By translating the poem in such an uncompromising way, Mac Intyre remained true to the iconoclastic nature of Kavanagh's work. In its staging of Kavanagh's poem, the Abbey Theatre production of <u>The Great Hunger</u> stripped the poem down to its most basic elements and, in reworking the poem through performance in 1986, the poem's imagery was honed even more. Maguire's hunger was performed in a small intense space, dominated and defined by the three objects—the gate, the tabernacle and the effigy. The corporeal presences of the actors in this space heightened the emptiness of the imagined environment.

2.3 WOMAN AS OBJECT

Is The Mother effigy in <u>The Great Hunger</u> a passive object? ('Passive: acted upon' (Oxford Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 1990)).

Although bodies are not stable or fixed, but are themselves the site of instability at a number of different levels (biological, psychological, technological) they nonetheless offer opportunities of bodily resistance to cultural shaping' (Charter in Welton 1999: 369).

The Mother effigy, flanked by an enamel bucket and a large black kettle, establishes on stage the domestic hearth, the far from 'cosy' homestead. The presence of The Mother on stage as an inanimate object resonates throughout the play; this decision to 'cast' The Mother as an effigy was made by Mac Intyre at the outset. The wooden effigy, roughly suggesting a seated woman, is deeply scored with vertical furrows in an echo of the furrows on the land and has the semblance of a face but does not have clear facial features and was, therefore, 'de-faced'. This defacement suggests a lack of subjectivity and a lack of accountability. As she is seated, her lap, at right angles to her torso, forms a seat of sorts, and at the base of the effigy, or at her 'feet', is a

⁸ See also section 4.4 on masking and the defaced body.

drawer. Maguire opens the drawer at different points, from which he takes a cloth, a wire brush, and, as described later, a bellows.

In <u>The Great Mother</u>, Erich Neumann creates a link between the act of seating and the act of possession:

In our patriarchal age, the term "to possess" a woman is used for the sexual act in which the man, lying above, believes—for reasons that defy rational understanding—that he has made her his possession. But the term still reveals the primordial, pregenital form of possession, in which the male obtains the earth from the female by being taken on her lap as her son (Neumann 1991: 100).

This connection is supported by the visual comparison between a mother holding a child on her lap and a chair holding the weight of an adult:

The prestige of the throne or chair was also enhanced by its contrast with the squatting or recumbent position usual for early man. A memory of the human form of the maternally receptive chair has been preserved down to our own time in the terms "arms", "legs" and "back" of a chair. That the primordial images of the mother throne, the throne as mother, the "enthroned" child still live in the depths of the modern psyche is shown by one of Henry Moore's sculptures that contains all these elements (Neumann 1991: 100).

The unfeeling object cleverly evoked the unfeeling driven creature of Kavanagh's poem. By reading The Mother as effigy in <u>The Great Hunger</u>, I wish to articulate the space between the liveness of the actor(s) and the inanimate representation of The Mother—the physical presence of performers in relation and in response to the physical presence of the effigy-as-absence.

Jill Dolan, in 'The Discourse of Feminisms' writes:

Performance usually addresses the male spectator as an active subject, and encourages him to identify the male hero in the narrative (...). The same representations tend to objectify women performers and female spectators as passive, invisible, unspoken subjects. The feminist spectator (...) sees in the performance frame representatives of her gender class with whom she might identify—if women are represented at all—acting passively before the spectre of male authority. She sees women as mothers, relegated to supporting roles that enable the more important action of the male protagonist (Dolan in Goodman & De Gay 1998: 289).

Dolan speculates on the implications of representation as structured by male desire and suggests that 'any representation can be seen as essentially pornographic, since the structure of gendered relationships through which it operates is based on granting men subjectivity while denying it to women' (Dolan in Hart & Phelan 1993: 106).

The 'essentially pornographic' denial of female subjectivity can be identified in texts but also in performance, staging decisions and the hierarchies of production. Does the decision to cast The Mother as an effigy reinforce the objectification of women, and the difficulties for female performers to take power within the structures of performance and production, or does it reinforce the marginalization of women in performance? Issues of the staged representation of women are considered by Tracy Davis in Questions of a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History. Davis cites questions posed by Chinoy and Jenkins who call for 'research that considers the visual image/icon on stage as it is shaped by director/performer/designer: what gender values are being reinforced or created by the 'stage picture' alone?' (Davis in McConachie & Postlewait 1989: 64).

Mac Intyre's decision to stage The Mother as a wooden effigy rather than as embodied by an actor raises certain issues: does this choice typify the problem of agency or raise the question of agency? Does it do both? Does it matter that those involved in the production, intent on a portrayal of Maguire and his world, may not have intended to raise the question of female subjectivity in the use of the effigy, if that is in effect what has happened? Phelan writing in <u>The Ontology of Performance</u> observes that:

[p]art of the function of women's absence is to perpetuate and maintain the presence of the male desire as desire—as unsatisfied quest. Since the female body and the female character cannot be "staged" or "seen" with representational mediums without challenging the hegemony of male desire, it can be effective politically and aesthetically to deny representing the female body (imagistically, psychically). The belief, the leap of faith is that the denial will bring about a new form of representation itself (Phelan 1992: 163-4).

Phelan suggests that denying the representation of women may bring about a new order. The effigy denies embodied representation, but it is debatable whether this has brought about new representations of women within Irish theatre. A reading of <u>The Great Hunger</u> needs to consider the context within which the poem was written and that of Irish society forty years later when it was staged. Representations of woman and of mother in Irish society have informed present-day, postcolonial readings and responses. The Mother as effigy in <u>The Great Hunger</u> is an unfixed image invoking

the political Mother Ireland, the Virgin Mary as mother (inanimate icons of idealised womanhood) and the constrained construct of motherhood.

Kavanagh's poem highlights the limitations of these options, Maguire is shown to be incapable of interacting with women, but the women are also trying to exist within very unforgiving parameters. This is highlighted in <u>The Great Hunger</u>, when Maguire and his sister share the stage with their mother. Throughout scenes one and two the effigy of the Mother has been wrapped in a cloth secured by a cord; at the beginning of scene three Maguire, with the help of his sister Mary Anne, unwraps the effigy⁹. In the Peacock production, Hickey as Maguire literally ran around the Mother in circles in scene three struggling to remove a cloth cover from the effigy:

MARY ANNE arrives downstage left carrying a large black kettle and an enamel bucket containing water. She leaves down kettle and bucket and moves to a position upstage and stage right of THE MOTHER. She stares MAGUIRE [sic] who's still downstage right. MAGUIRE responds by crossing to THE MOTHER and making an irritated attempt to loosen the cord which binds the cover about her. MARY ANNE turns her back on him, faces upstage. MAGUIRE moves downstage to occupy himself pouring water from bucket to kettle. The two share another look. MAGUIRE approaches THE MOTHER. A second time. Claws at the cord. Fails to loosen it. MARY ANNE intervenes, sweeps towards him with scissors aloft, snips. Returns to her position, again gives her back to the proceedings.

The cord is now in MAGUIRE'S control. He loosens it all the way by running in circles about THE MOTHER. Cord free, and dumped on the ground. MAGUIRE gives his attention to the cover, frees it—but not without making work for himself. Flings sheet on the ground in turn (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 37-38).

By unveiling The Mother to the audience Maguire can be seen as the agent of his own repression, actively exposing his tormentor, and making her presence felt in his world¹⁰. Such uncovering is also suggestive of an objectification of the female. Despite The Mother's influence on him, she cannot function unless Maguire as character (and Hickey as actor) removes the cover in this 'revealing' moment. The inanimate nature of The Mother as object suggests a disempowerment on the part of the character of The Mother that an actual actor may not have shown. Maguire's circling of the effigy echoes an image in the poem:

¹⁰ See section 2.4 'The Body in Contrast' for more on Maguire's subjugation.

⁹ See <u>Theatre Ireland 3</u> p. 130.

But the peasant in his little acres is tied
To a mother's womb by the wind-toughened navel-cord
Like a goat tethered to the stump of a tree—
He circles around and around wondering why it should be (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 23).

Mary Anne is remarkable in that she is not revealed to the audience and, although physically embodied by an actor on stage, the character is seen in relation to her facilitating Maguire, as above when helping him to remove the cover from The Mother. There is a suggestion of complicity during the scene, Maguire scrubs the effigy as Mary Anne scrubs the kettle with a brisk efficiency punctuated by their rhythmic exchange, more of an incantation than a conversation:

MARY ANNE: Brazil and The Amazon—MAGUIRE: The pig-gelder Nallon—MARY-ANNE: Brazil and The Amazon—MAGUIRE: The pig-gelder Nallon—(Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 38).

However, the repressive nature of their relationship with their mother is staged to a far greater extent in Maguire's case as the following assessment of the staged depiction of Maguire's repressed sexuality illustrates. Mary Anne, described in Kavanagh's poem as having 'One leg in hell and the other in heaven/And between the purgatory of middle-aged virginity—/She prayed for release to heaven or hell' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 16), is not central to the concerns of the production of the play, despite suffering as bleak a fate as her brother: 'His sister grunted in bed/The sound of a sow taking up a new position' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 10). In staging The Mother as inanimate, the opportunity was there to contrast this with an exploration of Mary Anne's fate of 'middle-aged virginity'. Effigy and actor presented both the construction of motherhood as emphasised by The Mother and the lack of freedom and self-realisation in Mary Anne's acceptance of the only alternative offered to her by the Church: 'His sister tightens her legs and her lips and fizzles up/Like the wick of an oil-less lamp' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 24).

Scene three allows one of the few insights into Mary Anne's and Maguire's experiences as shared; otherwise, they are at odds with each other, and Mary Anne is shown as another repressive force on Maguire. Here an exchange between Maguire and Mary Anne ensues, not through spoken language, however, but through an

exchange of sounds that they each create physically—Maguire bangs his feet together, Mary Anne slowly pours water from bucket to kettle. Once Mary Anne has left the stage:

[MAGUIRE] listens. Rises and goes to the drawer. Opens it. Interrupts himself to remove the bag-apron and place it downstage, a prayer-mat of sorts. Returns to the drawer, takes from it a bellows. With the bellows, goes to the bag-apron. Kneels. Tentatively works the bellows, then works it to climax in an image of masturbation. He returns the bellows to the drawer, shuts the drawer (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 39).

The Mother contains the bellows by which Maguire accesses his sexuality (see fig. 2.1), pointing to her repressive and controlling influence. However, as effigy, there is a suggestion of The Mother as a construct of Maguire's own anxieties, a symbol or representation of Maguire's own failure to engage with the flesh of 'the other'.

The drawer in the effigy, here containing the bellows, underlines The Mother as receptacle or as womb. The womb, a mobile organ traditionally and etymologically linked with hysteria in women, has here rendered The Mother immobile and silent, the site of an extreme hysteria:

The bodies of women were qualified, and disqualified, as substances wholly saturated with hysteric sexuality. Wholly *hysterike*, that is, a womb (hystera)—and hysterical, that is, subject to dislocations and shiftings of the womb, for the womb from Hippocratic times was taken to be a mobile organ whose displacements in the space of the female abdomen were taken to be the cause of female, psychoneurological excitability and of disturbances of the sensory, vasomotor, and visceral functions (Lingis in Welton 1999: 296).

Maguire is then in this sense going back to his origins, the womb or receptacle in the hysterically still Mother, in search of an expression of his own sexuality. The staging implies that as long as Maguire goes to his mother's feet, and sites the responsibility for his frustrations there, he will remain stunted.

Judith Butler in <u>Bodies that Matter</u> describes the feminist philosopher's project as having traditionally been one that 'sought to show how the body is figured as feminine, or how women have been associated with materiality (whether inert—always already dead—or fecund—ever-living and procreative)' (Butler 1993: 37). The Mother in <u>The Great Hunger</u> is associated with materiality, but here it is a wooden materiality without life or agency. With The Mother as effigy the audience is presented with that which was inert but ever-present and procreative as implied by the

presence of her children Patrick (Maguire) and Mary Anne. Butler considers Plato's <u>Timaeus</u> in <u>Bodies that Matter</u> to explore such issues as the female as receptacle. Butler questions the mother's identification with a receiving principle which then defines her as one whose function is to receive 'to take, accept, welcome, include and even comprehend' (Butler 1993: 40). Thus the receptacle, as mother, nurse, womb, is fixed. Butler cites Irigaray and Derrida in her materialisation of Plato's receptacle, stressing 'materiality' in her refusal of 'authoritative representation' (Butler 1993: 44). The effigy as a representation of Maguire's mother, with 'a venomous drawl and a wizened face like moth-eaten leatherette' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 7), is outside of the realm of self-representation and, thereby, inside the realm of Butler's 'authoritative representation'. Tina Chanter, in 'Beyond Sex and Gender', argues:

If women are the receptacle, the vessels, the incubators, of male desire—first they house the penis, then the child (at least if things go as the phallic economy dictates)—they also facilitate the representation of the male subjects, whose actions they reflect, and whose identities they consolidate. Women themselves are excluded from the "scene of representation" that they facilitate for men (Chanter in Welton 1999: 366).

The wooden effigy, material but unfeeling, functions as that which limits Maguire's sexuality, but, of course, having been stilled, neither does she have the potential to engage with her own sexuality.

Other moments in <u>The Great Hunger</u> show the effigy as society's construction of motherhood with its accompanying religious and political implications¹¹. Here The Mother is an object but with the implication, albeit contradictory, of individual subjectivity as the object is constructed and moved/placed/stilled by its society. In her setting at the domestic hearth (variously throughout) and her being carried aloft in a fertility procession—before being placed before the altar on the arrival of The Priest ('Spring moment of release' scene five)—spectators see The Mother as a

¹¹ Luke Gibbons writes on the stilling or silencing of women, in relation to <u>Anne Devlin</u>, a film on the historical figure directed by Pat O'Connor: 'It is hardly surprising that, faced with this attenuation of language and its identification with both male and imperial domination, Anne should have recourse to silence, to the mute condition of her own body, as a site of resistance. But at this point the question surely arises: is this retreat into silence, and the unmediated realm of inner, bodily experience, not precisely a reinforcement of the traditional stereotype which decrees that woman exists 'outside' reason and language, representing 'nature' and 'biology' as against the male domain of 'culture' and 'society'? More specifically in an Irish context, does it not lend support to the opposition between language and silence, action and passivity, which, in Marina Warner's view, lies at the basis of the submissive models of women central to both Catholicism and mainstream nationalism in post-Famine Ireland?' (Gibbons 1996: 112-113).

powerless construct of her society. Her objectification, by being highlighted, can be read as questioned here. The Mother is an object defined by the subjectivity of the characters embodied by the actors.

The image of The Mother in procession is a visual reference to religious processions of Marion devotion but is also suggestive of folk tradition. Here a paganism is suggested as the characters enact a spring fertility rite, carrying the effigy of the Mother in a procession reminiscent of both St. Brigid's Day and the May Day or Bealtaine rituals (see section 1.2). The staging of ritual is also present in The Great Hunger in the use of Church ceremony and an implied suppression of exuberance by the representative of the Catholic Church. The spring festival is confronted and controlled by The Priest in a way that suggests the confrontation of paganism and Christianity and the appropriation of rites and festivals by the Church. The ensuing Mass (hilarious in performance) is a biting portrayal of a Catholic ceremony, which plays on and to the experiences of audience members, secure in the presumption of a common frame of reference. 'Prayers' are intoned by the congregation, but the sing-song rhythms are actually lines from the original poem, such as 'Kate, throw another sod on that fire' or 'Curse o'God where's that dog?' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 43-44). Literary purists could read this use of Kavanagh's poem as sacrilege in more ways than one. Gilbert and Tompkins elaborated on the use of such a ritual:

Further complicating an examination of ritual is the fact that while ritual often adopts a theatrical context, its meaning tends to be altered when it is placed consciously within a play: its combination with drama devices which are designed primarily to entertain necessarily changes the ritual. (...) While this does not necessarily deny the sacred quality of the ritual, it does force it to interact with the secular. The resultant coexistence of ritual and drama preserves and disseminates traditional forms and practices. Nevertheless, even when ritual's overlap with drama appears to associate the two very closely, they must be recognised as distinct practices (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 60-61).

Funeral rites are also suggested in scene eighteen of <u>The Great Hunger</u> by the funeral of the Mother as effigy and in the reaction of her son Maguire, as he observes the ritual and timorously 'Kiss(ed) the Corpse' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 65).

'The (Symbolic) Mother will never be the "proper" subject of psychoanalysis and will always be a problematic subject for Western art because as an image who potentially contains the other within one continuous body, she wreaks havoc with the notion of symmetry and reciprocity fundamental to understanding the exchange of gaze operative in both' (Phelan 1993: 30). The role of The Mother as implied nurturer is problematized by her being cast as a wooden effigy. She is incapable of developing in relation to her circumstances, of softening in the face of hardship—both hers and that of her children—as she is here inanimate. There are religious resonances here of icon as mother as in The Virgin Mary:

The representations of the Virgin Mary as Queen Mother, sometimes with the moon or the world and a serpent at her feet, also suggest her correspondence with Mother Church, who nurtures and cares for all who belong to her, her children, and of whom Christ is mystically the bridegroom. In this abstract or allegorical character, Mother Church resembles Mother Ireland, both of whom are dependent upon their children to make them whole and glorious, but who are also the instruments of their children's redemption (Innes 1993: 40-41).

But there are also political and theatrical resonances in The Mother as unflinching, favouring perseverance, as in Brecht's Mother Courage, over a more acceptable maternal nurturing. As observed by Sarah Bryant-Bertail¹²: 'Courage's unnatural, amoral femininity is connected with sexuality, self-gratification, and avarice, the archetypal vices of Eve'.

While the effigy of The Mother in <u>The Great Hunger</u> is denied an active sexuality, there is an element of self-interest in her concern for the hereafter, blind (and 'blinded' in production) to the needs of the here and now. As described in the poem: 'She reached five bony crooks under the tick—/"Five pounds for Masses—won't you say them quick" (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 21).

THE PRIEST now turns entertainer, does a card trick for THE MOTHER. He offers a running commentary of sounds rather than words. Card-trick over, THE PRIEST gives himself to listening, head bowed, to THE MOTHER. A confession moment, could be. Thus positioned, THE PRIEST falls asleep (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 41).

In scenes seventeen and eighteen The Mother is dead and Maguire must approach the corpse. Again the staging of The Mother as an effigy becomes central; how is an inanimate Mother to become a dead Mother, that which was never alive? The act of performance is highlighted, as the effigy of The Mother was again in stark contrast to Hickey as Maguire in the Peacock production.

¹² Bryant-Bertail On the Road: The Picara in the Drama, unpublished presentation 1999: 17.

In scene seventeen The Mother is prepared for burial, an act reminiscent of the waking tradition, and Maguire is brought to her side to mourn her:

Enter two young women wearing black head-carves and black aprons. They march. One carries a towel. The first (...) takes the bucket (downstage left) and sloshes water over the 'corpse'. The second—same brisk idiom—dries off THE MOTHER. Then, together, they drape a white sheet over THE MOTHER and look around for—MAGUIRE. They spot him upstage left, sheltering by the wall. Resolutely, they march to that point, and commandeer him. He resists, shouting in Irish—

MAGUIRE: Ná hạc léi... Na hạc léi...

Nevertheless, they drag him to THE MOTHER, drag him backwards across the space and position him beside the sheeted corpse.

And the two young women exit, in lockstep (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 65).

The two women have an official function as servers in this funerary tradition. The 'immateriality' of The Mother effigy is heightened by her being washed and scrubbed—as a wooden object she hardly needs such ministrations.

In scene eighteen Maguire is left alone with The (dead) Mother:

MAGUIRE standing with his back to the sheeted MOTHER. He stretched out a hand, Touches the sheet, A spasm of fright though him, He rushes away from THE MOTHER and into a fit of pegging stones at the back wall, dodging their ricochet.

That passes. Centre-stage, he takes off his cap. Blesses himself. Moves again towards THE MOTHER. He takes the sheet and drags it away so that the face is exposed. Again he moves back, pauses centre-stage, flings his cap over the gate and away.

He returns to THE MOTHER. He must kiss the corpse. He circles. He moves in. He wavers. He closes. Crying like an animal, he kisses THE MOTHER.

Again he breaks away. Rushes to the gate (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 65).

The Great Hunger has come full circle, the stage imagery had Maguire unveiling the effigy of The Mother in scene three, and here she is once again 'sheeted', shielded from the eyes of an audience that could not affect her by their watching, as she could not perceive that she was watched. As he had unveiled her earlier, Maguire again reveals The Mother; but now he reveals a dead mother that looks the same as the 'live' one revealed earlier. We read that she is dead in his fear of her and his animated kissing of the inanimate 'corpse'.

In 1986 The Great Hunger toured to the Edinburgh Festival. Writing for the Guardian Joyce McMillan credited the production with '(...) expos[ing] both the terrible distortion of ideas about womanhood in such a society and the appalling effect of these distortions on the male half of the equation' (McMillan Guardian 16/8/86). This was not a typical response and was notably perceptive in its identification of the Mother effigy as inactive, iconographic and passive or 'acted upon'.

2.4 THE BODY IN CONTRAST

[W]omen commonly experience themselves as objects or passive recipients of action in patriarchy, whereas men attempt to activate their subjectivity as a way of proving or confirming their masculinity (Jones 1998: 122).

So writes Amelia Jones in the third chapter of Body Art: Performing the Subject. Here she looks at the work of American body artist Vito Acconci to interrogate masculinity, authority and performance. Although Jones is not writing for an Irish context, her work informs my reading of Maguire and the presence of the actor as Maguire in relation to the staging of The Mother as an effigy. The human materiality of Hickey as Maguire contrasts with the wooden materiality of The Mother: live versus 'unlive' materiality. As Hickey was a central figure in the collaborative triumvirate that staged The Great Hunger Maguire's position centre stage, as privileged subject, was unchallenged. The reading of the live body has to be conducted in relation to this process. Maguire had a heightened agency in the development of The Great Hunger because Hickey as collaborator had a level of authority. My reading of The Mother as effigy has questioned the representation of women within 'the phallic economy' (Chanter in Welton 1999: 366), but what of the representation of men? And what of the live body (not only that of Hickey as Maguire) sharing the stage with the effigy?

In scene eight, Maguire poignantly strives to speak to The Mother as he gently wipes her rigid face. The scene ends with Maguire slowly beating the unyielding breast of the effigy, ensuring that the scene encapsulates both Maguire's need of his mother and his frustration with her, having spoken only one word: 'mother'. Here the presence of The Mother as an inanimate object is maximised. In performance,

Hickey as the tangible presence of the actor, suggested the real urgency of Maguire; the effigy as the Mother was unmoved and unflinching in the face of his desperation.

MAGUIRE to the kitchen area. He stands by THE MOTHER. Tries to articulate something. Gives up. Opens the (MOTHER) drawer, takes out a duster, wipes THE MOTHER'S eyes and nose. Tries again to articulate something.

MAGUIRE: Mother... Mother...

He puts the duster away, and, kneeling position, slowly closes the drawer.

[...] MAGUIRE clutches THE MOTHER, leans his head on her shoulder. With his fist he beats her breast, slowly, mechanically, the fist beats on the breast of THE MOTHER (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 52).

Here is a reprise of an earlier image. As seen in scene three the embodied Maguire is subject to emotional and physical frustrations, these are his 'great hungers'. The Mother is unyielding and unfeeling on stage, and represents the lack of love and affection that blights Maguire's life. He does nothing active to combat this, but moves in circles around the space defined by his Mother object, occasionally hitting out against her. His lack of constructive action is highlighted by the fact that he is embodied and thus could move to change his circumstances. In contrast with Maguire The Mother cannot move as she is without animation, agency or authority.

Maguire is staged as being repressed and controlled by his mother. This subjugation on his part evokes the colonised experience. Amelia Jones' writings on gendering masculinity are in specific reference to performance art but are relevant to a reading of the performed representation of the male self as subject and subjected. If masochism in Freudian terms is associated with a feminising desire for subjugation (Jones 1995: 125) on the part of the male subject, what then of the male subject moving away from a colonised past? The self-representation of a male subject in a postcolonial society is an attempt to escape the guilt of having allowed himself to be colonised, a move to (r)emasculate himself. However Jones's argument that 'the masochist's self-induced mutilations serve to reinforce the impenetrability of the heroic male body, its survivability under any violent circumstance' (Jones 1998: 130), problematizes any equating of masochism with the colonised condition. Masochism as an eventual confirmation of male power or transcendent subjectivity is then perhaps an approximation of the condition of postcolonialism. It shows how the postcolonial masculine self negotiates anxieties of feminisation and of guilt by embracing disempowerment in an eventual assertion of power.

Jones cites Deleuze, '[t]he masochistic hero appears to be educated and fashioned by the authoritarian woman whereas basically it is he who forms her [and] prompts the harsh words she addresses to him' (Jones 1998: 130). This suggests that a masochistic Maguire, subject to his authoritarian Mother, has actually formed her himself, (a reading supported by Maguire's unveiling of The Mother in scene three). As an effigy The Mother cannot address Maguire. In relation to the context of the work the construction of Motherhood by an Irish postcolonial society must also be taken into account. By physically opening and closing the drawer, beating her breast, wiping her expressionless face, Maguire is constantly reinforcing her objectivity through performance and in contrast to his own, albeit masochistic, subjectivity.

Maguire's masculinity is defined by the subjectivity of the male actor in contrast to the lack of subjectivity of the 'female' object. Maguire's feminisation is indicated in the original poem in a number of ways: 'Nobody will ever know how much tortured poetry the pulled/weeds on the ridge wrote/Before they withered in the July sun,/Nobody will ever read the wild, sprawling, scrawling mad woman's signature,/the hysteria and the boredom of the enclosed nun of his thought' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1998: 14). In the poem Maguire's anxiety is attributed to the portrayal of his mother as a liar: 'And he is not so sure now if his mother was right/When she praised the man who made a field his bride' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1998: 4), 'And he knows that his own heart is calling his mother a liar' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1998: 5). "Now go to Mass and pray and confess your sins/And you'll have all the luck" his mother said./He listened to the lie that is a woman's screen/Around a conscience when soft thighs are spread' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1998: 11). Kavanagh's unsympathetic Mother was faithfully rendered by the decision to stage her as a wooden effigy, thus ensuring that this Mother could not act in defence of her 'character'.

As described earlier (section 1.1) Merleau-Ponty dismantles the subject/object binary and insists on an accommodation of the lived experience. This phenomenological approach can be applied to the performing body, and the experience of the audience seeing and responding to the performing body. The staging of The Mother as an effigy created a contrast with the bodies of the actors as other characters. The Mother object was given a subjectivity by a number of staging

details, and certain images lent the characters as subjects an occasional object-ivity. Thus, the subject/object binary yields dividends as this representational binary problematizes the opposition of subject and object in performance.

In scene thirteen the voracious sexuality of Agnes is in contrast with the rigidity of the Mother effigy and the repressed Mary Ann. There is no space staged for women between the pole positions of virgin and whore, again a representation of the postcolonial authorized versions of femininity. Encouraged by the other 'young women' Agnes provocatively approaches Malone:

MALONE comes on, idles centre-stage, boot scraping mud off his spade. Enter three YOUNG WOMEN, AGNES the dominant, AGNES seductive and with basket. The three YOUNG WOMEN whirl about the space, laughing, teasing MALONE without restraint (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 57).

As the scene progresses, Agnes and the other women play suggestively with a 'rope made of four black nylons' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 57); it becomes a skipping rope, and, with Malone's spade, a maypole: 'AGNES resumes her frolic with the rope, pulls it playfully up to crotch-level...MALONE trembles....' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 58). All the while Agnes is urging Malone to 'play your ace' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 58). The scene reaches a climax when the women use the rope to tie Malone to Agnes:

AGNES possesses MALONE—almost. The two struggle on the ground. Agnes is intent on removing his britches—and comes close to success.

AGNES: Jump, jump-

MALONE: Mother mercy—no—

AGNES: Jump, jump-

MALONE: Mother—Mother—

MALONE manages to extricate himself, palpitating fright, gathers coat and basket, and rushes off, upstage left. AGNES watches him depart (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 59 [original emphasis]).

Malone too blames his mother for his failure to respond to Agnes, as he runs from the stage calling for either the Virgin Mary as Mother mercy, or his own mother; they are suggested by this simple repetition to be almost one and the same.

There are, however, 'two centres of simultaneous action' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 57), in this scene as Maguire watches Agnes and Malone from the safety of his position on the gate upstage centre (see fig. 2.2). Maguire is distanced from the

corporeal urgency of the exchange between them and yet his watching objectifies them while mirroring the audiences' watching of the scene. The stage directions illustrate the difficulties of committing two centres of simultaneous action to the page:

MAGUIRE, buoyant, races to the gate and bellows his (for the moment) delight in being, in *sitting on a wooden gate*. Over the progress of the AGNES/MALONE action (see below), he will produce a sling and fire imaginary missiles at the sky, lie on his back on the top bar of the gate and become the fish in the sunlit pool, straddle the gate and ride flat out for the winning post—and win, and, finally, flatten himself upside down on the upstage side of the gate, face on view through the lower bars, legs a V sprouting from the top (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1988: 57 [original emphasis signalling a line from the poem]).

By taking up a series of positions on the gate, Maguire points to the relationship between object and function. Maguire also takes on the gate's 'presence' as an object, which allows him the role of voyeur. Anges and Malone do not acknowledge his presence, and Maguire further hides his presence by assuming an atypical position, he therefore does not look like himself. In suspending himself upside down on the gate in what looks like an uncomfortable position the actor also evinces a visceral response from the audience.

Director Mason described some audience members' frustration with this and other seemingly opaque images, and how they were discussed in the after show discussions in the previews of the first production in 1983. He recounted one conversation as he urged an audience member to imaginatively occupy Hickey-as-Maguire's position:

- —"What happens when you go upside-down?"
- -"Blood rushes to your head."
- —"Yes, blood rushes, what else happens to you?"
- —"You see everything upside-down."
- —"Yes, that's absolutely right. And that's a different way of looking at the things. So what's a different way of looking? Revisioning. You are getting the information, you just aren't connecting" (Mason interview: 243).

By finding another way of looking at Maguire the group were finding another way of 'revisioning' performance and inviting their audience to do the same. The gate was not a gate, The Mother was a wooden statue, and the clear positions of subject and object were problematized in a politicised interrogation of representation and

performance. In <u>The Great Hunger</u> the performing body is therefore contrasted to the representational objects on stage and to the non-performing bodies of the audience.

2.5 PERFORMANCE—A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The development of <u>The Great Hunger</u> and other works by the core collaborative group from 1983 to 1988 was the result of a working relationship that dates from the early 1970s. As they continued throughout the 1980s in reworking and touring <u>The Great Hunger</u>, and generating new material, they created an extended and closely observed body of work that provided an example of the advantages of an ongoing working relationship.

We said, "Look we want to go back to <u>The Great Hunger</u>, we feel we've only half-teased it and I think now we've discovered things, and now is the moment to go back." And we did and it was extraordinary how much more the idiom was familiar to us, we were more adept in the idiom and I think also we had learned so much more along the way. And I still look at it as an extraordinary period of personal growth, creative growth, to be able to do that with the company; that company held together for four or five years. And to see it five years on doing a performance of <u>The Great Hunger</u> was just breath-taking (Mason interview: 245).

Mac Intyre's early work played a significant part in the development of the performance idiom of the collaborative group. On 7 August 1972 Eye-Winker, Tom-Tinker was staged at the Peacock Theatre and directed by Lelia Doolan. This was a two-act political play set in Dublin in 'the modern era'. The Old Firm was produced at the Project Arts Centre in September of 1975 and on 10 August 1976, Jack Be Nimble, advertised as 'a new mime play by Tom Mac Intyre', was staged as 'a Peacock Workshop production', directed by Patrick Mason. Another Peacock Workshop production Find The Lady opened on 9 May 1977, which was based on the legend of Salomé and was also directed by Mason, who had initially joined the Abbey as a voice coach in 1972. In 1978 Mac Intyre spent time working in Oberline College, Ohio, and collaborated with students and director Wendy Shankin on Deers Crossing, produced in the spring of that year.

The Calck Hook Dance Theatre developed out of this project and later in 1978 Mac Intyre was awarded a bursary by *An Chomhairle Ealaíon*/ The Arts Council of Ireland, which enabled him to work with Calck Hook in Paris. Mac Intyre's Doobally/Black Way was produced by Calck Hook at Le Ranelagh, Paris, in April

1979 and was received well by critics and audiences. In October <u>Doobally/Black Way</u> travelled to Dublin and was staged at the Edmund Burke Theatre in Trinity College as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. Reactions to the play in Dublin differed greatly from those of the Parisian audience, and on the second night of the play's run, the performance was interrupted as police removed irate members of the audience¹³. This indicates a readiness on the part of Irish audiences to react forcibly in reaction to staged representation in the performance moment. This controversy did not generate a bigger audience for the play; neither did the success experienced by the Irish playwright in Paris endear Dublin audiences to this play. Mac Intyre's experimentation with form and his determination to explore alternative options for Irish theatre were, if anything, reinforced by this experience, as <u>The Great Hunger</u> would prove four years later.

As The Great Hunger toured throughout the mid-1980s, the collaborators continued to produce innovative work for the Peacock stage. The core group members, Mason, Hickey, and Mac Intyre, provided the central impetus for this work, working with various other actors during this period, depending on their availability and, no doubt, suitability. The 1984 production The Bearded Lady, following immediately on the success and controversy of The Great Hunger, was a theatrical exploration of the mind of Jonathan Swift, which used the image of Swift as Gulliver. But unlike his previous engagement with the work of Kavanagh, Mac Intyre now reinterpreted Swift through Swift's own work by depicting him as Gulliver in the land of the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos. The male Houyhnhnms and the female yahoos were effectively portrayed: the rational Houyhnhnms as horses on high platformed hoofs, the Yahoos as monkeys wild and primitive and each group moved accordingly. Vincent O'Neill, who played the Master Houyhnhnm, directed the movement; he also played The Priest in The Great Hunger. Here the group were building on the strengths and the mime training of O'Neill, which had made such a contribution to the representations of the body in The Great Hunger. 'Conal Kearney and Vincent O'Neill had come back from Paris, and had been working with Marcel Marceau, so that they had great physical orientation' (Hickey interview: 237).

¹³ See sections 1.3 and 4.5 for other incidents of audience and/or police reaction to Irish theatre.

Critical reaction favoured the imagery of the piece over the language, but the collaboration as a whole furthered their explorations of the potentials of physical theatre in this vivid production with Tom Hickey as the torn Swift. Rise Up Lovely Sweeney was the third collaborative production of Mac Intyre, Mason, and Hickey, staged in September of 1985. The play was a modern interpretation of the Irish mythical story of Sweeney, who was cursed to live as a bird. The myth has been explored by many including Heaney in Sweeney Astray and Macnas' Buile Shuibhne (1993), but Mac Intyre's Sweeney is politicised, a man on the run in modern Ireland. Again Hickey portrayed a man with a damaged psyche—first Maguire, then Swift and now Sweeney. But the theatricality of the piece showed that Mason, Mac Intyre and Hickey were not simply revisiting old territory but developing their work in an organic and challenging way. The design, again by Casson, created a clinical but disjointed environment where Sweeney realised the ambiguous anxieties of the age in a contemporary, broken Ireland. The 'mad' Sweeney could be in an asylum or a hospital but the healing remains elusive.

Mac Intyre's concern for 'The Hurt Mind', noted by Dermot Healy in the programme for <u>Rise Up Lovely Sweeney</u>, was voiced by Sweeney 'I'm talking of the hurt mind, hurt mind in wait and knowing as the hurt mind knows', and can be recognised as central to Mac Intyre's plays of this period.

We started with <u>The Great Hunger</u> and we went on to <u>The Bearded Lady</u> and then <u>Rise Up Lovely Sweeney</u>, which I still reckon is one of the things I'm proudest of, I thought it was just extraordinary and I think one of the best things Mac Intyre has ever done. It was an astonishing experience and an astonishing show, deeply unpopular! But astonishing! And there are people who will still tell you that, "that was the one." But it was after that we all decided the same thing, we all said, "we've got to go back to <u>The Great Hunger</u>" because we'd missed so much. It took really over three years, those three initial outings for us to really cop on, to develop a language, to develop an approach and to really cop on to what it was we were doing and it was then that we went back to <u>The Great Hunger</u> (Mason interview: 245).

Dance for Your Daddy premiered on 2 March 1987. In <u>The Great Hunger</u>, Maguire's relationship with his mother was central, but here the playwright examined the relationship between a father and daughter. Hickey played Daddy/Elderly Roué with Joan Sheehy as Daughter/Dark Daughter—the split or damaged psyche, 'The Hurt Mind', was centre stage once more. Snatches of dialogue in Irish, French and

English were matched by the use of other stage languages in a way that had become synonymous with the direction of Mason and the nature of the group's rehearsal process. Other performances included Vincent O'Neill as Homme Fatal/Dirty Old Man and Bríd ní Neachtain as Wife/Liz Taylor. In <u>Dance for your Daddy</u> father and daughter are seen to struggle to redefine their relationship by using the mechanisms of this relationship. The father-daughter relationship worked with others in the text to highlight the role of gender in society and the role-playing of the individual within that society.

On Monday 27 June 1988, the final play of the collaboration was staged. Snow White by Mac Intyre was directed by Mason, with Hickey as the seventh dwarf, Joan Sheehy as Rose Red and Michele Forbes as Snow White. Change was signalled by the absence of other actors who had performed in earlier plays and the design in this instance was by Monica Frawley (who also designed the Druid production of At the Black Pig's Dyke¹⁴). Here the relationship of mother and daughter was central, and, unlike in The Great Hunger, the mother was performed by actor Olwen Foueré¹⁵. However, the staging of The Mother in The Great Hunger was echoed by the presence of a dressmaker's female dummy and Snow White's interaction with it, illustrating her perceived lack of demonstrative physical affection. Mac Intyre used the Grimm's fairy tale as his point of departure, told by the Seventh Dwarf (Hickey) in the prologue, but from here the playwright brought his audience on a journey of recrimination and loss. By using a multitude of references and images, Mac Intyre examined another injury to the Hurt Mind as, in the words of Dermot Healy who also wrote the programme notes of Dance For Your Daddy, 'Mac Intyre, always on the look out for a new way home, has other, more subversive routes at hand'.

As I suggested in the introduction, this work over a five-year period begs the question—does an image-driven staging of text necessitate an ensemble process? When interviewed, Hickey noted how the actors' experience of performing the play was incorporated into subsequent productions. One of the changes made to <u>The Great Hunger</u> between the 1983 and 1986 productions, mentioned earlier, was the loss of a soundtrack in favour of sounds, animal and otherwise, being created by the actors.

¹⁴ See chapter 4.

Hickey commented that 'they were like the beasts in the field, they were so close to the earth, growing up out of the ground. That was another development, whereas the noise was done before on tape, why shouldn't it come out of the mouth?' (Hickey interview: 234-35).

This collaborative process also claimed the space for audiences to respond, as there were after-show discussions during the previews of the first run. Also, by incorporating changes as the need arose, between 1983 and 1986 especially, the performers could shape and distil the material in response to the experience of performance. Again Hickey made a number of pertinent points on this issue: 'it is important to say that as we went on, as we could see what was working, (and it would still be so if we were doing it), that quite good scenes would probably have gone out the door!' (Hickey interview: 237).

In 'Textuality and Authority in Theater and Drama: Some Contemporary Possibilities' John Rouse questions the possibility of spectator space within the process, which in turn raises the question of the space for the performer within the process:

It is one thing to sustain in theory a space for the spectator between the dramatic and performance texts, but directorial practice regularly invades this space, from which it author-itatively recloses the text, performance and performed, into the directorial work (Rouse in Reinelt & Roach 1992: 148).

Later, as Artistic Director of the Abbey, Mason would emphasize the centrality of the word: 'the writer and the play come first; and the play comes before any individual—writer, player, director, designer or stagehand. The [National Theatre] Society is, has been, and must remain a writer's theatre, even if it now values the theatric more than the literary' (Mason 1994: 12). He qualified this with a reference to ensemble work 'And it must remain what it was from the first, a company theatre whose productions are noted for their close ensemble work' (Mason 1994: 12). However, this seems at odds with a repeated emphasis on writing: 'at a time of widespread disregard for the word and the writer in theatre, the historic role of the National Theatre Society as a protector and promoter of both is of enormous significance' (Mason 1994: 13-14). Mason's statements are taken from 'A High

¹⁵ Fouéré's work with Mac Intyre and the group was informed by her work with Operating Theatre (see 1.3) and contributed to her participation in further broadening of the boundaries of theatrical

Ambition', the opening section of <u>Application to the Arts Council for a Grant-in-Aid to the National Theatre Society Ltd. for year ending 31st December 1994</u>. In 1994 Mason believed that the Abbey was working in opposition to an atmosphere of 'disregard for the word and the writer in theatre'.

As artistic director his was the task of reinvigorating the work and indeed the remit of the National Theatre Society, to secure the funding and the position of the Abbey and Peacock at a time of birth and rebirth in the regional and commercial sectors. Mason held fast to the ambitions of Abbey founders, which resulted in the privileging of the word. This was an ironic development in the career of the director who was so central to the success of The Great Hunger in the 1980s and its experimentation with form, not only with the word but also with the bodies, the rituals and the presences of the actors and audiences.

In relation to the players Mason continues: 'Dealing sensitively, imaginatively, and musically with text is a prerequisite for any member of the Company' (Mason 1994: 12). Actors are thereby defined through their relationship with the text, an ironic turn to Mason's work, given that he had, through his involvement with The Great Hunger, contributed so much to freeing the actor from an over-reliance on the word in the 1980s. In interview Mason spoke about theatrical process at a remove from The Great Hunger, but was obviously affected by what that work had tried to achieve:

Now a hard fact of theatre is that there is the kind of hierarchical understanding of talent like a director, playwright, and all the rest of it and there is a certain type of theatre, a maybe redundant type of theatre, where that hierarchy is operating still and therefore you get the splits between writer's theatre, director's theatre, designer's theatre, actor's theatre (Mason interview: 241).

Despite these sentiments, however, once in the pole power position in the National Theatre the authority of that position was wielded by Mason to return the authority of process to the playwright. The collaborative gestures of The Great Hunger's process did not make it to Abbey management level, but did inform subsequent stagings of the body in a sector that was becoming increasingly aware of the need to foreground the body, and was developing the skills to do so.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SAXON SHORE: PERFORMANCE—AN ACTING PROBLEM?

'Acting is like sex, you can't go into it feeling worried about the mole on your bum, do you know what I mean? Sex is about a particular sort of encounter between two particular sorts of propositions, which are usually human bodies. And if body is a problem in any kind of way then, why are you here? It's the same on the space. And I do believe that it goes down lower than the Adam's apple, which is not where every writer writes and not where every actor likes to act' (Rudkin interview: 265-66).



Fig 3.1 Joely Ricardson as Ceiriad and Robert Eddison as Llyr (replaced by Ian McDiarmid for the run) Almeida production of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> 1986.

3.1 CONTEXT OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION

In 1983, unlikely though it seems for a national institution, the Abbey was challenging perceived notions of performance with its production of <u>The Great Hunger</u>. That same year, a young company in Northern Ireland looked set to do the same with the planned production of <u>Athdark and the Flood</u> (later <u>The Saxon Shore</u>¹), a potentially explosive new play from David Rudkin. Field Day Theatre Company² was founded by actor Stephen Rea and playwright Brian Friel in Derry in 1980, and, in its first three years, secured a reputation for strong, if cerebral, work. A wide touring schedule north and south of the border added to the contribution of this essentially regional company. In the course of the 1980s, Field Day Theatre Company secured a familiarity with theatre in the most unlikely venues across the island.

<u>Translations</u>, Field Day's premiere production, was a new play by Brian Friel built around issues of naming and identity. Friel was exploring the formation of his political surroundings, but, in this instance, he was working from a distance of 150 years or so. Friel set <u>Translations</u> in a Donegal hedge school in 1833 in the fictional town of *Baile Beag* or Ballybeg, where a British army remit of renaming the local towns and villages for the first Ordnance Survey becomes a question of great cultural significance—progress or conquest? In 1981, Field Day produced Friel's version of Chekhov's <u>Three Sisters</u>, followed by <u>The Communication Cord</u> in 1982, also by Friel. Richard Pine in <u>Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama</u> considered Friel's relationship with this new company:

Friel, much earlier than 1980, acknowledged that 'I have never seen myself writing for any particular theatre group, or any particular actor or director,' but he would undoubtedly disown this now, since it is an underlying assumption that Field Day Theatre Company will give the premieres of his plays and that he will be involved in their production. It is therefore pertinent to consider Field Day an extension of Friel's interests (Pine 1990: 192)³.

¹ The script submitted to Field Day was originally titled <u>Athdark and the Flood</u>, but was staged as <u>The Saxon Shore</u> at the Almeida Theatre, London (1986).

² Eric Binnie offers a definition of Field Day in Modern Irish Drama: 'a day spent away from normal activities, a day spent outdoors, a sports day, a festival, a brawl, and, for example, in popular usage, as 'the critics had a field day,' it suggests a chance to assert oneself to the fullest and most triumphant or pleasurable extent' (Binnie in Harrington 1991: 564).

³ For a close examination of Friel's drama see Richard Pine's <u>Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama</u> (1990). In this publication references to Rudkin, <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, and Field Day's failure to produce the play are notable by their absence.

By 1982, Field Day members were worried that the company was perceived in some quarters as a Nationalist construct⁴, and they determined to engage with the Unionist tradition of Northern Ireland. Marilyn Richtarik's <u>Acting Between the Lines⁵</u> is a close study of the first four years of Field Day's history and places its work in a political and cultural context. She quotes Friel:

'I would say that all six of us [members of the board of directors⁶] are not at home in Northern Ireland and indeed all six would probably not be at home in the 26 counties. We appropriated (from Richard Kearney) the phrase 'Fifth Province' which may well be a province of the mind through which we hope to devise another way of looking at Ireland, or another possible Ireland and this really is the pursuit of the company' (Richtarik 1994: 245).

Friel described Field Day in specific terms as 'a forum where a more generous and noble notion of Irishness than the narrow inherited one can be discussed'. This dates from 'Field Day's New Double Bill', published in the <u>Irish Times</u> 18 September 1984 in which Friel voices a 'noble' ambition; one belied by the events of 1982-1983 when Field Day had actively sought, through playwright David Rudkin, 'another way of looking at Ireland' (Quilligan: <u>Irish Times</u> 18/9/84).

Friel approached Rudkin, of English and Northern-Irish parentage with a Unionist background, and commissioned what became <u>The Saxon Shore</u>. In the second issue of <u>Theatre Ireland</u> (Spring 1983), Michael Vernon wrote on the possibility of a new Rudkin play being the next Field Day production. He wrote of Rudkin:

His work bears the stamp of uncompromising individuality, and his dramatic signature is instantly recognisable. He can be difficult; sometimes his amalgam of the mystical, the futuristic and the arcane is so at odds with the naturalistic world of much popular contemporary drama that audiences literally fail to "see" and "hear" what he is saying (Vernon 1983: 59).

In the script submitted to Field Day, and in the slightly amended final script, Rudkin did use a 'difficult' image—'an amalgam of the mystical and the arcane'. Rudkin came to grips with the challenging nature of the dark side of Unionism by

⁵ 'Things Done and left Undone: The Fourth Field Day Tour' in Marilyn Richtarik's <u>Acting Between the Lines</u> details Field Day's decision to commission <u>The Saxon Shore</u> and the company's subsequent production of Athol Fugard's <u>Boesman and Lena</u> instead, which opened on 20 September 1983.

⁴ My use of terms Nationalist, Unionist, Loyalist and Republican needs to be considered in context, especially in relation to the terms Catholic and Protestant. Richtarik writes on this problem in <u>Acting Between the Lines</u> (1994) p. 202.

depicting his 'loyal' Saxons as werewolves, planted in Britain by Rome, slaughtering native Britons or Celts in defence of a crumbling Roman empire in A.D. 401. In response. Field Day paid Rudkin and returned the copyright to him. determination to have his play, written for Northern Ireland, produced there prompted Rudkin to offer it to the management of the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, who also decided against producing it. The Saxon Shore was eventually produced at the Almeida Theatre, London, in February 1986 and directed by Pierre Audi (detailed in 3.5). In interview, Rudkin speculated on Field Day's familiarity with his politics and with his work: 'I was well known as a Protestant, if I may use that really simplistic term, in the sense that I had already written a huge piece about Roger Casement, a radio piece, which was quite well known in Ireland⁷ (Rudkin interview: 261). But Rudkin's political position is not quite as clear-cut as his background would suggest: 'it is fairly well known that I am an Irish Nationalist in the sense that I believe that there is an Ireland. (...) We have glimpsed it in the past, and we shall glimpse it again, but it has to be a plural Ireland, and that's sexually plural and culturally plural. And, as I see it, that's the only way forward' (Rudkin interview: 264).

Rudkin was not only a politically challenging choice of playwright; the theatrical challenges presented by his work to date suggest that, in choosing him, Field Day was presenting itself with an exciting opportunity. Here was the chance to engage with issues of political diversity and commentary, while also engaging with theatrical form by staging the complexities of identity outside, or alongside, language. However, Rudkin identified a lack of awareness on Field Day's part: 'On reflection, I'm not sure that the homework had been all that thoroughly done. (...) my position was well known, but my work was not. So I think that there may have been a lack of proper clarity about what they were in for (...) it may be that they weren't too well equipped to foresee the kind of address that I would bring to bear on the opportunity' (Rudkin interview: 261).

In 'Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* and Rudkin's *The Saxon Shore*', Maureen S. G. Hawkins argues that Rudkin was 'writing for a Northern Irish Loyalist

⁶ Brian Friel, Stephen Rea, Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin and David Hammond.

