

*Confronting Past and Present:
Postcolonial Realities and Representations
in Five Plays by Frank McGuinness*

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A thesis presented to the Department of English,
the Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Spring Term 2001

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Introduction

Frank McGuinness is a contemporary Irish playwright and poet whose plays often deal with the colonial legacy of Ireland. This thesis sets out to explore five of McGuinness's plays in the light of the Irish colonial background that informs these plays. The focus is primarily on the representation of and the realities faced by the colonised (but also the colonisers) in the substantial, diverse and world-wide colonial framework that has been and still is experienced by so many countries. The theoretical framework of this thesis will therefore focus on postcolonial theory that can be applied to readings of postcolonial literature like that of McGuinness's. Postcolonial theory and literature particularly expose the historical, social and psychological effects of colonialism during and after colonisation, hence the term postcolonialism, which incorporates this wider perspective as opposed purely to the term colonialism, indicating the endurance of occupation, or the hyphenated term post-colonialism, which suggests the period following independence only.¹

Colonialism is a historical fact that has affected, at one time or another, almost the entire world, and for the majority of the world's population their experience of colonialism has been or is one of being the colonised. The notion that some people have the right to rule over other peoples has pervaded history, and the histories of a large and unknown number of peoples have been extinguished, eliminated or assimilated into oblivion throughout the history of colonisation. The European expansionist, imperialist, colonialist project of the past five hundred years is not an instance of colonisation that is forgotten, however, as the effects of it on the world as we see it today still profoundly pervade everyday life all over the world.

In terms of conquering and colonising foreign peoples, Britain is undoubtedly the nation that has had the most success since the British Empire by the early twentieth century controlled 'well over a quarter of the human race and over a quarter of the world's land surface.'² The British Empire's success and duration from its first attempt at organised colonisation in the 16th century of its neighbour Ireland until the dwindling of power in the second half of the twentieth century, relied entirely on 'getting *both*

¹ See Elleke Boehmer: *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 1 – 3, for a definition often used to distinguish between these terms.

² Colin Cross: *The Fall of The British Empire 1918 – 1968* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), p. 16.

colonising and colonised people to see their world and themselves in a particular way.’³ This particular way relied entirely on a colonialist discourse that divided the world into nations of civilisation and nations of barbarism. This division implied that the colonising nations (such as Britain and France) were superior compared to the nations of barbarism, primitivism and perpetual difference or otherness. The colonised under British rule were always taught to see themselves as inferior, uncivilised and lacking in value compared to the British mother country, and these realities had of course serious psychological implications as well as social consequences for the peoples who against their wills were subjected to a new reality that almost always involved some kind of military and violent means of forced subjugation.

Colonial discourse (or, rather, discourses, since this plural term also stresses the different discourses that appeared in different colonial places and situations) therefore, is a system of domination that emphasises the ‘*representations and modes of perception*’ that ‘the colonial power uses to keep colonised peoples subservient to colonial rule.’⁴ Postcolonialism is the relatively new academic field that theorises and pinpoints colonial discourse to explain colonialism and its lasting impact on peoples around the world. Postcolonialism naturally evolved in the wake of the extensive decolonisation of the world that took place in the decades after World War II, and it is a field of study that especially looks at the ways in which colonialism affects the representation of colonised peoples, though the minds of the colonisers of course are integral in this discourse system as well.

Though postcolonialism as an academic field first came into being in the past couple of decades, studies in colonialism and the effects of colonisation did appear much earlier. Naturally, colonialism was integrated into writings long before decolonisation occurred, but those writings were almost entirely by the colonisers, who of course promoted their mostly biased views on the matter. Not until the 1950s did some substantial works on the effects of colonialism on the colonised appear, and crucially, these works were mostly written by people who had experienced being colonised themselves. The serious psychological effects of subjugation and internalisation of colonialist values were at the centre of attention to these writers, of whom the psychologist Frantz Fanon emerges as perhaps the most central early postcolonial theorist.

³ John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Fanon was from the small (French) island of Martinique in the Caribbean, and was profoundly shocked and filled with hatred towards the French when he arrived in Paris as a student, finding himself subjected to discrimination and ridicule because of his black skin. His autobiographically based *Black Skin, White Masks* from 1952 is a harsh indictment of the French colonial power's destruction of the mind of its colonial subjects, and includes numerous moments of Fanon's recollections of the impossibility of being accepted in France because of his colour. His experiences of racism led him to state that 'The white world, the only honourable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man.'⁵ Fanon explored the system of colonial discourse that holds the coloniser as civilised and the colonised as always inferior, and he continued his indictment against France (and all other colonising powers) in the posthumously published *The Wretched of the Earth*,⁶ a book that clearly was inspired by his active participation in the Algerian liberation movement and the, by then, clear signs of colonial collapse that necessitated thinking on the period of decolonisation that would have to come.

Likewise, the Tunisian Jew Albert Memmi, who also was educated in the colonial metropolis Paris, was highly critical of colonial practices in his important book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.⁷ His book is a central, though often overlooked, work because it manages to look relatively neutrally at the situation of the coloniser as well as that of the colonised because Memmi himself was something of a hybrid in terms of belonging. He was a Tunisian Jew, and therefore not exactly a native colonised subject, but at the same time he was not French and therefore he did not feel home in France or among the French either. This in-between position has proved integral to the deeply penetrating psychology of his book, and together with Fanon, he constitutes a central part of the early theorising of the colonial experience that led to the later development of postcolonialism as a distinct academic field.

A decisive year for the development of postcolonialism was undoubtedly 1978, when Edward W. Said published his now-canonical *Orientalism*, a book that concen-

⁵ Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles L. Markmann (London: Pluto Press, [1952] 1986), p. 114.

⁶ Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin [1961] 1990).

⁷ Albert Memmi: *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (London: Earthscan Publications, [1965] 1990).

trated on exposing the Western world's conceptions of the Orient,⁸ the Western representations of the Orient through writings (such as travel-writing, newspaper articles, history books and official colonial documents), and the use of colonial discourses to justify colonisation and establish the otherness of the Oriental peoples. As Said states: 'The argument, when reduced to its simplest form, was clear, it was precise, it was easy to grasp. There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power.'⁹ Said established that the inferiority of the colonised was promoted through a rigid system of emphasis on the otherness, the shortcomings and the uncivility of the Orient compared to the West.

In the footsteps of Said followed two other central colonial discourse theorists that have had great influence on the thinking in the field. Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, both born in the former British colony of India, have emerged as major challengers to and developers of the ideas set out by Said in *Orientalism*, and the trio's excellent reputation in the field has led to them being labelled the 'Holy Trinity' of postcolonialist theorists by the critic Robert J. C. Young.¹⁰ Bhabha has specialised in discovering modes of colonial subjects' resistance to colonial discourses, and his definition of *mimicry* has established itself as central to the understanding of the relationship between coloniser and colonised. Mimicry is especially important in uncovering resistance, subversion and disobedience techniques used by the colonised as a means of coming to terms with, or rather, subverting, the colonial situation.

Bhabha points out that the colonised will strive to mimic the coloniser, but that the colonised will always be put down because of their inherent 'otherness'. This opposition of civilisation on the one hand and otherness on the other hand, will produce an ambiva-

⁸ Edward W. Said: *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1978] 1991). By 'the Orient', Said primarily means the countries subjected to British and French imperialism in Arabic and Islamic Middle East (for instance Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Algeria), then India and lastly the Far East. As Said points out, it was in 'the lands of the Arab Near East, where Islam was supposed to define cultural and racial characteristics, that the British and the French encountered each other and "the Orient" with the greatest intensity, familiarity, and complexity.' See p. 41 for quotation, and pp. 1 – 28 for a detailed definition of 'the Orient'.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁰ See for instance Robert J. C. Young: *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 163.

lence that subverts and undermines colonial power because the colonial subject floats, in the psychological sense, between two impossible and abstract polarities. As Bhabha writes, ‘mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses as an immanent threat to both “normalized” knowledges and disciplinary powers.’¹¹

The ambivalence of this mimicry will of course have consequences for the psychological state of the colonised who is constantly expected to aspire to become as civilised as the coloniser while at the same time being told that he can never be like the coloniser exactly because of his otherness. I use ‘he’ on purpose here, because both Said and Bhabha have been criticised because they almost completely ignore gender differences in the postcolonial context.

This is where Gayatri Spivak enters to add another important dimension to post-colonialism, namely that of gender and women’s experience of colonialism. Spivak focuses on the ‘double colonisation’ of women, who can be said to be colonised by both patriarchy and the colonial power. The silencing of women and their lives, and the attempts to recover their lost voices from history are central aspects of a number of Spivak’s writings, and especially so in what is probably her most central and certainly most famous essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’,¹² where ‘the subaltern’ is used as a term specifically describing this double colonisation and the generally low status of women (and especially Third World women, who, for the most part, are in a far worse situation than most Western/First World women when it comes to gaining recognition and status equal to men).¹³ Spivak is critical of any attempts to recover women’s lost

¹¹ Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 86.

¹² Gayatri C. Spivak: ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (eds): *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 66 – 111.

¹³ The more general usage of the term ‘subaltern’ comes from Antonio Gramsci’s definition of it as a term that refers to ‘those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to “hegemonic” power.’ See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds): *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 215.

voices because she sees this as an impossibility because of the loss of authenticity implicit in such a recovery. Nevertheless, her ideas are central to the reappearance and reinscription of women into an otherwise male-dominated and colonial history.

The trio of Said, Bhabha and Spivak has been accused of overshadowing other equally important critics, and they are sometimes being accused of being too general in their writings. This generality, however, is often a great advantage because of the very different colonial experiences around the world. The writings of Bhabha, for instance, are notoriously abstract and unspecific with the result that they are applicable to most colonial situations and frameworks. They open up space to work out local specifics, as is necessary in this thesis, based on a more universal postcolonial reality. Certainly, the works of Said, Bhabha and Spivak are responsible for much of the expansion of the field since the 1980s. Their writings are unquestionably impossible to ignore in any work on postcolonialism, and that Bhabha and Spivak especially have a prominent place in this thesis, is therefore deliberate as well as unavoidable.

Postcolonialism ‘recognises both historical *continuity* and *change*’ and it ‘acknowledges that the material realities and modes of representation common to colonialism are still very much with us today, even if the political map of the world has changed through decolonisation.’¹⁴ This is an important factor to keep in mind, as the end of colonialism does not also imply the overnight disappearance of colonial discourses. This thesis is very much marked by this continuation of colonial discourse, as it sets out to explore, reveal and understand the effect of British colonialism on one particular nation in the vast world of nations with a history of colonisation. Ireland, Britain’s closest neighbour and first colony finally gained independence for part of the island of Ireland in 1922, which also places it among the first of the British colonies (but, notably, one of the last ‘white’ colonies) to free itself from direct colonial rule. (In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Australia, New Zealand and Canada all gained dominion status and self-rule. Unlike Ireland, they did not claim full (constitutional) independence later). However, as will be made obvious through the chapters to come, Ireland was far from freed of colonial discourse even after independence.

Edward W. Said writes that ‘Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about

¹⁴ John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 33.

whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions – about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities.’¹⁵ In Ireland the past is never forgotten and always taken into account, and this preoccupation with the past is also integral in placing Ireland in a postcolonial frame together with other post-colonial nations in the world today. Ireland has often been overlooked in the postcolonial context because it gained independence so early, and also because it is a country that is Western and European, and as such belongs to the white world, as opposed to the vast majority of other former colonies.

Ireland also falls somewhere between the traditional categories of colonisation, which distinguishes between *settler colonies* and *colonies of occupation*. The former involved measures where ‘the invading Europeans (or their descendants) annihilated, displaced and/or marginalised the indigenes to become a majority non-indigenous population.’ Australia is one example of such a settler colony. In the *colony of occupation* the ‘indigenous people remained in the majority but were administered by a foreign power.’¹⁶ Several former (British) colonies, such as Kenya, Egypt and India are examples of this kind of colonisation. But Ireland is either and both because it was exposed to vast forced foreign settlement while the Irish natives still remained a majority population in most parts of the country. This fact is probably one of the main reasons why Ireland’s colonial past is often overlooked by most postcolonial critics.¹⁷

It becomes more obvious that Ireland should be seen as a postcolonial country just by looking at some of the predominant themes in Irish politics, social life and, of course, literature; themes such as language, resistance, nationalism, migration, representation and gender are all themes that are central to any study of a postcolonial country. Irish literature, which is the specific focus of this thesis, also fits well into one broad, but accurate, definition of postcolonial literature as involving reading ‘texts produced

¹⁵ Edward W. Said: *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 1.

¹⁶ See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds): *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, both quotes p. 211.

¹⁷ For instance, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds): *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) is one very important study that ignores Ireland’s literature and experience almost completely.

by writers from countries with a history of colonialism, primarily those texts concerned with the workings and legacy of colonialism in either the past or the present.’¹⁸

After a relatively slow start and a sparse number of books written on the subject of Irish postcolonial literature, it seems that Edward W. Said’s 1978 publishing of *Orientalism* played its part in the growth of books and essays published on Ireland and post-colonialism, as the vast majority of works on the subject have been published after this time, in line with the development of postcolonialism as a major field of study. A number of Irish critics have, particularly since the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, focused specifically on the postcolonial aspect of Irish society and literature and have produced critical works that successfully situate Ireland within a postcolonial frame shared by other postcolonial countries. Among these critics are Richard Kearney, David Cairns and Shaun Richards, David Lloyd, Gerry Smyth, Terry Eagleton and Declan Kiberd, who all have contributed with important and persuasive books on the subject of the Irish colonial experience.¹⁹

The recent interest in postcolonialism does of course not mean that postcolonialism was not a theme in Irish literature before the explosion and increased interest in the field in the 1980s and onwards. This postcolonial concern is a feature shared by a number of Irish authors, and Frank McGuinness is only one such particular author. From the mid 1960s poets, playwrights and fiction writers published works that clearly were based on a notion of Irish postcolonialism. Among Irish authors who have produced poems, plays and novels that clearly point to a postcolonial context and colonial history we find many familiar names, such as John Montague, Seamus Heaney, Brian Friel, Eavan Boland, Dermot Bolger, Thomas Murphy and John Banville. The list above only incorporates a few names of Irish authors who recognise the colonial legacies in Ireland, and out of these Brian Friel is probably the most prominent Irish postcolonial writer and dramatist. Friel is, like McGuinness, an Ulster playwright, though he, unlike McGuinness, was

¹⁸ John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 33.

¹⁹ For instance: Richard Kearney (ed): *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), David Cairns and Shaun Richards: *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), David Lloyd: *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), Terry Eagleton: *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), Declan Kiberd: *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, [1995] 1996) and Gerry Smyth: *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 1998).

born in Northern Ireland and only moved to the Republic (Donegal) later. Plays such as *The Gentle Island* (1971), *The Freedom of the City* (1973), *Translations* (1980) and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) are all connected to the Irish colonial experience, and McGuinness has stated in several interviews that Friel's plays have had a significance influence on his own career as a playwright.²⁰

Born in 1953 in Buncrana, County Donegal, Frank McGuinness grew up in a Catholic nationalist tradition on the Republic side of the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Donegal, however, is in a curious situation, geographically belonging to the province of Ulster and yet being the northernmost county of the Republic. The relative geographic isolation from the rest of the country, and the fact that much of Donegal is even north of Northern Ireland, could certainly partly explain why McGuinness is a playwright who repeatedly writes about outsiders, dispossessed people and marginalised groups of society. The history of Ireland and the troubles in Northern Ireland are integral in any understanding of his plays, and the location of Donegal obviously plays an important part in discovering the roots of his interest in dramatising such themes as colonialism, nationalism, history, myth, and identity.

McGuinness's dramatic career started in 1982, when his first play, *The Factory Girls*, premiered at the Abbey's Peacock Theatre in Dublin. The play's setting is in a Donegal shirt factory and the cast are almost solely women, making it a play that was different from most other contemporary Irish dramas at the time through its focus on a group of (marginalised) women. The building of a substantial career continued with the critically acclaimed and award-winning *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), where gender again is highlighted in the all-male play through the homosexual character Pyper. This play also marked the decisive entry of the colonial legacy, violence, nationalism, sexuality, the question of identity and the relation between myth and history into McGuinness's works, themes that he would further explore in *Innocence* (1986), a play about the Italian Caravaggio, and *Carthaginians* (1988), and also include in all his following plays to date.

