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From Trauma to Transformation: Death and Identity in the Plays of Frank McGuinness

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Abstract:

This thesis is a consideration of the representations of death in six of Frank McGuinness's original dramatic works. The objective is to evaluate the connection between these dramatic representations and the social, political and cultural contexts of the plays' first performances. The main contention is that the connection between these representations and their contexts serves to deepen an understanding of both.

While McGuinness has produced original plays since 1982, the plays considered cover the period from 1985 to 1999. His plays are complex responses to the conditions of contemporary Ireland, particularly the conflict in Northern Ireland. By looking at these conditions through a variety of perspectives, particularly those of "outsiders," the plays emphasise the need for the acceptance of a broad understanding of identity. These characters articulate their perspectives most clearly in their confrontation with the possibility and reality of death.

In these plays, the characters confront death during periods of conflict from Irish and world history. Facing the dangers of these conflicts, the characters confront the possibility and reality of death collectively, guided and encouraged, for the most part, by "outsider" characters. Their collective bonds allow them to better deal with death's complex, paradoxical power.

The thesis has three main body chapters, each of which concentrates on two of McGuinness's plays. Chapter One considers the connection between death and community, and concentrates on the paradox within the demands of both community and individual identity. Chapter Two examines the connection between death and constructions of "Otherness" and focuses on how definitions of Otherness both defend and jeopardise the individual in relation to their Others. Chapter Three explores the connection between death and family relations and looks at how individuals might escape a damaging, haunting legacy by embracing a wider, more inclusive perspective.

Introduction:
Sites of Paradox

Death is ubiquitous in Frank McGuinness's works. There are few among them that do not explore the threat, reality or memory of death. The following consideration of six of his original stage plays concentrates on his representations of death and their relation to issues of identity. Although McGuinness has been prolific in his career as a writer, with more than twenty original dramatic works, more than twenty translations and adaptations of European and South American classic works, four books of poetry, as well as a number of screenplays and short stories, this thesis is not a survey of his career, but examines the theme of death in detail in a relatively small but nonetheless important selection of his original plays. The plays selected for consideration are *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985),¹ *Carthaginians* (1988), *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992), *The Bird Sanctuary* (1994), *Mutabilitie* (1997) and *Dolly West's Kitchen* (1999). This selection encompasses a wide range of his original dramatic works in regards to both chronology and popularity. Regarding chronology, the selection covers a period of about fifteen years of his nearly three decades as a dramatist. Regarding popularity, the first three plays mentioned have each garnered a large amount of deserved attention, while critics have relatively ignored the latter three. All six plays, as well as many of those excluded from this study, share to varying degrees the themes explored in this thesis; however, these themes are particularly evident in the plays paired in each chapter.

There are three main arguments at the basis of this consideration. The first is that death is an evasive, complex sign that pushes the limits of not only representation, but also interpretation. Death, whether as death of the self or of someone other than the self, can both challenge and confirm issues of identity from the specific, such as the issue of loyalty for Northern Irish Unionists, to the universal, such as the general issue of mortality. Death's agency and power lies, in part, in how survivors, those who experience death either by proxy or as immediate possibility, choose to interpret it.

¹ The years given in parentheses for all plays referred to in this thesis will be the year of their first productions. Any references taken from the plays will refer to the published texts, unless otherwise indicated.

The second argument is that there is a perceivable movement in McGuinness's use of death from the early to later plays. In the early plays, which include *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Carthaginians*, the experience of death is, for the most part, traumatic, causing a lasting negative impact that generally damages the lives of survivors, manifesting in varying forms of social and / or emotional debilitation. In the later plays, particularly *The Bird Sanctuary* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, the experience of death is more transformative, signalling a significant and generally positive change in the survivors. While in all six plays experiences of death have elements of both trauma and transformation, those in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and *Mutabilitie* evince a balance of both. These categorisations are not to suggest that his early works have an overall grave tone or that his later works are exceptionally optimistic; rather, these categorisations relate specifically to the characters' responses to death.

The third argument is that there are often clearly discernable connections between the plays and the contexts of their first performances. As Aston and Savona (1991) suggest, "[t]heatre establishes its network of codified sign-systems by virtue of the cultural codes which govern behaviour, speech, dress, make-up, etc., in society at large" (p. 111). It follows, then, that an effective reading of these plays requires an understanding of the various codes McGuinness uses in them, such as, in the case of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Carthaginians* respectively, the codes employed by Northern Irish Unionists or Nationalists to reveal their particular allegiances. In the following chapters, this thesis will, to use Aston and Savona's phrase, "'read' the theatrical in terms of the social" (*ibid.*, p. 153). However, given the dynamic of the interaction between the world of the play and the real world, this thesis concentrates on the influence of the real world on the plays as opposed to the historical or political affect of the play in the real world.

The selection of drama is not merely an act of preference. Drama is the most dynamic of art forms, at times employing artistic and cultural codes that require all five senses, which allows for a wider breadth of reference than merely textual, visual, auditory or tactile art. The combinations of these codes are practically

unlimited, and each dramatic performance structures them in a unique way.² The audience understands information in the dramatic presentation through foreknowledge of these codes, which may be anything from the dramatic codes that classify genres to the cultural and linguistic codes of a particular locality in tandem with those that arise from the unique interactions that occur during each performance. This immediate multi-sensory involvement of the audience opens up dialogue between not only stage and audience, but also between individual audience members. This dialogue may allow a change of perspective in the audience, it might be met with indifference, or it might be met with protest as is particularly evident in plays with content that challenges accepted socio-cultural norms. This latter point is particularly clear in the case of *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by John Millington Synge, which met with protest and riots during its first performances, apparently due to its complex denial of patriarchal power coupled with a certain reference to women's undergarments (Morash 2002, pp. 130-8). The following study is an attempt to outline and analyse the various codes used by McGuinness to represent his characters' responses to the threat and reality of death. There are, however, certain limitations and difficulties within the following analysis. Aston and Savona (1991) suggest that the fact that no two performances are ever the same presents a peculiar difficulty for the student of theatre, one that students of poetry or other relatively static arts do not encounter (p. 108). The text of a play is a stable entity: barring accidents, the words one reads at one sitting, one reads at another. For the production team of a theatrical performance, the text may be a mere guideline. All members of the team can bring their respective interpretations and suggestions as to how to translate the text to the stage. Once the team has settled on a particular interpretation and completed rehearsals, each performance becomes subject to sometimes-subtle, sometimes-obvious accidents that may augment the interpretation. Given these possibilities, the text may be only a spectral presence within the performance. However, the element that provides a link between performance and text is the nature of their audience. Just as the spectator in the theatre is treated with a unique performance, so, too, may the reader be treated with a slightly augmented interpretation each time he or she reads the text. In other words, the interpretation of the audience is contingent on the varied conditions of

² For an in-depth discussion of dramatic representation see Manfred Pfister's *Theory and Analysis of Drama* (1988).

their viewing or reading and cannot be purely objective. The interpretations offered in this thesis are a case in point. Given this author's background in literary study, as opposed to theatrical practice, the plays are analysed primarily through the perspective of a reader. However, where applicable, this thesis refers to aspects of first performances based on critical commentary and / or recordings available at the Abbey Theatre Archives. Additionally, this author is a Canadian whose experience of Ireland is limited to a study of its literature and living there from late 2002 to 2005.

Two issues inspired the selection of the topic of this thesis: firstly, the prominence of representations of death in Irish culture and, secondly, the complexity of representing death. John Brannigan (1996), Barbara Brodman (1998) and Nina Witoszek (1988 and 1998) explore the pervasiveness of representations of death in Irish culture, relating the use of these representations to the formation and maintenance of Irish identity. They conclude that while these representations have their origins in ancient Irish myth and folklore, their persistence is due particularly to the history of colonialism and national struggle in Ireland that has lasted in various forms up to the present day. Indeed, the fall of the Gaelic Order in 1601 marked the death of Irish autonomy, and signified the English colonials' successful subjugation of Irish culture. Political and ideological expediency on the part of Nationalists in particular has often conflated the subsequent struggle for Irish autonomy into a roll call of martyrs, from Robert Emmet to Padraic Pearse, which created an ideology of sacrifice for the national cause that became the hallmark of the IRA (Kearney 1997, pp. 110-3). Equally relevant here, particularly in relation to *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, is the history of the Protestant colonisers who fought the Irish bid for autonomy, a fight that culminated in the partition of Ireland in the 1920s. As Witoszek acknowledges, Northern Irish Protestants have their own mythos of death and sacrifice that informs many of their contemporary representations of identity (1988, p. 41-45). An understanding of representations of death in the contexts of both Northern Ireland and the Republic, then, is an understanding of a vital and complex element of Irish identity.

According to Bronfen (1992) artistic representations of death, such as those explored in this thesis, are “aesthetically pleasing.” Of this element of pleasure, she ascertains the following:

Representations of death in art are so pleasing, it seems, because they occur in a realm clearly delineated as not life, or not real [...]. They delight because we are confronted with death, yet it is the death of the other. [...] Even as we are forced to acknowledge the ubiquitous presence of death in life, our belief in our own immortality is confirmed. [...] The aesthetic representation of death lets us repress our knowledge of the reality of death precisely because here death occurs *at* someone else’s body and *as* an image. (p. x; original emphasis)

The pleasure of representations of death emanates from their dual nature, which links them, on the one hand, to anxiety, and, on the other, to desire (*ibid.*, pp. x-xi). Viewers experience anxiety when the representation of death allows the acknowledgement of personal mortality and vulnerability, which is why the deaths of sympathetic heroes, for example, evoke such pathos. The desire for death, as Bronfen suggests in the quotation above, turns the representation of death into a confirmation of personal worth and strength in the face of mortality, which is why the deaths of villains, for example, are such triumphs. Anxiety or desire informs any given artistic representation of death. Particularly complex representations of death, such as the death of a sympathetic villain or a tragic hero, employ a combination of both. While the representations explored in this thesis vary in their connection with anxiety and desire, most are complex. This complexity blurs the lines of demarcation with respect to identity, which is a point this thesis elaborates through the examination of specific representations.

Death appears in the selected plays in a number of guises. There is murder, death in war, death by natural causes, death by supernatural causes and suicide. From the point of view of the characters, some of these deaths are unpredictable, some carefully orchestrated. A small number of characters die on stage, while, more commonly, characters report deaths that have occurred off stage. For the most part, the deaths are biological deaths, or non-reversible conditions wherein the body and mind cease to function. However, this thesis does not limit itself to such a literal

definition of death. In the case of the characters of *Carthaginians*, for example, death takes on a figurative dimension, being associated with the loss of a stable sense of identity in which the present self is no longer recognisable in light of its past. This dual position of death, as both literal and figurative, is summarised by Bronfen (1991) in the following: “Death is not just the end of organic existence, but also the removal of a social being from society” (p. 77). For the present purposes, this thesis broadly defines death as, on the one hand, biological death, which is the cessation of biological functioning, and, on the other, social death, which is the loss of a stable sense of identity that has been formed through the complex experiences of socio-cultural being. McGuinness’s plays do not address issues surrounding the complexity of biological death, such as when one can officially declare someone dead. As such, this thesis will not discuss these issues. The complexity of social death, however, is of particular importance to this thesis. This complexity arises from two factors: the first is the fact that, as mentioned, social death can occur before biological death; the second is that one’s social being can survive after the fact of biological death. The remainder of this thesis elaborates on this complexity.

The fact that this thesis concentrates on responses to the threat and reality of death requires some elaboration here. Regarding the reality of death, there is no understandable “reality” to death. Death, according to Hallam and Hockey (2001) is “a field of experience that cannot be ‘known’” (p. 23). As such, they suggest that the closest one can get to an experience of this unknown is through metaphor (*ibid.*, p. 23). A corpse, for example, provides physical evidence of the event of death, but no definite answers to its mysteries. As a metaphor, however, the corpse can have a profound affect upon the individual, evoking anxiety of personal mortality, feelings of triumph or indifference. In her elaboration of the term “abjection,” Julia Kristeva (2002) appraises the corpse as the “most sickening of wastes”:

[...] a border that has encroached upon everything.
[...] It is death infecting life. Abject. [...] Imaginary
uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends
up engulfing us. (pp. 230-231)

The abject, in Kristeva’s formulation, is not the corpse *per se*, it is not an object, but a physical or mental stigma attached to objects that set them outside the boundary

that defines the self. In other words, abjection occurs at the level of individual identity: the abject is an inseparable part of one's identity, being the rejected Otherness outside the border of the self, it is "quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (*ibid.*, p. 329). The corpse, in sum, metaphorically represents the limit of the self. While few corpses appear on stage in McGuinness's plays, when they do appear, they are disposed of or handled through ritual. The power of rituals associated with death lie in their prescribed meanings that can help survivors deal with the pain of bereavement. Such ritual handling of the corpse can alleviate its disturbing, abject power over the individual, and shift emphasis onto the personal, social or political meanings the dead have for the living. Through these meanings the identity of the dead live on in those who survive and remember them.

Sartre's examination of death in *Being and Nothingness* (1992) proves enlightening here. For him, death is outside of human determination: human will and freedom cannot cross the boundary that death represents. From the standpoint of the individual, subjectivity, which entails the ability to create meaning in life, ends with death. Yet, death does not "complete" our lives (Satre 1992, p. 689). This is because in death people become "prey for the living" (*ibid.*, p. 695). Life's subjectivity becomes an object for survivors; that is, after death, the meaning of an individual's life survives in the meanings attributed to that life by others:

The unique characteristic of a dead life is that it is a life of which the Other makes himself the guardian. This does not mean simply that the Other preserves the life of the 'deceased' by effecting an explicit, cognitive reconstruction of it. Quite the contrary, such a reconstruction is only one of the possible attitudes of the Other in relation to the dead life; consequently the character of a 'reconstructed life' (in the midst of the family through the memories of relatives, in the historic environment) is a particular destiny which is going to mark some lives to the exclusion of others. (*ibid.*, p. 692-3)³

In death, people become what can be termed "subjective objects" for survivors; that is, the meanings appropriated by an individual survivor for the dead are constituted

³ Sartre's employment of the term "Other" here refers to any person other than the self. Sartre's definition contrasts with the more specific definition of "Other" employed throughout the remainder of this thesis. See below for an elaboration of this definition, particularly in Chapter Two.

based on both the life of the now dead and the particular relationship the survivor had with the individual before he or she died. People form such relationships within a particular subjective standpoint that is filtered by ideological, social, political or other concerns. A relevant and very complex example is the dead of Bloody Sunday (on which there will be more comment in Chapter One) that have varying meanings for different individuals. Individuals who side with the cause of Catholic Republicans may view these dead as unjustly martyred to the cause of Catholic civil rights in Northern Ireland. Northern Irish Protestant Unionists, however, may view them as casualties of political insurgency.⁴ However, there is no guarantee of such distinction: a Protestant Unionist may view these deaths very similarly to a Catholic Republican and *vice versa*, or an individual may ascribe to neither view. The point here is that the dead can, and generally do, have subjective meanings that, being shaped by various affiliations and concerns, may differ from person to person. Yet, while the meaning attributed to the dead by those who survive them is in part subjective, and thereby incomplete, it is nonetheless, according to Sartre, an important “real dimension” of being (*ibid.*, p. 696). Moreover, these incomplete meanings, constructed by the memory work of survivors, are the only knowable dimension of the dead.

Hallam and Hockey suggest that survivors predicate this “memory work” on the desire “to secure in memory what is potentially dissolved in death” (2001, p. 25). The fulfilment of this desire requires the mobilisation of memories and materials that have metaphoric and metonymic associations with the dead. Thus, it is through these metaphors and metonymies that survivors maintain their link with the dead. For Maela in *Carthaginians*, the dress she lays on her daughter’s grave is a metonymy that suggests an image of her daughter as youthful and innocent, an image that was lost when her daughter died of cancer. For Michael in *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me*, the image of Spartan men combing each other’s hair metaphorically represents strength in the unity of masculinity and femininity, an image imparted to him by his father, who died not long after imparting it. For the Henrysons in *The Bird Sanctuary*, their house is a complex representation of the unity of the family, one that is fraught by the ghost of their oppression paternal

⁴ For a much fuller analysis of perspectives on Bloody Sunday, see Part II of Graham Dawson’s *Making Peace with the Past?: Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles* (2007, pp. 87-205), and Tom Herron and John Lynch’s *After Bloody Sunday: Representation, Ethics, Justice* (2007).

legacy. The construction of the posthumous identity of an individual through the memory work of survivors not only provides a sustained social life for the dead, but also reveals aspects of the identity of the survivors. Indeed, there is a constant and complex interchange between memory and identity in which one both shapes and is shaped by the other. Maela's actions show her to be tender, caring and motherly, but unable to accept the reality of her daughter's death. Michael embodies the image of the Spartans. To varying degrees, the Henrysons identify themselves by their memories of their father. Hallam and Hockey suggest that the connection formed between the living and the dead, as in the examples above, stress the possibility of continuity after death:

[...] metaphors of memory, which connect the intangible with the material, either convey notions of fixity and stability or they highlight process and transformation. At either end of this spectrum, however, metaphors of memory always allude at some level to continuity. (*ibid.*, p. 27)

For characters such as Maela and the Henrysons, memory sustains a disabling continuity with the dead. The plays suggest, however, the possibility of transformation. For these characters, continuity with the past must be "rewritten." Kiberd (1996) elaborates the process of rewriting the past:

If the past were to be exactly repeated in detail, it would smother the present [...] Indeed, to remember anything at all one must first learn how to forget it; for it is that temporary forgetfulness which gives memory the excitement of surprise, the force of revelation. [...] Since absolute forgetting is as impossible as total recall, the need is to bring elements of the past into contact with the present in a dynamic constellation. [...] [This] *translation* [...] is neither a break with the past nor an abject repetition of it, but a rewriting. (p. 629; original emphasis)

Through their memories of the dead, McGuinness's characters engage with both their past and their present circumstances. While many are caught in a static relationship with the past, with the traumatic elements of the past being central to their relationship with the dead, through their interactions with one another, the characters take steps toward actively rewriting their relationship with the past in

order to transform the present. This rewriting variously requires incorporation of significant elements of the past, as in Michael's case, or rejection of them, as is the cases for Maela and the Henrysons.

The characters' rewriting of memories carries a particular semantic weight given that many of them connect to collective cultural memory. Certain deaths, such as those of the Republicans in the struggle for Irish independence or of Northern Irish in World War I for example, have distinct places in historical memory in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively. In these cases, historical memory encodes death with politics: the dead are not merely individuals but representatives of a collective standpoint that privileges collective or state interests over individual concerns. This act of political encoding is a common response to mass death, as Hallam and Hockey (2001) posit:

The tensions between what is regarded as historical actuality and its subsequent representation in collective memories are politically fraught, especially when these memories involve death—a seemingly indisputable fact. The politics of denial and manipulation that unfold around mass death, and indeed, the multi-faceted dimensions of personal loss, which [...] often involve a recovery of the dead as social (if not physically present) agents, open memories of death and the dead to retrospective reconstruction. (p. 24)

This “retrospective reconstruction” of the dead is central to the arguments of this thesis. McGuinness's characters reveal their socio-political positions through their negotiations of their memories of the dead. Often these negotiations involve an attempt to “translate” these memories into a constructive constellation with the present. As a result, the characters come to understand identity not in a narrowly reductive way, but through an inclusive awareness and acceptance of difference.

While death has a direct relation to identity, Irish representations of death, such as those present in the selected plays, do not, as Witoszek contends (1988, p. 24), provide clear-cut answers to the question of Irish identity. While they give access to an important aspect of Irish identity, it is but one aspect among many. Furthermore, a particularly salient point is that, as Goodwin and Bronfen (1993) suggest,

representations of death are “sites of paradox” that complicate conceptions of identity (p. 4). For example, as its most obvious representation, the final boundary or end of life, death can be viewed as either rendering all of an individual life’s meanings null and void, or as allocating onto even the most menial event in life a supreme importance. Such a paradox exists because no one can know death. It leaves behind no defining evidence: as discussed above, what one observes in a corpse, for example, is not death *per se*, but a representation of death full of its own perhaps paradoxical associations. Death is a signified whose only signifier is intangible absence (*ibid.*, p. 7). Death’s disturbing power lies not only in this intangibility, but also in the fact that it can occur unexpectedly. This disturbing, unpredictable power makes death a source of great anxiety.

This anxiety is central to McGuinness’s characters’ response to the threat of death. The threat aims at the physical body, at the staples of identity, or at both. Such threats bring about two types of response. One is a visceral response in which the individual attempts to physically escape, subdue or kill the source of the threat. The other type entails a mobilisation of personal and cultural symbols that help the individual deal with the anxiety of the threat through identification with personal and cultural meanings. Sometimes the mobilisation of symbols bolsters the individual’s resolve, allowing him or her, on some level, to accept the possibility of death and, thus, escape or face the source of the threat more effectively. The soldiers in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, for example, resolve to fight in the war based on their loyalty to their homeland, for which they willingly put themselves in the line of fire.

Barring an immediate threat of death, however, individuals do not often resolve themselves to its possibility. As Becker examines in detail in *The Denial of Death* (1997), there is a paradoxical relationship between an individual’s propensity to accept the possibility of death and to deny this possibility in the normal functioning of everyday life. This paradoxical relationship is based on the dual nature of humanity as both a mortal, physical being and a symbolic being. It is in the realm of the symbolic that people create conceptions of identity. Because humans are social beings, collective symbolic activity gives rise to constructions of collective identity, to communities and cultures. These symbolic constructions give people a sense of

importance and meaning that allows them to live, for the most part, without anxiety about their mortality. Becker writes,

[...] man is not just a blind glob of idling protoplasm, but a creature with a name who lives in a world of symbols and dreams and not merely matter. His sense of self-worth is constituted symbolically, his cherished narcissism feeds on symbols, on an abstract idea of his own worth, an idea composed of sounds, words, and images, in the air, in the mind, on paper. And this means that man's natural yearning for organismic activity, the pleasures of incorporation and expansion, can be fed limitlessly in the domain of symbols and so into immortality. (1997, p. 3)

Yet, despite the relevance and power of this symbolic immortality, of identity, culture and the like, no matter how much it is denied, death does not go away. All people face death, whether through their own or by proxy. However, there is another paradox here: while death's unavoidable reality can expose the frailty of symbolic constructions of immortality, it can also expose its necessity. In other words, although symbolic immortality is illusory, it is, as Becker maintains, a "vital lie" that allows people to live without paralysing anxiety (1997, p. 51 and *passim*). In light of this fact, death is a prime force behind humanity's constitution and adherence to constructs of identity.

Indeed, Goodwin and Bronfen (1993) point out that "[c]ulture itself [is] an attempt both to represent death and to contain it, to make it comprehensible and thereby to diffuse some of its power" (p. 4). Culture both contains death and makes it comprehensible through the construction of beliefs in higher powers, through rituals, laws and so on. These constructions generally relegate death as an "Other" against which a culture's definitions of identity gain meaning. Particularly in violent conflict, such as that which provides the contexts of many of McGuinness's plays, a culture's enemy can become that which it defines itself against, its Other. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, a culture must contain and control its enemy, as it attempts to do with death, often resorting to simplistic, even stereotypical constructions of identity, in order to maintain the sovereignty of its own unique vital lie.

There is, however, serious difficulty with the apparent necessity of simplistic, stereotypical constructions of identity. Such constructions are generally oversimplifications that threaten to overshadow not only the complexity of individual identity, but also the simple fact of shared humanity. The dehumanisation that is resultant of stereotyping allows for the justification of violence and murder. McGuinness's characters often take issue with this fatal difficulty with simplistic constructions of identity. They view these constructions as being the cause of difficulty, not only to themselves, but also to their society in general. As such, the openly gay character Dido in *Carthaginians*, for example, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter One, separates himself from the limited scope of identity dictated by religious and political allegiance.

McGuinness's biographical details reveal a possible source for his emphasis in these plays on an inclusive understanding of identity. He was born in 1953 in Buncrana, a small town in County Donegal near the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Donegal is one of the nine counties that comprise the province of Ulster. After the partition of Ireland in 1920, the predominantly Catholic and Nationalist Donegal, along with the demographically similar Cavan and Monaghan, joined the Republic of Ireland while the remaining counties of Ulster became Northern Ireland wherein the demographic majority was Protestant and Unionist. McGuinness was in his teens when the conflict known widely as "the Troubles" erupted in Northern Ireland. This conflict was sectarian in nature and split the community of Northern Ireland along lines of political and religious affiliation. Scenes of destruction, violence and death became a relative commonplace.⁵ Growing up as a homosexual in such a complex and turbulent socio-cultural environment undoubtedly shaped McGuinness's sense of the complexity of borders of identity, as he admits himself: "There seem to be a lot of borders in my background, and that gives me a particular awareness of division" (O'Toole 1985b, n. p.).

The divisive issue of homosexuality is a very important one in examining McGuinness's plays. For instance, Dido's choice of separation from religious and

⁵ For much more detail regarding the Troubles see Thomas Hennessey's *Northern Ireland: The Origins of the Troubles* (2005). See also Martin Melaugh's "Conflict Archive on the Internet" (CAIN) (2008).

political norms is, in part, consequent of his status as a homosexual. Stambolian and Marks (1979) suggest that homosexuality is inherently “transgressive”:

Homosexuality tends to move across lines of demarcation. Because it perpetually questions the social order and is always in question itself, homosexuality is other. (p. 26)

While they were writing in the midst of the Gay Rights movement, Stambolian and Marks hit upon a significant issue that remains relevant today. From the perspective of the heterosexual “norm,” which has been traditionally viewed as the primary source, protector and beneficiary of the social order, homosexuality is a threatening Otherness. Yet, the nature of its threat, and how precisely it questions the social order, is unclear. The threat of an Other always seems to stem from a threat of death (biological and / or social). People who align homosexuality with death base their views on simplistic constructions of identity. A particularly poignant example, provided by Dollimore (1998), is the commentary of Rupert Haselden, a professed homosexual, on the promiscuous behaviour of certain homosexuals since the outbreak of AIDS:

There is an inbuilt fatalism to being gay. Biologically maladaptive, unable to reproduce, our futures are limited to individual existence and what the individual makes of it. Without the continuity of children we are self-destructive, living for today because we have no tomorrow. (p. 295)

Haselden gives special prestige to the fact of procreation, and thereby imputes a condemnation of the homosexual lifestyle wherein procreation is denied, replaced, he suggests, by a self-destructive promiscuousness. However, as is argued in Chapter Three, following Watson (1994), procreation is not the exclusive meaningful centre of human life; for example, human beings can find fulfilling meanings in creative artistic, scientific and social endeavours. Furthermore, homosexuals are not sterile just because they prefer same-sex partners; sperm donation and surrogate parenthood are not unknown in the gay community. Homosexual relationships are also not always promiscuous. For one, McGuinness has admitted that his relationship with his partner has lasted since the late 1970s

(Jackson 2002, n. p.). Moreover, homosexuals, like heterosexuals, can experience and express profound feelings through sexual activity.⁶ Dollimore interprets Haselden's remarks as suggesting that, in failing to procreate and resorting to promiscuity, "they [homosexuals] exemplify a general futility of existence, reminding others of their own mortality" (1998, p. 295). Is this reminder the source of homosexuality's threat to the social order? Whether denied, in Becker's sense, or not, death is an inevitable part of everyone's life. As such, an awareness of death's possibility can be healthy, given that such awareness helps individuals make choices that do not endanger life. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly how homosexuality might cause an individual to view mortality in a particularly negative way. Perhaps the homosexual, like Kristeva's corpse, is an abject image against which the heterosexual can define his or her sense of identity. With the spectre of AIDS hovering over the practice of male homosexuality, the connection between the gay body and the corpse has been all too often realised as both a symbol of mortality and a source of contagion. Yet, whatever the syntagmatic power of such images, one should not paradigmatically equate homosexuality with death. Such an equation dehumanises homosexuals, diminishes their rights and leaves them open to attacks, physical or otherwise, from narrowly conservative-minded individuals or organisations. Unfortunately, such dehumanisation persists.

It is possible to relate homosexuality's connection with death to the more general connection between sexuality and death that George Bataille examines in his *Sensuality and Death: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (1977). Sexuality arises against, and yet is invigorated by, the fact of mortality. Sexuality and death, then, are both imminent within and exclusive of one another. Reproduction, as an end of sexuality, is seemingly a force against death, yet, as Bataille phrases it, "[r]eproduction implies the existence of *discontinuous* beings" (p. 12; original emphasis). The urge toward sexuality, then, is an urge toward continuity in the face of discontinuity, or death. In his discussion of the term "eroticism," he elucidates the relationship between sexual excitement and reproduction: "while [there is] mutual independence of erotic pleasure and reproduction as an end, the fundamental meaning of reproduction is none the less the key to eroticism" (1977, p. 12). The

⁶ For varying views on homosexuality and its socio-cultural meanings, see John Corvino's *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science, and Culture of Homosexuality* (1997).

spectre of reproduction always haunts sexuality, whether consummated in the form of a child or not. The crux lies in the fact that life inevitably leads to death. However, paradoxically, death is seemingly the main source of the impulse towards life. As such, sex and death are intimately related. This intimate link, Bataille suggests, is what makes the sight or thought of death spur the impulse towards sexual excitement:

[...] there does remain a connection between death and sexual excitement. The sight or thought of murder can give rise to a desire for sexual enjoyment, to the neurotic at any rate. We cannot just pretend that a state of neurosis is the cause of this connection. [...] This truth extends far beyond the confines of vice; I believe that it may even be the basis of our images of life and death. (*ibid.*, p. 11-12)

The suggestion is that the connection between sex and death is somehow innate, operating on a primal level. Becker (1997) offers an interpretation of this primal connection:

Animals who procreate, die. Their relatively short life span is somehow connected to their procreation. Nature conquers death not by creating eternal organisms but by making it possible for ephemeral ones to procreate. (p. 163)

The difficulty that lies in this primal connection, however, is the position of the individual. Procreative continuity does not erase the fact of individual death: reproduction focuses its promise of immortality in the species; the individual survives only in traces of memories and genetic material. Becker succinctly summarises this difficulty in the following phrase: “Sex is of the body, and the body is of death” (*ibid.*, p. 162). The spectre of death, then, like reproduction, always haunts sexuality.

The basic physical make up of the body seems to point toward this fact, as Bataille points out:

The horror we feel at the thought of a corpse is akin to the feeling we have at human excreta. What makes

this association more compelling is our similar disgust at aspects of sensuality we call obscene. The sexual channels are also the body's sewers; we think of them as shameful and connect the anal orifice with them. (1977, p. 57)

The penis is the site of the disposal of urine, and the vagina is the site of the disposal of urine and menstrual blood. Thus, the paradox of heterosexual sex, that it involves joy and creation within sites of disposal. While this association with "the body's sewers" implicates all sexuality, male homosexuality's association with anal sex in particular is undoubtedly one of strongest criteria in its connection with death. Becker argues that the anus and feces represent "not only physical determinism and boundness, but the fate as well of all that is physical: decay and death" (1997, p. 31). Anal sex is damned because it is essentially uncreative joy within a site of disposal. Lesbian sex also suffers a similar stigma due to the taboo of menstrual blood, which Bataille argues, is associated with "internal violence" and the "degradation" of sexual activity (1977, p. 54). It seems that the essence of the connection between homosexuality and death is the failure of the procreative imperative, and the transgression of what some believe is the "natural order." This failure tends to blur the understanding that there are myriad creative possibilities in life.

Bakhtin (1968) identifies the juxtaposition between disposal and creativity, of death and sexuality as being part of the carnivalesque. Carnival⁷ is a traditionally festive mode that manifests parody, role reversals and a vast assortment of degradation, mockery and grotesquery. According to Bakhtin, it is "the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal [that] celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (1968, p. 10). Within the carnivalesque, the prohibitions on the body maintained by the established order dissolve. As such, he suggests that, in the festive mode, "images of feces and urine are ambivalent, as are all the images of the material bodily lower stratum":

[...] they debase, destroy, regenerate, and renew simultaneously. They are blessing and humiliating at the same time. Death and death throes, labor[sic], and childbirth are intimately interwoven. (*ibid.*, p. 151)

⁷ This thesis will use the term "carnavalesque" to designate aspects of the plays that fit within the rubric of "carnival" as defined by Bakhtin.

While the established order places the functions of the body within the rubric of degradation, linking them with death, Bakhtin shows how embracing degradation within the carnivalesque, that is, embracing the body and its various functions, not only liberates, but also brings about regeneration and renewal:

Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of non-existence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. (*ibid.*, p. 151)

Bakhtin links the ambivalence of images of degradation and grotesquery to the laughter that permeates the carnivalesque (*ibid.*, p.151). This laughter, he argues, shares the ambiguity and complexity of these images:

It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated 'comic' event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. (*ibid.*, pp. 11-12)

In McGuinness's plays, the laughter so often shared by the characters has this ambivalent quality. The challenge that the carnivalesque aims at the official order is also ambivalent. Change may take place immediately, long after, or not at all. It is important to view the carnivalesque, then, not as an immediate reagent for social change, but as a catalyst with varying efficacy. Nevertheless, for McGuinness's homosexual characters, who all experience some type of discrimination, embracing the ambivalence of their degraded social position helps them to realise new perspectives and new ways of seeing that counteract the prejudice of the established order.

The carnivalesque applies, in one way or another, to each of McGuinness's plays explored in this thesis. His protagonists embrace ambivalence in order to work toward their own kind of clarity: they attack and push away in order to heal and bring closer, and they align with death in order to discover life. Many of his protagonists are homosexual, bi-sexual, or, as is the case of Rima in *Dolly West's Kitchen*, an outspoken heterosexual female. All, in one way or another, resist the power of the established order that connects homosexuality with death alone. This resistance comes with their demonstration of the redemptive possibilities of accepting a variety of sexualities. The case of *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* is somewhat exceptional, given that homosexuality is not as explicit as it is in McGuinness's other plays. However, in this play, as in his other plays, the acceptance of love between two members of the same sex represents the possibility of integration, regeneration, renewal and redemption through the acceptance of a broad definition of identity.

Although homosexuality is not an overt issue in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, there is a development throughout his dramaturgy of his representations of homosexual characters, which more or less coincides with his openness in the media regarding his own homosexuality. He admits as much in an interview with Joe Jackson in 2002:

I did declare myself [as a homosexual], but not in print. And I do believe that in my plays of the Nineties particularly *The Bird Sanctuary* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* my homosexuality is more clear than ever before. Though in the earlier plays it definitely is more coded. And often the key issue. Whereas in the later work it's just another part of the play. (Jackson 2002, n. p.)

There is a strong variance between the presentation of homosexuality in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and that in *Dolly West's Kitchen*. This variance is due in great part to the social, cultural and economic changes that occurred in the years that separate the two plays. These changes have allowed McGuinness the licence to advocate the acceptance of an increasingly liberal perspective on identity.

Early in his career as a dramatist, McGuinness commented on what he saw as the narrow breadth of representation espoused by the Field Day Theatre Company.⁸ While Field Day ostensibly attempted to interrogate the complexity of Irish identity in the 1980s and '90s, McGuinness viewed their project as having a particular focus that neglected many other significant issues:

I'm a bit worried about the neglect of diversities other than the Catholic-Protestant/Nationalist-Unionist ones in Field Day: the diversities between the needs of men and the needs of women, between the needs not simply of rich and poor, but within the middle class, and of the homosexual and the heterosexual. (Fitzgerald 1985, p. 65)

McGuinness works deal with many of the neglected diversities he mentions here. His characters wrestle with issues of not only national identity, but also filial, gender and sexual identity in a bid to encourage or achieve a wider and more complex understanding of identity that, for the most part, avoids the dehumanisation of simplistic constructions of Otherness.

It is clear that McGuinness gives attention to a diversity of identity concerns in his plays. One of the most prevalent of these concerns is that relating to nationality and the relationship between Ireland and England, to which concerns of a filial, gender or sexual nature often correspond. Given this prevalence, the following consideration uses the framework of postcolonial theory as expounded by Declan Kiberd in his *Inventing Ireland* (1995) and by Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins in their *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (1996). These theorists examine the often radical changes effected by colonialism on native cultures. Although there has been much debate regarding Ireland's status as a post-colonial nation, Cleary (2007) suggests that post-colonial theory is applicable to Ireland:

The postcolonialist perspective [...] suspends the notion that geography, economy and culture are all neatly homologous with each other, and attempts to

⁸ For details on the varying successes and failures of the Field Day Theatre Company, see Marilyn Richterik's *Acting Between the Lines: the Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics, 1980-1984* (1994) and Carmen Szabo's "Clearing the Ground": *the Field Day Theatre Company and the Construction of Irish Identities* (2007).

investigate the discrepant ways in which Irish political and cultural life, which were obviously shaped and textured by wider European developments, were at the same time overdetermined by the country's dependent socio-economic composition. Contrary to what its critics would claim, then, postcolonial studies is neither misplaced nor out of place in Irish circumstances. (p. 26)

Indeed, the existence of two distinct political states on the island of Ireland is a product of its history of colonialism. Given that McGuinness's works show the necessity of coming to terms with Ireland's political duality and its relationship with England, one can view his works as post-colonial. Furthermore, post-colonial theory's emphasis on the hybridity of cultures and on discourses that official history has excluded seems to have particular relevance to McGuinness's works. There is a caveat to this analysis, however: a post-colonial reading of McGuinness plays should not focus merely on the bilateral relationship between Ireland and England, but must also be attentive to the complex of relationships between the Republic, Northern Ireland and England. A post-colonial reading is able to accommodate the complexity of these relationships, as Gilbert and Tompkins suggest:

Not a naïve teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism, post-colonialism is, rather, an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies. Colonisation is insidious: it invades far more than political chambers and extends well beyond independence celebrations. Its effects shape language, education, religion, artistic sensibilities, and, increasingly, popular culture. A theory of post-colonialism must, then, respond to more than the merely chronological construction of post-independence, and to more than just the discursive experience of imperialism. (1996, p. 2)

The agenda of post-colonialism, they assert, is to "dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power" (*ibid.*, p. 3). McGuinness's plays are post-colonial in that they confront the issues of unequal power that communities propagate in constructions of identity. Kiberd suggests that "[p]ost-colonial writing [...] is initiated when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance" (1995, p. 6). McGuinness's resistance is aimed at

simplistic, status quo formulations of identity that have caused so much harm within Ireland. As such, he attempts to reformulate the relationships between the Republic, Northern Ireland and England, which, to varying degrees, have maintained the taint of colonialism, and shows how through mutual understanding they might accept their individual differences and find a lasting peace.

Both *Inventing Ireland* and *Post-colonial Drama* argue that one of the tenets of colonial projects is to propagate the particular culture of the coloniser's home country to the detriment of the culture of the colonised. The result of colonialism, however, is that the colonised and colonists often mix culturally. As such, denizens of former colonies find in themselves a complex blend of their native culture and the colonists' culture, which is a realisation that receives an equally complex response that ranges from acceptance to repulsion. According to Gilbert and Tompkins, one of the primary modes of expression of culture and identity is ritual. Rituals are acts of affirmation. To display allegiance to certain beliefs, whether cultural, religious or otherwise, individuals enact rituals. Rituals are important to a community for two main reasons: firstly, they are "acts that are performed for the continuance and regeneration of a specific community often at a particular time, usually through a spiritual dimension"; and, secondly, they are "acts that are based in history and work to preserve history but which are not necessarily impervious to change" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, p. 58). Although Gilbert and Tompkins focus their attention on colonised people's use of ritual, one should note that rituals serve an equally important role for colonisers, being a powerful mode through which they can propagate their beliefs amongst the colonised. While McGuinness's plays seem to stress an over all acceptance of the complexity of identity within the contexts of both Northern Ireland and the Republic, his characters are often unable to accept the malleability and hybridity of their identities. Such recognition often challenges the very basis of their communities' definitions of themselves, which, for some of these characters, shatters the very meaning of their lives. Thus, certain characters resort to rituals in an attempt to affirm their history, their identity, their meaningful centre. As such, the plays present a challenge not only to those who advocate stereotypical constructions of identity, but also to those who would altogether dismiss stereotypes.