⁷ 'There isn't a very strong performance tradition in existence, apart from <u>Ashes</u>, of any of the other pieces, neither <u>Afore Night Come</u> nor <u>The Sons of Light</u>. <u>The Triumph of Death</u> is not known at all. So there wasn't the evidence visible' (Rudkin interview: 261).

audience' (Hawkins in Harrington & Mitchell 1999: 157), but this is a narrow interpretation of both Field Day audiences and Rudkin's intentions. Here Hawkins conflates the period of the play's rejection by Field Day in 1983 with that of its production and publication in 1986: '[Rudkin] is casting his argument in the context of their anxieties following the previous year's Hillsborough Agreement (1985)' (Hawkins in Harrington & Mitchell 1999: 164). Thus, pastor Agricola's parable to his Saxon congregation suggests, according to Hawkins, 'a distrust of Rome analogous to the growing Northern Irish Loyalist distrust of England in the wake of the Hillsborough Agreement' (Hawkins in Harrington & Mitchell 1999: 164). But The Saxon Shore text predates 1985 and, while it is true that audiences did not see The Saxon Shore until after the Hillsborough Agreement, by then the Northern Irish element of the play was being suppressed for its London production.

Rudkin used the werewolf image in <u>The Saxon Shore</u> to issue a performance challenge to Irish actors. He perceived 'a melodramatic naturalism' in Irish theatre, and a 'desperate weakness in the acting tradition' (Rudkin interview: 258). The playwright attributed this directly to the postcolonial condition: 'It was extraordinary; it was one of the strangest legacies of colonialism I had ever come across. And I thought, "This is something I want to address myself to" (Rudkin interview: 258-59). While addressing a perceived weakness in the Irish acting tradition, Rudkin also wanted to address issues of Irish identity: 'I felt that I actually had, arrogantly perhaps, something useful to contribute to the debate at that time in the country. I felt that certain things were being lost sight of that were essential. So yes, I saw it as an opportunity to be part of Ireland's agonising search for a viable identity, for the future, because there's future in the past' (Rudkin interview: 280). Although he had not directly confronted Irish theatre practice to date, his experimentation being within English theatre, Rudkin had addressed the question of an Irish identity, an Irish 'authenticity', in his previous work.

Afore Night Come⁸ was staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Arts Theatre, London, in 1962. The action is set in a commercial pear orchard in the British midlands where seasonal workers turn against Roche, an Irish vagrant who comes to work with them. Roche voices the fear and loathing directed at him by the

⁸ Rudkin won <u>The Evening Standard</u> 'most promising playwright' award (1962) for <u>Afore Night Come</u>.

midland labourers 'You English have always persecuted us. You English have always deliberately misunderstood us. The Saxon mind detests the poetry of the Gaelic soul' (Rudkin 1963: 84). Here was a precursor of the Saxon/Celt opposition developed later in The Saxon Shore. Roche, like Ceiriad in The Saxon Shore, was killed by the British (or Saxons) for being 'other'. The killing in Afore Night Come was ritualistic, fitted within a heightened realism; Rudkin would later move into a more theatrical vein to explore this troubled territory.

In interview, Rudkin drew a comparison between <u>Cries from Casement as his</u> <u>Bones are Brought to Dublin</u> and <u>The Saxon Shore</u>: 'there may have been a thought that I might come up with a representational, historically recognisable paradigm, which would, from the Protestant standpoint, seek to reawaken the Protestant communities to their ancient roots in Irish separatism, which are there. It would have been a very direct polemical argument that I had already done in the Casement piece to some extent, although I'd also skinned a few other cats as well' (Rudkin interview: 264-65).

Cries from Casement as his Bones are Brought to Dublin was originally a radio piece produced by the BBC and broadcast on 4 February 1973. It was staged later that year by the Royal Shakespeare Company, as directed by Terry Hands. This monumental piece would place considerable performance demands on the actor cast as Casement. Hands resolved this by splitting the role among a number of actors but Rudkin felt that 'this distribution of Casement's personae between several actors, for all its attractiveness, has the effect of diluting the character's complex force; and I do not recommend it' (Rudkin 1974b: 83).

With Casement, a homosexual Protestant Irish patriot, Rudkin saw the opportunity to question the monolithic notion of the Irish male as a heterosexual green Nationalist, kneeling, with doomed patriotic fervour, at the feet of Mother Ireland; or as an, again heterosexual, orange Loyalist desperately gripping the fraying ties to the Crown. At the end of the play, Casement urges a young patriot to move outside the prejudices that drive him and reject what he suggests to be a cruel Mother Ireland:

One colour fears another, fears its extremeness. But colours mix. First they must meet. Ireland, Ireland, transcend this trauma. Sons of Ireland, cease looking for your sunrise in the west (Rudkin 1974b: 78).

Here Rudkin's call to the people of Ireland, north and south, is unequivocal:

Tear this old bitch Erin off your backs. She'll squeal and claw off skin and flesh from your bones, but rip her off, be free of her; tramp her down where she belongs, beneath your feet, to be the land you live from, not your incubus and your curse (Rudkin 1974b: 78).

Rudkin would issue a similar call with The Saxon Shore almost ten years later.

Ashes was staged at the Open Space, London, on 9 January 1974⁹. Colin, a Northern Irish Protestant, and his English wife, Anne, are trying to conceive a child, a product of their mixed heritage. Although alluded to throughout, the issue of Colin's Protestant identity as an endangered identity is not raised directly until it becomes apparent that no child will be conceived. Colin returns to Belfast from England to bury his Uncle Tommy who has been killed in a sectarian bomb attack:

COLIN: If an undertribe can commit themselves to such atrocity, there must be some terrible misery they are trying to communicate. (...) Sure, we've known all along our old ways had to go. Sometime. The reckoning come. Some time. (...) Our inheritance *is* glorious: but all that has to be behind us now. Shed. I just—I just think we just have to—try to see, what new selves we can rise up out of this, and become (Rudkin 1974a: 47-48 [original emphasis]).

Here too Rudkin argues for change within the Unionist community, 'if we do not change, tomorrow has no place for us' (Rudkin 1974a: 48). In the characterization of Colin, Rudkin is questioning the future of Unionism. He voices the anxiety of a planted community in its resistance to an assimilation with the native population.

In Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said considers the legacy of imperialism:

Everything about human history is rooted in the earth, which has meant that we must think about habitation, but it has also meant that people have planned to have more territory and therefore must do something about its indigenous residents. At some basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others. For all kinds of reasons it attracts some people and often involves untold misery for others (Said 1993: 5).

Said's definition of imperialism operates, as he admits, on a basic level, but it does serve as a useful starting point. Colonialism is the exercise of imperialism and establishes a strange dynamic between the colonised, the coloniser and the agents of

⁹ <u>Ashes</u> was first produced in a German translation at the Hamburg Stadtstheater Malersaal, Germany (1973).

colonisation. Colonial resistance has often resulted in a newly independent state, the apparatus of which owes much to the departed coloniser. Said writes 'given the discrepancy between European colonial power and that of the colonized societies, there was a kind of historical necessity by which colonial pressure created anticolonial resistance.' He continues '[w]hat concerns me is the way in which, generations later, the conflict continues in an impoverished and for that reason, all the more dangerous form' (Said 1993: 45). This is perhaps the consequence of a relationship between the colonised and the agents of that colonisation occupying territory together, but not necessarily sharing it.

In writing on Ulster for an Ulster audience in the early 1980s, Rudkin was set to follow in the footsteps of other Irish playwrights, such as Sam Thompson, John Boyd, Christina Reid and Graham Reid, and of course, Brian Friel. A number of these earlier plays created precedents for Rudkin's writing of the Unionist experience in conflict with its Nationalist other. In 1957, Sam Thompson approached the Ulster Group Theatre with Over The Bridge¹⁰, his first full-length script for the stage, which deals with prejudice against Catholic workers among the predominantly Protestant workforce of the Harland and Woolf shipyard. The play was accepted; however, the playwright was then asked to amend the script. On his refusal, the play was withdrawn¹¹. Ulster Bridge Productions, a company formed by the playwright and actors from the Group Theatre, eventually produced the play at Belfast's Empire Theatre in 1960.

John Boyd's <u>The Flats</u> (1971) proves a vivid insight into the lives of an ordinary family living in a place where violence has become commonplace. In <u>The Death of Humpty Dumpty</u> (1979) and <u>The Closed Door</u> (1980) by Graham Reid, the audience is given an uncompromising access into the dark world of Belfast's sectarian gangs. Friel's <u>Freedom of the City</u> (1973) and <u>Translations</u> (1980) as

¹⁰ The central character, Peter O'Boyle, tries to assert his right to work in a hostile environment: '...I'm standing by my rights and I refuse to be chased out of my employment because I'm a Catholic ...I'm not goin' to be forced out of here to crawl back again when it suits the whim of a mob' (Thompson in Deane 1991: 372).

¹¹ Sam Hanna Bell recounts this incident in <u>The Theatre in Ulster</u> (1972) and goes on to quote the theatre management's justification for the move: 'they were determined not to mount any play which would offend or affront the religious or political beliefs or sensibilities of the man in the street of any denomination or class in the community and which would give rise to sectarian or political controversy of an extreme nature. This pronouncement, a "staggering repudiation of drama as a serious art form" as Stewart Parker puts it, hastened the disintegration of the UGT (Ulster Group Theatre)' (Bell 1972: 92).

mentioned earlier, were both written in response to the search for Northern Irish identity. A perceived dearth of Irish women playwrights has been addressed to an extent, in Northern Ireland, by the work of Christina Reid, Anne Devlin and Marie Jones. Particularly relevant to Rudkin's portrayal of Unionism is Christina Reid's Tea in a China Cup (1982), which looks at the experience of Protestant working-class women by employing flashbacks and references to the recent historical priorities of the Protestant community.

Rudkin planned to contribute to a Northern Irish theatre tradition which had explored the Northern Irish Unionist identity and its others. He evoked the planted history of the Unionist community analogously by setting The Saxon Shore at Hadrian's Wall during the withdrawal of the Romans from Britain in the fifth century AD. There are no references to Northern Ireland in the text, or any direct equivalents that would point to the analogy. However, priestess Ceiriad describes her native territory north of the Wall as 'The Grove of Oak Trees', pronounced 'Der-ou-oi' (Rudkin 1986: 25), a translation and pronunciation of *Doire* which is the Gaelic word for oak wood and for Derry, Northern Ireland, home of Field Day Theatre Company¹². The Saxons, planted in Britain by the Romans to secure the territory, are then left to their fate, with the ever-threatening presence of the old Britons, or Celts, at the other side of the Wall. In an historical note printed in Methuen's 1986 publication of the play, Rudkin explained, in quite emotive terms, the fate of the 'abandoned' Saxons in Roman Britain:

So, whatever the later "Saxons" did (...) to deserve the bad press the early Celtic literature gives them (and "Saxon" remains to this day the basic Celtic word for an "Englishman"), the likelihood almost certainly is that the very first "Saxons" to come [to Britain] were brought by Rome and planted (here): uprooted from their own lands, brought in misery and bondage to a neighbouring island to serve the Empire's cause; then, when Empire's need of them was done, abandoned against the aftermath (Rudkin 1986: vii).

The playwright's own background was an unspoken reference when he described the Saxon identity as 'synthetic': 'It just seemed to be right in so many ways, as a metaphor for transplantation, for being uprooted, for growing up, being brought up, with a synthetic identity. They believe "we're loyal citizens of the Roman

empire", when Rome is collapsing, Rome was ceasing to exist. Which is not a million miles away from the Unionist predicament really (Rudkin interview: 263). Rudkin's analogy can be confusing; his British are the native Celts supplanted by the Saxons, the Saxons have been imposed on the landscape by the imperialist Romans. Rudkin's 'oppressed' are the British; his colonisers are the Romans, and the Saxons are the agents of colonisation who are about to be left to their fate by the empire:

the parallels are fairly forceful. But what was beautiful about them was that the terminology and the landmarks were all 'arse-about-face'. The Roman allegiance is what the Saxon, the Unionists of that time, feel. So Rome is the great centre, the geo-centre for them and that's where their allegiance is and Latin is the language they want to learn. And the Brits are actually the Celts. So that the familiar name-calling was turned inside out, and this is a matter of historical fact. But I must confess that I did rather relish that (Rudkin interview: 263-64).

The Saxons of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> augment the Roman forces by manning Hadrian's Wall and are constantly on the alert for signs of native attack. However, given Rudkin's forms of theatrical representation and his position as a Nationalist, despite his Unionist background, his portrayal of Ulster's Unionist community was always going to be difficult for Field Day audiences to accept.

The fate of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> is suggestive of Herr's identification of the loss of representation(s) of the body (as considered in the first chapter): 'the body has frequently been associated representationally with danger and has been scrutinized with an intensity that stills'(Herr 1990: 6) ¹³. Rudkin's representation of the Unionist body as werewolf was quite obviously 'stilled', in that Field Day did not produce it; Rudkin's performing bodies were unseen, absent from the Irish stage. Herr called for a different reading of the body seven years after Rudkin had offered precisely that to the Field Day management:

Surely a different reading of Irish bodies and Irish social pattern must be generated if we are to understand the continued power of traditional images, myths, and gestures. This alternative reading would attend to the degree to which the represented body has become an anti-fetish in Ireland, a turnoff (Herr 1990: 33).

¹² Derry as a settlement dates from 546 when 'St Colmcille, or Columba, founded a monastery at a place called Doire Calgaich, or "Calgach's oak-wood", close to the River Foyle' (Rushe in Harrington 1991: 554).

¹³ See section 1.1.

In <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, Rudkin presents issues of identity to be explored in the performance moment itself. The exploration thus depends on the skill of the actors and director, and their commitment to this difficult image of werewolf. <u>The Saxon Shore's</u> form and content encapsulates issues of postcolonialism and performance. Postcolonialism in relation to form poses the question: how prepared are Irish audiences and practitioners to deal with the image of the wolf, now as much as in 1983? Postcolonialism in relation to content poses a related question: are we yet prepared to accept the uncompromising politics of Rudkin's play? Unionism is identified here with a savagery created and supported by the establishment. Such savagery, usually reserved for depictions of the colonised, is here embodied by the Saxons in defence of and at the behest of Saxon authority:

AGRICOLA: High in these cold windscourged hills of Northern Britain have we our garden. East, the length of that bleak shore. North, beneath this mighty Roman Wall, the northern limit of the world. West, to Solway and the sea. Our heritage. THEY, that were here before us, had done nothing. THEY had not broken this hard high land. THEY had not tilled nor sown, nor wrought, nor husbanded, as we. Yet THEY, in their slums and hovels of Turfimires, Pigsty Valley and Crooked Glen, look out like Ahab upon our garden we have made, and smoulder in their hearts (Rudkin 1986: 6).

Pastor Agricola urges his flock to be steadfast in the defence of Rome: 'Be glad. We have a goodly garden. And it is not ours to give.' He ends his sermon with '[t]he worm at Rome's heart shall die; Rome stand again; and all be restored' (Rudkin 1986: 7). This high rhetoric is reworked later by the werewolf leader Cambyses as he compels the Saxons to transform to wolves and attack the city of the native Britons, not only in defence of Rome, but of God: 'We are the shapes of His Wrath. And Wrath must work. Those in that city are not of God's Pattern' (Rudkin 1986: 39). The Saxons voice their certainty that they are the sole agents of divine will, 'For us alone His Ark stands ready' (Rudkin 1986: 39).

Rudkin's language echoes the present-day practice of implicating God in the exercise of loyalty to the empire. The Saxon Shore was written within the context of Northern Ireland and was intended for a Northern Irish company with a predominantly Irish audience base. The importance of this factor in the play's subject matter and production history cannot be underestimated.

In his 1996 publication <u>Performance: A Critical Introduction</u>, Marvin Carlson examines anthropological and ethnographic approaches to performance and charts the development of 'a contextual approach to folklore research'. Carlson sees such a contextual approach, as identified by Richard M. Dorson, as important in terms of performance because '[t]he emphasis of such an approach shifts from the text to its function as a performative and communicative act in a particular cultural situation' (Carslon 1996: 16). The cultural context of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, when combined with the political implications of Rudkin's violent imagery, is relevant to Field Day's failure to produce the play. Which worried the Field Day management more—what the play said about Unionism or, given the company's touring schedule, where it would have said it?

A contextual approach can also be considered in terms of the play's performance languages—was the projected audience considered ill-equipped to cope with Rudkin's choice of the wolf image—all very well in theory but not in context? Richtarik sought answers to such questions in Acting Between the Lines. Proffered answers varied from actor and Field Day founding member Stephen Rea's 'the play didn't really dramatically work, although there was wonderful writing in it' (Richtarik 1994: 201 [my emphasis]), to Field Day board member David Hammond's 'David Rudkin's northern Protestants were not the people I knew' (Richtarik 1994: 200). Another response, that of Field Day Theatre Company director Tom Paulin, was almost anecdotal, but alluded to the performative challenges involved, 'I just didn't fancy the idea of putting werewolves on stage in Magherafelt' (Richtarik 1994: 201).

When asked to comment on Field Day's failure to produce <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, Rudkin responded: 'I think he [Friel] was a bit cowardly. They were perhaps underestimating their audiences' (Rudkin interview: 264). The fate of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> at the hands of Northern Ireland's theatre managements calls to mind the views of John Wilson Foster, an academic from the northern Unionist tradition:

When partition occurred and the North and South of Ireland were locked into their respective mind-sets, Ulster did not need thinkers or apologists; it was on automatic pilot, fixed by grey and visionless men. Unionism as an intellectually or culturally defensible belief withered away (Foster 1991: 258).

Rudkin was building on perceptions of Unionism as intellectually or culturally indefensible in his portrayal of those loyal to the empire as violent tribal werewolves.

This was an oblique approach and not the direct contradiction of perceptions (like that of Wilson above) that Field Day was seeking. As suggested earlier (section 1.1), a postcolonial history foregrounds issues of self-representation: Field Day wanted to engage with Northern Ireland's Unionist self, but the Unionist self as corporealized by Rudkin proved to be outside their imagined framework. Field Day Theatre Company hoped to challenge their Northern Irish theatre landscape, and their own practice, in their professed readiness to give voice to the Protestant heritage, but Rudkin presented them with a political challenge within a theatrical one; one which they were not ready to accept, despite Friel's sentiment of 1981, 'If a great play emerged tomorrow, specially if it was a Northern play, we'd jump at it' (Richtarik 1994: 110).

3.2 STAGING TRANSFORMATION

The conflicting Saxon and Celtic communities live in the shadow of Hadrian's Wall. Originally, Hadrian's Wall:

ran from the Solway Firth to the mouth of the Tyne, right across the island [of Britain]. It was a massive structure. At first its western third was of earth, like the earlier wall; the rest was of solid stone. Behind the wall was a road, itself protected by a wall and a ditch. In front of the wall were observation-towers and fortified extensions; it was manned by the garrisons of several forts, with legionary camps to the rear and smaller outposts every mile. A graduated defensive system almost sixty miles long was thus developed (Herm 1976: 225).

As Roman power declined in Britain, Herm notes how Hadrian's Wall was stripped of its garrisons and manned by irregular half-native guerrilla troops. Rudkin collapsed the events of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> to take place during a single winter, A.D. 401. The Romans in the play are seen as the agents of authority, of order against the unknown Celt, and so the Saxon community is anxious to maintain the empire for their own protection. The Roman intervention on the Celtic landscape is specifically drawn by Hadrian's Wall, the protection it affords and the manning it requires by Roman soldiers and planted Saxons. In <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, the Wall is a patriarchal, military construct on the feminised, contested landscape. English playwright Howard Brenton, in the preface to a collection of his plays which includes <u>The Romans in Britain</u>, wrote:

Along with dinosaurs, the Roman occupation of Britain is something of an obsession with primary teachers in our schools. I remembered a picture of

'Caesar's legions crossing the Thames' pinned on the classroom wall when I was nine. Every one knows the Romans came to Britain. This is vaguely felt to be a good thing, because they built straight roads and 'brought law' (Brenton 1989: vii).

In sharp contrast to the militaristic progressiveness brought to Britain by the Romans, the Celts have a 'precolonial' feminised quality. Ritual, funereal and otherwise, is shown in the play to be the preserve of the mystic Celtic community, while the Saxons, in Athdark, are pulled between an admiration for the order of the coloniser and a yearning for the poetry of the colonised.

Rudkin sites the action of The Saxon Shore at the moment in history when the Roman soldiers were effectively handing over the defence of the wall to the Saxons. In the course of the play, the wall is deserted by Rome and the desperate situation of the loyal Saxons is voiced by the Old Farmer, who is insisting by the second-last scene that: 'We must take stock of what weapons we have. We have a task to do. In the name of Rome, a province to defend. (...) They'll see, with such surprise, such wonder and astonishment and shäme. 'Yond wall' they'll say. 'Lewk at yond wall. Whoever have rebuilded that? So stout, so grand. Never they Saxons. We never thought... (...) Everywhere it be broke, we shall restore it! Every milecastle shall be raised high again!' (Rudkin 1986: 46). Fear of the Roman withdrawal prompts loyal Saxons to commit acts of terrorism across the wall among the Celts. As they anticipate an end to the privileging of their position as loyal subjects to the empire, these planted Saxons strike out against the natives who will be in a position to reassert dominance once the military might of the imperialists has been withdrawn. The Saxons, depicted as ordinary individuals by day, develop a mob mentality by night and transform into a violent sectarian force. Rudkin heightened this transformation in his use of the image of werewolf.

I didn't intend there to be any dialectical equivalents, or any equations drawn; as if to say wolf equals this, or wolf equals that or wolf equals the other. It's just *what you become* once you pass through that process of being empowered. And of course that covers a multitude of things in politics, and in tribal life (Rudkin interview: 262 [spoken emphasis]).

The performance challenges presented by this image were considerable, challenges that Rudkin himself had to resolve before he could present them to actors and director. Only one full transformation *to* wolf is staged within the play, and only

one character, Athdark, enacts it, rather than the full wolf pack. Rudkin acknowledged the difficulties of the transformation moment and noted that 'the play doesn't actually impose upon the actor too many of those transformation scenes that run the risk of looking phoney' (Rudkin interview: 274). Physical details of the transformation emerge through the character's lines, and so through performance, rather than through specific stage directions. The play opens with the Saxons as werewolves, gathering after a night of attacks on the natives. The nature of the wolves' activities soon becomes clear as they report to their leader, Cambyses. Agnes is triumphant:

AGNES: I fell on a farmstead. Out beyond Turfmines. The farmer's little son came out to see what the noise was. He saw my eyes. My yellow eyes. He sank to his knees. 'Good wolf! Please! No!' I understood his British language! I tore he off among the thorns. I tore the flesh from his bone wi' teeth and claws. I feasted on he all. But 'shoulder and the stomach part (Rudkin 1986: 1).

Cambyses refers to their transformation in terms of divine duty: 'Good daughters and good sons, more nights shall come. God's work is never finished' (Rudkin 1986: 1). The broken language works with the strange imagery of the wolves to create an alien world inhabited by not-quite-human creatures. At the end of the first scene, the last wolf is left alone on stage, changing back from wolf into Athdark, a Saxon and the central protagonist. Athdark has been wounded in the course of the night and, as he becomes more aware, he is confounded by the weeping wound in his side. This wound becomes a symbol of the betrayal felt by Athdark's Saxon community and the Saxons' need to overcome it if they are to survive when the Romans leave.

This first act of transformation is implied; when they appear on stage, the Saxons are already wolves, and, in this first scene, the beginnings of a re-assumption of human form indicate the transformation process. Details of the atrocities committed are lurid: 'A white ewe-lamb had been the sweetest I had ate till now, and lapped its blood. But nothing so sweet as tonight. A British baby from its cradle' (Rudkin 1986: 2). In their wolf-state, the Saxons have an awareness of the act of transformation, which they lose when they change back to human: 'It tasted so sweet, I thought I should bring some home to share with my wife. Only she don't know where I be' (Rudkin 1986: 2). Cambyses, as their leader and master, instigates the first change in state, the transformation *from* wolf. As he orchestrates their transition,

Cambyses urges the Saxons to forget their actions as wolves, to ensure through anonymity a lack of accountability, a lack of self-awareness when 'human': 'Sleep for now. Sleep. Sink easy, in the dewy grass. Roll in the dew. Wash wolf away. Forget' (Rudkin 1986: 2).

The semblance of a more accessible narrative is introduced in the second scene as Athdark is seen at home with Mother Athdark. Athdark cannot understand how he came by his wound and believes it to be a punishment from God. The complexity of the Saxons' situation becomes apparent as Athdark prays:

ATHDARK: Stranger in my body. Egg of stone, like flinthead of a' axe...God my Father! Why do Thou lodge this here? Chastizing me? Some sin I done? Good Christian man. Athdark, of Grimsteads Farm. Good Christian Roman British Saxon man (Rudkin 1986: 4).

In scene three, Pastor Agricola gives voice to the fears and beliefs of the planted Saxons, loyal to Rome and intransigent in their moral superiority. Agricola tells of Naboth whose garden was appropriated by Ahab and Jezebel:

AGRICOLA: "That" said the King [Ahab] "looks just the place for me to have a pleasure garden. The work's been done, the soil's been broken..." (...) "Sir," said Naboth, "this garden was my father's and my father's father's. When they came here, they found wilderness. They broke at the rock. They clove, they cleared; they ploughed, they tilled, they planted and they watered...I have husbanded this garden, this work of my fathers; to hand on down to my sons that follow. It is my heritage, and it is not mine to give" (Rudkin 1986: 5) [my emphasis].

The pride of the Saxons as civilisers of the native territory is evident here. Before they came, all was a wilderness. Now they have planted, watered and cultivated alien soil and thus it is theirs. Agricola's tale is a fitting analogy for the Saxon (and so the Unionist) situation. They have claimed their 'heritage' and have secured it for their 'sons'; having taken it, wrested it from the uncivilized, they are its keepers.

Agricola then uses this parable to incite his Saxon flock, making specific reference to their own experience:

AGRICOLA: High in these cold windscourged hills of Northern Britain have we our garden...Our heritage. THEY, that were here before us, had done nothing. THEY had not broken this high hard land. THEY had not tilled nor sown nor wrought, nor husbanded, as we (Rudkin 1986: 6).

The pastor concludes with a call to his people to be strong and to give the ailing Roman empire example by their strength. He uses the signal light on the wall to symbolise the constancy of the Saxon faith:

AGRICOLA: Long ago, Rome brought our fathers here; when she was strong. Now Rome might weary. We do not. ... Our light does not go out. (...) Shield it well, and we shall never be forsaken (Rudkin 1986: 7).

Agricola combines sacred duty, biblical imagery and heightened language to impress upon his followers the gravity of their situation and their responsibilities. This scene lends divine authority to the violent actions of the congregation in the wolf state.

There is no ambiguity in the characters associations with the wolves; in the text, the individual wolves are specified as the characters of subsequent scenes. The characters' Saxon names identify them etymologically as different from the native British. The Romans also have a separate ethnicity, however, and this is humorously drawn in scene two of act two, as Athdark goes on duty guarding the Wall. Athdark struggles to master Latin, the language of the empire, while the Roman NCO struggles to pronounce Athdark's name correctly, calling him Athkard, Athkrat, Aftercart and Daftark in the course of the scene. Friel's <u>Translations</u> is brought to mind where Owen corrects the English Lieutenant Yolland who thought his name was Roland (Friel 1984: 421).

The third question I wanted to address myself to was a question that Brian Friel himself had begun to address in an interesting way in <u>Translations</u> with which, of course, this play has some measure of dialogue. And it was Friel with whom I first discussed the whole thing. Friel invited me to meet him and I went over to his house just outside Derry and we had a very long discussion about all these matters, and the third was the question of language. I said, "look, the discovery that you made in <u>Translations</u> I think was a very important discovery: that one can use a language to represent another language on the space," and I said, "I feel that you've made that discovery and can I actually go down that way and explore it? Because it's, in a sense it's homage to yourself, because you've found the hole in the hedge. I want to go through it and I want to explore it and kick around inside it and I want to find out what the implications are" (Rudkin interview: 259).

Rudkin's 'homage' to Friel's <u>Translations</u> informs a number of aspects of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>: the relationship between Saxon Athdark and Celtic Ceiriad, the role of language in the exercise of colonisation, the cultural losses inevitable during a period of political upheaval. But in his use of the werewolf image, Rudkin implied the need

for an accountability for sectarian Loyalist violence. In <u>Translations</u>, a corresponding Nationalist sectarian violence is only inferred by pointed references to the absent Donnelly twins (Friel 1984: 436, 442).

In the play, Rudkin uses the language of the characters to indicate cultural specificity. The Roman language of authority is formal, the Roman soldier's departure from this formality lends the character a contemporary resonance, and some humour, emphasising Athdark's own struggle to learn Latin.

NCO: Know what you are? Aftercart [sic]? A barbaros. People who can only say Bar bar. Oh get down off the Roman Wall! Down! Stand facing South and terrify your own! *Iesus H Salvator*, the rubbish—And straighten your helmet! (Rudkin 1986: 17).

Ironically, Athdark masters Latin, the language of the coloniser, in time to decipher a message telling of the Roman withdrawal from Britain. Among the Saxons, men and women, a short guttural speech pattern is symptomatic of an unsympathetic lifestyle. The language of the Saxons invokes the divine, while creating a sense of a clipped practical work ethic:

MOTHER ATHDARK: Athdark. Wake. Till your feet boy. Up. It's day this long time. Use well the light of the Sun. Stand lad. Put on ye. Your better clothes. Lord's Day (Rudkin 1986: 3).

The Celts are poetic, of course, with hints of Gaelic:

LUGOVELIN: There were primrose on the mountain. A curlew's crying. In the pale gold Sun, from the white crusts of the hills below, a touch of warm light, and the chill of snow (Rudkin 1986: 23).

As the Romans dismiss the Saxon language and culture, they are equally dismissive of the Celts, an attitude that clarifies Rudkin's analogy by associating the British Celts with Gaelic culture:

LITORIUS: WottaDEENi. Name of their Seltic tribe. GoDODDHin they call themselves. Can't even spell their own name. No writing, of course. Oral culture. Gift of words (Rudkin 1986: 27).

In the published text, Rudkin included a 'note on pronunciation and sound':

The 'Saxon' English of this play is dense and packed, with a few significant Latin borrowings (...) All these people, in werewolf mode, regress to an archaic, rustic idiom, as their texts suggest. The Celtic English of this play is more sinuous and melodic. The sentence-structures occasionally reflect the syntax of the Celtic languages themselves (Rudkin 1986: 50).

Here is the one specific reference to Northern Ireland within the published text: 'For the 'Saxon' language I have fused certain Northern English 'tunes' with Northern Irish idiom, and vice versa; and for the Celtic language I have, more delicately, blended Welsh and Southern Irish tune and idiom in a similar way' (Rudkin 1986: 50).

According to Michael Vernon, '[a]part from the sheer diversity of his work Rudkin has given British theatre some of its finest language. It is sometimes so telegraphic and concentrated that actors fail to find the appropriate vocal idiom' (Vernon 1983: 60). Rudkin's language is difficult because it is of the body; its struggles mirror the struggles of the body to negotiate a conscious sense of self, which can reconcile identity with circumstance. Language as a mediator is given voice by the body and shaped by consciousness. The werewolf image as an image of violence simultaneously performs the body and consciousness in a theatrical way, at once immediate and un-real:

In his treatment of violence Rudkin confronts the major problem of dramatists who attempt to incorporate images of contemporary reality into their work. Rudkin rejects the apparent truth of naturalism; we have too many subtly developed perceptual defences which either fictionalise or 'downgrade' the immediacy of 'realistic' violence on stage or screen (Vernon 1983: 60).

With his depiction of violence as the gathering and marauding of a pack of wolves, Rudkin chose to site his rejection of 'the apparent truth of naturalism' in the performance moment. The immediacy of his choice proved controversial. Why did Rudkin choose this image? Richtarik noted that Rudkin 'wanted to write a play that would force Irish actors to adopt a more disciplined approach towards their roles' (Richtarik 1994: 192-3). Such discipline was vital given the challenging nature of the material and also Field Day's touring requirements; a small to non-existent set and minimal costuming would place the responsibility for the imagery within the realm of performance. Rudkin made a virtue of this, eschewing the use of costume or mask:

On the question of the werewolves, it can never be right to use wolfmasks or werewolf costume. These human characters *experience* themselves as wolves (...) the transformation to werewolf is 'an acting problem' (Rudkin 1986: 52 [original emphasis]).

The wolf image is a development of that used in Rudkin's earlier play <u>The</u> <u>Triumph of Death</u> (1981). Here Rudkin placed the action of the play 'ostensibly in

the 'middle ages', for this purpose a telescoping of thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' ¹⁴. The foreword to the published script is a line spoken by the character Luther towards the end of the play: 'The past is another country. The past is not another country' (Rudkin 1981: 51). Here Rudkin fashioned history and religion into a journey, from the Crusades to Joan of Arc to Martin Luther. Three central characters, Crusade survivors, are forest dwellers and one, Jehan, is later burnt as Joan of Arc. One of her husband-brothers struggles with the onset of a wolf state towards the end of the play:

GIL: Werewolf was here last night. We're in his path. Home, house, in, hurry. Shut door behind us, bolt it. In now. In. Home. Safe. (...)

Smell him. Werewolf. Hereabout. Twilight his hour. He sniff around the house outside. Almost feel him. He nuzzle the foot of our door. (...) Smell him. Near. Near too near. With Us. In.

(Own breath becoming raucous, hand more clawlike.)

Wolfstink. Wolfstep. Indoors wi us all along. Waited for night (Rudkin 1981: 49).

In this scene, Gil moves over a branch 'kissing, biting, ravaging' it while he addresses it as his daughter. His experience of wolf culminates in:

GIL: Father shall guard thee. Cover thee against him, my own body. Husha. Husha! Little lamb I love thee!

(He sinks his teeth into the branch. Eases, *unwolved again*. One last flicker of a man) (Rudkin 1981: 49 [my emphasis]).

'Unwolved', in the light of day, Gil 'sees' the evidence of his having been wolf: 'I had a daughter. Where is she?' The scene ends with Gil's '[h]igh thin almost voiceless whine of pain': 'I can't see. (He suddenly turns on us). I can't see' (Rudkin 1981: 49). In this earlier use of wolf imagery, Rudkin describes a dark side of the self, and, in Gil's case, a subsequent inability to deal with that 'other self'. Both in The Triumph of Death and in The Saxon Shore, the wolf state is used as an image for the violent aspect of an otherwise sympathetic character who thereby distances himself or herself from these acts of violence that seem 'out of character'. However, Athdark, the central character of The Saxon Shore, is different. He too becomes aware of himself as wolf, but this wolf state is politicised by Rudkin to indicate group-

¹⁴ This is taken from the character list page of the Methuen text of Rudkin's <u>The Triumph of Death</u> (1981), [page unnumbered].

violence, rather than being simply instinct with little or no acknowledgement of personal responsibility.

In <u>Postcolonial Drama</u>: Theory, <u>Practice</u>, <u>Politics</u>, Gilbert and Tompkins examine the postcolonial body and suggest that a colonial use of the savage/primitive in performance sites the savage in the other, in the body of the colonised. Elleke Boehmer is quoted here in relation to her work on the body of the colonised subject:

In colonial representation, exclusion or suppression can often literally be seen as 'embodied'. From the point of view of the coloniser specifically, fears and curiosities, sublimated fascinations with the strange or the 'primitive', are expressed in concrete physical and anatomical images (...) the Other is cast as corporeal, carnal, untamed, instinctual, raw, and therefore also open to mastery, available for use, for husbandry, for numbering, branding, cataloging, description of possession (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 203).

Rudkin does something different in that he looks at the savage in the agents of colonisation, in the settlers. In an attempt to protect the colony from the colonised, the Saxons embody savagery; and the savagery of the other is actually in the self.

Gilbert and Tompkins also refer to Elizabeth Grosz to illustrate that the body is seen to be in need of control and suppression by the coloniser:

If the body is the strategic target of systems of codification, supervision and constraint, it is also because the body and its energies and capacities exert an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to a regular, systematic mode of social organisation. As well as being the site of knowledge-power, the body is thus a site of resistance, for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counter-strategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 204).

Thus, from the perspective of the coloniser, the primitive is defined in action or reaction to the civilised. In <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, however, the violence is seen to support the rhetoric of authority, rather than being presented in opposition to it. Athdark's struggle then is the struggle to overcome the darkness in the self, the tribal instinctual violence as political violence, in the course of the play. The language employed by Cambyses against the Celts, in the one transformation *to* wolf within the text, is graphic:

CAMBYSES: Rake at their hides with our claws God gave us! Harrow with our fangs, till the bowels of their filth gush from them tumbled and uncoiling; till the lungs of them, livers, lights and wombs of all their darkness spill like offal in their own gutters; till their limbs lie, parted, quivering, unknowable for pieces of Man (Rudkin 1986: 39).

This physical transformation, to be embodied by the actors, is implied by the wolf-leader: 'Man shrink inward. Wolf stand outward. Skin in, out pelt! Hair itch and bristle! Wolf, wake!' (Rudkin 1986: 38). The stage directions suggest the corresponding corporealization: 'The illseen forms begin to prowl and seethe' (Rudkin 1986: 38). Performatively, the activities of the wolves exercise colonial authority.

The transformation to wolf within The Saxon Shore heightens an awareness of performance, for the actor and the audience, as transformation highlights the initial act of performance. Marvin Carlson in chapter two of Performance 'Performance in Society: Sociological and Psychological Approaches' cites Russian playwright Nikolas Evreinoff, '[t]he art of the theatre is pre-aesthetic, and not aesthetic, for the simple reason that transformation, which is after all the essence of all theatrical art, is more primitive and more easily attainable than formation, which is the essence of aesthetic arts' (Carlson 1996: 35 [original emphasis])¹⁵. If indeed transformation is 'the essence of all theatrical art', then Rudkin is employing a primitive self-referential device in his staging of transformation in The Saxon Shore. The Saxon Shore is meta-theatrical, as much about the nature of performance as the nature of statesupported violence. However, in staging this transformation, Rudkin could then be said to be interrogating the performance of terrorism. Sectarian violence, as depicted in The Saxon Shore, becomes as much of an assumption of a role, a knowing assumption at that, as the assumption of the character of Athdark by actor Gerard Murphy for the Almeida production. If sectarian violence is knowingly assumed, it can just as easily be rejected.

Transformation is then the shift from one state to another, which suggests reversibility, a non-progressive set of conditions. Schechner offers a definition of transformation and considers its relationship with ritual and with theatre:

Characterization and the presentation of real or possible events—the story, plot, or dramatic action worked out by people, gods, or demons—is a transformation of real behavior into symbolic behavior. Theatrical transformation appears to be of only two kinds: 1) the displacement of antisocial, injurious, disruptive behavior by ritualized gesture and displays,

¹⁵ Here Marvin Carlson quotes from Nickolas Evreinoff, (trans. Alexander Nazaroff), <u>The Life in Theatre</u>, New York: Brentano's, 1927, p.24.

and 2) the invention of characters who act out fictional events or real events fictionalized by virtue of their being acted out (as in documentary theater or film or Roman-type gladiatorial games) (Schechner 1977/88: 109).

The Saxon Shore's transformation to and from wolf fits into the first category offered by Schechner. Herbert Blau's To All Appearances affirms Schechner's definition, but Blau goes further to offer three readings of transformation in theatre:

1) the empathetic identification with character in realistic theatre (Blau 1992: 139-140);

2) an access to performance in 'anti-naturalism' (Blau 1992: 183); and 3) a function of stylisation in the multiplicity of meaning, as for example employed in the work of Pina Bausch (Blau 1992: 189). Blau insists that the body of the actor cannot be included in a semiotic reading of performance:

One distinction to be made is that, develop as we will a semiotics of the body, the body is not, with information or image, part of the same delivery system. And even if it assumes in a given production the fiction of a mere function—with no more intrinsic value than light, color, fabric, or other objects in space—there will inevitably be the friction of resistance, with somebody calling it ego, this impediment of the body refusing to be a sign (Blau 1992: 70).

He continues '[a]s we turn to the signifying task, we may do so with the ideological suspicion—or is it ontological awareness?—that in or behind all systems the theatre is doing its work, disarming function, and transforming the real as only theatre can' (Blau 1992: 70). Here is the crux of Blau's 'transformation', the transformation of the real 'as only theatre can'. So, as the body resists signification within an existing system of reading, transformation of the body—from the real—can go, where exactly?

Blau's most telling summation of transformation comes later: 'a yielding to otherness which is in the subtlest naturalism' (Blau 1992: 144). This transformation as a yielding to otherness, although used by Blau in relation to naturalism, is, paradoxically, the use of the term that resonates here in relation to the transformation of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>. As an expression of sectarian violence, the 'yielding to otherness' of werewolf distances the perpetrators from their actions. If the wolves in <u>The Saxon Shore</u> are yielding to otherness, they are giving way, giving in to an urge for tribal violence. But within the text, Athdark comes to resist his wolf-state, he refuses to yield to the otherness of his actions, becoming self-conscious.

Performatively, the wolf image is difficult as it is far removed from the human, and yet Rudkin insists that it must remain human. The transformation to wolf in <u>The Saxon Shore</u> is the 'anti-naturalism' access to performance. As a yielding to otherness, it problematizes the performance of violence, and also performance itself, and demands accountability for both. This is an almost impossible demand that calls for a knowing recognition of, rather than a yielding to, otherness on the part of each actor.

3.3 DIVINE WOMAN

In the second act of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, the action crosses Hadrian's Wall to native British territory. In a grove of trees, a young Celtic priestess, Ceiriad, prays to 'Our Lady'. Ceiriad is representative of her native, feminised society (much as Athdark is representative of his planted, colonizing and yet defensive one). One of Rudkin's sources for the Celtic imagery was a local stone dedication to an unknown Celtic Goddess¹⁶. The name of the goddess is illegible but 'construed as Sattada or Saitada. The latter, on linguistic grounds, could be a title, Saita-Da, 'Lady of Grief' (Almeida programme note). Although unspecific, phrases such as Lady of Mercy, Lady of Grief, when matched with 'Our Lady' as virgin in the text (Rudkin 1986: 14), lend the figure distinct Irish Catholic associations. Ceiriad is, according to the stage directions, 'dressed in virginal white' and, as priestess, intercedes on the behalf of others: 'I always have to bring before You the prayers of others, and never speak to You of what I need or I desire.' She evokes a ritual that immediately draws a distinction between her society and Athdark's Spartan world:

CEIRIAD: Women and girls come here to Your high dwelling, with little images in clay, of hands or feet that are hurt, of eyes, ears, organs that pain or fail them. They place them all about Your sacred trees, for the touch of Your restoring mercy (Rudkin 1986: 14).

Already the sacred ceremonies of the Celts are in opposition to Saxon ceremonies. The deity is female, the language is poetic and the rituals—votive offerings at the shrine and the later burial processions for both Llyr (act two scene four) and Ceiriad (act four scene four)—are theatrical.

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¹⁶ This stone dedication was pictured in the programme for the 1986 Almeida production.

Jungian scholar Marie-Louise von Franz charts the development of the devotion to the Virgin Mary in The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption. She argues that the notion of 'Our Lady' as virgin had non-Catholic origins and was adopted relatively late as a Catholic teaching: 'The doctrine of Mary's Perpetual Virginity was, to say the least, of no importance in the eyes of the evangelists, and there is no evidence of its having been anywhere taught within the pale of the Catholic Church of the first three centuries' (Franz 1999: 36). According to Franz, a devotion to Mary as virgin dates from the fourth century. She quotes from the first sermon of Proclus at Constantinople that referred to the 'Mother of God' as 'the spotless treasure-house of virginity' (Franz 1999: 37). Representations of the Virgin Mary are said to have originated from those of the Egyptian goddess Isis and later adapted by the Christian Church, much as the Sheelah-na-gig, as an Irish representation of fertility, is believed by some to have been absorbed and suppressed by the Catholic Church in Ireland. Isis was a rich mythological source, with earthy and often dark associations, again closer to the Sheelah-na-gig than an Immaculate Virgin. The fourth century is identified as the time when these two images of female divinity, earthy and immaculate, were being conflated; The Saxon Shore is set in A.D. 401. 'The Virgin Mary inherited those traits, but in the official teaching she inherited only the sublime and spiritual, the attributes of purity and so on. The other aspects of earth, fertility, and the dark side, were never officially recognized' (Franz 1999: 40).

Ceiriad's privileged position as priestess places her outside an earthy sexuality enjoyed by others in her society, and she acknowledges this lack in her own life:

CEIRIAD: Some of the girls bring little clay hearts—not hearts of theirs, but of men. Men: they seek to turn toward them. Sometimes the image is of something grosser than a heart, something of a man I've never seen. I've never seen a man (Rudkin 1986: 14).

The virgin invokes the Virgin, 'Lady don't be angry. Lady, smile on me. Lady, You are virgin, You understand'. The young priestess brings an offering to the shrine; the clay heart of a man she has yet to envisage, hoping that 'somewhere his heart turn to me, and I know Love'. Ceiriad prays for love but is chastised by the older priestess Sulgwen: 'Leave Our Lady to Her work. It's sunset, we must tidy the shrine. And don't you stand there, looking southward for a man. Wall down there, end of the world is that. Nothing good came up from south of it' (Rudkin 1986: 15). From an

audience perspective, a meeting between the innocent Ceiriad and the wounded Athdark becomes inevitable. Rudkin suggests that it is part of the playwright's contract: 'it's implicit in the premise of the piece that this man is going to have to cross the wall. You're committed to that, it's part of the bargain. And obviously he's got to meet his opposite principle, his opposite cultural principle; go [to] meet the demon and discover the angel instead (Rudkin interview: 276).

Athdark transgresses; delirious, he has wandered through a breach in the wall and is found by Ceiriad. Athdark's performed struggle to stand is also his struggle to overcome his wound as representative of the other in himself and so, it is the feminised Celt, priestess Ceiriad, who heals him. On his recovery, Athdark believes himself to be in Paradise 'was God a Goddess all along?' (Rudkin 1986: 32), and his attempts to communicate with Ceiriad are a deliberate echo of Maire and Yolland's struggle to understand each other in Friel's <u>Translations</u>:

CEIRIAD: Sir?

ATHDARK: This Deenio she calls me: must be my Heavenish name.

CEIRIAD: Water.

ATHDARK: Gwisca...?

CEIRIAD: Mountain.

ATHDARK: Monidho...

CEIRIAD: Walk...

ATHDARK: Paths of Heaven! Why did they not each us this below? (Rudkin 1086: 26)

1986: 26)

In the performance moment, both are speaking English and can be understood, one as easily as the other. Within the text, however, as in <u>Translations</u>, the characters cannot communicate:

ATHDARK: Nothing I learned below has made me ready. I've so much still to master. Gwisca, water...

CEIRIAD: Yes, yes! The earth, the earth!

ATHDARK: Teer? Teer? The ground...? No...Can't be ground. Not here in Heaven... (Rudkin 1986: 32).

Again this draws our attention to the transformation that is performance, the audience suspends disbelief so that the characters cannot comprehend each other, although the actors obviously can.

Ceiriad tells the older priestess Sulgwen that they must learn to speak Athdark's language, the language of the other from across the divide. Intransigent, Sulgwen replies: 'Why? We are in our country. Where is he?' (Rudkin 1986: 25). Rudkin's analogy is inverted—the native are British and yet Celtic—but his signposts are clear, Athdark lives a Spartan life, he is loyal to the Empire, he is suggestive of the Unionist (Protestant) community of Northern Ireland; Ceiriad is British, and yet Celtic and worships 'Our Lady', she and her people are 'native', she symbolizes the Nationalist (Catholic) community of Northern Ireland.

Ceiriad's feminine healing persona is offered as an alternative to the savagery of the Saxons and their violent instincts as manifested by the werewolf image. However, within the Celtic community there is a corresponding patriarchal structure, which gives momentum and implies an inevitability of the conflict. In scene four of act two, Ceiriad's dead father Llyr is brought to the burial place, and the young priestess becomes 'Queen. Of Lost Britain' (Rudkin 1986: 22). Friel's <u>Translations</u> is not the only play with which Rudkin is in dialogue as there are echoes of Shakespeare's <u>King Lear</u> here. Ceiriad, the one faithful daughter, praises her cousin Lugovelin who: 'stayed at my father's side, when my sisters cast him out into the storm' (Rudkin 1986: 22). Lugovelin makes a tentative suggestion that he and Ceiriad reclaim lost Britain 'together', but Ceiriad 'has withdrawn from him' (Rudkin 1986: 24); he is too late, she has already met her 'opposite cultural principle' and the bargain, implicit to performance, has been sealed. Ceiriad is now poised between her old Celtic Britain and Athdark's Saxon Britain and seems about to exercise divine intercession on their behalf.

Hawkins writes of Ceiriad: 'that she is the banished daughter of Llyr (Shakespeare's King Lear) connects her to Shakespeare's Cordelia, further rendering her an embodiment of martyred, selfless love' (Hawkins in Harrington & Mitchell 1999: 165). Hawkins goes on to suggest that 'although his characterization of Ceiriad romanticizes the Celts, Rudkin balances his treatment of them somewhat through his characterization of the other Celts' (Hawkins in Harrington & Mitchell 1999: 166). While there is evidence within the text to support this view—Lugovelin, the dead Llyr and the violence of the Celts point to a patriarchal power structure within this feminised society—the violence of the Celts is not staged in The Saxon Shore, while the violence of the Saxons has a transgressive and animalistic quality. As wolves, the Saxons, male and female, perform atrocities across the wall among the Celts, in what

is referred to but not theatricalized, as an ongoing battle, with such actions committed by both sides: 'Burning our town, Broad daylight now. The savages. Come out from their holes in the ground. Turfmire. Pigsty Valley. Beggar bogs. And fire our goodly garden of a town' (Rudkin 1986: 19). Here, scene three of act two, Mother Athdark and Widow Flax watch the offstage Celts' violence; the violence of the wolves is seen onstage, however, as they work under cover of darkness.