His next major play, *Mary and Lizzie* (1989), explored the forgotten and silenced history of women through dramatising the lives of Mary and Lizzie Burns, two Irish

²⁰ See for instance Richard Pine: 'Frank McGuinness: A Profile', in *Irish Literary Supplement* (Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 1991), pp. 29 – 30, and Joseph Long: 'New Voices in Irish Theatre: An Interview with Frank McGuinness' in *Études Irlandaises* (Vol. 24, No. 1, Spring 1999), pp. 9 – 19.

sisters who lived with Friedrich Engels in England. *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992), another award winning and all-male drama, is McGuinness's most international drama to date, depicting the ordeal of three Beirut hostages (an Irishman, an American and an Englishman) chained to the walls of a dark cell. His next major play, the complex and explicitly colonial *Mutabilitie* (1997), is a play that goes back to the roots of Ireland's present state, both north and south of the border, through the dramatisation of Edmund Spenser's life as coloniser in southern Ireland in the late sixteenth century. McGuinness's most recent play, *Dolly West's Kitchen* (1999), is again a play about sexuality, nationalism, inter-personal relationships and the political and historical situation in Ireland, exploring Irish attitudes to Jews, Hitler and the British during World War II. The setting is again Donegal, specifically McGuinness's own Buncrana, and the play is a flourishing combination of the themes familiar from his previous plays.

What makes McGuinness unique and exciting is his constant insistence on confronting the past as well as the present, challenging any narrow-mindedness, misconceptions, stereotypes, traditions and myths that are present in the Irish psyche and society as a whole. This confrontation also consistently includes the relationship between sexuality and nationalism, where McGuinness puts forward homosexual characters as a response to the fixed gender polarities of masculine and feminine in the history of Irish nationalism, colonialism and the delicate relations between Britain and Ireland. The insistence on a redefinition of this relationship through a breakdown and subversion of the traditional gender trope of masculine conqueror and feminine victim is something that McGuinness is alone in promoting on the Irish stage, as well as the use of homosexuality as a mediator to problem-solving. As McGuinness has stated, 'If there is to be a new relationship between the islands – and the metaphor we've usually looked at is between man and woman – maybe we should be looking at different images of peace and communication, and this is a perfectly valid way of presenting imagery of a new way forward... (...) I think there has been a tentativeness with showing a gay relationship on the stage, and I'd like to think in the history of Irish theatre, I had some little influence in that.'²¹

McGuinness is also a playwright who enjoys experimenting with dramatic techniques and devices to create an atmosphere where 'an audience can challenge its own

²¹ Mic Moroney: 'Coming Home', interview with Frank McGuinness in *The Irish Times* (29 November 1997), p. 16.

myths, misconceptions, rituals, strengths and possibilities.’²² In Catholic Ireland, sexuality and homosexuality are not easy subjects (though there have been important changes to the traditional silence on these matters especially since the 1980s), and through his constant focus on characters who are deemed outsiders by their society, tribe or community, he also highlights the conflicting relationships between majority and minority, the individual and the communal, the personal and the public in ways that stress the difficulties and challenges of living on the island of Ireland. As Richard Kearney points out, it is ‘often in its deviant or dissenting voices that a community expresses those hidden aspirations or alienations which frequently find no place in our more established modes of expression.’²³ Those voices are allowed to speak in the plays of McGuinness.

History is of immense importance to McGuinness’s plays, and the consistent focus on the impact of the past on the present is ‘both a supplement to and a replacement of history.’²⁴ The past works as a filter of distance in time and place through which the present can be accurately recognised and assessed. The obsession with history also includes a scrutiny of the violence that has dominated the history of Ireland, a history that ‘has allowed blood to become a common language [in Ireland]’²⁵ and thereby put forward violence as an inevitable condition in Irish history. This inherent state of violence is also something that McGuinness examines closely through his plays, where the historical and mythical pasts are retold in ways that never let the playful imagination of the author be sacrificed in the name of historical facts. Instead, the past is broadened to include an intimate insight into the lives of realistic, sometimes historic, characters who experience close at hand the often violent, marginalising and oppressive events of history.

In a postcolonial perspective, this confrontation is necessary to re-establish the authority of the native people whose part in history has been ignored or heavily downplayed by the power of an imperialist presence. The postcolonialist dramatic project is a deconstructive as well as a historically supplementing one, and though not dedicated to

²² Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), p. xii.

²³ Richard Kearney: *Myth and Motherland*, Field Day Pamphlets 5 (Derry: Field Day Theatre Company Ltd., 1984), p. 5.

²⁴ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. xx.

²⁵ Deirdre Purcell: ‘On Fire’, interview with Frank McGuinness in *Sunday Tribune* (15 May 1988), p. 17.

detail historical truths, likewise the modern Irish history play unquestionably is dedicated to a reconstruction and reconstitution of history that effectively works to confront the past's inevitable influence on the present.

The scope of this particular thesis, therefore, is to examine five plays by Frank McGuinness that I find especially central and important to the understanding of the Irish postcolonial experience. McGuinness is of particular interest because very little has been written on his plays, and the very obvious postcolonial aspects of his works have hardly been touched upon at all by critics so far.²⁶ To date, a number of articles have been published on the plays he wrote before *Mutabilitie*, and one book has been published, though this also only looks at plays written prior to *Mutabilitie*.²⁷ In other words, the sheer lack of available criticism and assessment of McGuinness's career is one good reason to look more closely at this immensely interesting and talented dramatist, who clearly has developed into a particularly strong and noteworthy one especially with his two complex and impressive late 1990s plays *Mutabilitie* and *Dolly West's Kitchen*, two plays that were relatively successful on stage, but that as yet have been more or less ignored by critics.

The five plays in question in this thesis, *Mutabilitie* (1997), *Mary and Lizzie* (1989), *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), *Dolly West's Kitchen* (1999) and *Carthaginians* (1988) are, perhaps with the exception of *Mary and Lizzie*, all concerned with decisive moments in Irish history, north and south of today's border, moments that are inextricably linked to the effects of colonialism on the country as a whole. History and its consequences are confronted and explored by McGuinness, no matter how painful, uncomfortable, distressing or ambivalent the past and the present may be. These confrontations are made realistic and believable through the plays' characters, who are always marked by their country's situation through experiencing the pain, destruction, isolation, oppression and violence that follow their uncertain and agonising circumstances. The five plays I have chosen to look at are all plays where

²⁶ There is one exception, though, as Elizabeth B. Cullingford has written on the postcolonial aspect of *Carthaginians* in her article 'British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anticolonial Metaphor in Heaney, Friel and McGuinness', in *Publications of the Modern Language Association* (Vol. 111, No. 2, March 1996), pp. 222 - 239.

²⁷ See Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*. This is a good and thorough analysis of McGuinness's plays and translations up to 1992, but it lacks any thorough analysis of the postcolonial aspect despite this context being mentioned briefly several times.

audiences are faced with disturbing histories, realities and environments where the personal is always linked to the political, and the past linked inextricably to the present.

The sequence in which the five plays in question are presented in this thesis, is no coincidence, as they are presented in a historical order (rather than the order in which they were written) to emphasise the progress of colonialism as well as the effects of this progress and the postcolonial consequences on Ireland. The first chapter on *Mutabilitie* goes back to the crucially decisive events of sixteenth century English colonisation of Ireland that created for the future the situations described in the subsequent chapters, making the parallel and connection through history up to the present very clear. The introduction of colonial discourse on the resisting colonial subjects is particularly central to this crucial chapter.

The second chapter, on *Mary and Lizzie*, set in 1840s Ireland, looks at the situation of women in this environment of colonisation, and the central concept here is the double colonisation of women, a concept that until recently has been largely ignored in the Irish debate on postcolonialism. In the third chapter, *Observe the Sons of Ulster* is set during World War I, and this is a play that is unique in Irish literature because it is a play about the Northern Protestant community, written by a playwright with a Catholic (Ulster and Republic) nationalist background. The settler mentality of the Ulster Protestants is a central aspect of this chapter, and contributes greatly to the understanding of the ambivalent situation of the settler colony in Ireland.

The play in chapter four is set during World War II, some two decades after Irish independence. *Dolly West's Kitchen* explores the consequences of colonialism on the newly independent, decolonising nation and the challenges this background posed to the official and unofficial, personal and public attitudes to the world war and the warring parties, out of whom one was the former coloniser Britain. *Carthaginians* is set in Northern Ireland, the part of Ireland that did not undergo decolonisation or obtain independence. The nationalist Catholic community in Northern Ireland in the turbulent early 1970s is at the centre in this fifth and last chapter, and though violence and struggle for reunification with the Republic are present factors, the main focus is on the psychological damage caused by the lasting and unresolved colonial situation in the North, a struggle that still is very much present and still unresolved in today's Ireland.

As this thesis unfolds, the postcolonial aspect of Ireland should be thoroughly exposed, clarified and asserted through the focus on the contemporary playwright

McGuinness's confrontational career and, in the case of the five above mentioned plays, constant and important emphasis on Ireland's colonial past.

Mutabilitie

Mutabilitie (1997)²⁸ is perhaps the most complex of Frank McGuinness's works to date, being a history play, a fantasy play, a poetical play, and certainly a most playful though dark drama with challenging and innovative, experimental dramatic techniques. It is also a play that goes far back into history to expose the roots of the historic wounds that the colonial relationship with Britain has inflicted on Ireland. The multiple consequences of this relationship will be thoroughly displayed in this and all the chapters to come, though in *Mutabilitie* McGuinness concentrates specifically on the early and initial stages of colonisation and turns to the source of colonialism itself and its inherent complexities, causes and effects, in order to establish the causes of the circle of colonially inflicted behaviour existing on the island past, present and, as is likely, future.

The play centres on the rule of the colonial power itself here, with the subjugated Irish in a rather hopelessly desperate position as most reluctant colonised subjects. As in all his previous plays, themes such as power, violence, suffering, humanity, the effects of colonisation, and living in dangerous times dominate throughout and, as with a number of his other plays, McGuinness uses other texts directly or indirectly in this play to underline its themes and historical reality. It is in many ways a very uncomfortable play because of its painful recollection of the destruction of Gaelic Irish culture at the hands of the ruthless English coloniser four centuries ago.

This destructive project included an objectification of the Irish that followed the introduction of a colonial discourse that attempted to justify the cultural and political enforcement of racism through an emphasis on the posited human shortcomings of the Irish. As Homi K. Bhabha has pointed out, 'The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction,'²⁹ and this type of discourse is most evidently and explicitly incorporated into *Mutabilitie*.

²⁸ All quotes and references to the play are from Frank McGuinness: *Mutabilitie* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).

²⁹ Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, p. 70.

The play is certainly an example of how colonial discourse was crucial to the (relatively) considerable success of colonisation by the English, and the use of racism especially appears as a distinct tool of subjugation in relation to the play's plot. Albert Memmi recognises racism as the most crucial instrument of colonialism, identifying it as 'the highest expression of the colonial system' and maintaining that racism not only establishes 'a fundamental discrimination between the colonizer and the colonized, (...) but it also lays the foundation for the immutability of this life.'³⁰

The establishment of what can only be described as 'dehumanised thought'³¹ because of the idea of one people being superior to another is scrutinised in rich detail in McGuinness's play. It is a complex and disturbing project that uncovers painful realities of colonisation as experienced by the Irish, and as the plot unfolds it is made evidently clear that the grave responsibility of the coloniser in the ruthless process of gaining new land and humiliating the native inhabitants of that desired land, is endless and unalterable. The result is a play with a most intricate and rich plot that covers the historical process of colonisation accurately, convincingly and intriguingly.

In *Mutabilitie* (and as we shall see in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*), McGuinness uses the device of multiple, or simultaneous, dialogues between groups or pairs of characters, something that effectively disarranges the cohesive energy of the action taking place and thus works to highlight the importance of the historically decisive process of change and ensuing disorder that the play describes. These multiple dialogues are most densely concentrated in the important third act, as if to emphasise that the already dark and ominous events are turning worse and tragedy inevitably approaching, as the build-up of tension rises, with the third act as something of a climax of the individual ambitions of the characters and the ambitious goals of the British invaders.

As a long five-act play with three to seven different long and short scenes in each act, it is also truly demanding and displays enormous challenges to stage settings, props and costumes, not to mention the minimum of 13 actors needed to play the characters. Since many scenes are such that up to five groups of actors speak in simultaneous dialogues across the stage, one actor cannot fill two or more roles either, making any production of the play not only expensive and daring, but also most demanding to actors as well as audience. The intensity in the mentioned multitudinous scenes, as well as the

³⁰ Albert Memmi: *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 140.

³¹ Edward W. Said: *Orientalism*, p. 108.

intensity overall in the play, is demanding, but then one should not forget that *Mutabilitie* is a play about the complex and most challenging English-Irish relationship. It is not a relationship that can ever be described without complexities, ambiguities and confusions, and as such it mirrors the chaos of the initial and formative stages of colonisation itself.

The specific setting of the play is the south of the English-invaded Ireland in a time of deep crisis and consequent change, namely the time of English Queen Elizabeth I's rule, when the poet Edmund Spenser (1552? – 1599) was a civil servant to the queen in the Munster plantation, residing at his Kilcolman estate and castle half-way between Cork and Limerick. The play dramatises certain important events surrounding Spenser in the year 1598, which was to be his last in Ireland. As Sheriff of Cork he was a central force in the destruction and deprivation of Ireland and the Irish. The play is not only historical, then, but also partly biographical in that it brings to life Spenser's stay in Ireland with accuracy (though naturally a certain degree of free invention is displayed in details), and it relies heavily on Spenser's extensive writings on the situation in Ireland at a decisive time for the country's development and future history.

Extracts from Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596)³² are integrated into the play as part of the dialogue, and his unfinished *The Faerie Queene* (three parts were published in 1590, the next three in 1595, and a collected version was published posthumously in 1609) also acts as a subtext, specifically the *Mutabilitie Cantos* that the play partly shares its title with. The interrelation between Spenser's writings and the play is, as will be pointed out, crucial in serving the purpose of clarifying not only the effects of colonisation on Ireland, but also the view of the coloniser in so doing.

The play is essentially a grim and gloomy tale detailing the brutally forced and troublesome colonisation of Ireland that took place with methods of extreme severity throughout the latter part of the sixteenth century (and into the next). In the play we are presented with two polarities, the colonising conqueror and his victims, who are forced to interact with each other in the strained situation that reality has brought upon them. Spenser, who acts as the queen's representative and colonising Englishman in Ireland, is a man who is often ambivalent, uncertain and undecided on how to treat the Irish most

³² Any quotations and references are from Edmund Spenser: *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. W. L. Renwick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

effectively to best establish complete English reign. As the play opens, he seems to have accepted his position as coloniser, though it soon becomes obvious that the ambivalent feelings that Spenser seems troubled by probably are the result of what Memmi characterises as the acceptance of the usurper role: ‘accepting the reality of being a colonizer means agreeing to be a nonlegitimate privileged person, that is, a usurper.’³³

The usurper role is a role that, according to Memmi, is characterised by a cycle of oppression (most often violence) where the oppressor’s initial scorn for the oppressed is transformed into sheer hatred, so that ‘the more the usurped is downtrodden, the more the usurper triumphs and, thereafter, confirms his guilt and establishes his self-condemnation (...),’ and further, that this ‘self-defeating process pushes the usurper to go one step further, to wish the disappearance of the usurped, whose very existence causes him to take the role of usurper (...).’³⁴ Implicitly, the usurper role, therefore, is also in deep need of justification for its actions. The justification is, as we shall see, created through statements of the ‘uncivilised’ condition of the colonised, and such statements are at the focal point of colonial discourse. In *Mutabilitie*, Spenser is clearly not completely convinced that the Irish are fundamentally ‘uncivilised’, however, and this fact goes to suggest rather strongly that in the early stages of colonisation, Ireland was something of a testing ground for ideas that would later be implemented with full force in more faraway destinations.

One must not forget that Ireland was Britain’s first colony, and that in order for the Irish to be labelled ‘barbarians’, the colonisers somehow had to disregard the fact that the Irish were both white and European. As Anne McClintock points out, the answer to this obstacle was to draw deeply ‘on the notion of the *domestic* barbarism of the Irish as a marker of racial difference.’³⁵ The underdevelopment of Ireland compared to England (with regard to domestic barbarism that also included morality, values and culture), therefore, was decisive as a factor in the justification of colonial rule over Ireland. The effectiveness of introducing these notions of the degenerate Irish to the English people, is evident in writings from a much later stage of colonisation, where Charles Kingsley after a visit to Ireland in 1860 described the Irish as monkeys in a letter to his wife: ‘I

³³ Albert Memmi: *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³⁵ Anne McClintock: *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 53. *Domestic* barbarism refers to the supposedly filthy Irish homes, and especially the Irish practice of sharing house with their animals.

am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country.... but to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours.’³⁶

It is through his mentioned writings concerning Ireland that Spenser’s ambivalence shines through, and transferred to the text of the play, the effect of the violence he recommends (‘the disappearance of the usurped’, as Memmi puts it) is profoundly revealing, exposing the coloniser harshly. Spenser admired and idealised the fertile soil of Ireland, but soon came to despise the people whom he found to be immune to reform and only changeable through violence and starvation. To supplement and visualise this view, in the play we are duly presented with a deprived native Irish royal family who have lost their land and power, and subsequently are forced to live a life of hiding and destitution in the forests surrounding Spenser’s estate, remembering all too well their former glory and forever dreaming of revenge. They come to represent all impoverished Irish, and their attempted revenge mirrors the rebellions of others that have followed in their footsteps through the centuries up to the present. In other words, *Mutabilitie* also provides a frame for the contemporary struggle in Ireland through its emphasis on decisive historical events and the myth of a long dispossessed people.