In Chapter One of this thesis, *Observe the Sons of Ulster* is considered alongside *Carthaginians* in an examination of the connection between community involvement and death. The chapter begins by examining ideas of community, heroism and sacrifice put forth by Becker (1997) in conjunction with the term “altruistic suicide” elucidated by Durkheim (1997). The analysis of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* focuses on why the protagonist, Pyper, enters the war with a death wish and why his seven comrades fought for their community in the war despite the high likelihood of death. The chapter will also analyse how both Pyper’s wartime relationship with his comrades and their subsequent deaths affect his attitude towards his community and his life. Turning to *Carthaginians*, the thesis will examine Witoszek (1988) and Ó Súillabháin’s (1967) theories of the traditional Irish wake and how the play may be read as a “wake drama” that employs both explicitly and implicitly the form and function of the traditional Irish wake. The focus will be the characters’ various pastimes, games, stories, jokes, a play and so on, and how they serve to help them develop a sense of community that ultimately allows them to come to terms with not only their personal difficulties, but also the communal trauma of Bloody Sunday.

Chapter Two pairs *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me* with *Mutabilitie* and analyses how their characters’ constructions of Otherness relate to death. This chapter opens by examining the theories of Otherness in the relationship between Ireland and England put forth by Kiberd (1995), and the theories of the connection between Otherness and death examined by Goodwin and Bronfen (1993). In its consideration of *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me*, the chapter concentrates on how the characters’ constructions of Otherness are effected and affected by the constant threat of possible torture and death, and how these constructions both help them to deal with the trauma of their circumstances, and hinder their ability to get to know one another. *Mutabilitie* dramatises the confluence of the Irish and English in Ireland during the last days of Edmund Spenser’s stay there in 1598. The chapter considers why both the English and the Irish construct one another as Other in an effort to justify their respective plots against each other. The chapter concludes by considering how the realisation of a shared humanity simultaneously breaks down the often-detrimental structures of Otherness and allows for recognition of the complexity of individual identity.

The Bird Sanctuary and *Dolly West's Kitchen* are the focus of Chapter Three, which considers how the characters of these plays are haunted by dead father figures. The plays each present a family living in a big house that are facing the prospect and reality of disintegration. *The Bird Sanctuary* portrays the Henryson family as they deal with the difficulties that are tearing their family apart. The chapter investigates how these difficulties are sourced in the inhibiting legacy of the dead patriarch, and how the protagonist Eleanor uses murder and destructive language to create new possibilities and perspectives for her family. *Dolly West's Kitchen* focuses on the West family during World War II as they struggle against the physical and emotional neutrality that is causing them profound unhappiness. The chapter analyses how the family are caught in their condition of neutrality as a result of the crippling legacy of their dead patriarch, and how the family matriarch, Rima, brings her children and their lovers to a healthier, wider perspective of identity that allows them the possibility of happiness beyond the confines of a safe, neutral home.

While each chapter will examine how the content of the plays engages with issues that are particularly relevant to the contexts of their first professional productions, beyond the specificity of these contexts, it is clear that McGuinness's plays explore themes of universal importance. Death is perhaps the most universal theme of all. But, while death is ubiquitous in these plays, it does not have final dominion over his characters. Their struggle against the sometimes overwhelming power of death is one that finally connects them, if only tenuously, with life.

Chapter One:
Death and Community: Ghosts and Rituals in
Observe the Sons of Ulster and *Carthaginians*

The following chapter will concentrate on how the connection between community involvement and death is represented in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Carthaginians*. To elucidate this connection, the chapter will begin with a general exploration of community involvement and how it is manifested in the two Northern Irish communities explored in these plays. This exploration will relate community involvement specifically to mortality and the paradoxes of such a relation, giving particular attention to the theories of Becker in his *The Denial of Death* (1997) and Durkheim in his 1897 study *Suicide* (1997). The contexts in which the plays were first presented will also be summarised. In light of these contexts, an effective reading strategy is in post-colonial theory, as defined by Gilbert and Tompkins (1996). One can view these two plays within the post-colonial framework because they formulate resistance to the power structures originally formulated under colonialism that persist in the two prominent communities of Northern Ireland. Gilbert and Tompkins's theories are useful also in outlining the use of ritual and carnival in the post-colonial contexts represented in the two plays. In addition, the chapter will conduct an examination of the functions of both mourning and ghosts. Finally, before turning to the plays themselves, this chapter will investigate the functions of naming and silence within the two communities.

As for the plays themselves, both deal with death primarily as a traumatic experience. Death touches each of the characters in a negative way, leaving them emotionally, if not physically, scarred. Their respective experiences of death affect them profoundly, challenging their very conceptions of identity. The following examination of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* will concentrate on the concept of identity as portrayed in each of the play's four parts. It will detail how the central character Pyper changes from a confrontational homosexual with a death wish and a grudge against his community to a strong supporter and leader of that community. This examination will be accomplished through a consideration of the relationships he builds with the other characters in the play and an exploration of why his ghosts physically appear on stage at the beginning of the play. Particular attention will be

given to how the other characters' relationship with their community, its history and its mythology becomes central to Pyper's relationship to this community, which is not merely the British Empire, for whom they ostensibly fight in the war, but most specifically Protestant Ulster. The examination of *Carthaginians* will focus on the characters' mourning of both their various personal losses and the collective loss of Bloody Sunday, January 30th, 1972, when British soldiers fired upon a group of peace marchers in Derry, killing thirteen⁹ (Coakley and Gallagher 2005, p. 414). This chapter examines the play as an "elegy to the dead and the living of Derry" (McGuinness 1996, p. xi). Focusing on how the characters are in their own ways rendered silent by both their personal and collective traumas, the chapter will show how, by using elements of the traditional Irish wake, the characters learn to speak again by facing the truth of the past through sometimes humorous, sometimes painful revelations.

This chapter pairs these two plays because, despite their concentrations on separate communities, they share very similar conceptions of the power of community involvement. To understand the motivation behind community involvement and its connection with death in the two plays, it is useful to look at this connection in general terms. Although they may begin as such, communities are not merely random collectives. The basis of any community is that its members share some commonality, in, for example, methods of survival, beliefs, economic status, political allegiance and cultural practice. The two communities represented in these plays, of Northern Irish Protestant Unionists in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and Northern Irish Catholic Nationalists in *Carthaginians*, focus their internal bonds on religion and political status in relation to the Republic and England. Northern Irish Protestant Unionists strive to maintain the political, economic and cultural link with Britain. Their loyalty, however, is not always exclusively to Britain. For many Unionists, like McGuinness's sons of Ulster, their primary loyalty is to Northern Irish Protestants who make up a small majority of Northern Ireland's population; and their loyalty to Britain is conditional rather than clear-cut (McGuire 2006, pp. 5-6). Nationalists, on the other hand, desire an autonomous, united Ireland free of direct British rule, and, as such, they view themselves as primarily Irish.

⁹ While the play nominates the thirteen marchers who died on site during the tragedy, another marcher died later in hospital because of his injuries (Coakley 2005, p. 414).

Nationalists are, for the most part, loyal to Catholics, who hold a strong majority among the population of the Republic of Ireland, and are continually growing in number in Northern Ireland (*ibid.*, p. 6). Additionally, the Catholic Church has held a prominent position in Nationalist politics, holding a “special position” in the Republic of Ireland’s constitution until 1972 (Department of the Taoiseach 2004).

Taking part in their respective community supplies individuals from both with a foundation of meaning from which, and in which, they can live their lives with purpose. In the context of their community, death does not have the same power as it does in their lives outside of it: while the individual may tremble and cower in the face of death, through its rituals, beliefs and organizational systems, the collective conscience of the community is able to obviate, to some degree, the threat and reality of death. At the same time, being part of a community can be stifling, even threatening, as it is initially for the younger Pyper or generally for the characters of *Carthaginians*, as it can cause the erasure of individual identity. Generally, a community’s stability depends on adherence, sometimes quite strict, to codes, rules and beliefs, which establish and maintain the communal bond between its individuals. These codes, rules and beliefs are often sustained by traditions that are founded in an actual or deliberately skewed historical precedent. Eric Hobsbaum argues in his introduction to *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) that most traditions, even those based on actual historical precedent, have deliberately invented elements:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (p. 1)

For example, the ethno-religious nationalism that has permeated Catholic Nationalism and Protestant Unionism since Ireland’s bid for Home Rule and the subsequent political partition of the island ignores the fact that Ireland has had, even in its earliest history, a varied cultural landscape (Kearney 2007, p. 35; Foster 1992, pp. 1-43). However ignoble they may be, the traditions that inform constructs like ethno-religious nationalism help to maintain a sense of identity and solidarity

amongst the communities that sustain them. People may invent their traditions, and their communities may be, to use the term elaborated by Benedict Anderson (1991), “imagined,” but they are nonetheless powerful constructs.

The position of the individual in the community is sometimes quite ambiguous. For Becker (1997), the individual strives toward heroism (p. 1, *passim*). All human activity, he contends, aims toward a heroic transcendence of mere mortal creatureliness, which one achieves through personal heroic action or receives vicariously through attachment to heroic figures. Thus, people who of themselves are unable to live up to their own heroic images strive to be part of a collective that provides this much-needed illusion of transcendence. However, despite its illusory stability, the meaning of the community, and ultimately its perpetuation, tends to overshadow the worth of its individual members. To honour the name of the community, people sacrifice themselves every instant to its power and preservation. “Man will lay down his life,” Becker writes, “for his country, his society, his family. [. . .] But he has to feel and believe that what he is doing is truly heroic, timeless, and supremely meaningful” (1997, p. 6). This sacrifice is most telling in armed conflicts and wars, such as those that serve as the background of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Carthaginians*. Durkheim in his study *Suicide*, which appeared only seventeen years before World War I, distinguishes self-sacrifice for one’s country or community in war as a type of “altruistic suicide” that results when the individual is too strongly integrated into his community (1997, p. 217).¹⁰ As merely parts of what they view as an all-important collective, people experience “insufficient individuation” in a worldview that allows them to, ultimately, give their lives, with profound altruistic intention, to its transcendent power (*ibid.*, p. 217). The community generally views this individual sacrifice as representing their values, or, as Becker formulates, the “community gets more life by means of the victim’s death” (1997, p. 138), and accepts it at best with honour, ceremony and ritual that helps assuage the reality of death and push it from the minds of the survivors. Therefore, we have one of the paradoxes of community involvement: its ability to both save the individual from the anxiety of a meaningless, arbitrary death, and lead him or her with its myriad promises of greatness, remembrance, and immortality, straight into the grave.

¹⁰ See especially Book 2, Chapter 4, which deals specifically with altruistic suicide.

The legacy of Padraic Pearse is a particularly relevant one in this context. This legacy is concerned primarily with the blood sacrifice he made for his Republican ideals. Pearse led the 1916 rebels into the General Post Office on Easter Monday where they declared the Irish Republic and staged a poorly organised, yet highly symbolic, military operation. His subsequent execution helped secure him in Irish history as an indubitable martyr for the cause of Irish independence from England, which Ireland achieved, with significant concessions, six years after his death in 1916 (Moran 1994, p.1; Foster 1992, pp. 193-211). What is most remarkable about Pearse, for the context of this thesis, is that he had internalised the cause of his community: as Böss (2000) suggests, Pearse saw “personal and national history as part of the same ascent towards realizing an authentic essence” (p. 274). Indeed, his poem “Mise Éire,” which translates to “I am Ireland” (Pearse 1993, pp. 46-7), testifies to the coalescence of self and nation within Pearse’s philosophy. Böss reads Pearse’s staunch militant nationalism as being related to the fact that, during childhood, he had felt alienated from his English father and became very close to his Irish mother, the result of which is that he viewed his “original (national) selfhood [as] corrupted by the presence of a foreign (‘English’) substance in its ‘blood’” (2000, p. 274). In this light, his desire for death was one way to resolve the inner turmoil consequent not only of his mixed blood, but also of his latent homosexuality (*ibid.*, pp. 284-7).¹¹ Thus, dying for Ireland is for Pearse “a cleansing and a sanctifying thing” that can arrest both personal and national turmoil. The national community was Pearse’s centre of meaning. Only through his dedication unto death, his altruistic suicide, for that community does he attain his desired end, a renewal through sacrifice. Pearse’s personal erasure in death attained him immortality amongst his community, both as a historic and a symbolic figure who represented paradoxical triumph through death.

Pearse’s triumph was a Republican triumph. McGuinness, who admits that he grew up with the mythology of the 1916 Easter Rising as a triumphant event, said that the sacrifice of the Unionist population in Northern Ireland at the Battle of the Somme on July 1, 1916, “has as effectively shaped our destinies as anything that happened

¹¹ For a related psychological reading of Pearse see Seán Ferrell Moran’s *Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption: The Mind of the Easter Rising, 1916* (1994, pp. 15-21 and *passim*).

on Easter Sunday” (Hunter 1985, n. p.). Presenting such a powerful counter to the Republican myth of 1916 at the Republic’s National Theatre was not merely an act of artistic bravado, but a poignant reflection of the exigencies of the time.

McGuinness’s sons of Ulster merge their personal and community identities, though perhaps neither to the same degree nor so explicitly as Pearse, in their willingness to enter the war for the sake of their community. Throughout the play, however, McGuinness complicates this simple correlation between sacrifice and community as the characters attempt to understand their relationships with each other and with their community. He presents a similar view in *Carthaginians*, where the characters do not accept an unquestioning, proactive role in their community’s conflict. Regardless of the validity of their community’s traditions or the stability they may afford most individuals, the characters of *Carthaginians* find that adherence to such rules and beliefs compromise their personal freedom. The lives these individuals wish to live are lost to what they perceive as a limited and limiting perspective on life. All but one of the characters are in a state of social death, alienated from their community in hope of a return of (and from) the dead, a return that, in part, they manage to achieve.

Although the two communities represented in these plays share the relatively small area of Northern Ireland, they have a long history of political and military conflict with each other that since the late 1960s alone has resulted in over three thousand deaths.¹² It was a conflict based upon seemingly distinct and definite lines of identity coupled with antithetical political goals. After more than a decade of internecine conflict, there was a grim air in Ireland throughout much of the 1980s. It was a decade marked by economic difficulty throughout the island, death-centred political action in hunger strikes and paramilitary campaigns, conservative victories in the referenda on abortion (1983) and divorce (1984), and, perhaps most profoundly, by the failure to end the Troubles (Murray 1997, pp. 223-224). However, there were many and varied attempts to bring peace to Northern Ireland. One important attempt was the New Ireland Forum that conducted several private

¹² For a more detailed examination of the conflicted communities in Northern Ireland since the onset of the “Troubles” see Thomas Hennessey’s *Northern Ireland: The Origins of the Troubles* (2005), Sabine Wichert’s *Northern Ireland Since 1945* (1999) and Martin Melaugh’s *Conflict Archive on the Internet* (CAIN) (2008).

and public sessions between its first meeting on May 30th, 1983, and its report in April of 1984. The forum brought together leaders of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil. Unionist leaders were invited, but refused to attend. Despite the lack of support from Unionist leaders, the Forum's report, according to Brown (2004), revealed that the Forum had attempted recognition of what previous peace negotiations had failed to recognise:

The *New Ireland Forum Report* revealed a generosity of spirit [...] in its sincere efforts to comprehend the Northern unionist *mentalité* [...]. The creation of a positive vision of an Ireland in which unionists might feel more at home was identified in the report as a central aim for constitutional nationalists. (p. 331)

Yet, despite this generosity of spirit, the Forum was somewhat narrow-sighted when it proposed its three constitutional possibilities for the future governance of the Northern Irish state: a unitary state (a united Ireland), a federal constitutional state and a joint authority. The proposal failed to understand the full reality of Unionist opposition to the Republic's influence in Northern Irish governmental affairs. Consequently, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher determined that all three possibilities were “[o]ut, out, out” (*ibid.*, p. 332).

The Forum's participants anticipated this response and pressed on in their efforts to establish an accord that would lead to the end of conflict in Northern Ireland. In November of 1985, leaders from the Republic, Northern Ireland and Britain signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Agreement revised the possibilities presented by the New Ireland Form, stating that Northern Ireland would remain autonomous of the Republic unless a majority voted otherwise. Because Northern Ireland was predominantly Unionist, it seemed unlikely in that a united Ireland would not be immediately realised. However, the agreement still conceded the Republic an influential role in Northern Irish politics. In great part, it was this concession to the Republic that incited violent protest and backlash from Northern Unionists. Because the agreement enhanced the status of Northern Nationalists and gave the Republic influence in Northern Irish politics, it “was perceived by Unionists as damaging, unfair and one-sided,” write Coakley and Gallagher, “and they did their utmost to oppose it” (2005, pp. 416-417). According to Brown, Unionists also perceived it as

a betrayal by the British government who had failed to inform them of the direction of the Agreement (2004, p. 333). The Agreement, thus, failed to ameliorate the conflict in Northern Ireland. However, it laid much of the significant groundwork for the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which, for all its setbacks, has made substantial positive changes in the community of Northern Ireland, as will be discussed in Chapter Three below.

At their bases, the New Ireland Forum and the Anglo-Irish Agreement failed to account for a vital fear in the Ulster Unionist conscience: deracination. Particularly since the English conquests of the sixteenth century, as Cairns and Richards (1988) demonstrate, there was a mutual fear between the native generally Catholic Irish and the generally Protestant English planters and their respective descendents that the dominance of one would mean the loss of politico-cultural identity for the other. The “New English” planters dealt with their fear of deracination, as Cairns and Richards suggest, by incorporating the Irish “as permanently subordinated inferiors” (1988, p. 7). The Irish, however, founded their identity partly “upon the denial of English assertions” (*ibid.*, p. 20). The resulting conception of each other as “Other,” as will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Two, is seemingly the primary force behind the conflict in Northern Ireland.

While McGuinness was raised a Catholic Republican, his *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, like the New Ireland Forum, attempts to bridge the gap of understanding between the two communities. In an interview with Fintan O’Toole (1985b), he stated that in writing the play he wanted to challenge stereotypes of Northern Irish Protestants by emphasising the diversity within their culture: “By making all the characters belong to a single Protestant strand, yet having them all very different, I wanted to indicate its richness, its exuberance, its strength, and its humour” (n. p.). He further suggests that he wrote the play for Republican Ireland:

The only way the Catholic state can recognise itself is by coming to terms with the Protestant mind. So far the only policy in the Catholic state towards the Protestant mind has been to convert it. Rather than conversion there has to be recognition and respect. (*ibid.*, n. p.)

In his review of the play, Terence Brown (1985) says that he felt a certain unease with its presentation to a Dublin audience who “barely considers Protestant Ulster at all, and then only as some strange, aberrant form of life with which the liberal conscience must reckon” (p. 24). The complexity of the play, which he suggests might be lost on the Abbey Theatre’s audience, is that it both “attacks” Ulster unionism and reveals its humanity:

Ulster Protestant culture is shown in a state of permanent war, the Somme its tragically appropriate metaphor, its values rooted in self-destructive impulses. But it is also shown as indisputably human, its victims capable of laughter, tenderness, of loyalty to each other, to their homes and country and of courage in an ambiguous cause. (*ibid.*, p. 24)

In this light, it seems all the more important that the Abbey Theatre should have presented such a powerful and universally appealing play. For, as Brown concludes, the play is about “the chronic insecurity that has us all marching toward Armageddon, those fears that mean we arm with weapons of self-destruction so that we might not have to fear” (*ibid.*, p. 24). The play apparently suggests that Unionists share this fear with Nationalists.

Carthaginians was also effective in promoting from the Abbey Theatre an understanding of the “foreign” land of Northern Ireland. As is recorded in its programme, the Abbey staged the first production of *Carthaginians* in the same year as the Golden Jubilee of the Irish Association for Cultural, Economic and Social Relations. This organisation deliberately associated itself with McGuinness’s play in “[the] hope to remind a southern audience that the North continues to play a vital and distinctive role in Irish culture rather than being seen simply as a remote battlefield” (Abbey Theatre 1988, n. p.). Indeed, advocating understanding between the two communities remains a salient need because for each community represented in these plays collective memory is still a force against reconciliation.¹³

¹³ See Allen Feldman’s “Retaliate and Punish” in which he argues that in Northern Ireland in the 1980s, under the pressures of collective memory and history, as well as social and economic conditions, reconciliation seemed only a dream. This stalemate situation stems from the fact that “[h]istory, at several social levels, is synchronically organized in Northern Ireland, and the effect is to freeze historical process, making it almost impossible for individuals and groups to enter into processes of change” (Feldman 1998, p. 197).

However, the two plays, as Roche (1994) points out regarding other plays of the 1980s, “are concerned with redefinition of self and aims in a society where old structures are disintegrating” (p. 224). Both plays reveal the difficulty of following through with this disintegration of old structures because of the collective memories that overpower alternative perspectives of the past and present. These dramas depict the condition of stasis and paralysis created by the intransigent political situation in Northern Ireland in the 1980s; however, they reveal strategies for healing the pain and trauma of living in embattled communities.

In initiating these strategies, the plays employ two important markers of much post-colonial drama: ritual and carnival. As Gilbert and Tompkins observe, both ritual and carnival are used in theatre as modes through which represented communities can stage resistance to imperial power (1996, pp. 53-100). In the case of ritual, its use in the community is to preserve through a spiritual dimension the order and meaning that serves as the community’s basis (*ibid.*, pp. 57-58). In a dramatic context, rituals “express the mythos of the community” (*ibid.*, p.63), providing a familiar form through which the playwright can direct the gaze of the theatre audience towards the fabric of cultural traditions that make up the community (Witoszek 1988, p.17). For the characters on stage, in affirming cultural tradition and identity, ritual can take on a powerful role in the resistance to dominant powers that threaten their community. Nevertheless, while rituals depend on accepted forms to communicate their affirmations, as Gilbert and Tompkins argue, “rituals [...] are not static”:

Given its inherent adaptability, ritual—like other modes of performance, communication, and worship—can never be recaptured in its “original” pre-colonial form. The combining of ritual with other cultural forms can, however, provide new performative events and practices that acknowledge the changes wrought by colonialism. (*ibid.*, p. 58)

Within the context of drama in particular, rituals can take on meanings that augment their “pre-contact” forms. This augmentation is important to McGuinness’s treatment of ritual in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Carthaginians*, where the characters variously participate in prayer, a wake, as well as such ritualised events as

a re-enactment of the Battle of the Boyne, the exchange of sashes and the naming of the dead of Bloody Sunday, each of which are discussed below. The plays employ these important rituals from the characters' respective communities, but they neither always follow the prescribed original form nor always affirm the characters' intended meanings. Even when they take unexpected turns, the rituals are always linked in an important way with the traditions of the community. As such, they can have a transformative as well as an affirmative power within the community. One can attribute this transformative power of ritual to the carnival logic that suffuses both plays.

The carnivalesque can work with or against ritual in the affirmation of personal and collective identity. The usage of the carnivalesque in drama is to highlight the "transformative functions of costume, role-play, language, music, and dance" (*ibid.*, p. 79). Within the theatre space, the carnivalesque reverses the logic of a dominant order, opposing monologic order with polylogic alternatives. It is grounded in community and "presupposes the possibility of social reform by activating the communal imagination" (*ibid.*, p. 83). As Bakhtin maintains, people initiate these reforms in a state of "liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (1968, p. 10). As a communal celebration generally opposed to the dominant order, it becomes a vehicle for the marginalized members of a community to assert their subversive individuality and disrupt the oppressiveness of the ruling order. Participants in carnival utilise gaming, parody, role reversal, mockery, degradation, abuse and grotesquery to counter the norms of the oppressive order. The power of the carnivalesque, however, is not merely confined to its disruptive capabilities, but also lies in its regenerative and redemptive laughter, which, through its ambiguous, subversive effects, helps a community establish a new order. The social structures that become prey to carnival laughter may be changed, even destroyed, but, as Bakhtin posits, "in this system death is followed by regeneration, by the new year, new youth, and a new spring" (*ibid.*, p. 198). Yet, the new order is, like the conditions that brought it to fruition, ambiguous. The participants in the carnival not only change the external order, but also undergo change themselves: carnival laughter "is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. [...] They, too, are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed" (*ibid.*, p. 12). In both plays examined in this chapter, the two homosexual protagonists, Pyper and

Dido, bring the carnivalesque to bear on the other characters. It is through their ambiguous, subversive agency that the other characters come to realise a new order. At the same time, the protagonists experience their own renewal.

Along with both ritual and carnival, communities use the act of naming to solidify their shared filiations or demonstrate their opposition to oppressive structures. The plays examined in this chapter effectively demonstrate the contentiousness and empowerment of the act of naming. “The act of naming is a recurrent focus for drama concerning Northern Ireland,” observes McGuire (2006):

To name is to claim authority, to become an agent in the world and to signal membership of particular communities to be involved in what Silverstein (1992) calls a “scheme of identification.” (p. 4; reference in original)

Such a scheme plays out even in the naming of geographical space, depending on whom the speaker is. “Northern Ireland,” for example, is a relatively neutral and internationally used term for the six counties that comprise the political space beyond the border with the Republic of Ireland (*ibid.*, p. 7). Although “Ulster” technically refers to one of Ireland’s four provinces comprised of nine counties, since the partition of the province after Irish independence it has become a term whose use is “motivated by a unionist desire to be seen as separate from the rest of Ireland, politically and culturally” (*ibid.*, p. 6). Although it is somewhat contradictory, given that three of Ulster’s counties, Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal, remained part of the twenty-six counties of the Republic, this desire underlies the chant of “Ulster” at the end of *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, an act that emphasises precisely the focus and strength of the characters’ community involvement. “The North of Ireland,” according to McGuire, “is a nationalist denial of the legitimacy (and to some extent reality) of the border,” and is in direct contrast with “Ulster” in being an assertion that Ireland is a single unit, despite the political and cultural distinction of the six counties (*ibid.*, pp. 6-7). A similar contrariety exists in the naming of the city that serves as the setting for *Carthaginians*. The city’s official name is “Londonderry,” yet such a name has an obvious political contentiousness. Thus, for Unionists and their affiliates the city is “Londonderry,” Nationalists and their supporters drop the prefix “London” and call the city “Derry,” as the characters

do throughout *Carthaginians* (Mikami 2002, p. 233-34 n. 8). Naming can also be an attempt to soften or even deny the political affect of a particular event or period,¹⁴ but, as McGuire suggests with reference to “the Troubles,” such attempts are only very thin veils:

The euphemism of “the Troubles” does not disguise the fact that from the protests of a peaceful civil rights movement against the injustice of the Unionist state in the 1960s (Purdie 1990; Shirlow and McGovern 1997), a sustained three-way war developed: between republican militants; the security services of initially the Northern Ireland government and then the wider British state; and loyalist paramilitaries. (2006, p.4; references in original)

An additional and indeed more insidious function of naming is its use by the political factions in Northern Ireland during their torture scenarios (McGuire 2006, p. 70). The “naming of names”, as will be discussed in relation to *Carthaginians* below, can have a deep affect not only on the individuals who experience the torture, but also on a whole community.

The political relevance of naming, of course, is not limited to geography, euphemism or torture. Much of its power stems from its ability to invoke or conjure and to kill or entomb. The act of naming, according to Watkin (2004), can effectively bring the dead back to life, in the sense of invoking or conjuring them back to a quasi-presence primarily in memory: the dead live “on in the in-between spaces of the capacity and incapacity of the name to summon presence” (p. 204). However, a person’s memory of the dead is, at best, an incomplete picture of them. In a sense, naming kills or entombs the being of the dead through the name; put another way, naming is an essentialising act. Summarising the dead in the name, as Watkin points out, may be unethical because it robs the dead of their unique, singular being (*ibid.*, p. 230). Yet, as *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Carthaginians* seem to suggest, naming the dead, invoking or conjuring them back to memory, is for the sake of the living, emphasizing the interiority of the living in relation to exterior circumstances. Naming can then be a healing act, in that it can restore to

¹⁴ An insidious example would be the naming of World War II as “The Emergency,” which, though it emphasized the Republic’s neutrality campaign, was a blatant denial of the gravity and significance of the war. See the discussion of *Dolly West’s Kitchen* in Chapter Three below.

life, perhaps even a new life as in *Carthaginians*, those who have been lost. In other words, naming can bring the dead into new constellations of meaning in relation to the present and future, which may help those who remember the dead to find new life themselves.

One can relate this latter function of naming to the role of both mourning and ghosts in these plays. Mourning is commonly defined as the period of bereavement and remembering that follows a significant loss (*ibid.*, p. 2). Mourning's reward, according to Watkin, is health (*ibid.*, p. 152): its purpose is to allow a person to come to terms with the loss, to finally relinquish the pain and move on with his or her life. After the bereavement period, which generally consists of private and solemn inaction, an often-employed facet of mourning is the production of a public commemorative work in order to give materiality to the lost beyond mere remembrance (*ibid.*, p. 9). There is, however, a paradox in the supposed transcendent power of commemoration. This paradox designates commemoration as a task that both supports personal and communal identity and prescribes their content out of an unknowable past. In other words, while commemoration relegates onto certain aspects of events from the past an importance that allows them political and emotional relevance, even a sacredness, in the present, identity is always incomplete. Bakhtin identifies this paradoxical situation as being carnivalesque: "In the world of carnival the awareness of the people's immortality is combined with the realisation that established authority and truth are relative" (1968, p. 10). The realisation of this relativity is pivotal in debunking the supposed stability of the established order. Nicholas Miller (2002) suggests that the function of commemoration, or, in his case, memorials, is to prescribe a certain reading of history:

By giving the past its textual, legible form as inscription, conventional memorials—like all forms of history writing—bury its actuality in language, recovering it anew. Viewers who cede this textualizing and narrativizing function to the memorial itself obviate their own active memory-work in the present, and thus accept the memorial's disposition of the past as complete and distant. (p. 13)

The events themselves do not survive in commemoration, but ideas associated with them do: the events are “forgotten,” or, rather, one cannot know them in their totality in the first place; what one recalls of an event, then, is what it prescriptively represents. Thus, the established order can manipulate the meanings of events to secure its hold over the community. Elder Pyper wrestles with this function of memory at the beginning of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* as he ponders the shaping of history through invention:

Those willing to talk to you of that day, to remember for your sake, to forgive you, they invent as freely as they wish. I am not one of them. I will not talk, I will not listen to you. Invention gives that slaughter shape. That scale of horror has no shape, as you in your darkness have no shape. (McGuinness 1996, p. 97)

Elder Pyper’s protests the remembrance of the horror of World War I because of the pain it manifests. However, while doing so, he reveals that a significant part of history or even memory is the fact that it is shaped by invention.

Such a formulation of the memorial as giving the past a prescriptive completeness is of particular importance in the context of Ireland. For the Irish in the 1980s, commemoration through rituals, memorials and political action gave particular readings of history an immediate power that practically dissolved the distance between past and present. For Pyper in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, his commemorative work is not artistic in nature, even though he is an artist, but involves his taking up the cause of his lost comrades, the cause of Protestant Unionists, within Ulster (*ibid.*, p. 98). Mourning, in this case, has a political dimension. Nina Witoszek identifies this dimension of mourning as a “unifying factor” in Irish nationalism (1988, p. 42). She quotes from a funeral oration by Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams over the graves of three IRA volunteers that appeared in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* on February 28th, 1985:

Go ndéana Dia trócaire ar a n-anamacha dílse. (May God have mercy on their dear souls).[sic] To mourn them is to organize. Let’s go, friends[sic] from this sacred spot and mourn them. (quoted in Witoszek 1988, p. 42)

Mourning, it appears, is politically charged in both Northern Irish communities. Throughout their history, the political movements of both the Republic and Northern Ireland have borne the signs of commemoration like scars, ever and always magnifying the past, giving it immediacy to justify the present. The dead, as representatives of an idealized past, are utilized as motivational tools to spur political action. Both cases show how people use the dead in apparently private, emotional appeals for public, political mobilisation. As will be clear in the discussion of *Carthaginians*, such a use of the dead can deeply damage a community. In response to this damage, the characters of *Carthaginians* call for the successful mourning of the dead and a renewed life for the living.

The apparent problem with Pyper's work of mourning is that it is incomplete. This is explicitly represented by the physical presence of the ghosts of his fallen friends. In his essay entitled "Ghosts in Irish Drama," Anthony Roche suggests that

[...] it is because of the particular nature of Irish history that its drama insists on the presence of ghosts and on their corporeality, refusing a purely symbolic treatment as unreal and a form of betrayal of the dead through inadequate representation. (1991, p. 44)

The play binds the appearance of Pyper's ghosts with its representation of history. These ghosts pressure him to remember, to give "shape" to the slaughter that was the Battle of the Somme (McGuinness 1996, p. 97). Yet, it is their insistence on memory, which their physical presence emphasises, that is of greatest importance to the play. They appear to him in uniform as they were before their horrific deaths in battle: they are, in a sense, frozen in time, which suggests that Pyper, too, is frozen in time. After Pyper invokes or conjures them by speaking their names and citing phrases he used in conversation with them while they were alive (*ibid.*, pp. 98-99), he is transported through his memories to his time among them as part of the Thirty-sixth Division of the British Army during World War I. Though he remembers many of the points of contention between himself and the other men, it is their coming together at the end of Part Four that demonstrates best why his ghosts still appear to him: they reassure him, bolster his strength and resolve in taking up their cause. As such, the play presents a cyclical view of history. Although he begins the play questioning the validity of his identity and the power of martyrdom to secure it,

Pyper recalls memories that, in Part Two, challenge the idea of a secure identity, in Part Three, realign identity, and, in Part Four, confirm identity. This final confirmation brings the present and the past together, and the Elder Pyper becomes one with the ghosts of his past.

The women of *Carthaginians* consistently refer to the raising of the dead, yet the ghosts of the dead to whom the characters refer throughout the play do not materialise, as do Pyper's. In fact, although they never explicitly acknowledge as much, the characters, excluding Dido, are these dead. They are in a state of social death, each mourning his or her own stable sense of identity that was lost in the collective tragedies of the Troubles and in their own various personal tragedies. The resurrection for which the characters hope will not be a mere return of the dead, but, as in the carnivalesque, a reinvigoration, a renewal of the lives that were lost: the deadly course of history is due to change, not be repeated.

This chapter will now turn first to an examination of *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, then to an examination of *Carthaginians* and will consider each of the facets discussed above—ritual, the carnivalesque, naming, mourning and ghosts—as they appear in the plays in order to illustrate the plays' representations of the connection between community involvement and death.

The *dramatis personae* of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* consists of the aforementioned Elder Ulsterman Kenneth Pyper and his younger self, as well as seven working-class men from various towns and cities in Ulster, David Craig, George Anderson, Mat McIlwaine, Christopher Roulston, Martin Crawford, William Moore and John Millen. These characters interactions take place over four parts; the second, third and fourth parts are focused through the Elder Pyper's memories of his experiences during World War I. Part One, entitled "Remembrance," consists of a long monologue by the Elder Pyper, who is seemingly on the verge of dying, in which he confronts God and the eight ghosts that represent his younger self and his dead comrades from World War I regarding the current—as of 1985—state of Ulster. Through this monologue, the Elder Pyper shows that he is in some confusion regarding his identity as a loyal Protestant Unionist and the sacrifices that his fellow men made at the Somme during World War I. Part Two, "Initiation," flashes back

to Ulster's mobilization for war and depicts the younger Pyper's first meeting and interaction with the other men at a makeshift barracks. Here, Pyper challenges, sometimes belligerently, preconceived notions of identity. In Part Three, "Pairing," the men pair up on leave from the war at various locations where they discuss their relationships both to one another and their community and how these relationships have been affected by the war. Although they challenge themselves and each other to understand their circumstances, they find their respective notions of identity and their motivation to fight are more or less in alignment. In Part Four, "Bonding," they wait together in the trenches at the Somme for their call to go "over the top." Here they secure their communal bond as they play games, sing songs, act out a mock play and pray. The play ends with the powerful image of the younger Pyper joining with the Elder Pyper in the chant of "Ulster," after which, in the play's first production, the other men walk offstage into battle, and, ultimately, death.

For the first performance of the play at the Peacock in the Abbey Theatre, the stage was for the most part bare except for a huge banner of the Red Hand of Ulster as a backdrop (O'Toole 1985a, n. p.). From a practical standpoint, this setup allowed for transitional ease between the varied locations used in each of the four parts, particularly in the presentation of four locations simultaneously in Part Three. The bareness of the stage also helped to emphasise the ironic presence of the banner of the Red Hand, the central symbol of Ulster Protestant culture. This emphasis is subtly ironic because, as will be discussed further below, the play is not merely about sacrifice to the demands of history or community that the banner vividly represents. Symbolically, the malleable bare space helps highlight the idea that memory itself is malleable, that memory is like the play itself, a fabrication of the past. The use of two actors to play the role of younger and Elder Pyper reinforces this point. The two actors may even touch one another, but their separateness represents the split between the past and present as one that is ultimately irreconcilable in any total way.

Part One introduces Elder Pyper who delivers a long monologue. During the first half of this monologue Pyper is alone and addresses an unspecified "you" who, as he says, is forcing him to remember. This "you" implies God and, later, the ghosts of his fallen friends. However, given that Pyper speaks directly to the theatre audience,

he is implicating them, also. They have come to the theatre to hear his story, the play itself demands that he tell it. Indeed, as much as he attempts to deny so, there is a sense of necessity to Pyper's act of shaping history, of telling the painful story of the loss of his friends. It is, for Pyper, an act of affirmation: his friends may die at the end of each performance of the play, but his life choices are, in some way, justified by that fact. For the audience at the first production in Dublin, this affirmation is at once foreign, because of political complexities, and familiar, representing finally, beyond its politics, a very human response to tragedy.

Throughout this opening monologue, he reveals that he has taken up the cause of his fallen comrades and risen to the rank of "Elder" in his community.¹⁵ However, he also reveals that he is fraught by the paradoxes of community involvement: he has dedicated his life to the cause of his fallen comrades, but it has led to the destruction rather than the preservation of Ulster, as he tells his ghosts, "Ulster lies in rubble at our feet" (McGuinness 1996, p. 100). His confrontation with the ghosts brings him face to face with the crux of the Troubles, in which two sides driven by loyalty to their unique communities fight an ineffective war, killing each other for what is essentially the same cause, Ulster. In a review of the play, O'Toole (1985a) comments on this deadly crux:

[In this play] Frank McGuinness plumbs the Ulster Protestant mind and he also exposes the nerve ends of a modern schizophrenia which turns the love of home, tradition, and ancestral piety, into destructive passion half in love with death, a schizophrenia which makes security a euphemism for chronic insecurity. (n. p.)

An individual can only assuage the demands of the community in such a situation through a total dedication of life. However, for such a dedication to work, as Becker argues, the individual must truly believe the community to be worth it (1997, p. 6). Indeed, for Pyper, living in an Ulster under the control of Catholic Nationalists is unthinkable:

¹⁵ Referencing *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Mikami (2002) points out that "Elder" is a term used in the Presbyterian church to distinguish those members of the congregation who assist the minister in church affairs: "'Elder,' then, denotes Pyper's role as a leader or a pillar of an Ulster Protestant community" (pp. 15-16).