Athdark invests this other side of the wall with a divinity he sees in Ceiriad herself and believes himself to be in Heaven. When Ceiriad brings Athdark to realise that he is still alive he reacts in both bewilderment and anger: 'Do not touch me!...I was never dead? I am man still?....Whore of Ahab! Not Heaven. Not Heaven. Cumri land. Wall again. Living again. Toil again. Pain again. My lone again. And cold by night...Wall...Wall?' (Rudkin 1986: 34). Athdark lashes out, having responded to one construction of femininity he seeks revenge by invoking another; now Athdark's divine healer Ceiriad becomes both virgin and 'Whore of Ahab'. Feeling betrayed when he realises himself to be among the Celts, Athdark returns home to find the farm burnt out and his mother killed by the native British in another Celtic atrocity committed offstage.

The voice of Cambyses urges him to seek revenge:

CAMBYSES: Athdark, where have you been? What havoc here? Destruction...Ill have you husbanded your garden. They watch from above, bequeathed it ye. Your garden had need of ye: Athdark where were you?...Sin be for us to know of and for you to confess (Rudkin 1986: 36).

Athdark describes his journey in the language of those who believe that they are God's chosen people:

ATHDARK: I have walked in a garden of Sin. I fell asleep. I walked among strange gods. I spoke with Jezebel, in tongues of Babel. (...) Then I heard the voice of the God of my fathers. My eyes were opened. I saw I was on witches' mire. In Cumri land. I came away. I came away! (Rudkin 1986: 37).

Cambyses calls on the wolf within Athdark:

CAMBYSES: (...) All that while you slept and waked and walked and waked again, a deeper deeper Athdark lay in you asleep. Curled in you, deep, like a sleeping dog: ears twitching at some sound that does not wake him, but he hears; nostrils twitching at some scent that does not wake him, but he'll know again. This deeper brother wake. I call on him. Phwwwwy...Phwwwwy...Tik tik tik (Rudkin 1986: 37).

Athdark crosses the wall once more, inadvertently leading the pack. Still struggling to overcome the call to violence, Athdark pleads with Ceiriad to recognise him as human and to do so by calling him by his name, by identifying him: 'Save me! My name! Help poor Deenio! Tell Deenio my name of a man!' (Rudkin 1986; 41). Dialogue is presented here as the alternative to violence. But Ceiriad cannot cross the language barrier between them: 'You hide like a wounded beast. You are hurt. I know it. And the hurt makes you ugly. My love my love it does not matter!...No name by which to call you...But Man. Brother. Friend' (Rudkin 1986; 41). Unlike their previous interactions, Ceiriad's position outside his language is her downfall. By failing to call him Athdark (a name which the Roman NCO, as representative of the coloniser, could not master either), Ceiriad is under threat from Athdark's 'other'. Language is emphasised as the way in which we voice consciousness; Athdark needs to be recognised as his embodied human self. Athdark is aware as both man and wolf meet here at his 'yielding to otherness'; the language is imperative and has a sexualised urgency:

ATHDARK: I have left my name with my coat on the ground. I have no name when I come this journey, but snout, tooth, fang, claw...Tell me the name of the man I am! Or I do what I do. I come now. Here I am. Lady, pity me...

As he turns into wolf, Athdark kills her: 'He sinks his teeth into her throat. Both fall. Music turns to a scream' (Rudkin 1986: 41). Athdark tries to re-establish the distance closed by this transformation: 'What beast have tore this lovely lady? (Rudkin 1986: 41). However, the withdrawal of Rome leaves Saxons and Celts together in the one landscape. Eventually Athdark acknowledges his role in killing Ceiriad: 'There were such damage. There were such bloody slaughter done. And I killed the lovely lady. She was healing me' (Rudkin 1986: 49). This understanding of his own actions allows Athdark to take responsibility for those actions, outside an instinctual identification with the territorial defensiveness of the wolves.

One question raised by Rudkin's staging of Ceiriad as divine is whether his image of the virginal princess, like Mac Intyre's Mother effigy in <u>The Great Hunger</u>, reinforces or critiques stereotype? Is Ceiriad, although embodied, as much of a monument as The Mother effigy? As the other representations of women in <u>The</u> Great Hunger contextualize The Mother as icon, Ceiriad as a construction of idealized

womanhood is undermined by the pragmatism of the other women in <u>The Saxon</u> Shore.

Ceiriad is killed and, perhaps like The Mother as effigy in The Great Hunger, was so constrained by notions of an ideal femininity so as to be read as already dead. Ceiriad is set apart, even by her own people. Other women are free, 'blatantly' so, in the expression of their desires as shown by their prayers to 'Our Lady'. Sulgwen is direct, down-to-earth, unmoved by Ceiriad's romantic musing, 'Any man's head can be gold in the dark. It's kingdoms that marry' (Rudkin 1986: 32), an echo of Widow Flax's earlier comment to Mother Athdark, 'Nights are black. Blanket warms a couple. It's acres wed' (Rudkin 1986: 11). The correlation between the two characters was drawn in performance at the Almeida in 1986 as Brenda Fricker played both the Celtic Sulgwen and the Saxon Widow Flax, another reference to the points of identification in 'otherness'. Whether or not this doubling was intended to be significant is moot¹⁷, as in performance that connection was physically embodied and therefore open to audience interpretation¹⁸.

Mother Athdark despairs of her son's unmarried status and recognises her and Athdark's need to populate and thereby secure their territory in the name of the Emperor, for fear of being overtaken by the native population; 'you'd only to wait! Your over-breedin' 'ud have swamped us all! And my one son...' (Rudkin 1986: 20). Here is a divergence from the legacy of the Famine as mentioned in relation to The Great Hunger and attitudes to land. Unlike her wooden counterpoint in The Great Hunger, she does not 'praise the man who made the field his bride' (Kavanagh & Mac Intyre 1986: 4). The colonised attitude, as documented in the response the Famine of the 1840s, was to safeguard against the repetition of such a disastrous outcome of 'over-breedin' by monitoring social habits through later marriages, inheritance patterns and emigration¹⁹. The Saxons of The Saxon Shore are anxious to secure their legacy for future generations, but conversely they are producing descendants to secure the territory. This element of Loyalism expresses another aspect of postcolonialism, a different relationship to the same coloniser. Here is a knowingness

¹⁷ In <u>Ashes</u>, the other characters, apart from central characters Colin and Anne, were recommended by Rudkin to be played by one male and one female actor, but 'in this doubling there is not thematic significance' (Rudkin 1974a: 5).

¹⁸ See section 3.5.

¹⁹ See section 2.1.

that uses the apparatus of colonial resistance and historical political representations of gender to highlight an audience's set of assumptions: 'the parallels were there but they weren't facile. They involved lifting something up and crawling underneath and getting inside—basically to make the audience bloody work' (Rudkin interview: 264).

In the suggested doubling of roles, each Saxon werewolf has a corresponding Celtic other, the violence of one community mirrors the violence of the other. It could be argued, as Hawkins does, that, in his representations of the Saxon and Celtic communities, (and Ceiriad especially), Rudkin is 'condemning patriarchy as the root both of imperialism and of the Troubles in Northern Ireland' (Hawkins in Harrington & Mitchell 1999: 168). The feminisation of the warring Celts, and Ceiriad's role of divine victim, does call into question the patriarchal structures of both Celtic and Saxon communities, and the role of that patriarchy in perpetuating the violence. Nonetheless, while utilizing the binary of gender opposites, Rudkin is actually subverting gender roles in an unlikely feminisation within the text, the feminisation of Athdark, who ends the play as 'the beginnings of a man' (Rudkin 1986: 49).

3.4 THE BODY IN PAIN

Rudkin's sexuality is a self-professed influence on his construction of gender roles and sexualities in his work:

I don't consider myself to be either [a British or Northern Irish playwright], anymore than I'm a bisexual playwright or an Artuadian playwright or a Protestant playwright. Yes, you have these roles that occasionally become active. And it may be that I've made life harder for myself in that the moment there's come an opportunity to be identified I've done something which made it impossible (Rudkin interview: 280).

Athdark's journey from an assumption to a rejection of the wolf is central to <u>The Saxon Shore</u>. Athdark as wolf is wounded in the first scene of the play, and it is this wound or hurt that allows him to become aware of his transformation into wolf and subsequent activities, at odds with the civilised self but working to maintain the political status quo desired by that self.

In scene two, Athdark, the wounded fourth wolf of scene one, wakes to find the evidence of his actions lodged in his side. This 'foreign body' helps him to come to an eventual realisation of the self, but not before he first interprets it as the work of a vengeful God and then of the Devil: ATHDARK: What's here? This damp on my side...Blood...? Wound...?! Some beast have bit me in the night. In my sleep and I not wake? (...)

There's more yet. Like a great rock. Stranger in my body. Egg of stone, like flinthead of a 'axe...God my Father! Why do Thou lodge this here? Chastizing me? (...)

Good Christian man. Athdark, of Grimsteads Farm. Good Christian Roman British Saxon man. (...)

It is the Devil must have done this. Ay. The devil. To bow me. To fright me. Mock me. Bow me. I'll not be bowed (Rudkin 1986: 4).

But Athdark is bowed, and crouches in pain, physically halfway between the upright stance of a man and the grounded stealth of a wolf. Rudkin uses the wound to interrogate the individual's accountability for group violence, to create a consciousness of the mob-mentality:

I've been in the army, and I've worn uniform, and I know what happens. (...) I wanted to go deeper into what that experience was like—what happened when that part of you that dreamed and that part of you that was awake, what happened when they became aware of each other—to problematize a character. And I had to find a means of doing that through where the stone in the side comes from (Rudkin interview: 263).

Athdark has been penetrated by what he describes as the flinthead of an axe, and in this sense is feminised by Rudkin. Athdark's wound is like that of Christ in Carravaggio's 'The Incredulity of St. Thomas', theorized by Phelan as 'the hole in the body [that] is the physical mark of separation between one and the Other. That hole stands as beckoning lure and unbreachable threshold' (Phelan 1997: 2). Athdark's wound opens up for him the unbearable vista of his 'other' self; this new orifice leads to his interiority as wolf, as transgressor, terrorist. This is then the real feminisation within the text, and the divinity of Ceiriad serves in relation to this other feminisation. Ceiriad is curious, drawn towards Athdark and away from the imposed immaculate personae of priestess.

However, as Celtic goddess, she is unwavering in her feminised divinity and is the yardstick against which Athdark measures himself. So, unlike a more typical postcolonial representation—where the Celtic as other is feminised and the Saxon as settler, coloniser or agent of colonisation is a powerful masculine representation—Rudkin is subverting his own set of oppositions by portraying Athdark as both. Athdark's Ulster Protestant identity is feminised by his wound, the vanishing point in his own flesh.

In scene five of act one, Athdark's transformation to wolf is sited in the performance itself, and, in the following scene, Athdark realises that he is 'Man outward, wolf inside, that sink from Man to lope, four feet on the earth, and talk with the stars, and go wolf-journey. (...) God is good. He sent me this stone and wound to show me what I am. These are his Grace, they waken me' (Rudkin 1986: 12-13).

Athdark was aware of the wolves but had not realised his own involvement up to this point, unlike when, as wolves, all are fully aware of what they do. His wound draws Athdark's attention to his enactment of the wolf transition. Pain here is bringing a realisation of performance: Athdark's body is in pain but the body of the actor is not in pain, is not wounded. Thus, in the text, Athdark's wound brings a realisation of his transformation to wolf, and, in performance, the actor's absent wound brings a realisation of the actor's transformation to Athdark in the minds of the performers and the audience. Jeanie Forte, in 'Focus on the Body' included in Critical Theory and Performance, refers to the work of Spivak and of Elaine Scarry and 'the inability of theory to manifest the material, or useful body'. She identifies:

those circumstances in which the body is undeniable, when the body's material presence is a condition of the circumstance. Interestingly, one is that of pain, and another is that of live performance: two cases when the body must be acknowledged, when it becomes visible/palpable through inhabiting temporally a process that depends fundamentally on its presence (Reinelt & Roach 1995: 251).

Athdark's wound imposes the performance of pain on the actor, the material presence performs the absent wound. The 'flinthead of a' axe' (Rudkin 1986: 4) in Athdark's side marks the border in the body between states, actor and Athdark, Athdark and wolf. Athdark's awareness is then heightened in the liminal space of neither man nor wolf—and he works to resist his transformation. But, as I considered earlier, this transformation is within performance and Athdark's resistance to transformation highlights the undeniable presence of the body of the actor, the creative space between the constant (though performing) self of the actor and the variable self/other of Athdark/wolf.

Brian Massumi in 'The Bleed: Where Body Meets Image', published in Welshman's <u>Rethinking Borders</u>, considers the fracture between the body as subject and as object, when seeing oneself on film for example. 'The objectness of the object is attenuated as the subject, seeing itself as others see it, comes to occupy the object's

place as well as its own. Simultaneously occupying its place and the object's, the subject departs from itself. The subject-object symmetry of mirror-vision is broken' (Welshman 1996: 22-23). Athdark's wound effects this fracture, now he sees himself as if from outside himself, a distance matching that between actor and character: 'I were man till now. Thought I were. I were asleep. Dreamed I were a man, like others. Up there I wake. (...) I am of that company I've heard of. Those not of one skin. (...) I am. I am. Werewolf' (Rudkin 1986: 11-12). Such awareness is jarring and the responsibility it brings is a heavy burden, 'Oh it is worse than my pain. Worse, worse, worse than pain of the body, oh it is!' (Rudkin 1986: 12).

Athdark is a subject wounded by an object. But the wounding helps him to see himself as wolf (object) from the perspective of his own subjectivity. Grosz's feminist reading of phenomenology Volatile Bodies points to the gender specificity of the body which resonates for the gendered, performing body. Irigaray develops Merleau-Ponty's conflation of subject and object by placing the female, and the maternal, experience at the centre of this work and cites mucus as that which elides the gap between the body as subject and as object. Grosz writes:

The tactile is related by Irigaray to the concept of the mucus, which always marks the passage from inside to outside, which accompanies and lubricates the mutual touching of the body's parts and regions. The mucus is neither the subjective touching of the toucher not the objectivity of the touched but the indeterminacy of any distance between them (Grosz 1994: 107).

Mucus then effects a slippage between subject and object, 'the perceiving, seeing, touching subject remains a subject with a proprietorial relation to the visible, the tactile: he stands over and above while remaining within his world, recognising the object and the (sexed) other as versions or inversions of himself' (Grosz 1994: 107). Athdark's bleeding wound fulfils this same function; in performance the (imagined) seeping wound provides a slippage between the object/Athdark and the subject/actor. Athdark bleeds from his wound, a feminisation of sorts as a bleeding body could be read as a menstruating one. Athdark's wound in his side is also emblematic; he bleeds for the sins of his community, which lends him a Christ-like martyrdom. The performed struggle to overcome the wound and the self as wolf embodies Forte's 'circumstances in which the body is undeniable' (Forte in Reinelt & Roach 1995: 251) in performance and in pain.

As the play ends, the Romans leave the Saxons to their fate. The Pastor Agricola reads a letter from the Emperor, but Agnes refuses to be appeared:

AGNES: Well for you! Well for you, Imperial mighty power! Set us and native British at each others' throats: now forsake us naked to their rage...give us no defence?...Not even a name. British and not. Saxon and not. Roman and not (Rudkin 1986: 46).

The final irony is that Athdark deciphers the Roman signal just in time to receive the message of the fall of Rome: 'we are defeated. I understand it! A whole Latin sentence and I understand it!' (Rudkin 1986: 47). The last image is of Athdark standing alone on stage, holding a sword which he vows to use as a spade instead: 'All this land now. Foe to me. How shall I be neighbour, who have been such fiend to these? Sword I make a spade of you...Soon be day' (Rudkin 1986: 49).

Athdark has overcome his pull to transformation, pull to the ground and the state of wolf. He has also been 'healed', his feminising wound has been closed and now he can stand 'the beginnings of a man' (Rudkin 1986: 49). Through his wounding, his pain, Athdark foregrounded an awareness of 'otherness' and of transformation. This, in turn, questioned the oppositions of secular and divine, male and female, 'those that sink from Man to lope four feet on the earth' and 'beginnings of a man' and, ultimately, through transformation, actor and character.

3.5 PERFORMANCE—AN ACTING PROBLEM?²⁰

Athough <u>The Saxon Shore</u> was written in response to Friel's <u>Translations</u>, it also has a relationship with a later Friel play. <u>Dancing at Lughnasa</u> (1990) marked Friel's formal break with Field Day Theatre Company, as it was his first new work to be staged by a different company in ten years. The play premiered at Dublin's Abbey Theatre, was produced by Noel Pearson and directed by <u>The Great Hunger</u> director Patrick Mason. Here Friel sought to engage with issues of Irish identity, but, like Rudkin had done earlier, Friel was also interrogating theatrical form. <u>Dancing at Lughnasa</u> was the result of a concerted effort on the part of the playwright to find a new idiom; he chose dance.

²⁰ For a practical interrogation of the performance issues of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, please see the video and written documentation of <u>Transformation</u>—'an <u>Acting Problem'</u> in the appendices.

The play is set in Ballybeg, Co. Donegal, in 1936 at the Celtic calendar festival of Lughnasa, a time of release from routine and prescribed social behaviour. Five adult sisters, the Mundys, share a house during a period when being a single woman in rural Ireland was a strictly defined social position. One of the sisters, Chris, has stepped outside society's strict boundaries by giving birth to her illegitimate son, Michael. Michael is staged as an adult, narrating memories of his childhood and reconstructing the summer of 1936. At the beginning of act one, Michael recalls a rare moment of release experienced by his mother and four aunts:

MICHAEL: I remember the kitchen throbbing with the beat of Irish dance music beamed to us all the way from Dublin and my mother and her sisters suddenly catching hands and dancing a spontaneous step-dance and laughing—screaming!—like excited schoolgirls.

He continues:

MICHAEL: I had witnessed Marconi's voodoo derange those kind, sensible women and transform them into shrieking strangers (Friel 1990: 2).

There is an element of suspicion here. Michael voices a wariness of this idiom, an echo of Friel's, as he prepares his audience for the dance to come. The sisters are confronted by two possibilities of release. The radio, 'Marconi', presages the transforming influence of music and mediatization, and Lughnasa indicates an historical precedent for the modern 'Marconi'; Celtic calendar festivals are culturally specific echoes of a more physically liberal society. Unhappily, the Mundys of Dancing at Lughnasa are constrained by the expectations of Irish society of the 1930s and are also constrained by the theatrical realism of their creator Friel.

The dance itself, described in detail in the stage directions, comes midway through the first act:

Maggie turns around. Her head is cocked to the beat, to the music. She is breathing deeply, rapidly. Now her features become animated by a look of defiance, of aggression; a crude mask of happiness. For a few seconds she stands still, listening, absorbing the rhythm, surveying her sisters with her defiant grimace. Now she spreads her fingers (which are covered with flour), pushes her hair back from her face, pulls her hands down her cheeks and patterns her face with an instant mask. At the same time she opens her mouth and emits a wild, raucous 'Yaaaah!'—and immediately begins to dance, arms, legs, hair, long bootlaces flying (Friel 1990: 21).

One by one, the other sisters join in, each dancing in a way synonymous with their character. The height of the frenzy is described in the text:

With this too loud music, this pounding beat, this shouting—calling—singing, this parodic reel, there is a sense of order being consciously subverted, of the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves, indeed of near-hysteria being induced (Friel 1990: 22).

But Friel could not surrender performance to the performers, to allow the dance to speak for itself. Instead, he explained and defined the dance through the word before and after the moment of release when the dance could have spoken for itself.

Michael's final comments on Lughnasa, spoken directly to the audience, indicate the full extent of the appropriation of dance:

MICHEAL: When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement—as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. (...) Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary (Friel 1990: 71).

Friel distances his audience from the dance in two ways, by placing it firmly within the realm of spoken language and by distancing the adult Michael from his memories of the dance. The effects of such an effacement of the body are anticipated by Herr in the conclusion of 'The Erotics of Irishness':

While the need for a certain stillness remains projected onto the body, preferably the body of a woman or a landscape figured as female, the authorized centers of meaning in the society discover again and again that their own ability to move has been impeded (Herr 1990: 33).

Friel allows his characters to dance, but only for a moment and in such a way as to underline their lack of freedom of moment. The conclusion of <u>Dancing at Lughnasa</u> illustrates how the Mundy sisters have been 'stilled' by language. Friel's chosen performance idiom was problematic and remained rooted in the word.

Rudkin's choice of performance idiom is more immediate in <u>The Saxon Shore</u>; the transformation to and from wolf, while not entirely outside language, needs to be created physically and verbally onstage at the moment of transformation:

ATHDARK: I itch and crawl (...) what was that?! This light...Why does this daylight hurt my eyes? The land's going dark... (...) I jumped then. How did I lep so far so easy? (...) Sh. Easy. Easy...No sound...Feet four on the ground...and down of the wind... (Rudkin 1986: 9-10).

Here the language is suggestive of a physicalization on the part of the actor, language facilitates the body:

There is a need to be vivid and a need to be graphic. You've got to communicate a world to an audience and basically language is one of the two primary modes of communication. There is the body of the actor... which gives you a lot of information depending on how that body is presented, what it's clothed in, what it's attitudes are and where it is on the space. There is a lot of evidence to be got from that (Rudkin interview: 270).

Athdark's final 'stand' is where the performative risks of the play come to the fore. Rudkin sites the outcome of the play, and of Athdark's journey, in the performance moment itself, resisting the temptation to explain and expand on the performance moment and its meaning, as Friel did in the final moments of <u>Dancing at Lughnasa</u>.

Rudkin does imagine a role for language at this point: 'the language actually does *its equivalent* of the resolution. In other words it's all part of an organism' (Rudkin interview: 268 [spoken emphasis]). Language and the body work together in this performance moment, which, although Rudkin uses the image of a beginning, is also an ending, and not only in practical terms:

Closure is a beginning. A play is like an act of birth, is a series of contractions, and that's the last contraction. And the language has to do that work, but the language will not do it of itself. The man has to be present, (at the end of The Sons of Light it's a woman who is born on the space), they do it through a last aria. But you're left with that; you're left with human body on the space, which has just been born as the beginnings of a person, the beginnings of something, yes. And that to me is what theatre is, that existential place. (Rudkin interview: 268 [my emphasis]).

Rudkin places Athdark's struggle to stand, and the assumption of the wolf image, very clearly in the performance moment, in the work of the actor, siting the political in the body and the responsibility for presenting it with the actor.

ATHDARK: Wolf. No. Rest there on the ground, Dream, that. I must wake now. I must wake. Stand. Dig my garden. Spade, Spade, Who's there...? Soon be day... (He is standing now, the beginnings of a man) (Rudkin 1986: 49).

As we have discovered, Rudkin's choice of performance idiom and vocal idiom can be difficult; there is more than one 'acting problem'. Field Day was not prepared to tackle this particular 'acting problem', to address issues of performance in a production of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>. And although there are a number of political reasons, the theatrical implications are just as relevant. It seems ironic that Friel's own search for a new performance language through Dancing at Lughnasa was so

successful, but then it was safely sited in nostalgia, and ultimately, in the word. The physical transformation by the dancing sisters is placed in opposition to the conscious voicing of this transformation by Michael. The distance of time effected by the device of the narrator, and the citing of a conscious appraisal of the transformation in an-other body—Michael's—suggests that the performative implications of the transformation were not confronted.

The Saxon Shore was anything but safe. The transformation to wolf sited the consciousness of transformation in the transforming body and had the potential to unsettle Irish audiences and practitioners from a theatrical and political complacency. However, when it was eventually produced in London, the performance 'problem' of The Saxon Shore was de-politicised, with no references made to the play's analogous relationship with Northern Ireland. The political implications of Athdark's conscious transformation to werewolf (sectarian killer) were lost as the *performance* demands of this difficult image were not met. The staging of werewolves in the text comments on tribalism. To perform such an embodied tribalism, a company would need a vigorous ensemble rehearsal process; this was evidently not the case with the 1986 production of The Saxon Shore at the Almeida.

On 27 February 1986 <u>The Saxon Shore</u> opened at the Almeida Theatre, London. It was a beleaguered production from the outset. The script had been rejected by Field Day Theatre Company in Derry and the Lyric Theatre in Belfast, but now director Pierre Audi (then artistic director of the Almeida) had chosen to produce <u>The Saxon Shore</u> as part of the company's remit to work outside the mainstream:

<u>The Saxon Shore</u> represents the continuation of the Almeida as a resourceful centre for fresh and exciting productions outside the mainstream of British Theatre (Almeida programme note: 1986).

Rudkin had not had a London premiere of his work since his first stage play, <u>Afore Night Come</u>, was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Arts Theatre, London, as part of a season of experimental theatre in 1962. In the meantime, the majority of his stage work was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place, Stratford: a version of the radio play <u>Cries from Casement as his Bones are Brought to Dublin</u> (1973), a reworking of <u>Sons of Light</u> (1977), <u>Hippolytus</u> (translation after Euripides 1978), <u>Hansel and Gretel</u> (1980) and <u>Peer Gynt</u> (translation after Ibsen 1982). Other productions included No Title (reworking of

television play <u>House of Character</u> (1974)) and <u>The Triumph of Death</u> (1981), both at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Company; <u>Burglars</u> (1968) at The Oval Theatre, Kennington; <u>The Sons of Light</u> (1976) by the Tyneside Theatre Company, Newcastle; and <u>Ashes</u> (1973) at Hamburg Stadtstheater Malersaal, Germany. When interviewed by Giles Gordon of the <u>Observer</u>, Rudkin made no reference to Field Day in response to the Almeida premiere of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, saying only that 'It is a play I wanted to explore in a different, embattled context' (Gordon <u>Observer</u>: 23/2/86).

The Almeida provided that embattled context as it was in danger of losing its funding on the demise of the Greater London Council; it was a show of commitment that the Almeida Theatre Company would undertake such an ambitious project at that time. Audi had asked Rudkin to rework the text for seven actors instead of the original nine, but this seems to have been the only budgetary concession; original music was commissioned from composer Oliver Knussen, and Hildegard Bechtler designed the very elaborate set. Another seeming luxury was the length of the rehearsal period, reported in the <u>Observer</u> to have been seven weeks long (Rudkin remembered it as five), but here the problems began to surface.

Karl Johnson had been cast as Agricola/Llugovelin, but he left after one week of rehearsal to be replaced by Jonathon Kent. Robert Eddison was cast as Cambyses, but he was cast knowing that he would miss two weeks to facilitate his touring Hong Kong with a production of The Tempest and St Joan. The opening of The Saxon Shore was subsequently delayed as Eddison became ill and was replaced by Ian McDiarmid at short notice; McDiarmid was on book when The Saxon Shore opened. No doubt these cast changes impacted on the process that, according to Rudkin, 'never really became the big ensemble journey that I would have liked' (Rudkin interview: 276). An ensemble journey seemed unlikely given the rehearsal schedule, although Rudkin was present throughout, which would suggest a collaborative approach to the material. Rudkin was uncomfortable with his role in the process, however, having come through 'the Royal Shakespeare Company discipline' where roles were sharply defined: 'the author never gives direct notes to actors. The director does that. (...) The second thing is that you can only answer questions as to meaning, (...) there are very strict parameters that an author does not cross' (Rudkin interview: 275).

In the first week of rehearsal, the director and Rudkin worked only with Gerard Murphy, owing to the 'virtuosic' demands of his role (Rudkin interview: 275). In the second week, a number of actors joined in the process, including Pauline Delaney as Mother Athdark. By the third week, they were working with the full cast, where possible. But this piecemeal schedule could not accommodate the physical demands of the wolf imagery and the devising of a physical vocabulary for the group as a whole. Rudkin noted that Audi as director did not facilitate the transformation as he might have, 'he knew how to conjure the demons but he didn't know how to make them work for him' (Rudkin interview: 265). As a consequence, the rehearsal process took a tentative approach to the corporeal demands of the play:

The whole wolf thing, which is the core of it, we were not too clear which was the best way to organise because we were in really untried territory procedurally, whether it was best to do individually with individual actors, because it's very naked-making doing this kind of thing (Rudkin interview: 274).

Gerard Murphy, who played Athdark, remembered a number of 'wolf-workshops' but they 'petered out' (Rabey 1997: 193). Rudkin supported this in relating how each actor worked individually to find a physicalization of the wolf state, rather than performers working together in rehearsal. He described Murphy's physicalization of the transformation in detail:

He [Murphy] came in one morning and he said, "well, I tried a couple of things, maybe you'd like to see them?" And we said "please". So he slowly warmed himself in and ... I didn't know quite where the man ended and the wolf began. That was the first thing that was really quite impressive ... The flesh began to retire from the teeth, it was very slow, it started and it retreated and then it happened again, and it wasn't just one continuous unbroken thing, it was gradual, it was like a series of contractions. And it was very subtle. ... he didn't actually do it with all of his body at first (...) It would never really have been adequate in performance because you needed to be quite close, it was very intimate, profoundly intimate (Rudkin interview: 274).

Murphy's lonely process could have provided a strong foundation, or at least a point of departure, for the actor and for the full cast. However, in itself it proved insufficient. Audi and Rudkin worked the wolf image with individual actors, and thus the company failed to realise a coherent ensemble approach to this very difficult 'actor's problem': 'And then of course there were the group scenes, the becoming wolves. I don't think that was a problem we ever really solved (...) as a company

proposition. Relationships between the company and the director became rather jagged for a whole variety of reasons; I think they began to feel not too safe' (Rudkin interview: 275). However, McDiarmid, a late arrival to the rehearsal process as he replaced Robert Eddison at short notice, found it 'alarmingly easy to become a werewolf at short notice' (Rabey 1997: 196). He acknowledged Rudkin's work as having provided an unusual opportunity: '[t]he challenge is, not to embody a wolf, but to allow one's own lupine qualities to emerge. Actors are always aching to use the raw material of the self to discover more about it. Writers such as Rudkin provide opportunities for this' (Rabey 1997: 196).

Rudkin wrote <u>The Saxon Shore</u> for Field Day Theatre Company, anticipating that the imagery would challenge a cast's culturally specific blocks to such a physical idiom. Although the cast of the Almeida production of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> had a variety of backgrounds—Brenda Fricker from the Irish Republic; Gerard Murphy: Northern Irish; Joely Richardson: English; Jonathon Kent: South African—their rehearsal difficulties emphasized a physical reticence which many cast members could not overcome:

And it is interesting that it was precisely at that interface where the actor needed to deserve the body; it was precisely at that interface that our very serious company problems began (Rudkin interview: 265 [my emphasis]).

To effect the transformation the actors needed to 'deserve the body', but rehearsal and performance conditions can impact on the interrelationships within a cast. To take performative risks, a cast must feel themselves to be in an environment of trust:

when it came to the date, they were okay, oddly enough, in the first scene, (...) but the language helps them a lot there, because it's very savage and they didn't have to demonstrate too much. But there's a scene towards the end where they are called forth, when they were being conjured, (which you have to have in a play about werewolves at some point), and I think it was a little ordinary. Just putting it on, just being a bit nasty and flexing their claws and that kind of thing. I think they became really tentative (...) and then they might as well not do it at all. (Rudkin interview: 276).

In the published text, one section of the transformation to wolf scene is indicated as having been cut from the Almeida production script (act three scene four in Rudkin 1986: 38), leaving the company to make a more abrupt, and perhaps more difficult, transition. Rudkin and the company had identified the transformation as an

acting problem. In performance, this problem was made manifest and critical reactions varied. Some were confused: 'the plot-line is extremely confusing—partly through the multiple doublings of the company of seven, and partly though Rudkin's changes of idiom, which plunge from tirades and fairy-tales to telegrammatic werewolf speech and anachronistic comedy' (Wardle <u>Times</u>: 5/3/86). Other critics were dismissive: 'Athdark, a Saxon farmer with an alarming tendency to imagine himself to be a were-wolf strays over the wall into British territory' where he later meets Ceiriad and, according to the reviewer, 'has a fit of the werewolfs and does her in' (Shulman: <u>Standard</u>: 4/3/86).

The problem of the werewolf imagery was only one of a number identified by reviewers. Bechtler, with director Audi, created a very elaborate landscape that incorporated the fabric of the Almeida building, the four elements and a large steeply raked triangular plinth. At that time the building itself had an old brick interior, which was used to evoke the inescapable influence of Hadrian's Wall on the communities living on either side. A gas flame, emitting from a long pipe, burned throughout until the signal light, indicating the power of Rome, was extinguished in act four scene five:

ATHDARK: On 'tower, look. The light's gone out.
OLD FARMER: Ay. And on 'next. Tower to tower. Along the Wall, look.
Towers that still stand. The lights go out. Here come some night (Rudkin 1986: 47).

A running water font (an apparently troublesome device) created a fountain at Ceiriad's shire and a raked triangular plinth covered in earth and/or sand defined the playing space with a 'spiralling ramp that came down like half of an 'S' [that] came around and down and then onto the space' (Rudkin interview: 272). The Sunday Times review indicates the scale of the design: 'Bechtler's astonishing set suggests that it is already an archaeological site. The stone and rough-cast wings, collapsed ramps and builders' rubbish evoke the ruin of Roman rule' (Sunday Times: 9/3/86). John Barber described it as 'an evocatively sloping stage' (Barber, Daily Telegraph: 5/3/86), but Rudkin suggests that it created problems for the actors as it was difficult to negotiate: 'It was the busiest landscape I'd ever known actors in a play of mine have to contend with' (Rudkin interview: 271). He concluded that 'the design had intruded somewhat on the very austere magical process' (Rudkin

interview: 272). One review published in the <u>Observer</u> noted that: 'this is a fine elemental landscape for 'Peer Gynt', 'Timon of Athens', or 'Brand' but the actors move on it with some circumspection and I doubt its suitability for a play which is always intimate and austere' (Observer 9/3/86).

The difficulties of the wolf imagery were compounded by this apparently beautiful but unwieldy design, which was literal in its translation of the Saxon Roman world, making it all the more difficult to make the necessary imaginative leap to accommodate the 'unrealistic' 'transformations; 'it had a slightly literal effect on the way you read the stage as a spectator' (Rudkin interview: 273). The shape and layout of the space would have hampered any experimental non-realistic movement. Although he appreciated the incorporation of the four elements especially, Rudkin believes that his work is better served by a more basic, stark environment from which the actors 'can take their physical energy' (Rudkin interview: 270). But he identifies the design issues of The Saxon Shore as being part of a bigger problem in relation to theatre design: 'the design hardens up at a particular point in the development of the production... By the time the set (and it's well named as a set because it is set by then) is being put together, the actors work has often overtaken it' (Rudkin interview: 270-71).

Reactions to the 1986 performance of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> identified both the wolf imagery and the design as problematic, but only as symptoms of the issues of the production as a whole. The imagery of the play was read as overloaded, obscuring interpretations of Rudkin's complex premise. Murphy's performance of Athdark's wound was problematic: '[he] spends much of the first act hobbling through his agricultural and religious duties in a state of agonizing pain. As he is played by Gerard Murphy, a masterly exponent of guilt and physical anguish, it is difficult to pay attention to anything apart from that suppurating wound. This is a pity as the early scenes also contain an arresting sermon' (Wardle <u>Times</u> 5/3/86).

When produced in London, the play was, in practical terms, taken out of a Northern Irish context. Neither was the play promoted as an analogy for the Northern Irish Unionists' predicament. There are no specific references to Northern Ireland in the play, and the note in the Almeida production programme did not draw the analogy either. One detail that did 'set' The Saxon Shore within a Northern Irish discourse

was the casting of Gerard Murphy as Athdark. Murphy, from Newry, County Down, was described recently as 'one of Northern Ireland's leading actors' and his accent did register with some critics: 'Joely Richardson makes a beautiful Celtic princess; Gerard Murphy a striking, red-haired Romano-Saxon Lover. But my British matter-of-factness makes me ask why he has an Ulster accent, when his mother (Pauline Delany) speaks Yorkshire' (Sunday Times 9/3/86). Rudkin, however, rejects this and insists that while Murphy's background informed his interpretation of Athdark, his voice did not sound Northern Irish in performance: 'I don't remember hearing a single Ulster note in Gerard's performance (...) he realised that would have been the last thing to do with the role because that would have, in a sense, reduced it, and he really wanted to keep the thing as pure as possible' (Rudkin interview: 280).

In 1986, Rudkin was distancing himself and his play from Northern Ireland and his experience with Field Day. In a pre-production interview with Giles Gordon of the <u>Observer</u>, Rudkin made no mention of the play's history, citing two images—a horror-movie image of a werewolf outside a window and a lone red-haired man in Saxonish clothes holding a farm implement, standing alone in a pool of light—as his inspiration. But try as he might to minimize the play's origins, a number of reviewers, including Michael Billington of the <u>Guardian</u>, read the play as a metaphor for Ulster:

But Rudkin is also an Ulsterman and, on the public level, it is not hard to see parallels between his transplanted Saxon farmers and his own countrymen: his Saxons are victims of an identity-crisis, prey to border attacks and are eventually abandoned by the "perfidious Romans" who, (rather as in Brian Friel's <u>Translations</u>) use language as a tool of imperialism (Billington <u>Guardian</u> 5/3/86).

The published text of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> represents the original text with a number of details from the Almeida production included ('the published text will almost never diverge from that hardened performance text unless there is something that we did not get right, in which case I do it in isolation' (Rudkin interview: 282)), and it was published after the play was staged. Rudkin was quite emphatic on this point:

²¹ This description appeared in the programme for The Belfast Festival at Queen's 2000, Murphy was cast as Malvolio in The Birmingham Repertory Theatre touring production of <u>Twelfth Night</u> (Belfast Festival at Queen's 2000 programme note: 16).

it represents the text as finalised during rehearsal... I've never wished to have a play published before first production. I think it's a highly dangerous exercise. I'm always very doubtful when I see the play script on sale in the foyer on the way in ... It's a bit opportunistic and of course you do sell quite a lot but it's a document of limited worth. I draw up the published text from the prompt book (Rudkin interview: 282).

While Rudkin was part of the rehearsal process, the published text is not the close representation of production details, as in the publication of <u>The Great Hunger</u> for example. Specific design details such as the staging of the four elements were not published: 'I had my doubts about it, it did work quite well but it isn't something I would enshrine in the text. Sometimes I do enshrine production details in the text because I think they become definitive' (Rudkin interview: 273).

Accordingly, the 1986 Methuen text is not a documentation of the Almeida production but, as such, it may leave the creative space for further interpretations of the piece, further solutions to the 'acting problem' of performance. In his choice of the werewolf image, Rudkin presented his actors with an acting problem that brought the very act of performance into question. In the Almeida production, this problem was never fully resolved, but it had been stripped of its political context. This might suggest that the problem of performance can only be solved when embodied within a cultural specificity. With At the Black Pig's Dyke, Vincent Woods and Druid Theatre Company revisited the issues of performance as transformation and the staging of Irish issues for an Irish audience in 1992. The very different production histories of the wounded body of The Saxon Shore and the defaced body of At the Black Pig's Dyke indicate a climate change in performance, if not political, attitudes in the interim period.

CHAPTER FOUR

AT THE BLACK PIG'S DYKE: UNWITTINGLY INTERACTIVE

'The audience mustn't just liberate its Critical Conscience, but its body too. It needs to invade the stage and transform the images that are shown there' (Boal 1979 & 2000: xx).



Fig. 4.1 Mummers in the Druid production of <u>At The Black Pig's Dyke</u> 1992.



Fig. 4.2. Frankie McCafferty as Tom Fool and Deirdre O'Kane as Miss Funny in the Druid production of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> 1992.



Fig. 4.3 Miss Funny, detail of mask in the Druid production of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> 1992.



Fig. 4.4 Ray McBride as Captain Mummer, Diane O'Kelly as Young Lizzie and Stella McCusker as Lizzie Flynn in the Druid production of <u>At The Black Pig's Dyke</u> 1992.

4.1 CONTEXT OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION

The first productions of <u>The Great Hunger</u> by Mac Intyre, <u>The Saxon Shore</u> by Rudkin and <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> by Vincent Woods mark significant moments in the course and development of contemporary Irish theatre for a number of reasons. Their stagings of the cultural and political landscapes, and of the body, have contributed to current theatre practice. Close readings of each of these plays and their production histories can also contribute to an emerging performance discourse for Irish theatre. One aspect that the productions of these plays share is their incorporation of ritual. Church ritual and rhetoric are staged in the 'God-given' nature of the Saxon violence in <u>The Saxon Shore</u>; the Celts are evoked through their funerary ritual. Performance tradition is staged in <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> to the point where an act of recovery seemed to be occurring:

[A] lot of the material in the play comes from my own background, from the history and mythology of the area in Leitrim where I grew up, from stories that I'd heard as a child and from the tradition of mumming which was still alive when I was a child. As I grew away from it I realised that I was lucky enough to be at what I've since called 'the tail-end of tradition', and what I was capturing in the play was something of that (Woods interview: 284).

Local traditions suffuse At the Black Pig's Dyke. A recurrence of the theme of pig killing and the many layers of storytelling, which disrupted any realistic rendering of the plot, draw attention to the act of storytelling as well as the cyclical nature of the violence in the border regions 'at the tail-end of tradition'.

In this chapter I consider a number of issues pertaining to the staging of Irish politics and performance traditions so as to realise the implications for both audiences and practitioners. The Saxon Shore captured the nature of sectarian violence—the other within the self—by using a transformation to werewolf. At the Black Pig's Dyke also staged sectarianism but, unlike The Saxon Shore, it enjoyed national and international success. The contrasting fates of the first productions of these two plays could be read to reflect a bias towards the relevant cultures. The Saxon Shore deals with the Unionist condition—the fate of the settler; At the Black Pig's Dyke deals with the Nationalist condition—the fate of the colonised. Both plays are challengingly theatrical and were imaginatively staged. Although approaching the

problem from opposite sides, each playwright was actively questioning sectarianism, seeking a way across the borders of Irish identity.

Playwright Vincent Woods left his job as a journalist and broadcaster with RTE¹ to write and to travel. In New Zealand in 1990 he wrote his first plays. On The Way Out: A play in Three Acts or Three Short Plays comprises of: 'Act I/Play I: Tom John, Act II/Play II: The Leitrim Hotel, and Act III/Play III: John Hughdy². Their titles suggest that these scripts could be staged separately or as one play in three parts. The following year, in Australia, Woods met Maelíosa Stafford who was about to become the artistic director of Druid Theatre Company in Galway. Stafford arranged for Druid to stage John Hughdy and Tom John as part of a season of new Irish writing³. John Hughdy and Tom John, described in the programme as 'companion pieces', were first staged as lunchtime theatre on 4 July 1991 and directed by John Crowley. The Leitrim Hotel was not staged. Woods was then commissioned by Stafford to write a play for Druid Theatre Company based on the Irish performance tradition of mumming. At the Black Pig's Dyke opened on 30 September 1992.

Druid Theatre Company was well placed to produce Woods' work. Founded in Galway in 1975 by director Garry Hynes and actors Maire Mullen and Mick Lally, Druid was the first of a number of significant companies operating outside Dublin and heralded a welcome regionalisation of Irish theatre (see section 1.3). In her director's note for Druid's Summer Season of Theatre in 1975 Hynes wrote: 'theatre has for long been regarded as a night-time fancy of the elite. I feel it must be a means of expression for the community in which it is routed [sic], serving its educational, recreational and creative means. If it fails in this it will not survive, Druid Theatre Company's remit is to 'bring the best of Irish and international theatre to Galway and, through frequent touring, the rest of Ireland in a manner of up most [sic] professionalism and originality' and the company has 'brought the West of Ireland to the world stage with their many tours abroad' (Druid Theatre Archive

¹ Radio Teilifis Eireann, the national Irish broadcaster.

² Copies of these are held in the Druid archive at the Hardiman Library in the National University of Ireland, Galway.

Druid had been awarded a Better Ireland Award by the Allied Irish Bank to finance the season of new writing, which also included Cheapside by David Allen with Stafford in the cast, and a late night chat show/sketch The Bob Downe Show.

⁴ This is taken from the first page of the Hardiman Library UCG Druid Theatre Archive www.library.ucg.ie.

www.library.ucg.ie). Druid has enjoyed considerable success in both staging and exemplifying the West of Ireland⁵.

Owing to theatrical innovations outside or on the edges of the mainstream, Irish audiences have been aware of the potentials of theatre. The languages of image, movement and music have made a place for themselves beside the language of the word as written by Irish playwrights and spoken by Irish actors. An emphasis on the corporeal presence of the actor in Woods' play and a reliance on the audiences' acceptance of fluid theatrical form evidence a growing familiarity with the conventions of physical theatre due to work such as The Great Hunger (see section 1.3 also). The presence of the actor in the 1992 production of At the Black Pig's Dyke was exploited in a bid to realise its full theatrical potential, dance, music and ritual were used to explore the many facets of Irish culture—both the role of form in Irish theatre and the role of representation in the expression of the Irish condition. As I have examined in earlier work on The Great Hunger Mac Intyre gives Irish audiences a sensory insight into the physical and emotional deprivation experienced by many in rural Ireland. Woods also presents his audience with an uncompromising vision of Irish life—not concerned with the privations of a farmer trapped by his repressive society and his own fears—but with a people divided. In Woods' play, as in The Saxon Shore, there are two Irelands, two communities, two traditions.

At the Black Pig's Dyke shares with The Great Hunger a creative use of the dynamic between audience and performers, a concern with the dark side of Irish identity and an appreciation of the wealth of imagery in Irish pre-Christian ritual. As I illustrate in this chapter, Woods revealed the emptiness of political rhetoric just as Mac Intyre pointed to the failure of Catholicism to engage with the anxieties of the people. Mac Intyre's pagan procession, set in deliberate opposition to the rigid formality of the Church, was echoed by Woods' use of the mumming tradition in At the Black Pig's Dyke, a tradition that was frowned upon by Church authorities. I refer to the connections between the work of Mac Intyre and Woods, not to force an uneasy comparison between them, but to identify points of contact, the moments of

⁵ Druid's more recent productions since the return of Garry Hynes as artistic director have been largely successful, but one factor in this success has also provoked controversy: the work of Martin McDonagh, especially the staging of <u>The Leenane Trilogy</u>, is considered here in the conclusion.

resonance in both plays where the work of these playwrights engages with the power offered to Irish theatre from within the Irish folk tradition.

At the Black Pig's Dyke also questions the opinion of many commentators on the relative youth of theatre in Ireland as a dramatic form (considered here in the first chapter). The folk tradition of mumming is used effectively. Indeed, the play is driven by this image, which lent an unusually high level of theatricality to the action in performance. Ostensibly benign, the traditional straw costumes assume an element of disguise as the play progresses; the audience come to realise that in this case tradition, literally, masks hatred.

It seems ironic that Woods chose a precolonial ritual to investigate twentieth century Nationalist opposition to the colonial planting of Ulster⁶. At the Black Pig's Dyke is set at the border between Leitrim (in the Republic) and Fermanagh (in Northern Ireland) in the 1940s and the present day; these areas being renowned for their strong mumming tradition.

If you want to understand the mysteriousness of life you should sit on the border to keep watch on both sides. (...) That may be seen as the symbolic aspect of the Black Pig's Dyke, that is, that everything, even [the] country itself, is divided in two. The artist must place himself on the dividing line to fully comprehend that world (Kiberd (trans.) in <u>Id dTreo an Chúigiú Cúige—An Mhuc Dubh</u> broadcast 17/1/97).

By exploring the notion of a community divided, <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> questions both Northern Ireland as a political construct and the play as a social construct, and is compelling in its demand for our appreciation of the complexities of that situation.

Northern Ireland has provided Irish theatre with an inflammatory subject matter. Playwrights from the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland and 'mainland' Britain have explored the issue, sometimes taking an unexpected perspective. Since the mideighties (and The Saxon Shore by Rudkin), plays on the Northern Irish condition have included Frank McGuinness's Observe the Sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme (1985), which looks at the involvement of the Unionist community in the Great War and is, I believe, in the process of achieving canonical status. Ourselves Alone (1985) by Anne Devlin takes on many political challenges in its ironic use of such a Nationalistic title, which corresponds with the translation of sinn féin, (the name of one of the Nationalist political parties associated with the use of violence).

The play places women inside this territory, but without losing sight of the female experience. Somewhere Over The Balcony (1988) by Marie Jones and produced by Charabanc in Belfast was described by Jane Coyle as 'a black comedy' (Coyle 1993: 16)⁷. Set in the infamous (and identified as Nationalist) Divis flats in Belfast, Over The Balcony also engages with the lives of women living during 'The Troubles' on the first anniversary of Internment.

In 1992 At the Black Pig's Dyke was contributing to the ongoing appraisal of the legacy of Ireland's history, questioning notions of identity while challenging theatrical form. The central character Lizzie Flynn allows Woods access to both traditions of Northern Ireland. In his use of the image of Catholic Lizzie's marriage to Protestant Jack Boles, the playwright interrogates the dynamic tension between opposites. Woods conveys a sense that the struggle for Lizzie between Protestant Boles and Catholic Frank Beirne is just another episode in a long saga of revenge and reprisal. Indeed, by focusing on Lizzie as an individual, Woods offers us a panoramic view of the resentment felt by both communities. In scene four of the first act (a scene set in 'the present') a local mummers' group come to the house and find Lizzie and her daughter Sarah dead in their kitchen. The play then becomes a series of flashbacks, an investigation into the lives and deaths of Lizzie Flynn and her daughter Sarah by the Black Pig's Dyke 'Where the dead prepared shrouds for the living' (Woods 1992: 1). The inescapable violence of her history leaves Lizzie grieving and defeated. The all-pervading need for revenge has tainted her society; her flight across the Black Pig's Dyke with her Protestant husband is ultimately futile as the prejudices of the region transcend the border and follow the young couple to Fermanagh.