The interaction between the two groups of coloniser and colonised bears evidence of the implementation of colonial discourse and the effect of this changeover of values, morals and culture on those involved. The sense that the ‘uncivilised’ Irish need to be rescued from themselves and their primitive culture is present in the play through the attitudes of Spenser and his wife, who both accept that their ways of doing things, their values and their civilised background should provide ‘the best, truest world-view’³⁷ available, a world view which should be sought after by the Irish. It is, of course, not at all so for the Irish in question, who are ‘taught to look negatively upon their people, their culture and themselves’³⁸ as a result of the English invasion and subsequent traumatic disempowering internalisation of colonial sets of values.

³⁶ Charles Kingsley, quoted in Anne McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 216. See also Susan Chitty: *The Beast and the Monk: A Life of Charles Kingsley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p. 209. For a more detailed study of the portrayal of Irish people as looking like apes or chimpanzees, see L. Perry Curtis, Jr.: *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

³⁷ John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The dispossessed Irish group presented to us in the play should be known to those familiar with or interested in Irish literature; king Sweney and his queen Maeve are well known names from the Irish legends. The historical periods for these characters are of course different to those in the play, but as the play progresses, it seems clear that Sweney is actually based on Mad Sweeney from *Buile Shuibhne*, 'the king who went mad in battle, threw a saint's book into the lake and fled the North, transformed into a bird aloft over the fields of Ireland, voicing his pain and his pleasure in terse, beautiful poems.'³⁹ In the play, Sweney is old and disillusioned, is turning increasingly senile and often talks of birds and trees in between bouts of clearness where he plots revenge on the invaders and plans his return to power. He is, however, also addressing the important question of the fate of the Irish in light of the desperate events: 'Change and chance have befallen us. This mutable earth is now our lot. Brother earth, greetings from your mad king. We race, we rant, we dwell in darkness, until we dim to death. Is the lord listening? Is he in heaven or is he in hell? O god of change and chance, revenge me' (p. 34). Significantly, the play's title is incorporated into this statement, and it indicates change and the adjustment to change as a central theme of the play.

Mutability emerges as a constant presence in Ireland at the time of the play's setting as well as up until today, and though change is of course inevitable, the consequences of the radical and enforced change that occurred in Ireland from the sixteenth century and onwards have determined the country's development to this date. It is also worth noting that Sweney refers to earth as a brother, in other words earth and Ireland are still a masculine presence to him. This clearly suggests that the process of feminisation of the target country that is a constant feature of colonisation is not yet dominant or complete.⁴⁰ The transition is obviously underway at the time of *Mutabilitie*, however, where the old king is frail and dying, and it is the women that prove to be powerful as well as lethal as the play progresses. Notably, these women are not at all like the feminised image of the colonised (passive and helpless), but rather they are examples of a reversal of passiveness into strong or militant female figures that clearly represent colonial resistance (in ways that are similar to nationalistic reliance on strong female figures as iconic representatives of the nation). It is therefore noteworthy that it is the women in

³⁹ Declan Kiberd: *Inventing Ireland*, p. 597. A number of writers have written about Sweeney, among them Seamus Heaney (whose *Sweeney Astray* from 1983 is a version of *Buile Shuibhne*), Flann O'Brien and T. S. Eliot.

⁴⁰ This is a topic that will be discussed in more detail in chapter five (on *Carthaginians*).

this play who instigate the men's actions in many circumstances and take charge when decisions have to be made, as will be pointed out (note also that Edmund's wife is another powerful woman with significant powers over her husband).

The Irish women are vital in the bold plans for revenge, plans that don't seem completely doomed to fail at first. Sweney, his queen and three grown children Niall, Hugh and Annas, the File and the priest Donal all take part in the plotted revenge with enthusiasm, though it is also undoubtedly driven by necessity. The File's part in the revenge plot is crucial and vital to its success as she poses as loyal servant and subject to Spenser whilst spying on him and his family, aided by her former love Hugh. The File is involved in a web of intrigue, where she is very much involved in what Bhabha calls mimicry, or being almost the same (as the coloniser) but not quite. She is totally Irish with her people, but to gain an opportunity of revenge, she poses as a willing subject of reform to her master. The sheer ambivalence of her character suggests that 'the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal.'⁴¹

Moreover, her ambivalent position stresses the unease of colonialism as it struggles to reform the Other and at the same time keep its otherness intact to justify colonisation: 'The black [or Irish] is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces.'⁴² This is, of course, the view of the coloniser, or in this play, especially Spenser's wife, who is far more suspicious of the File than her husband is. Elizabeth finds it rather hard to believe that the barbaric Irish are truly converted into civilised people, stating to the File that 'You are a mad race' (p. 66). It certainly seems obvious that Memmi is correct when he states that 'the colonized means little to the coloniser. Far from wanting to understand him as he really is, the colonizer is preoccupied with making him undergo this urgent change.'⁴³

Like the character of Edmund, the File is full of ambiguities and contradictions; she is at once bard, servant, mother, nurse, spy and warrior, and as the story of her life is revealed, she emerges as an especially tested and tormented person, though still capable of compassion despite her troubles. Humanity, then, also emerges as a preoccupation in

⁴¹ Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, p. 91.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴³ Albert Memmi: *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 149.

the play, a theme not at all unnatural in a play where war and violence dominate. Signs of humanity add an almost invisible, but still detectable, element of hope to an otherwise hopeless reality. (Being human, then, is here used in the sense of being capable of respect and sympathy (in other words, humanity) towards other fellow humans).

Through the presence of the entity of the family and references to children and parents, the more mundane aspects of life protrude. From the outset, therefore, the play displays a realistic plot in light of the dispossession of the Irish and the rebellions that were to follow in the path of the English, and though Sweney and his court have been placed in a situation where they actually weren't in 1598, the forests of Ireland were host to other well-off Irish of the time who were chased away from their land.

Into this rather fixed coloniser-versus-colonised scenario, another historical figure suddenly turns up to disturb history and add an element of fantasy, magic realism and humanism to the play. It is none other than William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616), who never actually visited Ireland, though the country does figure in a number of his plays, such as *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Henry VI*, and there are direct references to one specific play of his in *Mutabilitie*, namely that of *Henry IV*, part one (performed ca. 1596 – 1598). His entrance into the play occurs in the second scene of the first act, and is in itself rather fantastic, as he, together with two fellow English actors named Ben and Richard, appears to be lost in the wild Irish forests, prey to the vengeful Irish people. Unlike his companions, he escapes being taken captive by the Irish by conveniently falling into a river, and it is here that the File spots him as she walks through the forest together with Edmund and his children, singing a prophetic song that indirectly expresses faith in the resurrection of her dispossessed people:

And a man shall come from a river,
He shall gleam like a spear, like a fish,
He shall kill and he shall feed us,
He shall lie and he shall heed us,
He shall give us the gift of tongues,
He shall do nor say nothing rash
But shall sing the song of all songs,
And a man shall come from a river. (p. 2)

The resurrection of the colonised people is an idea, if not a basic need, that hardly ever leaves the minds of the oppressed, though at the stage of colonisation described in

this play, the means through which this resurrection can happen, are depleted by the superior (military) force of the English invaders. One day, the colonised will reject the coloniser and rebel against oppression, however, and in the case of Ireland rebellion would be an almost constant factor for the colonisers to deal with. The File's song is therefore a foreboding and a reminder of what was to come in the next three or four centuries of colonialism.

Promptly finding a man in the river, then, not only confirms the prophecy, but even extends it as the half drowned William utters words that are suspiciously similar to those of a Catholic prayer: 'Praise God and his blessed mother. Blessed virgin mother, Lady most pure, most immaculate, tower of ivory, pearl of Christ' (p. 3). Edmund, on the other hand, has already established that the man must be English through stating that 'Despite your ragged clothing I know you are a civilized man' (p. 3), thus making a clear allusion to the English stereotyped image of the uncivilised and barbarian Irish.

This hegemony of inequality was to a certain extent inadequate and flawed, and as Bhabha convincingly has pointed out, there is inevitably a double edge, an inherent ambivalence in the colonialist project of stereotypification and reformation of barbarians. How can you reform an Other whose subjection to colonisation is justified through an emphasis on the eternal difference between the civilised coloniser and the uncivilised object of colonisation? Here lies the source of Spenser's ambivalence, because the ongoing reformation of his Irish servants also brings ample evidence of their capability of (and willingness to) change, something that clearly disrupts the concept of barbarism. This is what Bhabha calls mimicry because it is 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.'⁴⁴ The ambivalence of the project is obvious, and this ambivalence contains a much darker, subversive side to the colonial success of mimicry: 'The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.'⁴⁵ Disruption and subversion of authority is certainly an important aspect of *Mutabilitie* and the historical period it describes.

The fact that William is taken for both English and Catholic effectively turns him into a go-between character whose position is curiously similar to that of the Anglo-Irish. He is English, yet Catholic, thus he must hide his religious leanings when in

⁴⁴ Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, p. 86.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

fiercely Protestant Reformist England, and since he is not Irish, he is deemed a bit suspicious and not quite accepted in by the Irish either, despite the prophecy of the Irish wise woman. They are willing to accept him anyway, though, since they must embrace every resource and opportunity made available to them in their desperation.

William, however, is not a character just put into the play at random. Shakespeare was, after all, also a poet, playwright and contemporary of Spenser, and as briefly mentioned earlier, in a number of his writings England's Irish problem is a factor. Specific reference to this problem is found in the fourth act when the captured Ben and Richard discuss their theatre careers, and mention a recent play of William's with a Welsh character called Owen Glendower in it. According to history, Owen Glendower was a Welsh rebel who plotted against the English king early in the fifteenth century, and though unsuccessful in the end, his actions bore clear similarities to those of the Irish Earl of Tyrone, who in the late 1500s 'turned the power invested in him by Elizabeth against the English' so that by 'the end of 1597, then, the English faced in Tyrone a rebel leader of national standing whose aspirations appeared disturbingly similar to those of his precursor, Glendower, some two centuries earlier.'⁴⁶

Shakespeare must have been aware of the Earl of Tyrone's actions, and since so many of his plays relied heavily on historical facts, the play *Henry IV*, with its rebels and alliances, can also be seen as having an Irish subtext instigated by Tyrone's actions, and focusing on the difficult situation facing the English in Ireland. 1597 was also the year before Spenser left the country for good, and it marks a period of threat to English reign in Ireland that works to stress the ambiguities of the colonisers in the play. In McGuinness's play, however, Shakespeare has not arrived in Ireland solely to pursue the Irish conflict, but to escape the theatre world he knows in London because 'It no longer needs me' (p. 50). From a historical point of view, this could very well be true if we take into consideration William's other reason to go to Ireland: 'I'd like to leave the theatre and get a job in the civil service' (p. 50).

Being a playwright or poet in the Elizabethan society would never provide a man with any high-ranking status in society, and it was fairly normal for men of ambition but not status by birth, to go to Ireland, work in the civil service and thus gain land and status there, if not so much in England. For the English crown, this practice was a most

⁴⁶ Christopher Highley: *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), both quotes p. 89.

effective way of settlement colonisation that would be practiced until most land was in non-Irish hands.⁴⁷ Spenser is only one well-known example of such a man, and in *Mutabilitie* William Shakespeare emerges as a possible other through the imagination and creativity of the playwright McGuinness. Notably, as in all his plays, he uses the outsider character to add sexuality, and specifically marginalised sexuality, to the play, and clearly draws on the possible bisexuality of Shakespeare that has been proposed by critics of his famous sonnets.

Homosexuality flourishes in *Mutabilitie*, but mostly in a more suggestive and covert manner than in McGuinness's previous plays. The suggestions of affairs and possible affairs are hilarious and playful, with four different couples that seem to bond across the friendship barrier. Hugh is more or less put into William's arms for entertainment by the File, who again seems to have more than a servant relationship with Elizabeth in the fourth act scene where she goes down on all fours and growls like a dog, licking Elizabeth's hand, biting it and receiving a bite back:

Elizabeth: (...) That is the way I tame wild animals

File: Is it the way you tame wild thoughts?

Elizabeth: I do not entertain wild thoughts. (p. 65)

The latent sexuality of this dialogue also contains a clear reference to the sexual aspect of colonialism. Elizabeth implies that the File and her people are wild animals, and the wild Irish are of course sexually promiscuous as opposed to the supposedly chaste English. Supposedly is indeed the word for it since it is clear that William (and his companions) subvert this notion of English purity and chastity when Richard reveals to Ben that William is a 'molly' and that 'I've had him. Once' (p. 37), and later they both reveal to Annas that previously they'd 'sell our arses for a plate of bacon' (p. 57). While captives, they also confess their love for each other, thus setting up an interesting all-male love triangle involving William. Indeed, Ben's last act is to scream 'William' (p. 84) before he is killed. Though homosexuality is in excess in the play, it works perhaps more to secure the presence and validity of gayness on stage than to subvert the

⁴⁷ For instance, Cromwell's army that was to cause so much grief in Ireland in the mid 17th century was recruited mainly through a promise of free land after war effort in Ireland. See for instance James Scott Wheeler: *Cromwell in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999) and Peter Gaunt: *Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers and the Historical Association, 1996).

gender polarities, though this aspect is naturally a part of the play too through the ease with which the characters seem to accept non-heterosexual relationships.

The picture is further complicated and broadened by yet another aspect of William's stay in Ireland, as he tells Edmund that he and his two friends risked coming 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, that I may cease playing for I am tired of this theatre' (p.22). It is especially the words 'to play our parts upon the stage' that complicate as well as broaden the picture here because William comes to play two roles in particular in the play, each role being tied closely to his Englishness on the one hand, and his Catholic leanings on the other.

Edmund thinks, judging from William's feverish speech, that 'the queen herself may have sent him' (p. 22), and it is worthwhile noting that William's prayer when being found echoes that of Edmund when he refers to the queen in a religious manner: 'Most gracious virgin, lady most pure, lady immaculate, tower of ivory, pearl of Christ, your soldiers guard your chastity in this pagan country where Rome and its legions of priests and heathens would violate the sacred bed of England' (p. 23). It is noticeable that the purity of the mother country is emphasised, as this purity is part of the justification of colonisation of a less pure and chaste country that needs to be rescued from itself.

William's presence in Ireland is interpreted differently on the basis of a few words, and it is significant that he plays both parts rather willingly for a while. File finds what she thinks is final proof of William as the awaited saviour when his response to her singing 'Bard meaning poet, River meaning aibhne' is 'Aibhne, aibhne, aibh – aibh. Avon. Aibhne' (p. 24), creating the nickname the Bard of Avon in the process (and while the Irish bards went under and disappeared, the title of bard ironically has come to be a title of recognition in the English literary world).

Shakespeare's already fictitious presence in the play, then, also works to engage the audience in a game of playfulness that turns the attention to the craft of theatre and playwriting as well as the art of writing itself, where anything is possible – even the writer and actor Shakespeare coming to Ireland as a potentially miraculous Irish saviour, and also a loyal English servant, and playing both without ending up favouring either. It is a most humanist, neutral and somewhat diplomatic approach, and his mild mannered dismissal of both roles in the end certainly works as a comment on the inadequacy of persisting myths appropriated to the Irish by the English and vice versa, then and now. A poet should be able to look beyond myth because it is important that we

‘must never cease to keep our mythological images in dialogue with history; because once we do we fossilise. That is why we will go on telling stories, inventing and re-inventing myths, until we have brought history home to itself.’⁴⁸

It is indeed notable that there are three poets present in the play (even four if we count Sweney, who according to the legend composed beautiful poetry in his mad exile among the birds and trees). Edmund, the File (whose name, significantly, is Irish for poet or bard) and William are all members of the same profession, basically being court poets who are expected to write flattering and praising words to the king or queen of their nation (though it has to be said that William probably falls outside this category since he did not write specifically in honour of any royalties of his time). There are therefore obvious similarities shared between the English and the Irish poets in their way of work, but this is also one field where the Irish bards’ role is more similar to that of the Viking ‘skald’,⁴⁹ being invested with power only surpassed by the king or chieftain of the tribe as long as they invested their power wisely in glorifying verse.