Pyper: [...] There would be, and there will be no surrender. The sons of Ulster will rise and lay their enemy low, as they did at the Boyne, as they did at the Somme, against any invader who will trespass on to their homeland. [...] Sinn Fein? Ourselves alone. It is we, the Protestant people, who have always stood alone. We have stood alone and triumphed, for we are God's chosen. (McGuinness 1996, p. 98)

For him, Ulster's true faith is Protestantism, and its true leaders are Unionist. His difficulty with the demands of the community, then, is that they have left him, and the community, bereft of his strong, loyal friends. At the Somme, these men did not abandon the cause of their fatherland, and died because of their loyalty.

As is clear in the remainder of the play, Pyper's comrades are working class men who deeply value their community, who conform to the values of that community and fight to defend it. They integrate with their community so deeply that their choice of altruistic suicide is almost no choice at all. Even though they realize they are likely going to die if they continue to fight in the war, as Anderson stresses to McIlwaine, a great part of the initial impetus for joining the war came from the pressures of their community to play a certain role: "You'll go back to the front, if I've to carry you. You won't disgrace yourself or your breed or where you work" (McGuinness 1996, p. 158). But this impetus lay deeper than Anderson lets on in this particular passage. Being active members of their community, they generally accepted sectarianism, as is clearly exemplified in Moore and Millen's story of battering a young Republican who had painted a tri-colour, the Republican flag, on an Orangeman's lodge (McGuinness 1996, pp. 122-123). Furthermore, they fought as "Carson's men" to oppose Ireland's bid for Home Rule (McGuinness 1996, pp. 121-122).¹⁶ The men's reason for joining the army had its roots in their bid to oppose Republicanism and defend Ulster's loyalty; as Craig, Moore and Millen reveal to Pyper, they are "in this for Ulster" (McGuinness 1996, p. 115). Thus, the nation is their centre of meaning that gives them the self-abnegating courage to sacrifice themselves.

¹⁶ Sir Edward Carson is a major figure in Ulster's opposition to Irish Independence. He was the first signatory to Ulster's "Solemn League and Covenant" against the Republican bid for Home Rule in 1912, and in 1913 he established the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) out of signatories to the Covenant. The UVF were the military representatives of Ulster's opposition to Republicanism and, at the outbreak of the Great War, became the Thirty-sixth Ulster Division of the British army, which McGuinness' sons of Ulster represent (Murray 1997, p. 205; Foster 1989, pp. 190-193).

Consequent to the bond he made with the other men, the Elder Pyper admits that he became active in their struggle: “I at least continued their work in this province. The freedom of faith they fought and died for would be maintained” (*ibid.*, p. 98). Pyper commits his life to Ulster’s cause not only as a gesture of mourning and commemoration of his lost friends, but also because he has experienced a strong “transference” in the psychoanalytic and sociological senses. The social theorist Erich Fromm formulated transference as a reflection of human feelings of alienation:

In order to overcome his sense of inner emptiness and impotence, [man] chooses an object onto whom he projects all his own human qualities: his love, intelligence, courage, etc. By submitting to this object, he feels himself in touch with his own qualities; he feels strong, wise, courageous, and secure. To lose the object means the danger of losing himself. This mechanism, idolatric worship of an object, based on the fact of the individual’s alienation, is the central dynamism of transference, that which gives transference its strength and intensity. (1962, p. 52)

Following the footsteps of his lost friends, and seeing them in the form of ghosts suggests that Pyper’s transference is very intense. He has replaced the alienation he felt before entering the war with the love of his fellow recruits. The love of his friends extends into the love of his community almost seamlessly: he is no longer the abrasive homosexual with a death wish, changing dramatically to conform to a role of Unionist leadership.

His experience of transference, however, was not complete, at least not as he stands at the close of Part One. Throughout his monologue he struggles with the forces that press him to remember the horror and slaughter that took his friends from him, he even says that he does not want to be one of the chosen because of the pain of his memories (*ibid.*, p. 98). Finally, after allowing himself to remember, he tells his audience—both the ghosts and the theatre audience, who are still implicated here—that loyalty and sacrifice do not necessarily entail dying for the cause, that is, altruistic suicide. In fact, such a death is “[h]ate for one’s self,” a consequence of an inherited bloodlust, which is that “something rotting in humanity” (*ibid.*, p. 100). At

the end of Part One in a state of confusion due to the seemingly conflicting demands of his community and Ulster's survival, he urges his audience to help him defy this crucial aspect of Ulster's inheritance.

The remaining three parts of the play detail significant moments in Pyper's memories of World War I. Although many of these memories involve the personal experiences of the other characters to which he may not have been privy, the overall effect is that Pyper is shaping these memories to reflect the shaping of his identity. Throughout the play, there is a clear movement in how the characters view identity. While the Elder Pyper ends Part One with a conflicted notion of identity and duty, in Part Two through the efforts of the younger Pyper nearly all secure notions of identity are challenged. It is here that he enacts a role as an agent of the carnivalesque. In Part Three, the younger Pyper's carnivalesque disruptions coupled with the men's experiences in the war and with one another, cause them to realign their notion of identity, a notion that in Part Four is confirmed as they await their call to fight at the Somme. This change of perspective is central to understanding Pyper's taking up the cause of his fellow men. For, as is clear in Part Two, his younger self initially bears very little resemblance to the man he becomes.

While the Elder Pyper called for a defiance of his community's inheritance, the younger Pyper joined the army on the basis of a different kind of defiance. As he confirms to Craig, he joined to defy his Protestant fathers by fulfilling a death wish (McGuinness 1996, p. 164). While the other men's choice to die for their fatherland had plainly altruistic motives, Pyper's death would be, to use another of Durkheim's terminology, "egoistic suicide." This type of suicide results from excessive individualism: the individual is unable to integrate into his community, seeing it as stifling and deterministic (Durkheim 1997, pp. 208-216). Pyper's egoistic intention is one important factor that separates him from the other men.

In Part Two, the men meet in a makeshift barracks. Like all the settings used in the play, this barracks is free of authoritative representatives of the established order or, in this case, the officer class—called "top brass" throughout the play—and, thus, the recruits are free to speak and act as they please. In this carnivalesque setting, Pyper immediately establishes himself as an agent of the carnivalesque, employing

mockery, role reversal, violent trickery and an alignment with death, evincing a significantly different perspective from the other recruits. In fact, he is different from the military ideal, which is a loyal, physically and mentally fit, heterosexual male. Pyper subjects this difference to a carnivalesque reversal when he first meets Millen and Moore as he mockingly dons the persona of an officer (McGuinness 1996, pp. 107-8). Indeed, his difference, or “rareness,” as Moore remarks, is a central issue in the whole play. Moore’s remark comes after Pyper tells the others he grew wings to return from France (McGuinness 1996, p. 110). Rareness thus becomes bound to Pyper’s mental health, which his inconsistent narratives and his talk of death brings into question, prompting the other men to suggest that he is even a maniac (*ibid.*, p. 135). Additionally, his rareness relates to his outsiderhood. Helen Lojek suggests that, as a “willed” outsider, resultant of his rejection of his familial affiliation and his social status, and an “existential” outsider, consequent of his homosexuality, his perspective, at least throughout Part Two, poses a challenge to the other recruits and is dramatically privileged over the others (Lojek 1990, p. 57). His role throughout Part Two is what Nicholas Grene, in his *Politics of Irish Drama*, terms an “agent provocative,” a kind of master of the carnivalesque who directly or indirectly influences the other troops to an alternative consciousness through his verbal play and his physical threat (1999, p. 247).

Pyper deepens this role as an “agent provocative” by aligning himself with death. In their introduction to *Death and Representation*, Goodwin and Bronfen expound the implications of an alignment with death:

That which aligns with death in any given representation is Other, dangerous, enigmatic, magnetic: culturally, globally, sexually, racially, historically, economically. (1993, p. 20)

This alignment occurs because of Pyper’s outsiderhood, which pushed him away not only from his family, but also his community. Furthermore, as a homosexual, he anticipates and defends himself from the threat of violence with threats of his own. Being thus disposed, he deliberately speaks of death and dying and brings the reality of death dangerously close for the other men through both verbal and physical

attacks. As discussed above, within carnival logic death is the harbinger of renewal and regeneration. Pyper, aligned with death, is, thus, an agent of renewal.

When Pyper first meets the other men, he talks of mortality humorously, claiming to Craig that dying would be “good sport” (McGuinness 1996, p. 106) and that he is himself “fit for dying. Fit for the grave. Fit for pushing up the daisies” (*ibid.*, p. 111). Initially, his physical threat is latent behind his seemingly facetious verbal treatment of mortality and his homosexuality, which he subtly suggests at the beginning of Part Two when he asks Craig to kiss his bleeding thumb (*ibid.*, p. 103), but more overtly suggests when he speaks to the other men of his “remarkably fine skin” (*ibid.*, p. 109). This latter comment also invokes femininity and delicacy, two traits that jar with the masculine imperative of the army. His talk of his fine skin disguises his physical power, and his penchant for fighting “dirty.” The threat implied in his talk becomes explicitly physical when he plays the carnivalesque trick on Anderson, punching him in the groin (*ibid.*, p. 134). This trick, which requires that one choose between two hands, undoubtedly has the same end, a punch, no matter what the choice. One can read this trick as a metaphor for the war: for, as the men realize near the end of Part Four, “[w]hoever comes back alive, if any of us do, will have died as well” (*ibid.*, p. 188). Like the mythical trickster figure who is responsible for the advent of death (Witoszek 1988, p. 161), Pyper is bringing the reality of death directly before the recruits, and disguises its power in a violent game.

After this attack on Anderson, Pyper’s talk and disposition take on a more serious, threatening tone as he states, “[y]ou’re not going to survive. [...] we’re the scum [of this army]. We go first” (McGuinness 1996, p. 135). Soon after, as he brandishes his penknife, putting it to Roulston’s throat, he says the following:

You can feel that. Death. You fear that. Death. And I know death. I’ll let you know it. I’ll take away your peace and that’s the only disturbance I’m responsible for in this company” (*ibid.*, p. 136)

Pyper’s alignment with death, powerfully realised in the penknife, disturbs their peace. The men have grounded their peace in the illusion of being “God’s chosen”

who will survive the war if they fight together (*ibid.*, p. 135). As Becker suggests, a community cannot survive without such illusions:

Cultural illusion is a necessary ideology of self-justification, a heroic dimension that is life itself to the symbolic animal. To lose the security of heroic cultural illusion is to die. (1997, p. 189)

For the other men, Pyper is a threat to the security of their illusions and, thus, represents death.

Facing this threat, the recruits initially react with varied degrees of repulsion because they need to deny and suppress death, as represented by Pyper, in order to carry out their duty to their community. Most notable of these reactions is Millen's:

Millen: I've only met you. And I don't like you already. Now I don't care what you're going on about, but no more chat about dying. It'll be looking us straight in the face soon enough.

Pyper: I'm looking at you straight in the face.

Millen: And I don't care much for what I see.
(McGuinness 1996, pp. 111-12)

This repulsion is symptomatic of an experience of abjection. Millen is trying to repel, to suppress Pyper, whose being threatens Millen's self-definition. Thus, in the face of the threat of both physical violence and homosexuality, Millen counters with a threat of his own, in order to control, repel, and suppress Pyper's power:

Millen: I've heard about maniacs like you. The ones who sign up not to come back. If that's what you've done. I'm warning you—

Pyper: I need some sense kicked into me, right?

Millen: Right. More than right. (*ibid.*, p. 135)

Millen wants to "normalise" Pyper, to keep him from disturbing the relatively jovial patriotism and testosterone-driven sexuality the rest of the recruits supposedly share. Millen's threat, however, fails because it is this very suppression, repression, and oppression that Pyper is standing against in defiance. In fact, Pyper responds to Millen's threat by brandishing his penknife.

As Part One ends, Pyper cuts his hand with the penknife and Craig, the only one who attempts to see through Pyper's supposed madness, steps forward, unafraid, to bandage it with his shirtsleeve. As he does so, the two of them incant the following:

Craig: Red hand.

Pyper: Red sky.

Craig: Ulster.

Pyper: Ulster. (*ibid.*, p. 137)

This exchange references the mythopoetic history of the Red Hand of Ulster, which Richard Rankin Russell claims “represents the province’s ready desire to spill blood to protect its own inhabitants” (1998, p. 2). Grounded in the mythic tales of the eighth-century epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, it has become one of Ulster’s primary symbols. Even with the huge banner emblazoned with the symbol hanging at the back of the stage, Pyper ironically augments its significance because of the fact that the sacrifice he intends to make will render no positive service to Ulster; for him, the red hand represents only a warning of death. Craig’s action, however, foreshadows the relationship between himself and Pyper that triggers a significant change in Pyper’s attitude towards himself and his community.

In Part Three, McGuinness pairs the men into intimate spaces. On Boa Island, Lough Erne, Pyper and Craig consummate their relationship and discuss a number of ancient statues. At a Protestant Church Roulston and Crawford argue about physicality and spirituality. Anderson and McIlwaine gather at Finaghy Field, the site of the Twelfth of July Orange marches, to celebrate their contribution to Ulster. At the Carrick-a-rede rope bridge Millen helps Moore come to terms with their role in the war. In each of these spaces, the men begin to realign their sense of identity as not only Pyper, but also their experiences in the war have challenged their faith in their cultural illusions.

Pyper tells Craig that before joining the army he was unable to reconcile himself with his community because, to him, it stifled his will to live by overpowering his ability to produce new and personal art: he “could not create. [He] could only

preserve” what he had seen and learned from his ancestors (McGuinness 1996, p. 163). Thus, as he tells Craig, he devises his plan to die in the army:

I would destroy my own life. I would take up arms at the call of my Protestant fathers. I would kill in their name and I would die in their name. To win their respect would be my sole act of revenge for the bad joke they had played on me in making me sufficiently different to believe I was unique, when my true uniqueness lay only in how alike them I really was. And then the unseen obstacle in my fate. I met you. (*ibid.*, p. 164)

Pyper’s death would have been his method of contravening his genealogical line, which would serve only a solipsistic fulfilment. Pyper’s intention, however, is futile. His Protestant fathers would not see his death as an artistic, personal expression, but, ironically, as honour and respect for their community and its values. In this way, his death would be doubly self-defeating. Craig denies him this futile end, however, by saving his life. Craig admits that he joined the army because not only did he want a fight, but he also “wanted to save somebody else in war” (*ibid.*, p. 164). This admission makes clear that Craig joined the army with altruistic intentions, but, like his bandaging of Pyper’s hand, suggests also that he saw self-destruction in Pyper and did his best to stop it. Consequently, it is through his relationship with Craig that Pyper finds a validation for his life and comes to understand the desire to live. This relationship overturns the threat that was in Pyper’s physicality as he and Craig, as the first production suggested, make love.

One can connect Pyper and Craig’s sexual embrace to the carnivalesque. For one, it confounds not only the expected norms of the army, but also, as argued above, of society’s ruling order. For another, it serves a duo-purpose, on the one hand confirming Pyper’s rejection of his family legacy, and on the other bringing Pyper into the community he had initially rejected. As with most carnivalesque elements, there is simultaneously death and renewal, and as Bakhtin points out, the carnivalesque aims “at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants. [...] They, too, are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed” (*ibid.*, p. 12). Pyper, the initiator of the carnivalesque, is transformed by its subversive power.

During Part Three, the other men explore their relationships with each other and their respective roles in the war. Pyper's carnivalesque disruptions combined with the horror of the war cause them to question the apparently stable notions they held before entering the war. Like Pyper they experience important realisations of their own, realisations that hint of Pyper's perspective in Part Two. In the midst of a Protestant church, Crawford helps Roulston realise that he is not "Christ. Son of Man. Son of God" (*ibid.*, p. 151). By getting Roulston to fight in this church he demonstrates that what will protect him is not sacred, but human: "Now you can march out of [the church] with me, a soldier, a man, a brute beast. You're not Christ. You're a man" (*ibid.*, p. 162). He further accentuates this existential perspective by insisting to Roulston, "I've seen enough to see through empires and kings and countries. I know the only side worth supporting is your own sweet self" (*ibid.*, p. 152); which is a perspective shared by Dido in *Carthaginians*, as will be discussed later.

Millen and Moore also come to share this perspective. At the rope bridge at Carrick-a-rede, Millen tries to help Moore overcome his shellshock by telling him that, for the soldier, above individual choice is the duty to "top brass":

I do as I'm told. I make no complaints. If [top brass] order me to put my hand in the fire, for the sake of what I believe in, what they believe in, I'd do it willingly. You have to do that as well, Moore. That's the only way you'll come back alive. (*ibid.*, p. 159)

For Millen, top brass represents the cause to which they have dedicated themselves, and whose guidance makes it easier for them to cope with the chaotic circumstances of war. However, Moore does not concede to Millen's formulation. Instead, for Moore, there is "[n]o such thing" as top brass, because top brass are individuals like all the rest of those who are fighting. Individuals have the power of choice and, as such, do not need to follow top brass unquestionably. Rather, they choose to do so: "orders are only orders when you follow them" (*ibid.*, p. 168). Structures such as top brass survive only if the individuals they purportedly control perform their commands; they survive only if people are willing to believe in them. Moore realises here that it is individual choice that gets one through, even if that choice is to follow the commands of top brass.

When McIlwaine and Anderson attempt to stage their own Twelfth of July commemoration at Finaghy Field they are faced with the futility of such commemoration, especially since it makes them something of a laughingstock of the community. Through ritual commemoration, such as the Twelfth of July, a community displays its recognition of and respect for important sacrifices made in its name. The promise of commemoration, of possible social immortality, is a powerful stimulant for individuals to act on behalf of their community, even unto death, as the example of Padraic Pearse demonstrates. Without ritualised support and recognition, McIlwaine loses his secure sense of community:

We won't survive. We're all going to die for nothing.
Pyper was right. I know now. We're on the Titanic.
[...] Belfast will be lost in this war. The whole of
Ulster will be lost. We're not making a sacrifice.
Jesus, you've seen this war. We are the sacrifice.
(*ibid.*, p. 154)

Anderson does not initially agree with McIlwaine, but when asked to speak of Ulster's place in the war he says, "I do not speak of the Hun, dire enemy though he may be, when I speak of the enemy now. I speak of the Fenian" (*ibid.*, p. 167). Like those who laugh at him and McIlwaine, he is unable to see Ulster's purpose beyond its fight against Home Rule Republicanism. This myopic perspective leads him to despair as he realises that, in this war, he and the other recruits are being led to death: "Pyper the bastard was right. It's all lies. We're going to die. It's all lies. We're going to die for nothing" (*ibid.*, p. 167). This remark also attests to the fact that Pyper is not the only man affected by transference in this play. The men begin to see the world through Pyper's initially subversive perspective: death in the war becomes meaningless, absurd and unheroic.

Yet, the characters do not give in to the void created by this perspective. Instead, they all come to realize that they must return to the front, not only because their community expects it of them, but also because they have found something in which to believe: each other. The first production represented the metaphysical coalescence of the men through manipulation of lighting throughout Part Three. As each pair share their respective home-leave experiences they are given exclusive

lighting, but as by the end of Part Three, when they all confirm that they are returning to the front with each other, the lights come up on all areas simultaneously.

In the Part Four, entitled “Bonding,” the recruits are waiting in a trench at the Somme for the call to go to over the top into battle. In face of the harrowing prospect of trench warfare, they solidify their *esprit de corps* through both secular and sacred rituals such as playing a soccer game, singing hymns and songs, telling stories, re-enacting the Battle of Scarva, exchanging Orange sashes and praying, all of which deal in one way or another with Ulster Protestant collective memory. The play combines these affirmative rituals with carnivalesque moments that challenge the stability of the men’s loyalty. Yet, ultimately, the men realise that their loyalty is not merely to Britain or Ulster, but above all, to one another.

The various activities the men partake in during this final Part emphasise an important aspect of their relationship with one another: their physicality. The men scratch each other’s skin, play physical games, jump onto each other’s backs and generally interact in a viscerally physical way. The threat of physicality that permeated Part Two is gone. The fallible body now becomes the site of a powerful interpersonal bond, much like Pyper and Craig’s sexual embrace in Part Three. During the play’s first performances at the Abbey, the way the men interacted in this final Part was as much an indicator of their bonding as anything they said. Combining this physicality with their verbal interactions helps the men find comfort in familiarity; but they also emphasise the masculine imperative of loyalty and courage as a shield against the possibility of death on the front (*ibid.*, p. 173). They attempt to bolster this imperative through creating their own version of the Easter Rising, and a re-enactment of the Battle of Scarva. However, these two significant moments reveal the elusiveness of truth and the problem of depending on it when it becomes entwined with myth.

As argued above, truth can be lost or skewed in the formation of collective memory, and McIlwaine’s version of the Easter Rising¹⁷ is testament to this fact, being a carnivalesque retelling that undermines the event and those involved. According to McIlwaine, Pearse and “his merry men” took over the post office “because he was

¹⁷ For detail on the Easter Rising, see Michael Foy and Brian Barton’s *The Easter Rising* (1999).

short of a few stamps,” they read the proclamation of the Irish republic brandishing wooden rifles, and after being caught and led out to be executed, his own aged and widowed mother comes out of the crowd and shoots him using a Tommy’s rifle (*ibid.*, p. 175). This version of the Easter Rising serves a number of purposes. Firstly, deriding the Catholic enemy and one of their most important historical moments is a way for the Protestant community to bolster its own beliefs. Secondly, as Nicholas Grene (1999) argues, it is intended as “shock tactic for a Southern Irish audience brought up on the mythology of the Rising” and demonstrates that for Ulster Protestants the Easter Rising is a pale comparison to the service they were doing their homeland in the war: “For the people of the Republic the date of 1916 means the Rising; for Ulstermen it is bound to mean the Somme” (p. 250). Thirdly, it is a sinister form of historical revisionism. Shaped by the prejudices and enmities that plague the communities of Northern Ireland, this version mocks the sacrifice made by Pearse and the other participants in the Rising. Such carnivalesque degradation serves to, on one hand, bring the history and myth of the Rising down to earth. On the other hand, it serves to bolster the men’s particular perspective. History and truth are shaped to fit specific ends, as McIlwaine suggests: “To hell with the truth as long as it rhymes” (McGuinness 1996, p. 176).

This politically and ideologically motivated manipulation of history and truth does not always achieve McIlwaine’s “rhyme.” Such a failure occurs when the soldiers re-enact the battle of Scarva.¹⁸ As Helen Lojek (1988) suggests, even though the men are “[p]erfectly willing to alter the historical *facts* of Pearse’s rebellion to suit their needs, [they] insist on the inalterability of historical *myth*” when they perform this re-enactment (p. 50; original emphasis). Done “to make the blood boil,” the ritualized re-enactment brings all but Craig into action. Anderson, as the impresario of the event, insists that the others “keep to the result” (McGuinness 1996, p. 182), that is, present their acceptably shaped “truth” of the event. However, in a carnivalesque reversal, Pyper, the steed of King William, falls, ending the re-enactment with the historical loser James as the victor. One of the recruits exclaims

¹⁸ The battle of Scarva is the annual re-enactment of the battle of the Boyne. Before the calendar change, the battle of the Boyne occurred on July 1st, 1690—the same day on which the Battle of the Somme began—when the forces of the Protestant William of Orange significantly defeated those of the Catholic King James. It was the beginning of the end for James’ claim to rule in Ireland, and the onset of Protestant hegemony (Foster 1992, p. 127-128).

that this fall is “[n]ot the best of signs” (*ibid.*, p. 185), and indeed it is not, since they have invested such faith in the power of their commemoration. Although, like their version of the Rising, the fall manipulates the facts by a force beyond their control, it does not rhyme with their accepted cultural illusion. Pyper’s fall brings into question the conception of collective ideals as sacred, beyond the influence of contingency, as Bernhard Klein (2007) posits:

Clearly, the two battles (Boyne and Somme) are consciously collapsed into each other by the characters, but as the different results announce, such transhistorical links cannot be sustained in a play which is finally about the impossibility of translating the past into the present in terms of either an inherent congruence or a cyclical repetition. Historical and spatial equations are exposed as facile escape routes, dangerous and demeaning delusions. (p. 104)

In the wake of this dark foreboding, the men must face the reality of the front where, as their failure to manipulate the shape of history and truth suggests, contingency rules; no sacred ideal, no belief in a mythic past, will stop a bullet.

Despite the psychic blow of Pyper’s fall, the men turn to two highly significant rituals at the close of the play to seal their bond not only with their community, but also to one another: the exchange of Orange sashes and Pyper’s final prayer. What is most powerful in these two ritual performances is that they directly link religion and politics, becoming both clear markers of Northern Irish Protestant identity. This invocation of the spiritual dimension, which is, as Gilbert and Tompkins suggest, a defining mark of sacred ritual, is “performed for the continuance and regeneration” of their community (1996, p. 58).

Pyper, initially the outsider, is included in the exchange of sashes with the words, “[s]o we’ll recognize you as one of our own. Your own” (McGuinness 1996, p. 193). This emblem of Ulster’s Protestant political and religious unity seals the bond between Pyper and the other men; all the division, defiance and danger that Pyper brought to bear on the other men has faded away as he has proven himself loyal to them and their cause. They have also become Pyper’s “own”: the transference appears complete, not only because of his relationship with Craig, but also because,

for him, they represent life-giving ideals of heroism and community for which he abandoned his death wish. Like the other men, his community now supplies him with life. Yet, just before the exchange of sashes, as Craig points out to Pyper that the community is not as supportive as Pyper might wish: “What kind of life do you see for us when we’re out of here? It might be many things, but it won’t be together” (*ibid.*, p. 192). While McGuinness’s representation of homosexuality is more overt in this play than in *Factory Girls* (Lojek 2004, pp. 171-4), he disallows the fruition of Pyper and Craig’s relationship, which is doomed even if Craig were to survive. What Pyper and the other men discover, according to Jordan (2000a), “is that their tribal bond is more problematic and more complicated than initially perceived to be the case.” (p. 197). Yet, while Craig’s words visibly shake Pyper, before he can mount any profound protest, Anderson offers him an Orange sash. As O’Connor (1985) observes, in the world of the play, “nothing is really what it seems to be, religion, politics, morality can only be perceived as surfaces. [...] [W]hat we are seeing is a world of surfaces with no core of meaning” (n. p.). The power of religion, politics and morality, however, is that society ingrains in the subjectivity of the individual, serving as mechanisms for meaning in a world that ultimately challenges the stability of meaning. Put another way, ritual finally gains precedence over the carnivalesque.

Like the exchange of sashes, but more profoundly, this final sacred ritual of prayer demonstrates that the men’s loyalty to their community is not merely social or political, but is strongly entwined with their spiritual lives as well. There is, however, a terrible irony in this prayer. Pyper speaks the prayer, asking God to spare him and the other men, to fell their enemies at home as well as at the Somme, to return them home; it is in this prayer that he finally admits “I love their lives. I love my own life. I love my home. I love my Ulster” (*ibid.*, p. 196). The prayer climaxes with the chant of Ulster, which, as the *nebenscene* indicates, “turns into a battle cry” (*ibid.*, p. 196). This act of naming is particularly significant to the play; for it is “Ulster,” not “Britain” or “Ireland,” that the men chant. From a post-colonial perspective, this naming shows that the men have decided not to pick sides with either the coloniser or the colonized. Rather, their loyalty is to their own, which are not only the distinct community of Ulster Protestant Unionists, but each

other. Klein speculates that this chant overpowers the complexity of the men's situation:

One loaded word—'Ulster'—has now come to stand for a memory of identity so complex that it defies the very attempt to be expressed in rhetoric. Ritual chant has replaced reflection. (2007, p. 108)

The men are no longer able to question their role in the war. They have ultimately convinced themselves that their community, above even their own lives, deserves such commitment. The irony is that this commitment, which bolsters them against the fear of death and secures them in their dedication to their interpersonal cause, is what ultimately leads them to slaughter.

The Elder Pyper joins his younger self in the chant of the name of Ulster. This joining of the past and present is the climax of the Elder Pyper's memories. This is the moment when he truly seals his own fate, and stops history in its tracks. For, immediately following this moment he and the other men walk off-stage into death. While Pyper's seven comrades sacrifice their whole lives, for Pyper the sacrifice is less clear. He did not physically die, but changed so significantly after his friends' deaths that he was no longer the same person who entered the war. Rather, in a very significant way, his experience in the war taught him to value his life. While his community lost significantly in the sacrifices of Craig, Millen, Moore, Crawford, Roulston, McIlwaine, Anderson and the thousands of others like them at the Somme, it also gained in Pyper and those like him who took up the cause of Ulster Protestants. This powerful moment of sacrifice with which the play leaves the audience is the moment that most clearly demonstrates the change that has overtaken Pyper. While it represents the moment in which he completely abandons his death-wish for the sake of his community, as Klein argues, it also represents "a crippling deal between the generations" (2007, p. 104), securing sectarian intransigence and self-destructive violence into communal myth.

If there is a way forward for the embattled communities of Northern Ireland implied in this play, it is in the attempt to represent the Ulster Protestant mind with compassion and understanding, a fact rendered complex and powerful by the fact

that McGuinness is from a Catholic Republican background (McGuinness 1996, p. x). The play shows that behind the seeming intransigence and violent self-destructiveness of the Protestant Unionists in Ulster is the humanity that unites us all. In an interview with O'Toole (1985b), McGuinness recounts his experience of developing the characters:

The shock for me in seeing how the characters developed when I was writing the play was the wonder of how these men could have endured it all and then gone over the top at the Somme. And I felt that they could do it not because they wished to defend their country or even their own place, but because they wanted to protect each other. So the most positive of human feelings was turned to the most negative ends.
(n. p.)

What lies behind the men's dedication to their cause is not hatred, but the powerful positive experiences of loyalty and love that they share, that they see as necessary for Ulster's survival, but which ultimately are also tearing Ulster apart.

As stated earlier, the connection between community involvement and death causes a complex relationship between individuals and their community. Communities provide individuals with either structures, rules, regulations and beliefs around which they can build meaningful lives, or limitations that stifle or contradict their individual aspirations and freedoms. Pyper's relation to his community, as has been shown, is very complex, as it simultaneously provides him with a centre of meaning that helps him to overcome his desire for death and takes from him the friends who ultimately helped him to find this centre of meaning.

Carthaginians expands on this latter point, concentrating on ways in which the demands of a community can clash with the lives and desires of its individuals. The play portrays the events of four days—from Wednesday morning to Sunday morning¹⁹—in the lives of seven Catholic characters, Dido, Maela, Seph, Paul,

¹⁹ Anne Kelly-O'Reilly (2002) reads the play as a "contemporary passion narrative" (pp. 93-4). Although the connection between this play and the passion narrative is quite indirect, she does rightly posit that the primary connection lies in the possibility of resurrection: "The play *Carthaginians* places the same journey from *death to life*, in a secular setting, where there is no promise of salvation

Greta, Sarah and Hark, who have taken refuge in a graveyard. The play is divided into seven scenes that depict the characters' journey toward an emotional resurrection as they form a community bond, waiting for the miraculous rise of the dead.

The rising of the dead, as the play reveals, does not turn out to be a supernatural miracle. Rather, it is the characters, not the literal dead, who experience the journey from death to life. Although they are not literally dead, one can construe their alienation from their social surroundings within the confines of the graveyard as a form of social death. The dead that are central to the play, however, are not only these socially alienated characters, but also the thirteen who died on Bloody Sunday. The legacy of that day haunts the characters such that their resurrection involves not only coming to terms with their private difficulties, but also the lasting communal trauma of Bloody Sunday.

In Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973), a play about fictional Bloody Sunday victims who are resurrected on stage to explore their motivations in joining the peace marches and the callous absurdity of their deaths, the dead are given varied and often contradictory scrutiny by observers of their deaths. While Friel focuses at the beginning of his play on immediate public reaction to Bloody Sunday, *Carthaginians*, which was written with an emotional distance that Friel's play lacked, concentrates more on the personal reaction to the tragedy and the effects of public reaction to it on the characters' personal lives.

In order to illustrate the characters' passage towards resurrection attention will be given first to why, along with the reasons given above, they have gathered in the graveyard in the first place. In addition to this point, an examination will be performed as to how their presence in the graveyard transforms it into what Nina Witoszek (1988) calls a "wake space." The characters' interactions in this space, as will be discussed, utilize the primary activities of the traditional Irish wake, which can be roughly categorized as mourning and amusement. Particular attention will be given to the character Dido, who, as Eamon Jordan suggests, has a physical and

from outside, and the characters are called to be saviours of themselves and each other" (*ibid.*, p. 94; emphasis added).

ideological “mobility” that the other characters apparently lack (2007, p. 136). He will be examined as a carnivalesque master of ceremonies whose words and antics help to bring the other characters to an alternative perspective. A comparison will then be made between the concerns of the women, which apparently concentrate on the private realm, and those of the men, which apparently concentrate on the public realm. The aim of this comparison will be to assess how the intermixing of these seemingly disparate realms in the play emphasises the private, feminine realm, levelling a critique at the community that sacrifices individualism for the sake of ideals.

The first performances of the play at the Peacock Theatre began with “[a] tilted, bare stage, a huge black wall, crouched figures staring into the distance,” as Finegan (1988) observed (n. p.). “The setting,” he suggests, “is supposed to be a burial ground in Derry (with Wendy Shea’s design continued right to the back of the auditorium)” (*ibid.*, n. p.). The fact that the setting encapsulates the whole auditorium suggests that what will be happening on stage has deliberate implications for all witnesses, as Hingerty (1988) proposed:

We realise as the play unfolds that the author thinks that the people who perpetrate violence are ‘dead.’ And those who have suffered from Bloody Sunday onwards are being tormented into being ‘dead’ and that we who condone by just sitting watching are ‘dead.’ (n. p.)

The audience’s realisation that they are implicated in this play is a deliberate choice by the production crew. This significant emphasis on the audience suggests that, like *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, this play attempts to bring the audience to a more profound understanding of the complexities within the community of Northern Ireland.

The characters reside in this bleak graveyard to escape the community outside, which is embroiled in the sectarian conflict of the Troubles. They hide themselves from the outside world apparently because of their inability to perform the roles expected of them there. “Their respective wounds,” suggests Kelly-O’Reilly (2002), “make it impossible for them to be life givers, either to themselves or to others” (p.

95). For the women, these wounds are connected to frustrated maternity: Maela's child has died; Greta, because of a hysterectomy, cannot have children; and Sarah, though she is involved with Hark, is told to forget about the prospect of having a child. As for the men, they experience frustrated masculinity, which is connected to their failure to perform their masculine social duties. Hark suffers from the traumas of his experiences being "involved" in both the Civil Rights movement and the IRA, and particularly from his experiences in gaol where he failed to fulfil the expected duty of one "involved" by not volunteering for the hunger strike.²⁰ Seph has also failed to live up to the expectations of his community and has, thus, chosen to be silent because his "talking," that is, informing on his "involved" peers, has alienated him from them. Paul is losing his rational grip on reality because of the terror of the events of Bloody Sunday and is no longer a teacher or a quiz master. Frustrated masculinity is emphasized in the play, as Elizabeth Butler Cullingford points out in her essay "British Romans and Irish Carthaginians," "through the comic destruction of the phallus. As a cigar, it is smoked; as a banana, it is devoured; as a sausage, it is pulped; as a plastic water pistol, it is chewed up" (1996, p. 234). This destruction of the phallus, as well as the frustration of maternity, suggests that these characters are symbolically castrated and, as a result, view themselves as failures for not being able to perform the expected, conventional duties of women and men in their community. Juliet Mitchell suggests that the castration complex has a profound influence upon conventional terms of identity:

The castration complex is not about women, nor men, but a danger, a horror to both—a gap that has to be filled in differently by each. [...] Phallic potency and maternity—for men and women—come to stand for wholeness. (1984, p. 308, quoted in Wilson 1986, pp. 148-9)

Throughout the play the characters express their wishes to re-attain some idealized part of themselves that they have lost as a consequence of their respective traumas. These longed-for parts are essentially the ghosts that haunt the characters. In the graveyard, where there is not only death, but also rest and contemplation of the past, where, as Maela suggests, the characters seem to belong (McGuinness 1996, p. 353),

²⁰ The H-Block hunger strikes, which took place in the early 1980s, were staged to garner the release and pardon of Republican prisoners. These strikes, which culminated in the death of Bobby Sands, were part of a mythic heritage of sacrifice for the Republican cause (Kearney 1997, pp. 109-13).

they are hoping they will find something that will fill the gap in their lives and perhaps allow them to return to their community. This something becomes the rising of the dead.

From the very beginning of the play, the raising of the dead is a kind of refrain in the characters' speeches. This miraculous event is associated with the women's vision. This vision is not specifically described, yet such a vision plays on the fact that numerous spiritual phenomena—mostly involving statues of the Virgin Mary—were occurring amongst Catholic communities in the 1980s. The newspaper article that Greta reads refers to two famous series of spiritual occurrences: the bleeding statue of the Virgin Mary at Medjugorje²¹ and the moving statues of the Virgin Mary witnessed around Ireland (*ibid.*, p. 306).²² Despite its elusiveness, for Maela, Greta and Sarah, this vision is initially a source of hope that, along with the miraculous rising of the dead, they might overcome their “great personal tragedies” and find a way to return to the wholeness that now lies in their pasts.

Although in their pasts they are connected to each other in one way or another—Hark, Sarah and Paul through the Civil Rights movement, Paul and Greta through their teaching positions, Maela, Paul and Dido through quiz games, and all through the legacy of Bloody Sunday—their meeting in the graveyard is somewhat haphazard. Maela's constant vigil over her daughter's grave indicates that, since seeing the vision, she wishes that when the dead rise, she will get her daughter back. When Sarah asks Greta why she came to the graveyard she answers, “I want myself back. [...] I would like to be what I used to be” (*ibid.*, p. 350), which is a desire closely allied with her memories of her deceased parents. Paul is there to honour the dead of Bloody Sunday by building a pyramid out of rubbish, through which, he hopes, the dead might rise (*ibid.*, p.320). Seph has come to escape the judgement, ridicule and guilt of being an informant. Hark, other than being there as a grave digger, wishes to escape the responsibilities of being involved in the IRA. Sarah has come, apparently, to get Hark back into her life. Dido's motivation seems to be money: he came to the graveyard, as he and Maela reveal, to die on hunger strike as a means of getting sponsorship (*ibid.*, p. 304); and, for a small profit, he supplies the

²¹ Spelt “Maggiagore” in the text.

²² For insight into the Irish phenomenon of moving statues, see *Seeing is Believing*, edited by Colm Tóibín (1999).

others with food and entertainment. However, the play reveals that Dido's motivation is much more complex than a mere desire for money. Although their meeting is haphazard, and unconscious, it is fortuitous. Through it, they each find a way to express and confront the traumas that brought them to the graveyard in the first place.

A graveyard is perhaps the most plausible place to witness the rising of the dead. However, the graveyard in the play is not limited to this function. Rather, it is, in many respects, the "wake space" that Witoszek suggests is the primary space of modern Irish drama. She conceives the "wake space" as an "inside" space²³, a private refuge against the "outside" space of law, order and status quo:

The wake divides the dramatic space horizontally, in terms of the *inside/outside*. [...] [T]he inside is apparently secure; a refuge for sinners, failures, rebels and corpses. The nature of this space, however, is highly ambivalent. While it does accommodate the wake festivity, at its centre is death. The outside is of an equally ambivalent nature [being a space that] is both threatening and alluring. [...] [I]f the inner sanctum offers its votaries security at the cost of stagnation, the outside world offers growth at the cost of painful confrontation. (Witoszek 1988, pp. 152-3)

Although surrounded by soldiers and blockades, the graveyard is a neutral space among the dead where the characters are free from the conflict, prohibitions, privileges, hierarchies and norms of the culture of officialdom beyond its borders. It is, thus, a carnivalesque space. Although the characters might enter the space in a state of symbolic castration, the wake space allows for an interrogation of the supposed ideological security of the "outside," which has for various reasons driven the characters into communal sanctuary. This sanctuary is, however, fragile. In the November before the Abbey staged *Carthaginians*, the IRA bombed the Cenotaph in Enniskillen during a Remembrance Day service (Brown 2004, p. 333). McGuinness has himself admitted that this bombing was a particularly significant event in his own life:

²³ To avoid confusion in these spatial terms, the "inside" space is where the action of the play takes place, whereas the outside space lies always offstage. The outside does, however, encroach upon the inside, mainly through gestures of mockery or threat.