There are in essence four performance levels in At the Black Pig's Dyke that add richness and complexity to the play as a whole. At the most realistic level Lizzie is in the present-day, living in Fermanagh with her daughter Sarah, son-in-law Hugh Brolly and granddaughter Elizabeth. The second performance level is Lizzie's life in Leitrim the 1940s when as a young woman she courts and marries Jack Boles; this level is also performed and a younger actor plays Young Lizzie, simultaneously staged with the older, reminiscing, Lizzie. The mummers' are staged as both benign performers and terrorists; their enactment of the mummers' plays forms the third

⁶ See section 1.2 on mumming.

performance level in <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>. Finally granddaughter Elizabeth appears outside the actions at the beginning of both acts and in the epilogue, telling a analogous story of The Strange Knight. The action and interrelations between each of these performance levels are non-linear. Woods explores these levels with a playfulness that presumes upon an audience's willingness to subvert the given scenario of Lizzie rocking her granddaughter Elizabeth's cradle in a rural Irish kitchen. Lizzie's opening words take the form of the storyteller's, 'It was a long time ago Elizabeth and it was not a long time ago...' (Woods 1992: 1), setting both the scene and the atmosphere of expectation, and thereby acknowledging the presence of the audience. Tom Fool and Miss Funny repeat the image of the storyteller by acting as guides throughout, and Elizabeth is also a storyteller with her story of the Strange Knight in the prologues and epilogue.

There are also many doublings within the play: young Lizzie and older Lizzie, the past and the present, the murders committed on each side of the political divide, the action of the play north and south of the border. The decision to situate the action at as old and tangible a defence as the Black Pig's Dyke in west-Ulster provides Woods with a particular framework. Here Unionist anxieties at being so far from the stronghold of the east and from Belfast heighten political determination, whereas Nationalists are shown by Woods to use the border to their own advantage, while denouncing its existence. Thus, the Black Pig's Dyke exemplifies the complexity of meaning behind the term postcolonial:

Colmcille prophesied that the last battle between Ireland and England would be in the valley of the Black Pig. The Irish would be victorious and the country would be freed (Rooney (trans.) in <u>Id dTreo an Chúigiú Cúige—An Mhuc Dubh</u> broadcast 17/1/97).

At the Black Pig's Dyke investigates the dramatic potential of the conflict of cultures of Northern Ireland. Lizzie Boles creates an image of a place without borders and beyond conflict: 'It was a time when to go east was to go west, when to go south was to go north' (Woods 1992: 1). 'When to go south was to go north' suggests an ideal which the action soon contradicts; but the line could also be taken to mean the cyclical nature of sectarian violence, one side of the divide mirroring the other. The action of the play crosses two borders, one being the Black Pig's Dyke between

⁷ See also section 1.3.

counties Leitrim and Fermanagh, the other being time, as the audience is guided between Lizzie's past in the 1940s and her life in the present. In many instances both old and young Lizzies are onstage at the same time as Lizzie reflects on life on either side of the Black Pig's Dyke. By setting the action in the 1940s and the 1990s, both the Republic and Northern Ireland are shown to be political constructs. The border was not a political border in the pre-partition time recollected by the characters, but the Black Pig's Dyke has mythical symbolism and a pre-Christian history. According to legend sightings of the mythical Black Pig around *Samhain* or Halloween were portends of trouble, symbolic of change as this time was considered a liminal space between autumn and winter, light and darkness⁸.

This reading of At the Black Pig's Dyke text and its Druid production seeks to address both the theatrical vision of the playwright, and his exploration of Irish identity as effected by his acts of cultural retrieval, the staging of the mummers and references to local history, local legend and politics. I have a dual focus here as I consider both the staging of folk tradition as a recuperative, theatrical strategy and the political implications of the use of a masked performance tradition to interrogate issues of sectarian violence and accountability. As stated in the introduction, the text of At the Black Pig's Dyke used here is the unpublished Druid production text, which differs from the published play text, in that many of the stage directions particular to the production and developed in rehearsal were subsequently removed for publication. Woods was present throughout the rehearsal period.

The Black Pig's Dyke had a distinct presence within Woods' play, providing both backdrop and stage, as the characters struggled to move beyond their personal borders.

It probably was at the time of the Gaelic conquest that a series of linear earthworks was constructed which runs discontinuously from the head of Carlingford Lough on the east coast to Donegal Bay in the west. Known locally under different names, these earthworks have the picturesque collective title of the 'Black Pig's Dyke'. An alternative, more suggestive, term is the 'Great Wall of Ulster' (Heslinga 1979: 110).

⁸ The symbolism of the Black Pig in the region of the Black Pig's Dyke is documented in <u>Id dTreo an Chúigiú Cúige—An Mhuc Dubh</u> ['Towards the Fifth Province—The Black Pig'] an Irish language documentary on the folklore of the region of the Black Pig's Dyke, which was broadcast on *Teilifis na Gaeilge* [now TG4], 19 January 1997.

There are many points of comparison between The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke and one of those is quite tangible: the structure around which each play is built. The Black Pig's Dyke was not built on the same scale as Hadrian's Wall, in that bogs and woodlands interrupted its structure, and there is some debate as to its function, it was either designed as a defence against cattle raiding or as a more military manned frontier. However, it has been likened by some to the Roman defence which is the setting for Rudkin's play: '[v]arious archaeologists agree that the detached earthworks [of the Black Pig's Dyke] may be copies of the Roman frontier works in Great Britain, perhaps as seen from the outside, and that they mark the southern border of the original Ulster kingdom' (Heslinga 1979: 110). A report published in the Leitrim Guardian (1997) 'Linear Earthworks in Ireland' disputes this, however, and suggests that recent excavations indicate that the earthworks of counties Monaghan (in the Irish Republic) and Armagh (in Northern Ireland) date from the last centuries B.C. This would prove the Black Pig's Dyke to be an older fortification than Hadrian's Wall, built during Hadrian's reign A.D. 117-138.

Regardless of this fact both structures have inspired much speculation and superstition; local historian Lorcán Rooney recounted how it was considered bad luck to build a house on the Black Pig's Dyke⁹. Another superstition was always 'to kill a pig in the full of the moon, otherwise when you'd put the bacon into the pot it would reduce'. 'Linear Earthworks in Ireland' recounted a folk belief that the Black Pig of the title was a cruel schoolmaster, who was magically transformed into a pig and chased overland by his pupils. It was said that he left a large furrow (the Black Pig's Dyke) in the ground as he ran before drowning in a lake or river. In interview, Woods recalled another version of the folktale:

From the time that I was a small kid my mother used to talk about the story of the Black Pig's Dyke, which you hear in the play, of how this very old fortification was created by a black pig running underneath the ground and pushing the earth up, and that it was still trapped there, running endlessly. There was an idea that, eventually, there would be a great battle on the site of the black pig, where the Protestants of Northern Ireland would be routed and defeated once and for all (Woods interview: 290).

⁹ Rooney and other locals were interviewed in <u>Id dTreo an Chúigiú Cúige—An Mhuc Dubh</u> broadcast 17/1/97).

Woods' reference to the history of the Dyke culminating in the routing of the Protestants from Northern Ireland is ironic in a sense that as an ancient fortification the Black Pig's Dyke has been cited as an early example or an early proof of the otherness of Northern Ireland.

Woods' play stages Lizzie as a contested Catholic female, her Protestant husband Jack Boles is a sympathetic character—his opposite is the obsessive Nationalist Frank Beirne who wants Lizzie to leave Boles and come to him. Beirne's characterization proved controversial in performance as he, and Northern Irish Nationalism, are associated with psychotic butchery. This was as unpalatable an image for Nationalists as the werewolf was as an image of Unionism in The Saxon Shore, although Unionist audiences did not get opportunity to take exception to that image of themselves (audience responses to the characterization of Beirne are detailed in section 4.5). Woods' incorporation of the set structure of the mummers' plays into the action is also politicised, as the killers are costumed as masked mummers. However, Woods disavows a political agenda:

I didn't set out to write a political play. I suppose the play was unavoidably political in the subject matter that it eventually tackled. History is political, everything at some level is, and yet I believe that everything at every level is also more than political. The play was trying to bring out of the darkness some things that had been in there for too long, and to tell the stories that had been half-forgotten, maybe half-suppressed or repressed, to bring those out into the light and let people look at them. And confront people with what we are, what we have done (Woods interview: 286).

Despite Woods' insistence, <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> engendered a very political response in particular audience members, as its subsequent production history proves.

4.2 STAGING TRADITION

While Woods disclaims political motivations, he does acknowledge that in staging the mummers' plays he was seeking recognition for the Irish performance tradition.

I wouldn't make any great claims to try to recover any mumming play. But as a kid I went out on Stephen's Day, as a Wrenboy, and you think that this is something that is going to continue forever; but for the last few years whenever I was back in Leitrim (...) not a single person, not a single child goes around anymore on the Wren. And I think there's something very sad about that. If the play only succeeded in capturing something that was alive once and not anymore, then I think we'll have achieved something in that (Woods interview: 285).

As considered in the first chapter, staged Irish rituals and traditions include the funeral rites of keening and waking, Celtic calendar festivals, religious ceremonies, storytelling, music and dance. At the Black Pig's Dyke includes a number of Irish traditions and is an intricately woven fabric of image and ritual. The mummers' progression from bearers of blessings, entertainment and good fortune, to disguised vigilantes is well developed in the text, and was visually chilling as first staged by Druid Theatre Company in 1992. This development is redolent of the historical association between mummers, Strawboys or Wrenboys and bands of rural activists such as the Whiteboys or Ribbonmen; but also suggests the more immediate image of today's masked terrorists (see section 1.2).

Luke Gibbons details the performative element of agrarian violence in nineteenth-century Ireland in 'Identity without a Centre: Allegory, History and Irish Nationalism': [t]he most conspicuous evidence of the cross-over with other forms of peasant custom such as mummers and Strawboys was the symbolic dress of male insurgents, and in particular the systematic adoption of female clothing: bonnets, veils gowns and petticoats were pressed into service in this transgressive costume drama' (Gibbons 1996: 141). Such costuming lent an anonymity to the agitators that was significant in At the Black Pig's Dyke; actors playing characters with a legitimate role in society also played the mummers who, behind their masks, could be benign or violent, or both. This ambiguity differed from the direct association between the characters and werewolves in Rudkin's The Saxon Shore. There is also a suggestion in Gibbons' specification of both the male gender of the agitators and their assumption of female garb—veils, bonnets, gowns and petticoats—of a cross-dressing; in their defence of Mother Ireland the rural activists became her.

The action of the play transcends the border, the Black Pig's Dyke, much as the mumming tradition did:

County Fermanagh has a widespread tradition of Mumming, both in the east in places like Lisnarrick and Lisbellow, and in the west, especially around Derrylin, Derrygonnelly, Garrison and Belcoo. Across the Border, in Blacklion, there was another group, while there were mummers farther west at Glenfarm in County Leitrim and at Ardfarm near Bundoran (Gailey 1969: 10).

As detailed in section 1.2, mummers group consisted of the leader Captain Mummer, a Doctor, two heroes or combatants, and a number of musicians; and in County Tyrone, for example, the heroes were named as either St. Patrick and St. George or King William and King James.

TOM FOOL: And one was killed—it all relied On the tradition, the tribe, the side Of the household where they played—or fought (Woods 1992: 18).

Woods used both Miss Funny and Tom Fool as part of the mummers group in At the Black Pig's Dyke, all of who were masked to great effect.

[I]n mumming plays (...) you have a male and female fool. And in Irish, there are two terms, *amadán* being a male fool and *óinseach* being a female fool. I was always struck by that distinction of the two sexes having their individual foolishness, or foolishnesses. And they seemed both to come out of a very old tradition of theatre and to come out of the landscape of what I was writing about. So it seemed to make sense that they could stand back a bit and direct things, or send up the wrong signals, or play with the audience which I thought they do very successfully (Woods interview: 288).

In original mumming plays the 'individual foolishnesses' of both sexes were not embodied, in that a boy or a man played Miss Fool, so that even though there was traditionally recognition of the female role, it was still contained within the male performer's body¹⁰. Tom Fool and Miss Funny play off one another, with a sharp wit that belies their titles of Fools. As they lead the audience through the complex maze of flashbacks and analogies, the Fools lighten the atmosphere with knowing asides to the audience:

TOM FOOL & MISS FUNNY: In the end...
MISS FUNNY: And the end's comin' up...

TOM FOOL: As the farmer said, kissin' the sheep (Woods 1992: 65).

Unlike the Fools of the original mumming plays, the contemporary Fools of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> can be played by a male and female actor, allowing women to embody the role of Miss Funny: 'they're very bawdy as well, which is there in the tradition (...) I think again it ties into the notions of fertility and life continuing, which is also very much there in the text of the play' (Woods interview: 288-89).

¹⁰ See section 1.2.

Act one scene one opens with the arrival of Tom Fool and Miss Funny who introduce the device of the mummers' play by describing the characters and storyline, thereby educating the audience on the basics of this almost extinct performance tradition. In scene two and subsequent scenes the fools move between the action of the mummers' plays and the action of Lizzie's scenarios, masked and unmasked, to comment on the events unfolding. They function more as guides than narrators, easing the movement between past and present, while reinforcing the note of inevitability which is sounded by Lizzie and Sarah's deaths in act one scene four. The function of Tom Fool and Miss Funny as guides or interpreters is established immediately, as the stage directions indicate: 'Tom Fool and Miss Funny slide in to theme music (in the original Druid production the musician mummers played live music in performance, composed by Brendan O'Regan, who also played the musician/Beelzebub mummer¹¹). Tom Fool carries a bladder and staff, Miss Funny a collection box. Each has a grotesquely made up face and bizarre costume. They stand and stare at the audience for a moment' (Woods 1992: 3).

Performance elements are emphasized by Tom Fool and Miss Funny directly acknowledging and addressing the audience; the device of the storyteller is used (for the third time) as both characters begin by outlining the tradition of the mummers' play:

TOM FOOL: A midwinters' play for a midwinters' night.

MISS FUNNY: A mummers' play alright. (...)

TOM FOOL: Auld guff that had them in stitches Every Christmas or

midwinter

MISS FUNNY: Catholic Protestant or Dissenter Sittin' back to watch the crack (Woods 1992: 3).

The theme music, which heralds their arrival onstage throughout, is one of many aural signifiers in the play as the almost subliminal power of music is intended to create or heighten atmosphere. Tom Fool subverts his role within the performed mummers' play of act one, scene two by ostensibly getting his lines wrong: 'Here come I, Tom Fool/With me bladder and staff in me eye,/I didn't come here to make you laugh,/No, I came to make you cry' (Woods 1992: 11). Although he then goes on to correct himself and initiates a bawdy interaction with Miss Funny, he has

¹¹ Druid Theatre Company production details follow at the end of this section.

communicated to the audience that all is not as it seems outside the set plot of the mummers' play.

As the mummers finish their play and remove their masks, the playwright makes a brief but sharp comment on the nature of performance itself:

THE BUTCHER (pointing to MISS FUNNY): Anyway, I wanted to be her... MISS FUNNY: Don't be ridiculous. Nobody else can be me. Do ye not know that much yet? (Woods 1992: 13).

This was included at the behest of original director Maeliosa Stafford; Woods reluctantly complied but later asked Garry Hynes, director of the play's final revival to tour to Sydney, Australia in early 1995, that this section be removed. It does not appear in the version of the play as published by Methuen. Therefore this comment on performance, ironically, lived only in performance, a self-awareness as ephemeral as the moment itself.

Woods capitalizes on the existence of Tom Fool and Miss Funny within the mumming tradition, and brings them together in the action of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>. As clowns or fools they are tolerated by the other characters; the sting of truth is veiled by their comedy. Bizarre and outspoken, their invention and intervention serve the play well, giving a fluidity to the form and a commentary on the action.

While Captain Mummer seems ignorant of Lizzie and Sarah's fate until the moment their bodies are discovered in act one scene four, the visual impact of the mummers' involvement in the murder of Jack Boles, Hugh Brolly and Lizzie makes a wordless, theatrical connection; and Captain Mummer voices his own doubt, when trying to apportion blame:

CAPTAIN MUMMER: Is there anybody here knows anything about this?

Is there any of ye had a hand in it?

Do you know anything?

Or you?

Heroes?

Doctor?

And you, Miss Funny?

What about him who's gone for help

What do I know myself? (Woods 1992: 16).

The Captain's questions acknowledge the conspiracies of silence in small communities that allow violence to flourish; he seems to accept responsibility for a

subconscious awareness, a silence, a determined ignorance. <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> portrays a man, a secret society and a large number of the region's people, engaged in the act of violent or passive political resistance.

OLDER LIZZIE: Men with masks, men with sticks, men with their mouths full of rhyme, men with their hearts full of hate, men with their minds stained with blood. Men to dance at a wake, men to cry at a birth, men out searching for their own shadows...Men in gangs, men in a line, men to cut sticks, men to break bones, (...) Men with their heads soft from beatin', men with their hands raw from work, men with their feet that would walk by themselves for a day and a night and a week and a year and end up nowhere... Butchers of men (Woods 1992: 43).

In scene five of the first act Tom Fool and Miss Funny effect the transition from the mummers' discovery of the dead Lizzie to a short time earlier when Lizzie sits in the kitchen and reconstructs her youthful romance with Jack Boles. During this transition, Miss Funny supervises the mummers' staged changeover and the almost ritualistic removal of their discarded straw masks and costumes which are cast onto a cloak centre stage, an action reminiscent of the tradition of certain mummers at the end of the Christmas season. Alan Gailey cites an example from Robert Harbinson's Songs Of Erne: 'one detail that is evocative of a sense of ritual. At the end of their season's activities, the mummers throw their straw masks on a bonfire' (Gailey 1969: 53). This staged change emphasizes the contrived nature of the mask, the decision to assume and remove it, and also suggests the power of the act of masking, as confirmed by the later action of At the Black Pig's Dyke. Tom Fool takes the opportunity at this point to criticize the moral priorities of his society:

TOM FOOL: Tom The Fool—John Thomas The Fool...
But no—no talk of sex —I wouldn't like
To vex the decent people (...)
Better to talk about a bomb
In a creamery can, a van in a ditch (Woods 1992: 18).

Act one, scene eight, sees the wedding of Miss Funny and Tom Fool. This social occasion provided the platform for Beirne's confrontation with Lizzie's father Michael Flynn, and his attempts to secure Lizzie from Jack Boles. However, such concerns aside, the wedding also gives the audience insight into the actuality of ordinary life, such as it was, in Leitrim. Each character parallels their function within the mummers' play, especially Flynn, whose blessing on the couple could have come

from Captain Mummer himself. This long blessing, rhythmic and elaborate, is suggestive not only of the mummers' play but also the general tradition of storytelling, or *bealoideas*¹². Mention of the practicalities, 'There's more tay than in China, despite the auld rations./There's poteen in plenty and porter in lashin's/And tobaccey and snuff—as much as a wake,/Soda bread, boxty and lots of sweet cake' (Woods 1992: 30) lends an air of normality and a simple human interest to the proceedings, which undercuts the viciousness of conflicting loyalties.

The musicians, also mummers, perform traditional Irish music on stage, both heightening the atmosphere, the sense of foreboding, and allowing the audience to identify, or identify *with*, a non-verbal expression of Irishness. Act two opens with a second prologue, followed by a bridging scene, where The Fools refocus the action on 'them that was dead at the start' and introduce the new character Hugh Brolly. Tom Fool and Miss Funny are another example of mirroring within the text: north mirrors south; one mummers' play mirrors the other; Jim Boles' death mirrors Sean Brolly's. Although gender opposites, their roles as fools give them the same function within the play.

Catholic Frank Beirne lays claim to the title of butcher, both visually by his actions, and verbally, as he is both accused of butchery and uses the graphic imagery of pig killing to intimidate.

MISS FUNNY/TOM FOOL: Riddle me that And riddle me this
There was a butcher with his knife
Who wanted Lizzie for his wife.
He stabbed her husband and he ran
And asked again to be her man
And she refused and so he said
He'd live his life to see her dead (Woods 1992: 64).

The culture of the border regions of west-Ulster is rich in pig imagery; the ritual of pig killing features as a local tradition and is a central image in Woods' play. In a documentation of the pig-killing of the region one local pig butcher gives an account of what he sees as the symbolism of the ritual:

Sometimes, when we're getting ready I am reminded that I am like a priest preparing for Mass. The pig is Christ, being sacrificed for the people. Servers helping me... and a bucket as a chalice for the blood. There's both eating and

¹² As used for the voice of Mommo by Tom Murphy in <u>Bailegangaire</u> (1985) see section 1.2.

drinking. I never killed a pig without tasting it later. It wouldn't be right. I respect pigs and I love them. But sometimes you have to kill the thing you love (*Id dTreo an Chúigiú Cúige—An Mhuc Dubh* broadcast 17/1/97).

The 'servers' hold down the pig, take off their caps and bless themselves before the pig butcher uses his knife to inscribe a cross on the throat of the pig¹³.

The butcher is a potent image in sectarian politics, not least because of a group of UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) Loyalist killers who operated in Belfast in the mid 1970s, known infamously as 'the Shankill Butchers'. 'The Shankill Butchers' abducted their Catholic victims and then tortured them using butchers' knives. While the gang operated eleven members murdered nineteen people¹⁴. In act two scene nine of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> Beirne finally does that which the audience has been expecting since scene four of act one, he kills Lizzie, the woman he claimed to love.

Woods' use of the mummers is evocative, ritualistic, and as I have already stressed, sinister. Their plays and costuming inform and underline Lizzie's scenario, and are ultimately inextricable from the other facets of her life by the Black Pig's Dyke. The mummers drive the visual design of the play, and the flexibility of its staging, as illustrated by the Druid production.

In the original 1992 production, as directed by Maelíosa Stafford, the onstage presence of the musicians as mummers facilitated the many sound effects, from the ominous beat of the bodhrán in scene eleven of act one as the mummers surround Jack Boles (played by Brendan Laird), to the heralding of the beginning of the mummers' plays. Songs such as 'The Enniskillen Dragoons', 'The King', 'Barbara Allen', and 'The Ballad of Lord Leitrim' added texture to the play in terms of plot and in their sensory appeal to the audiences' senses and folk memories.

Stella McCusker played Lizzie and young Lizzie/Sarah/Elizabeth was played by Diane O'Kelly who did look a little like McCusker thereby underlining the device in performance. The performance of shared mannerisms also helped to effect the device of split-subjectivity (see fig. 4.4). Ray McBride as Michael Flynn and Captain Mummer led the mummers. A renowned traditional Irish dancer, McBride

¹⁴ See Lovalists by Peter Taylor, London: Bloomsbury, 1999, pp.151-155.

¹³ Another traditional pig butcher from the region gave a graphic account of his work: 'The most important thing is to get the knife in direct, between the two shoulder blades, because if you stick it in a shoulder blade the pig will be a long time dying, and all the blood won't come' (*Id dTreo an Chúigiú Cúige—An Mhuc Dubh* broadcast 17/1/97).

choreographed the movement for the Druid production and brought his considerable skills to bear on the overall marketability of At the Black Pig's Dyke as an exponent of Irish tradition. Peter Gowan played the original Frank Beirne and Sean Lawlor took over the role in 1993. Although there are associations made between character Frank Beirne and the Butcher mummer throughout the play, in the Druid production the actor(s) who played Beirne also played the Doctor in the mummers plays, with the Butcher mummer being played by one of the musicians. Actual musicians were cast as the mummer-musicians (composer Brendan O'Regan, and Cora Smyth; Smyth was replaced by Alan Kelly in 1993). In performance the physical and vocal freedom of expression allowed Tom Fool (played by Frankie McCafferty) and Miss Funny (played by Deirdre O'Kane) to move outside the stricter boundaries of form that restricted portrayals of the other characters. David Wilmot played both Hugh Brolly and the second hero of the mummers.

In the Druid production the mummers carried a 'straw wall' that was used to set a stage within a stage while working as shield, barrier and boundary—a physical obstacle mirroring the image of the Black Pig's Dyke itself. The set as designed by Monica Frawley was deceptively simple. Missing were any iconographic indications of place, or political allegiance—the kitchen was suggested by a few articles of furniture, a number of farm implements and a grain-chute. Somewhat incongruous for a typical kitchen setting, the grain chute fit well with Woods' stage vision and was used in a number of ways in performance: the bundle of mummers' costumes was taken by Tom Fool and Miss Funny in act one scene five and thrown down a grain chute stage left (Woods 1992: 19), and in scene seven it served as the Fools' entry point to the stage when they emerged to conjure up an enactment of their wedding.

A chair fixed high on the wall was used by Tom Fool to give a disjointed, almost surreal air to the stage setting as framed by the huge double-doors. These doors, suggestive of a life beyond the local horrors of sectarianism, also closed Lizzie's world in on itself. The sense of expectation, engendered by Lizzie's first words: 'it was a long time ago...' was heightened by the ominous knocking on the huge double doors that dominated the back of the set as the disembodied voice of Captain Mummer called out 'any admittance for Captain Mummer and his men?' (Woods 1992: 1). In performance the staging decisions for act two, scene six

reminded the audience that all is not as it seems. Tom Fool sat on the chair set halfway up the wall above Miss Funny, a spotlight shone on one face miming the words while the other spoke. In a review of the original production Lynda Henderson wrote:

Miss Funny speaks first—a hair-raising, deep, mannish growl. Your flesh creeps with the strangeness of it. (...) The light switches on Tom Fool—and he cries his forebodings in a thin falsetto. As the exchange goes on, you slowly recognise the theatrical sleight-of-hand. The miming is precise and timed perfectly. The real speaker is the one in the dark (Henderson 1993: 52).

In an article for <u>Theatre Ireland</u> entitled 'Staging the Troubles', Ian Hill described Woods' play as:

a stunning, marvellous play, each action counterpointed by visits of village mummers, men dressed in traditional straw masks, reciting old, at first apparently meaningless rhymes, whose content, in old legends, brutal, sexual, crude, cruel, reflect the centuries old tribal feud.

He concluded:

Leaving the theatre (...) I realised that Druid, a theatre company from the wild beauty of Galway, with a script from Vincent Woods, had at last, stunningly, staged The Troubles, brushing the euphemistic phrase aside (Hill 1993: 46).

Hill was responding to such perceptions as that questioned by Evans in 1979: 'English is so freely spoken in the Republic, and so persuasively written, that the outside world is made familiar with the cause of Irish unity, whereas the taciturn North gets a poor press' (E. Estyn Evans in Heslinga 1979: foreword). The production history of The Saxon Shore substantiates Evans' observation of the taciturn North getting a poor press, or no press at all in this instance, contrary to Rudkin's intentions of staging the Unionist predicament. At the Black Pig's Dyke attributes to both communities a shared tradition that has been perceived as the domain of the Catholic community. Woods's play was described in a review for the Irish Times by David Nowlan as 'a complex weave of symbolism and reality, of altering time and of dialogue and narration' containing 'remarkable stretches of powerful menace and horror, and occasional flashes of irreverent comedy' (Nowlan Irish Times 1/1/1992). By staging border traditions and superstitions in a political context Woods, and Druid Theatre Company, politicised these traditions in such a way as to provoke very strong

reactions from their audience, both positive and—as considered in section 4.5—negative.

4.3 WOMAN AS TERRITORY

Lizzie Flynn is at the centre of Woods' play. Her past and present are inextricably linked with the tensions of her society and have tragic consequences. Catholic Lizzie becomes contested territory by marrying Protestant Jack Boles and moving from Leitrim to Fermanagh. Setting himself in opposition to Boles: 'The shopkeeper that can't keep his hands for his own breed—but has to go after our women—the same as all the fuckers before him' (Woods 1992: 38), Frank objectifies Lizzie, and sees himself as a defender of Irish womanhood and, thus, of Ireland. Lizzie has been placed between two men by the playwright:

JACK BOLES: You heard what she said, Beirne...Let her alone now...

FRANK BEIRNE: The day is long gone when I have to take orders from the likes of you... If ye want her—come and fight me for her...

YOUNG LIZZIE: There's no one takin' me—and no fightin' over me...

JACK BOLES: I could fight him if I wanted...But it's alright...He's goin' to do what he's told... (Woods 1992: 37-38).

Thus Lizzie functions as an onstage example of how 'women's bodies often function in post-colonial theatre as the space on and through which larger territorial or cultural battles are being fought' (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 213).

Here Lizzie, as territory, follows a long tradition of representation. Ania Loomba refers to sixteenth century pictures, atlases, poetry and travel-writing as comprising '[t]he long pictorial tradition in which the four continents were represented as women now generated images of America or Africa that positioned these continents as available for plunder, possession, discovery and conquest. Conversely, native women and their bodies are described in terms of the promise and the fear of the colonial land (...) Thus from the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond) female bodies symbolise the conquered land'. Furthermore, '[t]his metaphoric use of the female body varies in accordance with the exigencies and histories of particular colonial situations' (Loomba 1998: 151-152).

The identification of Lizzie with the land under dispute is used in <u>At the Black</u>

<u>Pig's Dyke</u> to challenge notions of Northern Irish Nationalism and of the Northern

Irish Protestant, if not the Unionist. Lizzie is no defenceless *Roisin Dubh* waiting to be liberated by a hotheaded young patriot, but is nonetheless the object of Frank Beirne's desire:

Colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonised lands, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality (Loomba 1998: 168).

Beirne is a native of Leitrim, his and Lizzie's territory is in what is now the Republic of Ireland. According to the text, the time of Lizzie's youth is in 'the past' and her reconstructions are formulated in 'the present' (Woods 1992: unnumbered), but when Jack Boles and Young Lizzie appear in act one scene five the stage directions describe them as wearing 1940s clothes (Woods 1992: 20). Although the time periods are ambiguous, when Lizzie moves to Fermanagh she moves from the Free State/Republic into Northern Ireland. Beirne then loses Lizzie to territory that is still occupied by the Republic's erstwhile coloniser.

Women represent danger within the broader nationalist project, not just as emblems of nationality, or national territory, but also as the agents of racial purity and so of impurity. David Lloyd states 'any Nationalist must police the desire of women, and, indeed, contain the mother within the matrix of a 'motherland', which is always to be possessed by the sons of the fathers as their rightful inheritance. Purity of race and patrimony demands control over reproduction' (Lloyd 1993: 53). To wrest control from the coloniser, and to assert independence, the colonised replicate rather than erode the conditions of otherness. Mayer's Gender Ironies of Nationalism confirms what Lizzie represents in the text, and why:

Women's national importance is based on their reproductive roles, which include biological and ideological reproduction, reproduction of ethnic or national boundaries, transmission of culture and participation in national struggles. Their centrality is also based on women's symbolic status, connected to their reproductive roles, as representatives of purity. Only pure and modest women can re-produce the pure nation; without purity in biological reproduction the nation clearly cannot survive (Mayer 2000: 7).

The fear of racial impurity is given as a driving force behind Beirne's obsession with Lizzie; the racial mixing in her proposed marriage to Boles is all the more insidious to people like Beirne as the 'difference' is not immediately recognisable. Beirne's actions are representative of the colonised construction of a

national morality to preserve the nation: '[a]nxieties over the nation's boundaries have been projected onto the bodies of Irish women and have been materially manifested in constitutional attempts to define the limits of women's bodies' (Martin in Mayer 2000: 71). Here Martin identifies anxieties in the Irish context but Loomba recognizes similar anxieties in reactions to the more racially apparent couplings of white women with black men. She cites eighteenth-century historian Edward Long, ending with his '[t]hus, in the course of a few generations more, the English blood will become so contaminated with this mixture...as even to reach the middle, and then the higher orders of people' (Loomba 1998: 159). In At the Black Pig's Dyke Frank Beirne's anxiety is as a member of the colonised rather than colonizing people, but the purity of the race is the proof of 'otherness' and thus the reason for resistance, '[s]exuality is thus a means for the maintenance or erosion of racial difference' (Loomba 1998: 159).

Lizzie's fate is appropriated by Beirne's nationalism; she functions as a Nationalist symbol and as the motivation for Beirne's violent sectarian actions. This begs the question—as does Ceiriad's divinity in <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, or The Mother as effigy in <u>The Great Hunger</u>—is Lizzie as contested territory critiquing or perpetuating the patriarchal control of women and their roles in the exercise of nationalism?

An additional factor complicating the delineation of a gender-specific body politics is the metaphorical link between woman and the land, a powerful trope in imperial discourse and one which is reinforced, consciously or not, in much post-colonial drama, particularly by male writers. In some instances, women's bodies are not only exploited by the colonisers but also reappropriated by the colonised patriarchy as part of a political agenda that may not fully serve the interests of the women in question (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 213).

In <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> Lizzie makes the decision to cross the border and to marry Boles, but otherwise she is a passive victim of Beirne's aggression.

Lizzie is not the 'pure' symbol of nationalism that Beirne's obsession with her suggests. Vincent Woods emphasizes the complexities of colonial history through Lizzie's father Michael Flynn, who had been a member of the British army: 'A lot you know...England gave me a good livin'...It put clothes on my family's backs and mate [meat] on their bones...' (Woods 1992: 33). The common enemy in <u>At the Black</u> Pig's Dyke, to those of both traditions, is poverty: 'I never had an enemy only poverty

and want' (Woods 1992: 34). But this is only an oblique suggestion in a script carried by the preoccupations of its characters. Flynn's voice of reason goes unheeded by those whose anger is focused on the fact that Flynn took the 'King's shillin' rather than on the reason why he had to do so:

FLYNN: I had to cut the buttons off me army jacket and it was the only jacket I had—so some young *amadán* the likes of you wouldn't take it into his head to shoot me for a collaborator (Woods 1992: 34).

Gilbert and Tompkins offer a reading of this wearing of the uniform of the coloniser, which reaches beyond the prejudices of the Nationalists of <u>At the Black</u> Pig's Dyke:

When a colonized subject wears the dominant culture's costumes, s/he is never simply framed by and within imperial representation. Most often, some kind of appropriation is at work so that imposed or adopted dress codes, like hegemonic language(s), are changed or otherwise "indigenised" in order to suit their new context (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 247).

Flynn first put on the uniform of the British army to feed his family, but his subsequent use of the jacket and removal of its buttons are evidence of a deconstruction to suit the narrowness of his postcolonial society. A local, John Tom Frank, also chose to join up, but his membership of the U.S army was less offensive to the sensibilities of his Leitrim neighbours: 'There was John Tom Frank swankin' it around like a lord in his Yankee uniform and drawing his army pension...And he was the hero and the soldier and the great man' (Woods 1992: 34). The dollar, a welcome currency sent home by emigrants, was a more acceptable coin than 'the King's shillin'' in the region of the Black Pig's Dyke. Flynn's past as a member of the British army sounds a faint echo of Thompson's Over The Bridge mentioned in the previous chapter, in which the workers of a Belfast shipyard allow sectarianism to triumph over the concern for all workers, as espoused by the trade union¹⁵. So, despite Frank Beirne's rhetoric, Lizzie is a political hybrid, an Irish Catholic, and the daughter of a man who 'drank to the King in his day—and took his shillin'...' (Woods 1992: 33).

¹⁵ DAVY: All my life I've fought for the principles of my union and Peter here fought for them too. Would you want me to refuse to work with him because he upholds what is his right, to work without intimidation? (Thompson in Deane 1991: 1181).

[B]oth patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled in a number of respects, and both feminist and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1998: 101).

Lizzie is both a woman in patriarchy and a colonised subject but it is the postcolonial Beirne who replicates the inequities of colonialism by his actions, and imposes the dominance she experiences in the text.

The effectiveness of Woods' decision to place both older and younger Lizzies on stage during the flashbacks in At the Black Pig's Dyke owes much to the precedents set by earlier plays, as seen, for example, in Friel's Dancing at Lughnasa (1990) and Christina Reid's Tea in a China Cup (1982). Staging two sides of the one character has also been done before as in Friel's Philadelphia Here I Come (1964) (see section 1.3). Tom Kilroy examined the biographical coincidences in the lives of Brendan Bracken and William Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw) to fashion his cleverly constructed exploration of identity in Double Cross (1986). Frank McGuinness also used the device of flashback; Pyper the narrator reviewed his own life this way in Observe the Sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme.

However, Woods breaks new ground because these recollections are accommodated within the structure of the play itself; the older Lizzie sounds her voice of hard-won wisdom while the younger Lizzie (in the text—and in the Druid performance—Young Lizzie is played by the actor also playing Sarah and Elizabeth) is the embodiment of energetic determination. The device of the two Lizzies allows the older Lizzie to recollect and her younger self to comment upon these recollections; in performance the memories were simultaneously remembered and dramatized for the audience. On occasion the two Lizzies speak together, exemplifying, as here in act one scene six, how the act of remembering is also a performance:

YOUNG LIZZIE: I swear Jack—so long as I live I'll never forget it OLDER & YOUNG LIZZIE: It was a blustery May day at the height of the raidin' and the shootin' ... and he was beyond in the forge with Jim Boles and a good few others. The shop was a' raidin' every few weeks before that; and this day didn't someone come runnin' over to Jim there was another raid on. (OLDER LIZZIE takes up the narrative while YOUNG LIZZIE and JACK sit quietly)

OLDER LIZZIE: Damnee he lifted up a big lump of an iron bar and said "It'll be the last raid they'll make" (Woods 1992: 24 [my emphasis]).

This use of reconstruction also placed the action squarely within Lizzie's own experience and framed the action from her perspective as a postcolonial subject:

Working in opposition to exclusionary identity politics, split subjectivity enables the recognition of several—even, potentially, all—of the factors and allegiances that determine the syncretic colonised subject. Post-colonial theatre addresses this issue in various ways, one of the most interesting of which is the presentation of a narrator who is simultaneously staged in the shape of a different actor. This strategy ensures that the single character is embodied in several ways, and even in several sites (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 231-232).

By specifying in the text that one actor play Young Lizzie, Sarah and the adult Elizabeth, and that Lizzie's granddaughter has her name, Woods marks the passing of generations and sub-textually emphasizes the inescapable nature of history:

I actually can't remember [who made] the decision to use one actor for the three parts. What I do remember is very much wanting the play to tell a generational story and one almost without a beginning or an end, or one in which the beginning and the end could form one seam and run on (Woods interview: 291).

Lizzie's granddaughter Elizabeth appeared onstage as an adult, outside the action itself, to tell the analogous tale of the Strange Knight. However, her first words emphatically contradict those of her grandmother, as she demands that responsibility be taken for the events on either side of the border, and indeed for the border itself: 'It was not a long time ago at all, and it was not far away. It was in a land where the black pig had furrowed an ancient tunnel under the earth and where it ran still, trapped and frantic beneath the ground' (Woods 1992: 2). The black pig furrowed the dyke and thus ran 'trapped and frantic' beneath an edifice of its own making.

Woods establishes the line of action of the play through the lives of Lizzie, her daughter Sarah and granddaughter Elizabeth. We first meet Lizzie and the baby Elizabeth in the kitchen, an all-too familiar setting in the Irish theatre perhaps, but also a place of retreat and safety. Such cosy associations are undermined in The Great Hunger as the hearth is identified as the stronghold of The Mother and, as such, a negative space. But this area of domesticity is seen as the only place of female autonomy. In At the Black Pig's Dyke this limited area of control is denied Lizzie as,

by scene four, Lizzie and her daughter Sarah are found dead in this same kitchen by Captain Mummer.

Frank Beirne, implicated in Lizzie's death by the stage action, is an example of Nationalist extremism that is balanced by Michael Flynn, his daughter Lizzie and Jack Boles, characters who strive for a pluralist society. But the playwright offers a mitigating insight into Beirne's motivations with the story of Clements, nephew of Lord Leitrim, and his manservant John Brolly. All of Woods' characters live in the shadow of history; and this piece of local history highlights the long-felt bitterness of some sections of this community. When asked why Clements and Brolly were fighting, Lizzie replied 'The old people used to say that there was some—matter of honour, some promise broken, I know Brolly had a sister Mae—and I think maybe she had a child—Clements' child' (Woods 1992: 23).

Again we see territories mapped on the bodies of women; Mae (like Lizzie) has become a symbol of what her community has lost, or stands to lose. In some ways, Mae, as an image, is more potent. Jack Boles, as Protestant, is politically empowered, and Lizzie, as both a Catholic and his employee, is vulnerable—but their relationship is one of love and mutual respect, whereas Mae, sister of Clements' servant and mother of Clements' child, fills the description of the politically oppressed and is an emotive symbol for the Nationalist experience. Mae, and Ulster, have been planted. John Brolly and many others fought in her and Ulster's defence while Clements and, by implication, the Unionists of Ulster have used their position to abuse. Beirne cites Mae Brolly as an example when warning Lizzie about Jack Boles in act one, scene nine: 'you'll end up if you're not careful. With child like Mae Brolly—and promised the lot...That he'll marry ye...But he'll not marry you. He'll be like Clements—only he'll be cuter and won't drown. (...) And you have no brother like John Brolly to fight yer corner' (Woods 1992: 36).

Frank Beirne identifies with the Brollys, and his violence stems from a need for revenge, for them, and others like them. He sees Clements and the Boles family as 'other', the privileged Protestant class, and the source of injustices suffered by him and his people, thus his violence escalates as the play progresses. The name Brolly resonates throughout the play, and when we later meet Hugh Brolly Beirne's

identification with the family is exposed as limited and used only to suit his own purposes. Hugh Brolly is Mae Brolly's great-grandson:

SARAH: Oh, he told me it all...How his grandfather with the two different coloured eyes was the child of May [sic] Brolly and Clements—the man who drowned her brother. Can you imagine what it was like for that woman? Dragged up to the Big House and left pregnant and the[n] promised the lot—that he'd follow her on and marry her if she'd go to America (Woods 1992: 67).

Hugh Brolly, like Sarah his wife, is a product of Ulster's two traditions and, as such, suffers Beirne's distrust and hatred. Beirne's identification with the abuse of power exercised over Hugh's great-grandmother Mae is now discarded, as she gave birth to a child of both traditions 'with the two different coloured eyes'. Any mingling of bloodlines is unacceptable to Beirne and his Nationalist rhetoric cannot accommodate it: 'He had bad blood in him. Mixin' like that breeds informers...' (Woods 1992: 78). This intolerance ultimately indicates an inability on Beirne's part to accept the realities of Ulster and of Ireland. Racial purity in the Irish context is a construct of the extremist, and this is theatrically underlined in the play by the killings of Sarah Boles and Hugh Brolly. By allowing their daughter Elizabeth to survive Beirne's vengeance, Woods challenges the bigotry of Beirne and to a lesser extent that of his Unionist counterparts and, in this way, seems optimistic for the future of Ulster.

One counterpoint to the bigotry of Beirne's character is the tale of the Strange Knight told at the beginning of acts one and two, and to conclude the play.

A woman asked the Strange Knight a riddle on the road: 'How many people were in the world before the world was made? How many graves did it take to bury them? What way were they laid?—Facin' north, south, east or west?' The Knight replied that he would 'answer any riddle in three parts but not in four', shot her and moved on until he 'arrived at a fair where two men were havin' a dispute over a piece of land. He said he could settle it and offered a fine price to whichever of them would sell it to him. One man said he'd sell it that minute, the other said he wouldn't sell it for love or money. So the Strange Knight said to the second man: you're the owner, it's your land. Then he shot the two men and had the land for himself' (Woods 1992: 2).

The story of the Strange Knight continues at the start of the second act. Elizabeth tells of how, arriving at a castle, the Knight learns that the people have killed their king; he then becomes their leader and turns them against one another until he is the only one left—lord of all he surveys. A forecast of the spiralling violence of act two, this second prologue reinforces the dread created by the non-linear form of the play.

The final instalment of the tale of the Strange Knight is in the form of an epilogue. Elizabeth appears at the double doors upstage, the carnage of the final scene surrounding her. Her words contextualize the stage picture:

ELIZABETH: The land around him grew rancid from the decay of bodies in the ground (...) He ordered a banquet but there was no food; a ball but there were no musicians; a duel but there was no-one to fight. The Knight returns to the place where he shot the woman of the riddle. His tears of remorse fall to the ground: (...) down into the heart of the dead woman. And out of her heart grew a flower—a blood red poppy...And the Strange Knight plucked it and when he did it fell asunder. Petal after petal drifted to the ground and out of each sprang a dozen women with hooks and seeds and implements to sow and harvest. They yoked the Strange Knight to the ground and so began the endless task of restoring the land to life and the beginning of happiness (Woods 1992: 80).

The stage directions specify that Elizabeth scatters a handful of what look like red petals to the floor while delivering these lines, thereby appropriating an image of death used throughout the play, such as when 'Frank Beirne stands for a moment looking at the body, then walks the length of it scattering red confetti from his hands' (Woods 1992: 77), to suggest life and hope instead.

By suggesting a reversal of the violent patriarchy of the play, although heartening on one level, the conclusion of the story of the Strange Knight reinforces the 'endless' nature of strife. Elizabeth merely reinforces a resignation to the cyclical nature of sectarian violence by suggesting that these petals draw forth from the ground women who then begin 'the endless task of restoring the land to life and the beginning of happiness'. Lizzie laboured over this endless task while her husband was murdered like his father and brother before him. Her daughter married Hugh Brolly, who was murdered shortly after his brother Sean; executed by his own 'tribe' as a traitor. By projecting back, we realise that Mae Brolly too, survived both Clements and her brother John; thus the women's condition of waiting in dread, used to poetic affect by Synge in Riders To the Sea, is given a political dimension.

The epilogue ultimately portrays women as both survivors and reinventors of the endless cycle, the 'endless task of restoring the land to life and the beginning of happiness.' This epilogue, when viewed in light of the action it stands outside, cannot counter the power of Lizzie's fate and of its being a version of what has gone before. The strength of the play's representations of territorialism and violence makes it hard to accept the optimism of Elizabeth's hasty conclusion.

4.4 THE BODY DEFACED

While two actors play Lizzie, the actors playing Jack Boles, Frank Beirne, Michael Flynn and Hugh Brolly also play the parts of the mummers:

MISS FUNNY: (...) Men of hay
Or straw—what does it matter?
Better keep back, mind your place,
Better watch the face beside you—
You never know in the latter end
What's what, who's who, what will happen (Woods 1992: 17).

In Masked Performance: The Play of the Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre
John Emigh regards 'the relationship of the mask to its wearer as a paradigm for the
relationship between self and other (and self and self) that lie at the heart of theatrical
process' (Emigh 1996: xvii). In At the Black Pig's Dyke the mummers' masks
theatricalize the gap between the self of the actor and the other of the character. The
masks also mark the gap between the self of the character and the other as mummer
and potential sectarian killer. The characters as mummers are de-faced and for the
most part are not held accountable for their terrorism: is the mummer as musician and
the mummer as murderer the same person? The play in this sense seems to express a
suspicion of the mask, a suspicion of performance itself:

TOM FOOL: So them's the mummers that you saw, but who knows what's behind a straw man?

MISS FUNNY: Or a straw woman. There's more to all of this than mummin' (Woods 1992: 19).

The terrorist activities of the masked mummers also de-face their victims. Both Jack's brother Jim and Hugh's brother Sean were remembered as having had their faces shot, their very identities erased—such 'loss of face' makes for emotive imagery. Lizzie's father Flynn is again used as a bridge between the extremes of the

two traditions; Flynn's respect for the Protestant Boles family offsets the mindless vehemence of Beirne and his like. Lizzie remembers her father's account of the murder of Jim Boles and his son Tom with candour and sorrow:

OLDER LIZZIE: The gunmen were gone—out the back—and Jim was lying on top of the bag of provisions they were fillin' to take with them. Be the time they moved him the bag was full up with blood and everything in it—bread and tay and sugar—was saturated right through. Young Tom was dead in the back yard (...) Most of his face was gone from the shot (Woods 1992: 24 [my emphasis]).

For the most part Beirne's direct involvement in violence has been alluded to, or masked as seen in the enactment of the murder of Jack Boles: 'The group of mummers fold the straw wall around Jack so that it looks like a sheaf. They stand in a large circle around it and sticks are handed out (...) Frank Beirne's voice is heard singing another two verses of Barbara Allen (from within masked circle) (...) The mummers withdraw the sticks with a harsh violent sound. Jack stumbles forward from the sheaf and falls on the ground' (Woods 1992: 42-43), 'He'd been stuck in the neck like a pig' (Woods 1992: 69). Beirne has hidden behind the mummer's mask and so can deny that he had 'hand, act or part in the killin' of Jack Boles' (Woods 1992: 71).

The question of masking and of group violence behind the anonymity afforded by a mask is one that the playwright raises throughout the play. The mummers, led by Beirne, come to represent the faceless violence to which Lizzie and her family have been subjected. Woods uses this older performance tradition to problematize stage realism. Lizzie's history, although non-linear, is relatively accessible and the plot can accommodate the masks of the mummers. But the masks distort the realism of the play from within, foregrounding performance and thus the role of the actor. By staging performance tradition in this way Woods, and Druid, were problematizing Western theatre practice as identified by Augusto Boal:

The Mask hid the Actor behind the Character. Realistic theatre melded the two together again, dissolving the Actor, who was subjected to the empathetic command of the Character (Boal 1979 & 2000: xxi).

In another doubling within the plot Hugh Brolly's experience reflects Jack Boles'. Hugh remembers the death of his brother in terms that echo the 'loss of face' imagery cited earlier: 'I could see the side of his face where he was hit—his eyes...'

(Woods 1992: 74). It is implied in the text that the 'others' shot Hugh's brother Sean for Nationalist sectarian activities. Hugh joins Beirne to avenge his brother's death, but cannot be party to planned atrocity against the local population. In act two scene nine Beirne kills Hugh as an informer. The mummers form a semi-circle around Hugh and taunt him as a 'traitor', 'collaborator', 'informer', 'grasser, squealer'. Then the remaining mummer 'slowly removes his mask to reveal Frank Beirne' (Woods 1992: 76). Beirne is a 'barefaced' malevolent bully:

FRANK BEIRNE: Pigs squeal Hugh. Do you know what I do with pigs? I cut their throats. You squealed Hugh... (...) You squealed for others. If you squealed for them, squeal for us. The pig has lost his tongue. It's not all pigs lose, Hugh...How would your Sarah like that?' (Woods 1992: 77).