It is also interesting to view the exchange between the File and William on the practice of poetry in the two countries, with William obviously under the general influence of English insistence on the flaws in everything Irish: ‘I’m not as your poets are. I don’t praise disobedience and I don’t spread discontent’ (p. 55). His dismissal of the title ‘Bard of Avon’ is also in line with this display of prejudice, and works to alienate him further from his attributed role as saviour: ‘Bard of Avon? What an extraordinary description. Quite barbaric, really. I don’t like it’ (p. 55). At this moment, William shows that he is very much under the influence of English indoctrination of the idea of barbarian Irish after all, and confirms that to him, the Irish represent something fundamentally other than the English despite his possible sympathies for the plight of the Irish. The fixed stereotypes have got the hold of him, even though they are not wholly convincing. The File’s attempts to merge William’s theatrical talents with his Catholic leanings into a rebellious plot against the English are equally futile as her persuasive ‘Are you not a priest in this new religion that may attach itself most secretly, most devoutly to the old abandoned faith?’ (p. 57) is only met with a dismissing ‘I do not wish to understand

⁴⁸ Richard Kearney: *Myth and Motherland*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ The skalds wrote derogatory verse (‘nidvers’) aimed at their enemies, though their main task was to praise their chief. Beheading was often the reward for verse not laudatory (or derogatory) enough.

you' because 'You speak of a sin fit only for the flames' (p. 59). Together, religion, poetry and theatre are too dangerous a combination for William.

The important role of the Irish bards was also something that interested Spenser, and led him to write of their powerful and loyal Irish poetry that 'It is great pity to see so abused to the gracing of wickedness and vice, which would with good usage serve to beautify and adorn virtue. This evil custom, therefore, needeth reformation' (*View*, p. 75), and so he recommended that the bards should be executed if found. Being a poet himself, however, made it crucial to do the exact same thing as his Irish counterparts, and so he wrote *The Faerie Queene* to his own queen, a work that contains passages of praise for Ireland, though also obvious contempt and fear, such as in stanza 55 of the first of the two *Mutabilitie Cantos*, that describes the land as a forest hiding Irish 'wolves and thieves':

Them all, and all that she so deare did way,
Thence-forth she left; and parting from the place,
There-on an heauy haplesse curse did lay:
To weet, that wolues where she was wont to space
Should harbour'd be, and all those woods deface,
And thieues should rob and spoile that coast around.
Since which those woods and all that goodly chase
Doth to this day with wolues and thieues abound;
Which too-too true that land's in-dwellers since haue found.⁵⁰

Spenser would later recommend removing all the forests to get rid of the hiding-places of untrustworthy Irish, something that certainly is most visible in today's Ireland. This particular passage also reveals the trouble that the colonisation of Ireland caused Queen Elizabeth I, who did not have an easy task of subjecting the resistant islanders to her rule. The problems arising from the efforts of the English Crown are well dramatised in the play, where the writings of Edmund Spenser are integrated into the text, and especially so in the third act, where passages from *A View* of the conversation between Eudoxus, the English newcomer to Ireland, and Irenius, the knowledgeable Englishman settled in Ireland, are transformed, almost word by word, into a discussion between

⁵⁰ Edmund Spenser: *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 1039.

Edmund and William on Ireland and the Irish. William represents the newcomer, then, who asks questions that ‘Irenius’ Edmund answers:

William: Which particular evils?

Edmund: Ancient, long grown evils. Errors of law, custom, religion.

William: Law? The Irish have laws?

Edmund: These laws are repugnant to God’s law, and to man’s. Murder can be forgiven through the mercy of money paid to the child or the wife of the murdered man. Through this vile law many murderers live quite freely amongst them. All quite concealed.

William: A most wicked law indeed. (p. 45, also *A View*, p. 5)

The laws in question here, are of course the old Brehon laws that were looked upon with utter contempt by most English, who despite recognising a degree of logic in them, saw them as an obstacle in the way of colonisation. And though Spenser saw redeeming features in the Irish, signs of which are evident in his writings, he also recommended the use of ‘extirpation or at the very least bloody campaigns of reduction.’⁵¹ According to Richard A. McCabe, ‘the line of Spenser’s argument necessitates the gruesome imagery. In political terms the image of horror is the image of success.’⁵² Horror, of course, is only successful in the eyes of the victorious, and one especially infamous passage of such horror from *A View* incorporated in to the play is a description of starving Irish, victim to harsh persecution by Spenser and his superiors: ‘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 (...) 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’ (p. 12, also *A View*, p. 104).

In the play, these images ultimately come to haunt Edmund, despite his earlier more positive view of his Irish servants, whom he felt he had succeeded in changing for the better:

Edmund: They are intelligent beings. They are capable of instruction. They are capable of salvation.

⁵¹ Patricia Coughlan: ‘“Some secret scourge which shall by her come unto England”’: Ireland and Incivility in Spenser’, in Patricia Coughlan (ed): *Spenser and Ireland. An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1989), p. 50.

⁵² Richard A. McCabe: ‘The Fate of Irena: Spenser and Political Violence’, in *Spenser and Ireland*, p. 117.

Elizabeth: They are animals.

Edmund roars at her.

Edmund: They are Irish.

Silence.

Elizabeth: You share my fear. (...) You have seen the devastation of these late wars of Munster. They are seeking revenge against us. (p. 9)

A sense of guilt, or at least unease, about the violent measures undertaken to establish rule over the Irish is evident here, and there are certain ambiguities present in this dialogue that strongly suggest that there is a problem on the part of the coloniser to fully justify colonialism, especially in light of the fact that, as mentioned earlier, the Irish after all are white Europeans and as such not very different from the English. However, this is a dangerous line of thought as the colonisers ‘must never admit that other peoples are not really very different from themselves, as this would undercut the legitimacy of colonialism,’⁵³ and there is a sense that the reformation of their Irish servants has turned out to be worryingly successful, with the result that through hearing ‘their language returning through the mouths of the colonised, the colonisers are faced with the *worrying threat of resemblance* between coloniser and colonized.’⁵⁴

Spenser’s wife has recognised the anxieties in her husband through her own, and his uncertainty soon overshadows whatever lenient feelings he has nurtured towards Ireland. His fear only grows as the play progresses, and to such an extent that return to England seems the only option is he to survive. However, he finds it equally impossible to maintain his position in Ireland as he feels that ‘England no longer needs me. I am abandoned here in exile’ (p. 51), and his lack of actual authority in Ireland, where he is nothing but a servant to another figure of authority, ultimately destroys his confidence in himself as a poet as well: ‘I have ceased to write – (...) The poem, the great poem is unfinished –’ (p. 51). His poem is unfinished, and so are his attempts at colonisation.

As a storm, symbolic enough in itself, rages in the fourth act, Spenser is full of fear inside his castle, that now feels like a prison where any escape route chosen will inevitably lead to destitution, whether in Ireland or in England: ‘It for the best that tonight we stay close beside each other. Our enemy is at ease with the wildness of the elements. It is now 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

⁵³ John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 53.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55. This is of course also directly related to Bhabha’s notion of mimicry.

of this corrupt land does corrupt my brain, and my sick imaginings devour my sense and reason' (p. 64). Spenser, of course, was indeed to die shortly after his return to England, in January 1599. Subsequent to his dark if not mad thoughts in the play, bad dreams also torment Edmund, foreshadowing the desperate actions that will lead to his return: 'I will burn my books. I will burn my house' (p. 79).

The bad omens at Kilcolman coincide with Sweney's final lapse into senility and incapability of grasping reality; his last act of clarity is to order the execution of the English captives. Madness might be a word for it as he believes himself to be a bird, and this collapse of order forces his queen to realise that 'we have indeed fallen from a great height. I fell, not willingly, but I had in my warrior's heart the hope to rise again –' (p. 88), and her only means of control left is her life, that she controls by ordering her sons to end it for both king and queen: 'No, I have a life. And a power to end it. Give your mother what she asks for' (p. 89). The queen seems forced to accept colonisation at this moment, but she continues to resist through her decision to die, and as such she 'continues to think, feel and live against and, therefore, in relation to the colonizer and colonization.'⁵⁵

The demise of Edmund, the Irish king and his queen are pessimistic events and give but little consolation as they all were reluctantly brought down by the same figure of authority more powerful than they, namely the Queen of England. After Spenser, others would come to Ireland to destroy, but in the footsteps of the Irish there would be almost nothing except descent into almost complete darkness, if not oblivion for several centuries. There is, however, a flash of hope as the play concludes. William is shown the way to England by the File, who accepts that he is not the saviour after all, and graciously spares his life. There is a sense that this act of humanity also incorporates a rejection of violence since it would have been easy for the Irish to dispose of William in the same way as his companions, or in the same way as the English dispose of the Irish. William, however, has shown that he is not a man of violence or persecution, he is only partly influenced by the English view of the Irish 'race' and eventually longs for the safety of England rather than a dangerous life in Ireland as a foreigner or traitor.

The remainder of the Irish group are alive and relatively well, harbouring positive thoughts for their 'eternal destitution' (p. 97) and mutual love reassured. Into this comes Edmund's child, who ran away as the castle was set on fire. According to history, a

⁵⁵ Albert Memmi: *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, p. 205.

child of Edmund's perished in the Kilcolman fire, but in McGuinness's play the event is significantly subverted into an act of humanity, a hope for the future of the distressed island as the child is adopted by the Irish: 'Hugh: We have a child. He is to 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' (pp. 100 – 101). The child, then, is not going to be completely Gaelic, but will be enabled to retain its own Englishness ('natured like his own'), which is an attitude to cultural interaction and interrelation that potentially is embracing the best of both cultures in question. In other words, it is an exemplary conduct of proper humanity that strongly criticises the domination of one supreme culture in colonisation and imperialism, a domination that is destructive, arrogant and certainly lacks magnanimity.

Mary and Lizzie

Mary and Lizzie (1989)⁵⁶ upset the critics somewhat when it premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Pit* in London in 1989. They found it unstructured and confusing, which perhaps is understandable considering the strangely fantastic and wholly unconventional opening of the play, where a pack of women are found living in trees, chanting and singing in Irish. Surely it is an unexpected opening scene, but in the light of McGuinness's other works, it makes perfect sense. The experimental, unexpected and unconventional are elements that can be found in all his plays to date, and *Mary and Lizzie* is overall a most convincing play when one considers the intention behind the use of these disturbing, challenging and at first possibly unsettling dramatic devices.

The play uses a controlled, though at first a seemingly loose, structure of nine different scenes that establishes the story of a journey through history, time, places and especially the psyche of women. The essential preoccupation of the play is the exclusion of women from history, and McGuinness has chosen to extract two virtually unknown women from the history books and re-appropriate their story so their importance can be recognised and acknowledged. Mary and Lizzie Burns are the play's protagonists; they are two Irish sisters who have been barely mentioned in a sentence or two in biographies of Marxist philosopher Friedrich (Frederick) Engels,⁵⁷ the man they are known to have lived with for a time in Manchester from the 1840s and onwards.

Their contributions to history through their relations with the historically prominent figure Engels (as well as his companion Karl Marx) remain, of course, largely unknown because the lives of these two women were ignored due to the social position of their sex. McGuinness's complex account of a period of the sisters' lives is therefore mostly imagined. However, the play's focus is not limited to these two women alone, as their

⁵⁶ All quotes and references to the play are from Frank McGuinness: *Mary and Lizzie* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989).

⁵⁷ See for instance David McLellan: *Engels* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977) and W. O. Henderson: *The Life of Fredrick Engels* (London: Frank Cass, 1976). A slightly more detailed account of Mary and Lizzie is available in Grace Carlton: *Friedrich Engels: The Shadow Prophet* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965).

story also comes to represent and tell the story of all silenced women throughout history whose stories and lives have been ignored, degraded, repressed and robbed of individuality.

The story of the two women also illustrates what is known in the field of postcolonial studies as the 'double colonisation' of women,⁵⁸ which is a phrase that refers to the oppression suffered by women not only at the hands of patriarchy, but also through being labelled second-class citizens by a colonising power. The simultaneous oppression such double colonisation involves, and especially the silence surrounding women in documented (colonial) history, has been given much attention by one prominent feminist postcolonial critic and theorist in particular. Indian-born Gayatri Spivak has paid attention to the attempts made by the *Subaltern Studies* scholars in India to reclaim and retrieve from colonialist texts the (lost) voices of 'those who did not comprise the colonial elite'.⁵⁹

Subaltern is a term that now generally refers to groups and classes in society that have been ignored when history has been recorded, their contributions to history being rendered insignificant. According to Spivak, women constitute one such subaltern group that has been largely silenced both as part of a colonial society and a post-colonial society, in addition to the subjugation already experienced through patriarchy: 'both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.'⁶⁰

Importantly, Spivak questions the work of the subaltern scholars and the whole idea and legitimacy of recovering voices from history. This makes it imperative to take her view into consideration knowing that McGuinness's project with *Mary and Lizzie* resembles that of the subaltern scholars to such an extent that it can hardly be ignored in any postcolonial analysis of the play. His attempt to give voice to two historically mute women is, I would argue, an important statement in favour of a revision of a tradition-

⁵⁸ The phrase is used in a number of books on postcolonialism, and particularly by women theorists in the field. See for instance Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (eds): *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (Sydney and Aarhus: Dangaroo, 1986).

⁵⁹ John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 191.

⁶⁰ Gayatri Spivak: 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', pp. 82 – 83.

ally male-biased history, even if the actual authenticity of these women's stories is questionable since they are definitively silenced through death.

To Spivak retrieval is problematic, however, as she strongly emphasises that the lost voices can never actually be retrieved because their individuality, originality and above all consciousness, is forever lost and forever unrepresentable. The consequence is that the lost voices will remain lost, and any attempt to retrieve these voices 'will continue to keep the subaltern as female entirely muted.'⁶¹ The (female) subaltern cannot, therefore, speak according to Spivak. Even subaltern women who are not dead are still unable to speak and be heard because their speech is not recognised or correctly interpreted by patriarchal societies. This does not mean, of course, that one should simply leave the lost voices behind and forget them all over again. I rather believe that Spivak criticises the system of representation that causes women to be silenced in the first place, and that McGuinness's play therefore represents a refusal to accept the system of beliefs that denies certain groups of society their rightful space in history.

Notably, the play also appeared at a time when there was a fierce debate in Ireland concerning the position of women writers in Irish literary society.⁶² Naturally, the debate also came to concern itself with the position and representation of women in Irish society as a whole. *Mary and Lizzie*, therefore, is a play that attempts to reclaim the lost voices of Irish women who have been victim to the patriarchal and colonial way of seeing history from an almost solely male point of view. On the whole, then, this play is a drama that certainly can be seen as a feminist postcolonial critique of male oppression of women, even though a man wrote the play. (It is of course not impossible for a man to write from a woman's point-of-view, and men can surely be as feminist as women. Likewise, it is not the case that only black people can write about blacks or colonised write about the colonised).

⁶¹ From a discussion on Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 193.

⁶² The debate became very intense after the publication of the three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1990. The three volumes were marked by a paucity of women writers, to the great outrage of some prominent contemporary Irish women poets as well as a number of critics, scholars and academics. Subsequently, after much debate, work on an additional volume dedicated to the works of Irish women writers was commissioned to appease the critics and lower the tempers. It is to be published in autumn 2001 as volumes IV and V. *The Field Day Anthology* was not the only one that ignored women writers, though, as a selection of other anthologies of Irish writings published in the 80s also failed to take much notice of the writing women of Ireland. Common to them all was that they were edited by men.

The feminine, the female consciousness and the role of women in society are all crucial elements in this play, and as we shall see, the subversive power implicit in this re-appropriation works not only to deconstruct stereotyped notions of what constitutes an Irish woman but also undermines the concept and accuracy of history itself. It is very much a feminist play in that it refuses to acknowledge linear time and history as the only means by which we can know our past, present and future. Concepts frequently found in feminist theory are easily recognised throughout the play on closer inspection. The ideas of Julia Kristeva, and to a lesser extent Hélène Cixous, are especially important contributions to the more theoretical aspect of the play.

Time is of crucial significance, as McGuinness here focuses on two particular women who move across space and time on a journey (or journeys) that history as we know it has failed to recognise because it only acknowledges one dimension of time. Kristeva identifies three time dimensions or perspectives, where historical time is the familiar one with linearity as the principal element, and where time implies ‘departure, progression and arrival – in other words, the time of history.’⁶³ Linearity also implies logic, which has become a hallmark of patriarchy. The second dimension is a purely feminine perspective of time that is the opposite of the historical, logical and linear, as it is identified as cyclical, plural and fluid. It seems that we can identify a blend of these two categories in *Mary and Lizzie*, and a blend of the two opposites is also Kristeva’s third dimension. This blend would work to challenge, confront and make visible the suppression of the feminine in history. This is undoubtedly also McGuinness’s project in *Mary and Lizzie*. Moreover, since postcolonialism is also a male, patriarchal project that relies on linearity and a one-dimensional time (and history), the time aspect of this play also works as subversive and oppositional with regards to the force of colonisation.