The day that the bomb went off at the Enniskillen memorial was the worst day of my life apart from Bloody Sunday [...]. I felt totally helpless and hopeless. . . It convinced me that there will never be a United Ireland in my time. The IRA have bombed it apart. (Jackson 1989, n. p.)

Indeed, the horrific fact of the bombing lends certain insecurity to the characters' vigil as forces beyond the borders of the graveyard can easily shatter their sanctuary.

Although they are free to speak and act as they please in this inside space, the characters are initially unable to speak about their personal difficulties. This reticence to speak, as Maela reveals, is motivated by fear: "The dead will rise here. A miracle. But we can't talk about it, for fear if we talk about it, it won't happen" (McGuinness 1996, p. 298). This fear of talking is significant in almost all of the other characters' experiences, causing Maela to be unable to admit that her daughter is really dead, Sarah to admit that she wants Hark back, Greta to not see herself as a whole woman, Seph to render himself silent, Paul to have bouts of madness and Hark to not be able to admit that he values life over sacrifice for the Republican cause. Within the complex socio-cultural configuration of Northern Ireland, the characters do not adopt silence merely to hide their personal traumas. Rather, Bloody Sunday taught them that speech is not free in Northern Ireland: they, like the speaker in Seamus Heaney's poem "Whatever You Say Say Nothing," have succumbed to "the tight gag of place / And times" (1975, p. 59), which has persisted into the 1980s. Hark and Seph in particular attest to the difficulty of speaking in such a turbulent political situation. Their silence speaks volumes on how the expectations of one's community can overwhelm individuals, expectations that side more with death and degradation than life and reconciliation. It is, however, only after they allow themselves to speak and express their inner turmoil to each other that they can begin to heal themselves.

This impetus to speak comes through the enactment of the primary activities in the traditional Irish wake: the personal and communal mourning and the carnivalesque amusements. The characters' utilization of these activities aligns the play with the ritual elements of the traditional Irish wake. While its function and significance has

become less pronounced in modern Ireland, according to Seán Ó Súillabháin, in his book *Irish Wake Amusements* (1967), the wake was a traditional way for an Irish community to join together to grieve the loss of one of its members (1967, p. 12).²⁴ It was a ritualised cross-section of mourning and celebration, traditionally consisting, on the one hand, of solemn prayer and keening, and on the other, of feasting, drinking and amusements, such as singing, dancing, story telling, joking and gaming, often riotous and obscene in nature. The keening, a droning wail done either by the community women, usually those of the deceased's family, or by hired professionals, expressed the sorrow for the death. Although there is no explicit keening in the play, the characters' public displays of sorrow function similarly to the traditional keened in that they give expression to this sorrow. The function of the amusements, as Ó Súillabháin maintains, is to initiate three important tasks for the community (*ibid.*, pp. 170-172). Firstly, the liveliness of the wake participants helped to alleviate the communal sorrow. Secondly, the gaming, which may have even involved the corpse, brought the community together to celebrate the life of one of its members—sometimes mocking as much as lauding the dead—attesting to the lasting impression the dead had on the community. Finally, these lively demonstrations, performed in the face of physical death, supported the community's immortality by making a persistent physicality into a symbol of transcendence. These three tasks lay behind many of the ritualised and carnivalesque events in the play.

The carnivalesque amusements that take place throughout the play seem to fit the first of these tasks, the alleviation of sorrow. Carnivalesque laughter, as Bakhtin has shown, may degrade, deride and mock, but it also uplifts, enables and strengthens. The first among these in the play are the women's jokes in Scene One. The jokes that Maela, Sarah and Greta share about the man with the cigar ends and the women with the bananas (*ibid.*, pp. 299-300)—which, as argued previously, demonstrate the destruction of phallic symbols—show that they are able to laugh and cheer each other up. Though sexuality and reproduction are such deep concerns for each of them, the jokes provide the necessary distance and humour to speak of them,

²⁴ Ó Súillabháin notes that other countries partook of a similar wake style, such as Prussia, Denmark and Sweden (1967, p. 173).

opening up a channel for the expression of their personal traumas related to reproduction later in the play.

Another such carnivalesque amusement is the quiz game that occurs in Scene Six. The game is accompanied by what the nebenscene describes as a “party mood” (*ibid.*, p. 354). Dido initiates it after Maela’s painful acceptance of the death of her daughter (*ibid.*, pp. 352-3). The questions refer to both high and pop culture, a gesture that, according to Lloyd (1993), allows the mixture of seriousness and burlesque that expresses “indifference to cultural hierarchies” (p. 96). This democratic gesture not only brings the more serious elements down to earth, but also enables a critical perspective. For all of the variance between questions, two of them touch on subjects particularly pertinent to the play’s critique of community in Northern Ireland:

Paul: What is the capital of—sorry the Judicial capital of the Netherlands?

Sarah: The Hague.

Paul: The European Court of Justice is in the Hague. There will be justice, and there will be peace, but there will be no peace without justice. [. . .]

Paul: Hark’s team, what does Carthage mean?

They confer.

Hark: We don’t know.

Dido: It means new city. (*ibid.*, pp. 362, 364)

The reference to The Hague is suggestive of the violations of justice and human rights that have plagued Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles. However, the mention of the meaning of Carthage being “new city” suggests that there is a chance for renewal in Derry and, by extension, Northern Ireland. The quiz game is itself an act of renewal, bringing all of the characters together in a “party mood,” and specifically providing Dido, Maela and Paul a nostalgic return to their time at the quizzes.

Hark’s interrogation of Dido in Scene Two is another carnivalesque amusement, albeit a very sinister one, that helps Hark to express one of his painful memories. Like Martin Lynch’s *The Interrogation of Ambrose Fogarty* (1982), Hark’s interrogation of Dido is a violent re-enactment of an interrogation by either the

police or the army. As in Lynch's play, the interrogator, in this case Hark, attempts to get information from an apparently innocent victim through verbal and physical/sexual violence, attacking the victim's body—Hark grabs Dido's crotch—, his sense of manhood and his possible political affiliation (McGuinness 1996, p. 314). Hark's performance of the role of interrogator is a reversal of his own experience as the victim of an interrogation, which is revealed in his slippage of his own name into his act. This reversal foregrounds the fact that identity in Northern Ireland seems to require a level of performance, of role play; a fact emphasised by the resemblance between Hark's performance and that of the policemen in Lynch's play. Hark's motivation in adopting this persona may be an act of personal empowerment, of trying to come to terms with the past by performing it. He may also be motivated by Dido's repeated seductions. During the most intense moment of the interrogation when Hark grabs Dido's crotch, he equates homosexuality with the Nationalist cause: "Is the united Ireland between your legs? What happens when cocks unite? Disease, boy, disease. The united Ireland's your disease" (*ibid.*, p. 314). For him homosexuality is a dual threat, both as a source of disease, stereotypically AIDS, and effeminacy; thus, he attacks Dido in an attempt to control the threat. However, the equation, here, of homosexuality with the Nationalist cause reveals Hark's view on the failure of the cause to unite Ireland, a failure that has contributed to the political disease of the Troubles.

While Ambrose Fogarty is caught in a "rotten system" that he is unable to beat—evinced by his understanding that reporting the violence dealt him by the corrupt police will do no good because it will be "investigated" by other corrupt police (Lynch 1982, p. 79)—Dido exclaims to Hark that although "[s]ome people here fuck with a bullet and the rest fuck with a Bible, [...] [he] belong[s] to neither" (McGuinness 1996, p. 315). As a homosexual, Dido conforms to neither the military nor the religious norm. Like Crawford in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, he finds his own self to be the only true cause to which he can faithfully dedicate himself. Dido will not submit to the biased, easy performance of identity demanded by his community, as Hark does. For him, one cannot prescribe identity so easily; an idea he embodies as he appears in several guises throughout the play. Dido's homosexuality sets him apart from the other characters and, as Lojek argued in relation to Pyper, gives him an alternative, privileged perspective through which to

view and represent the world around him. His alternative, and dramatically privileged, perspective, like the younger Pyper's, enables him to be an agent of the carnivalesque. He fulfils this role by presenting his world through a farcical play.

The Burning Balaclava is written by Dido under the pseudonym / alter ego Fionnuala McGonigle as an attempt to tell “[a]n everyday story of ordinary Derry ones” (*ibid.*, p. 327). The play is a farce, a hilarious satirical critique of the Troubles. It involves all of the characters, requiring all but Seph to take on roles of the opposite sex; Dido himself takes on two roles. The farce's characters are all stereotypes, represented primarily through symbolic props and variations on the surname Doherty. The use of such stereotyping, as Kelly-O'Reilly (2002) points out, is a blatant comment on the conflict in Northern Ireland:

[The use of stereotypical symbols] focuses attention on how much of the war in Northern Ireland is in fact a war about symbols and how and what they mean. The easy stereotyping of the other through the use of symbols in the play allows the audience to see the power of symbols at work in the community. The war over symbols suggests a collapse of the symbolic function into literalism. When the real ambiguity and ambivalence of symbols is denied, the resultant literalism ultimately leads to the death of the symbol, at least in its more liberating aspects. (p. 101)

The “collapse of the symbol into literalism” permeates the farce, as nearly all of the murders that occur are committed based on stereotypical definitions of identity. However, while the use of stereotypes and farce seems to conflate art, identity and politics in Northern Ireland, its metatheatricality—its humorous carnivalesque reversals and substitutions, its being a play-within-a-play—coupled with intricacy in naming suggests that Dido's gloss on the lives of “ordinary Derry ones” is more complex than it first appears. The fact that it is a play-within-a-play foregrounds the layers of theatricality at work, not only within its own performance, but also within *Carthaginians* in general. The distinction between fiction and reality in the lives of both the characters acting out Dido's play and of the audience viewing *Carthaginians* is called into question, ultimately showing that truth can be as absurd as fiction (Mikami 2002, p. 44). This theatricality is emphasised by the cross-dressing of all but Seph, the diminution of the title of “hound of Ulster” from the

Celtic hero Cuchulain to a stuffed dog on a lead (McGuinness 1996, p. 336), as well as Dido's multiple layers of performance, firstly as himself, then as Fionnuala McGonigle, then as both Doreen O'Doherty and a faceless, nameless British soldier. This complex play with identity is apparent also in the fact that every last name in the play is a variation on Doherty. While these variations appear to grant similitude to the characters, it reveals the diverse confluence of lineages and cultures that make up Northern Ireland, from the overt Gaelic of "O'Dochartaigh" to the English of "Doherty." Furthermore, although Hark insists that it is a well-known fact that everyone in Derry is named "Doherty," Greta points out that "[n]o one here's named Doherty" (*ibid.*, p. 332). This detail suggests that what is important here is not the universalising simplicity of Dido's representations, but the individuals who are often hidden beneath the layered performances and disguises of identity.

Apart from its nuanced subtexts, the plot of *The Burning BalACLava* is a "love-across-the-barricades" tale, loosely utilizing the Romeo and Juliet formula, in which an involved Catholic Padraig O'Dochartaigh, played by Maela, wishes to consummate his love with his Protestant girlfriend Mercy Dogherty, played by Paul. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews suggests that such a love affair

[...] can only be realised in a private sphere where sexuality and politics are dissociated and individual self-realisation counts for more than the claims of the public, political world. (2003, p. 32)

Their relationship, however, is deliberately political as is made clear by the interventions of the couples parents: Mercy's father is a belligerent RUC man, played by Greta, who advises her to kill her Catholic lover; Padraig's mother is the sacred heart toting Irishwoman, played by Hark, who secretly depends upon the war for money and so tells Padraig to kill Mercy. The two sides meet in a showdown scenario and when a priest, played by Seph, is shot in the crossfire, a succession of retributive murders occurs until everyone is dead. The farce ends with the British soldier speaking on the theme of death as the ultimate leveller:

They've got me. I join the dying. What's a Brit under the clay? What's a Protestant in the ground? What's a Catholic in the grave? All the same. Dead. All dead.

We're all dead. I'm dying. They've got me. It's over. It's over. It's over. (McGuinness 1996, p. 344)

Behind this humorous death speech, which achieved its humour in the first performance by being played by David Herlihy with exaggerated melodrama, Dido is suggesting that in the conflict that has for decades split the community of Northern Ireland along lines of politics, religion, economics and so on, there are no winners. Death renders all apparent difference and all seeming authenticity null and void. Identity, the play suggests, can only survive in the living individual, not in the dead who the living use as symbolic ammunition for revenge and war.

After the conclusion of the farce, Dido's question as to whether the farce is "just like real life" is met with silence because, given the complexity at work within it, the characters are unable to provide an answer, they instead dismiss it as "shite" (*ibid.*, p. 344). On one level, the play within a play is like real life in that it captures the problems of intransigent perspectives. On another level, the play destabilises identities, requiring gender changes and, for Dido, multiple roles. The suggestion is that identity is not so easily pegged as the "reality" of the Troubles seems to indicate. By foregrounding such issues of identity, *The Burning Balaclava* encourages them to contemplate their relationship to their own personal traumas and to the wider trauma of Bloody Sunday. As Mikami points out, in

[...] taking on one of Dido's roles, all the characters find an outlet for their emotions, even though they despise the play itself. [...] [Through their participation, they] re-experience and work through the traumatic and emotional experience of 1972 and new insight is generated. (2002, pp. 42, 44)

After the farce, the other characters find the words to express their traumas. Dido, as a carnivalesque master of ceremonies, has brought them into confrontation with issues that affect each of them, and has enabled them to speak.

Each of the characters learns the healing power of storytelling by taking part in the amusements. Kristin Morrison (1983) suggests that storytelling is a modern dramatic convention that allows characters to express their psychological inwardness:

[...] the telling of a story allows characters that quintessentially “modern,” Freudian opportunity to reveal deep and difficult thoughts and feelings while at the same time concealing them as fiction or at least distancing them as narration. (p. 3)

Speaking stories is useful to these characters because transforming trauma into narrative provides a distance between the teller and the story so that healing may begin. This facet of storytelling is particularly clear in the women’s respective revelations.

Each of the women’s narratives begins in the third person point of view, seemingly to create the necessary distance to speak their painful memories. Yet, they switch to and end in the first person point of view, perhaps because the experiences are too personal to keep at a narrative distance. Sarah begins her story with “[o]nce upon a time” and details, through the third person, how “Hark and Paul and Seph and Sarah” participated in the civil rights movement until “[o]ne of the gang, the girl, she went away, but not to the Alps. Amsterdam. Now that’s another story” (McGuinness 1996, p. 327). Here she switches to the first person point of view as she sums up her life as a drug user: “I took a pill. I took a powder. And I got hooked. [...] I bought it myself and I sold myself to buy it” (*ibid.*, p. 327). She finishes her story by admitting that she conquered her habits and brought herself “back from the dead” by facing the truth of her difficult circumstances; a realization that she insists must be made by each of the characters if they are going to overcome the pain of their respective difficulties.

Both Maela and Greta begin their stories similar to how Sarah began her joke of the man with the cigar ends earlier in the play, but, unlike the joke, the stories are serious. For Greta, her story involves a woman who visits the doctor who tells her she needs an operation, an operation that leaves her sterile. This woman is unable to come to terms with the changes in her life because she receives little help from her parents. Here Greta switches to the first person in her thrice-repeated cry: “Mammy, Daddy, I’m afraid” (*ibid.*, 373). Greta’s call for her “mammy” has a complex etymology that seems to fit Greta’s circumstances. Marina Warner suggests the following regarding this etymology:

In Greek, the root *mamm-e* gives both the word for the breast, the word for a child's cry for the breast, and the name of mother, as it still does in English, and the Romance languages. (1985, p. 282)

One can then interpret Greta's calls for her "mammy" as manifestations of her desire for nurturing that have been frustrated her whole life. Sarah steps forward to comfort Greta with a very significant gesture that one can interpret as playfulness: gently touching her breasts (McGuinness 1996, p. 374). Sarah's role in this gesture is threefold: she is at once a mother figure, a child figure and a lover figure. Thus, Greta's scream, which follows the touch, is the manifestation of her unfamiliarity with both maternal and sexual nurturing and touch. One may also read this scream as a kind of keen for the significant losses in her life. This playful, quasi-sexual gesture, along with the earlier kiss of Greta's hand (*ibid.*, p. 349), is Sarah's way of confirming Greta's place in the group of outsiders that is now a surrogate family. After this gesture, Greta feels confident that the dead will rise, that she will overcome the negative influence of the ghosts of her parents.

Maela's story is a manifestation of her pain of learning that her daughter has cancer. Spoken in the third person it tells of a woman who visited the doctor with her daughter who is experiencing "'pain in her heart and in her head and in her hair.' So the doctors shave the child bald and the child dies with no hair" (*ibid.*, p. 317-8). This manifestation of her pain is the first step she takes in confronting her past. She has been unable to accept the truth that her daughter died on the same day as the events of Bloody Sunday, and even denies that any death occurred on that day. However, this attempt to repress and deny her anguish is quelled in Scene Five when her memories of that day flood back and she is forced to face the truth. In her recollection of these memories, she switches to the first person point of view as she links the deaths of the thirteen peace marchers with the death of her daughter: "They opened fire and shot them dead. [...] She opened fire on herself. When I wasn't looking she caught cancer" (*ibid.*, p. 352). This link implies that the marchers died of a social cancer, that is, the sectarian conflict. Given Maela's situation, the equation also suggests that on the public level there is still much grief and denial regarding Bloody Sunday, a fact foregrounded by the re-opening of inquiries into the

events of Bloody Sunday by British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998 (Dawson 2007, p. 92). This public grief and denial must be faced, but with the support of the community. Indeed, after Maela's keen-like outburst, the others help her by quizzing her with trivia questions, allowing her to rejoin the group as part of the "Sonny and Cher" quiz team (McGuinness 1996, p. 352-53).

As for the Hark, Seph and Paul, their concerns are distinctly public, and deal directly with Bloody Sunday and its political aftermath. While each of the men ascribe to active and public agencies in dealing with the pain of the past, they learn that they need the private feminine space to come to terms with their difficulties. Seph, because he has informed on his comrades, mourns for most of the play in silence. However, the inspiration for his informing was what he experienced on Bloody Sunday: "I went to those I informed on. I said, kill me. Let me die. They said, live. That's your punishment. Life. Not death. Live with what you've done" (*ibid.*, p. 346). However, despite the stigma attached to what he had done, he reveals that his intentions were not of a malign nature:

They said after Bloody Sunday they wanted to avenge the dead but they wanted to join them. And I would tell on the living who wanted to join the dead. I'd save them from themselves. I'd save them from the dead. (*ibid.*, p. 370).

Retaliation, in Seph's view, will not change the bloody cycle of the conflict; rather, it will only increase the number of dead. His attempt to grip on to life in a society that has called for violent sacrifice effectively alienates him from that society.

Hark's "involvement" with the IRA has yielded him deeply affecting experiences, such as that which is manifested in his interrogation of Dido discussed above. The trauma of these experiences has made him very antagonistic. It is not until he is threatened himself that the source of his distress is revealed. When Paul confronts him, calling him a coward and threatening him with a water pistol, Hark finally admits to not being able to live up to what was expected of him as an involved soldier:

Can't fire, can't kill, can't eat. Coward. I'm a coward. Want to eat. Want to live, I want to live. And I can't face the dead. Will the dead go away and stop haunting me? I cannot kill to avenge you. All I could have killed was myself. And I couldn't. I can't. Come back to me, Sarah. I'm dead. Come back and raise the dead. (*ibid.*, p. 372)

Like Seph, he was confronted with the legacy of the dead that has been maintained by the cultural belief that the dead can only be appeased if honoured through revenge, as is implied, for example, in Gerry Adams's call for Republican organisation. Instead of following those who sacrifice themselves for the sake of the dead, Hark chooses to live, but it will be a life, like Seph's, looked upon by his society with great ignominy. His choice kills him socially, and he finds solace and livelihood only in the graveyard. He is, however, unsatisfied with this circumstance and, therefore, calls out to the living, to Sarah, to bring him back to life. As Sarah and the others accept them into the group, life becomes existence in the company of friends who can share love and respect for one another.

Paul's attempts to overcome his distress from memories of Bloody Sunday through the construction of his rubbish pyramid. According to Becker, people need to feel a sense of "cosmic importance" and "primary value":

They earn this feeling by carving out a place in nature, by building an edifice that reflects human value: a temple, a cathedral, a totem pole, a skyscraper, a family that spans three generations. (1997, p. 5)

Paul's monument, his homage to the dead of Bloody Sunday, becomes, in this view, an attempt to recapture the significance, the life that was lost on that day. Because he believes that the living cannot heal the damage of the Troubles, "but the dead might" (McGuinness 1996, p. 369), he hopes to appease the spirits of the dead and invoke them back into existence through his monument. He succeeds in this invocation not through his rubbish pyramid, but by speaking the names and addresses of the dead of Bloody Sunday (*ibid.*, p. 377-8). This naming fulfils the second task of the wake ceremony, which is to celebrate the dead. By naming the dead he is in a sense bringing them back to life. No longer are they rubbish being carried through the streets of Derry, but are given distinction through his public

naming. This act of naming echoes Maurya's naming, in J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904), of the men in her family who died in their struggle against the sea. Both acts of naming are public acknowledgements of the dead that also reveal the private suffering caused by their deaths; but, while Maurya's act has an explicit religious tenor, this element is muted in Paul's. Paul's naming apparently invokes the political rather than the religious. However, this political dimension, as Lojek (2004) argues, is paradoxical. The naming is simultaneously recognition of the individuality of the Bloody Sunday victims, and a generalising gesture that attempts to fit the dead into a prescriptive ideology:

On the one hand, the specificity of naming suggests an emphasis on individuality and particularity. On the other hand, ritualized naming is a sort of synecdoche in which a part stands for a greater whole, thus reducing the emphasis on individuality and particularity. That tension and ambiguity are inextricable from the power of ritualized naming and may, in fact, be a source of its power. (p. 122)

While Paul's recitation of the names of the Bloody Sunday dead may encapsulate this paradox, he recites not merely for the sake of dead as much as for the sake of the living. In keeping with the other characters, Paul does not invoke the dead for the purposes of revenge, or as a war cry, but as an act of healing, of recognizing and celebrating them. Thus, Paul's gesture wakes the dead of Bloody Sunday; the living need not act further, but to realise that the dead are dead and the living can go on living.

At the end of the play, after each of the characters has brought to light his or her respective past and, to an extent, come to terms with this past, they form a kind of chorus that concludes, "[b]ury the dead. [...] Raise the dying. [...] Wash the living" (McGuinness 1996, p. 379). The concept of raising the dead is no longer the centre of attention; the ghosts that had such power over the characters are not brought back to life, but put to rest. The characters understand that allowing the dead to rest, that is, giving them due respect and the benefit of social ritual, and shifting attention onto those who have a chance at life is how their contemporaries will be able to possibly deal with the problems of the Troubles. Concentrating on the dead and on the world beyond the living will lead to more death, and perhaps more supernatural instances

like the women's vision. Even though this message is clear, the play shows that it is not going to magically change the whole situation in Ireland; that change, like the Northern Irish peace process, has not yet been completed: the balaclava is not burnt but "burning." This idea is relevant to Dido's final gesture of leaving, which suggests that, though he loves Derry, he does not belong to it, for it is not yet fully ready to change and accept the differences that have so long segregated its community. Unlike his namesake, as Butler-Cullingford notes, Dido does not submit to death:

[Dido] rewrites the metaphor inscribed in his name, which defines him as a deserted victim of imperialism. Instead he determines, like Aeneas, to move on. (1996, p. 235)

His choice to leave may also be because he finds the social order within Derry, still, too constricting. The carnivalesque may be enabling, but change will be difficult. Moreover, even though the characters have faced their pasts, they are not yet able to put it behind them completely. Dido's final speech fits particularly well to this idea. Overturning Paul's prescription that Carthage will be destroyed, he says that despite all the violence and corruption of the past, "Carthage has not been destroyed" (McGuinness 1996, pp. 310, 379). However, he also suggests to the audience, as much as to himself and the other characters, to "watch yourself" (*ibid.*, p. 379). This suggestion invokes both the idea that the audience examine themselves, to "love [...] and leave" (*ibid.*, p. 379) the ghosts of their pasts, and a warning that if they are not careful and do not "cease their violent hand" there will be no chance of changing the state of affairs. Before he leaves, Dido speaks the word "play," a word that not only suggests entertainment, energy and liveliness, but also the fluidity of constructs of identity and the discovery of new alternatives. As such, the play leaves the audience with hope that the future holds a chance for change in which the dead are successfully laid to rest and the living live on. The play, thus, fulfils the final task of the wake, which finally shifts emphasis from the dead onto the living.

For the mourners in the graveyard, as well as for Pyper, death has been, for the most part, a traumatic experience. Death damaged almost all of them. Pyper's response is commemorative work. The graveyard mourners' response is social death. Even

Dido, who seems to be the only character not significantly scarred by death, does not feel comfortable in the Derry community, where collective memory and prejudice maintain violence and designate homosexuality as unacceptable. However, Dido has found a way to fulfil the Elder Pyper's wish to defy the violent inheritance of the past by showing not only the absurdity of the conflict, but also the necessity to wake and put to rest the damaging legacy of the past. This defiance, for both Dido and Pyper, seems related to their homosexuality. However, while they may try to find love in their respective communities, these communities prevent them. The power of collective memory is not easily defied. In *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, the Elder Pyper, is unable to let go of the historical inheritance of Northern Irish Protestants because of his deep emotional investment in his friendship with the other men in the Thirty-sixth Division during World War I. This investment is the primary impetus behind his adoption of the Protestant Unionist cause in Ulster and has been the source of his energy to maintain the sectarian status quo in Northern Ireland. Pyper, primarily the Elder Pyper, is a solitary figure. When he speaks, no living person speaks back. For him the past alone responds. A response that, while he wishes to use in defiance of Ulster's destruction, but one that ultimately overpowers his temporary critique of Ulster's inheritance. At the end of *Carthaginians*, however, the characters do not maintain such a profound adherence to the voices from their past. Their traumas receive sustained critical attention as the characters share with one another. In both the wake-like mourning and amusement they are able to find a voice for their respective sorrows and are able to come to terms with them. They find the strength to overcome their initial silent suffering in their relationships with one another in the present. This impetus to speak seems to be the key to dealing with a seemingly intransigent past. Both plays explore the paradox of community involvement, showing how the demands of community can promote segregation, sectarianism, hatred and the will to kill in its name, just as it can provide individuals with loyalty, friendship, love, and a will to defend it at all cost.

Chapter Two:
Death and / as the Other: Murder and Power in
Someone Who'll Watch Over Me and *Mutabilitie*

As argued in Chapter One, a community attempts to solidify its integrity against the threat and reality of death through its use of rituals, myths, laws, definitions and the like. This attempt is not always successful, as individuals from the community may find its strictures too limited, or not limited enough. The situation becomes more complex when a community encounters another community that may be significantly different from it with respect to race, systems of belief, law and culture. These differences can become the basis of both communities' constructions of each other as "Other." The following chapter will investigate the relationships of "Otherness" as represented in McGuinness's *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and *Mutabilitie*, and how these relationships affect McGuinness's representations of death in these plays.

In order to complete this examination, this chapter will first propose a workable definition of "Otherness" and how it relates to death, concentrating on the chiasmic construction of death as Other and the Other as death. The chapter will then give a summary of the construction of Otherness in the relationship between Ireland and England, giving particular attention to Kiberd's elucidation of this relationship in *Inventing Ireland* (1995). Given that these plays first appeared in the 1990s, this chapter will briefly examine the political and economic changes that occurred in the late eighties and early nineties that sparked the economic phenomenon known as "the Celtic Tiger" and the peace process that culminated in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. While the relationship between Ireland and England is seemingly the central concern of each of these plays, especially *Mutabilitie*, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* introduces a further complexity in the fact that it involves, in addition to an Irishman and an Englishman, an American and Lebanese Arabs. Thus, the chapter will provide a cursory summary of the political conditions in Lebanon during the 1980s when the Islamic Jihad Arabs embarked on their hostage-taking campaign, which the play is based upon.

Turning to the plays, the chapter will examine *Mutabilitie* as an attempt to re-examine and redefine the relationship between Ireland and England at the end of the sixteenth century when England was in the process of its plantations of Ireland, and the Irish way of life was drastically changing. This examination will concentrate on the effect of various instances of murder that take place in the play on the relationship between the two communities. *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* deals with the experiences of an Irishman, an Englishman and an American while they are imprisoned by Lebanese Arabs. The chapter will explore the relationships of Otherness as constructed between the individual prisoners and between them and their captors. Death is a central concern in these relationships: being unarmed and chained to a wall, the prisoners are always at the mercy of the Arabs, a fact confirmed when the Arabs apparently kill one of them. Death also plays a significant role in the relationship between the Irishman and the Englishman as they argue about the shared colonial history of the two countries. The constant threat of death, coupled with the characters' remembrance of dead family, also plays a significant role in helping the characters, particularly the Englishman and Irishman, form relationships that challenge their initially stereotypical understanding of one another's identities.

For the purposes of this chapter, "Otherness" arises when differences between two or more subjects threaten the integrity of one or more of these subjects. Individuals evaluate differences based on a generally definitive trait, or traits, such as nationality, race, political or religious affiliation, gender, sexuality, income and the like. Although individuals may apply constructions of Otherness on a national scale, as do the characters of these two plays, they are contingent on the individual's perspective: the individual's definition of what is and is not acceptable. These definitions generally rely on simplified constructions of identity instigated as a demonstration of power that generally result in stereotyping. As Lojek (1995) points out, summarising Seamus Deane:

Stereotypes are 'mutually generative,' [Seamus Deane] suggests. The 'community that exercises power' stereotypes not only the Other, but also itself, and both groups internalize the stereotypes. (p. 350)

Stereotyping serves both to confirm the “community that exercises power” in having a meaningful, if simplistic, idea of identity and to deprive the Other of such meaningful associations. Consequently, Otherness becomes the basis of self-definition, providing the limit against which the community empowers its selfhood, or, for the Other, a detrimental standard that the self can only with difficulty escape.

One’s Other, then, represents what one wishes to repel, or, in some cases, expel from the self, being a “not-self.” As such, the Other embodies a threat to the identity of the community, to its well-being as a community, and comes to represent the possibility of its death, both physical and social. In the case of social death, if the Other is able to gain power over the community, the Other will destroy the basis of the community’s identity by imposing its own values. Being forced to relinquish the stability of one’s identity is, for some, a fate that equals or even rivals death, and they kill or die to prevent it. Michel Foucault (1990) argues that, in the modern world, death has become the counterpart of the sustaining forces of life. He suggests that “power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (p. 137). Power maintains itself by the rule of law, which both sustains and is sustained by a certain formulation of socio-cultural identity. “Law cannot help but be armed,” he posits, “and its arm, *par excellence*, is death; to those who transgress it, it replies, at least as a last resort, with that absolute menace” (p. 144). Death, in this formulation, is “at least a last resort” in the maintenance of identity in face of a threatening Other. This idea is encapsulated in the Protestant poet Edmund’s assertion in *Mutabilitie* that Catholicism is heathen and will doom all to an eternity of damnation unless it is “cut from the tongue” (McGuinness 1997, p. 48).

The mention of the relationship between Ireland and England in this context begs the following question: if the Other presented such a threat, why would England invade Ireland, whose threat to England was ostensibly latent? Put in simple terms, the construction of Otherness can be an exercise in projection. As will be discussed in further detail below, Kiberd (1995) asserts that from the very beginning of England’s colonial project in Ireland, the Irish were “the perfect foil to set off [English] virtues” (p. 9). As such, apart from its economic benefits and its strategic position for military and shipping endeavours, Ireland was a keystone in the

formation of English identity. In attempting to put a stake in the heart of Irish identity, English identity was empowered. One can elucidate the reasoning behind this empowerment by examining the connection between Otherness and death.

Edmund's assertion of the need to subdue, even by violence, the "errors" of the Irish emphasises that death and Otherness are closely connected. The Other, as demonstrated above, can represent death. Death is also Other. One can regard it as the extreme limit of Otherness, where Otherness succeeds in destroying identity. Because they view it as the seeming opposite of life, the living attempt to keep death from them as much as they can, to contain or limit its power. As Goodwin and Bronfen (1993) argue, society refuses to accept mortality and attempts to contain it in social, ritual and artistic constructions (p. 3 and *passim*). Thus, for example, cemeteries contain and keep the dead body out of the way; laws prevent people from endangering lives; people try to uphold communities rather than live alone; and memorials to dead people and past events proliferate. However, death's power stems from the fact that no one can know it, because, quite simply, no one has lived to tell about it. As a forbidden, unknowable subject, as Goodwin and Bronfen have shown, it is allowed

[...] to emerge [in society] only in ritually determined moments or in circumstances of communal violence. Death is thus necessarily constructed by a culture, it grounds the many ways a culture stabilizes and represents itself [...]. (*ibid.*, pp. 3-4)

In the name of stability, for a community such as the Elizabethan English, subjugating its Other is a particularly potent demonstration of its power. Because the Other is a representation, perhaps more accurately in this case a projection, of death, overpowering the Other is, in a sense, controlling death, containing or limiting its power: with the threat denied, the community can live securely. Becker sums up this function nicely: "The community gets more life by means of the victim's death" (1997, p. 138).

England's construction of Ireland as Other has within it a paradox: while the English attempted to destroy what in their eyes the Irish represented, the Irish were significant in England's formation of its early colonial identity. In the years of the

English plantations of Ireland, Kiberd argues, Ireland was “invented” by England: “With the mission to impose a central administration went the attempt to define a unitary Irish character” (1995, p. 9). However, this definition of Ireland was contemporaneous with England’s own assertion of national identity:

[...] the makers of crown policy in Ireland made ever more strenuous attempts to define an English national character, and a countervailing Irish one. [...] From the later sixteenth century, when Edmund Spenser walked the plantations of Munster, the English have presented themselves to the world as controlled, refined and rooted; and so it suited them to find the Irish hot-headed, rude and nomadic, the perfect foil to set off their own virtues. (*ibid.*, p. 9)

As such, England constructed Ireland as Other, as being “not-England,” and initiated policies to convert the Irish to English ways. When the Irish refused peaceful submission to English policies, the English crown found it necessary to use force. The Irish were no military match for the English and, despite numerous uprisings, were culturally and economically subsumed beneath their control.

This control was maintained until Ireland won its right to self-government, with the Irish Free State being officially instated in 1922, over four centuries after the collapse of the Gaelic order in 1601. The Irish won this right through parliamentary agitation championed by Charles Stuart Parnell and his followers, not physical force as represented at the time by the Fenians. The allegiance between nationalism and the Catholic Church proved very potent in the bid for independence, an allegiance that provided the seeds for Protestant protest to and rejection of the Republican cause (Foster 1992, p. 180-1). The Republican Irish accompanied their bid for self-government with an earnest Irish-Ireland movement for cultural revival to regain the autonomy that died with the Gaelic order at the hand of the English. According to Kiberd, “[i]t was the grand destiny of Yeats’s generation to make Ireland once again interesting to the Irish” (1995, p. 3). The revival reinforced ideas that were being enacted politically: Ireland would no longer be England’s stereotypical foil, but would, as Yeats and the founders of the National Theatre declared, assert an “ancient idealism” (Gregory 1973, p. 9). This idealism would bring the Irish to foreground its Gaelic heritage through, among many things, language, sports and arts. In the

political sphere, the movement sought to oust British maladministration while utilizing British virtues (Foster 1992, p. 185).

Self-government, however, did not automatically free Ireland of the cultural and political tensions of its colonial past. Because of the degree of Unionist support in Northern Ireland, self-government came at the cost of conceding six counties from the province of Ulster to Great Britain, creating the state of Northern Ireland.²⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, throughout its history, Northern Ireland was an exceptionally sectarian state wherein some of the well-worn constructions of Otherness implemented by and against the English colonials maintained power, especially after the onset of the Troubles in the late 1960s. Discrimination and violence was a part of everyday life for each faction fighting for autonomy and freedom against their Other in Northern Ireland. It would not be until the peace process initiated in the early 1990s, which culminated in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Belfast, that a hoped-for end to the internecine strife could be seen as an achievable reality.

Despite the seeming inflexibility of the construction of Otherness perpetuated between Ireland and England, the lines that demarcate Otherness are not always clear. Difference and similarity are not always easily determined. This lack of clear demarcation, this blurring of the lines, is what lies within the relationship between Ireland and England in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and *Mutabilitie*. These plays suggest that there is a possibility of looking beyond even long-entrenched differences, of discovering, through a shared humanity, the power of love and friendship.

During the years between *Carthaginians* and *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, Ireland was initiating a rigorous campaign to counteract the economic ills experienced throughout the late 1970s and most of the eighties. Charles Haughey's government introduced significant spending cuts and increased taxation to help stimulate growth. Ireland also began to look outside its borders for investment, and so increased cooperation with international businesses, particularly from the United

²⁵ For a more detailed account of Irish independence and partition see Michael Hopkinson's *The Irish War of Independence* (2002) and Malcolm Anderson's *The Irish Border: History, Politics, Culture* (1999).

States (Brown 2004, pp. 353-4). By the early nineties, the economy was beginning to stabilise. At the same time, there were significant changes occurring at the philosophical and cultural levels. Ireland and England began a fresh attempt to end the conflict in Northern Ireland. The 1993 “Downing Street declaration,” signed by both the British Prime Minister John Major and the Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, established that all Irish parties not engaged in violence could participate in talks regarding the future of Northern Ireland (Coakley and Gallagher 2005, p. 417). This declaration led to the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, which was followed soon after by a loyalist ceasefire (*ibid.*, p. 417). By the mid-nineties, economic and demographic growth boomed: the economic policies of the latter eighties evolved into the “Celtic Tiger” phenomenon as Ireland became one of the strongest economies in Europe, and floods of immigrants and returning ex-patriots reversed the trend of emigration (Kiberd 1995, p. 573; Munley *et al.* 2002, p. 1). The 1993 vote in parliament to decriminalise homosexuality was a sign that the conservatism of the 1980s was perhaps loosening its grip on Irish society (Kiberd 1995, p. 572). Amid these changes and the bid for peace in Northern Ireland, Ireland and England began to re-evaluate their relationship, which, as will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three, became a significant aspect of the Good Friday Agreement. Notably, the fact that *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me* brings the feuding pair of the Irishman and the Englishman together with a relatively minor, yet nonetheless important, mediating American character, seems to be an artistic foreshadowing of the Northern Ireland Forum, which met from 1996 to 1998. During this Forum, representatives from Britain, the Republic and Northern Ireland met under the mediation of former United States senator George Mitchell to discuss a peaceful resolution to the Northern Irish conflict (Coakley and Gallagher 2005, p. 418). Clearly, McGuinness’s focus on the intricacies and development of the relationship between the Irish and English characters in these plays was as timely and relevant as his representations of the Northern Irish community in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Carthaginians*.