Compromise was never an option for Beirne, 'There was a war on. Things had to change, don't you see. Things had to be done' (Woods 1992: 71); and here we see him do what he feels has to be done:

FRANK BEIRNE: Yer brother must be turnin' in his grave, pig—to have a Judas fuckin' Iscariot in his litter...(Woods 1992: 78).

Beirne shoots Hugh in the head with a pistol; there is no ambiguity in the staging of Beirne's violence here: 'Frank Beirne stands for a moment looking at the body, then walks the length of scattering red confetti from his hands' (Woods 1992: 78). Beirne rejects the anonymity afforded by the mask, and the responsibility for sectarian violence is placed squarely on the head of this obsessive Nationalist.

Lizzie gives a certain explanation for Beirne's behaviour by recounting an incident involving Beirne's father, which suggests that Beirne was brutalised by his upbringing. This account could also be taken to suggest the cyclical nature of such viciousness both in terms of the Beirne family and social violence in general:

LIZZIE: I minded of the day I saw Frank Beirne's father killin' pigs in the market yard. Most of the men used a hook, and they stuck it in the pig's mouth and out through his jaw so they'd be able to do the job quick. But auld Beirne flung the pig down and kicked him on the head with his hob-nailed boot; and he held him down with his own weight before he cut his throat... I was looking at those boots with spatters of blood on them—And I knew as well as everyone else that they were stolen out of Boles' shop the day they shot Jim Boles and his son for being Protestants and shopkeepers and decent people (Woods 1992: 40).

Beirne was born into the tradition of butchery. His violence is given a cyclical nature through the story of Clements and his servant Brolly. Young Lizzie recounts another savage incident:

YOUNG LIZZIE: Lord Leitrim's nephew Clements—and John Brolly his manservant...I see the fishing boat and the two men in it...There's a shout and one of them is standin' up...They're strugglin' now—and the boat is overturned. They're gone under—but they're up again—their heads...One holdin' onto the boat—one strikin' for shore—swimmin' strong. But the other—his companion—has the oar now. He's puttin' him down—he's pushing him down by the shoulder—leverin' with the boat (...) Clements drowned Brolly because he couldn't swim and he couldn't bear to see his servant survive (Woods 1992: 22-23).

Woods gives Beirne an ostensibly contemporary political motivation 'Where there's still planters there's politics (...) where there's still them as owns half the place and goes north for the Twelfth¹⁶ there's still politics' (Woods 1992: 34). However, the playwright treads on dangerous ground here as he associates Nationalist politics with the irredeemable bloodlust of 'auld Beirne's' killing of the pig.

Woods identifies the ideological flexibility of the border in terms of its political implications and the resulting difficulties for the security forces on both sides. Beirne is not above using the border to his advantage, while working actively to undermine it. While he protests that he passed scrutiny—'Let me tell ye, our own defenders of the peace beyond asked me a few questions. And they're satisfied I hadn't hand act or part in the killin' of Jack Boles' (Woods 1992: 71)—Lizzie recognises the ambiguity of the situation: 'You know fine well that even if ye walked home, even if ye crossed the dyke soaked in his blood for all to see, ye'd never be sent here for trial' (Woods 1992: 71).

Beirne is an apt, even eager, vehicle for the playwright's investigation into the actions of the extremists but there is little in Woods' text to balance the theatrical menace of Frank Beirne and the mummers as murderers. On the opposite side of the ideological border, as mentioned, Clements and his treatment of the Brolly family is examined, but these incidents happened well in the past, and they are not re-enacted in the action of the play. And while Woods balances Beirne's brutality with the sympathetic characters of Lizzie and her father, Sarah, and Captain Mummer, we are

¹⁶ The Twelfth of July or Orange Day is the Unionist commemoration day in Northern Ireland.

not given a dramatic indication of what Beirne's acts of resistance and his atrocities are against. The story of Clements is in the nature of an old grudge, neither urgent nor compelling, absent from the stage save for indirect references.

Woods thereby resisted the temptation to stage what was done to the 'native' population by the (now becoming 'native') colonising force; he also avoided pitting one side of the community against the other to any great extent but concentrated on what Lizzie's people were doing unto themselves. The sympathetic portrayal of Jack as victim, and, by association, his father and brother, offers little justification for Beirne's actions. Perhaps in the murders of Hugh, Sarah, and ultimately Lizzie, we see a murderer gone beyond his political ideals, too far beyond control to be justly associated with any cultural or national ambition. If this is the case, then the playwright strikes an uneasy balance. Visually and physically compelling, At the Black Pig's Dyke stages a connection between unhinged, psychotic brutality, and political aspiration (Nationalist aspiration almost exclusively). In performance some members of the audience did not favourably receive this depiction of Nationalist violence. Beirne's actions are ultimately seen as motivated by his obsession with Lizzie; and his use of the political is in an attempt to mask his real ambition; therefore, Woods could be seen as having finally retreated from the controversial nature of his play. He claimed that he did not set out to write a political play. While the majority of critical response lauded Woods' treatment of 'the Troubles', it could be argued the Woods did not in fact stage 'the Troubles', but made the dangerous decision to site his character-driven narrative in a troubled, contested landscape.

4.5 PERFORMANCE—UNWITTINGLY INTERACTIVE¹⁷

Mumming as staged in At the Black Pig's Dyke—recovered and incorporated into the action of the play—is a celebration of the performance elements of Irish folk tradition. This celebration is interwoven with a violence that plays on the ambiguity of the mask as the mummers become killers. The performance problems in the recovery and politicisation of a folk theatre tradition were highlighted by an incident that occurred during the tour of the Druid Theatre Company production. This event also underlined the implications of bringing a political play to the heart of its political

 $^{^{17}}$ I am indebted to James King of the University of Ulster for material and information on this incident.

landscape. On Friday 1 July 1993 a group of spectators staged a response to the play at the Rialto Entertainment Centre, Derry, by intervening to perform an epilogue at the end of the performance. This incident foregrounds a number of issues relevant to a consideration of the body in performance, such as the performance moment and the performer/spectator relationship. Also pertinent is the danger of essentialising the body in an attempt to simplify the performance implications of the presence of the actor. The actor has a role in the production of meaning (to a greater or lesser extent), and also in the way an audience member reads the performance of character and the performance of politics.

At the Black Pig's Dyke, as staged by Druid Theatre Company, was an engaging and compelling combination of theatricality and politicised narrative. The border, the Black Pig's Dyke of the title, was a real presence on stage, and the struggle for power was chillingly presented through the fate of non-partisan Lizzie, an attractively strong-minded character but a victim nonetheless. Woods evokes the masked nature of sectarian violence in At the Black Pig's Dyke by his use of the mummers. The traditional straw costumes and masks developed a contemporary significance in performance; here were hooded killers, protected by their community, disguised by their anonymity. Controversy arose particularly in relation to the character of Frank Beirne, a Republican strongly associated with blood and butchery, who was seen to represent the ambitions of the Nationalist community in his pursuit of Lizzie before and after her marriage and in his acts of sectarian violence in the play.

The Druid production enjoyed a very successful run in Galway, and went on to tour Ireland, north and south, crossing and re-crossing the Black Pig's Dyke. Early in 1993 At the Black Pig's Dyke received two of the three Belfast Telegraph Theatre Awards (EMAs) for 1992, one for best production, and one for best actor (Frank McCafferty in the role of Tom Fool). Druid was the first theatre company from the Republic to win a Belfast Telegraph theatre award. As a result of this, and, having already toured Armagh, Belfast, Coleraine and Enniskillen in 1992, the production was invited to play Derry's Rialto Entertainment Centre in June. On the Friday night of the run an 'intervention' was staged at the end of the performance. Two people joined the actors, who were still onstage, and enacted Epilogue to At the

Black Pig's Dyke, their performed response to the play, which took issue with the play on its own theatrical terms. These other 'actors' were members of the audience of the previous Monday's performance who then formed Ad Hoc and planned this intervention or epilogue to the Friday night's performance in the interim.

As the lights went down on Elizabeth, who tells the final part of an analogous tale running throughout At the Black Pig's Dyke, five knocks were heard off stage; this convention is used throughout. An unanticipated spotlight lit an Ad Hoc actor dressed as the Butcher mummer who is strongly identified with Beirne in the play. Ad Hoc's opening lines echo the opening of At the Black Pig's Dyke, and their script describes Ad Hoc's actions¹⁸:

ACTOR ONE: T'was a long time ago and t'was not a long time ago. (knock offstage). This is still the play and it's not still the play. (knock off stage). (ACTOR ONE slowly removes his mummer mask to reveal a union Jack hood with eye holes cut out. Grabbing the cleaver that hangs from his belt by a piece of string he takes the poise [sic] of the butcher mummer.)(...)

ACTOR ONE: Here am I the Butcher! (he breathes heavily, sniffing the blood on his cleaver.) (...) (He takes off the union Jack mask to reveal the face of Tom Fool. He starts to laugh.)

ACTOR ONE: The fools, the fools they've left us (laughing then gesturing to the audience and cast) Who's fooling who? (As Tom Fool he performs clown-like movements, he moves through members of the [Druid] cast, as he does, he speaks.)

ACTOR ONE: My real name is John, or was it Margaret, or Charlie? No it's Albert. Albert Vincent Woods (Turning his back to the audience and bending down so his upside down face appears below his arse) the playwright.

(As he straightens up and turns around he becomes aware of ACTOR TWO and freezes. ACTOR TWO comes on stage, *as herself*. She walks over to actor one and with a small penknife cuts away the butcher's cleaver and lets it fall to the stage. She drops her penknife on the stage and moves forward to address the audience.)

ACTOR TWO: Peace is not the absence of war, peace is the absence of the conditions that create war. (The spotlight goes out, both actors exit the stage and take their seats...) (Ad Hoc script 1993 unpublished [my emphasis]).

¹⁸ The script of <u>Epilogue to At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> (unpublished) was included in a letter from Jim Keys on behalf of Ad Hoc to Druid Theatre Company dated 24 July 1993. All lines and stage directions are taken from the Ad Hoc script.

The political content of the Ad Hoc script and the group's move from the auditorium to the stage echo political theatre games and interactions. There are some similarities here between Ad Hoc's <u>Epilogue to At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> and Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre for example, but the points of distinction cannot be elided.

Forum theatre is a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience, again spect-actors, is invited to suggest and enact solutions. The problem is always the symptom of an oppression, and generally involves visible oppressors and a protagonist who is oppressed. In its purest form, both actors and spect-actors will be people who are victims of the oppression under consideration (Boal 1992: xxi).

The Druid production of Woods' text was not intended as a formal representation of a political oppression or a search of a solution. However, the fact that, in the Ad Hoc script, Actor Two comes onstage 'as herself' points to Ad Hoc's identification with the oppressions they perceived within the text.

Ad Hoc member Jim Keys wrote to Druid on behalf of the group¹⁹ and included a copy of their Epilogue to At the Black Pig's Dyke script. Keys explains:

Our purpose was not to terrorise or censor Druid Theatre Company but to dramatically expose that there is a very real connection between what was being acted out on stage and what is continually being acted out on the streets in the north of Ireland. (...) we are asked to accept symptoms as cause, as the psychologically disturbed republican baddies destroy the peace and generosity of the good, well-balanced, well-off settlers, the humour is used to disarm the audience to a constant flow of racist inferences that the sickness of this conflict comes out of an irrational pre-occupation with the past rather than the injustices of the present (Keys 1993 unpublished: 1).

By writing to Druid Theatre Company Keys was attempting to create a dialogue with the creators of the play's meaning in a way that the staged intervention had failed to do. Their original attempt to 'dramatically expose' the connections between the action of the play and the realities on the streets of Northern Ireland was primarily in dialogue with the audience rather than with Druid. Ad Hoc's intervention could not be considered an interaction as Druid were not party to Ad Hoc's plans—the company was not given the choice of engagement; it was imposed upon it.

Boal's incitement of the spectator as spect-actor in the preface to <u>Theatre of</u> the Oppressed seems more relevant to Ad Hoc's surprise tactics:

¹⁹ Ad Hoc members were Grainne Barrett, Suzanne Curran, Jim Collins, Stephan Gargan, and Jim Keys.

The audience mustn't just liberate its Critical Conscience, but its body too. It needs to invade the stage and transform the images that are shown there... With their hearts and minds the audience must rehearse battle plans—ways of freeing themselves from all oppressions (...) The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the Spect-actor is not fictional. He exists in the scene and outside it, in a dual reality. By taking possession of the stage in the fiction of the theatre he acts: not just in the fiction, but also in his social reality (Boal 1979 & 2000: xx-xxi).

Derry theatre-goers, politicians and commentators were outspoken in response to Ad Hoc's actions. A heated debate raged in the local press in the aftermath of <u>Epilogue to At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>. In response Ad Hoc wrote <u>A Critical response to At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>, which was published in the <u>Derry Journal</u> 9 July 1993. Here they describe the plot of Woods' play as:

attempt[ing] to depict in sophisticated naivety the reality of the ongoing conflict in the six counties as an irrational consequence of evil born in the hearts of men. We are asked to collude with the author's view that it is disturbed psychology rather than social injustice that fuelled and still fuels this conflict (Derry Journal 9/7/93 [my emphasis]).

Here is the core of Ad Hoc's objections to <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> stated publicly and with a coherence that was lacking in their initial staged response. Fear of the identities and the intentions of Ad Hoc ensured that their message was not staged at the Rialto. The end of their scripted intervention was lost in the ensuing confusion.

Keys questioned the political insight of the Rialto audience, an unexpected irony given that it was as audience members that the group had first encountered the play the previous Monday:

While this analysis would have little credibility on a politicised audience it will sit comfortably with middle class audiences who in general only watch politically controled [sic] highlights of the real conflict, and who seek interpretations that reinforce their collusion with the normality of the state (Keys 1993 unpublished: 2-3).

Lionel Pilkington, in 'Irish Theater Historiography and Political Resistance', describes At the Black Pig's Dyke as dealing with 'what it sees as the insidious interpenetration of sectarian murder and mumming festivity amongst a rural community on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic' (Pilkington in Colleran & Spenser 1998: 26). This description seems to suggest collusion between

murder and the tradition of mumming, Pilkington's use of 'insidious' here seems to overlook the deliberate nature of the device as used by Woods.

The discourse of performance studies offers a framework for a consideration of the performance issues in a reading of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> in Derry as 'Unwittingly Interactive'. Ad Hoc questioned theatrical form and theatre's place in the political arena: 'It is the use of artists and the convention of theatre against the meaning of art and in the service of the state violence. It was for this reason that we thought it necessary to artistically expose your use of the theatrical convention' (Keys 1993 unpublished: 2).

Ad Hoc's intervention was symptomatic of presence, of liveness. Auslander's 1999 publication <u>Liveness</u> and, in particular, 'Live performance in a Mediatized Culture' informs my reading of the implications of Ad Hoc's actions in the performance moment. Here, Auslander confronts the notion of community, the communality of audience and performers as he considers the ontological implications of live performance and mediatized performance. <u>Liveness</u> considers the reproduction of the recorded moment and the possibility of the reproduction of the live. Does it compromise the integrity of the live to attempt to reproduce it through recording it? Auslander suggests 'the very concept of live performance presupposes that of reproduction—that the live can only exist within an economy of reproduction' (Auslander 1999: 54).

Ad Hoc's <u>Epilogue to At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> was dependent upon the live moment to be effective; surprise was obviously a significant factor in the impact of the piece. Can it then be placed in Auslander's economy of reproduction? Is an intervention such as this one a one-off by definition, beyond reproduction? (as evidenced by the reports of the event²⁰). Auslander emphasizes the gap between the performer and the spectator, a gap that was bridged by Ad Hoc:

Live performance places us in the living presence of the performers, other human beings with whom we desire unity and can imagine achieving it, because they are there, in front of us. Yet live performance also inevitably frustrates that desire since its very occurrence presupposes a gap between performer and spectator. Whereas mediatized performance can provide the occasion for a satisfactory experience of community *within* the audience, live performance inevitably yields a sense of the failure to achieve community

²⁰ Considered at the end of this section.

between the audience and the performer (Auslander 1999: 57[original emphasis]).

An article published in the ends of performance offers another interpretation of the Auslander's community of spectators and the fracturing nature of live performance. Diana Taylor in 'Border Watching' refers to media coverage of violence and the subsequent compassion fatigue felt by many readers and viewers, including herself. She suggests that central to compassion fatigue is identification, either a resistance to it or an over-identification with the victim:

Identification, understood in psychoanalytic literature as the 'internalization of the other' functions as an act of metaphoric substitution, supplanting the 'you' with the 'as if it were me'. All of a sudden the specificity of the problem vanishes. (...) But this drama is not about me—as such—for I am neither the victim (who is helpless) or the perpetrator (who is guilty). My role is not to take on one's fear or the other's guilt, but to understand my role as *spectator* in enabling or disrupting the scenario (Taylor in Hart & Phelan 1998: 181[original emphasis]).

Borrowing an image from theatre, Greek theatre in particular, Taylor uses 'witness' to describe the relative roles: the internal 'witness' or actor comments and updates information from within, the external 'witness' or spectator looks on but, as the proposed recipient of the information, is central to the process. Taylor's work informs the role of the theatre spectator, especially the spectator of a political narrative such as At the Black Pig's Dyke. However, given that in the theatre the narrative is even more of a construct, the internal and external witnesses are not part of the same exchange mechanism; internal witnesses have been rehearsing the act of giving witness for some time before the performance.

In relation to the Ad Hoc intervention in the performance of <u>At the Black</u> <u>Pig's Dyke</u> in Derry, Taylor's notion of witnessing is further complicated when considered in relation to identification. Taylor insists:

The witnesses, those who receive and act on (e.g., transmit) the drama, participate in the meaning-making process. It is the spectators/witnesses' job to challenge the plot, interrupt the action, and reinterpret events. If they don't buy into the drama, no communication is possible. If they withhold their support, the meaning-making enterprise of spectacle is interrupted and perhaps even rendered ineffectual²¹ (Taylor in Hart & Phelan 1998: 182).

²¹ Taylor goes on to use the image of the border, (which is irresistible in relation to the Black Pig's Dyke, named after the geographical and political border and cited in much of the play's violent imagery): 'The Border has suddenly moved—it's no longer a question of the outer looking at the inner—we

Witnessing, then, implicates the witness in the act. All are both subjects and objects, bridging the gap as perceived by Auslander. Here actors and spectators are sharing and exchanging the act of witnessing, but where within this is the responsibility for that which is being witnessed to be placed? In relation to At the Black Pig's Dyke, that which Ad Hoc 'witnessed' elicited a very strong and performed response; they 'challenged the plot' in no uncertain terms, 'interrupted the action', and offered a very specific 'reinterpretation of events'.

Unlike At the Black Pig's Dyke some productions are designed with audience participation in mind. In 'When the Audience Joins the Cast' Peter Marks lists recent off-Broadway productions that have attempted to attract a new (or some would say lost) theatre audience through interaction (New York Times 22/4/97)²². In terms of Taylor's problematization of identification, audience members have the option of refusing both resistance to and over-identification with the situations offered by these interactive productions. Instead, audience members can choose to act as witnesses. Does this form of interactive theatre implicate participants or does it compromise their integrity as witnesses? Audience members of an imposed intervention rather than a shared interaction occupy problematized positions as witnesses. Ad Hoc's performed objections to the portrayal of Republicanism in the psychotic behaviour of character Frank Beirne actively resisted and thereby identified with Druid Theatre Company's production. But by moving from the external to the internal, they also made, in Taylor's words, 'witnesses of others, ensuring that the memory of injustice and atrocity is engraved upon, rather than erased from, collective memory' (Taylor in Hart & Phelan 1998: 184).

In interview Woods gave his reaction to the Ad Hoc intervention at the Rialto: What upset me about that particular incident in Derry is that the people staging the protest actually took over the stage before the play finished and

inhabit the expanded border zone of the 'inner'. (...) Witnessing presupposes that looking across borders is always an intervention and that the space of interlocution is always performative' (Taylor in Hart & Phelan 1998: 183).

²² One of the fascinating aspects of such interactive theatre is the process by which audience members are approached, or chosen. In a subsection entitled A Zoo? Not really. Some rules of Engagement, Marks notes that in Tony 'n Tina's Wedding anyone from the audience can perform but in Blue Man Group prospective participants tie a white paper bandana around their heads to indicate a readiness to interact. Is this premeditated interaction as opposed to spontaneous participation? Is the use of a white bandana a necessary precaution? Or by purchasing a ticket are audience members automatically accepting the possibility of becoming part of the performance?

scared the life out of the actors, because the actors were masked at the end of the play (...) and they couldn't see what was going on. Suddenly they were aware of people on stage around them, people that weren't in the play and someone saw a union Jack and thought 'our number's up'. They were genuinely very frightened and left the stage (Woods interview: 287).

This echoes Rudkin's response to the Field Day decision to cancel the production and tour of The Saxon Shore:

I think that they [Field Day] thought that Protestant audiences might read the wolf image as a direct insult to them and that they would be offended and they would become violent and hostile and I didn't really want actors to face that sort of danger (Rudkin interview: 264).

However, Rudkin did insist that 'I don't mind actors being scared shitless, I'm quite prepared to do that and I think that they should be' (Rudkin interview: 264). In retrospect perhaps the response of this section of the audience to At the Black Pig's Dyke confirmed Field Day Theatre Company's fears in relation to a tour of The Saxon Shore. Audience members in Derry were proved here to be a volatile and outspoken force—with a vested interest in the portrayal of their political situation. Of course it could also be argued that this was a Nationalist response to a theatre tradition (developed in Derry by Field Day Theatre Company) that had portrayed them in a more positive light to date. In response to the performative nature of the Ad Hoc protest, Woods thought it 'great!' that 'people have the energy and imagination to organise a theatrical protest to a piece of theatre' (Woods interview: 287). However, he considered it more appropriate that such a theatrical protest be 'staged in the foyer, outside the theatre, or on stage after the play was finished' (Woods interview: 287).

In this instance, according to Ad Hoc, theatrical form does not invite a dialogue as it presents the audience with a closed construct within which it is considered inappropriate to respond. Yet, despite their condemnation of theatrical form as a convention, through their actions Ad Hoc members contradicted themselves. In the liveness of the moment, because of the convention, Ad Hoc could question theatre on its own terms.

The Ad Hoc intervention was variously reported in its aftermath in what became an interesting spin on the mediatization of performance. The following appeared in the <u>Irish Independent</u> Tuesday 6 July 1993:

Angry protesters stormed the stage of *Derry's Guildhall* on Friday night objecting to the politics of an award-winning play from Galway's Druid Theatre Company. Three minutes from the end of 'At the Black Pig's Dyke' written by former RTE journalist Vincent Woods, *a group of some ten people* wearing masks, some wrapped in union jacks, invaded the stage. (...) One member of the cast said afterwards: "It was terrifying. We thought we were going to be shot." (...) "The group had every right to protest, but that was not the way to do it," said Frankie McCafferty later. "It was very frightening and it was ineffective because the audience did not understand why they were objecting." The Druid Theatre Company have been invited to return to Derry in the autumn' (Irish Independent 6/7/1993 [my emphasis]).

And so by the time it made it to the pages of the <u>Irish Independent</u> an intervention by five people, two of whom were 'actors' on stage at the Rialto Entertainment Centre, had become a storming of the Guildhall by some ten people. Jocelyn Clarke for <u>American Theatre</u> (March 1995) offered another version of this event: 'Presented in town halls and small theatres both north and south of the border, the production evoked extremely strong responses among audiences—in Derry, masked men stood at the back of theatre holding English Union Jacks' (Clarke 1995: 62-63).

In At the Black Pig's Dyke traditional music, folklore and performance traditions were theatrically linked to sectarian violence and postcolonial vengeance, as they provided cultural proof of ethnicity and otherness; in performance they added texture and an undeniable marketability to the play. Lizzie's marriage to Protestant Jack Boles makes her a target for bigotry and territorialism, as Beirne sought to retrieve her in the name of nationalism masked as love. Her fate evidences postcolonial tendencies to cite national struggles in the bodies of disempowered women. Beirne's sense of personal vengeance when mixed with political ambition leaves him ultimately responsible for the killing of four of the play's main characters. The Druid Theatre Company production of 1992 toured widely and successfully. Yet its run in Derry was significant in that the play's politics engendered an active response from members of the audience, resulting in a debate which reactivated the political relevance of an art form all too often considered the preserve of the complacent. At the Black Pig's Dyke illustrates a number of key concerns for contemporary Irish theatre: how to give body to tradition, how to perform gender and how to stage a troubled and divided postcolonialism.

CONCLUSION

'In a way, theory gives theater back again to the body politic' (Reinelt & Roach 1992: 5).

Wooden, Wounded, Defaced—Performing the Body in Irish Theatre 1983-1993 is an investigation into representations of the body. Readings and analyses of these staging decisions are informed by my use of postcolonial, gender and performance theories. This thesis also identifies the points where these theories interact or overlap, as the performing body is also the postcolonial body, the gendered body. In my readings of The Great Hunger, The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke, I have interrogated performance innovations and foregrounded the political uses to which these innovations have been put. In some cases, these were not innovations at all, but reinterpretations and recuperations of other ritual or performance traditions. And while the notion of the Irish body is an essentialist one, the body performs within a culturally specific set of conditions.

It was not my intention to offer a template for Irish performance discourse; for each of the critical choices I have made here, I am aware that there are many other possibilities. However an analysis of Irish performance is informed by the following considerations: analyses of the performance moment, the materiality of the performing body, the politics of representation, the audience's place in the process and the context of the production. The three plays and their productions that I focus on have points of comparison in terms of their contexts, content and performance histories. The critical framework emerged in response to my choice and assessment of the material, and my own concerns as a researcher and practitioner. Documentation issues are key; the politics of performance do not stop at what is staged, but how it is staged, reacted to, recorded and remembered.

As I illustrated in chapter one, the body is staged within a certain set of cultural conditions. Herr identified a suppression of the body in Irish representations and her article informs my reading of the Irish body in performance. Representing the self raises issues of authenticity and tradition as part of an exercise in nationalism. Colin Graham, Declan Kiberd, Richard Kearney and David Lloyd have each addressed Irish authenticity and the invention or recuperation of tradition. Their work informs my reading of the body in performance in Irish theatre and how the performing body is received. Essentialism in relation to identity meets essentialism in relation to performance on the Irish stage. Phenomenology and readings of materiality, when linked with the issues of Irish authenticity, help to frame

considerations of the body that must interrogate the postcolonial status of the body, the gender specificity of the body in practice and also in process. Representations of the male and female body are undertaken in a context where previous cultural representations resonate and continue to inform current projects. The portrayal of women in Irish society still has difficulty in emerging from the domestic domain as identified and idealised by De Valera's Ireland. The political narratives have also shaped the construction of a male identity.

Representing self and other on the stage is a material process. Language is a significant factor, but only one of many. The importance of language for a postcolonial society has foregrounded the text at the cost of a suppressed body. The literary discourse ensures that written language has an exchange value and is a tangible proof of cultural endeavour and cultural difference. Recording and acknowledging the performative as part of a cultural tradition are difficult tasks. These performance traditions have a pre-Christian history and their recovery has implications for current performance and political practice in the construction of a native culture and identity.

Performance rituals and traditions have been considered the preserve of folk history, and evidence of superstition. As Brennan suggests:

The political tasks of modern nationalism directed the course of literature, leading through the Romantic concepts of 'folk character' and 'national language' to the (largely illusory) divisions of literature into distinct 'national literatures' (...) Nations, then, are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role (Brennan in Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1997: 173).

By charting how and when these traditions have been suppressed and recovered, the politics of representing the body become obvious. Irish theatre does have a performative history and there are many examples of practitioners and playwrights working to reincorporate the body into the process, from the theatre of Yeats to the founding of Macnas in 1986 and beyond. The plays considered in this thesis were produced within this context and have contributed to the ongoing development of that theatrical tradition.

The Great Hunger was produced as a resurgence of corporeal representation was about to take place in Irish theatre, and it has been cited as an influence on a

number of subsequent productions. A review by Joe Woods of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>, broadcast on 'The Good Arts Guide' <u>BBC Radio Ulster</u>, drew a direct comparison between <u>The Great Hunger</u> and <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>: 'A stunning piece of theatre indeed—this was the greatest piece of imagist theatre I've ever seen and certainly the best since Tom Mac Intyre's 'The Great Hunger'' (Joe Woods <u>BBC Radio Ulster 22/10/92</u>). In 1997, another adaptation of Kavanagh's work, the novel <u>Tarry Flynn</u>, was performed on the main stage of the Abbey theatre and directed by Conall Morrison. Again, the influence of <u>The Great Hunger</u> was cited:

The spirit of Tom Mac Intyre's memorable adaptation of Kavanagh's poem, The Great Hunger, over a decade ago, whispers through these stretched vowels and fluid movements; not because Morrisson is paying explicit homage to Mac Intyre, but because that explosion of visual and physical exuberance is an inevitable influence in this territory (Meaney Irish Times Weekend 17/5/1997).

The legacy of <u>The Great Hunger</u> is recognised in the discourse, but has remained a footnote, a performative other defined as such against the more literary-driven mainstream plays within the canon.

In the early 1980s Rudkin wrote <u>The Saxon Shore</u> for Field Day Theatre Company. The political landscape of Derry and of Northern Ireland and the performance landscape of Irish theatre led Rudkin to offer a politically and performatively challenging piece. The fact that this challenge was not taken up by Field Day is indicative of the company's cultural and political agenda, and illustrates how certain representations of the body were not acceptable to sections of the Irish theatre community at that time but were deemed inappropriate for Irish audiences.

Almost ten years after Field Day decided against producing <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, the embodiment of the divisions of the Northern Irish community was undertaken by Druid Theatre Company, who were also responding to an increased interest in ethnicity and the marketability of Irish tradition. With <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>, Druid were in a position to foreground the performing body and to incorporate it into the ostensibly realist narrative of the play, as theatre practice had created a readiness to engage with a variety of stage vocabularies among Irish theatre audiences and practitioners. However, its merging of performance tradition and the performance of

sectarian violence necessitated a difficult balance, and a very clear set of political parameters, which were not achieved in production.

STAGING IRISHNESS

There are three basic phases in the process of cultural decolonization. The first is when a native elite is taught the master's language in order to serve his interests (Crusoe and Friday, Prospero and Caliban, etc). The second occurs when the native intelligentsia reclaims a once-despised local lore but expresses it in the language of the coloniser. The third—less often reached—is when the artist chooses to write in the vibrant language of his or her own people (Kiberd 1999: 10).

That the 1983 production of <u>The Great Hunger</u> was a theatrical interpretation of a canonical poem suggests that Mac Intyre and his collaborators were working in the third phase of Kiberd's decolonisation process. The postcolonial body corporealized the characters of a postcolonial literature, with the one inanimate exception of The Mother. This was done at a time when the full potential of Irish literature as a commodity was being realised. The notion of physical theatre as a commodity, an item of cultural exchange, had yet to take hold in Ireland. <u>The Great Hunger</u> was influential in broadening the interpretations of Irish literature and the market value of a theatre form that is not word-driven.

In <u>The Saxon Shore</u>, the transformation to werewolf becomes a performance trope. Performance theories of transformation, when applied to Rudkin's image, problematize the subject/object binary and implicate materiality in the performance of the other. The assumption or rejection of identity is both a political and a performative act. Theorizing transformation informs the interrogation of representation in performance. Rudkin used the image of werewolves, as Woods would later employ the mummers, to physicalize the horror of organised sectarian violence. But Rudkin was careful to site this group violence in a well-crafted context. He worked to give his audience an awareness of both the difficulty of the Saxon's situation and their partial responsibility for that situation. Rudkin dealt unapologetically with this specific version of Irishness; his choice of theatrical form

was as uncompromising as its content. However, both form and content contributed to <u>The Saxon Shore's</u> invisibility within the Irish discourse¹.

The recent success of Belfast playwright Gary Mitchell suggests a comparison with Rudkin as the appeal of Mitchell's work has been attributed in part to the fact that he gives voice to the Protestant, working class, Unionist and Loyalist community.

It has been suggested that (...) the world is not interested in my community but I believe it has more to do with the fact that my community has no interest in presenting itself to the world. My frustration is that while everything Irish is promoted very skillfully and successfully around the world, members of my community prefer to sit and whine about how unfairly they are treated and misrepresented without ever realising that maybe it's their responsibility actively to pursue change by writing plays or making movies. Obviously I believe that we should not churn out tiresome propaganda but simply tell our truth, tell our reality and make it entertaining (Mitchell Irish Times 25/3/00: 14).

Mitchell's work is deliberately shaped to represent the irredeemably violent 'reality' of that community and has enjoyed a level of success that suggests audiences in Northern Ireland and the Republic are prepared to accept a staged representation of Loyalist violence. Mitchell's work has been produced both north and south of the border and in England. In a Little World of Our Own opened on 12 February 1997 at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, and was directed by Conall Morrison. Tearing the Loom opened at the Lyric Theatre Belfast on 17 March 1998 as directed by David Grant and Trust opened on 11 March 1999 at The Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London as directed by Mick Gordon.

The note on the back of the Royal Court publication of <u>Trust</u> is an insight into contemporary responses to documentation: 'published alongside the premiere production, this 'Instant Playscript' is intended to reflect the immediacy of the play on the stage. *It is printed direct from the author's own disk* prepared only a few days before opening night. The aim is to give audiences at the theatre and readers all over the world instant access to *the best of current new writing* as it hits the stage' (Mitchell 1999: back cover [my emphasis]). While this publication is an 'instant' response to the process of production, the cover note is not a significant departure from others in telling the reader that the 'playscript' is the work of the playwright.

¹ In <u>Contemporary Irish Theatre</u> by Anthony Roche, a production history of Field Day Theatre Company is included. Roche writes on its 1983 season but there is no mention of <u>The Saxon Shore</u>

Mitchell's recent work includes <u>As the Beast Sleeps</u>, which opened at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, on 10 June 1998, also directed by Morrison. <u>The Forces of Change</u> opened 6 April 2000 at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, directed by Robert Delamere. <u>Marching On</u> opened on 9 June 2000 at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, and was directed by Stuart Graham who played Ray in the first production of <u>In a Little</u> World of Our Own.

Such prolific work suggests that audiences are ready for what Mitchell sees as an essential representation of an overlooked Irishness: 'Orangism, Loyalism and the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] have been easily demonised for years, rightly or wrongly. Surely it is more interesting and essential to open these organisations up, look inside and therefore discover that at the core of these institutions are human beings with their own strengths, weaknesses, virtues and failings' (Mitchell Irish Times 15/3/00: 14). In terms of theatrical form, however, this new staging of Protestant Loyalist Ulster falls short. Mitchell's work is marked throughout by an adherence to realism, stretched to accommodate stage violence and is not on par with, never mind a development of, a performativity as brought to the same issues by Rudkin.

Woods fashioned certain elements of Irish culture persuasively to heighten the sectarian horror. He used the performance traditions of mumming, traditional music and dance and storytelling to expose extreme, less attractive aspects of Nationalist endeavour. At the Black Pig's Dyke was a well-packaged Irish play; the lyrical rhythms and textures of the folk culture were employed in a celebration of Irishness, while the chilling actions of the mummers, as led by Beirne, charted the ugliness of a divided society. Woods rooted the motivations in the personal rather than the political, however, and as such engendered a strong response from sections of the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland, who were not receptive to this version of Irishness and refuted its authenticity.

STAGING BODIES

An emphasis on issues of performance was already inherent to the plays and their production histories, but also served my ongoing engagement with their performance implications. Such performance issues include the representation of the body as an inanimate object and its resonances when 'playing opposite' the live actor. The body in pain marks transformation as a performance reference within performance. The defaced body emphasizes the link between identity, consciousness and accountability. The body of the actor is therefore the site rather than a mere vehicle of signification.

Because the nation is often constructed by elites who have the power to define the nation in ways that further their own interests, the same elites are also able to define who is central and who is marginal to the national project. In the intersection of nation, gender and sexuality the nation is constructed to respect a "moral code" which is often based on masculinity and heterosexuality. This is the reason why the leaders of the nation may try to represent their nation as "modest"—and in turn speak in terms of the ideals of the nation in imposing on women a traditional moral code (Mayer 2000: 12).

The Great Hunger, The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke each offered a corporealization of gender roles in their contemporary Irish society. The staging decisions of The Great Hunger made a strong statement about the role of women in rural Ireland, and the disenfranchisement of men such as the lonely Maguire. The Mother in performance and in the published text is specified as a wooden, inanimate object. Other characters' relationships to The Mother are staged as live bodies interacting, or failing to interact, with this wooden object. In the 1980s the performing bodies of The Great Hunger actors were in contrast with the disembodied Mother effigy; this device articulated the space between subject and object while eliding that space. The wooden Mother was at times given a subjectivity by the stage business, the characters were objectified by a number of physicalizations within the text.

Maguire's anxieties were foregrounded and embodied in performance by Hickey. His animated engagement with the inanimate effigy staged the frustration and hopelessness of the aging Irish farmer. The postcolonial body became masochistic in the performed intimations that Maguire had created the Mother effigy himself and thereby had created that which dominated and controlled him. Here was the suggestion that the Irish, through the Constitution, state bodies and identification with the Church, have in fact created the repressive Irish society with its limited scope of representation. The Mother as a container, a receptacle, an icon and as wooden 'other' to the flesh of the 'self', is an extraordinarily resonant image that can be read outside and beyond any intentions behind the initial staging decision. As a restricted,

contained woman, the effigy could also be read as an image of the place female practitioners usually occupy within the hierarchies of the theatre process, and within a postcolonial society. However, this situation is changing somewhat in the contemporary theatre field.

The Saxon Shore identifies 'the other' in the body of the Celtic priestess Ceiriad. Ceiriad is invested with a divinity that was ritualised, poetic and pure. As such, she provides a foil for the Saxons and an analogy for the colonised condition. However, Rudkin problematizes gender opposition in his portrayal of Athdark as both a violent aggressor and a feminised victim. Having been both masculine aggressor and feminised victim, Athdark acknowledges the complexity of identity and can finally stand 'the beginnings of a man'. What exactly this version of man will be is left to the actor to embody in the performance moment at the end of the play and to the audience to interpret. The portrayal of the political other through an investigation of transformation and gender opposition was an exercise Field Day could have embarked on with The Saxon Shore, but this was not to be.

The production history of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> charts the need for an appreciation of the body as a site of transformation (and the need for a less literal reading of the body). In Irish theatre discourse, that appreciation has been secured to an extent by other theatrical innovations of the twentieth century (as considered in section 1.3) and by the two other plays considered here. Athdark's wounded body brings him and potential audiences an awareness of the transformation from Saxon to wolf, and thus actors and audiences have a heightened awareness of the transformation from actor to Saxon. The staging of the wounded body closes the gap between subject and object, self and other, embodiment and representation. Athdark's wound as a feminisation ultimately undermines the binary opposition of masculine and feminine. The 1986 Almeida production presented the gender opposition, but the full resonances of the political oppositions were lost.

At the Black Pig's Dyke staged woman as disputed territory. The men in Lizzie's society are shaped and driven by an inherited and unquestioning territorialism and recourse to sectarian violence, but are ultimately looking for a personal revenge. The issue of female subjectivity is explored by the splitting of Lizzie into younger and, therefore, 'older' Lizzie and in her embodiment by two

actors sharing the stage. Lizzie's split/double subjectivity is offset by the 'assumed' anonymity of the mask-as-object of the mummers. In At the Black Pig's Dyke, the mummers' bodies are 'defaced'. The violence facilitated by facelessness also perpetrates facelessness as the victims in the play are described as having had their faces and thus their identities erased. The assumption of the mask to indicate the performance of violence works here much as the transformation to wolf does in The Saxon Shore. The performance tradition of mumming serves the politics of the play. This was a very attractive strategy; Irish audiences could enjoy a rousing evocation of a creative performance history. In the 1992 production, the defacing of the mummers allowed Woods and Druid to question identity and accountability. But when Beirne's face was finally put to his actions, the play's political message was compromised. By giving Beirne personal motivations, Woods impoverished the political power of the mask as staged through the mummers.

PERFORMANCE AND PROCESS

In 'Textuality and Authority in Theater and Drama' (in Reinelt & Roach 1992), John Rouse articulates the distinction between dramatic and performance texts and attributes the authority of the latter to the director:

we all know, and usually murmur in passing, that this text is "written" through a collaboration between those who control its various signifying systems (actors, designers, composers etc.), but we "legitimise" the text's authority by attributing it to the director (Rouse in Reinelt & Roach 1992: 147).

Each of the three plays considered here was written by a male playwright, and the conditions of their production, whether fully realised or not, were male centred and that is where the authority has been placed within the discourse. The Great Hunger collaboration was primarily between Mac Intyre, director Mason and actor Hickey; At the Black Pig's Dyke was written by Woods and directed by Maelíosa Stafford; and The Saxon Shore was written by Rudkin and commissioned by Friel as a representative of Field Day, whose choice was augmented by the board of directors at that time comprising six men². This evidence supports Mayer's view that:

Even when the binarism of hetero-patriarchal norms is challenged, it virtually always remains the case that it is men who claim the authority to define the nation and its boundaries; to define the process of nation-building; and to

² See section 3.1.

articulate what masculinities and femininities are appropriate to the nation (Mayer 2000: 14).

The process and publication of <u>The Great Hunger</u> are indicative of a growing emphasis on collaboration in the creation of meaning. What it also illustrated is the difficulties of an appropriate documentation, the gap between the production text and the published text and whether or not a play can be open to reinterpretation if the production text and published text are one and the same.

The Saxon Shore illustrates that constructing a suitable performance discourse is reliant upon a consistent performance vocabulary and documentation process, this could then be applied to the acting problem of performance. The Saxon Shore necessitates that the enactment of transformation be undertaken by the body describing it. There is no gap here between the telling and the doing of the transformation. In production, however, there was a gap between the transformation within the text and the transformation in the rehearsal process. This gap was not closed by the rehearsal process and performance of the Almeida production of the play in 1986. The 'problem' of performance is foregrounded by the production history of the play. The difficulty was in finding and committing to an ensemble approach to the performance of the wolf image. The recovery of documentation on this production also typifies the challenges of recording and analysing performances that are not text-driven.

The first production of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> was shaped by the input of choreographer and actor Ray McBride, designer Monica Frawley, Woods, Stafford and each of the other actors and musicians. The 1992 production text includes stage directions and specifications of stage detail. Methuen's published text elided a number of these details developed in rehearsal and thereby returned the authority to the playwright. <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> provides a theatricalized example, but only one example, of the general practice of publication.

STAGING THE BODY IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH THEATRE

In 1983 Mac Intyre was unequivocal when he spoke about the risks of a more physicalized theatre idiom: '[i]n the literary theatre you can make mistakes and at least half get away with it. In this mode, the safety net is not there. If it is not

convincing the audience should walk out of the theatre on the spot. Good luck to them. That's what I'd do' (Mac Intyre quoted in O'Toole Sunday Tribune 8/5/83: 7). Since that time, many strides have been made in the scope and vision of theatre, due in part to international developments in dance, theatre and performance art. The Dublin Theatre Festival, the Dublin Fringe Festival and the Galway Arts Festival, to name the most prominent among Irish arts and theatre festivals, have hosted a number of international companies and productions that have influenced both Irish theatre practice and the expectations of audiences. There have been higher incidences of Irish companies and productions touring abroad and of Irish practitioners travelling abroad for training. This growing internationalism is facilitated in part by state funding programmes. There are also more training courses available to study performance and drama in Irish universities and colleges, with an increased emphasis on practice.

Although plays by both Woods³ and Mac Intyre⁴ have been well received since the mid 1990s, both have almost invited further marginalization by their recent work in the Irish language, and, in Mac Intyre's case, working with dance. Mac Intyre has collaborated with the Irish Modern Dance Theatre for You Must Tell The Bees first staged on 26 September 1996 at The Firkin Crane Arts Centre, Cork. This piece was based on Mac Intyre's own poem 'Widda' and included language as spoken by the dancers. Mac Intyre has also crafted responses to canonical Irish language poems for the stage. His bi-lingual Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire (original poem by Eibhlín Dhuibh Ní Chonaill) was a Peacock Theatre production that opened in Spiddal, Co. Galway, on 16 April 1998. It was directed by Kathy McArdle and Hickey played the Judge. *Cúirt an Mheán Oíche* (original poem by Brian Merriman) followed this, a production that revisited the theatricality of The Great Hunger but was almost entirely in the Irish language. This Peacock Theatre production was directed by Michael Harding and opened at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, Galway, on 19 November 1999. Bríd ní Neachtain, Mary Anne in The Great Hunger, played Aoibheall.

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³ Woods' other work includes an adaptation of Ignazio Silone's <u>Fontamara</u> for Vesuvius Theatre Company, which opened at the Dublin Fringe Festival on 29 September 1998.

⁴ Mac Intyre's <u>Good Evening Mr. Collins</u> is probably his most accessible and acclaimed piece since <u>The Great Hunger</u>; it was produced at the Peacock Theatre where it opened on 5 October 1995, as directed by Kathy McArdle.

Woods' <u>Song of the Yellow Bittern</u> was an obvious successor to <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>. <u>Song of the Yellow Bittern</u> was set across seven generations and staged the Irish tradition of waking; it was produced by Druid Theatre Company and opened on 22 September 1994. This production was also directed by Maeliosa Stafford and designed by Monica Frawley, and a number of actors from <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> were also in the cast, including Frankie McCafferty, Ray McBride and Brendan Laird. The play was well received, although the layers of storytelling and changing time periods were considered confusing by a number of critics.

On 17 July 2001 <u>Ag Claí na Muice Duibhe</u>, an Irish language version of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u>, opened at An Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe as part of the Galway Arts Festival. It was again directed by Stafford, choreography was attributed to Ray McBride and Margaret McBride and music was by Brendan O'Regan, as in the original production. None of the actors of the 1992 Druid production performed in this Irish language version of the play. The design, again by Frawley, included a huge haystack upstage centre. The following director's note described his intentions in restaging the play, this time in the Irish language, and was included in the programme:

What does it mean? To come back (revisit) a play ten years after you first work with an author and attempt to stage a work as challenging as this play. What can you say that's new, or indeed how can you recreate something that keeps pulling you back to its conception. The only answer I've found is to reevaluate the present by continually underlining the elements of our past that are beyond analysis. Simple and basic harsh responses to love, fear, hate, joy, revenge, and justice that have been catalogued in our methodology (folklore) and seen to provide a useful clue toward a better future. Call me naïve....But then again it's a very simple story (Stafford in <u>Ag Claí na Muice Duibhe/At</u> the Black Pig's Dyke progamme 2001: 3).

Since the early 1990s, young companies (as documented by <u>Theatre Stuff</u> and <u>The Irish Theatre Magazine</u> for example) have built on the emerging emphasis on practice and the influences from abroad as encountered through experimental work touring to Ireland. The recent work of Barabbas...the Company, Corn Exchange and Blue Raincoat has foregrounded performance; and each company has made a significant contribution to the ongoing training of Irish actors and performers by running a series of training courses and workshops. Niall Henry and Malcolm Hamilton founded Blue Raincoat in 1991. The company's emphasis on physicality is informed by an interrogation of Suzuki's Stomping and Anne Bogart's Viewpoints

approaches, among others. Henry explains: '[w]hat would be different in an Irish context about a Blue Raincoat show is that although there is a very strong physical and visual context to the pieces, usually there is a play with a beginning, middle and end, and a story to it. It is neither an attempt at a visual piece, nor a straight play. The attempt is to arrive at both, in a sense. Something that is beguiling to the eye, and that, at the same time, would also follow the traditional basic theatrical rules of drama' (Henry quoted in Kilroy Irish Times 8/7/00: 7). While Blue Raincoat's work has an undoubtedly physical idiom, it is hard to see from Henry's sentiments how the company's intentions for a strongly physical and visual play 'with a beginning, middle and end, and a story to it' mark a departure from the Irish theatre context.

Recent Blue Raincoat productions include Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll, adapted by Jocelyn Clarke, and Alice through the Looking Glass, also adapted by Clarke and described as the company's 'companion piece' (Kilroy Irish Times 8/7/00: 7). These plays were performed in repertory (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was a revival) at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, and opened on 13 July 2000 for a five week run followed by a tour. Blue Raincoat, in partnership with the Peacock Theatre, returned to Dublin with a production of Synge's canonical text The Playboy of the Western World that opened on 10 July 2001. This production created considerable excitement as it was a meeting of the treasured text and a contemporary approach to performance. Barabbas...the Company former member Mikel Murfi, a leading exponent of physical theatre on the contemporary scene, played Christy Mahon. Pegeen Mike was played by Olwen Fouéré—another actor associated with 'physical' theatre (see section 1.3).

This production placed the major concerns of Irish theatre centre-stage: the power of the text, the role of the actor, the actor's body and materiality in the creation of meaning. Conan Sweeney, who played the part of Jimmy Farrell, describes a process which, in performance, seemed ironically to have foregrounded language: 'Part of the process involves the elimination of extraneous movement, thereby finding how the smallest of movements can convey so much' (Playboy of the Western World Abbey production programme note 2001). Ben Barnes, the artistic director of the Abbey, is quoted in the programme, and his sentiments give some insight into how the word and the body worked together in this instance: 'Most productions of The

<u>Playboy of the Western World</u> focus on the primacy of the text. A physically committed production, which reflects the vividness and muscularity of the spoken word, is what excites me about the approach of Niall Henry and his acting ensemble' (<u>Playboy of the Western World</u> Abbey production programme note 2001). This production was notable for its level of physical commitment and unflinching moments of stillness, offering a reassessment of the term 'physical theatre' through practice.

Barabbas...the Company has drawn on the movement training methods of Jacques Lecoq to inform its work, as seen in <u>Strokehauling</u> (1996) a solo piece performed by Mikel Murfi, and in its foray into Irish canonical territory with an acclaimed adaptation of Lennox Robinson's <u>The Whiteheaded Boy</u> (1997) as directed by Gerard Stembridge⁵. Corn-Exchange offers workshops in Commedia dell'arte; an approach the company combines with other performance traditions in its interpretations of classics, such as <u>Streetcar</u>, the company's 1997 version of Tennessee Williams' <u>A Streetcar named Desire</u>.