The structure of the play itself is a crucial element in the project of re-appropriating the female voice in history and highlighting the dominance of colonialism and patriarchy’s fixed expectations of the role of women. Historically, the play evolves within the Victorian period of the British Empire, the pre-famine era of colonial Ireland and Marx and Engels’ revolutionary Marxist thinking. The Victorian age was of course also the Empire at its height of success, and the race for profit was severely felt by the colonies,

⁶³ Julia Kristeva: *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 194. See also pp. 192 – 195 for the full argument on time dimensions.

with Ireland ultimately having to face the dire consequences of famine and the lack of relief from the colonial masters.

The setting of the play in this historical context, however, is distorted and subverted by the nine different scenes in the play and their rapid movements through, across and in time and space. The scenes jump between spaces without giving any explanation, a movement that Cixous defines as another perspective on time where 'woman always occurs simultaneously in several places.'⁶⁴ McGuinness refuses to adopt the familiar linearity that usually characterises time and history, and instead he has created a drama that steadily crosses time barriers, distorts the concept of reality and introduces multiplicity, fluidity and reversal, so to speak, of silence.

The structure of the play is essential in the understanding of the engagement with 'the process of history, the exclusion of women from the historical narrative and the role of women,'⁶⁵ and as we shall see, the play's fantastical elements constitute a dramatic form that emphasises the usually ignored consciousness and imagination of the female. This is made evidently and painfully clear as the first scene of the play, 'The City of Women', opens with a paragraph where Lizzie in few but powerful words tells the distressing story of women who 'followed soldiers who they believed loved them. At the camp they were received like lepers and banished into the forest' (p. 1).

The social stigmatisation of women who did not conform to or who departed from the expected moral standards is evident, but more importantly, the women in this story have been banished so utterly that they no longer live on earth; they live in the trees, away from social condemnation and demands of conformity and submission to a fixed set of values. The isolation and powerlessness involved for the women living in trees becomes clear as Mary arrives to persuade Lizzie to descend from the trees and the Pregnant Girl appears, lamenting that 'My name is gone, my good name' (p. 2) because she is now a fallen woman. Mary has worked out a different choice for the two sisters:

Mary: We've work to do away from here

Lizzie: Such as what?

Mary: Wander the earth. (p. 2)

⁶⁴ Hélène Cixous: 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in Elaine Marks and Isabelle De Courtivron (eds): *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p. 252.

⁶⁵ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 122.

Their project, then, is to live in and confront a society that may castigate them for what they are, how they behave, their past and their demeanour. Their only chance for a life of some self-respect is to refuse to conform just as readily as they refuse to be castigated, even if the women in the trees dismally predict that their fate is inevitably going to bring them back: 'You, Lizzie Burns. Who still has a name. You'll lose it, like we lost ours, so speak, before it's lost' (p. 4). The loss of name, and thereby the loss of identity, can only be compared to death, which clearly is a state of such utter powerlessness that Mary and Lizzie have to reject such a prospective existence in favour of a wandering life. However, before they can pursue walking through life, they have to realise, face and preferably discard the confinements they have been subjected to so far. That involves confronting both patriarchy and colonialism.

The first step in this process occurs in the second and third scenes, 'The Earth Opens' and 'The Magical Priest', where Mary and Lizzie encounter the Old Woman, who of course is none other than Mother Ireland herself. The ancient symbolic and mythological concept of Ireland as feminine works to define their roles as Irish women, and it is therefore necessary for Mary and Lizzie to confront the fictive goddess image in order to exchange it with reality in a way that can liberate them from the traditional confinement and impossibility of living up to the goddess ideal. This feminine ideal is again closely related to the elements of colonial discourse that labels inferior everything feminine while at the same time worshipping the fertile land, so that 'the feminizing of the land represents a ritualistic moment in imperial discourse, as male intruders ward off fears of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy.'⁶⁶ The sisters proceed to follow the Old Woman (Mother Ireland) into the earth, where they are promised a meeting with her son. The symbolism implicit in entering the earth is obvious; the earth is fertile and thus feminine, but the earth is also an underworld, and so also represents the consciousness (or the unconscious) of the sisters.

That Lizzie first is afraid to enter the earth because 'It's a grave. (...) I'm afraid of the grave' (pp. 7 – 8), is a clear indication that the scene is imagined and a product of fantasy, and that the scene represents an internal confrontation with a painful and perhaps unresolved past (their mother died giving birth to Lizzie) and the social and cultural heritage and rigid expectations awaiting the sisters in the present. The fusion of life and death that occurs in the underworld is reminiscent of a state of dreaming, but to the

⁶⁶ Anne McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 24.

two sisters it appears as a real and natural progression in the journey that they have just begun.

As they meet the Old Woman's son, the Priest who appears to have lost his mind, his frantic speech makes it clear that he represents the religious divide in Ireland: 'Turn from blind faith to a wise one. I have been Catholic, I have been Protestant, now I am both and wish you were too' (p. 10). His vision of the future of the torn country that is Ireland is not a positive one: 'To my strange religion, which is the destiny of Ireland? A killing combination of two defunct faiths that can only survive by feeding off each other?' (p. 11). In this talk of religion, we find a critique of the overwhelming position of religion in Irish affairs, both past and present.

In the Irish colonial context, religion was yet another means of establishing a hierarchy that sharply divided between superiority and inferiority. Hence, the Protestantism of the colonisers was superior to and more modern (reformed) than the therefore primitive Roman Catholicism of the native Irish population. Religion, then, became an important means of separating supposed barbarism from civilisation, and though no large-scale or significant projects of conversion were ever implemented, the religious divide always functioned as an important marker of the difference between coloniser and colonised in Ireland.⁶⁷

It is obvious that McGuinness is pointing to the adverse effects of religious unrest and the consequences seen in Ireland due to it, and he moves on to subvert the associations implicit in one specific religious ceremony that symbolises unity and union between two different parties. Marriage is normally a union between two (gender) opposites such as man and woman, but it can also, more symbolically, be a union between other opposites, such as when the Priest claims he is 'a mixed marriage' (p. 12) because of his loyalty to both the Catholic and Protestant faith. Mary and Lizzie, however, reject this traditional concept of marriage as they demand to be married to someone they are familiar with and undoubtedly regard to be their equals:

Mary: Marry me.

⁶⁷ It is a fact, though, that a small number of Protestant missionaries did attempt to convert Catholics in Ireland, and especially in the poor and rural western regions. There is, for instance, evidence of this occurring during the awful famine years (1845 – 1852), when starving Catholics were given food relief in return for conversion to Protestantism. See Irene Whelan: 'The Stigma of Souperism' in Cathal Póirtéir (ed): *The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1995), pp. 135 – 154 for a short but detailed study of the phenomenon.

Priest: Who to?

Mary: Myself.

Lizzie: Marry me.

Priest: Who to?

Lizzie: My mother. (p. 13)

The significance of this proposed marriage subversion is substantial, as the sisters demand a kind of freedom that stresses and recognises their femininity and also emphasises their need to define themselves as feminine through a feminine rather than a patriarchal lineage.

The dead mother of Mary and Lizzie meets her two wandering daughters as they proceed through the underworld in the play's fourth scene. Their mother is 'attended by six women in elaborate, jewelled costumes' (stage directions, p. 14), something which brings associations of a queen and her court. However, all the women died giving birth, so the court is not one of wealth, exuberance or indeed joy. The images of motherhood on offer are dark and depressing, and the already surreal element of Mary and Lizzie meeting the dead in the underworld, stresses that the experience is like that of a nightmare: a most unpleasant and disturbing dream that needs to be forgotten, suppressed or changed to prevent it from ever turning into reality for them.

The realities disclosed in the underworld are about to turn even worse for the two sisters, though, as their future in Ireland is predicted to be that of 'Famine', 'Death', 'Disease', 'Exile', 'Hunger' and 'Fever' (p. 15). The name of the fourth scene, 'The Feast of Famine', comes to be an appropriate title for a gloomy prophecy that develops into an extensive and visually fantastic song of lament where the prospect of the Irish 'dying, dying millions' (p. 17) causes the Mother to urge her daughters to leave Ireland for England: 'Get you now to your father. England is no promised land. But they look after their own. You'll have the bite in your stomach. Leave here before the earth devours its young and old' (p. 17). These words are also a stark reminder of the large-scale migration of Irish people who could no longer sustain a living in a most destitute country, a significant feature of Irish postcolonialism that still is very much present to this day in Ireland and certainly in the world-wide Irish diaspora communities (in places like the USA, Australia and England).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Diaspora is here used to describe communities of immigrants or descendants of immigrants in their new country who, according to Robin Cohen, 'acknowledge that "the old country" – a notion often buried

The earth suddenly turns into a force of darkness and imminent death, which can also be read as a warning that the two sisters must leave the underworld, or their imagination, before it's too late. They must also physically leave Ireland and go to England; in other words they must leave death and the underworld in order to survive and have a life at all. Notably, the otherwise fertile earth is turned into a force of death, making the feminine earth goddess not only an object to be desired, but also something to be feared because she is unpredictable and difficult to control. Apart from the ghastly predictions of death, there are several other indications of the hopelessness of living in Ireland. For instance, the question of language is brought up, and Irish is consequently associated with death as well:

Lizzie: We can't speak English.

Mother: What in God's name do you think you're talking in?

Lizzie: Gaelic.

Mother: Dead as a duck. Forget it. (p. 15)

Language is, of course, of crucial significance as the sisters must be able to speak or they will (as pointed out by, for instance, Spivak), be silenced, forgotten and passive like their foremothers no matter where they go or what they do. With a streak of magic, the Mother then has a gift to offer her daughters on their journey: 'I've arranged for you to be given the gift of tongues' (p. 15). This particular scene can be read as the moment when Mary and Lizzie develop, or gain, the necessary strength and courage to take the step back into the real world, now equipped sufficiently to rid themselves of the supposedly silent, obedient curse of their sex.

There seems to be nothing at all positive in Ireland for the sisters, though of course their reunion with their dead mother is of some significance as it strengthens and identifies their bond with their feminine heritage. This is complicated, however, by the fact that their mother urges Mary and Lizzie to go to England to find their father. In reality then, they actually have to leave the feminised Ireland behind to go to the patriarchal power of England in search of their patriarchal lineage. The complexity of the situation is somewhat eased, however, by the fact that death is such a dominating element in the feminised Ireland, and that the sisters therefore have to face the actual forces behind the feminisation (and thus the death images) in order to continue their journey. Their depar-

deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions.'

Quoted in John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 207.

ture for England can of course also be seen as an attempt to confront the colonising power that causes such grief in Ireland. Their journey across the sea is therefore an act of opposition, something that becomes clearer as they, upon arrival, meet the Empress herself.

A confrontation, so to speak, with patriarchy and male colonial domination is necessary for the sisters to go through to achieve a sense of freedom and self-respect. (They do, of course, also need to leave Ireland in order to escape the predicted famine and find some sort of security elsewhere.) There is undoubtedly a certain element of madness and an instant feeling of confusion and surrealism present in the first four scenes as we follow the sisters on their strange and fluctuating journey, but the use of this surreal dream-play device is also a brilliant way of building up a believable argument on how the two sisters come to reject the indoctrination of social values and expectations that otherwise await them as women. If the underworld scenes are representative of their minds, then it is easy to use the argument that change must, by necessity, first occur or develop in the mind before it can be outspoken and subsequently attempted.

The middle scene of the play, the fifth scene called 'Passing Time with the Queen of England', represents the shift of focus away from Ireland and over to England. Imagination again plays an integral part as the scene opens with a meeting between the sisters and Queen Victoria. Importantly, in the first staging of the play in 1989, a man was cast in the role of the Queen, so that 'the Queen's authority is confirmed as arising from patriarchal values rather than from feminine ones', which also implies that she is 'not a woman with power for she is a figurehead of state who has been groomed in a specific way.'⁶⁹ Her womanhood and her role as head of the Empire, then, can also be seen to place her in a symbolic role. As Anne McClintock puts it: 'In myriad ways, women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge.'⁷⁰ Queen Victoria gives the impression of being a troubled woman who's under great pressure from her subjects, both in Britain and the rest of the Empire: 'God, I'm knackered by state occasions. (...) A cruel mother, this country' (p. 22), and hence her portrayal of England proves to be one of perhaps little comfort to the sisters who search for some kind of security away from their doomed Ireland.

⁶⁹ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 133.

⁷⁰ Anne McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 24.

Manchester, their English destination, is rather arrogantly and dismissively described as ‘an open sewer’ (p. 23) by the privileged Queen. So, a parallel between the poor Irish and their likewise poor counterparts in Britain begins to take shape, though its significance will not come clear until a little later in the play, when the characters of Marx and Engels appear, and the play moves towards concentrating on the relationship between Ireland, Marxism and feminism, as well the troubled Irish-British relationship.

As the fourth scene closes, however, the Queen requests that the sisters forgive her, while at the same time stating that she does not know why she asks for forgiveness. One senses guilt on her part, probably as a result of the dire consequences of the expansion of her Empire, but also guilt enforced by her own statement that ‘A myth I am, but not yet a monster’ (p.23), which perhaps suggests that she knows she has the potential to turn into one. Comparing her manners to that of the sisters, a pattern of contrasts is established that will follow the play into the last four scenes. It is a pattern of stereotypical proportions where the Irish sisters from the outset are easily identified as ‘wild Irish’ through their fantastic underworld journey, and their meeting with the arrogant and well-spoken Queen, who in reality is nothing but a patriarchal goddess, only stresses their double otherness as women and Irish. Moreover, they are also poor Irish working-class women, a class that seems to have been ‘depicted as lagging even farther behind in the lower depths of the white race’ through colonialist discourse.⁷¹

The shift of scenery is sudden and unexpected as the sixth scene, ‘Bed’, is a dialogue between Marx and Engels, who are in bed together. Unexplained and with no obvious connection with the previous scenes, this opening is a mystery until the relationship between Engels and the sisters is made clear in the following scene. What this particular bed scene does offer, however, is an expansion of the play’s theme to include Marxist theory and the build-up of a frame to accompany the historically known facts about Mary and Lizzie that now replace and supplement the imaginative and fantastical elements that dominated the previous scenes.

The move from a feminine to a masculine environment is obvious in this change. Men’s fear of women also becomes evident, as the men are on the brink of going to sleep when Engels confesses that he’s afraid of the dark because of ‘dreaming’ (p. 26). Dreaming is fluid and irrational like the feminine, it is not possible to control, and is therefore feared, if not consciously, then certainly unconsciously and indirectly. Mary

⁷¹ Anne McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 56.

and Lizzie's entry into Engels' life is certainly dreamlike when they in the seventh scene, 'Manchester', appear before Engels, questioning him:

Mary: Are you afraid of the night?

Lizzie: Are you afraid to dream?

Mary: Do you see in your dreams?

Lizzie: Will you see with us? (p. 29)

Engels' response is merely to ask 'Who are you?' (p. 29) before he allows himself to be guided through Manchester by the sisters, who find their exhausted, ill and half-naked father working in Engels' factory. The state of their father is indicative of the state of patriarchy as a whole, and is a reminder of the sisters' project on their journey, namely that of rejecting patriarchy in favour of their own mode of life. The dark, gruel-ling story of suffering told them by their father, is reminiscent of the ominous tale of the underworld women in Ireland: 'Sore eyes, sore hand, sore work, sore body. (...) I need to die' (p. 31), and this parallel of suffering and death suggests that ultimately England is not the right place for the sisters either.