As with the two plays examined in Chapter One, post-colonial theory provides a framework applicable also to the two plays examined in this chapter. The plays concentrate on the colonial rivalry between Ireland and England, but with an eye to the future orientation of their relationship. The constructions of Otherness used by

the characters from each nation in these plays repeat the colonial “us versus them” mentality. Only when the characters acknowledge each other’s perspectives are they able to move beyond these constructions to see the humanity that they share and accept one another, differences and all. Difference is particularly important in the colonial relationship, usually being the justifying basis for domination (Bertha 2002, pp. 321-2). McGuinness, however, posits difference not merely within a relation of domination, but as a basic fact of individuation wherein the hierarchies implied by domination do not hold. Within these plays, the threat within constructions of otherness is not merely associated with death and destruction, but offers a different way to see the world. Indeed, as argued above, colonial legacy generally evidences mutual influence between coloniser and colonised. McGuinness is dramatising in these plays the necessity of acknowledging this mutual influence, this shared, even if troubled, history. Colonialism, however, is a particularly complex issue in *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me*. McGuinness does not attempt to comprehend the complexity of the West’s quasi-colonial interests in the East in the play; rather, he gives profound insights into the colonial history between Ireland and England.

Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me is loosely based upon the four-year-and-four-month imprisonment of Northern Irishman Brian Keenan, who was captured by the Islamic Jihad in April of 1986.²⁶ McGuinness admitted that he did not read Keenan’s account of his capture until after he completed his play:

I tried hard to avoid intruding on the private histories of the individual hostages, and my starting point was the common knowledge, the public fact that an Englishman, an Irishman, and an American were held captive together. That was the beginning and, in the long run, the end of it. (1992a, n. p.)

Rather than documentary history, McGuinness presents deep, fundamental facts of the experience that highlight, most of all, the human relationships the captives build. These relationships shed new light on the relationship between Ireland and England. However, the play also explores the relationship between the West, represented by the three prisoners, and the East, represented by their Arab captors. According to

²⁶See Brian Keenan’s *An Evil Cradling* (1993). This autobiography details Keenan’s experience as a captive in Beirut.

Lojek (1995), the play “without ever focusing specifically on the current Irish ‘Troubles,’ [...] casts a revealing light on the human factors which lie behind both those Troubles and the Mideast crisis” (p. 348). As such, the play’s international context provides a forum in which the characters at first establish their somewhat simplistic, stereotypical understanding of national identity, but finally come to see past narrow constructions of identity as they develop close relationships with one another. The setting of the play focuses on an isolated prison cell where the prisoners survive in enforced intimacy. In its nine Scenes the play details only the limited interactions of the prisoners (they cannot touch), keeping the Lebanese Arabs off-stage, beyond the wall. Given their limited movements, the play relies on their verbal acuity to supply a semblance of action in what is from beginning to end a psychological drama. For all the characters flights into the imaginary, McGuinness keeps the play within a naturalistic setting to emphasise the power of the imagination to burst the borders of a bleak, confining situation. It begins with an Irishman, Edward, and an American, Adam, who, in Scene Two, are joined by an Englishman, Michael. Each character seems to conform to a stereotype: Edward is garrulous, rude and apparently hates the English; Michael is for the most part refined, polite and somewhat feminine; and Adam seemingly typifies masculinity as he is very physical, does not hesitate in emphasising that he has a large penis and he apparently enjoys violence, expressing on one occasion a desire to kill an Arab as justification for his plight. The director of the first production, Robin Lefevre, commented that the play shows “the way the moment of terror can be distilled into something funny” (Meany 1993, n. p.). This comment corroborates the fact that the play has strong elements of the carnivalesque. Indeed, despite their limitations, like the characters of *Carthaginians*, the prisoners’ interactions are carnivalesque, mixing seriousness and playfulness as they exercise, argue, recite poetry, stories and songs, as well as imaginatively recreate films and sporting events. Through these interactions, they not only come to know one another, but also expose their lack of understanding of their Arab captors whose power is most fully demonstrated in Scene Six when Adam disappears, seemingly killed by the Arabs. In response to Adam’s disappearance, Edward and Michael are unsure and fearful of the fate that awaits them. In this condition, the two help each other face and, to an extent, come to terms with their personal difficulties apparently unfettered by the concerns of Otherness they have hitherto projected upon each other, which they were unable to

do in Adam's presence. In the end, Edward is freed, leaving Michael alone, but not before they enact a final Spartan ritual of combing each other's hair, and promising to watch over one another.

Although Edward and Michael are able to transcend the stereotypes of their national affiliations, the prisoners' relationship with the Arabs remains one of misunderstanding and enmity, and, besides some snippets of reports from the prisoners themselves, their interactions with their captors are left entirely to the audience's imagination. The dramatic strategy of keeping the Arabs off-stage aligns the audience with the prisoners, further relegating the Arabs to a position of Otherness. The drama's emphasis on the perspective of the West and its marginal representation of the perspective of the Arabs is a deliberate decision on McGuinness's part, as he explains: "I object to Western writers attempting to interpret a very complex situation which hasn't yet been explained by Arab writers" (McGuinness 1992, n. p.). The drama, then, captures a scenario in which the known West must confront its Other in the unknown East, a confrontation that, through a kind of carnivalesque reversal, forces them to confront the Otherness among and within themselves.

Historically, the discrepancy between the Arabs and the West was made especially clear during the Lebanese civil war, which erupted in 1975 between the Christians and Muslims—a fact hinted at in the play by the constant presence of both the Bible and the Koran. The basis of the conflict stretches back to a census conducted in the early twentieth century that determined that Christians outnumbered Muslims in Lebanon. Based on this census, the Christians were given six deputies in government as opposed to the Muslim five. By 1975, the Muslim population outnumbered Christians and vied for more governmental representation. The Christians vehemently opposed and the Maronite Christian Phalange and its allies began its war on Islamic groups, which eventually drew in the major Muslim military institution, the Palestinian Liberation Organization. It was not until after Israel invaded in 1982, however, that the United States and the United Nations became involved (Cleveland 2004, pp. 385-8). The conditions of the opposing factions they encountered there reflect the illusiveness of McGuinness's Arabs: according to Pintak (2003), in the autumn of 1983, there were at least twenty-five

separate militias operating in Lebanon (pp. 7-8). While for the most part the Arab population determined their allegiances by the confessional system, money was an almost equal determinate. The fact that allegiances could so easily shift after every battle made it difficult to distinguish between friend and foe. Allegiance was also problematic in the efforts to bring peace to Lebanon. While the mandate of the United States and the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon was to provide a buffer between Israeli and Palestinian forces, the U. S. in particular had determined their favourites:

It was in Lebanon that America told Muslim civilians it would protect them, then watched them die. It was in Lebanon that supposedly neutral U. S. forces fired in anger on Muslim forces for the first time since World War II. It was amid the Crusader fortresses of Lebanon that American “peacekeepers” sided with the Christians and their Israeli allies against the forces of Islam, reopening a thousand-year-old wound. (*ibid.*, p. xi)

The experience in Beirut greatly damaged U. S. credibility and its foreign policy, and left its national psyche scarred (*ibid.*, p. xii). The fallout has been felt in international affairs ever since.

These details provide some clarity as to why the three characters have found themselves prisoner to the Lebanese Arabs. To the Arabs, they are Other; each of them is a threat that needs to be controlled. Although the characters hint at the reasoning behind their imprisonment—Edward’s comparisons between the sectarian situation in Lebanon and that of Northern Ireland, and Adam’s reference to the American interest in Arab oil (McGuinness 2002, p. 125)—they find the Arabs’ motivations in their capture almost inexplicable, especially given that the Arabs are “not terribly chatty” (*ibid.*, p. 102), providing them with no details.

The prisoners’ appraisals of their jobs in Lebanon also reflect their lack of understanding. Edward is a journalist and Adam is a doctor. While they are alone together in Scene One, they admit that they came to Lebanon for the money (*ibid.*, p. 95). Michael is a teacher who came to Lebanon because he “could only get employment here” (*ibid.*, p. 106). Speaking of Michael, Gleitman (1996) points out

that though he purports to know nothing about “the political situation in Lebanon, [his] teaching of English in a former colony is not an act of innocent politics” (p. 81). No matter how benign or insidious their occupations or their intentions are, as Cleveland (2004) notes, they cannot escape the reality of the sectarian conflict in Lebanon:

In the dangerous conditions of a society at war with itself, individuals sought safety in communities of their coreligionists. Members of other religious communities, no matter how non-sectarian they may have been personally, came to be viewed as enemies. (p. 392)

Even if they did have a deeper understanding of the political situation that lies behind their capture, they are victims of circumstances beyond their control.

They do have some control, however, in how they respond to these circumstances, as Edward suggests: “They [the Arabs] do as they’re ordered. I do as I choose. Locked in chains, for all to see, but not beaten down. [...] We’re at our own [mercy]” (McGuinness 2002, p. 128). They exercise this limited control through carnivalesque language. Such language, as Bakhtin has pointed out, is ambiguous, allowing the captives to not only attack, deride and accuse one another, but also share imaginative interactions such as jokes, stories, songs, relived sporting events, imaginary films, and a trip on Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. This language allows them to both maintain and defend their distinct identities and come to shared understanding of each other.

Once Michael arrives, the three characters almost immediately distinguish themselves by their respective nationalities. This response becomes an important tool in their efforts to cope with the desperation of their circumstances by allowing them to distinguish themselves, firstly, from each other and, secondly, from the Arab Other. The first point becomes particularly apparent in Edward and Michael’s relationship while Adam is still with them. The two apparently conform to the archetypal stereotypes highlighted by Kiberd (1995, p. 9): the controlled and refined Englishman versus the hot-headed and rude Irishman. From the first moment Michael recovers consciousness and speaks his mannered English accent, Edward,

to use Adam's term, "freezes him out" (McGuinness 2002, p. 103), relentlessly jibing and verbally jabbing at him. Although they share English as their first language, there are three types of English here, each distinct from the other in significant ways. This distinction is emphasised when Michael, perhaps purposely, takes a somewhat superior tone in saying that "the Irish have the most attractive accent but their coarseness is so self-defeating" and proceeds to call Hiberno-English a dialect (*ibid.*, p. 129). Edward gets particularly incensed:

What I speak is not a dialect of English. [...] We took you and your language on, and we won. Not bad for a race that endured eight hundred years of oppression, pal, and I speak as a man who is one generation removed from the dispossessed. (*ibid.*, p. 130)

While Edward apparently wants Michael to acknowledge Ireland's linguistic distinction, he quickly changes the direction of the argument by accusing Michael for the dispossession of the Irish, and further, holds him personally responsible for the Irish Famine. Michael retaliates with a particularly powerful attack, asking "[c]ould it be that you only had your silly selves to blame?" (*ibid.*, p. 131). While, as Kiberd points out, there is still much debate regarding the extent of British culpability in the Famine, they did maintain their *laissez-faire* economics and shipped large quantities of grain out of Ireland; "pervading all" he concludes, "was a sense that this was the final betrayal by England" (1995, p. 21).²⁷ Edward's accusation and Michael's potent retaliation may be, as Mikami (2002) suggests, a "mark of real conflict" (p. 98), but they are not merely focused on history, or on questioning or interpreting that history; rather, they seem to stem from the favour Edward asks of Adam before Michael even appears:

[...] let me be able to do my worst to you, and you be able to do your worst to me. Is that agreed? That way, as you say, they won't break us, for we'll be too used to fighting for our lives. (McGuinness 2002, p. 96)

²⁷ In his play *Famine* (1968), Tom Murphy presents a somewhat ambivalent perspective on the Irish Famine. On the one hand, he clearly presents the flaws in the British policies that contributed to the Famine, but he also shows how an Irish leader's dedication to his own sense of what is "right" could also have its own tragic consequences.

While “doing the worst” to one another might help them build their defence against the power of the Arab Other, it also helps Edward to break through Michael’s stereotypical controlled and refined Englishness. Bakhtin argues that, within the rubric of the carnivalesque, verbal abuse and ridicule are not only forces of disruption and separation, but also of regeneration and renewal:

Abuse is death. It is former youth transformed into old age, the living body turned into the corpse. It is the ‘mirror of comedy’ reflecting that which must die a historic death. But in this system death is followed by regeneration, by the new year, new youth, and a new spring. Therefore, abuse is followed by praise; they are two aspects of one world, each with its own body. (1968, pp. 197-8)

The abuse the two characters volley at one another serves as the catalyst for a positive change in their relationship that allows them, finally, to praise one another. In response to Edward’s consistent tormenting, Michael undergoes a carnivalesque reversal, taking up the coarse rudeness stereotypically associated with the Irish. This is an early sign of the breakdown of stereotypes that takes place later in the play. It is after this breakdown that they can see beyond preconceptions and build a relationship on respect and shared humanity that disregards national stereotypes because they serve only as a barrier in their understanding of one another.

Perhaps the most dynamic examples of their use of national affiliation are their constructions of imaginary films. These constructions, as pointed out by Lojek (2004), function similarly to the myths that the characters of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* summon to bolster their cause in the war (pp. 44-5). The films accomplish this powerful function by aligning the characters microcosmically with one another and macrocosmically with the Western world. The first film is Adam’s interpretation of Michael’s situation. It has a “Hitchcock” ending, according to Adam, with the main character, an Englishman, lost in the streets of Beirut, abandoned by those for whom he was trying to give a party (McGuinness 2002, p. 109). They do not focus long on this imaginary film, perhaps because it too vividly captures the prisoners’ terrified sense that they are in an inexorably foreign land, abandoned by the forces of civility and humility.

The second imaginary film is a collaborative effort. This time they abandon the starkness of Hitchcock in favour of humorous parodies of well-known films from England, America and Ireland. Through these pop culture references, the characters give a deliberate and recognisable shape to their circumstances, benefiting both themselves and, potentially, the audience of the play. This clever device aids in defining the seriousness of their situation through humour, which makes this episode particularly appealing to a general audience. The choice of pop culture is, however, complex here. Its function is similar here to its function in the quiz game in *Carthaginians*, providing a sense of “indifference to cultural hierarchies” through a mingling of seriousness and burlesque (Lloyd 1993, pp. 95-6). Although these pop culture references may help the three characters to realise they have a shared bond that helps them to contextualise their predicament, they are not universally benign. These references also betray the limitation of the characters’ perspectives regarding the Arabs. Edward begins this second “film” with a parody of *The Sound of Music* as a guitar-playing nun comes to Beirut “to do her Christian duty to the orphans of that troubled city” (McGuinness 2002, p. 110). As with the prisoners’ occupations, the nun’s duty, no matter how ostensibly benignant, is not innocent in a city so deeply torn by sectarian conflict. The nun, played by Madonna, as Adam humorously interjects, is consequently shot and her guitar destroyed. As she is being carried off, vultures gather. Adam takes over here. In his section, as the vultures begin to attack the nun’s corpse “a band of machismo Arabs arrive on white steeds [and] shoot the heads off the vultures” (*ibid.*, p. 110). “Sam Peckinpah Productions” as Edward interjects. Peckinpah is known for his American “shoot-em-ups,” a genre of film that generally glamorises gratuitous violence and simplifies conflict into a “good versus evil” dialectic in which the “good” American hero predictably saves the day. Although not confirmed as such, in Adam’s section the “heroes” are the machismo Arabs, perhaps analogous to the American-backed Maronite Phalange, who take vengeance for the nun’s murder. Michael’s contribution owes much to Richard Attenborough’s film *Gandhi*, as Adam suggests, for he has a “man of peace” dressed in a loincloth preaching against violence to the machismo crowd (*ibid.*, p. 110). As Gleitman (1996) argues, this reference to *Gandhi* demonstrates a subtle but telling political message:

[*Gandhi*] is an English film about the catalyst for India's movement out of empire into postcolonial status. [...] Attenborough's film attempted to rewrite Gandhi into a Christ-figure, thereby fitting him into an acceptable Western epic motif of the pacifist savior[sic] sacrificing himself for his people. (p. 82)

That Michael views *Gandhi* as “a testimony to [Attenborough's] decent, well-crafted and honourable political views” (McGuinness 2002, p. 114) shows that he is unable to see beyond a wholly Western, and Westernising, perspective. Edward adds one final section, a parody of the Oscar-winning Irish film *My Left Foot*,²⁸ in which a group of dancing peasants “win the hearts of the cruel Arabs” (*ibid.*, p.110). One peasant, apparently modeled on Christy Brown, is disabled and wishes to be an artist, “[w]ith the help of his mother, and his own determination, he finally wins an Oscar, which he collects with his ear” (*ibid.*, p. 111). Adam declares this to be “an Irish movie” in which, as Edward concludes, everyone “live[s] happily ever after” (*ibid.*, p. 111). The three characters appropriate the parodies in an attempt to understand and contextualise their shared perspective. As such, the parodies work similarly to McIlwaine's parodic appropriation of the Easter Rising in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*; for, though they blur the narrative details of the original films, they have established a kind of “truth” that “rhymes” with their shared perspective. This shared perspective aligns all three with the West and betrays complicity with the neo-colonial project in the East; for, the Arab Other appears in their parodies not as self-sufficient, civilised human beings, but as orphans, murderers, cruel warriors, and vultures (Gleitman 1996, p. 82).

While these stereotypes may have an ignoble side, there is also a side that allows the prisoners to glean strength from them. These stereotypes construct the Arabs as a violent, unreasonable, uncivilised, even bestial Other, giving the characters some level of reasoning as to why the Arabs have imprisoned them, especially since the Arabs do not try to enlighten them. Indeed, the construction of an Other, even if based on stereotypes, is a way for a community to define and validate itself. Each of the characters share in the imaginative illusion provided by their parodies, and this

²⁸ The film is based on the life of Christy Brown, an Irish artist born with cerebral palsy who learned to paint and write with his left foot. Daniel Day-Lewis won the Best Actor Oscar in 1989 for playing the lead role and Brenda Fricker won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for her role as Christy's mother (Brode 1999, p. 109).

sharing provides them with a shaped “truth” that, in their third imaginary film, gives them access to the reality of their circumstances.

Their third imaginary film is, again, a collaborative effort. But, this time instead of adapting other films they summarise their own situation. If their second imaginary film aligned them with stereotypes of the West, this third effort suggests that they have formed their own “in-group” as Lojek (1996) suggests:

They form, in fact, their own group, and like other groups they develop social cohesion and order by developing a general (and transmittable) set of values.
(p. 351)

The formation of this group ethic is in part a defence mechanism to stave off the power of the Arab Other. However, it also serves to open up the lines of communication between the three prisoners. While after the second imaginary film they argue about how they do not fear each other (McGuinness 2002, pp. 111-2), after this third, which forces them to directly view the helplessness and madness of their situation, they are able to admit their fears, albeit in a humorous, unsentimental way:

Michael: You both scare the shit out of me.
Edward: English people always scare the shit out of me as well. As for fucking Americans—
Michael: Yes, they are all quite mad— (*ibid.*, p. 113)

This admission, infused with a carnivalesque laughter, shows how their sharing has helped them to realise a level of shared humanity. This admission, however, does not prevent them from attacking one another, as the above examination of Edward and Michael’s relationship shows. But, combined with their imaginative films, their letters, exercise, songs, stories and laughter, it solidifies them into a group, united against the power of their captors (Lojek 1996, p. 352).

Their group dynamic, however, does not usurp the Arabs’ power, nor does their alignment with their stereotypes fully protect them against it. Adam attempts to understand the Arabs through reading the Koran, but such an understanding is greatly attenuated by the sectarian conflict that prescribes anyone of a different

religion as an enemy (Cleveland 2004, p. 392). He also tries to plea for his life on account of his being American, eventually acknowledging that while an American is a “prized possession,” he is “not loved” (McGuinness 2002, p. 118). Not loved, in this case, given America’s handling of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The odds seem stacked against Adam. It is still nonetheless surprising when at the beginning of Scene Six it is revealed that the Arabs have taken him away and, presumably, killed him. The play does not confirm whether he is really dead or not—though Michael interprets the tears of an Arab as a guilty admission of Adam’s murder (*ibid.*, p. 147). What is important here is that the remaining two prisoners believe he is dead. Facing the reality of the power of the Arab Other, the captives, particularly Edward, are traumatised. However, Michael helps Edward ritualistically bury Adam (*ibid.*, pp. 143-6), an act that, like the waking of the dead of Bloody Sunday in *Carthaginians*, helps them to secure what power they have into a communal bond. Mikami (2002) suggests that “this imaginary funeral is their first acknowledgement of a shared wound” (p. 102). Such an acknowledgement is a significant step in their process towards abandoning their stereotypical constructions of one another and getting to know one another.

As with most deaths within the rubric of the carnivalesque, Adam’s disappearance is followed by renewal and transformation within Edward and Michael’s relationship. Following Scene Six, they negotiate a different shared identity through an engagement with issues of sexuality and gender. While alive, the masculinity that Adam emphatically represents seems to be a dominant aspect of the prisoners’ relationships with each other and the Arabs: they insist that they “be men” and face the power of the Arabs without showing fear or pain (McGuinness 2002, p. 127). Proving masculinity also seems to be a motivation behind their usage of their national stereotypes. After Adam’s disappearance, the play utilises homosexuality and femininity to contrast a simplistic idea of competitive, testosterone-driven masculinity. In Scene Eight, Michael questions Edward as to whether or not he wanted to sleep with Adam (*ibid.*, p. 156) since Edward admits during their imaginative funeral proceedings that, to him, Adam is “beautiful to look at [...] innocent. Kind, gentle. Friend. I believe it goes without saying, love, so I never said” (*ibid.*, p. 145). Although, in Scene Eight, Edward answers Michael with a “no,” the revelation of his love for Adam is, as Mikami posits, an “admission of a

hidden and subtle homosexuality [behind which] lies a chance for him to re-order himself, to re-integrate something inside him that until now has remained unspoken” (2002, p. 105). This subtle admission is also an acknowledgement of the power of an alternative perspective to the masculine, an acknowledgement that becomes a significant part of his relationship with Michael.

When Scene Seven opens, Michael is reliving the 1977 Wimbledon Ladies Final between the Dutch Betty Stove and the English Virginia Wade. Michael plays as Virginia Wade and Edward joins as Betty Stove, the historical loser of the match (McGuinness 2002, pp. 147-8). However, after the match he joins in with Michael, extolling the efforts of Virginia Wade, even acting as Queen Elizabeth II to honour Wade’s achievement (*ibid.*, pp. 149, 153). Along with the amusement they share, their carnivalesque adoption of female personas is another significant aspect of this episode. What these impersonations foreground is the fact that gender does not determine identity. In fact, in Scene Seven, the power of definition is given to a Derry woman whose two words they use to describe their own situation: “Ridiculous, ridiculous” (*ibid.*, p. 152). These impersonations also mark a shift in, a carnivalesque reversal of, the concerns of nationality between the two. Virginia’s victory is a victory for both of them, proof that “there is a God” (*ibid.*, p. 153), allowing Edward in particular to jettison his stereotypical responses and celebrate an English victory.

In the remainder of the play, the feminine becomes representative of home, peace, love, loss and, most importantly, strength. As is revealed in their letters home (*ibid.*, pp. 121-2), Edward and Michael associate “home” with the important women in their lives: for Edward, his wife; for Michael, his mother. In Scene Eight as the two celebrate Christmas, Edward has an erotic fantasy in which he conceives of sleeping with a woman as being peace:

Peace is lying beside a woman. Touching her, by accident, all soft. Smelling her, not stinking like us. Listening to her breathing. That’s the only sound she makes, in the peace. Her breath. Listen, listen. Peace together, as she sleeps and me awake, lovely, lovely. [...] Her legs move as she sleeps and I hold them, and want to lift them and conceive in the morning, on

Christmas day in the morning, in the happy, happy
bed, our bed. Wife. Wife. (*ibid.*, p. 155)

Unity with the feminine here represents hope for the future in the possibility of a child, of being free from the bonds of strife represented by both the prisoners' relationship with the Arabs and the unhappy relationship between Ireland and England that had initially prevented Edward's friendship with Michael.

For Michael, his wife Nita's death aligns the feminine initially with loss, but finally with the strength to deal with loss. While she was alive, he maintained his university post, being full of ideas for publications. However, after her death in a car accident, he was unable to keep up his work:

[...] after the incident, I simply read the Old English elegies and the medieval romances, and I taught as best I could. I published nothing. I'd lost my wife and my ambition. My lack of publications didn't help at the time of the rationalisation. (*ibid.*, p. 119)

Losing his university post is in great part what led him to Lebanon. In Scene Five, he reveals to Edward and Adam that he had "thought about [suicide] after Nita's death. But she reasoned [him] out of it" in an imaginary conversation by advising him to "[m]ake [his] pear flan" (*ibid.*, p. 129). Although this comment is laden with irony because his pear flan is associated with his capture (*ibid.*, p. 107), he does not seem to be disrespecting his wife's memory. Rather, the imagined feminine spirit of his wife is a sign for him to try to enrich his life by getting to know his colleagues, a sign of strength to carry on. He finds this sign in the optimistic medieval version of Ovid's Orpheus myth, "Sir Orfeo," in which Sir Orfeo, after losing his beautiful wife Herodis to death, travels to the underworld and wins her back by means of music (*ibid.*, pp. 140-1). This story seems to be an appropriate analogue for his own circumstance, for just as Sir Orfeo realised that "whither thou goest, I go with thee, and whither I go, thou shalt go with me" (*ibid.*, p. 141), Michael, too, does not abandon his wife in death. Rather, she remains a benevolent influence.

The benevolent influence of the feminine also plays an important role in Edward and Michael's relationships with their fathers. Both men have lost their fathers:

Edward's died of cancer, Michael's "because of the suffering he'd endured during the war" (*ibid.*, p. 157). However, these two father-son relationships are very different. Just as Michael found an allegory for his own experience of loss in "Sir Orfeo," so too does he see in an Old English poem, "The Wanderer," an analogue for his experiences both of his father's death and of his imprisonment. Once, after his father had died, while reading the poem he imagines his father speaking to him through it. The poem depicts a man, alone and desolate, remembering good times. He finds two lines from the poem particularly haunting: "*Oft him anhaga are gebideth*" and "*Wyrd bith ful aread*," which he translates as "[a] man who is alone may at times feel mercy, mercy towards himself," and "[f]ate is fate" respectively (*ibid.*, p. 158). Through the poem, Michael constructs a patriarchal triad of literature, father and country, a triad that, he admits gives him strength:

When I read "The Wanderer," I feel possessed by my father. I feel for him, and for England. I love my country because I love its literature very much. I am proud to have taught it. That pride and, yes, I mean pride, is the reason I can sustain my sanity here. (*ibid.*, pp. 158-9)

While such a triad might appear to disregard the feminine, it is through his memory of his father that perhaps the most powerful feminine image of the play takes form, the image of the Spartans combing each other's hair. In what Michael says was perhaps their only real conversation his father tells him:

There is a place called Sparta. Brave soldiers come from there. When they have pain, they show it by controlling it. You have been raised by a strong woman. The bravest men sometimes behave like women. Before the Spartans went into battle, they combed each other's hair. The enemy laughed at them for being effeminate. But the Spartans won the battle. (*ibid.*, p. 158)

The Spartans combine both masculinity and femininity into the strength to endure; Edward and Michael attempt to do the same. After Edward is released in Scene Nine, he and Michael share one last conversation. The climax of this conversation is the Spartan ritual of combing each other's hair (*ibid.*, p. 168), a gesture that Gleitman suggests is "a powerful acknowledgement of their communion and love"

(1996, p. 84), which, as Mikami posits, “prefigures a possible union between Ireland and England [...] [in which] politics might be overridden by a recognition of a shared humanity” (2002, p. 103). The gesture is a final act that demonstrates the bond they have formed with one another, a bond that brings together the masculine and feminine and confirms that they have relinquished the competitive nature of their national stereotypes.

Throughout the play, the prisoners have each tried to understand how best to comport themselves in their circumstances, concluding, on one hand, that it is best to laugh and be strong, to hide their fear and distress. Coming to terms with femininity, on the other hand, gives them the opportunity to show their emotions. During the pair’s imaginary trip in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, Edward travels to Ireland to talk with his deceased father, imagining him on his deathbed (*ibid.*, p. 164-6). In this moment, Edward’s strength seems to falter and he makes a child-like appeal to his father to save him: “There is a hell, Da. And I’m in it. I am very scared, Daddy. Please save me. Please get me out of this place. [...] They’ve beaten me. [...] Save me” (*ibid.*, pp. 165-6). Unlike in Michael’s imagined conversation with his wife, Edward’s father does not provide Edward with any solution to his desolation. Michael, however, does try to get him to laugh; but to no avail (*ibid.*, p. 166). This breakdown encapsulates his sadness for the death of his father, his being held prisoner and his own apparently lacklustre fatherhood. Edward’s only consolation in this circumstance seems to be that he was able to vent his emotions. This venting contrasts greatly with their earlier construction of “being men” as involving a steadfast denial of weakness, no matter how dire the circumstance (*ibid.*, p. 127). Here, Edward lets his emotions show, embracing a feminine response that lends some honesty to his circumstances. As Michael’s father said, “even the bravest men sometimes act like women.”

Within the carnivalesque, regeneration and renewal follow significant moments of anguish and disruption. Immediately following Edward’s emotional breakdown, the play shows him free from his chains, having his last conversation with Michael. This dramatic reversal is both powerful and mysterious. It may be that where masculinity, in a sense, died with Adam, the play is here privileging a feminine response. There are no simple answers in such circumstances: it may be that the

prisoners' emotional states meant nothing to the Arabs; there is no confirmation. As far as Edward is concerned, his nationality helped him, and perhaps, he speculates, their guilt over Adam (*ibid.*, pp. 166-7). Nothing is confirmed from the Arab side.

As for Edward and Michael's own relationship, while many of their interactions with one another before Adam's disappearance seemed to have little regard for their respective emotional conditions, after his disappearance they seem to try to bolster and corroborate one another against their desolation. In Adam's masculine presence, the carnivalesque laughter is initially a "weapon" that they are seemingly forced to use to protect themselves from their captors, as Lojek suggests (1995, p. 351). After Adam disappears, it becomes a genuine expression of their bond with each other, allowing them to take on female, even animal, roles, to visit their homes aboard Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and to express their pain from being ignored by their political representatives.

However, laughter is not the only medium through which they form their bond. Perhaps even more important is their ability to help one another express and deal with pain. In the immediate aftermath depicted in Scene Six, as Edward attempts a hunger strike, Michael tells him, "I know about grief. About mourning. How it can destroy you" (*ibid.*, p. 144). Therefore, he insists that Edward admit Adam has died, and to "[b]ury him. [. . .] Remember him" (*ibid.*, p. 144). Their final exchanges of this Scene show how Michael's insistence has helped Edward:

Edward: I'm hungry.
Michael: Then eat.
Edward: Dear friend.
Edward eats.
He's dead.
Michael: We are not. (*Ibid.*, p. 146)

Michael's revelation here, like the final moments of *Carthaginians* in which Dido insists that "Carthage has not been destroyed," fulfils the third task of the wake ritual, and provides himself and Edward with a feeling of symbolic transcendence in the face of death: Michael has shown Edward that Adam's death does not mean their own deaths. Even though they cannot determine the Arabs' plans, they must not despair; the fact that they are alive is reason enough to go on living.

After this significant corroborative effort, the two characters bond through a series of imaginative re-enactments and journeys, intimate admissions of pain and passion, that help them to see each other not as Other, but as supportive friends. When Edward imaginatively teaches Michael to drive Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Michael puts concisely the power of their friendship: “I had a terrible fear of driving, but you taught me to conquer it, and with you in the car beside me, I feel quite safe” (*ibid.*, p. 163). This feeling appears to be mutual as Edward admits to Michael as he prepares to leave the cell, “[y]ou’re the strongest man I know. I am not. I need you” (*ibid.*, p. 168). Their relationship, which has developed through their sharing of imaginative play and real pain, has transcended the stereotypes to which they initially clung. A relationship seems to prefigure corroboration between their nations against the power of an Other.

The play uses the Arabs as an obvious Other to offset the prisoners, a ploy that brings the play into line with contemporary concerns in the relationship between nations of the West and the Arab nations of the East, as Lojek argues, “[t]he private sphere of the three captives merge into the public sphere of political unrest and terrorism, and Beirut merges with Belfast” (1995, p. 385). What is apparently at the heart of this play is what both Beirut and Belfast share: a long history of sectarian conflict. The Other, as this play shows, is anyone who forsakes the primacy of life in favour of political and ideological agendas. The play, however, is optimistic. If there seems to be little hope for communion between the West and the East, Ireland and England may find common ground in its fight against sectarian Otherness. About a year after its production in 1992, Ireland and England attempted to stage this common ground in talks that set the 1990s peace process in motion.

While *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me* takes the relationship between Ireland and England as one of its central themes, *Mutabilitie* focuses exclusively on this relationship. Set in 1598, the play’s five acts imaginatively recreates the final days of Edmund Spenser’s stay in Ireland on the eve of the fall of the Gaelic order. The English are represented in the play through two sets of characters: one is the household of the Protestant poet and administrator Edmund, a character based upon

Edmund Spenser,²⁹ which includes Edmund's wife Elizabeth and their children;³⁰ the second is the three theatre practitioners, the Catholic playwright and poet William, a character loosely based upon William Shakespeare, and two actors, Richard and Ben. The play portrays the Irish through the fallen court of King Sweney and Queen Maeve, which includes their court poet and educator File, their two sons Hugh and Niall, their daughter Annas, and their priest Donal. Hugh and File, in service to their king and queen, have also become servants to Edmund, who has taken them into his home on the hope of converting them to English ways. As these points suggest, the play is very complex in both form and content. Its complexity is likely the source of many of the negative reviews the play received during its first performances. Even a review that was generally positive called the play "a conundrum for any critic" (Moroney 1997, n. p.). This complexity likely arises from a number of elements, such as the combination of McGuinness's use of the structure of Elizabethan or Shakespearean theatre with modern expressionistic techniques, the nuanced combination of history and Irish mythology, and, as Lojek (2004) suggests, an overly elaborate set (p. 155).

The play portrays a time in Irish history when the English and Irish were fighting for the rule of Ireland; the general context is the aftermath of the wars of Munster. At the opening of the play, the Irish capture the two actors, Richard and Ben, while William escapes and is later found in a river by Hugh and File as they lead Edmund and his children through the forest. Among the Irish the English captives are, for most of the play, well-treated until their nationality, coupled with their boldness, provokes the Irish to kill them. William, who is ill when found in the river, recovers in Edmund's castle. Given his vocation, his Catholicism and the circumstances of his rescue, File believes he is the answer to her prophecy of a saviour for the Irish. However, he has come to Ireland to set up a theatre and to appeal to Edmund for a job in the civil service. As the play progresses, it reveals that Edmund, seemingly due to his exile from his home in England and his guilt for being part of the destruction of the Irish way of life, has lost his will to write and administrate. He

²⁹ For clarity, the name "Edmund" designates the character, while "Spenser" refers to the historical figure. The same device is employed regarding William Shakespeare and his fictional analogue, William.

³⁰ The list of *dramatis personae* does not specify how many children Edmund has. According to Lojek (2004), professional productions have varied the number of children; there were two children in the London production, but only the boy in the Dublin production (p. 149n).

progressively falls prey to madness, which culminates in his destruction of his castle. The Irish king, too, is falling prey to madness. While his wife Maeve attempts to rule in his stead, the loss of their kingdom, coupled with the king's madness, is too great a sorrow and she requests of her sons to kill both her and Sweney. File and Hugh, who once were married and had a child that died, attempt to overcome the English within the walls of Edmund's castle, establishing a trust that would make the English vulnerable to attack. File, however, is weary of having to resort to revenge and violence. She puts faith in William that he might save the Irish through his art. However, William, as stated above, has other plans, and leaves without fulfilling File's expectations. After Hugh kills his mother and father, his sister Annas curses him and his brothers to death. To save them, File instructs them to relinquish the war with the English, to dedicate themselves to living in poverty. They agree and, in the final Scene, seem to be happy in their choice. At the close of the play, one of Edmund's children, forgotten in Edmund's flight, finds the Irish enjoying their new found happiness and they accept him among them.

Historically, after the fall of the Gaelic order in 1601 and the subsequent flight of the Irish Earls, the English solidified their position as the rulers of Ireland, irrevocably changing the Irish way of life forever (Foster 1992, p. 113). Given its conclusion on a note of peace and acceptance, one can read the play as a negotiation of national identity in response to the significant changes that were once again taking place in Irish society. At the time of the first production of *Mutabilitie* in November of 1997, this negotiation of national identity remained a significant issue as the peace process between the Republic, England and Northern Ireland progressed towards the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

As quoted earlier in this chapter, Kiberd (1995) suggests that during the volatile period in Irish history when Spenser lived in Ireland, the English and Irish negotiated their respective national identities in opposition to each other (p. 9). Thus, the relation of Otherness became the basis of identity. The following examination of *Mutabilitie* will concentrate first on the constructions of Otherness utilised by both the English and the Irish in the play. Particular attention will be given to perspectives of the three artist figures, Edmund, File and William. Secondly, the consideration of the play will focus on the various instances of murder

that either take place or are reported in the play and how they both influence and are influenced by the Irish and English constructions of Otherness. These murders, to which the characters respond with a mixture of trauma and transformative energy, include that of File and Hugh's child, of the Catholic woman as reported by William, of the two English prisoners and of the Irish king and queen. Notably, the play is infused with elements of the carnivalesque, which even its name suggests, given that the carnivalesque is initiated from an impetus for change. The chapter will elaborate on these elements, which include File's attempt to counter English authority through theatre along with the many reversals that take place throughout the play. Finally, the chapter will show how the play, as McGuinness maintains, "speak[s] to a contemporary audience" (*ibid.*, p. 272).

In the very first scene in the play, in which a group of hooded Irish capture the English actors (McGuinness 1997, p. 2), the stereotypical distinction between the Irish and English is brought to the forefront. However, the play is not merely about the distinctions between the Irish and English; rather, more importantly, it is about their similarity and how such similarity affects both. Much of the dramatic tension of the play arises from the characters' negotiation between the similarity and difference of the two cultures. Ostensibly governing the relationship between the two cultures throughout the play is their constructions of one another as Other. These constructions are generally based on the archetypal stereotypes discussed by Kiberd (1995, p. 9), and are to a great extent required by the English and Irish characters both for self-definition and for support in their respective plans to defeat each other. As such, as in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, such constructions serve as the justification for violence and destruction. Yet, as the two cultures converge within the walls of Edmund's castle, they begin to see past these simplistic constructions to a shared humanity, as Edward and Michael do, that threatens the legitimacy of their respective plans.

The constructions of Otherness are in great part the work of the artists, who are not only called upon to laud their royal leaders, as is the case particularly with Edmund and File, but are also the visionaries and teachers within their respective communities. They are responsible for defining their respective cultures, for articulating what it means to be English or Irish. These artists are responsible not

only for defining national identity, but also in justifying the destruction of the Other. This latter duty is one that causes great tension in the lives of the artist figures as they fight to reconcile their duties to their communities with their own humility.