A series of recent articles have expressed an anxiety about new Irish plays and productions. Is contemporary Irish theatre practice experiencing a backlash against the body—is it *perpetrating* a backlash against the body⁶? The recent success of Druid Theatre Company's productions of the work of Martin McDonagh as directed by Garry Hynes, especially The Leenane Trilogy⁷, has brought the company considerable success both in Ireland and abroad, but criticisms have been levelled against McDonagh's versions of Irishness. Vic Merriman, in 'Decolonisation Postponed: The Theatre of Tiger Trash' (Merriman in Roche 1999), spoke out against the politics of representation in the work of both McDonagh and Marina Carr.

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⁵ See 'Barabbas at Play with The Whiteheaded Boy' by Eric Weitz in <u>Theatre Stuff</u> (2000) (ed.) Eamonn Jordan, pp. 269-279.

⁶ In The State of Play: Irish Theatre in the Nineties (1996), Karin McCully wrote an overview of the theatrical styles of Ireland's prominent playwrights, but again an emphasis on language and the role of the Abbey supersedes any performance-driven reading of the work: 'surrealism, absurdism, the most attenuated lyricism, live parallel lives, often in distinct contraposition to the action they accompany—from the dense mastery of John Millington Synge, through the modulations of O'Casey, Behan, Friel, Murphy or McGuinness and, in the last few months and years, the incredible mergings of emotional realism and full-blown expressionism in the works of Sebastian Barry and Marina Carr, to the wizard-weird conjurings in the language of Tom MacIntyre' (McCully in Bort 1996: 25).

⁷ For a detailed reading of McDonagh's work, see 'Decolonisation Postponed: The Theatre of Tiger Trash' by Vic Merriman in <u>The Irish University Review</u> Autumn/Winter 1999 and 'The Gothic Soap of Martin McDonagh' by Karen Vandevelde in <u>Theatre Stuff</u> (2000) (ed.) Eamonn Jordan.

Although there are comparisons to be made with Carr on a number of these issues, her work has a greater emphasis on theatrical imagery. In 'National Theatre: The State of the Abbey' (1996) McCully states:

The undeniable "female energy" in the plays of Marina Carr is a powerful, giddying tidal wave of theatrical innovation, associations, and ideas, which whips the head of tradition around from continually biting its own tail, and forces it into territories only partially explored by the few intrepid women playwrights of the past (McCully in Bort 1996: 27).

McCully identifies the work of Marina Carr as a potential source of renewal for Irish theatre: 'What women playwrights may add up to in this regard is no less than the future of Irish theatre, a theatre close to exhaustion from the re-negotiation of its own recurring themes, a theatre in need, like all evolving things, of a bit of the other' (McCully in Bort 1996: 27-28).

'In McDonagh's case The Beauty Queen of Leenane, A Skull in Connemara, The Lonesome West and The Cripple of Inishmaan stage a sustained dystopic vision of a land of gratuitous violence, craven money-grubbing and crass amorality' (Merriman in Roche 1999: 313). Merriman argues that McDonagh's and Carr's plays evidence the betrayal of the disadvantaged and the socially marginalized by a newly-postcolonial order that offers 'bourgeois audiences course after course of reassurance' (Merriman in Roche 1999: 314) and that the funding and resources of the public sector should be invested in a more responsible drama. Interestingly, Merriman implicates the form of these works in the distraction of audiences from the full impact of the content:

The resources of the most successful of Irish theatre companies have been deployed in the service of deeply problematic work, to the extent that their theatricality—their ability to operate as spectacle—overpowers engagement with their significance as dramatic art. What is at issue here is the meaning of these representations as constitutory events in the evolution of a civil society (Merriman in Roche 1999: 315).

The power of representation is thus seen to have almost deluded postcolonial audiences into a betrayal of themselves. What is also significant in McDonagh's case especially is that while his work has been well-produced and received, the plays do not in any way extend the boundaries of stage representations except perhaps, like

Mitchell, in the representations of violence. Druid's continued reliance on the production of McDonagh's work has been seen to be at the cost of new developments.

There [have] been rumblings at Druid's decision to stage a reprise of Martin McDonagh's <u>The Lonesome West</u> in Dublin's Gaiety theatre rather than come up with something new. (...) The Druid has been one of the most highly funded theatre companies in the country and between 1975 and 1980, averaging seven productions per year. This figure has fallen in recent years, with an average four productions per year between 1995 and 2000 (Egan Sunday Tribune 19/4/01).

Conservatism in relation to theatrical form is particularly prevalent in the current work of young male Irish playwrights. Brian Singleton describes a new emphasis on the monologue form in 'Am I talking to Myself' published in the Irish Times 9 April 2001: 'The recent plethora of dramatic monologues in our major theatres signals an attempt by our young playwrights to wrestle with form, and exert control over the theatrical process' (Singleton Irish Times 19/4/01: 12). One of these plays, Port Authority by Conor McPherson, is in the form of three overlapping monologues by three Dublin male characters who describe events of their lives to the audience with no acknowledgement of the other characters; each actor worked in his own section of the stage without any physical contact with the other actors. The play, directed by the playwright, opened at the Gate Theatre on 24 April 2001, having premiered at the New Ambassadors Theatre, London, on 22 February 2001.

The conclusion of Singleton's article points to the space between the characters and the events they describe: '[S]ince the action has already happened, the characters are unaware of each other, and their narratives are unchallenged, the drama is removed from embodiment and re-enactment and relocated in the gaps in the characters' perceptions and in the tensions between the multiple truths' (Singleton Irish Times 19/4/01: 12). This is the summation of a process that revealed itself in how the women referred to in McPherson's narrative were not staged: '[w]oman, with whom these three characters are preoccupied, is rendered mute and denied self-representation' (Singleton Irish Times 19/4/01: 12). This could point to a worsening of the condition of representation of women on the Irish stage as, to take one example, although the key female character in The Great Hunger (1983) is not embodied The Mother is at least represented by the effigy.

However, in terms of theatricality, do these monologues open up opportunities for a response to and incorporation of audience response in a way that other theatrical forms do not? Could this be their departure, their innovation? Susannah Clapp, in her tellingly entitled 'Is Conor McPherson Simply Too Good for the Stage?' (Observer 25/2/01) raises the issues of embodiment and the role of the actor in Port Authority. She asks if London audiences gain anything from being in the presence of three actors who speak 'as if they were taking part in verse-speaking competition' (Clapp: Observer 25/2/01: 10). But perhaps Clapp answers her own question as she identifies one feature of the production which was also an aspect of performance when this production played before Dublin audiences:

[s]o dolefully cajoling was [Jim Norton] that a member of the audience burst out with a big sigh of joking compassion. And so in tune was Norton that he batted the sigh back with a confident nod and grunt—as if he were doing stand-up. An equivocal moment that: a moment when a character becomes a turn, and a set-piece burst its boundaries (Clapp Observer 25/2/01: 10).

A performativity inserted itself into the process as the presence of the actors speaking in monologue to the audience created a seeming intimacy. The play's heavy dependence on language made the exchange seem conversational and audience responses lent momentum to the actors' performances. The play is well written, but the performance moment reasserted the theatricality of an embodied narrative, even if in this case it was at the remove of the characters' recollections.

These are just some of a number of recent developments in the Irish theatre that have offered a variety of performed representations of the body and presented a particular version of Irishness in the wake of The Great Hunger, The Saxon Shore and At the Black Pig's Dyke. In creating a critical framework, I have interrogated postcolonial, gender and performance issues particular to the Irish context. The recovery of tradition and ritual, the performance of transformation, the construction of femininity and masculinity, the physicalization of the cultural condition, the staging of borders—each of these issues has been open to interpretation through performance.

This thesis was shaped in response to primary and secondary material and contributions from practitioners and others. My interrogation of the primary material was led by the productions themselves and my various forms of engagement with

them, be it as an audience member, researcher or practitioner. The interviews conducted with practitioners and playwrights foregrounded documentation, and the Rudkin interview formed a large part of my exercise of 'recovery' in relation to The Saxon Shore's production details. A commitment to engaging with performance discourse and a determination to site these works in practice led me to a variety of sources that might not seem immediately applicable to the Irish discourse, such as Amelia Jones on body art or Peggy Phelan on wounding and the body. Relating this material to the specifics of Irish representation was facilitated by my own work as a practitioner and researcher (see appendix (ix)) and by the example of the playwrights considered here, who have been shaped and influenced by performance traditions as diverse as that of the Royal Shakespeare Company (Rudkin), the Irish folk tradition of mumming (Woods) and the work of Pina Bausch (Mac Intyre).

Given the developments in Irish theatre since 1983, a varying dependence on spoken language as the focus of meaning and a readiness to explore new stage languages and incorporate other disciplines, audiences and practitioners are in a better position to answer Herr's call for a new reading of the Irish body. The critical framework and an emphasis on performance in Wooden, Wounded, Defaced—Performing the Body in Irish Theatre 1983-1993 have been shaped in answer to calls from such writers as Herr, Rudkin and McMullan to engage with the body in Irish performance. By merging aspects of postcolonialism, performance and gender theories, I intend this thesis to contribute to an Irish performance discourse and to recentre representations of the body in the analysis of Irish theatre practice.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX (i)

THE GREAT HUNGER ABBEY PRODUCTION & TOURING HISTORY

1983

9 May - 4 June Peacock Theatre, Dublin. (Previews Thursday 5-Saturday 7)

1986

- 11 16 August Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh, Scotland.
- 23 24 August Annamakerrig, Co. Monaghan.
- 20 October (4 week run), Peacock Theatre, Dublin.
- 25 November 13 December Almeida Theatre, London.
- 18 22 November Grand Opera House, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

1987

- 7 10 September Theatre Royal, Waterford.
- 16 September 4 October La Maison des Cultures du Monde, Paris.

1988

- 10 February Gorky Bolshoi Drama Theatre, Leningrad, Russia.
- 20 February Moscow Arts Theatre, Russia.
- 1 6 March Zellerbach Theatre of the Annenberg Centre, Philadephia, United States.
- 27 March (2 week run) The Triplex, Borough of Manhattan Community College, New York, United States.

APPENDIX (ii) INTERVIEW WITH TOM HICKEY 18 MARCH 1996 DUBLIN.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

This is a review by Colm Tóibín in 1986 in the <u>Sunday Independent</u>. He writes "there are however other scenes which seem merely gratuitous with the characters, without much aim or much effect, filling time but nothing else. These are in the minority they still affect the production". How do you react to such an opinion?

TOM HICKEY:

Well, obviously I couldn't agree but I could understand people having that reaction in non-narrative presentation, I can quite understand people who would and could say that. There would have been a very sharp point to any of the sequences that we did. I think what he might be referring to is there was a whole area in the production whereby people became animals. The verbal score at some times amounted to sounds and repeated words and you heard repeated phrases. I can't help it if people have a problem with it, a whole multi-layered presentation, which has to do with sounds, physicality etc. So what Colm would call 'prancing about' would have a very clear intent. I remember one particular sequence where Maguire and the two other men, the three other men, were trick-acting as it were but in doing so they became, (as they became other things at other points), Conal Kearney's character became like a buck calf, a buck heifer or a calf or something like that. You know this is what he [Tóibín] is referring to, but it was very much come up out the same well I would say. But I can understand someone saying that because if you're in the theatre and you're looking for drama in the more conventional terms and what you are getting is something that is going towards dance and you're expecting a more conventional dramatic presentation I can honestly expect someone to say that and I can understand it, absolutely.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Were you pleased with the reaction that the play received?

TOM HICKEY:

Yes. I mean, I've forgotten, I don't know. All I remember is that the reviews the first time round were very good. Incidentally, Gerry Stembridge reviewed it quite positively for The Irish Press, but that was one of the better ones.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

There was a lot of controversy about the trip to Russia.

TOM HICKEY:

Yes, that was ridiculous—it was silly—"why weren't we sending a more traditional Abbey piece" etc. They sent two pieces, <u>The Field</u> which was shall we say, a more traditional piece and I couldn't see what the problem was with sending a more modern piece. Everybody forgets it was the Russians who came here, saw theatre at the Abbey, and wanted <u>The Great Hunger</u>. Everybody forgets that. They wanted it! The Russians who came here saw it and wanted it immediately. In fact if my memory

serves me right, when the Russians arrived, the run of <u>The Great Hunger</u> had finished. We did—I don't know how long after the show had closed—we actually did a performance for them in the rehearsal room! Not with the set as it was but with the gate and with the props. We did it for the Russians in the rehearsal room because they wanted to see it. And when they saw it they said "yeah, we'd like it." That's what everybody forgets in relation to that controversy, the Russians wanted it, it wasn't foisted upon them.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The expression 'The Hurt Mind', where exactly did it arrive from, or when?

TOM HICKEY:

Dermot Healy wrote the programme note for <u>The Great Hunger</u> the first time around and I think it came out of that.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Do you think that <u>The Great Hunger</u> would have been, could have been, produced in any other theatre in Dublin aside from the Peacock at that time?

TOM HICKEY:

I'm sure it could but the fact that a piece like it went on where the facilities were the best was a very fortunate thing. I think I told you before the story about Tom Mac Intyre approaching me in the pub in Leeson Street after a play at the Focus. That would have been 1982, it was the year The Silver Dollar Boys was in the theatre festival because I was already engaged to be in it. There was supposed to be a production in the Project, he, Tom was trying to organize the Project to do it. Subsequent to my conversation with him he sent the play to Joe Dowling and Joe Dowling accepted it. At the beginning of '83 (as I always did at the beginning of the year with Joe) he'd give me an idea of the main things he wanted me to do in the year and one of the first things he said "I would like you to do, we have a play by Tom Mac Intyre and we want you to play Maguire in that". When I heard him mention The Great Hunger I said "I want to play Maguire in that," and he said "and that's what you're playing," so that was all right. So it came around.

You know, and I'm sure other places could have done it but because Patrick Mason was directing in the Abbey it was hugely important. I don't think that Joe was ever one hundred percent convinced about this type of work but what he was convinced about one hundred percent was that it should be done. That was always my feeling about Joe. He himself may have had the odd reservation but he felt it hugely important that it should be done. And that was always his position, even in the face of the most awful flack later on. The Great Hunger, because it was Kavanagh I suppose, had some respectability. But when Mac Intyre was let loose there was no respectability! Joe always said that it is right that this work should be done. I thought it was '82 but it might have been '81 when he came to me. It took another year before it got into the Abbey.

It was absolutely the right place. Patrick of course had already worked with Tom in the 1970's. And that was the wonderful thing about it, a revival of their working relationship from the two short plays that they did in the mid-70's. Everything is Russian roulette.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Did the show preview?

TOM HICKEY:

I think it probably did. The routine became that we would have a discussion every night after each preview with the audience and based on topics that were raised and also based on Patrick and Tom's perceptions looking at it and our experience from doing it things would be amended. There was a discussion, because late on in the first production three fate figures appeared with a scissors at the end of Maguire's life, and two Swedish people who were at one of the previews said "this is old hat this metaphor of the scissors". So, not immediately, that sequence became different.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

What exactly was the rationale behind the three good fairies?

TOM HICKEY:

I think it was found to be an intrusion. It became more pure later, because the introduction of another male, the Packy figure, allowed the narrative to be told by figures that were between the two worlds rather than decidedly from the other one. Packy had a foot in both worlds and that was found to be far more acceptable, and I think quite rightly so, than the three metaphorical figures, the ones the Swedish had the trouble with.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

But the objections were voiced at the very start in '83?

TOM HICKEY:

I remember them saying their problem was the scissors. Also at the end of the first production we had his [Maguire's] voice, which went out too. It was a purification of the piece.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

At the very end?

TOM HICKEY:

At the very end, as Maguire was dying. Originally in the text it was a very long passage. But Patrick reduced it to a short passage while Maguire died.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Also in '83, the animal noises at the mass, were they on the soundtrack? And then in '86 it was the congregation themselves that made them?

TOM HICKEY:

When the litany was finished, the four one-liners from the poem, which we all did like a litany, it ended with animal noises and then the priest. On his appearance we did the animal noises. They were underneath, on a tape and not at the litany, originally. That was a purification move as well. Again, it became less mechanistic in the sense that they were part of the ground. They were like the beasts in the field, they were so close to the earth, growing up out of the ground. That was another

development, whereas the noise was done before on tape, why shouldn't it come out of the mouth?

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

So, quite a few changes made after the 1983 production?

TOM HICKEY:

Quite a few. The opening was far better in the '86 one. I think originally for instance I came on with a candle. That went.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The Maguire character at the start, the poet-farmer image, was that still there? Did you come on wearing glasses and being the poet-farmer at the start all the way through?

TOM HICKEY:

No. The glasses were not a poet image, the glasses were in a sense an age image. You could almost say that Maguire was old and he was dreaming. I think they [the glasses] had to do with age but also they had to do with perception, about seeing. He was in a fog, he was trying to see, he was older, I think all of those things were mixed in. Because those one-liners were like as if he were having a dream.

That poet-farmer again was a more conscious way of looking at it. There was some sense of Tom [Mac Intyre] in the original text of the poet-farmer, but when we started rehearsing there was never any question of the poet-farmer, it was the farmer who, without realising it, said poetry. He, that way, got out of the mundane. His perception of the mundane became great using the poem.

There was in Tom's mind some sense of Patrick Kavanagh/Patrick Maguire, I think he was trying to play with that. But very quickly it became Patrick Maguire.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Another purification?

TOM HICKEY:

Yes, absolutely. I think that he had an idea Patrick Maguire/Patrick Kavanagh and that didn't last, for sure.

"The bridge is too narra, The hay has wings". See, that's all, "the tubs is white, the tubs is white" and then Packy said, "Maguire, you're wrong about that". That was initially done by Conal Kearney's Malone. Yes, he used to do that originally: "you're wrong about that Maguire".

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The 1988 publication of the script, is it the script of the 1986 production?

TOM HICKEY:

It is the closest you'll get to what it became. The best way to describe the work is that it was quite structured; I used to use the word in a 'steel-like' fashion. But the irony or the contradiction was that it could be changed quite easily and still hold that structure. Therefore as time went on the structure, as far as I was concerned, still

stayed the same, but actually it had altered. Mac Intyre went to almost every performance of this play, and he would come up with a gesture all along the way.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

In some of the reviews, the critics or reviewers seemed to be arguing among themselves whether it was important for the audience to have read the poem before going to see the play or not. What would you think?

TOM HICKEY:

If I was going to see a play that was rumoured to be difficult and I hadn't really liked The Great Hunger, out of my curiosity, (but you see, it wouldn't be a normal theatregoers curiosity), I would read the poem. I'd say I'll have a look at this just to see this, because I may enjoy the show better. But ordinary play-goers don't normally do that. Having said that, they're entitled if they go along and see a piece to be able to see it without actually having heard of the poem and that was the way we did it. We didn't assume any familiarity with the poem at all, what we tried to embody was the play/poem.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The card-game in the '83 version, it was gone by '86 wasn't it?

TOM HICKEY:

Yes

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Why?

TOM HICKEY:

Well, in rehearsal, in the original in '83 there was a 'tangler' scene where there are arguments basically, with the tangler. A tangler is a man at the fair who facilitates a deal between the farmer and the buyer, the man from the markets in Dublin or wherever he came from, or another, the buyer farmer. And what interested Mac Intyre was the fact that there was a huge gestural thing and that climactically the tangler got the farmer's hand [Hickey gestures, claps hands and spits] and he'd do the deal. So we worked on this in the original '83 production for I think at least two and a half to three days, and we were having trouble, we couldn't get it to click. We were improvising it and re-jigging it, and Mac Intyre came in on the Friday morning and he said to Patrick 'Patrick I've solved the tangler scene," and Patrick said "Great what is it?" "I've cut it!"

I'm not so sure that it was as brutal in relation to the card-playing scene. I don't remember the reason, I remember the experience. I can remember playing the card scene and people fell asleep almost playing the cards. To my memory, they fell asleep. So, I can only imagine that it wasn't yielding the same dividends so therefore, or maybe there was a crossroads scene that became tightened up an enormous amount too. There was 'galoothering' around and playing around with praises about Easter, but I don't think there was the 'pitch and toss', there was a lot more 'pitch and toss' in the original.

It was a question of how, the ultimate question always was, what is this doing for us and if it's not doing as much as the other scenes, well then, out!

For instance, in it's purity, the tabernacle scene that eventually arrived with the Marlene Dietrich was a very pure scene, but very spare. I think the scenes that were working very well we found were becoming very spare. There was the wonderful, (which didn't change at all), going to church scene, and that was what we would have called a very busy group scene. But then there was a spareness that came into a lot of the other stuff. It may be that the card scene ultimately was very fussy or something and wasn't doing enough for us. But it is important to say that as we went on, as we could see what was working, (and it would still be so if we were doing it), that quite good scenes would probably have gone out the door!

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

What would you say were the influences on The Great Hunger?

TOM HICKEY:

I think that Mac Intyre for whatever reason, I didn't know him, was always interested for me to play in the piece. Conal Kearney and Vincent O'Neill had come back from Paris and had been working with Marcel Marceau so that they had great physical orientation. The rest were cast from the Abbey company at the time, Fiona MacAnna, Máire ní Ghráinne was in originally and she got injured in the rehearsal and was it Bríd ní Neachtain came in? Máire ní Ghráinne was actually rehearsing for about two and a half weeks, then Bríd ní Neachtain came in.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

How long was the rehearsal process?

TOM HICKEY:

I think it was about five weeks, it's four weeks, I think it was five weeks every play got then. Five weeks. But I do remember the rehearsal period because we rehearsed in so many different venues that we called ourselves the Wandering Tribe! It had its own sort of poetry in that already the same. I know that we rehearsed some of it in the Francis Xavier Hall, on the stage, we rehearsed in Kildare Street, the Alliance Francaise, Kildare Street, upstairs, that's where we met and that's where we started rehearsal. There were two other venues I think apart from the Francis Xavier, you see currently the Abbey have the rehearsal room, which would have been used, but they didn't have any rehearsal venue for the Peacock. Now they use Team [a rehearsal space on Marlborough Street, Dublin] but then they didn't. So it was definitely started in the Alliance Francaise, amazing, you know when you think that we went to Paris afterwards.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Five weeks?

TOM HICKEY:

I think it was, yes. What year was that? '83? [Hickey fetches rehearsal diary] Saint George's Hall. Now we're in the Francis Xavier Hall, the next week. So that's two weeks, now we're on the third week, we're still in the Francis Xavier hall. Now we're in George's Hall, back in George's hall on the Friday, that's three weeks. Peacock foyer rehearsal! On the Saturday. The fourth week, George's Hall.

So now we're going in the fifth, so there was five weeks. Let's see. I wasn't, you see, the pressure was on, there's no detail! You know, just, there's no detail: "feeling awful" "pains in muscles" "sore throat". I remember that.

"Very tired" is written on the Friday, "very tired" because I'd never done anything like this really before. Now we were doing it for five weeks, the boys had exercises, the Marcel Marceau stuff, which we all –

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Warm-ups?

TOM HICKEY:

Yes, all of that. "Very tired" and "tired pains" "went to bed, stayed there", on Saturday afternoon, I was so – fucked! And I thought, I remember that Saturday morning that was, that was a run-through on the Peacock stage and I thought I was going to die. That's it, I remember that! I said, well, I said 'look sure I'll go out and die now, sure, I mean I'll have died working and that won't be the worst thing,' but I felt so bad. I'll never forget it. So on Monday, we're in the Peacock. Technical, yes, that's that. So there was five weeks. Now preview, first preview. Dress rehearsal on the Wednesday, first preview on the Thursday right? So, let me see how many previews there were, preview on the Thursday, preview on the Friday. Preview on the Saturday. Opened on the Monday! So we'd three previews. 10.30 performance on the Monday for thespian audience that means actors who were from all sorts of places.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

What do you think the impact of the play was on Irish theatre post '83?

TOM HICKEY:

I don't think, I don't know. I don't really know that. I mean you never know at the time. If it had any impact it would have filtered in almost without people realising anything.

I remember Patrick saying, his refrain was at those discussions after the previews, "I'm not asking you if you understand it, I'm asking you if you recognise it". That's one of the things Patrick used to always say. Because people used to be driven insane, and they used to get very annoyed and very frustrated because it wasn't rational. In my personal experience, there would be no surprise now, but that was a real pioneering job because unless you believed in it you wouldn't do it. I'm an actor, I need a script and I need some conventional direction but this is something else because in a way it requires one to not only call on the technical resources of voice and body, you're forced, you have to find out who you are in a way before you do it. In that sense, that dimension is what makes it quite different because we can all hide, we're given a script, and if you don't know who you are you can't do the revelation. But as I say, in purely staging terms, the way The Gay Detective is staged for instance, (apart altogether from other controversial matters in it), I think there would have been a lot of confusion in audiences if that was done before '83, you know. They would have said, "well hold on a minute now, what are they doing, walking across that armchair?" you know?

"What's that, I mean what's that all about?" Whereas it's quite clear that people in the Project had no problem about the armchair being used as a ladder, steps down into a cellar or something. That certainly is a difference, But it always was that, in the rehearsal process, if you didn't make a mistake you weren't getting anywhere. You make the mistake, you go and try to do something this way and then one of the company—and this is one of the interesting things—anyone, Mac Intyre or Mason or any of the actors would say "that bit there worked very well, that bit there," and that became the whole key into the way it was done. But you wouldn't have found that out unless you did it the other way.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The other productions, there isn't like as much coverage, reviews or articles.

TOM HICKEY:

The interesting one is <u>Rise Up lovely Sweeney</u>, a lot of people say that was the best, but it was the most difficult as well. And there certainly parts of it that didn't work. And it was always Patrick's ambition and Tom's ambition to go back and do it again. It was an amazing piece.

APPENDIX (iii)
INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK MASON⁸
22 MARCH 1996
ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Given that <u>The Great Hunger</u> was a collaborative project, what exactly did you see in the role of the director?

PATRICK MASON:

Well, I've always seen the role of the director as being both an instigator and at certain points being a total autocrat and it basically shifts between those two roles. But fundamentally all direction is for me collaboration, because theatre involves so many, the talents of so many energies, that it's not a matter of it being either one thing or the other. I think truly theatre is a collaborative act. I think you have to understand the nature of collaboration, which is that everyone comes from their particular area of expertise, of experience, of talent. And a true collaboration respects that. But that doesn't mean to say then that there's possessiveness about those areas. There has to be a confidence in fact that isn't possessive in any neurotic way at all. And there has to be a respect of the individual talent involved and expertise and that goes for directors, writers, actors, composers, any component, designers. That is an idea of theatre and that is an ideal of theatre and that is an ideal of theatre, which I understand as ensemble. That is a value, an ethos that I believe in very strongly. Now a hard fact of theatre is that there is the kind of hierarchical understanding of talent like a director, playwright, and all the rest of it and there is a certain type of theatre, a redundant maybe type of theatre, where that hierarchy is operating still and therefore you get the splits between writers theatre, director's theatre, designers theatre, actor's theatre and all this.

That's all very interesting as a sort of manifestation of contemporary power-play that goes on from corporate board-rooms to, you know, government departments through to theatre canteens and green rooms and is a fact of life. But ideally all theatre is collaboration but is collaboration, which is based on a healthy, and a total respect for individual talent, a lack of possessiveness and an openness to the contribution of others.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

And would you say that <u>The Great Hunger</u> was the most collaborative piece of work that you had done to date?

PATRICK MASON:

Yes, I think so. One of the understandings about the collaboration with Tom Hickey, Tom Mac Intyre and myself was that the initiator was Tom Mac Intyre. Tom Mac Intyre as a great theatre poet, writer, had a certain vision of this material, <u>The Great Hunger</u>, and he brought it to Tom Hickey as the actor he saw in the lead role and he

⁸ At the time of this interview Patrick Mason was Artistic Director of the National Theatre Society, incorporating the Abbey and Peacock Theatres.

brought it to me as the director he wanted to work with and we started from traditional positions.

And the more we then worked together, talked together about the material, and lived with the material together, the more certain areas then began to blur. The visual poetry, which is very strong in Tom, I countered with an equally strong vision, but his provoked mine. Tom Hickey with the verbal score and indeed the physical score of the play, of the piece, his instincts, his vision provoked that. What we did was to work together towards a rehearsal script, a scenario and that was a starting point for everyone in the group. But it was understood that from day one, though that was the starting point, also there was a total freedom; it could go anywhere.

And therefore as the material became animated, became alive and started to move around, we would all have to chase it to see where it went. And then it becomes an active process. But never underestimate that in any expedition there is also someone who is leading at any one point, and someone is organizing it. So those traditional roles are still there, although from moment to moment they disappear but they can reappear whenever you want them to.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY: Did you fulfil that role of leader?

PATRICK MASON:

No, it passed from one to the other. What fascinates me about Tom Mac Intyre is that he is a poet of the theatre, he's the most extraordinary voice and vision within the Irish theatre, within the European theatre. Temperamentally we get on very well and we also share all of the same underlying beliefs. We also have a great mutual interest in dreams and in archetypes and are both very well-versed in psychology and are fascinated by the language of dreams. And by the potential of the image, again in the context of the theatre that is traditionally associated with literary work, and scripts. We would see this as a counter-movement, which I suppose if you look at it in one way we were. If you look at it in another way there's the most wonderful language in The Great Hunger, beautiful incantatory poetic language in all the work, because Tom is accomplished, he's a great poet as well and he has a fascination with language but language which pushes towards the magic of incantation, of music, of the work that moves towards a cry.

I can think of many sequences in <u>The Great Hunger</u> where the language, the physical score was naturalistic and yet the repetition or the stretching of that movement pushed it into another realm where it carried a metaphorical symbolic significance. Directors, writers, your role, my role, this role, that role; the process itself is a much messier, more mysterious thing, but the important thing is that everyone gives themselves to the process and that's the key thing and that's the exciting thing. But then at the same time however far you ramble you're also coming back to something else, and what are you coming back to? You're coming back to the particular world, in this case the world of Patrick Kavanagh's <u>The Great Hunger</u>. You're trying to tap into the kind of energy that is in that place and you're trying to put yourself in touch with that, it's not that you're just simply wandering off into the middle distance in the hope of finding something. There is a destination, you just don't quite know how to get there and you won't know it until you get there. The getting there is everything, but you are heading there, it's not just a wander, so you are constantly coming back to the ground and what is the ground of that? It's a world, it's an experience, it's an

energy which you're trying to tap into and I think in all Mac Intyre's work. All the various expositions which he initiated, <u>Rise Up Lovely Sweeney</u>, the Sweeney story, the potency of Swift, Gulliver, these are all kind of presences, energies within the sort of cultural life, and within the psyche the imagination of this island, and he has the extraordinary ability to tap into them, and lead all of us into them. And once we're inside it we're all in it together.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

There's almost a contradiction in embarking on an exercise removed from the literary and using 'a literary masterpiece' don't you think?

PATRICK MASON:

Yes, but you see it's an interesting thing; you're always looking for something that will connect. What underlies the literary piece is the best connect into deep levels of energy and presence, imagination, life. And so you're looking for whatever it is, that lightening rod, you're looking for something that gets you through that. Now the interesting thing about The Great Hunger is that it's also the cultural icon, it's in the language, it's in the psyche, it's in the cultural life of the country, therefore you're immediately starting with an advantage because this material is hot, the energy is there. What you're trying to do then is take energy not just into another form but you're trying almost to go to its source, to go to its root and therefore it's a bit like. that extraordinary paradox that the literary feeds off life, but the literary can lead you to life, nourish you. You can, if you deal merely in the literary, become increasingly etiolated and self-referential until you lose all sense of life, but this was another process, this was saying this comes from life; this leads us back to life. How do we, term what is that relationship? And so you know it's not The Great Hunger by Patrick Kavanagh it's The Great Hunger by Tom Mac Intyre but far from filtering, becoming yet another barrier between us and the experience, it was interestingly enough quite paradoxical, a way of going back to the experience that nourished the poem in the first place.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Tom Hickey made the point to me recently that in the discussions that you had with the audience afterwards, one of the things you asked them was did they recognize it, as opposed to understand it. How did people react to that?

PATRICK MASON:

The discussion was interesting, we had them because we realised there was often a huge amount of anger, because people didn't understand it. And what became interesting was people [saying]: "oh, this is rubbish", "it's boring", "I didn't understand it."

And you say: "now wait a moment, just think, now can you remember any action, any particular sequence?"

- —"Yes, he went and sat on the gate."
- —"Well what happened then?"
- —"These people came in and then he turned upside-down and he was hanging upside down and he looked around the gate."
- —And you say, "you understood that perfectly, that's exactly what happened. He sat on the gate, people came in and then he turned upside down and watched them upside

down. You're not missing anything, it's all there, you're getting the information but you don't quite know what to do with it do you?"

- —"Well I mean it's just upside..."
- "What happens when you go upside-down?"
- -"Blood rushes to your head."
- —"Yes, blood rushes, what else happens to you?"
- —"You see everything upside-down."
- —"Yes, that's absolutely right. And that's a different way of looking at the things. So what's a different way of looking? Revisioning. You are getting the information, you just aren't connecting."

And therefore recognition is maybe a better word than understanding. And you get all angry and frustrated and upset because you're using only that part of the mind that, culturally, we are conditioned to lead with our understanding. But if we start looking at it in terms of recognition say, just look at it, let it happen and watch it, if you recognize it, if it makes you laugh, laugh, if it makes you feel sad, feel sad. Don't ask why, just yet! That can come later.

So it was a kind of way of saying "look you understand, it perfectly. You're not missing, anything, you're seeing and hearing everything, it's just that you're not letting it connect but if you stop worrying about it, it might."

And then that used to lead us onto dreams and what dreams are and what things do in our dreams.

All you're trying to do, I think, and it's very simple and very difficult, is to revision. Just to revision. And say "look, we have such a strong cultural bias towards the intellectual, analytic understanding, the Appalonia, that we don't even know it, it's so much second nature to us that we don't even know what it is." And all you're saying is, like any poet or any painter you're saying there are other ways, there are other ways of looking, there are other ways of being, here are other ways of hearing.

But that's very hard for people. The one thing that everyone had, or most people (the number of people who denied they ever had a dream was a bit depressing!), we do have an experience of that, very personal experience of another sense of being, of looking at things. That's our dreams.

That's all you're doing.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

A defence mechanism?

PATRICK MASON:

Yes, and it's very hard to break it down. It's very hard to break it, and you know you can challenge it, you can do it aggressively, you can seduce it, you can do all kinds of things, but it is very hard to break down. One of the most interesting things that we found was when we took The Great Hunger up to Annamakerrig and we did it in the barn and it was extraordinary, we did two performances, three performances. And things that Dublin audiences had terrible problems with, to them it was just playful. There was recognition, total recognition. There wasn't a problem. There wasn't a problem because we were on the same soil, we were on the same soil and there was immediacy about the rural experience.

⁹ Artist's retreat, The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annamakerrig, Co. Monaghan

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Do you think the rural audience member would have been more prepared to be receptive?

PATRICK MASON:

Yes, I think that's possible. You see all this business is profoundly mysterious. Oscar Wilde says think of the thing as killing, and that is one of the high prices for this analytical intellectual bias, we end up with lifeless forms.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Did you have many of those discussions after the performances?

PATRICK MASON:

Yes, we used to do it when we were previewing because it was helpful to us, we were working on the show everyday changing things and trying to balance things out and it was very good to get that kind of direct feedback. Quite possibly therapeutic for the audience, it was actually quite useful for us because you got a sense of where things were just not focused.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

So some of that did feed back into the performances?

PATRICK MASON:

Oh God, yes, absolutely! Oh absolutely!

But it was interesting, you get various parts of the performance where there was unhappiness and you couldn't say why but there was. But you see it's interesting in the work process because we work intellectually, analytically but we also have to learn to work instinctually. And it's not a matter of one or the other, you want to do both. The difficulty of this work is creating a situation, and one of the things from my point of view as an animator in rehearsal was to create a situation where, for a moment, the analytical could be shut off and the instinctual might rise to the surface. So we played a lot, a lot of structured games which led to unstructured open improvisations carried out at speed and silently, so that language and thought became impossible and therefore it had to be instinctive reaction to situations of change. We used to do a lot of this just to warm-up the actors and then we would maybe go to a long analytical discussion of a scene, but then we would know, we would label the scene, we would give the scenes titles, so a title of a scene might be 'a barrel of gunpowder' because we found images much more redolent of potential meaning than saying you know 'this scene where he rejects his mother'. And we devised all kinds of ways of just trying to outwit the analytical intellect, or distract it, so that something else might pop out.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

How long was your actual rehearsal process?

PATRICK MASON:

Five weeks. The first week was entirely workshops, workshop games, introducing objects. Props, themes, words, sounds, and then we would do very close discussion of

the text and so on and give ourselves the headlines and then with the headlines go back to improvisation again. So that was the process. And that would take five weeks and then the sixth week would be production week and then we'd be in with previews and we'd have four or five previews so it was quite a lengthy process. All supported by this theatre! Let it be said, we were all paid!

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Given the style of work that it was, given the amount of physical work that was involved; you have to have trust in such a performance.

PATRICK MASON:

Absolutely. And the group we picked were all people who we knew had a background, either they had trained in movement or had experience of that kind of work. And as the work progressed we tried to expand the group and to carry people with us, and lost some as well. We started with The Great Hunger and we went on to The Bearded Lady and then Rise Up Lovely Sweeney, which I still reckon is one of the things I'm proudest of, I thought it was just extraordinary and I think one of the best things Mac Intyre has ever done. It was an astonishing experience and an astonishing show, deeply unpopular! But astonishing! And there are people who will still tell you that, "that was the one." But it was after that we all decided the same thing, we all said, "we've got to go back to The Great Hunger" because we'd missed so much. It took really over three years, those three initial outings for us to really cop on, to develop a language, to develop an approach and to really cop on to what it was we were doing and it was then that we went back to The Great Hunger. We said, "Look we want to go back to The Great Hunger, we feel we've only half-teased it and I think now we've discovered things, and now is the moment to go back." And we did and it was extraordinary how much more the idiom was familiar to us, we were more adept in the idiom and I think also we had learned so much more along the way. And I still look at it as an extraordinary period of personal growth, creative growth, to be able to do that with the company; that company held together for four or five years. And to see it five years on doing a performance of The Great Hunger was just breathtaking. And it taught me something about acting, and it taught me something about the value of ensemble that you cannot achieve in theatre without that time, that investment of time and energy. But when they're there it's extraordinary.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

So, even though the '83 production of <u>The Great Hunger</u> had a five/six week rehearsal period by the time the '86 one came around it had had a three-year rehearsal period?

PATRICK MASON:

Yes basically. And it showed, and that's a thrilling thing to be part of and unfortunately in the way the theatre is structured and financed that's almost impossible to achieve now. And that's why I do keep saying that that is thanks to this theatre and to the commitment that was given to that work. And because of the subsidy for this theatre we were able to achieve that.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Do you think there's any chance of anything like that happening again in the future?

PATRICK MASON:

I hope so, I'm trying to! I'm trying to encourage the circumstances where I can. But these things, you never come from quite where you're expecting to come from and you've got to ensure that the circumstances are there for it to happen and it will eventually, something will, eventually.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

That kind of work relies on a real knowing, but a real knowing isn't really financially viable, unfortunately.

PATRICK MASON:

Well, I think one of the things you're up against is this fundamental dominant culture of consumerism, which is almost by definition a short-term immediate gratification, consumption one. And things of the imagination, the things of the imagination that have depth, resonance, just don't grow like that, they need nourishing, they need investment, they need developing over a longer time-scale. I think there's signs that people are beginning to realise that. You know, it's not for nothing we're beginning to realise that it does take forty or fifty years for a mature tree to grow, we're suddenly aware that when you cut down a mature beech that you're destroying seventy years and you won't see it again in seventy years. And I think maybe we have to suffer the loss before we realise what we have lost, I think there are signs that this is beginning to dawn on the consumer society, that there are other things in heaven and earth and they require time.

It's always going to be a struggle. And by and large it comes down to the individual talent and the recognition of the potential and then something can happen. Or there are the very extreme figures who have this vision and go off, (Polish theatre's full of them), and go off and live on a mountainside for ten years and come down with an extraordinary event! Holy theatre you know, in the Brook sense. We live in a messier and more imperfect world but it's still possible.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

To get back to <u>The Great Hunger</u>, you were talking about dreams, what was the interesting thing for me was the development or the loss of the three good fairies and the introduction of Packy. It's interesting to hear you talking about dreams and what was a more specific dream sequence.

PATRICK MASON:

Do you know it was kind of too obvious and we suddenly thought "it's a bit obvious." And, you know, that terrible whiff of 'little people' and we thought "hmmmm, wait a moment, wait a moment", and Packy emerged as this sort of idiot-savant who wandered, wandered through the piece and there was something in the image of the storm lantern and this blitzed face calling through the storm and crying out terrible warnings to Maguire. This was a much more terrifying and potent image, though funny enough it had a more naturalist bent to it, yet its resonance seemed to us so huge. Whereas we had great fun with the fairies, with the little presences, there was something at the end of the day that we all got a bit dissatisfied with, it was slightly too available, slightly twee.

But then there were things like the tabernacle that never ceased to delight me, just, the little golden house.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The Lili Marlene sequence, that was a later addition?

PATRICK MASON:

That was a later one. Well, we were talking one day, because we were going on to Paris with it, and we were going to Russia with it, and we started to think about the rest of Europe and were just realising "Bloody Hell, you know it was the middle of the second world war!"

I mean we were talking about the Emergency and talking about this strange thing of the isolation, which of course was an aspect of the hunger. And Tom actually mentioned he remembered hearing on a crackly radio Lili Marlene, Marlene Dietrich and so we just tried it. And it was wonderful. I mean it just was so potent. And this extraordinary nostalgia and innocence about it too, it's bizarre isn't it? There is a kind of strange innocence, lost sort of innocence there. And that was a moment when we were in Paris and in Moscow. That sound, that sound and that sequence when he was just polishing his reflection in the door of the tabernacle, was a kind of electrifying moment because sound, for everyone, carries such huge meaning, resonance of meaning.

So it was a sequence that developed from a discussion, developed from the fragments of memory and seemed to fit, sit easily within the world of the performance.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

There was lovely light in that scene as well, that placed it somehow.

PATRICK MASON:

Yes, it just seemed to sit in the world of the play and it opened up a whole other aspect of it in that way. That's what I mean, the material keeps yielding more and more as you get more and more into it.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Ideally would you liked to have done it without an interval?

PATRICK MASON:

We did it in Annaghmakerrig without interval, we played it straight through. Yes I think probably that's true. Usually what happened in the performance with an interval was that you'd go to the first half, and the audience would be alright, and they'd go out at the interval they would talk and talk and talk and by the time they came in most people had sorted things out, do you know what I mean? If they were going to come back in, some just left! If they were going to come back in they'd been hooked and also they'd had a chance to swap notes and that's very reassuring for them just to be able to say "What was that bit?" "Well I thought ...," "Did you?" And it was a moment for the audience to steady itself and decide whether it wanted more or not, so it did have its purposes, because we always found the second half was much freer, much easier, it's like they'd just had that time to get over the shock!

All those very simple things: "Was that...?" "Oh that's his mother of course that's his mother," simple things.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

So, the mother as effigy, that idea was there from the very start?

PATRICK MASON:

That was there from the very beginning, that was Tom's [Mac Intyre's] image of the mother as this extraordinary effigy, furniture, of kitchen, house, mother, everything. The tabernacle was me.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

It was originally a—

PATRICK MASON:

It was a table with—

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Baize-

PATRICK MASON:

—a revolving table yes. And I was unhappy with that because it seemed to me far too abstract.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

So the tabernacle did come up during the rehearsal process?

PATRICK MASON:

Yes, and the gate was Tom's. You see, we were fascinated; we were fascinated with the poetry of the bits and pieces, the poetry of those objects. Because I'm a great believer in, theatre is the poetry of everyday objects.

Once when we were working on the Sweeney we went to Carlow, the well, and inside this little sanctuary of the well this guy who had the cure of the well, was there's this wonderful stone sanctuary with the water pouring all over it and he was using a rusted 7-UP can to pour these libations. And I just thought it was wonderful, that's it, that's absolutely it. That for me opened up a whole theatrical language. The objects themselves, because you remove then from their context, they begin to speak. The kettle, the wire brush, and that tabernacle, some were rejected because they just were too mundane, they didn't resonate, others did really. A flat surface with the revolving [table], it was just abstract, there was not magic in that. But there is something quite extraordinary about that little golden house. And what is the magic of that rusted 7-UP can? That it's the grail. There's a whole language of theatre there. I mean that was the astonishing thing for me about the Sweeney, that Appalachia I call it, the Hurt Mind. That busted telly and their minds away with "galactic zippedy-do-dah" [from Rise up Lovely Sweeney], there's an idiom of theatre in that which is very for me very powerful and it's a thing about resonance, it's a thing about presence. You know the old thing that you can read a story as narrative, you read a story for character or psychology and then you read a story as metaphor, as symbol. The best stories can be read in all those ways. And I think this idea I keep calling it of a resonance, objects, words sounds, gestures, have a resonance that goes quite beyond the literal meaning, beyond narrative, beyond character and take you into another dimension altogether.

And the really strong moments, the images, the gestures the sounds create these extraordinary knots of energy, multiple energies that just become charged. They become charged, they explode in the imagination and go on for days afterwards, and you don't know why just like a dream, these sort of burning images that fire off all kinds of associations.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The notion of 'the Hurt Mind' where did that originate?

PATRICK MASON:

The idea of the Hurt Mind in Appalachia, it's Mac Intyre. That's where Tom Mac Intyre is quite extraordinarily original, a unique force in the Irish theatre for the Irish people. And at his best, there's no one there, in that territory. And I think what was extraordinary about the collaboration was it was maybe some of Tom's best work, some of my best work, some of Tom Hickey's best work. Not everything worked but at its best we we're all at our best, it was just enormously stimulating.

And I remember Hickey the opening night in Edinburgh, the Assembly audience and the seats, because the seats started going up after about ten minutes. It was a big invited audience, all the right people, and the seats starting going up and people started leaving and it got to the point where I thought if another seat goes up, that's it, we're gone, we're gone! And I was watching Hickey all this time, I thought he was going to die actually, I thought he was going to have a heart-attack, and every nerve, every muscle was concentrated and so focused, and I swear to this day he stopped the seats going up! He just stopped them by sheer force of presence and will and he just pulled the whole thing right around, it's wonderful. I can tell these stories because it ended up a vast sell-out success. I'd never seen an actor do that before nor since. And it was terrifying, terrifying. I really thought he was going to die. But he has such power as an actor and such total commitment and focus. And I said to him afterwards "I thought you were going to die!" And he said, "So did I! So did I but I can't tell -." he said "the waves, it almost was as though that audience wanted me to stop and I was fighting, I was determined not to." And he said, "It was a sheer battle of wills," it was extraordinary. And the reactions to The Great Hunger were always extreme, always extreme. Which is a sure sign that something is happening, even people's "I hate it, I hate it," and then I'd say "Why are you so angry? What's this anger about? Is it that you don't understand it? Is it just, or has it...?" and then after you'd get people and they'd come to you and they'd say "I was there at a preview and I hated it, but I couldn't get it out of my mind, I've got to come back and see it again"

And there are a lot of people, who walked out and never came back but it was raw, it was potent, it was distilled I think is the word. It was very essential and that made it extremely demanding to play for the actors, it was extremely demanding to play because there was no safety net.

APPENDIX (iv)
TOM MAC INTYRE BIOGRAPHY
DATE OF BIRTH: 10 October 1931

PRODUCTIONS:

Eye Winker Tom Tinker 7 August 1972 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Lelia Doolan).

<u>The Old Firm</u> 25 September 1975 The Project Arts Centre, Dublin (director Alan Stanford).

<u>Jack Be Nimble</u> 10 August 1976 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Patrick Mason)

Find The Lady 9 May 1977 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Patrick Mason).

Deers Crossing Spring 1978 Oberlin College, Ohio (director Wendy Shankin).

<u>Doobally/Black Way</u> Calck Hook Dance Theatre April 1979 Le Ranelagh, Paris and 8 October 1979 The Edmund Burke Theatre, Trinity College, Dublin (director Wendy Shankin).

The Great Hunger 9 May 1983 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Patrick Mason);

<u>The Bearded Lady</u> 10 September 1984 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Patrick Mason).

Rise Up Lovely Sweeney 9 September 1985 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Patrick Mason).

<u>Dance For Your Daddy</u> 2 March 1987 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Patrick Mason).

Snow White 27 June 1988 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Patrick Mason).

Kitty O'Shea 8 October 1990 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Ben Barnes).

Go On Red (three one act plays: <u>Fine Day For A Hunt, Foggy Hair and Green Eyes</u> and <u>Jack Be Nimble</u>) 14 February 1991 Punchbag Theatre Company, Galway (director David Quinn).

<u>The Mankeeper</u> 30 September 1991 Midas Theatre-in-Education Company Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (director Paul Brennan).

<u>Fine Day for a Hunt</u> 16 July 1992 Punchbag Theatre Company, Galway (director Sean Evers).

<u>Chickadee</u> 18 May 1993 Red Kettle Theatre Company, Garter Lane, Waterford (director Tom Hickey).

<u>Foggy Hair and Green Eyes</u> (reworked version) 4 October 1993 Project Arts Centre Production, Clarence Hotel, Dublin (in association with Tom Hickey).

<u>Sheep's Milk On The Boil</u> 23 February 1994 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Tom Hickey).

Good Evening Mr Collins 11 October 1995 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Kathy McArdle).

You Must Tell The Bees 26 September 1996 in collaboration with the Irish Modern Dance Theatre, Firkin Crane Arts Centre, Cork.

<u>The Chirpaun</u> 3 December 1997 Peacock Theatre, Dublin (director Kathy McArdle). <u>Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire</u> 16 April 1998 Coláiste Chonnacht, Spiddal, Co. Galway (director Kathy McArdle).