The awful appearance of their father is of course also a coarse reminder of the state of the Irish in England. The Irish were at the bottom of the social ladder in the industrial centres of England at the time of the play's setting, and they were frequently assumed to be degenerate, stupid, lazy and unreliable. Such characteristics were also used to describe the black and coloured subjects in the overseas colonies, so that the Irish were at this stage effectively the blacks of Britain. They were generally despised by the British, and seen as a major threat by the poor British working class, who readily accused the Irish of stealing their jobs and only source of income. To be Irish in England was not a good prospect for a better future, rather it was a further hindrance to any form of social and working life. Their situation was certainly not helped by the fact that they usually gathered in the industrialised cities where colonial discourse was 'systematically deployed to map urban space into a geography of power and containment' where 'the analogy between slum and colony was tirelessly evoked.'⁷²

The two Irish sisters manage to fascinate Engels, however, and after asserting that the sisters are not afraid of the dark, he asks them to live with him. The dark here seems to be a symbol of the departure from moral values that such a proposal implies. Two unmarried women living with a man (and not acting only as his servants, but also rather

⁷² Anne McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 120.

openly as mistresses) is in itself an act of subversion in the Victorian society of that (historical) time, and ignoring the strict moral codes is such a serious thing that Engels also asks them ‘Are you afraid of changing the whole wide world?’ (p. 31). His question acts as a persuasion of the sisters to join him, because he states his willingness to ignore or stretch rules as well, and Lizzie verbally performs a marriage ceremony to seal the pact: ‘Then the match is made, till death do us part’ (p. 31).⁷³

The attraction that Engels demonstrates towards the sisters, can be related to his fear of darkness and what this darkness implies in a colonial context. Darkness means blackness as well, and in relation to women, this hints at a supposed lack of sexual inhibition on the part of colonised (black) women, who from the beginning of colonisation were ‘associated with an unbridled, lascivious sexuality’⁷⁴ and who were seen as insatiable seductresses. They were both feared and desired, then, by colonising men. As the blacks of Europe, Irish women were likely to be associated with the same immorality, and could therefore be likely objects of desire for travelling Victorian men of independent means who were unmarried or had immaculate wives to come home to.⁷⁵

The marriage pact would perhaps at first glance be an appropriate place to end the play because of the historical facts known about Mary and Lizzie and the contentment expressed in these words, but the journey has other aspects to it that need to be investigated before Mary and Lizzie can possibly find true contentment and the themes of the play properly explored. A crucial scene of the play is scene eight, called ‘Dinner with Karl and Jenny’, where the dinner literally becomes a symbol for the different elements of the play that here come to carve out a relationship as well as confront each other through the interplay between the characters.

The dialogue is marked by a number of direct quotes from Engels’ book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*,⁷⁶ a book first published in 1845 that identified the

⁷³ From the historical facts known about the sisters’ life with Engels, these words are indeed accurate, as both sisters lived with Engels until their deaths (both died before Engels). See Grace Carlton: *Friedrich Engels: The Shadow Prophet* for further historical details.

⁷⁴ Anne McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 112. See also her comments on the same page on sexuality being called ‘the African sin’.

⁷⁵ McClintock also points out that ordinary working-class women were objects of desire and fear for men from higher classes. It could therefore be argued that Engels’ interest in the sisters is not solely based in colonial discourse on (Irish/colonised) femininity and sexuality.

⁷⁶ Friedrich Engels: *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, translated and edited by W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

working class Irish as being a most degraded race. For instance, Engels was rather harsh in his initial judgement on the Irish contribution to the world, stating that they supplied 'England, America, Australia, etc., with prostitutes, casual labourers, pimps, thieves, beggars and other rabble.'⁷⁷ But, as Eamonn Jordan notes, 'to Engels' credit, he later moved beyond these reductive descriptions towards a more analytical position.'⁷⁸ It is perhaps suitable to point to the fact that the book for the most part was written before his relationship with Mary and Lizzie developed, and that historians have failed to take notice of the positive, humanising impact this relationship must have had on his subsequent rethinking on the Irish.

Marx, however, was never convinced, and in the play, it is overtly suggested that he let himself be ruled by the social norms regarding non-marital relationships in the case of Mary and Lizzie and the Irish, because in the dinner scene he openly expresses his disregard for them: 'These women are not welcome in my house' (p. 35). The ensuing dialogue between Marx and Mary makes his inclination for Victorian values obvious:

Marx: I have frequently acknowledged my friend's financial assistance.

Mary: Then why do you look at his women with poison in your face?

Marx: You are not his women, you are his whores.

Mary: So are you. (p. 35)

Mary and Lizzie are regarded as being whores by Marx, then, since they do not conform to society's values and thereby threaten social conformity and control. Or, as McClintock puts it, 'it seems that underlying the anxious, baritone cries about sexual license lay fear of loss of patriarchal control in the home over the bodies, labor and money of the young women.'⁷⁹ There is of course also the implication that since Mary and Lizzie are Irish, they are promiscuous and behave like prostitutes, something that Marx also implies in his comments about them being whores. The accuracy of the equation that Irish women (in England) are whores, is flawed, however, and this fact demonstrates that regarding black women as lascivious is flawed too. One study of prostitution in Victorian York, for instance, shows that 'a disproportionately low number of prostitutes' was drawn from the large and poor Irish population in the city, and that 'the Irish

⁷⁷ Engels quoted in Liam O'Dowd's new 1990 introduction to Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 49.

⁷⁸ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 138.

⁷⁹ Anne McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 118.

community (...), though poor, contributed few women to an activity which actually declined or even virtually disappeared in areas colonised by the immigrants.’⁸⁰ It is likely that this study is representative of other English cities with large Irish communities, and there is certainly no reason to doubt that prostitutes in York were any different than others of their kind. The suppositions of Irish immorality, therefore, must be largely attributed to colonial discourse that was based more on assumptions than actual facts.

The dialogue also makes obvious that Marx can see sex only from a male point of view since he regards the sisters as being sinful seductresses, while Engels is without any blame in the matter. The image of the whore again brings into light the fear of women that the patriarchy suffers from, and the social stigmatisation of women who fail to conform to moral values. Submission is a prison for women, and Marx’ wife Jenny shows all the signs of being trapped in a circle of submission that frequently makes her ‘indisposed’ due to nerves. She has long since realised what she was destined for: ‘No, I am redundant. A useless piece of production, past child-bearing, and there were no sons—’ (p. 39), and with these words she sums up the place of woman in society.

Jenny Marx is drawn between social expectations and her own wishes, but has subdued herself to Victorian values nevertheless and suffers the psychological consequences. Her strong disapproval, if not hatred, of Mary and Lizzie, prompts to her reveal to the sisters what attitudes Engels expressed on the Irish race in his book. The result is an argument where Marx labels them ‘a rotting mass’ and ‘the lowest of the low’ (p. 41), while Engels is accused by Mary of passivity and inability to face his fears: ‘You don’t know us. You fear us. So you’ll remove us. (...) Change the world, eh? Change us. Change yourself first. Mr Engels is afraid of the dark. We’re the dark’ (p. 42). This is a comment that clearly makes the association between darkness as the Other, and darkness as female (and/or colonial) sexuality. The assertion of their status as the other also turns into a verbal divorce from their male companion and subsequently they are again on their own, seemingly free from any kind of patriarchal bond.

It is a paradox, and certainly not accidentally included in the play, that the revolutionary thinking of Marx and Engels made no serious attempt to recognise the importance of the feminine in any society. Instead, gender differences were largely

⁸⁰ See Frances Finnegan: *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 32 and 53 respectively. This detailed study also shows that police records of 106 known prostitutes in York in 1843, stated that only 2.9 per cent of these women were Irish (see p. 71).

ignored and the female worker more or less aligned with the importance of the male worker. This could ideally mean a lesser patriarchal influence on society if Marxism is implemented, which would, again ideally, lead to a dismissal of the gendered society as it is. However, Marxism as an ideology fails to recognise the inevitable impossibility of getting rid of existing ideas before and after a revolution, which in the case of women implicates no sudden status change.

As several feminist postcolonial critics have pointed out,⁸¹ the rights of women remain in the shadow of the freedom-seeking colonial nation during the transitional phase from colonised country to independent country. Though women no longer are doubly colonised in a post-colonial society, they remain colonised by patriarchy as the nation-building becomes the focus and ‘questions of women’s rights and autonomy complicate any simple celebration of anti-colonialism, nation and liberation.’⁸² (In a Marxist society, patriarchal values would also still dominate since women would still be silenced through the lack of attention given to gender differences, individuality and the female consciousness.)

The dialogue between feminism and Marxism, then, provides no actual improvement for women. This is made even clearer in the final scene of the play, where a boy speaking Russian reminds us of the extreme consequences of Marxism: consequences that are no less horrifying than those experienced by the Irish. It is a case of history, and indeed patriarchy, repeating itself in an endless cycle, a cycle that Mary and Lizzie come to reject in the final scene, when the Pregnant Girl (pregnancy, of course, being the prime symbol of women’s position in the male dominated society) suddenly appears on stage again to give birth. The child is a wooden box, much like a coffin, that the girl puts back again, because she has nothing else to do but ‘Start again, I suppose. Rough life, eh? No rest, no rest, until the grave’ (p. 47).

The cyclical element is emphasised as inadequate, and it is clear that the fluid form of the play itself is a subversive device that stresses the flaws of concepts of (historical)

⁸¹ For instance, Gayatri Spivak, Anne McClintock, Ania Loomba, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Benita Parry. For the latter two, see Chandra T. Mohanty: ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’ in Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (eds): *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, pp. 196 – 210, and Benita Parry: ‘Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse’ in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds): *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 36 – 44.

⁸² Ania Loomba: *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 227.

continuity. For Mary and Lizzie this means that their journey must continue infinitely since they have come to realise that they cannot be held back by social and colonial forces that in reality advocate individual imprisonment through a system of rigid social values as well as concepts of colonial discourse. Their gesture of forgiveness offered to Engels is a subtle reminder of their feminine humanity: 'You'll fail, but you'll be forgiven, for you loved, and love forgives. Forgive? Love forgets' (p. 48). Despite the gloomy visions of the future, love is the emotion that ends the play as the sisters, joined by their mother, sing 'No rest have I, or liberty, For love is lord of all' (p. 49) as they continue wandering the earth. There is no definite closure, and there is no solution on offer as the play ends, only fluidity and possibilities. There is therefore also hope of recognition present for the sisters, which would secure their individuality and position in a less stringent society.

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme

Much as in *Mutabilitie* the position of the coloniser is central in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985),⁸³ but the latter play portrays a coloniser who is no longer in the process of conquest, but is rather trapped between the colonised Irish Catholics and the colonial power, the British mainland. Ulster Protestants, the majority settler colony in what today is Northern Ireland, are centre stage in this play which, with its setting in a time of war and violence both internationally and internally early in the twentieth century, has much to contribute to the understanding of the current deadlock situation in Northern Ireland and the unsettled position of the Ulster Protestants. Their presence in Ulster can be seen to be under threat from both the Catholic majority (on the island of Ireland as a whole) and the British state whose Empire is now virtually non-existent and whose colonial history is often seen as something of an embarrassment. This play stresses the Ulster Protestants' eagerness, willingness and determination to remain in a colonial relationship with the British, as the colonial power's representatives in Ireland and Ulster in particular, though the playwright does so without judgement against this community whose underrepresentation and misrepresentation in Irish and British history are widespread.

With this play Frank McGuinness has created a war drama that in many ways differs from the traditional conception of what such a play should, or is expected to, contain. War literature is a descriptive and visual literature closely related to political and military events recorded by history, where above all the heroism and destruction alike of soldiers is usually depicted in a frenzy of horrible and disturbing actions.⁸⁴ Significantly, though *Observe the Sons of Ulster* undoubtedly is about war, and World War I specifically, the play avoids directly presenting the war. In fact, we do not see the play's

⁸³ All quotes and references to the play are from Frank McGuinness: *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, in *Plays One* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 91 – 197.

⁸⁴ See, for instance, Joan FitzPatrick Dean: 'Self-Dramatization in the Plays of Frank McGuinness', in *New Hibernia Review* (Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 1999), p. 104.

eight Ulstermen in direct action on the battlefield at all because it is not the intention of McGuinness to provide us with what we expect from a history of men in war. Rather, it is the consequences of those events that preoccupy McGuinness.

Instead of scenes of utter horror, such as those disturbingly displayed by German author Erich Maria Remarque in his monumental 1929 anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*,⁸⁵ or traditional scenes of heroism and bravery, McGuinness focuses on the relationship between the past and the present, history and myth, society and the individual through the parallel between the eight fighting Ulstermen of World War I and the fight of Ulstermen past and present. As in (almost) all his plays, history again plays a crucial and integral role.

A preoccupation with history is far from something new in the world of Irish literature; it is almost universally present, and the belief that the past holds the solution of the future is forever looming over the Irish consciousness together with the impossibility of forgetting the past with its myths and factual history altogether. Christopher Murray points out that the history play 'has always been concerned with power, identity and the national consciousness.'⁸⁶ In relation to the history of Ireland and particularly Northern Ireland, this is a definition that proves central to the interpretation of *Observe the Sons of Ulster* when the play's relationship between history and myth is further scrutinised.

Myth, which is crucial in providing people with a sense of unity, tradition and background, also, of course, tends 'to ignore the silences, the gaps, the contradictions and the alternative perspectives which surround past events,'⁸⁷ and so the Protestant perspective offered by McGuinness can only give us insight into one of the two distinct Ulster communities' consciousness. Myth acts as a provider of the community's set of images of itself and images that represent the community to others. The ideological implication of myths is obvious, but myths are also alienating and can easily turn into an imprisoning force that fails to reassess and reinterpret existing myths in accordance with the

⁸⁵ Erich Maria Remarque: *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. Brian Murdoch (London: Vintage, 1996). Remarque's realistic descriptions of the fear felt by German soldiers during World War I was the main reason for his exile from Hitler's Germany from 1933, when his novel was burnt under the claim that it was a betrayal of the German front-line soldiers. His citizenship was also withdrawn.

⁸⁶ Christopher Murray: 'The History Play Today' in Michael Keneally (ed): *Cultural Contexts and Literary Idioms in Contemporary Irish Literature* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), p. 269.

⁸⁷ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 28.

continuous flow of history. The danger of reliance on myth is clearly that it relies too heavily on the past.

As James Loughlin points out, 'the myth encompasses the total world-view of the group, and in so doing makes no distinction between past, present or future. Essentially, it embodies an ahistorical enclosed outlook, denying the possibility of change in history.'⁸⁸ Furthermore, the past 'provides lessons of conduct for the present and the future; the acceptance of those lessons presupposing the existence of an unchanging environment,'⁸⁹ something which clearly is a hindrance to any revision of myths or traditions, especially in a situation where your very existence in one particular place (here Ulster), and also your legitimate claim to that place, depends on these factors.

Any audience or reader of McGuinness's play, even those only vaguely familiar with the Northern Irish situation, will probably recognise and be aware that the situation has not changed much since the time of the play's World War I setting or prior to this time, for that matter. Though Northern Ireland since has come into existence, the tensions and troubles in the region cannot be said to have changed significantly. The play is, therefore, indeed highly relevant in its use of the past experiences of eight Ulster soldiers as a metaphor for the present state of Northern Ireland and its Protestants. A history play explains the past, and here the history play is also used to draw a line from the past to the present, inextricably linking the two together. The deployment of the history play, therefore, acts as an examination and critique of the present as well.

Prior to World War I, Ulster was in turmoil due to the prospect of Home Rule for Ireland. The ensuing argument between Irish Catholics, who viewed Home Rule as an important step towards full independence, and the strongly anti-Home Rule Irish Protestants (of whom the Ulster ones were most prominent) rapidly developed into a question of nationalism and national loyalty. The Ulster Protestants increasingly emphasised their bond with Britain and their British identity, and in this context 'Protestantism provided one of the most enduring and easily exploitable bonds of identity between the Unionists of Ulster and the population of Britain.'⁹⁰ The fact that most Ulster Protestants were the descendants of Scottish Presbyterian settlers was downplayed to allow for a more general British identity where "Anglo-Saxon" racial characteristics were allied

⁸⁸ James Loughlin: *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885* (London and New York: Pinter, 1995), p. 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30

to a common Protestantism as the basis of that identity; and this racial identity was clarified by invidious comparison with the supposed characteristics of Irish Romanist Celts.’⁹¹ This makes evident that the old colonial discourse techniques of portraying the Irish as an inferior race were not yet rejected, and this supposed inferiority actually appeared as a means of propaganda in the British general elections that were crucial to the fate of the Home Rule question. It was not unusual to see pamphlets with examples of Irish barbarism such as this Conservative party candidate’s from the first election where Home Rule was a major issue in 1886:

Q. Have the Irish ever had Home Rule and how did they behave?

A. They murdered every Englishman and Protestant they could lay their hands on in 1641. They were set on by the priests, who said that the killing of them was a meritorious act. Altogether they killed in that year 150,000 Protestants – men, women and children.⁹²

It is especially noteworthy that these words rely entirely on a reference to the past history of Ireland, and especially so the year 1641 when the Irish rebelled quite successfully against the British. The focus on the role of the Catholic priests in this insurrection is important because this embraces Ulster Protestant fears of being subjected to rule by a ‘Papist’ state, and stresses the threat posed to Protestants under such a supposedly authoritarian rule. That the estimate of deaths is rather exaggerated and based on biased sources is of no concern to the cause since these reminders and figures are made to appeal to the Protestant sense of injustice and cruelty that will occur under any form of Irish rule.⁹³

The appalling prospect of Irish Home Rule from the 1880s onwards caused a constant reiteration of historical references and emphasis on loyalty to Britain by Irish Protestants and their British allies (especially the Conservative Party), and when it became clear in 1913 that the third Home Rule Bill (the first and second Home Rule Bills were defeated in the British Parliament in 1886 and 1893 respectively) would finally be passed, Ulster Protestants prepared for war. As many as 100,000 men joined

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹² *Ibid.* From Tory candidate for Hyde, T.H. Sidebottom’s campaign pamphlet.