Spenser's purpose in Ireland in service of the English crown was to oversee a plot of land and assist in the implementation of the "Irish plot," which is, according to Julia Reinhard Lupton (1993), "the numerous manuscript proposals for reforming Ireland" (p. 96). These proposals, which include Spenser's *A View to the Present State of Ireland* and his *Mutabilitie Cantos*, textualise

[...] Ireland as a wasteland (desolate, depeopled, and unpossessed) in order to defend an active policy of further wasting [through systematic depopulation, geographic reinscription, and georgic recolonisation] followed by restorative "plantation." (*ibid.*, pp. 93-4)

Spenser's *A View to the Present State of Ireland* consists of a dialogue between Eudoxus and Irenius on the problems facing English planters in Ireland. Of the two, Irenius is the only one to have lived in Ireland. He describes what he believes are the errors of the native Irish, figuring them as England's Other, as an uncivilised, disordered and deceptive race incapable of governing themselves, while insisting upon the role of the English as advocates of civilisation, order and truth. He concludes that perhaps the most effective solution to the problems of carrying out the Irish plot is that the Irish "be altogether subdued" (Spenser 1970, p. 12), that is, genocide.

In the play, the English, as represented by Edmund's household, maintain and advocate the legitimacy of such negative constructions of Otherness that are fundamental to their colonial campaign in Ireland. Such constructions are represented vividly early in the play by Edmund's wife, Elizabeth, who speaks of the Irish as "vermin," "savages" and "animals" (McGuinness 1997, pp. 8-9). Like Irenius throughout Spenser's *View*,³¹ Edmund himself constructs their cultural

³¹ As Irenius declares at the outset of the *View*: "I will then according to your advisement begin to declare the evils which seem to be most hurtful to the common weale of that land, and first those which I said were most ancient and long grown; and they are also of three kinds: the first is in laws, the second in customs, and last in religion" (Spenser 1970, p. 3). The remainder of the *View* is concerned with his observations of these errors and his solution to them.

differences as “errors,” seeing them guilty of “[e]rrors of law, custom and religion,” because of which murder is easily forgiven, lack of discipline is tolerated in their army, bawdry and sycophantism is sung by their bards, and blasphemy and idolatry is taught by their religion (*ibid.*, p. 45-8). As such, for Edmund, the Irish are a threat not only to his and his family’s physical well-being, but also, as so often iterated by Irenius, to English society as a whole. To protect the “sacred bed of England” (*ibid.*, p. 23), Edmund suggests that their beliefs “must be cut from the tongue. Such beliefs must be destroyed. It is for the good of the heathen people,” who are such because of their “allegiance to heathen, superstitious Rome” (*ibid.*, p. 48).

Spenser, as Kiberd highlights, “wished to convert the Irish to civil ways, but in order to do that found that it might be necessary to exterminate many of them” (1995, p. 11). Similarly, in the play, Edmund does not merely want to kill them, but repeatedly emphasises that he can succeed in converting them to English civilisation. As part of his civilisation project, he adopts a patronising attitude to the Irish, seeing himself as their saviour: “They are civilised. I have succeeded in that. [...] Had I not saved them, Elizabeth, how could they save themselves?” (McGuinness 1997, p. 10, 12). He further qualifies this civilisation project by foregrounding Irish inadequacies in his description of them during the wars of Munster, which is near verbatim of one of Irenius’s observations in the *View*:

[...] The same province of Munster was a most rich and plentiful country, full of corn and cattle, that you have thought they should have been able to stand long, yet before one year and a half, they were brought to such wretchedness, as that any stony heart would have rued the same. Out of every corner of the woods and glens they came creeping forth upon their hands for their legs could not bear them. They looked like anatomies of death, they spoke like ghosts crying out of their graves, and if they found a plot of watercress or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for the time, yet not long able to continue therewithal; that in short spaces there none almost left, and a most populous and plentiful country suddenly left void of man and beast; yet sure in all that war, there perished not many by the sword, but all by the extremity of famine, which they themselves had wrought, in these late wars of Munster. (*ibid.*, p. 12; cf. Spenser 1970, p. 104)

According to Renwick, who edited the 1970 edition of the *View*, the paragraph that contains this quotation is “the best-written paragraph in the *View*”: “That paragraph is the best written because it is the one paragraph that is fully charged with emotion; and that emotion is not gloating satisfaction, but horror” (Spenser 1970, p. 185). While in this paragraph Irenius is making the point that a strong military action against the Irish would be aided by their own mismanagement, the play quotes this paragraph at length possibly because it captures the tension between human emotion and civic duty that Edmund is experiencing in regard to his role in the Irish plot.

Despite Edmund’s fervour for his cause, McGuinness admits in an interview with *Studies* that through Edmund he wanted “to make this ‘git,’ which [Spenser] was, a sympathetic character” (Barber 1998, p. 272). Creating such sympathy for one so maligned in Irish history as is Spenser is similarly what McGuinness attempts in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* in making the Elder Pyper, a staunch Protestant Unionist, even briefly question the war that has ransacked Ulster. According to Murray (2002), Edmund is “Spenser as the bad conscience of imperialism” (p. 165). The play presents Edmund as a man torn between the demands of his position as a servant of Queen Elizabeth I and his sympathy for the humanity of the Irish. Edmund views Hugh and File as the “benevolent future of [their] unfortunate Irish race” (McGuinness 1997, p. 8), and appears genuinely sorrowful that he is unable to save more Irish from a fate similar to that which he had witnessed in the wars of Munster. He tells as much to the fevered William during their first interview: “My heart is as heavy in sorrow, William, as yours is in distress that I cannot save all beyond these walls as I have saved you and these my servants” (*ibid.*, p. 22). His distress increases throughout the play: he no longer writes, nor does he perform his administrative duties (*ibid.*, pp. 51, 71-2), and he begins to show signs that he is losing his grip on reality, as he admits to William, “[w]e have started to go mad” (*ibid.*, p. 52).

The source of this distress is a complex interweaving of the trauma of witnessing the Irish die in such distress, his possible guilt for having to advocate the killing of the Irish people, his failure to succeed in his civilisation project on a grander scale, his fear of the Irish who may attack him and his family at any time and his feeling of

exile from his home in England. In Act Four, Scene Two, he summarises the affect upon him of these latter two points:

[...] Our enemy is at ease with the wildness of the elements. It is now that they may strike. [...] I am looking that I may leave Ireland, and if that not be granted to me, then give me leave to die, but I would fain die in England. The very soil of this corrupt land does corrupt my brain, and my sick imaginings devour my senses and reason. (*ibid.*, p. 64)

Yet, despite Edmund's deepening distress, his dedication to the cause of English civilization blinds him to the possible benefits of diplomacy. Even though he may have been able to utilise the services of the Irish poet, File, he does not attempt to meet with the Irish authorities; nor does he openly advocate peace. Although diplomacy at such a stage of the Irish plot would likely have achieved little, the point is that Edmund remains a distant authoritarian, begrudged by his Irish servants and their leaders. This distance, bridged only by his interactions with Hugh and File, causes an ethical conundrum for him that never gets resolved, and which causes him to surmise that "[i]f [Queen Elizabeth] were to marry, it should be to an Irishman. Were she to marry him and conceive a peace between us, there would be gentleness in the house at night" (*ibid.*, p. 50). Left without such assurance of peace and torn by the demands of the Irish plot, his attempt to help the Irish, as his wife points out, only masks his fear of the Irish as representatives of an abject, threatening Otherness that could invade his home at any time (*ibid.*, pp. 9-10, 64). As a consequence of his fear and madness, and his desire to return to England with some level of his dignity intact, he accepts his wife's request to burn the castle and blame it on the Irish (*ibid.*, p. 89). Historically, as Murray (2002) points out, Spenser's home was destroyed by Irish rebels (p. 166). By putting the responsibility of his castle's destruction in his own hands, the drama suggests that he is a man defeated by both his country's and his own vaunting ambitions. He has failed to honour the Queen by failing to conquer the Irish Other, and is too cowardly to return to England in honest disgrace. However, his cowardice may be attributed to the fact that in failing the virtue of honour, he has brought himself a step closer to the Irish Other, meaning he is a step further away from the civilised English ideal. Burning the castle gets him out of Ireland and blaming the Irish for it covers up the fact that

committing such a brutish act aligns him with the English stereotype of the brutish Irish. In a way, Edmund's distress is a product of his times, for admitting such similarity would compromise the stereotype of Englishness that he and his cause represents and, he believes, in the eyes of his fellow Englishmen he would be deeply disgraced. As such, Edmund is a complex and sympathetic character for whom "political necessity has proved less tolerable in practice than in theory" (*ibid.*, p. 166), and whose failure presents the possibility for new growth (*ibid.*, p. 167).

The Irish are represented in *Mutabilitie* by the fallen court of an Irish king and queen, Sweney and Maeve. There are two notable features of this king and queen. First, as Murray (2002) points out, there was no High King in Ireland after the twelfth century, and by the end of the sixteenth century Irish chieftains no longer called themselves kings (p. 167). Second, their names link them with Irish myth and legend. Sweney, or Suibne in Irish, is the central figure in the Irish legend *Buile Shuibne*,³² which details how the priest Rónán cursed Suibne for his part in the battle of Moira in the seventh century, resulting in Suibne's madness and flight into the forest, believing himself a bird (Mikami 2002, p. 114). McGuinness plays on this latter fact in having King Sweney's descent into madness manifest in his acting like a bird (McGuinness 1997, p. 87). Maeve, or Medb in Irish, is the Queen of Connacht in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* from the Ulster Cycle, who fought against Ulster in the cattle raid at Cooley.³³ The use of these names suggests that Sweney and Maeve are, as Mikami argues, "indices to Irish culture and order before Tudor colonisation" (2002, p. 114), and their titles are blanket terms to show that their own small court is a microcosm of Ireland in general: they are the last of the Gaelic order.

The artist figure in the Irish court is File, whose name derives from the Irish *Filidh*. The *Filidh* were a group of poets, according to Beresford-Ellis, "whose first duties were to praise their patron, to preserve their genealogy and to be learned in history and literature, as well as to master their craft" (1987, p. 122). Just as the play alters historical fact in having Edmund burn his own castle and having an Irish king on the throne at the time, the play also makes the traditionally male File a woman:

³² Two other artist treatments of this legend are Seamus Heaney's *Sweeney Astray* (1984) and John Ennis' more recent *Near St. Mullins* (2002).

³³ See Thomas Kinsella's translation entitled *The Táin* (1985).

[...] in creating the Gaelic poet as a woman McGuinness was outrageously defying a patriarchal tradition in the ancient Irish academy. [...] The effect is to introduce a possibility which conflicts with what otherwise stands as unalterable history. (Murray 2002, p. 166)

Such a possibility appears to be precisely the aim of the play. It is through the efforts of this female artist that the Irish in the play eventually find an alternative to the war with the English. Her gender does not affect her performance of her duties and she fulfills her role in the court. As she reminds Maeve, when the Irish were still possessed of a kingdom she was responsible for the education of the royal children, had her own servants, was schooled in the art of divination and, as she does throughout the play, acted as advisor to the king and queen (McGuinness 1997, p. 30). However, the English have compromised her power by leaving her and the rest of the royal family bereft of a court. In response to this compromise, she and Hugh conceive their own “plot” to defeat the English by entering Edmund’s household as spies disguised as servants to gain their trust, find their weaknesses and plan an attack (*ibid.*, p. 15, 32).

Just as the English construct the Irish as Other to justify their colonial Irish plot, in her reports to the king and queen, File “entertains the company,” as the nebenscene suggests, with the differences of English culture, constructing them as Other to justify their own plot against the English (*ibid.*, p. 13). She denounces the English as savages for their apparent denigration of the status of women, scoffs at their Queen’s professed sacred virginity, calling her a “woman who would be a man,” and calls their conception of royalty as God’s representatives on Earth a demonstration of “a profound self-importance” (*ibid.*, p. 13-14). These constructions, edged with crude humour, also align the English with masculinity, which is demonstrated in their aggressiveness and their unemotional, rationalized dedication to their colonial project. Behind their laughter, and their constructions of Otherness, the Irish are hiding their fear of the power of the English and their colonial plans for Ireland. For them, the English represent the possibility of annihilation, of the death of their way of life. File’s coarse carnivalesque degradation of the English in this scene allows the Irish to laugh, helping them to deal with the possibility of death, as similar humour does for the characters in *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me*. Perhaps this is

the idea behind File's admission that the Irish respond to death by laughing at it (*ibid.*, p. 66); perhaps they believe that from death comes renewal, regeneration and a new life. Fear of the English also appears to be why File and Hugh are among the English, waiting for the moment to call an attack, and why she instructs Annas to pledge to kill their prisoner Richard after Annas tells her that "[h]e decided to come [to Ireland] to ask for land" (*ibid.*, p. 27). She tells Annas that the English "are our enemy. They must be taken care of in the way that shall not harm us. [...] You have the right to remove any man who could further the cause of England in this country" (*ibid.*, p. 27). Annas agrees in order to revenge the damages done to her family, country and faith on account of the "Irish plot." It is this pledge that leads to the murder of the two English captives.

While both the English and the Irish seem to invest a great deal of effort and attention to the fact that they are different from each other, the play both subtly and explicitly demonstrates many ways that they are similar to each other. As Murray (2002) points out, the play is about "two rival but equal cultures. The dispossessed Irish are represented as anthropologically and artistically sophisticated. They are not primitive; they are merely different" (p. 166). Like the English, the Irish have royal leadership. Both also have royal poets, File and Edmund, who share some explicit similarities: both have duties to work for their respective sovereigns, to praise them and their cultures, and to denigrate their enemies. Moreover, when Edmund points out the Irish errors of custom, saying that Irish bards praise disobedience and rebellion and indulge dire fantasies, his wife tells him the following:

My husband, do you detect in your words any sign of yourself? These Irish poets praise their betters to line their pockets, as you do, Edmund. You can conjure any sour vice into sweet virtue through honeyed words, as do they. (*ibid.*, pp. 46-7)

Here, however, Elizabeth is pointing to the major crux in the play: "The congruence of the Irish and the English, and the subliminal distress this similarity causes the English" (Mikami 2002, p. 111). This similarity, while it holds the glimmer of a future reconciliation between the two cultures, is an anathema not only to the English cause in the play, but also that of the Irish. This is why Edmund burns his

castle, pointing blame at the Irish, and why Maeve rebukes File for her apparent softness towards their English enemy (McGuinness 1997, p. 31).

The play suggests, however, that Edmund's recognition of the similarity of the two cultures overwhelms his fervour for his cause, for the control, conversion or killing of the Irish. The Irish plan for revenge upon and removal of the English from Ireland is also collapsing because of the tremendous loss they have endured at the hand of the English. These two points are emphasised by the madness of both Edmund and Sweney. As discussed previously, Edmund is driven to madness by his inability to accomplish his political enterprise, by his feelings of exile and by the threat of the wild, uncivil Irish. In Act Five, Scene One, his madness manifests itself in his attack on his own child, in which he attempts to project his desire to have and control patriarchal power onto the child:

Edmund: [...] I want to ask you something. Will you be my father?

Child: It can't be. You are my father.

Edmund: If you do not obey me, then I will kill you, and I will know for sure that you are dead, father, you will stay in your grave this time. (*ibid.*, p. 85)

The child manages to escape and Edmund gains some control of himself. His words, however, suggest that he is facing the collapse of his own patriarchal power. In wanting to kill his father, he wishes to appropriate patriarchal power, to become himself the arbiter of such power. He is, however, denied this appropriation and the scene ends, as the nebenscene dictates, with an aurally distorted reprise of the final two lines of "The Song of Common Prayer" (*ibid.*, p. 86). Edmund had earlier lauded the Common Prayer of the Church as the most "well devised" and "sure established" work of human wit (*ibid.*, p. 44). This aural distortion of the last two lines, which read "This song we sing of common prayer / Decree we stand in your true faith" (*ibid.*, p. 86) is a manifestation of Edmund's loss of the stable, patriarchal power of his faith and country, which has left him exiled, devoid of a kingdom among the Irish.

Similarly, Sweney's madness is connected to the trauma of watching his people fall to the English Other. It also serves to connect him more directly to his legendary

namesake Suibne, as suggested previously. This madness manifests itself, as it did for Suibne, in his imagining that he is transforming into a bird: “I would not be your father. Rather I’d be your pet. Build me a golden cage. I will sing for you there till your heart bursts with joy” (*ibid.*, p. 87). His wife, Queen Maeve, points out that his madness is what has enabled him to survive starvation and the wars of Munster (*ibid.*, p. 34). But, she also sees such madness as a threat to her race: “your father, the king, will drag your hopes into the ground with him” (*ibid.*, p. 88). Indeed, one can read his forgetfulness and confusion about his identity as a metaphor for the loss of the traditional, even legendary identity in Ireland, something akin to a pure Irishness, represented by his kingship. Throughout the play, he mourns the loss of his kingdom, and wishes that death would deliver him from his dispossession and lowliness:

We are no longer divine beings, far above the destiny of mere mortals. [...] Change and chance have befallen us. This mutable earth is now our lot. Brother earth, greetings from your mad king. [...] Oh god of change and chance, revenge me. [...] I am tired. [...] I wish to die. [...] I have seen too many dead. [...] They died for my sins. [...] I pray to God for forgiveness. [...] He is tired too and no longer listens. (*ibid.*, pp. 34, 56)

Sweney’s desire for death, like Edmund’s desire to leave Ireland, is seemingly a consequence of the fact that Otherness is threatening to overcome him and his people: the English Other have defeated the Irish and now threaten those who have survived with either assimilation, which is akin to social death, or biological death. Sweney sees only a hopeless fight in the future of his race and wishes to be free of the morbid responsibility of leading the rest of his people to their deaths. Having fallen to such a lowly position, defeated and mad, Maeve requests that her sons take her and Sweney’s lives.

When Maeve rebukes File for her apparent softness towards the English, she assumes it is because File has truly sided with the English (*ibid.*, p. 31). However, this apparent softness indicates that File has become weary of having to advocate revenge (*ibid.*, p. 30). This advocacy is her duty, but she seems to hope for and imagine a peaceful resolution to the war with the English. This hope is counter to

the desires of the established order, suggesting that she wishes the liberation from this order, which she might find in the carnivalesque. This hope is manifested in her prophecy that a man will come from the river to “speak [their] stories” and save them from the English (*ibid.*, pp. 2, 35). She believes this man to be William for three reasons: firstly, in his fever he reveals that he shares their faith, Catholicism (*ibid.*, p. 3); secondly, he has a gift with words; and finally his home in England is on the Avon, which is an Anglicisation of the Irish *aibhne* meaning “river” (Bertha 2002, p. 327).

McGuinness says of Shakespeare that “[h]e is the epitome of English culture, and he’s the great connector between Protestant England and Catholic England because he has those two wires fused in his theatre” (Whitley 1997, n. p.). Indeed, William seems to embody the possibility of linking the two opposing sides, given that, on the one hand, he shares with other of McGuinness’s characters like the younger Pyper and Dido the alternative perspective of homosexuality (McGuinness 1997, p. 37), and, on the other, he is both Catholic, like the Irish, and English. Embodying this alternative perspective, William is a possible agent of the carnivalesque, promising the possibility of change. His cross-cultural, alternative perspective seems to be what File wishes to harness in seeking William’s help. To her, he is the one most able to communicate the stories of the Irish. He will show the English the rich, vibrant culture and the humanity of the Irish that constructions of Otherness have made obscure and abject. However, in a significant reversal, it becomes clear that he is not exactly who File expects him to be. In his fever, he reveals to Edmund why he has come to Ireland:

To play our parts upon the stage. To receive due
reward. To live like lords in Ireland. To meet the poet
Edmund. To plead my case before him. To take me
into his service. (*ibid.*, p. 22).

He later asks Edmund for a job in the civil service and assures him that he will “assist [him] in the continuation of [the English] conquest [of Ireland]” (*ibid.*, p. 50, 52). Furthermore, in a conversation with File, he denies the subversive potential of his homosexuality and his Catholicism, telling her that his desire for Hugh is “sin fit only for the flames” (*ibid.*, p. 59), and that his Catholicism, “is death to all ambition”

(*ibid.*, p. 54). He quite clearly does not want to shoulder the burden of Irish history, as Murray notes (2002, p. 164).

William's motivation for siding with the English seems to stem from his traumatic experience of witnessing the burning of a Catholic woman, the story of which he relates to Hugh:

I have seen a burning. [...] Heretics. Catholics. [...] A woman screaming at the stake. [...] I would have turned my head away from the horror but for the fear I might have been mistaken for a weeping relative and branded with this burning woman. I kept my eyes firmly set on her suffering. The stench of her flesh corrupted me. I grew cruel in that instant. (McGuinness 1997, p. 70)

William's attempt to become an official part of the English cause, in light of this horrific experience, is seemingly an exercise in self-preservation. It is also strong evidence of the violence that accompanied the Protestant English interdiction against Catholicism during the reign of Elizabeth I, which, as Spenser's *View* shows, was a strong contributing factor to England's invasion of Ireland.

This murder also centres on the image of fire, an image that runs throughout the play, representing the connection between artistic inspiration and destruction. In regards to its representation of artistic inspiration, William alludes to play writing as "hear[ing] sweet airs in the fire" (*ibid.*, p. 20), and later, when he speaks to Edmund of the theatre he tells him "I let the lives I create burn in brilliant, everlasting fire" (*ibid.*, p. 52). File attempts to get William to use his fire, his creative inspiration, to help save his faith and, by extension, her people: "You are a Catholic in honest service to a Protestant nation that shall keep the true faith through your fire, your theatre" (*ibid.*, p. 57). However, William denies File her request.

As Spenser's *View* evidences, creative inspiration can be destructive when it is utilised to proliferate constructions of Otherness and inspire profound malignity. For Edmund, fire also represents creative inspiration, but it provides him only the illumination of his demons, suggesting that his advocating of the Irish plot in his poetical works has brought him only guilt and pain. This is another significant

reversal, his creativity that brought destruction to the Irish, now brings destruction to him and so he turns fire upon his possessions, “I will burn my books. I will burn my house” (*ibid.*, p. 79), in hope of appeasing his demons. Like the destructive, yet (ethnic) cleansing fire that consumed the Catholic woman in William’s horrific story, Edmund construes the fire he uses in the destruction of his house as a cleansing death sentence:

As we do burn heretic flesh, so I must burn heretic stone. You, my great cathedral, where my queen was virgin goddess, have turned to devil worship. I must free the devil from you and baptize you anew in fire. Cleansed, these stones will be free. (*ibid.*, pp. 98-9)

The cleansing power of fire appears to be Edmund’s only way to free himself from the madness that has gripped him in Ireland, a madness predicated on his inability to finally reconcile his work for the English crown with the humanity of the Irish, a humanity that suggests parity with the English, contradicting the very basis of Otherness demanded not only by the Irish plot, but also by English identity itself.

In trying to get William to use his fiery inspiration for the benefit of the Irish, File is seemingly attempting to find something that will speak their stories to the English, thereby ending the conflict between them. As she understands it, the theatre is a holy, transformative place in which the dead may rise to life once more, and as such she believes it will be the medium through which William might help her fallen race rise again (*ibid.*, pp. 54-61). Her conception of theatre foregrounds its carnivalesque possibilities. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) suggest that there is a strong connection between theatre and the carnivalesque:

Through particular uses of space / place, Carnival dissolves the usual demarcations between performer and audience, auditorium and outside street. It claims a right to all public space and creates a theatre wherever there is a confluence of people, thus giving the marginalised access to the privilege of self-representation. (p. 84)

Self-representation is precisely what File wishes to accomplish. She wishes to “[reconstruct] the docile (colonised) body as an unruly (resisting) body that threatens

to loosen institutionalised authority's [in this case, the English] grasp on representation" (*ibid.*, p. 86). Storytelling, as the characters of *Carthaginians* discover, helps to create understanding, to alleviate fear of an unknown Other. William is, however, unable to provide her with what she desires. Whereas File expects an immediate and literal transformation to occur in the external world, through his enigmatic, carnivalesque "Fall of Troy," William shows her that art will hardly accomplish such literal, external transformation. What the "Fall of Troy" suggests is the necessity of accepting the principle of mutability, of inevitable change, which governs even the strongest of empires: "Chaos of change that none can flee, / This earth is Mutabilitie. / Where lies a man there hangs time's sword" (McGuinness 1997, p. 78). It is a warning to both the English and the Irish that like Troy before them their empires will fall. However, File realises at the end of the "Fall of Troy" that nothing between the Irish and English has changed, the English under Elizabeth I will follow through with their plot to end the reign of the Gaelic order: "Elizabeth, / Great queen of England, / Your name rhymes with death" (*ibid.*, p. 80). This moment is one of the significant turning points in *Mutabilitie*. File realises now that change and death are inevitable. She takes it upon herself, after this realisation, to turn these changes through her own will. At the same time, Hugh also sees that "William is not our saviour. Words will not help us" (*ibid.*, p. 80), and he declares that it is time to attack the English.

Immediately following this declaration, the Irish put their English captives on trial for their defilement of Annas. The trial is somewhat haphazardly conducted, with Ben, in a carnivalesque reversal, serving as the judge over Richard (*ibid.*, p. 81). They naively attempt to dupe the Irish by re-creating the scenario of *The Two Thieves*, in which one thief's sacrifice for the other gets both released (*ibid.*, p. 82). Richard and Ben wish that theatre would inspire an immediate change in their captor's perspective, but, like File before them, they soon realise that this is not the case. Although the Irish play along at first, following File's instructions Annas gives Richard the fatal kiss and he is killed by Niall (*ibid.*, p. 83). What follows this murder is a ritual performed by Sweney in which he smears his children with English blood. This ritual is similar to the "bleeding" ritual performed by fox hunters during which they initiate their children by smearing them, usually on the face, with the blood of the hunted fox. The effect of this morbid ritual is the

complete attenuation of death's traumatic affects by turning it into an initiation, inspiring communion among the Irish against the English Other. This communion is particularly emphasised as Sweney's priest Donal incants "Do this in memory of me" during the ritual (*ibid.*, p. 84). There is a strong hint here of the Last Supper celebrated by Jesus and his followers before his crucifixion (I Corinthians, Chapters 54-55). The suggestion is that Sweney is creating a ritual based upon the consumption of the body and blood of the English Other that blurs the distinction between sacred (the Last Supper) and secular (blooding). Through this ritualised killing, Sweney is passing on to his sons and daughter the long-entrenched war against the English with a sacred blessing, and tells his son Niall that while he may not be able to rule, he is "fit to lead. There is a difference. The times demand that difference" (*ibid.*, p. 83). While he may treat the English dead with heightened significance, he is not giving the corpse its respect, as he claims; rather, he is relegating it to the symbolic, replacing its individual meanings with his own subjective prescription. Through the ritual, Sweney does not want to end the fight against the English Other peacefully, and finally instructs his progeny to "[k]ill him [Ben]. Kill them all" (*ibid.*, p. 83-4). Mikami (2002) suggests that these murders align the Irish with the violence advocated in Spenser's writings:

By showing this parallel between the Irish and the English, McGuinness suggests that the ferocity found in Spenser's political writings is not a personal trait but a universal human defect. (p. 115)

As is suggested by Edmund's brutish destruction of his castle, this ferocity connects the Irish and the English: both give in to their bloodlust out of fear of losing their identity. For, even though Sweney attempts to transform the atavistic violence of the act of murder through ritual, he is still prescribing to this universal human defect. The command to kill, however, would be the final command issued by Sweney.

Shortly after these murders, before granting her sons leave to attack the English, Maeve commands them to kill both herself and Sweney. Her pained request comes out of her realisation that neither she nor her husband can help in the campaign against the English because she and Sweney have lost the will to fight for their kingdom and their lives:

We two shall not rise again. That is my warning. Do you see why you must kill me? [...] Once I had a kingdom and a people, a husband and a king. Now I have nothing. No, I have a life. And a power to end it. (McGuinness 1997, pp. 88-9)

Having lost everything truly meaningful, Maeve sees nothing but the abject misery of her circumstances. Death is, for her, a release from the burden of watching the last of her people fall under the reign of the English Other. As the remainder of the play shows, their deaths seems to represent both the impending fall of the Gaelic order and the loss of what might be called pure Irishness, that is, an Irish identity that is ostensibly free of the influence of the English Other. As is repeated throughout the play, the English have, in a sense, won, having gained an undeniable, although certainly not total, influence in the Irish landscape and in Irish culture.

Lojek (2004) suggests that the sons' fulfilment of Maeve's wish "parallels the common postcolonial image of sons overthrowing their ineffectual fathers as a first step in achieving independence" (p. 149). However, they are disallowed the exercise of this independence, which would have come in fulfilling Sweney's command to "kill them all." For, when the sons commit what are essentially regicide, patricide and matricide, they meet an unforeseen consequence: Annas curses them to death with the words, "[y]ou will take your own lives, and I will go with you to meet our maker, for by my own hand I too will die" (*ibid.*, p. 96). Annas's response is due primarily to the trauma of seeing her father and mother dead. However, File steps in, ending Annas's curse with the following words:

I knelt where my lord and lady loved arm-in-arm in death. I kissed their hands and feet. I saw the light of eternal rest in their faces. The grave itself did weep, and in that weeping I heard their sweet voices speak. They say, repent, repent for your revenge. Leave the world and its desires. Renounce the kingdom. Walk as beggars through the earth. Or there is no consolation beyond the grave. Repent. Be penitent. Be pilgrims. (*ibid.*, p. 96)

Here, in yet another reversal, File has turned the trauma of the deaths into a possibility of transformation. She uses her cunning and creativity to initiate a

positive change in her life and in the lives of those important to her. What William provided her, according to McGuinness, is “a confidence to speak for herself, rather than for her tribe or for her tradition” (Long 1999, p. 11). Indeed, here, she does not speak for the ghosts of the dead king and queen, whose wishes were to keep fighting the English; rather, she is speaking for herself. She will not waste the independence gained in the death of the king and queen on a doomed war with the English. The Irish relinquish their attack on the English, even when the priest insists that they will win if they keep faith (McGuinness 1997, p. 97). Eventually they all join in File’s pact of destitution, sealed with the bonds of love between each of them.

The final scene of the play shows the Irish living in a more relaxed and free atmosphere. Here, in the final reversal of the play, they are surprised by the appearance of an English child. For File and Hugh, this child is, in a sense, a reminder of the child they once had and lost together. They tell the story of their child’s death separately, each with a different version: File to Elizabeth and Hugh to William. In File’s version, she gives no details as to how the child died, merely says that it happened in the snowy mountains, seemingly during the wars of Munster, and that as a result, “[she] was determined from that moment to join with the English” (*ibid.*, p. 71). This version seems to be a ploy to gain sympathy from Elizabeth; and it works, for File is able to use Elizabeth against Edmund. Hugh’s version, however, contains the details of how File, having sworn she would survive, “twisted [the child’s] neck. [...] Dashed its brains out she did. [...] Spilt like milk on the winter snow” (*ibid.*, p. 71). This account suggests that File was thinking only of her race, not herself, by ensuring her own survival, given she is such an important member of the royal court. The death of this child, however, is an early signal of the end of a pure Irish lineage, as Hurt (2000) suggests, “*Kindermord*, the resonant motif of child-death [implies] the death of the self” (p. 280).

The English child, however, symbolically suggests a solution to not only the grief of loss felt by Hugh and File, but also to the difficulty between the two cultures. The child, as English, reverses the construction of the Irish as children, utilised by Edmund (McGuinness 1997, p. 8). Hugh does not allow a complete reversal, however. Despite the suggestion by the priest that the child may be used as a hostage, Hugh insists that he will be “fostered as our own. Reared as our own.

Nurtured like our own, and natured like his own, as decreed by our laws, our customs, our religion” (McGuinness 1997, pp. 100-1). McGuinness himself has said the following of this scene:

There’s a tiny glimmer of hope, a sparkle of humanity that can’t be extinguished, [...] but yes, it acknowledges that we’re living in dangerous times. And ongoing events, particularly the breaking of the ceasefire, certainly fed into it. (Moroney 1997, p. 16)

Above all, the child represents hope for the future of relations between the Irish and English. The Irish acknowledge that they will care for him, even though he is Other. The promise implied in this child in regards to the relationship between Ireland and England contrasts with that in Thomas Kilroy’s *The O’Neill* (1969) and Brian Friel’s *Making History* (1988), two other plays that deal with the same period in Irish history. In Kilroy’s play the relationship between Hugh O’Neill and Mabel Bagenal does not even produce a child; rather, he banishes her when it seems politically advantageous to do so. Friel, however, allows Hugh and Mabel to consummate their relationship, but quickly undermines the possibilities inherent in this communion by having Mabel and their child die in childbirth. McGuinness allows a more optimistic perspective to radiate from the ending of his play, perhaps because of the circumstances into which the play was first performed.

The play is set in 1598, the year Spenser fled Ireland for England, but McGuinness has said, “the play is a metaphor for 1998” (Holland 1997, quoted in Mikami 2002, p. 113). In her conversation with William, File says, “[w]e approach the end of this century. [...] Let it be an end to war” (McGuinness 1997, p. 58). With Ireland and England heading towards the Good Friday Agreement that occurred in 1998, one may read the play as a timely advocacy for the end of Ireland’s conflict, for the release from powerfully restrictive and destructive constructions of Otherness, and for an embracement of a relationship of peace.

Both *Mutabilitie* and *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me* show how the use of constructions of Otherness is a complex issue. Such constructions can provide a group with a sense of shared identity in the face of the unknown. But, they can also diminish the complexity of identity. Constructions of Otherness are most volatile

when used as the reasoning behind violence. The plays show how when two cultures who mutually construct one another as Other come together there is always a chance that they will see beyond their simplistic constructions to the complex humanity that they share with one another. Proximity, of course, does not guarantee the possibility of coming to such a beneficial realisation, as the conflict in Northern Ireland has shown. The plays are hopeful, but they are not overly sentimental about the relationship between Ireland and England. There is a “glimmer” in each of them of a peaceful future, but they also acknowledge that “we’re living in dangerous times.”

Chapter Three:
Death and the Family: Language and Legacy in
The Bird Sanctuary and *Dolly West's Kitchen*

The previous two chapters related much of the concern of the plays in one way or another to the community or nation. While these concerns are present in *The Bird Sanctuary* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, the focus in these plays is the microcosm of domesticity. This shift of concern, however, does not completely alter McGuinness's dramaturgy, and many of the themes that are present in his other works, such as gender, sexuality and nationality, are present in these two plays. The one recurring theme most pertinent to this chapter is death. Both plays represent death in a number of forms. Both are concerned in great part with the deaths of parental figures and set the parental legacies, the matriarchal and the patriarchal, in contention with one another. The parents' ghosts do not manifest as Charlie's adoptive father does in Hugh Leonard's *Da*, for example. However, like Charlie, the characters' dead father figures haunt them, metaphysically living on in their stories and actions. In addition to the haunting by the dead father figure, in *The Bird Sanctuary*, the first play discussed in this chapter, there are also issues with suicide, both as part of the patriarchal legacy and of the protagonist's negotiation with this legacy. There is also a murder by witchcraft. In *Dolly West's Kitchen*, which is set during World War II, there is the death of the mother figure, Rima, and the deaths encountered by the characters who fight in the war. While in most of his other plays death is traumatic, McGuinness attenuates the trauma of the deaths that occur in these two plays, such as the supernatural murder in *The Bird Sanctuary* and Rima's death in *Dolly West's Kitchen*. This attenuation, however, does not reduce the power of death in these plays; rather, it accentuates death's transformative power. This particular power is also seen in the deaths that occur in *Mutabilitie* and, to an extent, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* as discussed in Chapter Two, which suggests that McGuinness's plays of the 1990s emphasise this transformative rather than the traumatic power of death. The following discussion of *The Bird Sanctuary* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* will look into how these plays' emphasis on transformation mirrors the transformations that were taking place in Ireland at the time.

These plays are also a departure for McGuinness with respect to the settings and economic standing of the characters. While in his earlier plays, he concentrates for the most part on the working class in circumstances that greatly reduce their freedom, in these two plays he focuses on two bourgeois families who live in economically comfortable circumstances. This comfort is represented on stage in the form of the houses themselves. In *The Bird Sanctuary* the first floor sitting room and kitchen of the house are the only settings used on stage, while in *Dolly West's Kitchen* the kitchen of the house is, for the most part, centre stage with a garden and shoreline respectively at either side. Yet, despite their economic security, the families are, in a metaphysical sense, trapped in the comforts of these big houses, haunted by the ghosts of dead parents. The resulting conditions are similar to what Witoszek (1988) deems to be the conditions of the wake participants as discussed in relation to *Carthaginians* in Chapter One above: “if the inner sanctum offers its votaries security [it is] at the cost of stagnation” (p. 153). Witoszek suggests that characters who live in such conditions stagnate because they are haunted (*ibid.*, p. 165). However, while they are initially in a state of stagnation in their relationships with one another and the outside world, there is a strong impulse for change championed by the plays’ protagonists. They adopt carnivalesque language to help their families realise a different perspective, a necessary change in their lives. The plays thus enact the confluence of the competing forces of stagnation and change within big houses filled with ghosts and memories. While within the houses the characters are provided the material comforts that feed their stagnation, the capable female protagonists provide an encounter with a life beyond the confines of the house that may bring pain, but also hope, opportunity, love and fulfilment.

In his essay “On the Family as a Realized Category” (1996), Pierre Bourdieu writes:

As is seen especially clearly in societies based on the ‘house,’ where the perpetuation of the house as a set of material assets orients the whole existence of the household, the tendency of the family to persevere in its being, to perpetuate its existence by ensuring its integration, is inseparable from the tendency to perpetuate the integrity of its heritage, which is always threatened by dilapidation and dispersion. (1996, p. 23)

While this tendency may be characteristic of many bourgeois families, in *The Bird Sanctuary* and *Dolly West's Kitchen* McGuinness depicts two families caught between a desire to perpetuate and a desire to change. For many of the characters, the desire to perpetuate has been frustrated, which has led to disengagement from and disintegration of healthy, productive relationships. In *The Bird Sanctuary*, this disengagement and disintegration causes the breakdown of the marriages of two of the Henryson siblings and in *Dolly West's Kitchen* it is the source of what can be termed the West siblings' physical and emotional neutrality. Eleanor Henryson and Rima West engage with and embrace their families' disengagement and disintegration, Eleanor through her carnivalesque use of language and art, Rima through her introduction of "badness" into the household. Through these media, both protagonists bring alternative perspectives to bear on their respective family plights. These plights are apparently sourced in their memories and perceptions of dead father figures, for Eleanor this figure is her own father and for Rima it is her children's father. In countering the influence of these dead fathers, Eleanor and Rima help their families to lay them to rest, to, in a sense, kill them a second time, in order to potentially escape their detrimental influence. Such usurpation of patriarchal power has a precursor in J. M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) in which Christy Mahon is able to escape the detrimental influence of his cantankerous father by "killing" him twice. While Christy ostensibly gains freedom through a physical display of power—hitting his father over the head with a loy—the killing is imaginary: the father is not physically killed, but rendered powerless. Similarly, in these plays, the characters achieve the second death of the father through the workings of the imagination, which earns the characters a chance to heal the damage of their patriarchal heritage and gain freedom within their lives. This carnivalesque "healing through killing" is further represented in *The Bird Sanctuary* by the voodoo-like murder performed by Eleanor as a favour to her sister, and in *Dolly West's Kitchen* by participation in the Second World War. Both protagonists employ such a paradoxical methodology to guide their family members towards a painful engagement with the exigencies of their past and present, towards the changes that open up the possibility of a better life for them all.

The alternative perspectives represented by Eleanor and Rima place high value on inclusion and acceptance of difference in regard to issues of national, filial and

sexual identity. Because the plays interlink these strands of identity, as the protagonists advocate change in a single facet of their families' identities, they open up the possibility of a generally wider, more inclusive perspective. Like many of McGuinness's other plays, such as *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and *Mutabilitie* in particular, both plays deal notably with the relationship between Ireland and England. Additionally, like *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, *Dolly West's Kitchen* includes American characters, but the later play delves into the relationship between the two countries, a facet relatively unexplored in the earlier play. The protagonists aid or encourage the relationships other characters share with the English and Americans in these plays, offering these characters an escape, albeit not always a perfect one, from the stagnation of their filial legacies. The protagonists also help the other characters face and, for some, come to terms with differences of sexual identity, especially in regards to the issue of homosexuality in each play. These perspectives provide a way out of the death-in-stagnation represented by the houses in favour of embracing the death that is inherent in change and accepting confrontation with an unknown outside world.