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Dance The Dance, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1970.

<u>Blood Relations: Versions of Gaelic poems of the 17th and 18th Centuries, Dublin: New Writers' Press, 1972.</u>

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SHORT STORIES:

The Harper's Turn, Dublin: Gallery Press, 1982.

<u>The Word For Yes: New and Selected Stories</u>, Oldcastle, Co.Meath: Gallery Books, 1991.

TV SCRIPTS:

<u>Painted Out</u>: a one hour drama broadcast by RTE 18 January 1983 (director Louis Lentin).

<u>Scruples</u>: a three part drama brodcast by RTE 8, 15 and 22 June 1989 (director Peter Omerod).

RADIO:

<u>The Visitant</u>: a 60 minute play broadcast 22 October 1980, RTE Radio (director and producer Sean O'Briain).

Green Sky Over White Bend: a short story broadcast 28 September 1981, BBC Radio 4 (producer Cherry Cookson).

The Mirror a play broadcast 1 January 1983, RTE Radio

<u>Grace Notes</u> a 30 minute play broadcast 13 November 1983, RTE Radio (director and producer William Styles).

<u>Fine Day for a Hunt:</u> a 30 minute play broadcast 24 November 1985, RTE Radio (director and producer William Styles).

<u>The Mankeeper</u>: a 30 minute play broadcast 29 October 1988, BBC Radio 3 (director and producer Jeremy Howe).

<u>Stirabout</u>: a 45 minute play broadcast 12 November 1988 and repeated 16 June 1990, BBC Radio 3 (director and producer Jeremy Howe).

Willy Wynne Con Motto: a short story broadcast 27 September 1989, BBC Radio 4 (producer Eoin O Callaghan);

<u>Fine Day For A Hunt</u>: a 30 minute play broadcast 11 November 1989, BBC Radio 3 (director and producer Peter Kavanagh);

Rise Up Lovely Sweeney: a 65 minute play broadcast 13 November 1991 as part of the BBC Radio 3 series Drama Now (director and producer Eoin O'Callaghan).

<u>Rise Up Lovely Sweeney:</u> a 60 minute play broadcast 16 February 1993, RTE Radio (director and producer Garvan McGrath).

ADAPTATIONS:

Libretto for <u>Ariane and Blue Beard</u> produced by Opera North 17 September 1990 The Grand Theatre, Leeds (director Patrick Mason).

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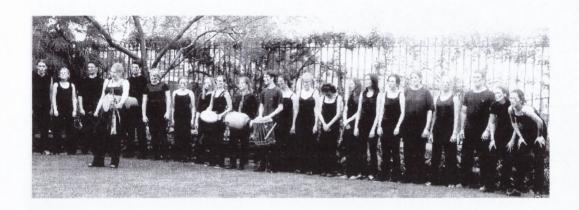
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- 'Foggy Hair and Green Eyes' <u>Krino 13</u> (Dún Laoghaire, Dublin: Anna Livia Press, 1992) pp.61-76.
- 'The State of Poetry' Krino 14 (Winter 1993) pp.35-6.
- 'The Mankeeper' in Dermot Bolger (ed.) <u>The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish</u> Fiction (London: Picador 1993) pp.9-13.
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APPENDIX (v) TRANSFORMATION—AN ACTING PROBLEM¹⁰

The assumption and rejection of the wolf image, (a physical image central to <u>The Saxon Shore</u> by David Rudkin) performed in procession to and from a number of key outdoor sites on Trinity College campus, Thursday 13 May 1999.



Performers: First year Theatre Practice students, BA programme, The School of Drama, Trinity College Dublin:

Sarah Colgan, Emmet Condon, Michael Fitzgerald, Ginny Gilbert, Emma Godsil Anne-Laure Gueudret, Nancy Harris, Rosalind Haslett, Cushla-Brid Hehir, Aoife Hester, Ruth Hetherington, Jessica Hilliard, Wayne Jordan, Mark Lawlor Oisin Leech, Rachel Lysaght, Glenn Montgomery, Adrian Mullan, Joe O'Brien Kathy-Rose O'Brien, Siobhan O'Dowd, Layla O'Mara, Rosemary O'Reilly Antonia Parnaby, Laura Pyper, Miriam Ross, John Ryan, Joanne Sheridan Ruth Smith, Ursula Smullen, Sirin Soysal, Maeve Sweeney, Jane Veitch Lorna Woods.

Director: Bernadette Sweeney

Drummers: Bisi Adigun, Ken Samson and Brian Monaghan

Photographer: Anne (Holly) O'Connell Camera Operator: Anna McMullan

Video Editor: Edmond Krasnigi and Ray Conway

With thanks to Anna McMullan, Chrissie Poulter, Dennis Kennedy, Ann Mulligan and Elaine Winters.

¹⁰ Please see attached video for rehearsal material on the wolf transformation.



Fig. (v).1 'Itch', Rosemary O'Reilly <u>Transformation—An Acting Problem</u> 1999.

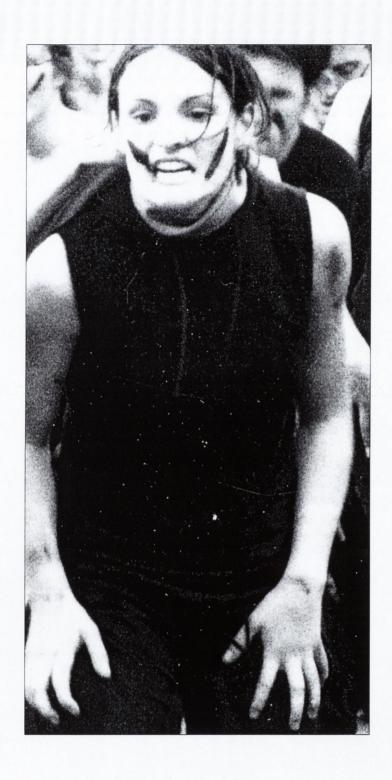


Fig. (v).2 'Prowl', Ruth Smith <u>Transformation—An Acting Problem</u> 1999.

TRANSFORMATION—AN ACTING PROBLEM: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS.

Central to <u>The Saxon Shore</u> is the issue of transformation and in my research of the material I wondered how this would be resolved in practice. In May 1999 I directed the first year students at the School of Drama Trinity College in what became an interrogation of the transformations to and from wolf in Rudkin's <u>The Saxon Shore</u>. I had worked with the students throughout the year, leading workshops in movement, voice and improvisation, working with two separate groups. This left me with considerable room for manoeuvre, especially when it came to the outdoor performance in the final term, which I have entitled <u>Transformation—an Acting</u> Problem.

As a practitioner and a researcher I was aware that I had had the opportunity to build an ensemble over the previous eight months, and it was time to turn that to the advantage of the performers and of my own research. I was anxious to build on the strengths of the traditions of the project and yet was keen to maximise the final six-week term in building a solid working relationship as I was now working with the full group. In relation to The Saxon Shore I was aware of two things:

- 1: Rudkin's description of the transformation as 'an acting problem' (Rudkin 1989: 52)
- 2: In the Almeida production of 1986 according to the testimony of Athdark actor Gerard Murphy the wolf workshops had 'petered out' (Rabey 1997: 192).

As we were not attempting to the stage the play I had an amount of freedom but, within the framework of the outdoor event, I had instead a different set of constraints, although not necessarily limitations. I was curious to know if a point of arrival could be reached if the point of departure was movement rather than solely text.

Over the first two to three weeks we worked to shape a procession with a series of performance spaces en route where the full group would stop and a subsection would perform, an echo of previous outdoor events (also suggestive of the performance ritual of the Pattern, see section 1.2) But the movement throughout was to be based on the assumption and then rejection of the wolf-image. It was impossible to rehearse in the public (outdoor) performance spaces without giving an approximation of the final performance, so the physical demands of the piece were not fully apparent until the event itself, awareness of performance *through* performance.

Earlier we had worked with Grotowskian notions of opposition, as developed in his actor's training period of 1959-1962. In <u>Towards a Poor Theatre</u> he stresses the importance of:

the study on vectors of opposite movements (e.g. the hand makes circular movements in one direction, the elbow in the opposite direction) and contrasting images (e.g. the hands accept, while the legs reject). In this way, each exercise is subordinate to "research" and to the study of one's own means of expression, of their resistances and their common centres in the organism (Grotowski 1991: 107).

I used this as an access to the wolf-imagery, a sense of the body working in opposition to itself, a resistance to a change in state.

ATHDARK: Oh...I am of that company I've heard of. Those not of one skin. Man outward, wolf inside, that sink from Man to lope, four feet on the earth, and talk with the stars, and go wolf-journey (Rudkin 1986: 12).

Another resistance image used was one of posture or physical positioning within the space

ATHDARK: Sh. Easy. Easy...No sound...Feet, four on the ground...And down of the wind... (Rudkin 1986: 10).

A number of practical physical exercises were employed including:

- Standing resisting but eventually succumbing to a pull to the floor
- Lying or crouching resisting but eventually succumbing to a pull to an upright position
- Variations and interruptions of the above

By slowing down, speeding up, fracturing and observing the above process, and concentrating on the transfer of weight, the human implications of Rudkin's image became apparent. As it is sited in the body of the actor this transformation had to be an acting problem, an actor's problem. To try to find a solution outside of the body of the actor and impose it on the body of the actor in performance (an imposition that can just as easily come from the actor as from any other party) would be to lose the resonances of the image, to remove the implications of agency, the human responsibility for the inhuman actions within the text.

As discussed in chapter three, in scene one of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> each character, as wolf, gives voice to unutterable actions:

AGNES: The farmer's little son came out to see what 'noise was. He saw my eyes. My yellow eyes. He sank to his knees. 'Good wolf! Please! No!' I understood his British language! I dragged he off among the thorns. I tore the flesh from his bones wi' teeth and claws. I feasted on he all. But 'shoulder and the stomach part.

CAMBYSES: Good sister. One Briton less, to sow his rebel seed.

AGRICOLA: Master? I tore a woman from her bed. Down Pigsty Valley. Too large to drag far (Rudkin 1986: 1-2).

An embodiment of this human savagery became the student actor's problem for the outdoor performance. The notion of procession has many continuing associations with Northern Ireland and the perceptions and portrayals of physical violence; processions and parades are enacted to claim or defend territories. The annual Orange March to Drumcree is one of the troubled events of 'the marching season' and is not simply a local issue thanks to the media coverage it receives every year. The March is emblematic of 'the Troubles' abroad. Some of those participating

in <u>Transformation—an Acting Problem</u> are from Northern Ireland and brought a variety of personal responses to our 'march' across the Trinity College campus. We were hoping to physicalize the link between the mob violence and each individual's role within that mob. Also, drumming as a way of inciting visceral responses from march participants and onlookers was also referenced; professional drummers, led by Bisi Adigun, brought a contemporary commentary and necessary element of spectacle to <u>Transformation—an Acting Problem</u>. Early in the rehearsal process, before looking directly at sections of text, I introduced a series of actions from within the text of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> and matched them with student input and responses to the material, in an attempt to find an access to the necessary physicality. These actions and images identified the transition and became the physical vocabulary used for the procession, and included 'flesh', 'dread', 'dark', 'feasted', 'crawl', 'tickle', 'lapped', 'lope', 'prowl'.

ATHDARK: ... My skin...It stings me all over. It *itches* me, it crawls... (Rudkin 1986: 8 [my emphasis]).

[Stage direction: 'the illseen forms begin to *prowl* and seethe...' (Rudkin 1986: 38 [my emphasis]).

AGNES: I *dragged* he off among the thorns. I *tore* the flesh from his bones wi' teeth and claws (Rudkin 1986: 1[my emphasis]).

SULGWEN: Howling flailing thrashing seething. A beast, that. Fling him back over (Rudkin 1986: 21).

By putting 'itch' 'prowl' 'tear' 'drag' together in a sequence a progression to a wolf state seemed possible all the while within the human body leading to human action and a human accountability. Although this work was quite abstract initially, by slowing down, fracturing, isolating and repeating physical images, arising from 'itch' for example, a fascinating performance idiom began to emerge. We worked en masse, in groups, and individually to explore and identify striking and/or symbolic moments that would then be interpreted and adapted by the bodies of the whole group.

As mentioned earlier the one tranformation *to* wolf state within the text involving more than Athdark himself, is in scene four of act three, and is inferred rather than staged directly. We used this scene as the 'call to wolf' as Cambyses urges the Saxons to allow the wolf within to emerge: 'Man shrink inward. Wolf stand outward. Skin in, out pelt! Hairs itch and bristle! Wolf, wake!' (Rudkin 1986: 38). This scene proved very useful as a point of access. As an incitement we used Widow Flax's 'We are wolf. We are free. No act we cannot do' (Rudkin 1986: 38). This and other lines were spoken by one of the performers and repeated in unison by the full group.

A series of lines or images from the text were used to access the notion of transformation, not only what to transform to, but what state to transform from. The upright nature of respectability became a strong reference in this work, as the wolf state was found in rehearsal and emphasized continuously in performance as being in opposition to such physicalized respectability. Lines such as 'This is my heritage, and it is not mine to give', 'Man shrink inward. Wolf stand outward', 'We are the shapes

of his wrath, and wrath must work', 'Those in that city are not of God's pattern', 'I killed the lovely lady', 'How shall I be neighbour who have been such fiend to these', were chorused by the group as they enacted the final images, in the, finally successful, attempt to reject the wolf image. To close, and in attempting to find Rudkin's moment of physical resolution, the group worked in a swiftly moving circle, to reject each of the four central images, 'itch', 'prowl', 'tear', 'drag', interspersed with a single 'No!', chanted by the full group each time. Finally they stood, still and silent, a physicalization and gendered broadening of Athdark's final moment in The Saxon Shore where he is standing now, the beginnings of a man' (Rudkin 1986: 49). This performance explored otherness through transformation, but having foregrounded it through the body, the work and the presence of the actor, the transformation became an assumption of, rather than Blau's 'yielding to', otherness.

In rehearsal and performance I found that the difficulties in working this way are just as potentially compromising to performance, as the individual approach to the wolf-problem as used by Audi for the Almeida production of The Saxon Shore. Luckily we weren't working to produce The Saxon Shore but had we been, because of the intensity of the group ensemble work and the incorporation of the drumming, the smaller scenes would have suffered. Any close reading of text was not an option in the rehearsal period that we had; it may be that The Saxon Shore either needs a longer rehearsal process, or as such is not viable for production with the commercial theatre sector. Perhaps it is only university, college or other non-commercial companies that can give it the time that it needs. It could be argued that this is the case with all of Rudkin's work, apart from early pieces such as Afore Night Come or Ashes. The performance issues raised by this material in relation to an Irish theatre discourse include a consideration of identity and otherness, and how identity can be interrogated through transformation in performance. The political implications of The Saxon Shore are inextricably linked to the performance implications.

APPENDIX (vi)
INTERVIEW WITH DAVID RUDKIN
13 DECEMBER 1999
STRATFORD-ON-AVON, ENGLAND.

DAVID RUDKIN:

I think the first thing is to locate the play within how I actually saw the landscape of the theatre in Ireland at the time. The time when the trouble was really pretty bad, and I think you know something of the Field Day background to it so I don't need to go over that ground again, but from my point of view there seemed to be certain endemic weaknesses in the way that the theatre in Ireland was addressing itself to the current situation. Everybody was saying "oh we're writing this play, we're doing that play, we're all very bold and up to date," and all that kind of thing but what seemed to me to be totally wrong about it was that the theatre that was going on wasn't necessarily reinforcing the audiences' attitudes whether the way they were polarised but that it was actually reinforcing the way that they saw things. I saw it as a question of what we would call representation. How was the landscape to be mediated, how was the Irish landscape of 1980, of 'the Troubles' to be mediated to an audience in such a way that they actually learnt something, because they weren't learning anything. I went to see all these plays in Belfast and Derry and everywhere and they were all reinforcing, not the way people felt about it but the way people actually interpreted what they saw. I wanted to reverse that so the first thing was then to release the narrative from the topical frame of reference. In other words to go into history, (which is always about now anyway), and in Ireland particularly you get that. There are very good examples, precedents, a piece like The Crucible, a piece like Sergeant Musgrave's Dance, they have all addressed themselves to a current crisis, but using a metaphor of an earlier situation so you have to start to decode it freshly. So that was the first thing, and I think that was the first stumbling block that Field Day fell [at] because there is this tradition, has always been this tradition in the Irish theatre, of a kind of melodramatic naturalism, that sort of Plough and the Stars way of looking at it, and Lord knows, he [O'Casey] had enough trouble with that play.

So that was the first thing. The second thing was that there was a desperate weakness in the Irish acting tradition that located itself around "how do you present the truth of a character", "how do you present extreme situations without adopting as it were extreme melodramatic gestures?" I had found that Irish actors when they worked this side of the water were usually the greatest actors under the sun. Now I have not been fortunate to work with Jack McGowran for instance, but I had worked with Patrick Magee, I had worked with several of the major actors and actresses from Ireland who were brought up in the Abbey tradition and were working over here. And I found that there were roots that they were drawing on, cultural, demonic roots that they were drawing on, but then they were being very disciplined in the way that they drilled their energies into the classical disciplines of the post-Shakespearean theatre in England. And this led to phenomenal power, gentleness, lyricism and at the same time the capacity to encompass rage and extremity. And I found that these same actors when they were working at home in Ireland were just letting it all hang out. I don't know whether this is true to this day but it was certainly true in the eighties. The same actor would be unrecognisable when I saw him or her in Ireland, they were hammy, over the top, indulgent, self-indulgent and indulging in all sorts of stereotypes. It was extraordinary; it was one of the strangest legacies of colonialism I had ever come across. And I thought, "This is something I want to address myself to".

It's the equivalent of, and this will seem a very dark image in the context of talking about body, but I once knew an actor who used his arms far too much, and his energies dissipated into lots of arm gestures, and it was one of the weaknesses that directors had never actually found a way of dealing with. He was a very good actor and I wrote a play for that company, and I wrote a character for him to play who had lost both arms. Do you see what I mean? And what I was doing with him was I was compelling that actor to use the energy in a much more tapped and a banked up way so that it was more focused, it wasn't dissipated. Now what I was doing with The Saxon Shore was to some extent not dissimilar, ethically speaking. I thought, "I must write roles in which it is impossible to act in that way," because it will take you only so far to act in that way and sooner or later the actor will become very uncomfortable. Somehow they are starting to strike wrong notes and they'll know it. And it isn't something that you concoct in an abstract arid way to yourself as a dramatist. But there's an instinct that you have when you start to evolve a particular dramaturgical landscape that this is going to give the actors a certain sort of work to do which is going to make certain demands on them that they're going to have to meet. Otherwise they're just not going to able to do it at all and it isn't any more clear or structured or thought than in my mind because of course what always comes first is really the image itself. There isn't an agenda, which I then find an image that will serve it. But the whole thought process is in a way parallel, you're thinking about the issues I've just raised, the actors hamminess, tendency to ham, the question of representation, all these things go into the mix but the image doesn't come about as a result of intellectual thought process, it's beginning to grow at the same time, so maybe one is a manifestation of the other. So there were problems like that, of representation, of performance and the acting tradition

The third question I wanted to address myself to was a question that Brian Friel himself had begun to address in an interesting way in Translations with which, of course, this play has some measure of dialogue. And it was Friel with whom I first discussed the whole thing. Friel invited me to meet him and I went over to his house just outside Derry and we had a very long discussion about all these matters and the third was the question of language. I said, "look, the discovery that you made in Translations I think was a very important discovery: that one can use a language to represent another language on the space," and I said, "I feel that you've made that discovery and can I actually go down that way and explore it? Because it's, in a sense it's homage to yourself, because you've found the hole in the hedge. I want to go through it and I want to explore it and kick around inside it and I want to find out what the implications are." Because he took it so far and no further in a way, and in a way he used it almost as a solution to a problem, which became a thematic matter. But I wanted to take it a bit further, to try to open up the whole question of where is the speech coming from that I am using as a character, because speech is awfully important to me in the theatre, (we may call it language but I think of it as speech), which to me is almost pre-linguistic. I was speaking an early British Celtic language and it happened to be put into English for the sake of the audience. I actually wanted to try to get behind the whole business of what noises am I as a character making and I wanted to write language in such a way that somehow it would feel like what the language historically was. This is probably not a very realistic thing to attempt to do because it is a bit fantastical, a bit Utopian. But I really wanted to get behind that language and feel what for Athdark especially, who is struggling with speech all the way through the play. He is actually trying to learn a language which is a secondary language with which he has made a phenomenal investment, so he is very conscious of trying to make his mind and his throat click together and make the appropriate right sounds. So he knows there is a language problem in order to become the kind of man he wants to be. I felt that all the way through, it wasn't a question of a Celtic language and then a Roman language and a Saxon language

Also what language do we speak when we are unconscious, when we're flying, when we're covering miles and miles and miles by moonlight and not knowing? There is a sort of visceral thing about it. The wolves also talk, they talk and what language are they speaking? It may be that if somebody overhead the wolves talking in the first scene they wouldn't even be speaking Saxon! At the werewolf trials of the medieval period in France this little girl comes in and says, "I saw a wolf but it was my brother looking at me out of his eyes and it was my brother's voice," and then the judges say to her, "Well what did he say?" and she says "I didn't understand or I can't remember," and obviously that means that maybe he said something that she did understand at the time but they were words that she wouldn't have understood if she'd seen them in a book. So I'm really trying to get at that visceral almost pre-cultural sense of something comes up from here and it comes out as speech.

There's a sermon and there's a letter at the end or a message; I was interested in getting inside that whole language because Ireland is absolutely—I say speech rather than language—I mean there is a language issue particularly now, very interesting the direction that the language issue has now taken. But also there's the whole speech issue. Within the languages if you choose to speak English as an Irish person then there are many sorts of English that you can choose to speak and there are many things that you can do with it. And it's the same in Northern Ireland as a Protestant culture, there are words, there are forms of words that you would use in one context and not in another. There's a whole tribal subdivision. So it's a very complex issue and it's all to do with self-identification and where you locate yourself at a particular moment in time. It's a thing that English people don't understand at all, because they've actually just run the world for a while and never had to bother about learning any other language so they don't understand it. It's an issue about selfidentification, they really don't [understand]. That's why my plays have such difficulty in this country because very often there's a very strong element of that dilemma and that predicament in them. So that's the background of the piece, as far as my political reading of what was called for from myself as a particular sort of dramatist, to put myself into the debate.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Were you actually approached by Field Day?

DAVID RUDKIN:

I was approached by Field Day. I had known Stephen Rea very slightly because on two earlier occasions there had been a moment when he might have done a role that I had written and he didn't for one reason or another. So we'd been looking at each other out of the corner of our eye for some while, way back in 7:84 days and so on. So yes, the approach came from them.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

And they were familiar with the nature of your work, obviously?

DAVID RUDKIN:

I hope they were. On reflection I'm not sure that the homework had been all that thoroughly done. But because I was well known as a Protestant, if I may use that really simplistic term, in the sense that I had already written a huge piece about Roger Casement, a radio piece, which was quite well known in Ireland. It was also grappling with the whole sexual issue, and grappled with the question of Protestant identity and its practice. It's an Irish struggle, which is a thing that people don't want to overlook. So my position was well known, but my work was not. So I think that there may have been a lack of proper clarity about what they were in for.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The reason I ask that question about the familiarity with you own work is because your work to date was so theatrical.

DAVID RUDKIN:

Yes.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

And in terms of what you've said about the Irish acting tradition; it must have been realised that what you were going to come up with, was going to be very theatrically challenging.

DAVID RUDKIN:

I would have hoped that was why. I'm not so sure that that was why the invitation came to me. That is to attribute, and this is probably rather ungracious of me to say, but I think that is to attribute to Field Day a slightly more profound reading of the situation than that which was actually brought to it. I'm not certain whether there wasn't a touch of tokenism in it really. Brian very disarmingly said, "Look, I've done three—" in fact I think he had done three pieces with Field Day by that time and he said, "They're calling me 'Friels on Wheels, it's time they got a play from somebody else." And that's [why] they cast around. And I was fairly large on the landscape although perhaps a little in shadow, and I don't think that they investigated too closely what the implications were, not at all. It has to be said that there isn't a very strong visibility of Rudkin's theatre. There isn't a very strong performance tradition in existence, apart from Ashes, of any of the other pieces, neither Afore Night Come nor The Sons of Light; The Triumph of Death is not known at all. So there wasn't the evidence visible. I think it may be that they weren't too well equipped to foresee the kind of address that I would bring to bear on the opportunity.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

You mention the word tokenism; do you think that what they were looking for from you was in terms of the content of what your work would have been, and your position, rather than the form of your work?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Oh, I think that's true. And I think that might suggest that there was some limit in Field Day's polemic. That was part of the problem as I saw it in 1981, which was when these conversations happened. Although, at that time I don't think there was any other company, or any other theatrical enterprise that was making any really serious endeavour to promote, or to provoke a debate of perception, apart from in Dublin and Belfast and the odd university space. The whole idea was to travel the thing around. One of the things that I put into my conceptual mix was that they've got to able to carry this play about easily, so that they don't have to put sets up. The very afternoon I went to see him Friel had just finished a farce of some sort, (he said "we can never tour this piece!"), and it involved all those kind of rather late O'Caseyesque disasters where houses fall down and people fall out of windows. It was very prop-y and I think it had a tree that collapsed in through a roof or something. I mean it was a very tech-y sort of show, and they're bad enough in a situated theatre, let alone—

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The town hall in Skibbereen, or whatever.

DAVID RUDKIN:

The town hall in Skibbereen, or a field in Co. Monaghan, or what have you. All my plays basically, (apart from <u>Ashes</u> which is the only play that happens indoors of all the plays I've written), all my theatre is under the sky. And pretty well on earth rather than floors. It's all very elemental because that to me is where theatre starts; and to me the actor must—and I'm talking about the actor now not the character—the actor, in my view, would have only wood and stone. To me the theatre is a wooden place with a light and some bits of wood and some bits of stone and some skins. And if you look at any of my theatre that's roughly where it starts out, if you actually strip it away. It's a very elemental place.

So that was another aspect; that I wanted to write something that basically needed very minimal technical, it can be done in a very elaborate way, but I wanted it just there to do with actors getting up in front of a audience. Which is where we come to the real problem of course, which is what have the actors got to become? And there was never any question in my mind about the wolves, because I know that it's one thing to find myself being talked to by a wolf. That's one problem. That's one sort of existential crisis. It's a totally different sort of thing to have a man sitting opposite me who believes he is a wolf. But he's perfectly capable of behaving as a wolf. And that's scary plus! A wolf is one thing. And a man who believes he is a wolf is a totally different beast altogether, and, to some extent, I think much more dangerous. And they believe they are wolves; therefore they are wolves existentially, in that existential sense, they *are* wolves. While they do it, they can cover these distances, they are liberated to put their teeth into people's throats. They are empowered, or emancipated, by that belief.

And I didn't intend, this is perhaps where my naiveté comes into play, but I didn't intend there to be any dialectical equivalents, or any equations drawn; as if to say wolf equals this, or wolf equals that or wolf equals the other. It's just *what you become* once you pass through that process of being empowered. And of course that covers a multitude of things in politics, and in tribal life.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

So, at the outset, you weren't looking for an image to parallel masked terrorism.

DAVID RUDKIN:

Not necessarily no. Although I know that that connection is inevitably going to be made. And I wasn't going to be disingenuous about that. I wasn't going to say "Oh no, no I didn't mean that at all." I'm far too canny a man to fool myself, to fool anyone else. I know perfectly well that sooner or later it was going to be connected that this was to do with people who put balaclavas on. You become a totally different person. You remove the thing you see in the mirror, the self-presentation, and you become a totally different thing. This is not news to anybody. I've been in the army, and I've worn uniform, and I know what happens. So I wasn't innocent about it. But I also know that I wanted to go deeper into what that experience was like—and what happened when that part of you that dreamed and that part of you that was awake, what happened when they became aware of each other—to problematize a character. And I had to find a means of doing that through where the stone in the side comes So I know perfectly well that people would start drawing up a table of equivalents. I couldn't avoid that. And, in a way, that's part of the agenda that I know I had to deal with. But the image of Hadrian's Wall had been in my mind for a very long time, long before Field Day came. The whole idea of the Saxon, the idea of the Roman transportations that had begun to happen in the late fourth century, that whole idea had haunted me for quite a while. As had indeed, and now I can't remember whether it's still in the play or not, but the idea that the place that the people were being brought from was gradually being swallowed by the north sea, where there had been hills were now islands, and they built houses on top of houses to prevent themselves being flooded. And the people who came to the north east coast of what was then Britain, like what we now call Northumberland, Co. Durham, Tyneside, Tynemouth, Weymouth, and so on, the people who came from parts of Friesland, the opposite coast of the north sea.

There's a passage from one of the late historians, which is very poignant, where he actually sees all these people, these Saxonic people, on the dock waiting to be transported on a Roman galley and dumped in Britain. And they're in cages, according to this historian; it's transportation twentieth century style. They're in cages. There are old men and young men. And there are babies. There are boys and girls wooing each other in these cages. It's a horrifying piece of Latin. And they're just taken on a ship and they're dumped on the shores of North Yorkshire and Northumberland and it is called the *Litus Saxonicum*, the Romans actually called it *Litus Saxonicum*. There is some dispute as to which shore it meant, or why it's called *Saxonicum* whether it means the Saxons lived there or whether it means it faced the Saxons.

But for all that, the image was there and I'd often, as it were, lifted the lid up and looked at it and said, "I really ought to deal with that". So then when the Friel invitation happened it seemed that it's moment had come. It seemed to be right in so many ways, as a metaphor for transplantation, for being uprooted, for growing up, being brought up, with a synthetic identity. They believe "we're loyal citizens of the Roman empire", when Rome is collapsing, Rome was ceasing to exist. Which is not a million miles away from the Unionist predicament really, the parallels are fairly forceful. But what was beautiful about them was that the terminology and the landmarks were all 'arse-about-face'. The Roman allegiance is what the Saxon, the Unionists of that time, feel. So Rome is the great centre, the geo-centre for them and

that's where their allegiance is and Latin is the language they want to learn. And the Brits are actually the Celts. So that the familiar name-calling was turned inside out, and this is a matter of historical fact. But I must confess that I did rather relish that. So the parallels were there but they weren't facile. They involved lifting something up and crawling underneath and getting inside—basically to make the audience bloody work! You know! I said "look if we're going to be right-minded about this let's show you what it's like being that. And then you may begin to have a right to have an opinion." That was roughly what I was doing.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The wolf image was a problem. Do you think that it was a problem because what they were looking for, in commissioning a play from you, was some sort of *credit* for having engaged a Protestant voice?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Yes, I do. But as is so often the case in these contexts—and Ireland is not the only one where this kind of thing happens—I think that that engagement when it came to the bottom line, would still need to be on what I would call 'Green Academic terms', if you follow me, and if I may say so without offence. Because in any case it is fairly well known that I am an Irish Nationalist, in the sense that I believe that there is an Ireland; we've glimpsed it in the past, and we shall glimpse it again, but it has to be a plural Ireland, and that's sexually plural and culturally plural. And, as I see it, that's the only way forward. But that's very difficult because for so many decades, so many generations, (and I was brought up in an Orange family), you begin and end with a particular picture of yourself which is pretty rigid, pretty monolithic. Well it's a cliché, but you see, there is no change without change. And it sounds tautologist to say that, but it needs to be spelt out.

And, I think that there was a darker problem, which they [Field Day] didn't foresee. In a way maybe I did foresee it but in order to write the play I had to discount it because as a dramatist if you shy away from where your image has taken you, because you have anxieties or nervousness about certain implications, then of course you never write anything. And I learnt very early in my career not to see those things. I think perhaps the aspect that did, sincerely I believe, disturb Field Day was that they were afraid to doing the play in front of audiences whom it might provoke too much. I think they felt, (now whether they were being honest or not I cannot say, there was never a totally comprehensive clear explanation from Field Day as to why they didn't do the piece, so I was never too clear what the rationale was. I just heard at second hand from various people who went into it for various research reasons, and they said, "well they said this, and they said that and they said the other"), but I think that they thought that Protestant audiences might read the wolf image as a direct insult to them and that they would be offended, they would become violent and hostile and I didn't really want actors to face that sort of danger. I don't mind actors being scared shitless, I'm quite prepared to do that and I think that they should be. But I think they thought "we just daren't do this in front of, we can't take this to Magherafelt" or something. I think he [Friel] was a bit cowardly. They were perhaps underestimating their audiences, but it's old hat now, it's ancient history. There may have been a thought that I might come up with a representational, historically recognisable paradigm, which would, from the Protestant standpoint, seek to reawaken the Protestant communities to their ancient roots in Irish separatism, which

are there. It would have been a very direct polemical argument that I had already done in the Casement piece to some extent, although I'd also skinned a few other cats as well. I don't write that kind of play. I don't write a legislative sort of play. I'm not that kind of writer. And, all told, I just feel that all those things combined to make the play undoable from their point of view.

No one was surprised except myself. My wife said, "Well, what did you expect?" My agent said, "What did you expect? You will write the plays you want, dear. Do you expect people to do them?"

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Performatively, do you think Field Day was up to it?

DAVID RUDKIN:

How does one answer that question? The history would be—whom would they have gone to? Stephen Rea was a major figure in that whole enterprise, and obviously that [Athdark] was the role he would have needed to do. And on two earlier occasions as I hinted there had been Rudkin roles that he had looked at and moved off from, he didn't feel he wanted to do them. I wasn't concerned as to who was likely to play it or not, I can't think about that when I'm writing a character. I made that mistake once in my career, (apart from when I work with a company and say right he's going to do this and you're going to do that), but I wrote a freely originated piece with a particular actor in mind for a particular role and then he didn't do it, and I was devastated for a long time. I never made that mistake again. The character is the character; he is nothing to do with the actor at all. So I couldn't concern myself as to whether Stephen Rea would be right for Athdark or not. That could not be part of my polemic, if I can use that word, or my imperative couldn't actually address itself to that. Who else there would have been I really don't know.

But we did come into, and this is moving perhaps a little more closely into your field of reference, this business about when actors, coming from that tradition, found themselves challenged by these parts, what happens? And it is interesting that it was precisely at that interface where the actor needed to deserve the body; it was precisely at that interface that our very serious company problems began. It was partly because the director was inexperienced, Pierre Audi, it was partly because he'd worked with singers and he'd done some opera work, but he had not worked with straight theatre if we may call it that. He was a very intelligent director, culturally very Catholic, the most un-parochial man I had ever worked with in the English theatre, English theatre is very parochial, I really enjoyed Pierre, I loved being in his company. I loved the discourse with him because he was half-Lebanese half-French, he was very well informed about all sorts of things and he was so un-English and I really relished that, you know. But he knew how to conjure the demons but he didn't know how to make them work for him. That was the main trouble.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Gerard Murphy in <u>Sacred Disobedience</u> referred to the wolf-workshops as having 'petered out'—

DAVID-RUDKIN:

They did. I don't blame the actors in a way, because you see, acting is like sex, you can't go into it feeling worried about the mole on your bum, do you know what I

mean? Sex is about a particular sort of encounter between two particular sorts of propositions, which are usually human bodies. And if body is a problem in any kind of way then, why are you here? It's the same on the space. And I do believe that it goes down lower than the Adam's apple, which is not where every writer writes and not where every actor likes to act. And of course, basically, actors are lazy. In the sense that over the years they have evolved a 'vocabulary of solutions' as they call them; "oh this is what I do when I play a, play a death scene. This is what I do when I play a mad scene. This is what I do...", and it's like a bank that you draw on, and all that depends upon whether you had read the genre of the piece correctly. And we came straight up against this difficulty in the Irish tradition so what it would have been like if we done it with Field Day God knows! There wouldn't have been the background of Pierre's wider cultural frames of reference to deal with because we had two wonderful Irish actresses Brenda Fricker and Pauline Delaney. I had seen Pauline Delaney be quite gothic very many years ago in a <u>Playboy</u> in which she played Widow Quinn, it was one of the most gothic performance I ever saw.

Brenda Fricker I had seen in things like <u>The Ballroom of Romance</u> and so on, and they are both very strong performers, but within a particular tradition. Now this <u>[The Saxon Shore]</u> is a play that superficially seemed to belong to that tradition, from where Pauline would be coming, or where Brenda would be coming as these two old women, those two old biddies. But they weren't two old biddies really, I mean it wasn't Bessie Burgess, do you know what I mean? Although of course I am looking over my shoulder at that. But the equipment that they brought, the intelligence, which was formidable, that they brought to bear was to some extent, not quite appropriate. There were certain difficulties of perception about the landscape that they were in on the space. And that led to a need on their part, (and on Gerard's it has to said although he was able to transcend it, but not always), there was a deep need on the part of the actors to sentimentalise.

I can remember one day they all came because they were getting very upset, they were feeling really bothered because Pierre was quite austere, extremely austere. There had been one of the greatest rehearsals I had ever seen the day before, when Gerard and Pauline did the first scene when she makes him get up in the morning which can be a terrific scene, just a woman making her son get out of bed, get off the floor, stand up, any parent's done it. And the way they did it, it was so banked and so lucid and everything was there and nothing was showing. It was terrific, it was very beautiful. I was really moved to tears by it. I thought the whole story is there in this. And in a way they never found it again, because, for them, it wasn't enough. And that's what I think was enough. But for them it wasn't. They weren't emoting; there wasn't the sentiment you see. So after a while they said:

- —"Look, we just don't feel that we're doing it the way, we don't feel that we're getting the chance to do what we do best", (which is a common complaint with actors,)
- —"So what is it you think you want to do, what is it you do best?"
- —"Well, I just feel so cold, and you're making me be so cold, you're making me so puritanical, biting it all back. And basically the audience aren't going to love us."
- —"So okay, the space is yours, play the scene, do what you like. Let's see what you want"

And they did it. And it was all over the place. And there was no narrative. And they realise after a while, (this is the oldest story, in the world)

-"Let's do it your way."

But we ran into that kind of difficulty in much more subtle ways, certainly with the wolves. There was even at one point, although it didn't survive very long, (we had to discuss it and consider it even if it was only to reject it), the idea of some sort of wolf costume. Which was not in the frame at all as far as I was concerned. It didn't make any sense at all, "Right I'm going to be wolf so I do this." It was just hilarious! But you have to let everything be considered in order to follow it through, and see when it fails you, then you don't hear about it ever again.

Now it does have to be said that Brenda is a great actress but misunderstood the play in some kind of deep cultural way. She was very unhappy. That Friday Brenda said, "We haven't done, the big story." So we said, "okay, let's find out." And she did something that—my blood just ran cold. It was bare and so starving and beautiful. Beautiful. I mean the wind blew through that speech, the wind on the top of the coldest mountain. And it was, it was fabulous. It was deep. And, it cut very deep. It was wonderful, wonderful. And of course she was never able to do it again, because then she wanted to *play* it, or to illustrate it. So that all the time we were up against the way actors wanted to take refuge.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Do you think that was in some way a reaction to the wolf image, in trying to make the characters redeemable, because the wolf image was so difficult?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Yes, I think that is possible. I think because the actor, the performer wants to balance things out a bit don't they? "I'm not all fangs", and "I've got my nice side". I think there is that and also it's to do with discomfort, sheer discomfort. But some actors are emancipated by that discomfort. I've been very privileged to work with some. A wonderful actor, he's a bit older now, a guy called Nigel Terry who was in The Sons of Light, a very uncomfortable person, very deep inner life, very recessed and he only really functioned properly if you actually turned him inside out, which of course, was backwards.

Because the sensation of the werewolf always had was as though their skin was turning inside out. And he needed to be turned inside out. There was a young actress Veronica Roberts who one doesn't hear of now, who did an amazing performance in a piece of mine called The Triumph of Death, she played the part of Joan of Arc for that, and she was like that. You wouldn't have thought it when you saw her, she just looked very ordinary, you might say an ordinary actress if there is such a thing. And then she just proceeded to just astonish me, and she just slowly over the weeks turned herself inside out. In the first act she had some very scary scenes to play and she said "I have never been so frightened in my life and I wouldn't be anywhere else for all the world." And that's the kind of thing that I really need. Now Gerard is capable of that. But I think it was partly because the two women were sort of reinforcing his own weaknesses. They were being very motherly to him. It's extraordinary how in the generation of performance the story of the play replicates itself inside the company's own relationships. And they brought out in Gerard the things he most needed to abolish. You see, Gerard's mode of sentimentality is a kind of romantic self-annihilation. I don't know what he's like now. He's like Laughton, for very similar reasons, there is a sort of self-loathing, which can be a source of great power to an actor, and it was in the case of Laughton for instance. And when it enables you to mutilate yourself then you saw something that you didn't normally see.

It's really quite chilling the kind of masochism of that performance. Gerard's like that. There's a kind of headlong self-immolating quality that he has, which was wonderful if you can actually prevent it from becoming a kind of ostentation, a way of saying to the audience, making the audience go "whoops", the sort of thing that Olivier used to do, make them lose sight of the play basically and look at the actor for a minute which I think is unforgivable, but they do do it.

And then Gerard reined all that in, it was astonishing. Actors will always think—it's like teachers who think "oh that was a good lesson" because they were aware of doing some teaching, and oftentimes that wasn't a good lesson at all. And it's a very similar thing as this. And in the two most beautiful moments in Gerard's performance, when it eventually settled down (and it went through a very tempestuous period when it lost itself completely, which is partly my fault) the two most extraordinary moments in the performance were not moments that perhaps any audience would have noticed. One was when he carried off a dead goat that he has savaged, and he had carry it down a lot of steps on the space, and there was something so archetypal about the way he held it and the image of it, the iconography of it. This, ungainly man limping, mutilated, well not mutilated but stunted creature carrying this lovely animal that he had killed and he knew that he had done this abominable thing. he had transgressed and there was an awareness; he just had to carry this thing beyond a wooden floor and down a hole. And the other was the ending, which we did in broad light, and the light got stronger even though it was quite dark and as the man grows up on that last page and all the languages come together "Ahvona; current, stream..." [Rudkin 1986: 49]. All the languages join; spade, 'spathum' becomes spade. The language grows and becomes civilized and he realises he's got to stand up and live and be brave and fight and perhaps die in the very next second. He got to do this, otherwise he's on the run for ever and ever. And there was a beauty; it was worth travelling miles to see. There was a beauty in that man, he isn't a beautiful man by any stretch of the imagination. And he knows it; he's not that narcissistic. But there was a beauty, virile, masculine, it was totally unconventional, totally unorthodox, it was beautiful. And in that moment he had understood the meaning of the whole piece. So it is possible.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

What fascinates me about the play is particularly encapsulated in that moment, the resolution, if there is even such a thing, is in *performance* in the end, not in the language.

DAVID RUDKIN:

That's right. I mean the language actually does *its equivalent* of the resolution. In other words it's all part of an organism, it's all part of an organism. Everything, everything has to achieve that kind of closure and for me it didn't. Closure is a beginning. A play is like an act of birth, is a series of contractions, and that's the last contraction. And the language has to do that work, but the language will not do it of itself. The man has to be present, (at the end of <u>The Son's of Light</u> it's a woman who is born on the space), they do it through a last aria. But you're left with that; you're left with human body on the space, which has just been born as the beginnings of a person, the beginnings of something, yes. And that to me is what theatre is, that existential place.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

As a playwright would you consider that a risk? In leaving that moment within the realm of the work of the actor? It's quite unusual I'd say.

DAVID RUDKIN:

I'd never really thought about it, I just assumed that if I do my work properly and the actor is up to it then it'd work. [Laughs] I think if I was to do something and leave the actor to make it up, and say, "well I don't know what you do there" to an intelligent actor, what the actor has to deliver of that part is evident to the actor. If the actor's done the work properly they know that's the journey, the play's a journey, from a kind of omega to a kind of alpha. And, if they haven't understood that it's up to them then we've got the wrong actor!

No, it is a risk. But then it would be a risk even if you did it with words. If it was just a question of a sort of Stoppardesque theatre, where you were at the mercy of the wit of the text, I still think there's an element of risk, there's always going to be an element of risk. That to me is the implication of coming to the theatre at all, that is what's implied by coming to theatre, which is at the end of the evening you are going to face yourself in a mirror. So yes, that is a dangerous proposition.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

—Dangerous territory.

DAVID RUDKIN:

- 'Without anaesthetic' as Artaud said.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

A comparison that I have drawn, a complex comparison because it involves a comparison with <u>Dancing at Lughnasa</u>, so we're back to Friel. The play in some ways was purporting to be a search for a new idiom, and the idiom was dance. But at the end of the play the dance in Michael's final speech is, in a way I would consider it almost appropriated by language. He describes the release of the image of the dance rather than letting the dance—

DAVID RUDKIN:

Rather than letting the dance happen. Yes, but you know you're entering into another territory here, you see, how are the audience to know whether the dance is good or bad? And it's very like the old genius problem, like here's a painter of genius, well let's look at the painting, let's look at the sculpture, "oh that's not very good, I could do better or is that supposed to be a great work of art?" or "is this guy on the screen supposed to be a great concert pianist?" You have that problem of how do you authenticate?' And I don't think that I would, in fact I know that I would not do that. But the issue is always going to be, not will the character do it, but will the actor do it? And that's the wrong question. It's like nakedness on the stage, the issue is not that the characters are naked but how far will the actor go? It just loses focus, it destroys the focus completely—a totally immoral way of writing. Actors have sometimes been very scared and they've said, "Am I going to be alright out there?" Because they do feel very bare and they do say, "Am I going to be okay?" And I say, "You're going to be totally safe."

I heard the whole of that last speech [of The Saxon Shore] up there on Hadrian's Wall. I know, because I noted it down and several other things, some of the wolf stuff. I camped along the wall a lot, I think you can't now because of the way it's breaking the rock up. But I camped a lot up and down that wall, the wildest bit and just began to think about a sort of action and what sort of words would go with it. And it's good to do that here whether it's something as corny as atmosphere or where it's to do with a mode of concentration. Ultimately of course you have to reproduce that mode of concentration in the very uncongenial context of a study, and when I do tend to write things now I focus very much on the wooden floor, which we sit round and converting that imaginatively, placing the person on it, focusing on that, focusing all the time, concentration. But that's something that you do once it's begun to generate itself I think. I just find it an essential part of the creative process to locate myself in some equivalent landscape. It's to do with texture as well, what do things look like; you never know what you're going to need to describe and the low adjectives tend not to have much of a function in drama because they're rather horizontal in the way they work. There is a need to be vivid and a need to be graphic. You've got to communicate a world to an audience and basically language is one of the two primary modes of communication. There is the body of the actor of course, which gives you a lot of information depending on how that body is presented, what it's clothed in, what it's attitudes are and where it is on the space. There is a lot of evidence to be got from that. It tells you a lot about that world and what that body naturally looks like. And I just find if it's on an island or in a forest or whatever, it's a totally different set of textures.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

I wanted to ask you about the staging of the actual Almeida production. You said it was more cluttered than you wanted, had hoped?

DAVID RUDKIN:

I thought that the design landscape, in other words what the actors had to negotiate physically on the space, was a bit busy. It, as I remember, had a certain amount of broken rock, and I think there was a broken column somewhere. The landscape was like a metaphor for the world of the whole piece and to that extent it's perfectly proper because it must mediate something of the world in which the narrative is taking place. I thought it was a little over-elaborate in the way that it did that, because to me the most important thing about the design landscape is basically that it should be absolutely minimal, as all art should be in my book because the actors have to take their physical energy from it, therefore it needs to be as primary as possible and it needs to be geologically as simple as possible so that they don't have to worry about negotiating funny corners and angles and odd changes of level or strange ramps, slopes and things like that. I felt that this design, this is one of the things that happen in the modern theatre far too much in my experience; the design hardens up at a particular point in the development of the production. The designers come, they go away, they come up with lots of concepts, they have lots of meetings etc., they come in one day with a model and the actors all gather around the model and they start poking the miniatures around. The writer stands back at this point, because this is a very difficult moment for the writer when the imagined landscape—which is of course a totally unrealistic one, is unpractical in the sense that the writer sees Hadrian's Wall, sees mountains, sees lakes, sees trees, sees clouds and he conjects an

entire earth into a totally unrealistic space—now he has got to look at real physical things that actors have got to live with and on and from and therefore for the writer that moment is a particularly estranging one. So I stand well back from the model and I look at it and I try to see it from the actor's point of view. It's nothing to do with my landscape whatever. And I recognise that. It's a bit like watching a child put on school uniform for the first time etc. And then the actors continue their work and one of the things that does happen fairly often is that as the actors' work develops they need less and less. The design sometimes doesn't expose itself to the same drift. It's hardened up already. And, so that by the time the set (and it's well named as a set because it is set by then) is being put together, the actors work has often overtaken it. That has been my experience over and over and over again.

I remember once Peter Brook was working here doing two pretty hefty pieces of Shakespeare, he did Lear with Paul Schofield, this was about 35 years ago, I remember seeing it and I met him shortly after because my first play was done shortly after, and I was very impressed by how austere the set quote unquote, for the Lear was. It was basically nothing, just an enormous stage which had been painted some kind of grey, stony grey, and at the beginning of the so-called storm sequences in the third act all that happened was that three enormous sheets of bronze descended very slowly from the flies and the vibration going through the theatre just made you shake. It was very Artaudian. It was terrific. And then there was a bench on which Lear and the fool sat, for that 'my wits begin to turn' sort of thing, and I was very impressed, and Brook looked very wise and serene and he said "Well, that's why we had to postpone, because there was so much set. We couldn't work on it anymore." So they had to go back and strip a lot of the set away, just as you do with writing, you keep taking it out, and with acting too, you keep taking it out. The space at the Almeida isn't a very big stage, quite small really, they handled it extremely well, I will say this, and it did become a landscape of a sort, but I felt it just created a few problems for the actors that they could have done without.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

There is a suggestion in the reviews that there was a central triangular plinth or—

DAVID RUDKIN:

There may well have been, that I don't remember. My main eidetic sensation as I remember was of a kind of geometrical chaos, and that the centre had gone. There was that sort of disorder and lack of resolution, tension. It was the busiest landscape I'd ever known actors in a play of mine have to contend with.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Were the Celtic and Saxon landscapes differentiated from each other in the space, do you remember?