⁹³ Historians today seem to agree that in total over the years from 1641, when the rebellion broke out, to the final defeat of Catholic forces in 1652, approximately 20% of the Protestant population died. This would mean that up to 200,000 Protestants died during the struggle. See James Scott Wheeler: *Cromwell in Ireland*, p. 224 – 227 for details on estimated deaths and the differing views of historians.

Edward Carson's Ulster Volunteer Force during 1913 to defend their province against the prospect of Catholic rule. Thousands of these men were subsequently to join the British Army on the outbreak of the world war in 1914. One of the worst battles of the war, the Battle of the Somme, which of course is central to the play through the title reference, was to claim some 420,000 British lives (British casualties reached as high as 60,000 after the first day), including a significant number of Ulstermen, who mainly saw their engagement in the war as a means of strengthening and consolidating their bond with Britain.

In the past, this bond with Britain had been consolidated through particular emphasis on Protestant loyalty and sacrifice for the sake of British-Irish unity, and this was expressed through yet more historical references: 'If there had been no Londonderry and no Enniskillen and no Newtonbutler two hundred years ago ... there would have been no independent United Kingdom today.'⁹⁴ And if there were no United Kingdom, Britain would of course not be a colonial power either. These references gave meaning to the modern Ulster military struggle for the sake of British unity and hence nationality at the turn of the century and up to the world war that would provide Ulster with another proof of its loyalty to Britain through one of the bloodiest battles ever.

The Battle of the Somme has become etched on the minds of Ulster Protestants because of the terrible and appalling number of lives lost during a relatively short period of time and for minimal tactical gain (allied forces managed to advance only about six miles during the four months the battle lasted). Their sacrifice on the Somme battlefield has ever since been commemorated by Ulster Protestants as unmistakable proof of their strong ties with and unquestionable loyalty to Britain. Curiously, the Battle of the Somme started on July 1st 1916, the exact date of the historically decisive Battle of the Boyne in 1690,⁹⁵ a battle that was also to create lasting myths seriously affecting the relationship between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants. As will be pointed out later in this chapter, this coincidence of dates proves to be of crucial significance to the Ulstermen of this play (as it was of significance to other Ulstermen at the Somme that day).

Structurally, the play seems strikingly concerned with the number four, as there are four acts, four pairs of men and also four different Ulster locations in the third act. The

⁹⁴ Taken from *Belfast News-Letter* (18 June 1892), here quoted in James Loughlin: *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, p. 38.

⁹⁵ William of Orange's victory over James II is generally celebrated by Northern Protestants on the 12th of July instead of the 1st due to a change in the calendar in the eighteenth century.

exact locations are uncertain for three of the four, with the stage directions simply stating 'Ulster: Boa Island, Lough Erne (...); a Protestant church (...); a suspended rope bridge (...); the Field (...)' (p. 138). The four parts are named 'Remembrance', 'Initiation', 'Pairing' and 'Bonding'. The four pairs of men that gradually are formed, are partly based on already existing friendships and partly on new acquaintances, as some of the eight men already have established friendships, such as Millen and Moore, McIlwaine and Anderson, whereas Pyper knows the preacher Roulston from his school days and Craig once attended one of his sermons. Pyper and Craig form a pair after their initial meeting and obvious signs of (sexual) attraction towards each other, while Roulston pairs up with the youngest of the eight, Crawford, to 'Turn your [Crawford's] mind away from this evil, young man' (p. 125). Roulston's pairing with the youngest man also agrees with Pyper's comment that 'Roulston's best friends were always much younger' (p. 119) and hints at covert homosexuality.

The structure of the play also works effectively to locate the conflict between different reasons for fighting given by the men voluntarily engaging in war. Publicly, national identity was of course central, and warfare is again a central means of consolidating such identity 'as a mobiliser of ethnic sentiments and national consciousness (...) [and] a provider of myths and memories for future generations.'⁹⁶ Part one, appropriately called 'Remembrance', is where the Elder Pyper evokes the memory of his dead comrades long after they perished, in a soliloquy dominated by contrast and inconclusiveness as well as introspection and lament. His retrospection into the events of the past offers a perspective characterised by distance in time with the effects this has on the surviving old man's memory. The accuracy of his memory is not questionable or likely to be unreliable; it is too firmly based in the realities of war and mostly ignores familiar notions of noble bravery and heroic fighting.

His words make it instantly clear that the Elder Pyper is not completely reconciled with the events of his past, and that his explanation of what made the eight men fight on foreign soil is caught up in a tug-of-war between public and private causes. A tremendous guilt for being the sole survivor torments Pyper, like so many of his generation who could not comprehend how, or why, they had survived when so many others died horrific deaths: 'Those I belonged to, those I have not forgotten, the irreplaceable ones,

⁹⁶ Anthony D. Smith: *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 27.

they kept their nerve, and they died. I survived. No, survival was not my lot. Darkness, for eternity, is not survival' (p. 98).

The fact that his friends are dead, while he is not, is torturing the Elder Pyper just as much as it is a pain for him to be alive with the memories of what made them fight initially and through to the end: 'Answer me why we did it. Why we let ourselves be led to extermination? In the end, we were not led, we led ourselves. We claimed we would die for each other in battle. To fulfil that claim we marched into the battle that killed us all. That is not loyalty. That is not love. That is hate. Deepest hate. Hate for one's self. We wished ourselves to die and in doing so we let others die to satisfy our bloodlust. That lust we inherited' (p. 100). The lust is here portrayed not as a necessary fact of life for Ulster Protestants who protect their land, but as a negative and destructive force. It can possibly be linked to the project of colonialism, where the lust for new land made way for the dispossession and often annihilation of the people who already occupied the wanted land. Bloodlust, then, becomes a negative force that cannot bring proper fulfilment, as we clearly see with Pyper.

The sacrifice of blood, or the inherited lust to perform such an act, certainly does not seem to get an overwhelming support in this statement, and as Ulrich Schneider points out, it is 'surely not an excessively sympathetic portrait of loyalism.'⁹⁷ It certainly portrays war as a useless waste of lives whatever the grand cause and works to put emphasis on the darker, vengeful and hateful sides of the Ulster Protestant consciousness, but even more the view of Pyper here guides us towards the eight men's final reason for fighting a war they eventually came to detest, namely that their relationship that final day overcame the burden of their past and its mythologies.

The usefulness and significance of martyrdom or blood sacrifice in the name of nation, country, community or tribe seems shattered and highly questionable as the men are disgusted with the whole idea and horrible implications of war, and the ancient and classical notion of heroic sacrifice for one's country, the notion of 'dulce et decorum est pro patria mori'⁹⁸ seems equally shattered, but the Elder Pyper is still marked by his

⁹⁷ Ulrik Schneider: 'Staging History in Contemporary Anglo-Irish Drama: Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness', in Geert Lernout (ed): *The Crows Behind the Plough* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), p. 96.

⁹⁸ Famously used by British poet and World War I soldier Wilfred Owen (1893 – 1918) in his poem *Dulce Et Decorum Est*, the line is taken from Horace, meaning 'it is sweet and honourable to die for one's

ancestral past as he, prior to this, contradicts his own words by hailing his comrades as heroes and professing to continue their involvement in the making of history: 'I at least continued their work in this province. The freedom of faith they fought and died for would be maintained. 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' (p. 98).

The definition of homeland is especially crucial here, as Pyper's words disclose the problem of settler colonies and their claim to the land they occupied as part of colonisation. It is highly questionable whether the Ulster Protestants can be labelled settlers several centuries after the original occupation and/or dispossession of land took place, and the occupants don't really have anywhere else to go after so many centuries. As Liam O'Dowd points out, 'The "colonizers", it can be argued, are now "native" because they have occupied the land for so long and anyway the "natives" who would overthrow them would merely colonize them in return if they succeeded.'⁹⁹ Importantly, the bond with the ancestral past is maintained through an insistence on Britishness as opposed to Irishness, and the threat of reverse colonisation, so to speak, is used as yet another argument in favour of continued relations with Britain.

Through this, the otherness represented by the native Irish Catholics is maintained and their struggle for independence is still seen as a major threat to Ulster-British identity. Downplaying any positive Irish role in British life, then, remains the norm. It is, for instance, obvious here that Pyper is completely ignorant of the fact that thousands of Irish Catholics who joined the British Army also perished at the Somme and in other battles of the war. Coincidentally, the predominantly Catholic 16th Division fought next to the 36th Ulster Division at the Somme and likewise suffered horribly heavy losses, but this fact is largely ignored by Ulster Protestants, who benefited from the sympathy offered to them by the British public after the Somme tragedy.¹⁰⁰ That being said, the contribution of the many thousands of Irish Catholics who fought and died in World War I has, until quite recently, largely been equally ignored by their own community. (It

country'. For poem, see Wilfred Owen: *The Complete Poems and Fragments*, ed. Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), p. 140.

⁹⁹ Liam O'Dowd in his new 1990 introduction to Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁰ See Pamela Clayton: *Enemies and Passing Friends: Settler Ideologies in Twentieth Century Ulster* (London: Pluto Press, 1996).

is therefore likely that Irish audiences, north or south of the border, could still be equally ignorant of the Catholic war sacrifice).

It seems that Pyper's problematic relationship with himself, his past and his community has forced him in some way to see the war as a 'necessary stage in the process of history,'¹⁰¹ and that he has come to accept his tribe's demands. However, that the ghosts of his dead friends appear together with the ghost of his younger self, the Younger Pyper, signifies a detachment from his own self that is closely linked to his past experiences. No resolution to this detachment will appear until the final part, but in the middle parts – 'Initiation' and 'Pairing' - the initial sacrificial, tribal reason for entering the trenches of the Somme is gradually changed into a shape of personalised private reasons to fight and die because there is in the end no other way out. As the ghosts dance back into the story of their deaths, the Younger Pyper joins them, and the memory of the past can begin to assemble into a story of the survivor as much as the dead.

What is immediately striking about the play is that *Observe the Sons of Ulster* is a most masculine play in that there are no women present, nor is the entity of the family. It is noteworthy that the men always refer to women in general through using pejorative terms, and this is especially evident in the second act after they first meet at the barracks, when Moore ends up calling his own grandmother 'a stupid old bitch and an old rip' (p.114). Millen and Moore also enter the scene speaking of sexual experiences:

Millen: You never laid a hand on her.

Moore: Think what you like.

Millen: You wouldn't know where to put it if I wasn't there to tell you. (p. 107)

The phallic overtones are obvious, and the short dialogue is an early indication of the exploration of male sexuality that is to come stronger later in the play. Instead of soldiers talking about women and sex (as one would probably expect from soldiers isolated from the other sex for long periods), we are presented with homoeroticism and homosexuality in overt or covert shape as the men form closely knit friendships in a hostile environment of war. Violence and war are, of course, traditionally male, aggressive ways of attempted problem-solving that are responsible for making the kind of history that continues to repeat itself in a vicious pattern of violent, meaningless out-

¹⁰¹ Ulrik Schneider: 'Staging History in Contemporary Anglo-Irish Drama: Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness', p. 94.

bursts. Thus war with its implied masculinity has strong, powerful and ever-lasting impact on the making of factual history as well as myth. One should not forget that European colonialism was such a large-scale (male) expansionist project on the world that by 1914 'Europe held a grand total of roughly 85 per cent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths.'¹⁰²

It is therefore significant in the context of the play that the main protagonist of the eight soldiers is Kenneth Pyper, an artist and homosexual who has turned against his tribe's set values through his own choice of being different, a choice as important as his being defined as an outsider by his own kind. Pyper is very much a man dispossessed and marked by his own community, and his outside perspective is parallel to that of McGuinness himself, who has taken the outsider perspective in writing a play about the other side, he being an Ulster Catholic writing about Ulster Protestants. Note also that the first word in the play's title is *Observe*, which indicates that this is a play very much about watching something or someone from an outside perspective.

By using Pyper as the medium, so to speak, the author has also constructed a parallel between the opposing communities in Northern Ireland who both would, undoubtedly, view a homosexual as something other, something hovering on the extreme border of the community's acceptable norms. (In the otherwise uncompromising atmosphere of Northern Ireland, at least here is an aspect of life that both communities generally have the same, however wrong and prejudiced, attitude against.) Homosexuality is not, however, a preoccupation in the play; this is not a play about homosexuality, rather homosexuality is used as a device to draw the contours of tribalism and the public sphere up against the needs of the individual. The tension created between the will to be part of a tribe and the will to be individual and maintain a private sphere, is a central theme in the play, and the otherness of homosexuality stresses this tension.

According to Eamonn Jordan, 'the logic of the tribe induces almost a rigid mask, that attempts to dismiss identity and personality outside the fixed constraints. The tribal mask represents a closed consciousness.'¹⁰³ It is this tribal mask that the outsider Pyper struggles against in the course of the play through his homosexual consciousness, his artistic interests and his ambivalent sense of duty towards his tribe. The dramatic structure works to highlight this central theme of the tensions between inherited traditions

¹⁰² See Edward W. Said: *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 6, and *Orientalism*, p. 123.

¹⁰³ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 31.

and individual freedom, and implicit in this is the colonial reality of Ireland and Ulster. In particular, this is evident in Pyper's (as well as the other men's) struggle with ambivalence and inherent uncertainty of legitimacy, identity and belonging.

In this second part of the play, Pyper also establishes himself as a defiant mocker who right from the beginning thrives as the odd man out among the eight men meeting up in the makeshift barracks to prepare for a major war effort. Whereas the seven others unabashedly confess to being involved some way or another in anti-nationalist campaigns – with some belonging to Carson's men (Millen, Moore and Craig) and others working in the overwhelmingly Protestant-dominated Belfast shipyards (McIlwaine and Anderson) – Pyper immediately stands out when informing the others of his foreign experience and seemingly ignorant stance concerning the demands of his tribe. It works to differentiate Pyper from the others and confirm him in his status as outsider when the others immediately categorise him as 'rare', a 'milksop' and belonging to 'the ones who sign up not to come back' (p. 135).

The homosexual reference implicit in labelling him 'rare' and Pyper's own quaint and intentional obsession with his 'remarkable fair skin' (p.134), demonstrate the tension present in him between his chosen outsider status and the otherness defined in him by his tribe. Pyper is just as marked by his ancestral roots as the others. Though he has tried to distance himself from those roots by being an artist, living in Paris, he discovered he could not create what he had envisioned because 'I couldn't look at my life's work, for when I saw my hands working they were not mine but the hands of my ancestors, interfering, and I could not be rid of that interference. I could not create. I could only preserve. Preserve my flesh and blood, what I'd seen, what I'd learned. It wasn't enough. I was contaminated' (p. 163).

Joining the army, where Craig quite correctly points out that there is 'no place for rareness' (p. 106), seems not to be the most obvious choice for Pyper, who initially manages to alienate the other men by his insistence that they are not going to survive because 'we're the scum of it [the British Army]. We go first' (p. 135). These ominous words are obviously also suggesting the Ulster Protestants' precarious and ambivalent position within the British Empire and the British nation. The suggestion that they are nothing but 'scum' is probably meant to emphasise the fact that Ulster Protestants are largely seen as being Irish by people from the British mainland and (what was) the British Empire, and that in British politics Ulster was and is something of a 'problem' to the former colonial power.

The possibility of being ignored, labelled as Irish or regarded as a 'problem' by the British is something that cannot be accepted by the other men in the group, as this would of course undermine their whole identity. Pyper is subsequently labelled by Moore and the others as a maniac and Craig is the only one taking interest in the strangeness, joining Pyper in a symbolic chant as Pyper deliberately slits his hand: 'Red hand. Red sky. Ulster. Ulster' (p. 137). The symbolism of blood sacrifice present in the Northern Irish Protestant consciousness is evidently a matter Pyper struggles to come to terms with in a satisfactory manner in light of his recent flight to France and attempted escape from tribal demands, and subsequent return to the conformity and unity of the national armed forces.

His story of how he married a 'Papist whore' (p. 125), however, is testimony to Pyper's involvement in anti-Catholic activities as he claims to have married her 'to make an honest Protestant out of her' (p. 126). Converting the 'Papist' seems to be a solution to the 'Catholic problem', and it certainly is one way of continuing to pursue a colonial situation in Ireland, though perhaps not very feasible. Pyper's words make evidently clear that religion is (perhaps) the most important source of the Irish troubles.¹⁰⁴ This story also sparks one of the comic moments in the play when Pyper reveals that she had three legs and Moore links this to a supposedly truthful rumour he's heard before, 'but only in relation to nuns' (p. 127). However, Pyper's grotesque emphasis on killing the woman by cutting off the extra leg ruins the moment and confirms to the others that he is to be avoided. The question has to be raised whether Pyper's involvement in such activities is mere storytelling and thereby fictitious, because the story of the French woman is definitively too fantastic to be wholly true.