The protagonists succeed in bringing change to their families through their use of language. Witoszek (1988) identifies a strong reliance on language as a common trait amongst many of the characters of modern Irish drama, and suggests that this reliance privileges "memory over action, endurance over initiative, [and] is connected with evasion as a way of existence" (p. 165). However, the protagonists of these two plays communicate their alternative perspectives through a language that wrings pleasure from hatred, that alters in its repetitions, that attains truth through lies, that attacks and even kills in order to salve. It is a carnivalesque language that functions similarly to that used by the characters in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, in which their adoption of rude and even violent language, doing the "worst" to one another (McGuinness 2002, p. 96), is both a defence mechanism and a medium through which they may become liberated from the established order. That the two protagonists are women foregrounds the issue of gender and language. Stereotypically, as Key (1996) observes, "[w]omen are supposed to be 'nice' and men are supposed to be 'strong'" (p. xxv). This dichotomy feeds into their use of language. Men and women use language differently. Socio-linguists suggest that, because language is a social medium, this discrepancy results from social constructs

of gender (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, pp. 15-32). In their comments on language, Ashton and Savona (1991) suggest that, “[a]s a logocentric or phallogocentric sign-system (as identified in Derridean or Lacanian terms), language places the female subject in a marginalised relation to its patriarchal order” (p. 70). Within patriarchal constructs of language, women stereotypically do not possess the same power as men; their voices are too different, too emotional and irrational to be heard (Key 1996, pp. 122-127). McGuinness’s protagonists, however, do not keep silence within a prescribed patriarchal order. Their rarely “nice” words challenge the limitations of a biased perspective, expose their family members’ personal and communal evasions and encourage them to accept one another in the light of new constellations of identity.

To introduce each play, this chapter will provide a summary both of what takes place in the play and the contexts into which each was first performed, given that the national, filial and sexual issues with which they deal remain important issues in contemporary Ireland. And, as McGuinness himself has said, “you can’t let what’s happening to your country pass by without saying ‘I notice it, I see it’” (Moroney 1997, n. p.). Looking first at *The Bird Sanctuary*, this chapter will elucidate the Henryson family’s difficulties, and will concentrate on how Eleanor attempts to counteract these difficulties through her fantastic and imaginative use of language and art. The chapter will then consider how in *Dolly West’s Kitchen* the family are in a state of physical and emotional neutrality. The chapter particularly focuses to how Rima attempts to offset the damaging effects of this neutrality by encouraging her children to encounter and challenge their personal difficulties through relationships outside of the family.

During its first performances at the Abbey, *The Bird Sanctuary* sparked a running debate in the editorial section of *The Irish Times*. While early reviews were generally positive, it was the remarks by Polly Devlin that inspired even Sebastian Barry to defend the play’s merits. Devlin castigated nearly all aspects of the play, including the set design, the dialogue and the actors, concluding that the play “should not have made it out of the in-tray of the script department” (1994, n. p). One response was that of Denise Meagher who defended the play for its contemporary relevance:

The emphasis in Ireland on family, the preoccupation with our British neighbours, the fear of change, are as relevant now as they were at the turn of the century. The old house in Booterstown is suggestive of past tradition in today's world. Yesterday the family was safer, more private, today it is dangerous and public, a threat to our cultural self-image. While we are forced to ask if tomorrow they will be at all, the bonds we see among the Henryson family in Mr. McGuinness's play leave us with a sense of hope. The family is still the family. Ireland is still Ireland, despite, or maybe because of change. (1994, n. p.)

While Meagher's comments capture central themes in the play, Devlin, as Lojek (2004) suggests, likely expected a more naturalistic presentation (pp. 137-8). In its two acts, the play complexly blends traditional "fourth-wall" realism with fantastic elements that are, at times, jarring and opaque. The play details the happenings of a single day in the Henryson house in the Booterstown bird sanctuary in Dublin during which Marianne Henryson returns to Ireland from her home in England. Act One stays primarily in the realistic mode and introduces five members of the family, the three middle-aged siblings Eleanor, Marianne and Robert, and Robert's wife and son, Tina and Stephen. Eleanor is an artist who has been a recluse in the family house for three years completing some paintings. She is assisted by Stephen, who Tina threw out of their house after discovering his homosexuality. Eleanor is deeply concerned that Marianne and Robert will try to sell their family home, which she has not only turned into her studio, but also, by not keeping it clean, turned into a "kip" (McGuinness 2002, pp. 300, 304). After Marianne arrives, however, she explains that she has returned to ask for Eleanor's help to save her failing marriage, hoping that Eleanor will use witchcraft to kill her husband's lover in exchange for full ownership of the house. After much discussion and many arguments, during which they reveal secrets to one another, such as Robert's gambling problem and Eleanor's suicide attempt, Eleanor accepts Marianne's request and orders a feast. Act Two manifests the fantastic elements and opens with Eleanor performing a voodoo-like ceremony with the bones from the feast as the others have gone to a local public house. When the others return there are further discussions and arguments that focus on topics such as Eleanor's reclusion and suicide attempt, Marianne's marriage, Robert's family's difficulties, and the Henryson family legacy, during

which Marianne gets a phone call informing her that her husband's lover has died. At the conclusion of the play, the family seems ready to reconcile their differences, and, through Eleanor's fantastic and revelatory efforts, glimpse a different perspective that could reconfigure their family bond.

At the time of the play's first production at the Abbey Theatre in February of 1994, Ireland and England had only recently broken fresh, significant ground in the attempt cease the conflict in Northern Ireland. As discussed in Chapter Two, the 1993 "Downing Street declaration" set off a chain of events that would culminate in the Good Friday Agreement. Significant economic and demographic changes came with the "Celtic Tiger" phenomenon that boosted a sense of Irish self-confidence. At the same time, highly publicised events, such as the notorious 1992 X case, in which a fourteen-year-old rape victim was restrained under court order from seeking an abortion in England, and the case of repeat paedophile Father Brendan Smyth, the handling of which exposed important inadequacies in both the Catholic authorities and the Republic's government, were symptomatic of the changing attitudes that came with this new self-confidence (Brown 2004, pp. 365-9). The 1990s were, according to Brown, "a decade of revelations" (*ibid.*, p. 403), in which the former ineluctable staples of Irish identity, church and state, were exposed as very human institutions.

For all of these changes, as Kiberd observes, there was something of a "philosophical vacuum" accompanying the boom in the markets (*ibid.*, p. 573; see also Coulter and Coleman 2003, pp. 24-5). In *The Bird Sanctuary*, Robert's wife Tina remarks upon this "vacuum" in her comments on the changes in contemporary Ireland:

More money being made. Not much happiness, but
more money. Plenty of money. Less happiness.
When there was less money, people were—I don't
know—people were together, together in their misery,
you know. Now they're alone in their misery.
(McGuinness 2002, p. 290)

This unhappiness stems perhaps from what Michael Cronin *et al* suggest in *Reinventing Ireland* (2002) is the disengagement of much modern media from larger

political issues in favour of “lifestyle” and “human interest” programming, which leaves individuals “ill-equipped either to fully understand the structural causes behind individual plight or to engage in political action with others to effect profound, long-term change” (p. 8). The play is critical of the apathetic, self-serving hedonism symptomatic of such a “philosophical vacuum,” emphasising instead the need for engagement with the unhappiness that lies behind the prosperity. This point has particular resonance given the current state of the Irish economy. In the post-9/11 global economic climate, Ireland’s economy has significantly slowed in comparison with the boom of the mid to late 1990s. Its dependence on multinational companies, its unbalanced regional growth and its failure to invest in a more solid economic infrastructure has left it vulnerable during the global economic changes of the past few years (Coulter and Coleman 2003, pp. 21-3; Munley *et al.* 2002, p. 2).³⁴

The play offers its critical perspective through the medium of carnivalesque fantasy. In exploring fantasy in the plays of John Millington Synge, Toni O’Brien Johnson (1991) suggests that fantasy is instigated from a desire for difference, a desire that leads to the transgression of the boundaries of reality, which, ultimately, “disrupts the status quo” (p. 149). The status quo in *The Bird Sanctuary* is rooted in what can be termed the anxiety of influence experienced by the characters in relation to their family legacy. For Robert and his family, this anxiety causes confusion and self-deception that disables them from dealing with the problems that have torn them apart. Marianne also feels powerless to effect a positive change in her marriage, given that her husband is on the verge of abandoning her. Eleanor employs both her linguistic and supernatural powers in order to create an enabling fantasy for her family that allows them to, in a sense, escape the damaging influence of the past.

The Henryson house is that focus of the characters’ anxieties. Initially, Eleanor’s anxieties radiate from the fact that Marianne may sell the house upon her return. The house is “where [their] parents lived and died, where [she, Robert and Marianne] were born” (*ibid.*, p. 288), where Eleanor now lives and paints, and which she has, according to Marianne and Tina, turned into a “kip” (*ibid.*, pp. 300, 304). As she tells Stephen, “I’ll die if this house is sold. I’ll stop painting” (*ibid.*, p. 277).

³⁴ See also Peadar Kirby’s *The Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth with Inequality in Ireland* (2002).

The house is a symbol of a legacy that is a mixture of prosperity and unhappiness, which conjures mixed and confused feelings from each of the siblings; it is a place, according to Robert, that has “left [them] all in the state [they are] in” (McGuinness 2002, p. 325). This legacy focuses on their father, who had specific expectations for his children and showed little compassion when they failed to meet these expectations. These expectations haunt each of them, as they admit that they still hear their parents’ voices “[e]very day. [...] Clear as a bell” (*ibid.*, p. 322). As the major source of their confused feelings, these “voices,” on the one hand, constantly remind the siblings of their failure to meet their father’s expectations, which Marianne clarifies in saying, “[m]y father wanted me to stay in Ireland. I didn’t. He wanted Eleanor to be an architect. Jesus. All of us, we let him down, didn’t we?” (*Ibid.*, p. 338). On the other hand, the voices are a constant reminder of their father’s failure to treat them with respect. This latter reminder is particularly relevant for Robert, who recalls that his father, when he heard that Robert had failed the Leaving Certificate, said to him,

[...] You may think I am disappointed in you, Robert, but I am not, he said, because you are and always will be stupid, very, very stupid. I am content that you can at least write your name, he said, but I am sad that it is our family name. Henryson. You have failed me, he said, but I am not disappointed. (*ibid.*, p. 325)

The pain of such a memory impels Robert to request that they sell the house (*ibid.*, p. 325). This pain is also indicative of the confusion of emotions, of guilt and anger, which is at the root of their family legacy. Such confused emotions appear to be the major motivations in the disintegration of the family, which is represented by the crumbling marriages of both Marianne and Robert, and the suicide attempt by Eleanor. However, Eleanor uses fantasy within the confines of the house to enable or create something new out of her family’s disintegrating relationships, a use that seems to fit a description of the combination of fantasy and architecture offered by Claude Fiérobe (1998):

The fusion of the real and the imaginary is not achieved at the expense of one of the constitutive elements but, on the contrary, the role of this

amalgamation is to energise the representation, to make it ring with multiple echoes. (p. 259)

While Eleanor disappointed her father by becoming an artist rather than an architect, it is from this transgression of patriarchal expectation that Eleanor ultimately finds an outlet to express her faith in her family. Rather than be an architect with the ability to perhaps physically fix the ailing house, she is an artist who, through her acts of imaginative fantasy, re-configures the meaning of the house, allowing it to "ring with multiple echoes."

She chooses this re-configuration because it appears that the loss of the house might bring her back to how she felt three years previously when she attempted to drown herself, "to clean [her]self of past and present" (*ibid.*, p. 306), which she undertook because, as she tells Marianne, she was lonely (*ibid.*, p. 340). She may also have attempted suicide by drowning because, it is suspected, her father may have done so (*ibid.*, pp. 331-2). Her attempt did not succeed because Tina pulled her from the sea, showing her that though she may have been lonely, she was not alone. As such, this encounter with death, which finally denied her a kind of unity in death with the father, led her to deal with the past and present by dedicating herself to killing the father a second time. To do so, she both paints the bird sanctuary and creates something new out of the disintegrating relationships within her family (*ibid.*, p. 306).

Jordan (2007) suggests that Eleanor embodies ambivalence in that she is bi-sexual, and she is both an artist who uses her talent to instil hope in her family and a performer who "summons the darkness to kill" (p. 138). Like other artist figures, homosexuals and women in McGuinness's plays such as Pyper, Dido and File, Eleanor has access to a privileged carnivalesque perspective, which she brings to bear on her family's difficulties. In her ambivalent position, she is, like the younger Pyper of Part Two in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, aligned with death because of her maternal inheritance of witchcraft. Nevertheless, she is not merely an agent of death; rather, she is also an agent of fantasy who is able to cull hope from death. Here, the idea of "life being born of death" is brought into the domestic, family zone, a move that reconfigures the Nationalist cult of death in which, as Barbara Brodman argues, murder and self-sacrifice is enacted for the sake of national

identity (1998, p. 75). Eleanor embraces, and even encourages, the disintegration and death of her family legacy and she kills Marianne's husband's lover because she has faith and hope that she can create a new identity for the family. Reconfiguring identity, then, is not merely a broadly national issue, but one that needs negotiation within the household.

Eleanor initiates her attempts to bring her family to a new relationship with one another through two media: language and painting. In their essay "The Tradition of Vernacular Hatred," Witoszek and Sheeran suggest that such evidence as the bands of satirists that Irish kings would use in verbal battle with their enemies, the abundant variety of curses used to harm or even kill and the use of invective and macabre language in modern Irish drama "points to a culture in which malediction seems to have been a much more dominant code than the code of benediction" (1991, pp. 16-7). Eleanor's language, however, is not merely evidence of the supposedly dominant code of malediction. Her language is full of rudeness and invective, and even includes a curse, but it is also often humorous and sometimes even tender. In fact, she often flits back and forth from tenderness to insult, which leads Tina to admit to Marianne, "[t]here's times I don't know how to take what that sister of yours says to me" (McGuinness 2002, p. 289). Tina's puzzlement is, indeed, understandable; for, Eleanor's is a language in which "hate, like love, is only a figure of speech" (*ibid.*, p. 306). It is a paradoxical carnivalesque language that, on the one hand, is a force of hatred and destruction as evidenced by the sisters' consistent and biting verbal attacks on one another and the murder of the Tasmanian by way of the voodoo-like curse. On the other hand, the violent, invective language is a force of defence and healing, pushing the family toward confrontation with their personal and communal pain and eventual regeneration and renewal. The power of such language lies in its link to the imagination, in its capacity to expose and counter hidden difficulties. Art, too, has this link to the imagination and this capacity to influence change. In this play, both Eleanor's harsh, imaginative language and her art become powerful tools to help her siblings cope with their frustrations. Such power lies in Eleanor's access to a different perspective that presents alternatives to the painful circumstances of her family's reality. This consideration of the play will now turn to the power of Eleanor's language in relation to the difficulties in the

families of her siblings before concluding with an exploration of the significance of her art.

Robert and Tina's unhappiness is predicated primarily on two facts: Robert has a significant gambling problem, and their son Stephen is openly homosexual. Regarding Robert's gambling, Eleanor reveals that "he gambles everything [he and Tina] earn," and that she has to bail them out (*ibid.*, p. 290). Their relationship with Stephen is equally troublesome, as Stephen says, "I'm my father's son, my mother's curse" (*ibid.*, p. 277). Indeed, Tina threw him out of their house three years previously, after discovering his sexual orientation (*ibid.*, p. 290, 334). Robert, Tina and Stephen deceive themselves into thinking that their unhappiness will perhaps solve itself, or be solved by some force outside of themselves, and, as such, refuse to take responsibility for it. Even when Tina has particular difficulty, likely with both issues, during the Christmas holiday, Robert's reaction to her sorrow is to avoid talking about it or its sources:

[...] less said the better. I say, take to the bed, pet, you take to the bed and pretend it's not the time of year that's in it. It's sent to afflict people, Christmas. New Year. And I find I can laugh her out of it eventually. And a good laugh clears the air. (*ibid.*, p. 295)

This avoidance is characteristic of how Robert deals with conflict and pain, masking them in light-hearted, rambling verbosity. Yet, behind his open displays of light-heartedness is a profound pain, as Tina explains:

Some nights he thinks I'm sleeping, he starts to walk through the whole house. And he keeps walking. There's the rare time he sits on Stephen's empty bed and I hear him crying. [...] I know there's something not right. [...] [T]he man I married I loved. And we had a son. The joy, his joy, all our joy. No more. No longer. And Robert is also no longer the man I married. He is no longer the man—no longer. (*ibid.*, p. 316)

Robert and Tina's difficulties are maintained because both refuse to talk about them, preferring to suffer private grief. Stephen, being his "father's son" also refuses to talk and thereby bridge the gap between himself and his parents.

Despite even the memory of his father's sharp chastisement of him after failing the Leaving Certificate, Robert has fooled himself into believing that his father's influence is a positive force. This belief is particularly problematic in Robert's relationship with Stephen. He imagines that his father could have changed Stephen: "I wish he's seen Stephen grow into a man. Lived to see him. Daddy could have coped well with all this. I mean, put some sense into him" (*ibid.*, p. 324). Here, Robert equates the legacy of the father with conservative values, which treat homosexuality as a cursed affliction aligned with death. Robert is not able to cope with the situation, nor is he able to make sense of it, seemingly because of the dominance of his father's conservative, denying voice over him; a voice that he says has left him tongue-tied (*ibid.*, p. 325).

Eleanor employs her imaginative language in trying to coax Robert and Tina into reconciling with Stephen and facing the challenge of Robert's gambling. To this end, she has no qualms telling lies, such suggesting she had both a miscarriage and an abortion. Her reasoning for telling such lies is as follows: "It gave one something to say at dreadful dinner parties. I was usually drunk and tearful, and it did provoke other people into making the most revealing confessions" (*ibid.*, pp. 320-1). Eleanor's deliberate adoption of a powerful fiction allows her to create an alternative history, one that allows others, or rather, as she says, provokes others to reveal their own secrets, as Stephen did when he told her of his homosexuality (*ibid.*, p. 321). Throughout the play she demonstrates an expertise at provoking, if not full confessions, at least enough of a reaction to get the people she cares about to talk about their secrets and difficulties. One such provocation occurs near the end of Act One. This time she does not resort to fiction, but to a powerful event nonetheless. Here she tells of her attempt at suicide, revealing that Tina had said to her, "[i]f you die, how will I live?" (*Ibid.*, p. 306). Near the beginning of Act Two, Tina confronts her saying she should not have revealed those details, and then confesses that she had imagined Eleanor was Robert and that their family is falling apart because of Robert's gambling and Stephen's estrangement (*ibid.*, pp. 315-6). Eleanor had

earlier attempted to get Tina to talk about these issues in front of Marianne, emphatically suggesting that she believes Tina should face them with openness and honesty, but Tina avoids giving any details (*ibid.*, pp. 290-1). After Eleanor's provocations, Tina is finally able to admit near the end of the play that she has been cruel in throwing Stephen out of her house and invites him to return, but with a humorous caveat: "please, son, no men in your bed. The shock I got before. [...] I'm not up to it. Well, at least, no men from Cork" (*ibid.*, pp. 331, 333-4).

As for Robert, he at first resists the reconciliation of his wife and child seemingly because it comes with an acceptance of Stephen's homosexuality, a "disease" from which his father would not have let his family die: "He would save us from death" (*ibid.*, p. 331). Robert's difficulty in this case seems to result from the fact that Stephen represents the last of the Henrysons, as Marianne remarks to Stephen: "You're no more going to fill the earth with little Henrysons than Eleanor did. You're the last of the line" (*ibid.*, p. 299). Watson (1994) in examining death in the English renaissance suggests that, although the urge to procreation is

[...] a tangible and communal form of immortality tied to the cycle of human life, a consuming of the body in the hope of rendering life eternal[,] [...] [such a] radically communal solution to death proves no less satisfactory than a radically individualist one. (pp. 7, 45)

In other words, while Robert's grief is due to his perception that he has failed his father because Stephen has turned out to be gay, procreation affords only an illusory solution to the problem of death. Thus, his desire to change Stephen is unqualified. Robert need not keep trying to live up to his father's expectations because, as Marianne reminds him, "[h]e's dead, Robert, our father's dead" (McGuinness 2002, p. 331). At the end of the play, Robert has great difficulty accepting his father's death and the issue of his gambling remains unresolved, but it seems that through Eleanor's linguistic efforts his family is poised to heal its damaged bonds.

Marianne, as mentioned, has returned to her family house because her husband has left her for a younger woman (*ibid.*, p. 289). She and her husband, a man Tina describes as having "the airs and graces of a duchess and the manners of a pig"

(*ibid.*, p. 314), are seemingly in a constant fight for power in what appears to be a painful, loveless relationship. As she tells Stephen, though she works hard to fit in as a doctor, when they throw dinner parties, her husband belittles her in front of their guests, calling her his “Irish navvy,” “maid” and “skivvy” (*ibid.*, p. 298). She, however, does not always allow him to patronise her; as she tells Eleanor, once when he accused her of having a drinking problem, she smashed the windows out of his car (*ibid.*, p. 323). The rather unsubtle suggestion is that though he may be right, she will not give in without a fight. Eleanor summarises their unhappy marriage as follows:

She is a woman who always gets what she wants. [...] Once, [her husband] was quite kind. Full of energy. Talent. She got her claws into him when they were young, and turned him into a husband and father. She took his passion and made it hers. He became staid and solid and silent. I understand it. It's the terrible attraction of the Irish for the English, and the English for the Irish. Together, they behave as expected. She's mad, he's cruel, that's the way. They should never have married, but they are. And it's gone on so long, they're set in their ways. (*ibid.*, p. 317)

As Eleanor suggests, Marianne's marriage explicitly foregrounds the relationship between Ireland and England, a relationship that the play not only seems to suggest is necessary even if unhappy, but also hints that it may be reconfigured in the future, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Regardless of the difficult nature of her marriage, Marianne enlists Eleanor's help. Marianne's request appears to be an attempt to re-appropriate her power, which her husband's Tasmanian lover threatens.

Eleanor and Marianne have a complex relationship. They are among the “querulous dyads” of modern Irish drama, who, as Witoszek and Sheeran point out, are most commonly two males like J. M. Synge's Old Mahon and Christy in *The Playboy of the Western World*, Samuel Beckett's Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm and Clove in *Endgame*, that “live in a state of negative symbiosis: while they trade insults they are yet dependent on each other” (1991, pp. 20-1). Indeed, as mentioned above, they continuously verbally attack and belittle one another. The following exchange is one example among many:

Eleanor: I've given myself to each and every one of you.

Marianne: What a waste of giving. What a waste of a fuck. Don't be shocked at that expression. Every mother, if the truth were told, has said it about her child at some time or other. But forgive me, I forget you wouldn't know that.

Eleanor: I wondered how long it would take for the marvels of having three lovely children to be paraded in front of me.

Marianne: You've never forgiven me for having children.

Eleanor: On the contrary, I was delighted that you were fertile in that respect, because in every other respect you are a barren old bitch. (McGuinness 2002, p. 332)

While it is a dominant aspect of their relationship, this seeming bitterness appears to be a ploy, a façade, which disguises the fact that, like other “querulous dyads,” they need each other. Their coming together foregrounds the possibility of reconciliation in the family. In some respects, they each represent a side of the family legacy, Marianne is similar to her father in that she is a doctor with a drinking problem, and Eleanor is like her mother in that she has the powers of witchcraft. Yet, they are not locked into either mould: both have broken from any kind of full inheritance, Marianne married an Englishman, and Eleanor was, according to Marianne, disowned by her mother (McGuinness 2002, p. 334). Their coming together, then, like Eleanor's interventions in Robert's family difficulties, suggests an alternative configuration of the family legacy. Their meeting is initiated by Marianne's desire to save her marriage by enlisting Eleanor's powers to kill her husband's lover. Indeed, as is characteristic of other querulous dyads, “there is one point at which they reach a certain solidarity when, perforce, they turn against a third party” (Witoszek and Sheeran 1991, p. 21).

According to Marianne, one of the reasons why she is so intent on saving her marriage is because she fears retribution from her mother's spirit: “If I don't, our mother will kill me” (*ibid.*, p. 293). Enlisting Eleanor's help is an attempt to harness the dangerous power of the maternal legacy, to turn its death-dealing capabilities to her advantage. In this light, Marianne may be counted among the women discussed

by Barreca (1993) who “have found themselves excluded by the social order that gives them neither permanence nor importance. Only death will give them these, and with death they will deal” (p. 189). As such, witchcraft offers her a means of returning the power that her husband took from her through his patronising attitude and his attempt to replace her with another woman.

“Kill her,” Marianne requests of Eleanor, “[y]ou have the power. Witchcraft. Kill her, and you can keep this house. For life. That’s why I’m here. That’s the deal” (McGuinness 2002, p. 289). Eleanor’s killing of the lover of Marianne’s husband explicitly demonstrates the powerful, paradoxical and carnivalesque use of language in the play. While according to Marianne, Eleanor is frightened of death because it is beyond her control (*ibid.*, p. 297), for Eleanor it is the whole family who is afraid of death, and who, consequently, has “ceased in some way to live” (*ibid.*, p. 327). By accepting Marianne’s request, she is attempting to use death, as it is in carnivalesque logic, to breathe life into her family, to create something new out of their disintegration. While, as Barreca notes, “women’s use of their intransigent powers occurs in reaction to a perceived wrong committed against them or against their loved ones” (1993, p. 187), for Eleanor, this wrong affects both. Near the end of Act One, she orders a feast, and, at the beginning of Act Two, uses the bones, bread and wine shared by the family to enact her occult ritual. She ties the bones with coloured thread, symbols of “hope,” “charity” and “poverty,” breaks bread over them, “the food of faith,” pours wine over them, which she calls “blood,” a symbol of family, and speaks the curse, “[m]ay her hands and feet be pierced, may they number all her bones. This night may she be received into her reward of paradise” (McGuinness 2002, p. 311). Not too long afterwards, while she and Marianne are in the midst of an argument, Marianne receives the call that confirms that Eleanor’s witchcraft has worked (*ibid.*, p. 334-5). Like the women Barreca discusses, for Eleanor, “[d]eath is summoned but not welcomed by [her] [ritual], invited but not embraced, so that the experience of death is invoked without being irrevocably initiated” (1993, p. 178). That is, beyond the killing of the Tasmanian, Eleanor’s intentions are not merely to destroy, but as her descriptions of the ingredients of her ritual suggest, to express hope and faith in her family, to heal it and to create a new constellation of meaning for it.

Eleanor accepts Marianne's request after Marianne explains to her that her husband's lover is "a Tasmanian [who has been seen] reading Tolstoy on a train" (McGuinness 2002, p. 294). On the surface, anchoring the voodoo-like murder in this alliterative phrase seems implausible, even silly. Mikami (2002) reads it as a joke because, like Tolstoy's eponymous heroine in *Anna Karenina*, the Tasmanian temptress dies in a train accident (p. 152); however, she does not explore why McGuinness would use such a device in such a circumstance. As a joke, it presents Eleanor with the opportunity to make a sharp quip about the power of the Russian novel, which nearly causes Marianne to burst out laughing (McGuinness 2002, p. 335). This macabre carnivalesque joke seems to function similarly to the macabre humour that Vivian Mercier defines in his book *The Irish Comic Tradition* (1962) as "a defence mechanism against the fear of death [...] [that] help[s] us to accept death" (p. 49; original emphasis). The alliterative phrase and the resulting humour helps Eleanor accept Marianne's deal. While it is not what one might call violent language, it, in a sense, is an accessory to violence, and seems to fit David Grant's broad definition of violence:

Broadly, violence occurs whenever another human being is treated as an object or thing, rather than as a person able to give consent or to refuse to enter into a discourse or relationship. [...] As Simone Weil eloquently says, violence congeals, hardening and turning the other to stone. Its supreme expression is making a corpse of the other—that is, something wholly inert. (2001, p. 3)

The phrase dehumanises the Australian, allowing Eleanor to view her merely as an object obstructing the fulfilment of her sister's wish. The joke also defends Eleanor against the painful crux of the request. On the one hand, fulfilling her sister's wish returns her sister to the ignoble state of her marriage. On the other, if she does not accept Marianne's deal she will likely lose the house and her ties with Marianne. Whatever her choice here, there is pain. Eleanor's humour, then, connects her to what File mentions to Elizabeth of laughter in *Mutabilitie*, "[i]t is a habit amongst us [the Irish], a custom, to laugh when we should cry" (McGuinness 1997, p. 66). Eleanor chooses not to cry, but to infuse her pain with carnivalesque laughter. In a sense, this laughter is a self-deception, much like Robert's evasive laughter, but this deception protects her from the painful crux of Marianne's request. Marianne, too,

may be deceiving herself in thinking her repugnant marriage is worthy of a murder. Apparently, by giving Eleanor a purpose, a goal, her dedication to her family is what helps to save her from the loneliness and despair that drove her to attempt suicide (*ibid.*, p. 306, 340).

Like her witchcraft, Eleanor uses her artistic talents to set in motion the reconciliation of her family. However, she receives little support from them in this endeavour. Throughout the play, Marianne shows little but disdain for Eleanor's choice to pursue the life of an artist. For Marianne, as with Robert, procreation is a powerful, even though in a sense illusory, solution to the problem of death. The fact is, as a foil to death, Eleanor's choice to produce art is similar to Robert and Marianne's choice of procreation. According to Watson (2001) art has the "peculiar ability to preserve precisely what procreation does not[;] [that is, an idea.] If one's being can be channelled into an idea, then that being can outlast the mortal body" (p. 7). This function of art appears to be what Eleanor desires in painting the bird sanctuary. According to Eleanor, she is working on this painting for a specific reason:

Keep the faith. In the family. That it will live for ever. That's what I want to pretend. My great strength. It's allowed me to lock myself away and work and work until it's finished, the bird sanctuary, and I will paint it, for the family, and when it's finished, I may lose the faith, I may stop pretending, but I wouldn't bank on it. (McGuinness 2002, p. 327)

The act of pretending, of using imagination, enables Eleanor to keep her faith in her family, and give it a kind of immortality. Concordantly, she believes that by using her imaginative abilities she will be able to relegate a similar longevity onto the bird sanctuary:

I'm painting the bird sanctuary. If I don't, it will be lost [...] There will come a time when Booterstown will be under the sea. [...] I have to remember and record it. This is happening in my lifetime. Jesus Christ, the idiots were even threatening to build a road through the sanctuary. A road through one of the country's pride and joys! (*ibid.*, p. 293)

As in many of McGuinness's plays, the imaginative artistic act of remembering is not merely a repetition or copy, but enables a new way of seeing.

This imaginative function of art is presented through the three other paintings of Eleanor's that are present on stage throughout the play: one of Eleanor and Marianne as young girls, one of their mother with Robert lying on her lap and one of their father sitting with his hands folded either sleeping, thinking or watching (*ibid.*, p. 287). These pictures serve as representations of the family's past, which they have each had so much difficulty leaving behind. After all their arguments, revelations and reconciliations, the characters arrange in postures that resemble the portraits: Eleanor and Marianne stand together, Stephen lies sleeping in his mother's lap and Robert sits with his eyes closed and his hands folded (*ibid.*, p. 339). This resemblance suggests that, while Eleanor has succeeded in bringing Robert's family toward reconciliation, there is no guarantee that they will escape the damaging hold of the past. However, the differences are important here, too: this is a very different family, a family full of its own possibilities: not a repetition, but a reconfiguration.

As Eleanor prepares to reveal her painting of the sanctuary, she tells Marianne to close her eyes to see her signature (*ibid.*, p. 341). This is a particularly poignant point, given that Marianne had chastised Eleanor for never having had children, for it suggests that the family name will live on through her art. Eleanor, as Jordan's assessment quoted above attests, has chosen an alternative to marriage and children, which allows her to see their filial unhappiness from a different viewpoint, one that allows her to provide them insight into how to come to terms with the changes in their respective families.

The play repeatedly compares Stephen to Eleanor. Like Eleanor, he is an artist (*ibid.*, p. 315). However, he has not yet found the confidence that Eleanor possesses, for, when it comes to his parents, he is rendered practically silent. Only when his mother makes the effort to invite him back home, after much coaxing by Eleanor, does he confess to being too stubborn to talk to her or his father about the possibility of reconciliation (*ibid.*, p. 331). It seems that Stephen's time is yet to come. Like Eleanor, he does not fit the status quo adopted by his parents. Helen Lojek's description of Pyper in *Observe the Sons of Ulster* as an "existential

outsider” because of his homosexuality (1990, p. 57) is also applicable to Stephen. He is an existential outsider who, like Eleanor, has access to an alternative perspective. He employs this perspective in conversation with Marianne, constructing an amusing reversal of her husband’s abusive behaviour:

I’m having an affair with your husband. He visits Ireland secretly. I insist we stay in the finest suite of the Shelbourne Hotel. We make love. I humiliate him each time. I make him do as he doesn’t wish to. He obeys me. Then I call him my English maid. My English skivvy. And if he does not obey, if he is not my English maid, then he will know the strength of his Irish navy. (McGuinness 2002, pp. 298-9)

Through this complex carnivalesque reversal, which Mikami suggests is a “metaphor about the relation between the two countries [in which the image] of weak lamenting Hibernia being raped by England [...] is reversed” (2002, p. 151), Stephen is suggesting a different view of the relationship between Ireland and England that reinforces Irish self-confidence in an image of sexual dominance. The development of Stephen’s perspective, however, as stated above, is yet to come; just as, in 1994, many of the most significant changes in Ireland were in their gestation stage.

The reconfiguration of the relationship between Ireland and England represented by Stephen is also present in Eleanor’s relationship with Marianne. The final scene between the two sisters refers to the family legend in which Queen Victoria visited Booterstown. In this legend, the Queen, having thought the house to be particularly eye-catching, knocked on the door. When it seemed as if no one was to answer a shiver passed over her “as if in sorrow for the wrongs done” (McGuinness 2002, p. 278). Seeing the Queen thus, the woman of the house, “a beautiful old woman dressed in black,” opened the door and said, “[a]ll sins are forgiven” (*ibid.*, p. 279). According to the nebenscene both Eleanor and Marianne are wearing black throughout Act Two (*ibid.*, pp. 311, 318), suggesting that they share the role of the “beautiful old woman in black.” Marianne seems to take on the role when she receives the phone call from her husband that reveals the death of his lover. Here, she speaks the same words to her husband as the old woman spoke to the Queen, “[a]ll sins are forgiven” (*ibid.*, p. 335), suggesting that as Ireland is facing the changes ushered in

during the 1990s, the wish implied in the family legend for a reconciliation between Ireland and England may finally come true. In the final moments of the play, Eleanor takes on the role. According to Jordan, upon the revelation of the painting of the bird sanctuary, “[a] new beginning is there for the sisters to grasp, and the past must be left behind. Acceptance based on truth and frailty, evil and endurance is what matters” (2007, p. 138). Eleanor invites Marianne into her fantasy, telling her to use her imagination to see her painting of the bird sanctuary, which, as Stephen had earlier pointed out, encompasses “[t]he house, the bird sanctuary and the sea beyond it” (*ibid.*, p. 296): “This is, as I’ve said, proof I have existed, proof we have lived in Booterstown Avenue. [...] If you look, you’ll see it. The bird sanctuary. Believe me, you’ll see it. Pretend, pretend. Keep the faith” (*ibid.*, p. 342). According to the nebenscene the back wall of the house “magically” reveals the bird sanctuary (*ibid.*, p. 342), which strongly suggests that what the decaying physicality of the house once symbolised has been superseded by an artistic fantasy. This shared fantasy, which encompasses an imaginative experience of faith, and of the power of art to represent that faith, suggests a reconfiguration of the house and its symbolic resonances with the family legacy. The sisters’ future relationship will no longer be threatened by the bitterness and guilt of their filial past; instead, it will be guided by compassion.

Such an imaginative vision of the relationship between Ireland and England is one of the central themes to *Dolly West’s Kitchen*. This three-act play is set during World War II in and around the West household in McGuinness’s hometown, Buncrana. The characters include the three West siblings, Esther, the eldest, Dolly, the middle sibling, and Justin, their mother Rima, their maid Anna, Esther’s husband Ned, the visiting Americans, Jamie and Marco, and the Englishman Alec. Act One consists of three scenes in which the siblings reveal their difficulties: Esther’s marriage is on the verge of collapse, Dolly has been unable to find a life or love outside of her home and Justin, who is an officer in the Irish army, is enraged by the fact that Dolly’s ex-lover Alec, an Englishman, is coming to visit. Despite Justin’s protests, the family prepares a dinner that they share with Alec and the two American soldiers Rima found in a local public house. Act Two is three months after the dinner, Justin and Marco, Esther and Jamie, and Dolly and Alec have formed or deepened their relationships, much to the chagrin of Esther’s husband Ned. As Alec and the two

Americans prepare to leave to fight in the war, Rima, who helped orchestrate and encourage their relationships with her children, dies, leaving the siblings and their lovers to work out their difficulties on their own. Act Three takes place after the war. Alec and the Americans return to Ireland greatly affected by their experiences in the war. As the play ends and the family fight to cling to their fragile integrity, Justin helps Marco deal with his hatred, Esther decides to stay with Ned to raise their child, Jamie finds love with Anna, and Dolly decides to go with Alec to England.

Given the setting of the play and the date of its first production, the key issues for the context of this play are Ireland's involvement in World War II and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Ireland's role in World War II is characterised primarily by its adoption of the policy of neutrality. This policy metaphorically forms one of the thematic centres of *Dolly West's Kitchen*; as such, before exploring its manifestation in the play, it is useful to elucidate its application in its historical context. It is debatable whether such a policy was beneficial to Ireland during the War. John Murphy suggests that "[t]he fundamental explanation was that the people perceived neutrality as the acid test of sovereignty" (Girvin and Roberts 2000, p. 13). That is, the Irish government's adoption of the policy was, at least in part, an exercise of the independence it had gained within the two previous decades, a mark of the country's dedication to its own interests. Furthermore, there was a lingering sense amongst neutrality supporters, left over from the revolutionary period and World War I, that Ireland should not participate in "England's wars" (*ibid.*, p. 9)—a view represented in the play by the youngest West sibling Justin—at the risk of re-igniting internal conflict. As such, one can view neutrality as a safeguard strategy to prevent hostilities in a country that had only recently suffered a civil war:

[...] formal participation in the war on Britain's side even if supported by a significant section would have created serious internal dissensions, aggravated by IRA trouble-making: an overt war effort, in these circumstances, would have been counterproductive and at real risk of being sabotaged by extremists. (*ibid.*, p. 13)

Consequently, the popular view, which coincided with that of the government, was that neutrality was the only feasible option for Ireland in 1939. This view, however, did not prevent some 70, 000 volunteers from the Republic from fighting on the Allies' side (Keogh and O'Driscoll 2004, p. 274). Nor did it prevent the government from quietly supporting the Allies (Girvin and Roberts 2000, p. 178).