DAVID RUDKIN:

I think that they were in this sense: that when you first went across the wall here was a part of the space that hadn't been used until now but then of course once it was opened up by the action it [the production] liberated itself to use the entire space because it had been redefined by the process. I don't think there was anything schematic.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

There wasn't an actual wall that was traversed? Put simply, was the wall staged?

DAVID RUDKIN:

As I remember the acting space was quite steeply raked by actors' standards, and it just sort of ended, and there was void that the spectator was left to supply imaginatively, there was a brick wall, it was used very boldly and very unrealistically. There was a particularly beautiful use of the contradiction between what's physically there in front of you and what is morally there. I think the Almeida had been an old synagogue or something, there was a brick wall at the back and beautiful pepper and salt bricking as I remember, some of it whitewashed and some of it very dark and it was just brick, it was a beautiful wall, lovely. And there was like kind of a spiralling ramp that came down like half of an 'S', started up there and came around and down and then onto the space, I can't remember whether that was integral to the building or not, this was fourteen years ago!

And there's a scene in the play where Athdark has come back from being on the other side of the wall, first of all he thinks he's in Paradise, and then gradually he starts to smell the turf and all the old ancestral hostilities reassert themselves and he comes back. And there's an amazing sense of dissent as he comes back, all the way down, it's in one long aria as I remember he starts up at the top there with the other woman and he ends up down here with his dead mother and it's all in one line as I remember and it's quite an journey for the character to make. And then Cambyses appears, who is his dark mentor, in charge of his dark side, (Cambyses was Ian McDiarmid, and he had the book because he was still on, his very first gesture at the beginning of the very first performance—he came on and showed the audience the script, and then after that you don't see it anymore). Anyway where he gets Athdark to lead them back to *Dinos Maros*, he came down this ramp, now of course there is no ramp in the real world of the play, (it's rather like a staircase, it was like one of those Dame Edna staircases, it was quite extraordinary, quite extraordinary the contradiction), and he came down and he did that conjuration as he was coming down there. I remember Pierre saying to me "That is the most frightening actor I have ever seen. I really believed that he could destroy the world." And he just transcended the brick and the staircase, the ramp, whatever it was, what was the actual visible literal foreground, the journalistic foreground, totally transcended it. Source of amazing imaginative energy and he had the script as well. And yet he was terrified. I mean that is what it is about, that's what I'm thinking of when I talk about an actor using the space, using the textures of the space as a source of energy. It's magical, in the anthropological sense of the term, it is the witch doctor who has a bone and a stone and a flame and he can make a person die. And that's what it's about. So that I felt that the design had intruded somewhat on the very austere magical process.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

And was there dirt on the floor?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Yes there was dirt. That was quite good, yes, Pierre was quite right in this regard. He liked the set more that I did. But there were real things on it; it was the old four elements. There's bound to be air, obviously there was real earth, which is wonderful underfoot, (we had it in Afore Night Come, my very first play, where we had real turf

on the stage, which was absolutely unprecedented in the theatre. Also we had no curtains, which was unprecedented in the English theatre of 1962). He had real earth, and he had real water flowing, there was a little tap, (we had a terrible job getting it to work). And he had real flame; he actually had real flame on the stage, which was very daring. And it was quite extraordinary; it wasn't in the text at all.

I had my doubts about it, it did work quite well but it isn't something I would enshrine in the text. Sometimes I do enshrine production details in the text because I think they become definitive. But the opening gesture, the light was very shadowy and very obscure on this rather shattered exploded looking landscape and then there was a tall thin pipe, like aluminium or something, maybe a harder metal, and suddenly 'whoof' a flame, a (gas obviously) flame just suddenly appeared. It was quite effective. And that flame was burning all the way through until it went out, when the signal tower goes out 'Roma...' whatever it is, I don't know the Latin words. So, he had all the four elements there in the space and from a magical point of view that was all there. And I liked that aspect of it. But I felt that it had also another effect that I wasn't too happy about, which was that it had a slightly literal effect on the way you read the stage, as a spectator, there would be a font, it would suddenly be a fountain, so that somehow for that bit to be a fountain you had to cancel a lot that was there. I felt that it cluttered our processes.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Do you remember how the shrine was staged?

DAVID RUDKIN:

I think that was where the fountain was. Hildegaard, who did the design, had seen some of my drawings that I had done upon Hadrian's Wall of the, there were some bits Celtic sanctuaries, and things that were in one or two of the museums along Hadrian's Wall, that one for Saitada for instance, and I had done some drawing and I think I had got some picture postcards, bits and pieces from the museum because I always need these points of reference for myself. There was a bit of, it wasn't a whole statue obviously because that would have incorrect and it would have been far too dominant, but there was something that looked as if it might be part of a statue, a stone statue of a goddess, of a feminine principle, Saitada or whatever Celtic goddess in that part of the world was. So there was something that gave you the idea that it was a sacred place, but I can't remember all the details terribly well. I haven't got any pictures.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

How long was the rehearsal process?

DAVID RUDKIN:

It was quite a long rehearsal process. That was partly for economic reasons because actors are expensive. Normally if it's a full company thing you just get the company in and do it for three weeks. But because of the nature of the work with the Athdark for instance, because that is quite a virtuosic role in terms of what it carried, we got Gerard in by himself for the first week. And I can't remember who he [Audi] brought in after—he brought various people in over the second week, I think Pauline will have come in and Brenda, maybe the younger woman. A couple of more people came in the second week and then I think everybody was there by the third week, and then it

was three weeks, so there was one, two, three, four, five, quite a long rehearsal process, certainly long by modern standards.

The whole wolf thing, which is the core of it, we were not too clear which was the best way to organise because we were in really untried territory procedurally, whether it was best to do individually with individual actors, because it's very naked-making doing this kind of thing. Gerard would do what he called his homework and he would do an awful lot of work at home. Some actors, you know that they've not even thought of the thing since yesterday. With Gerard you always knew he'd got it between his teeth. He came in one morning and he said, "well, I tried a couple of things, maybe you'd like to see them?" And we said "please". So he slowly warmed himself in and he stood, this was in a church hall somewhere, it wasn't in the space because they were doing something else on the space, the most uncongenial place anyway, wherever it was, and he, I won't attempt to simulate it but I didn't know quite where the man ended and the wolf began.

At first I thought he was just thinking, the way a musician might think before they stated to play a long sonata or something. And I think he did 'this' with his arms, which was very human. And he didn't actually do it with all of his body at first, it was just this part. The flesh began to retire from the teeth, it was very slow, it started and it retreated and then it happened again, and it wasn't just like one continuous unbroken thing, it was gradual, it was like a series of contractions. And it was very subtle. It would never really have been adequate in performance because you needed to be quite close, it was very intimate, profoundly intimate, [it was like] watching a man who had an absolutely dreadful secret, that he was actually saying "well look, all my life I've, you know, I really have this most abominably revoltinglooking penis, and I'm going to let you see it," it had such an awful sense of invasion. It was very disturbing; it was very beautiful. That's a word I've used more than once in connection with that performance. And it was just that the flesh was coming away. the mouth, the jaw, the jaw was coming away from the teeth, the head seemed to change shape and it seemed to elongate. But what was most impressive at the point, and most beautiful about, it was that it was emotion all the way through, that you actually felt a muscular thing, you actually felt that this was a transformation that this man did not want to make. You felt pain, you felt moral pain. That was what I felt, profoundly, from it. I thought it was one of the most astonishing things I had ever seen an actor do. Now it would never have been possible to do that in performance given the geometry involved, because it would always have to be enlarged. You could do it with cinema obviously, but then of course the conditions in which you achieve that are so suspect that it wouldn't necessarily have the same immediacy, presence.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

And that was something he brought into the rehearsals himself?

DAVID RUDKIN:

He did that in the privacy of wherever he lived, as his homework. He did it for us because I was the writer and Pierre was the director, there wasn't anybody else there except the stage manager, and these people have learnt the knack of being invisible. And in a sad way he was able then to reproduce it in the solo moments, but the play doesn't actually impose upon the actor too may of those transformation scenes that run the risk of looking phoney. It's all to do with what's the story that leads up to it,

what's the struggle that leads up to it, or what's the point that takes you through or what happens when you're there, or what part of you was still awake? And then of course there were the group scenes, the becoming wolves. I don't think that was a problem we ever really solved as a company, as a company proposition. Relationships between the company and the director became rather jagged for a whole variety of reasons; I think they began to feel not too safe.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Were there 'wolf-workshops'?

DAVID RUDKIN:

There were a few, but they didn't really work well. One of the reasons for this is that the director was untried as I've said and everybody is untried at one time so I don't hold that against him at all. I think that were certain political subtleties and certain political courtesies that maybe he needed to know that he didn't, about how to proceed with this sort of thing; also I would have wished and I did wish many a time to retreat from the rehearsal process because there's a limit to how used an author is, I learnt that very early.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

You were involved in the rehearsal process?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Yes. I speak as somebody who was brought up within the Royal Shakespeare Company discipline, which apparently is quite different from others, because actors say, "oh, you can tell you've worked with the RSC!" where there are very strict protocols about what the author can and cannot do and I accept that, he's not the director after all, so the author never gives direct notes to actors. The director does that. You give your notes to the director. The second thing is that you can only answer questions as to meaning, and occasionally in sheer despair if an actor cannot tune a line to mean what you want it to mean, he says "well, you say it," not so that he can imitate how you say it but so that he can hear how the meaning is made audible, and then he'll do it in his own way. So there are very strict parameters that an author does not cross. But in a relationship with the actor, the friendly personal relationships must also be conducted with a considerable amount of discipline. That's saying if you fall in love with people, learn how to handle it and so on. But the one thing that you must try not to do and avoid doing is that the boundary between the director and the author must never be obscured.

But more and more Pierre was using me almost as a co-director, and I would say "I really think I oughtn't to be at the rehearsal tomorrow because so and so is doing something and they're very nervous about it and I, I think I make her nervous", and Pierre said "I need you with me." So I got a bit entangled. I got wrong-footed rather and I don't think that helped and Pierre did at one point lose confidence in the company and they, on one occasion, virtually said, "Pierre, we'd rather you didn't come in tomorrow", a lot of physical mechanical problems had accumulated, there were a lot of silly little niggles, little corners that characters were having to turn physically and they hadn't really had a chance to solve the physical problems and they were very worried, so they said to Pierre "take a long weekend, we want to just solve these problems". So they asked me would I take that rehearsal and I said "strictly on

the understanding that I am like the assistant stage manager who is simply saying 'Right, what's next, what do we have to solve next.'" They had a very good day and they solved all the little problems, solved them very quickly the way actors do, and they were very happy. But they had begun to lose confidence in the director, and that's a very awkward situation for the writer, because you find yourself sucked into the vacuum. So, it's not surprising that in that context, the idea of wolf-workshops never really materialised.

I'm afraid that at first Pierre said "Well, maybe we should do it individually with them because it doesn't seem to work too well with all of them. Let's do it individually first so that they don't feel silly, which is a serious consideration, and then we'll do it together." But it never really became the big ensemble journey that I would have liked. But you know one was asking an awful lot.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

There was never a suggestion at any point of bringing in a choreographer?

DAVID RUDKIN:

I don't know that that would have solved the problem. I see what you mean, I think that there was somebody but they were only there for a couple of sessions. There was somebody, I can't remember who it was. But I think the problem was deeper. It wasn't just like learning how to be like Incas, it's a quantum leap of a sort. So, that was a disappointment to me, because when it came to the date, they were okay, oddly enough, in the first scene, where they're just about to come down, but the language helps them a lot there, because it's very savage and they didn't have to demonstrate too much. But there's a scene towards the end where they are called forth, when they were being conjured, (which you have to have in a play about werewolves at some point), and I think it was a little ordinary. Just putting it on, just being a bit nasty and flexing their claws and that kind of thing. I think they became really tentative, and this does happen and actors lose their bottle, then they will become tentative, and then they might as well not do it at all.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The relationship between Athdark and the priestess, pronounce her name for me?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Ceiriad? [Care-ee-ad], as I remember Ceiriad, yes, there's an old Celtic name rather like that in the Welsh sources.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

That relationship was seen as a deliberate echo of <u>Translations</u>, as you mentioned earlier.

DAVID RUDKIN:

I didn't put it there to do that, but it's implicit in the premise of the piece that this man is going to have to cross the wall. You're committed to that, it's part of the bargain. And obviously he's got to meet his opposite principle, his opposite cultural principle; go meet the demon and discover the angel instead. Similarly from her point of view, virgin, who has been brought up by the hag, (it's like Miranda in The Tempest) and then one day there's lots of men all over the place, suddenly in a flash

there's three. There's a father and there's a suitor and there's a lover of sorts, it's very unlikely but he is. And so that there are these encounters with opposites, yes, of course, that's where the trick first becomes apparent in the play isn't it? The language is being used in this way. But there was a deeper problem for the actors to solve, which I don't think there is in <u>Translations</u>. I think that Brian's [Friel] use of the language trick is quite simplistic in that she's actually speaking Irish anyway, it's lovely how you hear it's Irish that she's speaking. We had to solve the problem, we had to come up with an answer, I had to come up with an answer which was "Well, is this English? Doesn't sound like it," because we didn't have any frames of reference.

I was writing an English for Ceiriad that was British which was closer to the language before the migrations crossed to the Irish Sea, so it's closer if anything to Welsh than to English. But I wanted to avoid a kind of 'Under Milkwood-ery' I wanted to avoid all those associations that go with the Welsh tune because that brings in a whole lot of cultural negotiations which were quite inappropriate. Yet at the same time I had to have song behind it, so I actually tried to write a kind of English which, it's difficult to put it into words, I wanted it to have either Irish accent and a Welsh tune, or the other way around. It needed somehow to touch echoes of an Irish form of speech, and Irish tuning, because I was putting the words together in a more Welsh way, [with] Celtic grammatical structures, although not to any great complexity. There was a similar problem with the English, because of course that was a sort of foreground language for something else. So they were speaking a sort of Saxonic language and I had to find a tune for that too.

We said, "yes, it's going to be northern English, but again it mustn't sound like <u>Coronation Street</u>." Again, there are all those associations, those musical associations that you have to expunge. But we need to have some starting point, some vernacular point of reference we overlaid it with a Celtic sense, we chose certain vowels and certain diphthongs from Ulster English and a couple of things from Welsh here and there. I was quite synchronistic in how I did it, it was almost synthetic in that sense, it was "well, let's use this and let's use that and use the other, because at no point do we want to become just a simple regional unitary form of speech, it needs to have elements in it that don't quite fit."

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Did that need inform the casting? Were you involved in the casting?

DAVID RUDKIN:

I was strongly involved in the casting in an advisory sense. I had always thought that Gerard would be very interesting for Athdark, and really quite anxious that he should do it.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Where's he from?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Newry [Co. Down, Northern Ireland]. Although he understood the landscape of the piece very well, he understood the whole political landscape about the people, the others, he understood that very well, he had an inside track on that, we didn't need to explain anything to him. And of course he understood about the werewolf thing too being a Catholic boy from an Irish Co. Down small market town, growing up gay

before the word was even known, I think he understood about discovering he was a wolf. He used that as his private frame of reference. He used what he calls "the actor's secrets." He's very interesting in how he constructs his process.

I asked for Pauline Delaney because I thought she would be very reliable, very interesting. The other roles were not so easily cast, I didn't have much to do with the casting the other roles, mainly because who I thought, Pierre didn't think, or if we both agreed on somebody they weren't available or something like that. I did ask for Robert Eddison as Cambyses, I said, "you'll never get him because he's the last of a great generation of English actors," he was about eighty. He had very bad feet, he had ulcers and he was in pain most of the time. And he said he wanted to do it, he liked the language. And, at the first read, we actually did a first read, you don't always do that but he had a first read, every single thing was absolutely exact. Every syllable, he took all the typography, which is occasionally unorthodox, he took it all as though it was a symphonic score. Everything, there weren't any misprints, everything was intended, he found why, he found out internally why everything was there. He said every single line exactly as I heard it when I wrote it; I'd never had that before in my life. He would have been amazing. We waited for him because he was doing a tour of the Far East with Anthony Quayle, who was travelling Shakespeare, so we postponed by a week the rehearsal process, for Robert to be back, and he was amazing. And then he was ill and Ian McDiarmid was brought in. I think that in a way was the beginning of Ian's connection with the Almeida, and Johnny, Johnny Kent, who was, (it has to be said and he knew this), was not our first choice for Agricola, and Lugovellin. It was a very different actor, Karl Johnson, actually Karl began and then he signed another contract at the end of the first week, which was ethically dubious of course, but that's how it goes. Johnny Kent I'd worked with two or three times before that, and I thought he's a very loyal actor, very direct. And they're both now running the Almeida. That's the extent of my involvement with the casting.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

There were no references to Northern Ireland in the programme.

DAVID RUDKIN:

That was at my insistence.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Why?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Because I thought the moment we mention that the whole play goes out of the window. And in fact it is amazing that there were people who never even made the connection.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

No, some of the reviews don't make that connection.

DAVID RUDKIN:

And that doesn't matter. It's a bit like giving away the ending of <u>Psycho</u>, I thought that once we had done that we had in a sense subverted the entire process, that I had

first sought out to achieve, which was to make people work to decode this situation. That's why I wrote it the way I did, otherwise I'd have set it in Co. Tyrone in the 1970s or I'd have set it in Coalisland or somewhere. And I thought, "No I'm not going to do this because the moment you do this then that's just going to be the lens through which everything is perceived, and it is going to have a reductive effect on the piece, and they're not going to see why I'm doing it." It is a way of looking at Ulster, of course it is. From a very intimately inhabited position within it, knowing what it's like to wake up in a village "Oh they were here last night because the bridge is gone." Knowing what it feels like to have that feeling about 'the other', something that English people cannot comprehend. So that if I actually told them that was what it was, I think we would have lost a lot, okay if they didn't make the connection, maybe that matters less.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

But was the connection there in rehearsal?

DAVID RUDKIN:

As I remember, and this was one of the beauties of the long rehearsal process, at no point, to my recollection, was reference ever made or was recourse ever had to a current polemic crisis in the search for an answer to anything because it wouldn't have given those kinds of answers. That's the whole point. So, it wasn't "ah, we're being very clever and we're doing a very kind of involved and murky metaphor for something."

I think people just got stuck on inhabiting the metaphor. There was one very interesting point that Johnny Kent made, because he's from South Africa, he's a white South African, and he said that what he liked was that he knew from his experience in South Africa that the people that we see as the red-necked bastards, the Dutch Reform Church, the Dutch Clergy and so on, who were pretty nasty, he said, and yet they're good men. And he knew about that and he knew about that paradox and so he had an inside track. In a funny way it was the old bloody cattle raid of Cooley all over again, because the anger and the hostility and the difficulties that came to the surface in the production of the piece, in the working of the piece, did draw some of their fury from the ancestral anger of the Irish people, there was no question about that. I very much felt somehow, they'd have put me up against a wall and shot me if it had come to that, it was extraordinary that those demons were there, the hostility, the Irish anger, the rage about which I know a great deal was actually in place.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

In the casting of Gerard Murphy, in terms of his accent, his voice was making the shadow of that suggestion.

DAVID RUDKIN:

Well actually that's an interesting point, and in a way of course it's an evident point that one has to make. I don't remember hearing a single Ulster note in Gerard's performance. You could play it with any number of Ulster modes of speech that you might choose but I wrote it in a very broad Northern rather than Saxonic terse rhythm, very short sentences as I remember, sometimes one word sentences and things like that and they actually make it more difficult for people to hide in a regional accent,

the punctuation is against it, because it's the tunes and the phrasing and so on, where you begin to swim and to sing.

Gerard is very intelligent, he realised that would have been the last thing to do with the role because that would have, in a sense, reduced it, and he really wanted to keep the thing as pure as possible. The synthetic accents didn't locate themselves in a particular geography, or had geographically contradictory essences, that don't take fright, or take refuge in any conventional assumptions. That's why we made it as difficult as possible for people to make sentimental connections; I think that it was more like a kind of very granitic Northern English, it was more like a kind of Tony Harrison kind of English than anything else, as I remember.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

I mention that because it was picked up on in some of the reviews, and not in others.

DAVID RUDKIN:

There are phraseologies, there are terms, there are little combinations of words, which are very vernacular and very idiomatic. But again I always tried to get them said in a way that wasn't where it came from.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Do you think yourself to be writing of two traditions? Would you consider yourself to be a British playwright? A Northern Irish playwright?

DAVID RUDKIN:

I don't consider myself to be either of those things, anymore than I'm a bisexual playwright or an Artuadian playwright or a Protestant playwright. Yes, you have these roles that occasionally become active. And it may be that I've made life harder for myself, in that the moment there's come an opportunity to be identified I've done something which made it impossible. And in a way perhaps it was. The whole Field Day disappointment, and it was a desperate, for me at that time, how I felt about it. I felt really rejected by it, because there is a part of you however sublime you might like to think you are, there is a part of you that wants to be involved and that wants to stand up and be counted and it wants to be useful, and I felt that I actually had, arrogantly perhaps, something useful to contribute to the debate at that time in the country. I felt that certain things were being lost sight of that were essential. So yes, I saw it as an opportunity to be part of Ireland's agonising search for a viable identity. for the future, because there's future in the past. And so I saw it in those very literal and foreground terms. Characteristically enough I obviously came up with something that made it quite impossible, because other imperatives took over. But when the letter came (and it came on a very bad day for me because it was the day after the 1983 general elections, which was this absolutely squalid affair that Margaret Thatcher had won. It was an election that had been conducted in very sinister and disturbing matters and very sinister and disturbing ways. And the way that the press had been used, the way that everything had been used—it was a very depressing day for me the day after the 1983 general election and I felt very low. And of course we were in for almost ten years of her.) And that was the day that the letter came from Brian Friel whom they had deputed as the one playwright on the panel to break the bad news to another. So it wasn't a good day for me, it was a bit of a doublewhammy and, first of all I felt very frightened for England because of the political

implication of Maggie and she's still with us. And I felt very bad; yes it's a romantic thing to say but I felt personally rejected, I felt that Ireland had rejected me it's a silly thing to say but I felt that, and I thought well it's happened to Beckett so who am I to complain? After a couple of days you get on with it.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Has the play been produced professionally other that the 1983 Almeida production?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Not since the Almeida. Productions have been mooted, and for one reason or another have not happened. So there's no performance tradition, and I've not seen another production. I understand that there have been a couple of college ones, but there's no big performance tradition worth speaking of, none at all.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

And the original script that you submitted to Field Day, it was called <u>Athdark and the</u> Flood?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Athdark and the Flood was one, yes. I was never too clear at that point in the denotement of the play. The only difference really between the two versions, apart from the fact that the second version is much better, was that the first version was not quite so rigorously cut; there weren't any major conceptual differences, the play was more or less right from very early on. This doesn't always happen, some plays are totally wrong through four or five reworkings, until I actually begin to see what it needs to be. But some are more or less right from the first, it's just a question of cutting something and that's easy. And the other difference, which is part and parcel of this, was that the earlier version required a company of nine. There were a few other secondary characters, and the narrative was less harnessed and when Pierre said he wanted to do it, he said "there's only one thing, I can't afford nine actors, I've to rework it for seven." Which wasn't too easy and it involved a fair amount of logistical finesse. There isn't really a conceptual difference, and certainly in terms of the dramaturgy of it, the issues that you're interested in are more to focus, much better focused in the second version. I don't actually think I've got a copy of the first version

I know quite a lot about music, because I was going to be a composer rather than a dramatist at one time and I know quite a lot about early versions of things. I've read Beethoven's sketch books, I've studied a lot and it makes me very angry when musicologists say how banal this idea is and he managed to turn it into something—it isn't how it works at all, that's how the thing first presents itself and you know if it isn't adequate, so you find out what the implications are. That's how it happens. So I don't like the thought of people saying "oh dear what a mess this piece started in," because it isn't quite like that. It's a mess yes, but I don't want people holding their noses. I don't think it would really help you all that much except I'm not the person to judge that, you are. Then you may well say, "oh well of course obviously Field Day rejected that!" The trouble is if you submit a text it's always going to need more work, that's par for the course and therefore it is no excuse for a company to say, "well it was only the first version," because you either say, "look we want to go with this one, we'll have to do more work on it, we know this is always going to happen"

or you say "no this isn't for us." But it's never an excuse for a theatre company to say, "oh well, you know it needs more work," because that's exactly how things happen. They need more work; plays are rewritten.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Was the published version of <u>The Saxon Shore</u> what was brought to rehearsals at the Almeida?

DAVID RUDKIN:

No, it represents the text as finalised during rehearsal, because it wasn't published before, as I remember. I've never had a play and I've never wished to have a play published before first production. I think it's a highly dangerous exercise. I'm always very doubtful when I see the play script on sale in the foyer on the way in and I say "hey what does this—this represents what you started with three weeks ago. It's a bit opportunistic and of course you do sell quite a lot but it's a document of limited worth. I draw up the published text from the prompt book, I never take notes during rehearsal except on matters of my text, I never write a thing down about actors during rehearsal.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Was there an organic nature to it, in that were there changes as part of the rehearsal process that made it into the published text?

DAVID RUDKIN:

Well, always there are going to be things that aren't quite right although again I have to say as I remember there weren't colossal rewrites that had to be done during the rehearsal process of this. I did an earlier piece called <u>Ashes</u> we did it in Germany first, so there were different issues there. But when <u>Ashes</u> was done in England first there were significant aspects of the play which needed redefinition in terms of stage craft like how are you going to do the sex scene on stage and so on. So there were certain issues that needed to be discovered in the process so parts of that text were very fluid indeed for a long time, and didn't quite harden up until quite some while after the production had finished when the snowstorm and the cabal had settled.

Sons of Light was a similar piece. There were areas in it which almost defeated me up until the very last. There were corners that that play had to turn that I couldn't quite resolve or couldn't achieve until very late in the rehearsal process. I was quite despondent. There are another pieces like the Triumph of Death where there wasn't a single rewrite in rehearsal because I had already cut it, and as I remember Saxon Shore had very little rewriting because I remember most of our problems were actually with the company and with the actual business of getting it to happen. I don't remember going home and doing rewrites. I think there were a few here and there but again they were mainly cuts, as in, "here, we don't need that one go straight from there to there," and they're easy. And then every so often I would look at the prompt book but I usually know the text by heart by the end of the production anyway so that I could check it off quite easily. And the published text will almost never diverge from that hardened performance text unless there is something that we did not get right, in which case I do it in isolation.

APPENDIX (vii)

AT THE BLACK PIG'S DYKE DRUID PRODUCTION & TOURING HISTORY.

1992

- 30 September-17 October, [Premiere 30 September], Druids Lane Theatre, Galway.
- 20 October St. Patricks Hall, Armagh.
- 22 October Riverside Theatre, Coleraine.
- 23-24 October Ardhowan Theatre, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh.
- 26-27 October Abbey Centre, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal.
- 29 October Ballinamore Community Centre, Co. Leitrim.
- 31 October Town Hall, Shercock, Co. Cavan.
- 2-7 November Civic Arts Theatre, Belfast.
- 9 November Town Hall, Trim, Co. Meath.
- 11 November Town Hall Theatre, Kiltimeagh, Co. Mayo.
- 12 November Community Centre, Glenamaddy, Co. Galway.
- 14 November St. Mary's Secondary School, Nenagh. Co. Tipperary.
- 16 November Holy Family Senior School, Ennis, Co. Clare.
- 17 November G.A.A Hall, Tullamore, Co. Offaly.
- 19 November St.Brigid's Hall, Callan, Co. Kilkenny.
- 21 November Theatre Royal, Wexford.
- 23 November St. Michaels Hall, Ballyduff, Co. Waterford.
- 25 November Town Hall, Skibbereen, Co. Cork.
- 26-28 November Siamsa Tíre Theatre, Tralee, Co. Kerry.

1993

- 28 June-2 July Rialto Entertainment Centre, Derry.
- 6-31 July L.I.F.T. 1993 (London International Festival of Theatre) Tricycle Theatre, Kilburn Road, London.
- (December trip to Sydney Festival cancelled; due to play December 1993/early 1994, later played January 1995.)

1994

- 14-26 February Gate Theatre, Dublin.
- 28 February-5 March Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick.
- 8-12 March Cork Opera House, Cork.
- 14-16 March Watergate Theatre, Kilkenny.
- 18-20 March Hawk's Well Theatre, Sligo.
- 22 March-2 April Druid's Lane Theatre, Galway.
- 4-5 April Siamsa Tíre Theatre, Tralee.
- 9-16 April World Stage Festival, Toronto, Canada.
- 3-7 May Mayfest, Glasgow, Scotland.

1995

9-14 January York Theatre, Sydney Festival and Carnivale Seymour Centre 3649400. Sydney (Remounted / Produced only for Sydney, Ger Ryan as Lizzie, directed by Garry Hynes.)

<u>The Song of the Yellow Bittern</u> in the meantime opened on 22 September 1994 and toured nationally.

APPENDIX (viii)
INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT WOODS
SATURDAY 27 NOVEMBER 1999
PLAYERS THEATRE TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN.

This is a transcript of an interview conducted at Players Theatre before an audience prior to the final performance of a players' production of <u>At the Black Pig's Dyke</u> by Vincent Woods, directed by Trinity drama student Páraic Whyte. Video camera operator: Cormac Walsh.

On the panel were interviewer Bernadette Sweeney, playwright Vincent Woods and director of the player's production Páraic Whyte.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Vincent Woods is a former RTE journalist. His first plays were produced by Druid in 1991 John Hughdy and Tom John and directed by John Crowley. Then we had At the Black Pig's Dyke followed by The Yellow Bittern. There was a production done for the fringe festival last year, a version of a novel called Fontamara and he's currently working on some work we may mention later on. I'm aware that we're anticipating this final performance of At the Black Pig's Dyke so I'll begin by talking to Vincent about the development of the play itself and how it came about. So Vincent tell us how At the Black Pig's Dyke came about.

VINCENT WOODS:

People often say to me how long does it take to write a play—I began to write what became At the Black Pig's Dyke around December 1991 and we went into rehearsal with the finished script in August 1992. But I suppose looking at it in a broader light it took me all my life to write it because a lot of the material in the play comes from my own background, from the history and mythology of the area in Leitrim where I grew up, from stories that I'd heard as a child and from the tradition of mumming which was still alive when I was a child. As I grew away from it I realised that I was lucky enough to be at what I've since called 'the tail-end of tradition', and what I was capturing in the play was something of that.

So I worked as a journalist and had always written a certain amount, I always loved theatre but had never actually been involved in it very much. I wrote some dreadful play when I was about fifteen and acted in it, and it's best forgotten! But that was my only involvement. I studied journalism and I worked as a radio journalist and I eventually realised that there was something else that I wanted to do and I left RTE, I gave up, in inverted commas "a good job" and went off blindly with the notion of travelling and writing and wrote the first plays John Hughdy/Tom John in New Zealand and then the following year met Maeliosa Stafford in Sydney; we were working together on a radio programme on Austin Clarke, which I'd written. He mentioned he was coming back to take over at Druid as Artistic Director, so I gave him the plays I'd written and he said that he had an idea for a play somehow involving mumming, and I said "God I know a lot about mumming"—gave him the plays, a while later he rang and said "we want to do them" and when I came back broke from Australia he said "come up with an outline for a play somehow involving mumming and if we like it we'll commission it", so they commissioned it and it became At the Black Pig's Dyke.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

He asked you specifically to write a play about mumming?

VINCENT WOODS:

He asked me to write a play somehow involving mumming and incorporating the notion of mumming into the play. And we talked in very broad strokes about the idea of mumming and masking and conflict and the notion in the mumming plays of conflict death and resurrection, and the area where it was still alive, along the border, having resonances for the political violence in the North and along the border counties. And I had read Henry Glassie's books on mumming, I had read Alan Gailey's Irish Folk Drama and in so far as there were any texts that influenced the play, they were the texts. But it was from my own experience and from a folk memory and a folk memory of history that the play came into being. A lot of the time people ask me what are the written sources for the mythology in the play and I can honestly say that there weren't any. All the references, all the mythological reference came from the oral tradition, come from a kind of living spoken tradition with which I was lucky enough to grow up.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

You described yourself and having come at "the tail-end of tradition"—would you consider At the Black Pig's Dyke in term of its use of the mumming as an act of recovery on your part? In terms of tradition?

VINCENT WOODS:

To some extent yes; one group in Sligo who saw the play took up the idea of mumming and brought it back as something in the community a couple of years later. You can only do a certain amount of that and I wouldn't make any great claims to try to recover any mumming play. But as a kid I went out on Stephen's Day, as a Wrenboy, and you think that this is something that is going to continue forever; but for the last few years, whenever I was back in Leitrim sitting in the house on Stephen's Day, not a single person, not a single child goes around anymore on the Wren. And I think there's something very sad about that. If the play only succeeded in capturing something that was alive once and not anymore, then I think we'll have achieved something in that.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The image of mumming in the play is obviously very rich and the Druid production was very successful, a lot has been written about it in terms of press coverage. Kevin Barry, who is professor of English in UCG [University College Galway] wrote a piece in the Irish Times, a Second Opinion, a rebuttal of one of the early reviews of the play, and he talked specifically about the image of the mummers, he talked about their energy and their directness etc. But he also talked about the mummers becoming something else in that they became images of violence. And he referred to such as the Klu Klux Klan, the Whiteboys. Obviously, it's an ambiguous image in that it is very traditional, but it became very violent as well in the play.

VINCENT WOODS:

Yes, and there was always that potential for violence in a lot of the folk traditions, like Strawboys who came to weddings, like the mummers who came around

Christmas and to a lesser extent the Wrenboys. With the Strawboys, who came to weddings, there was the belief in some areas that they were almost like official folk gate-crashers, they had to be allowed entry. And if they weren't; if they weren't given food drink and made welcome, there was the idea that they could curse the wedding. There are lots of examples of Strawboys half-wrecking a house if they weren't given the proper treatment. Wrenboys, who came around on Stephen's Day with the wren, (and I think there's a reference to this in the play); there was a belief that if they weren't made welcome, if they weren't given sufficient in the way of reward for whatever they performed that they could bury the wren beside the house and leave bad luck. And with mummers then as well apart from the fact of the play and the conflict and all the things within the play, lots of people will testify to how even as children there was something quite terrifying about the image of these huge masked figures coming into the house and performing these plays. I mean it's an extraordinary idea in mostly small rural communities where you wouldn't see very much at all in the way of theatre, this was folk drama. And it was dramatic. It was drama. It brought something to life for people, and they were real plays born out of something God knows how old. And I suppose that was something I was interested in as well, was how old is this thing, how old was this conflict that we go back to. And even though different figures were taken up in terms of the heroes who fought, depending on where you were, to me it seems that it goes back to something very ancient, and the notion of conflict almost within human beings, that it's a very old conflict within ourselves that's enacted at a particular time of year, and defeated, and brought back to life, so there's always that sense of the potential for renewal which is what the play was trying to address as well.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Not only in terms of the use of the mummers but in the play in general there were a lot of references to sectarianism and violence. Do you consider the play to be a political play? Did you set out to write a political play?

VINCENT WOODS:

I didn't set out to write a political play. I suppose the play was unavoidably political in the subject matter that it eventually tackled. History is political, everything at some level is, and yet I believe that everything at every level is also more than political. The play was trying to bring out of the darkness some things that had been in there for too long, and to tell the stories that had been half-forgotten, maybe half-suppressed or repressed, to bring those out into the light and let people look at them. And confront people with what we are, what we have done, and that we are in many ways no different to most other people or societies at some point; but in doing so, in that dramatic way, to try to seek for a way beyond it, to see something out past it. And a play can only do a certain amount; it's only a play. Yet sometimes, in peoples' responses, one would think that it was more than a play, that it was entry into an active part or real life.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

The play was very successful, it toured nationally after its initial production in Druid, and it continued to be revived, it toured nationally again in 1994, it toured to Toronto, and it toured to the LIFT festival in London.

But talking about the play in terms of people's responses to it, and to it being part of real life, I want to discuss the incident in Derry. It was invited to Derry for the last week in June early July 1993 and it was staged at the Rialto. And during that week, on the Friday night, towards the end of the performance there was actually what was called an intervention, in that some local people had organised to stage a response to At the Black Pig's Dyke and actually interrupted the action of the play and staged their own version of the play. And in an article that was published in the Derry Journal as a response by the individuals, as a way of explaining why they chose to do what they did, they talked about the play and its portrayal of Nationalist. And one of the things they said in this article was that and I quote:

"We were asked to collude with the author's view that it was disturbed psychology rather than social injustice that fuelled and still fuels this conflict. Any reference to the British involvement was peripheral and ultimately obscured by the main focus of the play." Now that as far as I know was a response particularly to the characterisation of Frank Beirne. Would you talk about Frank Beirne and about the incident in Derry?

VINCENT WOODS:

I would be the first to defend anyone's right to free speech and to protest about anything. What upset me about that particular incident in Derry is that the people staging the protest actually took over the stage before the play finished and scared the life out of the actors, because the actors were masked at the end of the play, (if you haven't seen the play you might see it tonight), and they couldn't see what was going one. Suddenly they were aware of people on stage around them, people that weren't in the play and someone saw a Union Jack and thought "our number's up". They were genuinely very frightened and left the stage.

I think that the people organising the protest could have done so before the play or after the play on stage, outside the theatre, in the foyer, anywhere they wanted to, and there are lots of ways of protesting. And I think "great!" if people have the energy and imagination to organise a theatrical protest to a piece of theatre. I suppose I could be gratified that the play got such a response, that it obviously hit on nerves and provoked that response. I wasn't there on the night and my concern was for the actors who at the end of the day are doing a job, they're putting on a play and they're paid to put on a play and they might not even share what other people would see as the politics of what they're acting.

The protest should have been addressed to me or to Druid or to both. After the incident through Druid I said that I would go and meet the people who had organised the protest and talk to them freely about what they felt and that wasn't taken up. Some of the material I read for the first time tonight and it's very interesting and it's absolutely valid from the perspective of the people who had organised it. The character of Frank Beirne, (for those of you who haven't seen the play, you'll see him later), this is where references there to kind of thwarted psychotic behaviour—I think it would be very foolish to pretend that there aren't thwarted psychotic people involved in violence both here and everywhere else where violence occurs. Violence by its nature attracts people who are attracted to violence. And the character of Frank Beirne it turned out (and I didn't even know this at the time), had strong parallels to somebody with a very similar name from the broader area of those border counties who was operating at an earlier time. There are violent psychotic people. Frank Beirne is not a one-dimensional character. I think you'll see

in the play that his love of Lizzie is in its own way absolutely real and it's thwarted and twisted by the politics that have gone before it. And I think there's some reference in the protest about the play to the lack of context if you like. An awful lot of the context of the play comes from a much earlier time, way back through mythology and then more recently through the 19th century through the early years of this century and things that happened that go way back. And things as old as that do come down through us and do affect us and do go on affecting what's happening here. It's not as if everything is only thirty years old. It's not as if everything that's happening now in Northern Ireland in the six counties began in 1968/69. It goes right back. The play isn't about British injustice in Northern Ireland, which God knows we all know enough about. I wasn't going to tackle that. Sometimes you have to look at the mote in your own eye. And that's what I wanted to do; I wanted to look at what we have done.

I was quite involved, as a late teenager, in Nationalist Republican politics, and you see things and you can't go on justifying them, and if you do they never begin to end. Hopefully what is happening now, even today in the North, may be the beginning of something ending, and the beginning of something else beginning. That's what the play is about as well.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Even though you say you didn't set out to deliberately write a political play in terms of its response it engendered a very political response in particular audience members. And also the fact that it was responded to in such a theatrical way, I think is a very strong statement to the theatricality of the play and its use of things like the mumming tradition, music etc.

Another aspect of the mummers I'd like you to talk about briefly is Tom Fool and Miss Funny, and in the play and in the production you're going to see soon, they seem to act very much as go-betweens almost, between the action and the audience. Was that something that you envisaged from the outset or did that develop as the play developed?

VINCENT WOODS:

Well, I've always been fascinated by fools, in life and in theatre. It's always so striking in mumming plays that you have a male and a female fool. And in Irish, there are two terms, *amadán* being a male fool and *óinseach* being a female fool. I was always struck by that distinction of the two sexes having their individual foolishness, or foolishnesses. And they seemed both to come out of a very old tradition of theatre and to come out of the landscape of what I was writing about. So it seemed to make sense that they could stand back a bit and direct things, or send up the wrong signals, or play with the audience which I thought they do very successfully. I love them; I think they're great.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

They're very bawdy.

VINCENT WOODS:

Yes, they're very bawdy as well, which is there in the tradition, in the old mumming plays. The two mummers plays in this play I wrote myself, they're based on texts, they're based on traditional mummers plays. But the bawdiness is there, and I think

again it ties into the notions of fertility and life continuing, which is also very much there in the text of the play.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

As I said, I think they're very theatrical; they bring great energy to the play. Something else I want to discuss is the development of the play itself from the script to the stage production. And I know it was published recently by Methuen, that publication was taken very much from the Druid production?

VINCENT WOODS:

Yes, it would be. There are a couple of changes from the text that was originally produced but it's what I see as the definitive text of it. It's also published by Cambridge University Press. And in terms of the actual production of it, I have to acknowledge that Monica Frawley who did the original design, had a huge input in terms of how it was visualised, how it was seen, how it was put on. Maeliosa as the director, all the actors put a huge commitment into the play. And for me it was tremendously gratifying because it was very much that sense of people working together and that's when theatre is at its most satisfying and probably successful and gratifying. And there's a common objective of achieving the best with this, in every sense. Music has always been hugely important to me, very important in all the plays and it was great to work with musicians, dance, all of those elements. That's what interested me in mumming from the beginning, that all those elements seemed to be in it therefore they could go into a bigger play about or somehow involving mumming. And they're as old as we are, song, dance, conflict, music and I think the truth of something emerges and because a lot of the stories in the play are based on true stories, are based on real incidents, are based on things that really did happen. If the truth of them comes through them I think that that ultimately is the power of the play. It's not even as if I wrote it all, some of the stories that are there I have heard since I was very small and it seemed to be almost about passing those on, and passing them on to a bigger audience rather than just writing something or creating something.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

In terms of your own process as a playwright, was the play very much a given by the time you came to rehearsals?

VINCENT WOODS:

Yeah, we went into the rehearsals with a finished text. And some of things like choreography, music, direction, all that happened afterwards but the text was there.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

And you were in on the rehearsal process?

VINCENT WOODS:

Yes, which was great. It was the first time that I sat in on the rehearsals, for any play but particularly my own. It was great because, seeing people, you knew immediately who was right for the part, or who you thought was right, and it was a wonderful experience. I'm sure any of you who are involved with theatre will know that it is a

fantastic experience to see something transferring from page to stage and the process by which that happens. And it remains something very exciting.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

Can I ask you about the title, At the Black Pig's Dyke.

VINCENT WOODS:

It was actually one of the last things that came in the writing of the play. From the time that I was a small kid my mother used to talk about the story of the Black Pig's Dyke, which you hear in the play, of how this very old fortification was created by a black pig running underneath the ground and pushing the earth up, and that it was still trapped there, running endlessly. And she had heard it from her grandmother who had presumably heard it from her grandmother and so on. There was an idea that, eventually, there would be a great battle on the site of the black pig, where the Protestants of Northern Ireland would be routed and defeated once and for all. And it was to be near a Catholic church and we lived near a Catholic church and fairly near the Black Pig's Dyke so we used to fondly imagine that the great last battle would happen down the road. Maybe it has! And in writing the play, I had written an awful lot but it wasn't written from A to Z. I wrote the mummers plays first and I went back and wrote something else, and eventually I was working through the whole imagery of it, and I found myself writing about the Black Pig's Dyke and suddenly I thought "yes, that's the title, it's the right title of the play", I think there was a book published a couple of years afterwards called Along the Black Pigs Dyke, and if the play brought the phrase and reality of the Black Pig's Dyke back into the public domain, brought it back into people's consciousness, that's good.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

It's fascinating that you say it's seen as in some ways that it would culminate in the routing of the Protestants from Northern Ireland because in another sense it as an ancient fortification has been cited as an early example or an early proof of the otherness of Northern Ireland or an early precursor of the border, which is relatively new in political terms. That informs a lot of imagery of slaughter and of pig killing, and the ritual of killing and that comes across quite strongly in the play and in the title as well.

VINCENT WOODS:

Yes, that was deliberate again, that the notion of savagery and sacrifice, a very ancient and probably unfortunately timeless sense of that kind of conflict and savagery and violence. Again that's where we come back to the mummers plays being about what's within ourselves and not just about what's within others, but what we have to confront in ourselves.

BERNADETTE SWEENEY:

You talk about the savagery and obviously a strong aspect of that is territorialism, which comes across in the play; and very much the territorial aspects of characters, of Frank Beirne particularly, to an extent maybe Jack Boles as well, but in the tension between the two characters, over Lizzie. One actor plays young Lizzie, her daughter Sarah and Elizabeth, who tells the analogous tale; was that your decision from the outset or did it develop in rehearsal?

VINCENT WOODS:

I actually can't remember [who made] the decision to use one actor for the three parts. What I do remember is very much wanting the play to tell a generational story and one almost without a beginning or an end, or one in which the beginning and the end could form one seam and run on. And from the beginning that image of the cradle, of a baby, of a baby who survives, survives the slaughter, was a central image. I suppose one of the influences for that was the Enniskillen bombing and Gordon Wilson (who's originally from Leitrim); his daughter was killed, and I remember I was a journalist hearing him speak on the radio about the death of his daughter. He was holding her hand after the explosion and she was under the rubble and he talked about "I said to her once, 'Are you alright?' And she said 'aye' and I said to her a second time 'are you alright' and I said it a third time", and I was listening to this and this shiver went down my spine because I realised that he unconsciously using classic story-telling devices. He didn't say, "I said 'are you alright' and she said 'no'" but it was once, twice, three times and the way he was talking; it was a Leitrim man talking and that always stayed in my memory and the notion of his child dying although she was a woman in her twenties. And the strange thing is that at times, things in the play years later have a continuing resonance, not only here but abroad. In Kosovo last year there was a baby girl found alive, the only survivor of a massacre in a small village. And it was like this was the play. One of the nights when we were playing in Belfast, while on stage there was the ritual killing of somebody and the torturing of someone with sticks, up the road a woman being beaten to death with baseball bats by a gang of men. So the play seemed then and still to me seems to be universal. And that's the power of the play.

APPENDIX (ix)

THE AUTHOR AS PRACTITIONER: BERNADETTE SWEENEY

My research has been informed by my work as an actor, director and teacher. In July 2001 I performed the title role in <u>Baglady</u>, a one-person piece by Frank McGuinness directed by Kiara Downey as part of the Lincoln Center Director's Lab in New York. The soundscape was designed by Giles Packham. <u>Baglady</u> gave me the opportunity to interrogate a performance of the body when working with an Irish text for audiences outside an Irish cultural frame of reference. In May 2001 I travelled to the Roy Hart International Centre to take part in Pantheatre's Choreographic Theatre Workshop/Symposium directed by Enrique Pardo, which combined training with a search for an appropriate choreographic theatre discourse.

For the 1998 Dublin Fringe Festival I played Mae in <u>Mud</u> by Cuban-American playwright Maria Irene Fornes, also directed by Kiara Downey; and co-hosted Fornes' visit to Dublin, which included a playwrights' workshop and seminar at the Drama Studies Centre in University College Dublin. Also in 1998 I worked as part of Minc Theatre in association with the Abbey Theatre and the Arts Council/*An Chomhairle Ealaíon* on <u>Trust and Betrayal</u>, an actor-training workshop led by Enrique Pardo and voice coach Kristin Linklater. As a member Out and Out Theatre, Belfast, I devised, performed and toured <u>Mancruel</u> (1993). This devised, non-linear, physical production developed throughout the run in relation to audience response, and worked to interrogate the role of the audience in the process and in the production of meaning. I performed in <u>The Mankeeper</u> by Tom Mac Intyre (1991) adapted by the playwright for Midas Theatre-in-Education Company, Limerick, and directed Paul Brennan; in <u>Treasure Island</u> (1990) by Macnas Theatre Company, Galway, and in a series of the company's street-theatre events; and in a college production of <u>Burglars</u> by David Rudkin, directed at the University of Ulster by Lynda Henderson (1988).

From 1997 to 2000 I was tutor on the BA Junior Freshman theatre practice course at the School of Drama at the Samuel Beckett Centre, Trinity College, Dublin. There, I directed the Junior Freshman performance project in May 1999 and again in May 2000. The performance project in 1999 Transformation—an Acting Problem explored the performance challenge central to The Saxon Shore by David Rudkin, that of a transformation to wolf. In 2000 architectural space was interrogated in relation to text, which was in this case an interpretation of Salomé by Oscar Wilde. As theatre practice tutor, I spent Michaelmas and Hilary terms working with the students on a practical workshop-based introduction to theatre practice, leading to an engagement with the rehearsal and process techniques of twentieth century practitioners. The emphasis throughout the course was on group work and on process rather than product. In Trinity term this work culminated in a performance project as described above.

In 2000 and 2001 I have worked with students from the NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Dublin programme, working to develop an awareness of Irish theatre with a group of people not necessarily familiar with the context, this informed my own research into cultural specificity. I also work as a script reader for the literary department of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

Publications include the biographical entry on Tom Mac Intyre for John Bull (ed.) <u>Dictionary of Literary Biography</u>, U.S: Bruccoli Clark Layman, Inc., 2001; 'Who's Who in Irish Theatre' with Dr. Brian Singleton for Daniel Mayer-Dinkgrafe (ed.) <u>Who's Who in World Theatre</u> London: Routledge: 2000 and 'Northern Star' in <u>Irish Theatre Magazine</u> volume one issue two, Spring 1999.