Historical hindsight has shown, however, that there were some serious consequences to Ireland's commitment to neutrality in World War II. Two consequences are of particular interest in this chapter: first, the policy deprived the Republic of opportunities in both international politics and economics, and, second, further alienated the Republic from Northern Ireland. Regarding the first consequence, it may be speculated that official participation in the war would have deepened Irish ties with Europe and, particularly, the United States and accelerated their political and economic cooperation, which has since become the backbone of Irish prosperity (*ibid.*, pp.19-22).³⁵ As for the Republic's relationship with Northern Ireland, even if neutrality prevented the country from falling back into internal chaos, Geoffrey Roberts observes that Ireland's staunch commitment to the policy apparently damaged its relationship with Northern Ireland:

[...] neutral Ireland and Northern Ireland drifted further apart as a result of the war and Unionists were able to use their support for the British war effort as a means to safeguard both partition and Protestant supremacism. It might have been otherwise. In June 1940 the British offered to work for a united Ireland in exchange for Eire's entry into the war. [...] Blocking the way was the policy of neutrality and de Valera's unwillingness to contemplate even a partial revision of that policy. (*ibid.*, pp 178-9)

Approximately forty years after World War II, Ireland's neutrality policy has evolved along with its role in international politics and economics, but it remains a salient political issue. While Ireland has extended its involvement with, for example, the European Union (EU), maintaining neutrality has become a

³⁵ For a general overview of Irish politics and economics since World War II see the introduction of *Reinventing Ireland* (Cronin *et al* 2002, pp. 1-17).

contentious issue in Ireland's negotiation of the recent Lisbon treaty, which extends military cooperation and obligation between EU nations (Devine 2008, n. p.).

Concomitant with the evolution of Ireland's policy of neutrality are the changes that have taken place in the relationships between the Republic and Northern Ireland, and Ireland and Britain. The changes in these relationships were largely the result of the peace process that took place after the "Downing Street declaration" in 1993. Between 1996 and 1998, the British government organised the Northern Ireland Forum to bring British, Irish and Northern Irish political parties to the negotiating table. The resulting talks were assisted by external mediation, particularly from a team headed by former US senator George Mitchell. On Good Friday, April 10, 1998, these talks resulted in an agreement that was approved shortly thereafter in a referendum by seventy one per cent of Northern Irish voters and ninety four per cent of Southern Irish voters (Coakley and Gallgher 2005, p. 418). The Good Friday Agreement was wide-ranging in its scope and inclusive in its philosophy, addressing both short- and long-term issues surrounding three main strands: strand one dealt with devolved government for Northern Ireland, strand two with links between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and strand three with links between Ireland and Great Britain (*ibid.*, p. 418-9). Although it has not been without its difficulties, as will be discussed later, the agreement brought the dream of peace in Northern Ireland into the realm of the possible.

The tenor of the agreement forms another of the thematic centres for the play. Just as the agreement was a political attempt to deal with the legacy of conflict in Ireland through a policy of inclusion, so too does the play's protagonist Rima West attempt to deal with her family's troubled legacy by welcoming outsiders—the Englishman and the two Americans—into the household. However, like the agreement, the play boasts no guarantee of lasting, positive change; rather, the adoption of an inclusive, international strategy is shown to be perhaps the most effective way to work towards such a change.

The play explores the collapse of orthodox, patriarchal constructions of identity that are implicit in the West family legacy. This legacy is concentrated on a wayward father, a doctor who, according to Rima, passed up a life as a fisherperson to follow

his father's wishes, but had married her, a blacksmith's daughter, despite his father's protests (McGuinness 2002, pp. 234-5). However, even with his determination to be with her, he would leave her for years at a time, having many affairs with other women along the way. Yet, he always returned, and did so one last time to die, leaving Rima pregnant with Justin (*ibid.*, pp. 194, 226). This patriarchal legacy, with its mixture of freedom and abandonment, has led the West siblings to live in a condition that metaphorically corresponds to neutrality. This condition foregrounds the connection between sex and death, being characterised by their fear of losing those whom they love or of confronting the sources of their respective unhappiness, which, at least initially, prevents them from seeking meaningful relationships and carrying on the family line. The connection between sex and death is particularly relevant to this play. Like the characters in *Carthaginians*, the West siblings initially show no promise of reproduction or of meaningful relationships. Thus, not only does the family apparently have no future, but they are also failing in love. The influence of the dead father, then, threatens the family; however, by the end of the play, the family chooses to escape the influence of the father by consummating meaningful relationships and leaving the stagnant safety of the big house.

The house itself serves as a constant reminder of the influence of the father from which the characters are initially unable to escape. When Dolly tells Ned he should take Esther out of the house, he replies:

Into the married quarters at Dunree fort? You can't swing a cat in them. This a grand big house. More than enough room. Your da, Dr. West, left a fair whack of money. Esther's used to that way of living. What could I offer her? (*Ibid.*, p. 194)

While the house offers material comforts, it also serves to imprison the Wests in the legacy of abandonment that prevents any of them from escaping its economically comfortable, yet miserable boundaries. Only after they transgress the boundaries of marriage, sexuality and nationality are they able to expel the negative influence of their father, to face the possibilities that lie outside of their home.

During the play, before most of the characters leave, the shore offers a space in which the characters can explore alternatives to the legacy of the West father.

Llewellyn-Jones (2002) notes the following of the shore in her discussion of the play:

Whereas the kitchen table remained the focus for feeding both relationships and family tensions, the shore—the borderline between land and sea—was a heterotopic site for transformation. (p. 148)

In *The Bird Sanctuary*, the shore was a place for the confrontation with death, a confrontation that led Eleanor to dedicate herself to changing her home and her family. In *Dolly West's Kitchen*, the shore is more dynamic, serving as an intimate space, a family battleground, and a gateway to possibilities beyond the confines of home, but it too offers a sort of confrontation with death that leads to significant changes in the family. Initially, Esther longingly roams on the shore, talking to herself and, later, spends time alone with Jamie. It is where Marco and Justin begin their relationship, where Dolly urges Ned and Esther to deal with their marital difficulties, where Anna helps Jamie face the prospect of his death, and where Dolly and Alec finally commit to one another. The use of the shore represents a movement away from the house as a place of authority. It is a space that functions similarly to that utilised in the plays of many contemporary Irish female playwrights, as discussed by Singleton (2007):

Analysis of the performance texts reveals choices and strategies that work towards the de-essentialization of gender, and the new Irish woman in particular; she is taken out of the mythical country kitchen and is reconfigured on the street, the beach and in the garden. (p. 186)

Like the “new Irish woman,” the characters of *Dolly West's Kitchen* find a kind of escape from the damaging limitations of their patriarchal legacy by using the dynamic space of the shore.

Like Eleanor in *The Bird Sanctuary*, Rima becomes the primary force of change in the family. She has an alternative perspective that seems to be the result of years of enduring her husband's waywardness without ever, as she tells Alec, “straying” (McGuinness 2002, p. 226). At the heart of this perspective is an acceptance of the

failure and collapse of the patriarchal influence in the lives of her children, and an emphasis on a more open, inclusive view of identity. As Dolly points out, Rima realises her family's unhappiness is leaving them without much promise for the future (*ibid.* p. 242). She recognises that Ned and Esther's marriage is stalling, that hate drives Justin more than love and that Dolly wants more than the confines of her home. While Rima denied herself a life outside the bounds of her failed marriage, she wants her children to experience things that she did not, to gain a wider perspective on life beyond the confines of home. This desire is connected to her wish / fantasy to travel the earth in the form of a seagull, which she expresses to Dolly in her final words before her death at the conclusion of Act Two, Scene One:

I'd love somebody would give me one wish. Do you know what it would be, Dolly? A big seabird. [...] I'd spread my white wings and I'd fly all over the world, China and India, starting here in Buncrana and then up to Malin Head, and I'd never touch the soil of Ireland again until I[sic] travelled the whole earth, landing back again in my own garden. (*ibid.*, pp. 335-6)

For Rima, the idea of "home" is enriched by experiencing what lies outside of it. This is why she opens up her house and introduces the "badness" into her family by welcoming Alec and the Americans (*ibid.*, p. 208). This "badness" is the challenge to national, filial and sexual identity that these foreign characters bring to the household.

Rima's "badness," however, is found not only in the foreign characters, but also in her carnivalesque language. Like Eleanor, she uses invective, rude and sometimes crude language to goad her offspring and their lovers into meaningful relationships. Her language transgresses the narrow bounds of decency as she comments on topics of sexuality and nationality, always pointing towards a different way of seeing. As Helen Lojek (2004) notes, the play functions "as an impetus to expand understanding of sexuality, suggesting that 'normality' encompasses a variety of sexual orientations" (p. 184). This point is especially clear when Rima queries the gathering at the dinner table, "[w]hat's it like with two men in the bed?" and then tells of the gay baker who "had the biggest micky ever seen on a man in this town" (McGuinness 2002, p. 212). Her query and side story plant the subject of

homosexuality in the minds of her guests, showing that she herself is aware of its significance to her family. It also appropriates a symbol of virility—a large penis—for a gay man, suggesting that for Rima sexual orientation does not dictate significance; her son’s happiness is as important to her as that of her heterosexual daughters. Despite her support for him, she does not give credence to Justin’s scientifically supported claims of “true Irishness.” She tells the gathering that Ireland was not necessarily formed by geological upheaval, rather, “[a] little bit of heaven fell from out the skies one day, and when the angels found it, it looked so lovely there they sprinkled it with gold dust and they called it Ireland” (*ibid.*, p. 210). For Rima, there is no “true” Irishness; such identity is dictated as much or more by imagination than it is by scientific fact: there is as much truth in a song as there is in a geological survey. As Lojek points out in discussing this exchange between mother and son: “place is more than surface [...] [and] authenticity beyond the surface is both impossible and undesirable” (2004, p. 254). For Rima, happiness may come from the recognition and acceptance of differences and a flexible understanding of identity.

Rima’s death at the approximate mid-point of the play marks a distinct shift in the drama: the “badness” she introduced develops as the relationships between the West siblings and the foreigners strengthen, as is the case with Justin and Marco, Dolly and Alec, and Anna and Jamie, or collapse, as is the case with Esther and Jamie. Her funeral is a brief affair, accompanied by the expression of only a minimum of grief. In fact, Dolly is angered by the fact that Esther is “making so much mileage out of her grief” (McGuinness 2002, p. 241). The brevity and lack of grief at her funeral is odd given that her death is, as Lojek argues, “the passing of an era” (2004, p. 198). However, from a practical standpoint, the brevity provides a quick shift onto the resolution of what Rima began by introducing “badness.” This shift is evidenced in the brief funeral ceremony as blue light shines and, as the stage directions provided by McGuinness at the beginning of the play indicate, the shore / seascape dominates the stage (McGuinness 2002, p. 178). These elements of the funeral both remind the audience of Rima’s wish/fantasy and foreground the dynamic heterotopic shore, the space that symbolises release from the neutral, limited space of home. In addition, a symbolic transgression takes place during the ceremony as the two American’s wear their uniforms, which, as Anna earlier

pointed out, they are not supposed to within the Republic (*ibid.*, p. 188). Each of these indicators emphasise Rima's alternative perspective and the transition she set in motion. Her death also relegates her to a position similar to that of her husband; that is, she becomes a metaphysical influence that counters that of her husband in the lives of her children.

Rima's eponymous daughter takes over the role of instigator of change. Dolly reminds Esther that Rima "believed in this world, not the next" (*ibid.*, p. 242), and that she brought the "badness" into the household to bring about her children's happiness. With Rima gone, the onus is on those who survive her to come to terms with their own physical and emotional needs, which, for all but Esther and Ned, demands that they leave Ireland. "With the death of Rima and the end of the war," suggests Lojek, "[...] the home cannot survive as an isolated sanctuary" (2004, p. 200). Before they leave, however, Rima's children and their lovers confront the difficulties in their lives.

Justin never met his father, as Rima mentions (*ibid.*, p. 226), and attempts to compensate for this lack of masculine influence, much as did, according to Böss, Padraic Pearse (2000, p. 274).³⁶ After failing to do so in the Catholic Church, he seems to find this compensation in the Nationalist cause, to which he fervently dedicates himself, becoming an officer in the Irish army (*ibid.*, p. 198). Apparently due to his dedication to the Nationalist cause, he views the English as Other, and as such, after hearing that Alec might visit, attempts to fulfil the role of "man of the house" by aggressively protesting against any Englishman being welcomed in their home: "No British soldier will come under this roof. It's bad enough we have to tolerate them in the North. They've laid claim to that, but not for much longer after the war's over" (*ibid.*, p. 188). During the dinner in Act One, Scene Three, Justin verbally attacks Alec, telling him that the Irish hate the English more than they fear Hitler, and that the English are not facing the Irish but "the full might of Hitler's army" who will win the war (*ibid.*, p. 215). Alec retorts, telling him that the

³⁶ There are strong parallels between the character Justin and Padraic Pearse, such as the fervent dedication to the Nationalist cause, the repressed homosexuality, the alienation from peers. For examinations on these aspects of Pearse, see Böss (2000) and Moran (1994). Whereas Pearse did not accept his homosexuality and dedicated himself unto death to the Nationalist cause, Justin does accept his homosexuality and dedicates himself to life with his partner, Marco.

millions dying from Hitler's might is worse than the whole legacy of Irish suffering, and that Ireland will be saved by "English conscripts, Welsh miners, Scottish shipbuilders, Irish navvies" (*ibid.*, pp. 215-6). This verbal battle, as Morse (2007) suggests, "emphasises not just Irish neutrality but also the distance separating the Irish and the combatants" (p. 133). The schism between the Irish and the English has fed into a schism between Ireland and the Allied Cause. Alec's final words to Justin in this scene serve to challenge the manhood that Justin purportedly wishes to uphold: "When I go off to fight in this war, hell is where I'll be heading into. And Justin, you won't be with me" (*ibid.*, p. 216). This apparent accusation of cowardice affronts Justin, striking a nerve that is deeply connected to his feigned identity. In response he claims to Marco that he is not a coward and storms onto the shore that lies just outside the house (*ibid.*, p. 216). It is on the shore that he and Marco share a private moment that dramatically changes his attitude towards both his masculine and Nationalist imperatives, for no more does he attack.

Rima brought Marco back to her home presumably because she was aware of Justin's repressed sexuality, as is hinted when she tells him, "Son dear, would you get off your knees praying and dance? It would be the life of you. Why are you not out chasing women?" (*ibid.*, p. 189). The nebenscene here indicates silence, which signifies an inability or, perhaps more accurately, a refusal to reveal the truth. Later, when Esther notices a happier and energetic Justin, she asks Rima what has come over him. Rima replies indirectly and with a slight hesitation:

I'm sorry, I wasn't listening to you. I was looking at that patch in the garden where we grew pansies before the war. I always loved to look at them. They have magnificent colours. (*ibid.*, p. 232)

For Rima, Justin may be a "pansy," which can be a term for effeminity or homosexuality, but this fact does not diminish her love for him; rather, she sees in him great potential. This acknowledgement, coupled with her emphasis on the subject of homosexuality around the dinner table, as noted above, suggests that she realises that bringing Marco into Justin's life has helped him to unlock this potential, to find the necessary freedom in his life.

On the shore, Marco's subtle seductions help Justin to express his repressed homosexuality (*ibid.*, p. 217). According to Lojek (2004),

[t]he difference Marco's arrival makes is that by freeing Justin to be openly gay Marco removes the sting from the term and reintegrates Justin into his family. [...] Unlike the gay soldiers in *Sons of Ulster*, who know life together after the war is a virtual impossibility, Marco and Justin focus on the possibilities of life, not the release of death. (p. 203)

The play indicates, then, that despite the obstacles they might face due to their sexuality, they will survive. They overturn the stigma of death associated with homosexuality, finding happiness in the bonds of a loving relationship. This freedom, as Lojek's comment suggests, is a major development in McGuinness's presentation of homosexual characters. While in *The Bird Sanctuary* McGuinness had more clearly represented homosexuality, making it one of the central focuses of contention and reconciliation, Stephen, like Dido and Pyper before him, did not have a sustained, accepted and open homosexual relationship. Justin and Marco are, in a way, close to the pinnacle of the development of McGuinness's representations of homosexuality.³⁷

A furtive comparison can be made between Marco and Justin and Stephen, who was not yet self-assured enough in his sexuality or his identity to assert himself to his mother and father, or to defend himself in the face of their bigotry and their discussion of the stigma of AIDS (McGuinness 2002, p. 330). In a sense, Marco and Justin's circumstance is a reversal of that in which Stephen finds himself: they apparently have the full support of Justin's family; and no one confronts them on-stage with bigotry or stigma. The play distances negative attitudes towards their sexuality, representing such attitudes through recollected memories and the war raging in Europe. For example, Justin tells Marco that when he was much younger he confessed his homosexuality to a priest who was too uncomfortable with the subject to provide any counsel (McGuinness 2002, pp. 238-9). It seems likely that this experience helped him to decide not to become a priest himself, settling instead

³⁷ He goes a step further in his 2009 television drama *A Short Stay in Switzerland* showing Dr. Anne Turner's son Edward declaring to his mother his intentions to marry his gay partner. Dr. Turner happily supports her son's choice.

to be an officer in the Irish army. Another more pointed example is Marco's story to Justin of his parents' fierce resistance to his homosexuality. His bigoted father repeatedly called him a "twisted, mean cissy queen," and his self-righteous mother, "Our Lady of Second Avenue," when she found some drawings he had made of dresses, forced him to eat the drawings with ketchup and lots of salt until he vomited (*ibid.*, p. 239). He admits that he hates both his parents for their treatment of him, and had to learn to fight to defend himself against such treatment, a lesson Jamie takes upon himself to impart to Marco "the day [he] beat the shit out of him. Tough love. Learn to fight or die" (*ibid.*, p. 231). Marco fights to defend himself against the hatred, and is fighting in the war because of hatred: when asked if he knows what "the Nazis do to men like you," Marco responds forcefully, "[w]hy the fuck do you think I'm fighting them" (*ibid.*, p. 212). Fighting in the war is, as Jamie asserts, in defence of "difference" (*ibid.*, p. 213), which the Nazi regime stood to eliminate. Yet, for Marco, being apparently hated *by* others seems to breed hatred *for* others. However, when he attempts to suggest that he fought better in the war than any straight man, Justin insists, "[y]ou fought the same as any straight man" (*ibid.*, p. 253). This recognition of sameness, of shared humanity, is particularly important as Justin helps Marco readjust after he returns from the war. Marco reveals to Justin an image of the dead in the war that conflates the trauma of his youth with the trauma of the war: "I saw the dead, Justin. I saw the dead stretched like sheets of paper on the shore. White as paper. All dead. I have to vomit. Red sauce. All over the dead" (*ibid.*, p. 254). Justin tells him to face the reality of war, and insists that the red he saw was blood. This insistence separates the trauma of the war from that of his youth; it helps him to see the facticity of the war, to see that in torturing himself with these traumatic "dreams of red" he is pushing Justin away from him. The convergence of Marco's memories of the dead of the war and of his mother's abhorrent punishment under the rubric of hatred suggests that in coming to terms with his own hatred, he will be able to come to terms with these memories. Justin employs a matter-of-fact, unsentimental language similar to that used by his mother as he warns Marco that he will not tolerate a one-sided relationship:

I will not live like this. I will not be your nursemaid in Italy. I know how hard it's going to be to manage there, and if we're going to survive together, then you will have to pull your own weight. (*ibid.*, p. 254)

Marco must put his past behind him if they are going to survive together in Italy.

Both Justin's change in attitude and McGuinness's allowance for an enduring gay relationship is suggestive of the changes that were occurring in Irish society, particularly those resulting from the work of activists and politicians like former Irish President Mary Robinson, who fought for liberal rights in Irish society, whose efforts, along with David Norris, decriminalised homosexuality (Brown 2004, pp. 358-64). If the play's portrayal of an accepted openly gay relationship in a bourgeois setting is a somewhat facile skirting of the complexity of some gay relationships in contemporary Ireland, as Lojek suggests (2004, p. 203), it is because there is hope that perhaps attitudes have or can be changed.

For Esther, Ned embodies neutrality, being apparently too sheepish, too safe and reserved for her liking. She suggests this perspective when she speaks of Ned as "[a]n excellent man. An excellent soldier. Defending Ireland from invasion, a neutral man in a neutral army protecting his neutral wife" (McGuinness 2002, p. 182). Ned openly admits that he is not comfortable "[g]oing out foreign [...]. Even going into Derry, [he] feel[s] like a stranger" (*ibid.*, p. 192). He also tries his best, like Robert in *The Bird Sanctuary*, to avoid conflict, advising Justin to cease his verbal attack on Alec (*ibid.*, p. 214), and telling Alec that he should keep out of Buncrana because it is "not the safest of towns for him" (*ibid.*, p. 217), simply because he is English. He also, like Robert, avoids talking about his difficulties, only doing so when aggressively provoked, first by Dolly, then by Jamie (*ibid.*, pp. 243-4, 256-7). Ned's reserve and reticence seem to be linked to the fact that Esther has been deemed to be the sibling most like their father (*ibid.*, p. 193): according to Rima, he has "been dreading Esther will leave him since the day—hour they married. [...] If she does she'll come back. Her father did" (*ibid.*, p. 225). She does just as Rima predicts, apparently because, as she admits, "I had married the best of men. I didn't love him, I still don't. But he is still the best of men" (*ibid.*, p. 252). Despite Ned's stable, strong love for Esther, it seems that their contention arises from a mixture of boredom and sterility. Their relationship foregrounds the juxtaposition of sex and death. Just as Esther takes out her frustrations on Ned, she seems to blame herself, calling herself "neutral." The child that Esther births,

apparently for Ned, provides a needed connection between the two of them, and affirms a purpose for their apparently loveless and lifeless relationship. However, there are no guarantees that this connection will last. Esther is dubious on the subject of children, as Dolly points out, Esther quit her part-time teaching position because “she hated the children” (*ibid.*, p. 194). Ned is “the best of men” apparently because he can give the love and care for children that she is seemingly unable to provide. Ultimately, Esther’s desires go beyond merely filling the role of wife and mother, which is why she spends time with Jamie.

As Dolly tells Esther and Ned, Rima introduced Jamie into the household “to see if [Ned was] man enough” to stand up for his marriage (*ibid.*, p. 242). Jamie represents a clear contrast with Ned: he is foreign and, as he tells the gathering at dinner, “I like difference,” a point he is risking his life in the war to prove (*ibid.*, p. 213). Esther seems immediately attracted to him and begins seeing him for walks and tennis games on the shore. Her relationship with Jamie seems to fulfil her designation as “the one supposed to be like [their] father” (*ibid.*, p. 193). Dolly, however, as Jordan (2007) argues, “takes over Rima’s role after her death, provoking Esther and Ned to conceive a child, in a way that her mother would have approved” (p. 139). Dolly infuses her heated confrontation with Esther and Ned with uncompromising, invective language that, like Eleanor’s language, provokes healing through destruction. She verbally attacks Esther on the shore, telling her that she is running rings around Ned, that Jamie sees in her “a soft touch, a woman ripe for picking, an old woman. [...] Daddy’s girl has grown into an old woman. [...] A sorry old woman. A foolish old woman” (McGuinness 2002, p. 243-4). This accusation provokes Esther to admit in front of Ned that she is having a clandestine relationship with Jamie, but that she has never slept with him (*ibid.*, p. 244). The accusation also provokes Ned to say, “Dolly, fuck off out of our lives” (*ibid.*, p. 244). This is, according to Esther, the first time he has said “fuck.” Such a transgression seems to provoke interest from Esther who tells him “[y]ou know what to do” (*ibid.*, p. 244), suggesting that they will now, perhaps, conceive the baby that appears later in the play.

In the meantime, as Jamie prepares to leave to fight in Europe, he is very afraid and attempts to drown this fear in whiskey. Anna appears and attempts to comfort him,

eventually getting him to talk about his fear, which he connects to his memory of his father on his deathbed:

I've seen a man die. He was fighting for his breath. Fighting for his life. He was my father. [...] [H]e held my hand when he was dying. I can't forget him breathing. Trying to say my name. I was called after him. Jamie. He smelt like death. Jamie. A smell of shit. And honey, the shit's scared out of me. I know I'm going to die. I'm going to die. (*ibid.*, p. 248)

The pain of witnessing his father's death here converges with his fear of dying in the war through the image of excrement, which, according to Becker (1997), is a powerful sign of human frailty and vulnerability (pp. 30-34). Anna immediately attempts to displace such an image of waste, rejection, and death, by taking off her dress. The juxtaposition of excrement and sex gives a carnivalesque ambiguity to this episode, suggesting the meaning of the human condition is fraught with insoluble complexity. However, as discussed above, sex can be a foil to the power of death, affirming the bond between individuals. Sex is here apparently a affirmation of life, of communion, that counters the imagery of excrement and death. Indeed, sex and death's juxtaposition suggests change, renewal and new life. As the nebenscene indicates, the storm that was taking place now begins to clear (*ibid.*, p. 248).

When Jamie returns from the war, he and Anna become engaged. However, Jamie still has to get some closure in his relationship with Esther. He confronts Ned in the garden and they fight over Esther, destroying the garden. Earlier Esther made a comment to Rima on the garden that was an indirect comment about Ned, similar to the one Rima made about Justin:

I'm sorry I wasn't listening to you. I was looking at that patch in the garden where the piss-the-beds grew before the war. I never liked to look at them. They were useless to man or woman. (*ibid.*, p. 233)

With the destruction of the garden, Ned is no longer one of these useless "piss-the-beds." And when he and Esther talk with Jamie, Jamie reveals that the baby belongs to Ned (*ibid.*, p. 257). Ned has seemingly been able to overcome his limitations, to

an extent. Enough at least for Esther to decide finally to keep their family together; even though, as she admits, she does not love him (*ibid.*, p. 252).

As for Jamie, he is fortunate enough to have Anna who accepts him despite his fascination with Esther. Anna is a woman who has managed to survive the lifestyle of an orphan: she faced the corruption of the Catholic nuns who raised her and has been able to dispel the stigma of being unwanted and indecent, as Ned accuses, with a tough, unsentimental spirit (*ibid.*, p. 220-1). In leaving for America with Jamie, she is able to leave Ireland's "long memories" in her past for a life of possibilities that would otherwise have been denied her.

Dolly is the one sibling who managed to move away from home before the war to start a life on her own. She chose Florence, Italy, because she had studied European art history at Trinity College and thought Italy would be a good place to learn more (*ibid.*, p. 180). But, she owned a restaurant there and began to lose sight of why she went in the first place (*ibid.*, p. 179). Though the restaurant was successful, she always felt like a stranger, and when war loomed, she deemed it was time to return to Ireland (*ibid.*, pp. 192-3). For Dolly, like Ned, there is a sense of safety in being home. But, like Esther, this safety and reserve sparks a longing for something different and exciting. Alec's return presents her with an opportunity to fulfil this longing. This opportunity, however, is complex for two main reasons: first, both Ned and Justin attempt to keep Alec away from the house, as discussed above; secondly, and more importantly, there is no guarantee that Alec will stay with her if she commits to him, which is evinced by his history both of bisexuality and, like her father, of leaving her for extended periods (*ibid.*, pp. 192, 198). Dolly, with Rima's help, is able to deal with her brother and brother-in-law, but it is Alec who is most affected by his own tendency to wander, thinking that Dolly would not want to marry him because of it. Alec's difficulty seems to be related to his perception of his own parents' relationship: "My father—my mother— [...] I didn't want to inflict the same unhappiness. [...] [T]hey should have separated long before they started living for the sole reason of hating each other" (*ibid.*, p. 226). Even with Rima and Dolly's encouragement, he is apparently afraid of what such a commitment might become between him and Dolly. Rima encourages him to "[m]ake an honest woman

of Dolly” (*ibid.*, p. 225) because Rima knows that Alec can provide Dolly with a way out of the limited and limiting sanctuary of her home.

When Alec returns from the war, he is for the most part silent about what he had witnessed there. Dolly gets him to reveal what he saw with a small threat that is also something of a promise: “You will have to [tell me what you went through], if you’re going to get me to live in England” (*ibid.*, p. 260). What he saw, he says, was “[c]hildren. Dead children. Burned off the face of the earth. Millions. They saved us. The innocent” (*ibid.*, p. 260). As stated in the previous chapter, a dead child, *kindermord*, represents not only the loss of the future, but also the death of the self (Hurt 2000, p. 280). For Alec, the war has eclipsed a significant aspect of the future. This realisation, coupled with his doubts about his relationship with Dolly, leaves him cold, distant and damaged. Dolly helps him defy the brash trauma of his experiences, and, seeing that Alec truly wishes to return to his home in England, vows to join him, not because she loves England, but because of him: “I’ll be doing it for you. Not your country” (*ibid.*, p. 261).

As Morse (2007) argues, this play is not a history lesson, but “bears a definite complex relation to historical events” (p. 131). The final exchange in the play encapsulates this complexity, when Alec twice asks Dolly if the war is over and she replies both times, “I hope so” (McGuinness 2002, p. 263). Within the world of the play, the war to which Alec is referring is World War II: after the violence and death he and the two Americans witnessed battling Hitler, he is looking for some reassurance that such horror is now over, and that in his return to England he will not witness such destruction again. Appearing in 1999, the play is not merely about World War II, as Morse indicates in the following:

Rejecting both the documentary narrative and traditional history lesson, McGuinness brings into play overlapping layers of history that enable audiences to see more clearly—because from a historical perspective—both current events and such contemporary issues as political neutrality, individual identity, and gender. (2007, p. 137)

As Dolly implies in asking Alec, “[h]ow do you like the Irish at war, Alec? We have a genius for it, but only when it’s confined to our own” (McGuinness 2002, p. 245), the war she and Alec refer to in their final exchange is also the war in Northern Ireland, which the Good Friday Agreement has drastically reduced, but not ended. Dolly’s hopeful response is non-committal because she cannot guarantee that this war is over. Indeed, the devastating bombing in Omagh, County Tyrone, in August of 1998 forcefully challenges any such guarantees (*ibid.*, p. 138).

At the end of the play, the pairings between the Irish characters and the foreign characters resemble the international interactions that took place during the conception and inception of the Good Friday Agreement. All of the characters, except for Esther and Ned, leave Ireland. As such, Rima’s plan has succeeded. Her fantasy was to give her family the freedom and happiness they needed. This fantasy opened the way for the characters to escape the grip of the patriarchal past, of history. While in *The Bird Sanctuary*, fantasy is a mode to transform the house to fit the changes that have taken place in the family, in *Dolly West’s Kitchen*, fantasy has inspired their leaving. This generally outward-looking perspective counters the limitation imposed upon them through their patriarchal legacy. They escape the stagnation of neutrality. In a sense, Ned and Esther accomplish this escape, too, in that they have managed to fill the gap caused by childlessness. For each of the characters, the future is uncertain, but they have all found in their relationships something that will help them cope with this uncertainty, and ultimately with death.

The emphasis on hybridity, on giving a voice to alternative perspectives from that of patriarchal order, on new constellations within the relationship between not only Ireland and England, but also Ireland and the world, makes *The Bird Sanctuary* and *Dolly West’s Kitchen* post-colonial plays. In these plays, McGuinness shifts his conceits from his sparse, symbolic landscapes of the graveyard, the makeshift army barracks, the prison cell, the forest and so on, to the more realistic bourgeois family home. A shift also occurs in his use of death as a trope. As suggested earlier, in these plays death is in significant instances not as traumatic as it is in his earlier plays: in *The Bird Sanctuary*, the murder of the Tasmanian mistress is humorous, and in *Dolly West’s Kitchen* Rima’s death is a brief, attenuated affair. In these plays, then, death is primarily a transformative rather than a destructive force. In

killing the Tasmanian, Eleanor is able to help her family, and Rima's spirit seems to find a facsimile in Dolly who helps carry through Rima's plans to free her family from their neutrality. Furthermore, both Eleanor and Rima, and eventually Dolly, succeed in giving their families access to a different perspective that helps them face the challenge of their patriarchal legacies. Like Synge's Christy Mahon, the characters find great personal strength in their abilities to imagine life differently. At the end of the plays, like Christy, they seem poised to kill their fathers a second time, that is, to find within themselves the power to leave the debilitating influence of their fathers in the past.

Conclusion:
From Death, Life

Frank McGuinness has said that John Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is "a poetry of passion":

[...] a killer passion, a demon passion, but the demon
is human, its magic a meeting of death and love,
revealed as the death of love and the love of death.
(1995, p. 36)

Through his own passionate work, he, too, reveals the ambiguous meeting of love and death, wherein love of a person, a people or an idea may lead to death and death to a life bereft of love. Nevertheless, McGuinness does not give the final triumph to death. His characters struggle to find happiness and understanding, even when death seems to strip all possibilities away. This thesis has sought to provide a more profound understanding of Frank McGuinness's representations of death as paradoxical sites of simultaneous denial and definition. McGuinness's representations of death in these plays bear witness to the complexity of death's influence on identity. These representations bring to the fore the paradoxes latent in community involvement, in constructions of Otherness, and in definitions of identity themselves: death in his plays exposes the final insufficiency of a supposedly stable, fixed notion of identity. His characters do not face this harrowing fact alone, as does Keats's poetic personas; rather, as Jordan (2007) relates, in McGuinness's plays,

[...] collectivity is of greater substance than
subjectivity and functions as a counter to otherness.
McGuinness's characters are not isolated and self-
focused, but they play together. (p. 142)

In playing together, and facing death together, his characters challenge fixed and simplistic definitions of identity. Certain characters infuse this collectivity with elements of the carnivalesque, bringing all to an alternative perspective to that of the status quo. These characters, like the mythical trickster figure, bring others into a confrontation with death and the dead (Witoszek 1988, p. 161). They do not kill on stage; in fact, McGuinness rarely represents the physical spectacle of death in these plays. Rather, the characters' language invokes death. This primarily linguistic

confrontation with death, as shown throughout this thesis, allows for the renegotiation and realignment of identity. As it does within carnival logic, death features in his plays as an impetus for a new perspective on life, a new, better order.

Encountering death in these plays is encountering the bases of life's meaning, of identity. Given that the plays dramatise the connection between death and national, filial, sexual and gender identity, it is understandable that the characters question the validity of definitions of identity. Facing death can simultaneously expose both the frailty and power of humanity's illusions of identity. These plays concentrate on moments when frailty overwhelms or threatens to overwhelm such illusions. Each play suggests that survival in these moments of frailty depends upon an acceptance of difference that aligns difference not with the fatal possibilities of Otherness but with the protean dynamics of shared humanity, with life. In this way, McGuinness's plays counter Witoszek's prescription of modern Irish drama as representing the final victory of paralysis and escapism (1988, p. 165). They dramatise instead the often-painful release from the ghosts of the past; his characters experience, as Lojek (2004) concludes, "both torment and liberation" (p. 261). The plays are not mawkish in their conclusions: while life may gain dominion over death in these plays, death is not defeated. The concord reached by the characters gives no guarantees, and the future is not clear. In this way, there is realism to McGuinness's plays, staged as they were during periods of conflict or tenuous peace. His characters suffer the pangs of personal and communal conflict, but they do not finally despair. They greet their uncertain futures with hope.

The findings of this thesis place McGuinness's plays within the canon of contemporary works defined by Roche (1994) as being "concerned with redefinition of self and aims in a society where old structures are disintegrating" (p. 224). His plays closely relate this redefinition to his characters' response to the threat and reality of death. As Roche (1991, 1994), Doherty (1992) and Witoszek (1988, 1998) have shown by looking at the works of W. B. Yeats, Thomas Kilroy, Brian Friel, Brendan Behan, John B. Keane, Thomas Murphy, Stewart Parker and others, death has been a powerful trope within Irish drama since the inauguration of the Abbey as Ireland's National Theatre in the early twentieth century. These critics show that the trope of death is always, on some level, connected to individual and social identity.

McGuinness's use of death is, thus, part of a tradition in Irish drama. However, McGuinness not merely like his predecessors, has created a voice of his own that speaks of an alternative perspective to the status quo, a voice that is always aware of the vicissitudes and complexities of his home. He identifies deeply with his home, and his plays consistently reflect upon its salient issues. However, for him, drama is a medium to show not the mere facts of events, but the deeper human truths that shape the events. The numerous popular productions and revivals of his plays, particularly *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, suggest they have touched profound truths within not only Northern Ireland and the Republic, but also around the world. His themes are universal, and one ubiquitous theme in his plays is the complexity of the human response to death.

Even in the selection of plays for his translations, he appears to favour those in which the characters must respond to either social or biological death, or use elements of the carnivalesque to destabilise the status quo. His translation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1997), in which the protagonist Nora rejects her status-quo role as wife and mother, played on Broadway in New York and won four Tony awards. The influence of Ibsen and Chekhov on McGuinness's drama, particularly on *The Bird Sanctuary* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, is apparent (Lojek 2004, p. 201). However, as he noted in an interview focused on his translation of Euripides's *Hecuba*, he has found in Greek drama a correlative for his own dramaturgy: "The extremes of the [Greek] plays suited, actually, what I wanted to do with my own imagination" (Cavendish 2004, n. p.). Like McGuinness's own plays, Greek drama constantly engages with the human dilemma of death, of sacrifice and mutability. He finds the extremes of politics and human suffering in the world of the Greek plays very near to that within Northern Ireland. In *Hecuba*, a play set after the Trojan War, he sees a correlative for Ireland after the peace of the late 1990s. Like the aftermath of the war in *Hecuba*, the peace in Northern Ireland is not secure: "What we have learned is that there is no such thing as an aftermath to war," he says, citing the Omagh bombings of 1998 as particularly telling evidence (*ibid.*, n. p.). As his work on Greek classics like *Hecuba* suggests, the key to each of his translations is that, like his original plays, they provide access to universal human truths.

McGuinness is still writing original works, and death still appears as a powerful theme in them. His latest play, *There Came a Gypsy Riding* (2007), focuses on the aftermath of the suicide of Gene McKenna, whose family confront the impact of his suicide as they gather to celebrate his twenty-first birthday. This play, like *Observe the Sons of Ulster* and *Carthaginians*, concentrates on the traumatic power of death. However, like Dido, Eleanor and Rima, the family's distant cousin Bridget provides elements of the carnivalesque that help the family cope with loss. Suicide is also a central theme in his powerful television drama *A Short Stay in Switzerland* (2009). McGuinness bases the drama on the true story of Dr. Anne Turner who, after burying her husband who died of a neurological disease, is diagnosed with a similar fatal neurological disease. Rather than suffer as her husband did and inflict suffering on her family, she decides instead to go to Switzerland to be euthanised. Euthanasia is a subject that McGuinness had not treated of before. As his career matures, he seems to push the boundaries of representation. Yet, he is always aware of human feeling. His dramas all share a liberal perspective on life, which is always fragile, always haunted by the spectre of death.

The theoretical framework outlined in this thesis is applicable to works of other contemporary Irish playwrights for whom death is a common theme. McGuinness's stress on hope aligns him with, for one, Sebastian Barry. Barry's works, like McGuinness's, interrogate the effects of personal and collective history on the individual, and emphasise the need to renegotiate the constructions of identity that shape his characters' perspectives of history. In contrast, Marina Carr's works do not share the same optimism as McGuinness and Barry. In her works, the renegotiation of identity often fails, and her protagonists kill or die because of this failure. If any hope prevails in her works, it often requires a far greater compromise for her characters than McGuinness's characters require. While the physical spectacle of death is somewhat muted in McGuinness's works, it is often central to Martin McDonagh's, where bloody violence tends to take centre stage. His plays abound with dark humour, and are remarkable for making fun of death. The framework of this thesis is also applicable to works by artists beyond the borders of the Republic and Northern Ireland, particularly those who live in nations that have experienced colonialism, such as Australia, Africa and Canada, or those who represent minority communities within a country. The framework of this thesis

allows for a critique of any work that places humanity in opposition to its basic mortality.

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