One should not forget that in terms of sexuality and gender, the third leg that was supposedly sawn off the poor woman effectively represents a penis. The implication of this phallic downfall is, of course, that the masculine stance is weakened, which again works to promote the homosexual (and thus unmanly) presence in the play. In Pyper's favour, though, the story seems not to be completely untrue either, as he eventually in

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, the Opsahl Commission's report on Northern Ireland, *A Citizen's Inquiry*, ed. Andy Pollak (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993). Marianne Elliott, a member of this commission, stated that 'this fear of Catholicism, not simply as a religion but as a powerful political system, exists at every level of the Protestant community... it is the main defining element of their Britishness and their perceived link with a Protestant power.' Quoted in James Loughlin: *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, pp. 216 – 217.

the fourth act confesses to Craig that she killed herself because 'she was stupid enough to believe that I was all she had to live for' (p. 163). It is impossible to determine what the full truth behind the story is, since Pyper does not tell all and certainly changes a few details here and there to fit the occasion. At any rate, verbally he is a very active man.

Part three is the most dramatically experimental of the four parts with its simultaneous dialogues in four different locations between the men now paired. There has been a gap in time between part two and three as the men we now meet are back in Ulster on leave after experiencing their first five months of fighting in the trenches of France. The men are coupled in the pairs lined out above, and instead of going back to their families, they have returned in pairs to places of importance to them both personally and in relation to the public myths surrounding them. Moreover, we learn thoroughly of their disillusionment with, and distaste for, the ongoing war.

Craig and Pyper have returned to Boa Island in Lough Erne, where we learn that Craig saved Pyper's life during battle and thus forced Pyper to confront his past. The stone carvings on the island remind Pyper of his unsuccessful flight to Paris and his rebellion against his ancestors, who wanted him to conform to their standards. As a sculptor, he carved stones himself when he tried to find himself as an artist. The sculpting Pyper did, therefore, can be seen as a parallel to the 'setting in stone' of his still unfixed identity that the Protestant community in Ulster attempted to impose on him. Importantly, therefore, the carvings makes him realise that 'To win their [his ancestors'] respect would be my sole act of revenge, 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' (p. 164). This is evidently a realisation that brings Pyper closer to the roots he earlier wanted to deny. The signs are also there that he comes out as a homosexual on the island, as the language the two men use is intimate, like that of two newly fledged lovers: 'Craig: (...) But when you talk to me, you see me. Eyes, hands. Not carving. Just seeing. And I didn't save you that day. I saw you. And from what I saw I knew I'm not like you. I am you' (p. 164).

It is also noticeable that the two men use their first names when addressing each other, something that is rarely done by any of the other pairs. Millen and Moore have seen the signs as well when they in the same act mention the incident when Craig saved Pyper's life as if it was erotic: 'I saw Craig, what he did. He blew his own breath into

Pyper's mouth. It was a kiss' (p. 159).¹⁰⁵ Crawford has followed Roulston to the Protestant church he grew up in, and instigates a fight with Roulston that forces the preacher to accept his humanity through his use of violence in an old church. The fight connects violence and religion, two aspects of the Ulster Protestant mentality that are united in the belief that their people are God's chosen ones and that blood sacrifice in the name of their God can save them from the enemy (which usually means Irish Catholics who refuse to accept colonisation). As Loughlin points out, there was a sense of divine mission and special providence in both British and Ulster soldiers, but for the Ulstermen this was 'much more explicitly subscribed to, investing their attitude to the war with the dimensions of a jihad. Their particular construction of the British national myth was one in which the Deity actively intervened on behalf of the Ulster Protestants, a "chosen people".'¹⁰⁶

Violence and religion usually go hand in hand wherever there is armed conflict, and this is certainly true of Ulster. The fight between Roulston and Crawford therefore mirrors the situation in Ulster past and present. McIlwaine and Anderson play their part in this too, as they arrange their own march for Ulster, banging a lambege drum and cursing the war and the Papists in an effort to keep their spirits up. Their chant is solely influenced by their background as colonial representatives in Ireland and emphasises the belief in their legitimate and much fought for presence there. The banging of the drum, however, may well be seen as the two men's desperate effort to drown the sounds of war and their literally attempting to beat off the experienced fears and obvious threats present to them in battle. The last couple, Millen and Moore, struggle even harder to cope with the terrifying realities encountered in France. It is Moore who is paralysed by fear and cringes at the thought of having to cross the suspended rope bridge that they have returned to. Millen manages to persuade his friend to cross the bridge after all, and by doing so he helps Moore to regain his lost nerve and self-confidence.

Through the four scenes, it emerges that the friendships these men feel toward each other have replaced their earlier agenda, and that the interpersonal relationships now are

¹⁰⁵ Few critics have paid much attention to this sexual aspect of the play, as Anthony Roche points out in his book *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), p. 271. Interestingly, he also says that 'what was more apparent to me in Michael Attenborough's production of the play at the Hampstead Theatre Club in London in 1986 was that Pyper and Craig made love on the island (...)' (p. 272).

¹⁰⁶ James Loughlin: *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, p. 79.

more important factors in their reasons for fighting a war. It is the war that now is described as madness, and several of the men question their own sanity. They obviously need their friends to validate their reasons for fighting in the name of the community, and the importance of friendships seems to surpass the need to maintain public myths.

The occurrences of the experimental split dialogues are very important in this respect, as they are metaphors for the chaos and irregularity experienced in war, as well as a means of describing how history doesn't happen in any one single linear movement, as different parts of history takes place at the same time, creating micro histories with their individual linearities that then can be assessed and placed in larger historical context. The chaos and multitude of demands that the tribe imposes on the individual also resist any shape of linearity, easily leading to confusion and bewilderment. Thus the eight men use their close friendships to resolve their confusions and come to terms with an unbearable situation.

The final part, 'Bonding', takes place at the battlefield as the men await orders for the Battle of the Somme to begin, and emphasises 'the complexity of the bonding which has led these men to the Somme, and the complexity which is Ulster.'¹⁰⁷ In this fourth act, it is this battle that the eight men re-enact at the Somme battlefield shortly before the real fighting is about to start, as they stage a mock Battle of the Boyne (referred to as the Battle of Scarva in the play because that is where the actual re-enactment takes place every July in Ulster) with two men as horses, two men as kings and one man as narrator of the events. The outcome of the battle is an historical fact, and narrator Anderson points out that 'you know the result, keep to the result' (p.182) as the men fool about, being reassured and calmed by what they know to be fact on a decisive day of their lives.

Superstition and fate loom over the men; it is July 1st and the promise looks good for them in light of the events of the 1690 battle as long as they believe history will repeat itself. It is here that the coincidence in dates between July 1st at the Boyne and the Somme becomes crucial. It is therefore a shock and moment of instant depression when Pyper, who is acting as victorious King Billy's white horse, trips and falls. It is surely a bad omen for the already disillusioned men that their re-enactment of historical events goes, in their eyes, terribly wrong as the result is altered and the fall of the now mythical

¹⁰⁷ Helen Lojek: 'Myth and Bonding in Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*', in *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* (Vol. 14, No. 1, July 1988), p. 51.

horse is turned into an omen of death instead of victory and the promise of a longer life. To the doomed men, the mythology of their ancestral past has been a source of inspiration, and indeed justification, as they prepare to fight their enemy at a foreign battlefield.

One might also find it useful to keep in mind that the Battle of the Somme took place only some two months after the Easter Rising, which is firmly established as one of the triumphant historical and mythical moments of the Irish nationalists. The Easter Rising was a historical moment that the poet W. B. Yeats was to describe most famously as a ‘terrible beauty’,¹⁰⁸ a term that could equally be said to describe equally accurately the deaths of thousands of Ulster Protestants at the Somme. In the play, the link between Catholic insurgence and anti-colonialism on the one hand and Protestant loyalty to the colonial power on the other is maintained through the alignment of two important historical events. As pointed out, the deaths of the Ulstermen quickly became mythologised by their community, and to such an extent that ‘unlike Britain, where the war experience began to be critically assessed in the early 1920s, it was fifty years before any sustained assessment took place in Ulster.’¹⁰⁹ This is of course closely linked to the (Ulster Protestant) definition of the Ulster Protestant nation as an integral part of the British nation, both past and present. Timothy Brennan’s thoughts on nation and nationhood seem particularly relevant to this situation: ‘As for the “nation”, it is both historically determined and general. As a term, it refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the “*natio*” – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging. The distinction is often obscured by nationalists who seek to place their own country in an “immemorial past” where its arbitrariness cannot be questioned.’¹¹⁰

The eight Ulstermen are responsible for a little bit of myth revision and mockery in their version of the Easter Rising and how Pearse ended up being shot not by the British but by his own mother. The myth of Mother Ireland, that is (or at least was at the time) so important to the nationalist side is completely subverted by the alteration of historical facts. Pearse is shot by a mother who comments ‘That’ll learn him, the cheeky pup.

¹⁰⁸ W. B. Yeats: ‘Easter 1916’ in A. Norman Jeffares (ed): *Yeats’s Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 287.

¹⁰⁹ James Loughlin: *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, p. 84.

¹¹⁰ Timothy Brennan: ‘The National Longing for Form’ in Homi K. Bhabha (ed): *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 45.

Going about robbing post offices. Honest to God, I'm affronted' (p. 175). Pearse's last poem, written shortly before his execution, is actually entitled 'A Mother Speaks', and so a curious link between that poem's title and the Ulstermen's subversion of facts emerges. The Mother Ireland who supposedly summons her sons to fight for her four green fields, is replaced with not such a thankful or appreciative mother. The subversion of this nationalistic myth is followed by a familiar colonial discourse technique that, as discussed briefly in the first chapter, involves feminising the colonised. McIlwaine ends his Pearse story in the coloniser's way by stating that 'Fenians can't fight. Not unless they're in a post office or a bakery or a woman's clothes shop. Disgrace to their sex, the whole bastard lot of them, I say' (p. 175).

It is obvious that the myths and history of the enemy side aren't sacred to the Ulstermen and can therefore be altered or completely silenced to suit their and their tribes' needs to feel superior. Also, the Germans have replaced the Catholic tribe and now serve as enemy, but in light of the eight men's alignment of the Boyne and the Somme, both enemies are defined as the Other, and are good enough to fight against in the name of freedom and Ulster and certainly Britain. The close ties with Britain meant that loyalty was unquestionable, because for the Ulster Protestant community 'whose historic role was that of holding Ulster for the English/British State, their support for the war effort once the Home Rule issue had been dealt with – and even then not to their satisfaction – could confidently assumed.'¹¹¹

The power of the past and its victories over the enemy is particularly closely linked with the notion of war sacrifice for the sake of one's nation, tribe or community. The imminent sacrifice of their own blood has the potential to give the eight men mythical status, though their individual sacrifices at the Somme will not be remembered or re-enacted by their tribe the same way as the Boyne. They will be yet more names added to a long list of thousands of other annihilated men in the Ulster Division, but they will have done what they deem their important share for their country and people.

The men don't want to be where they are any more than they wanted to go back while on leave, but despite sensing their imminent deaths, they are facing their uncertain future through a bonding that relies mostly on personal relationships, slightly on cultural conventions and hardly at all on military influence. The eight men have formed their

¹¹¹ James Loughlin: *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, p. 76.

own little community through their support for each other and their knowledge of what war really is about.

As pointed out earlier, myths ultimately fail as the only encouragement and cannot function alone as the men's only motivation. The initial reasons for joining the army included such impulses as expression of love for Ulster, disdain for Irish nationalism, the importance of unity with Britain and indeed the possibility of blood sacrifice in the name of their tribe. All have proved to be unconvincing reasons to die for, but as the men contemplate their fate on the morning of battle, they still try to believe that their sacrifice will be Ulster's gain through singing Protestant hymns, 'Fare thee well, Enniskillen', playing football and then re-enacting the mock Battle of Scarva.

The failed battle deprives them of consolation and triggers a serious bout of depression, leaving all men except Pyper to believe that they are in fact going to die. Pyper now surprisingly emerges as the one trying to encourage the others through his juxtaposition of the river Somme with the rivers of Ulster: 'We're not in France. We're home. We're on our own territory. We're fighting for home. This river is ours. This land's ours. We've come home' (p. 188). This is to no avail, though, as the men have accepted their fate and spend their last moments before battle consolidated through the exchange of Orange sashes and singing more hymns.

Pyper is again in the role as orator, this time delivering a sermon-like speech that invokes everything that the tribe embraces and cherishes: '(...) If you are a just and merciful God, show your mercy this day. Save us. Save our country. Destroy our enemies at home and on this field of battle. Let this day at the Somme be as glorious in the memory of Ulster as that day at the Boyne, when you scattered our enemies. Lead us back from this exile. (...) Observe the sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme. I love my Ulster. Ulster. Ulster. Ulster. Ulster' (p. 196). The role of religion and the belief in a divine mission, as mentioned earlier, is especially prominent at this moment in the play, and these men's final chant reflects and verifies these words from the official history of the World War I:

'In no formation was religious feeling deeper than in the Ulster Division, all ranks felt that they were engaged in a Holy War under Divine guidance and protection, and the remembrance that that day was the anniversary of the battle of the Boyne filled every Ulsterman's heart with a certainty of victory.'¹¹²

¹¹² From the *Official History of the War*, quoted in James Loughlin: *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, p. 83.

The final chant is hypnotising and a tribal battle cry in which the seven men disappear and the Elder and Younger Pyper again meet and exchange a chanting, loyalist dialogue before embracing each other and dancing as the curtain falls on the sons of Ulster. So the past and the present are joined together, and the dance suggests that the Elder Pyper has accepted his younger self after years of confusion and struggle. However, the final stages of the play also indicate that Pyper has gone through a 'slow and final submission to the will and imperatives of the tribe,'¹¹³ and that he has accepted his place in the community and stopped fighting it by imposing his otherness on it. In the end, the play emerges as a play about the bonds that tie a community to certain fixed values as much as a play about the bonds of friendship between men in a difficult situation, as bonding is a term that can be associated with both limitation and unity alike. *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* is nevertheless a tragic drama. Describing the horrors of war, sacrifice, bloodshed, guilt and remembrance, it is a critique of all that unnecessary death and suffering humans inflict on each other over and over again to no discernible gain.

After the end of the war, the Home Rule Bill was finally implemented. After much campaigning, Ulster Protestants gained the right for six Ulster counties to stay in a union with Britain only after Irish nationalists' hard military struggle to gain independence for the entire island. The consequences of this partition of Ireland into Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in 1922, and what can be described as a continued colonisation of Northern Ireland, will be scrutinised further in the next two chapters, when the focus is shifted back to the Irish Catholic population (in Ulster). As will be evident, the complex situation that is Ireland involves yet more violence and trauma, much of which can be attributed to colonialism and colonisation.

¹¹³ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 31.

Dolly West's Kitchen

With *Dolly West's Kitchen* (1999),¹¹⁴ Frank McGuinness has created a powerful comic and at times tragic drama that, through its setting in McGuinness's own hometown of Buncrana, County Donegal, during World War II, scrutinises the entity of the family, the institution of marriage, religion, sexuality, emigration, the effects of war, and nationalism in the newly independent state of Ireland. It is, in other words, a play that is abundant in themes and subjects, though it is so without being incoherent, incomplete or confusing. It is an achievement by McGuinness that he has managed to put together such a complex yet easily comprehensible array of themes that stir audiences and create room for discussions that confront Ireland's past, and in particular Ireland's attitudes to World War II at a time when the Irish state was trying to define itself.

The setting in time is of course no coincidence, as the period of world war from 1939 – 1945 generally is known as 'The Emergency' in Irish history, and it is a period that in Ireland still can be very uncomfortable and embarrassing to discuss in light of the turmoil of ambivalent attitudes to the British, the Allies and Hitler's Nazi Germany that existed in the self-confessed neutral and independent Ireland. There are obviously post-colonial implications to this story of a newly independent country caught in the middle of a world war where the former coloniser is heavily involved. As we shall see the anti-colonial forces in Irish society at the time are evident throughout the play, particularly in relation to the consolidation of the independent nation, its culture and definition(s) of Irishness, as well as the relationship with the former coloniser. As Frantz Fanon puts it, a national culture 'is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.'¹¹⁵ In *Dolly West's Kitchen*, the importance of nationalism for the nation-building (or re-building) is central, and the results of decolonisation emerge through the experiences of the characters portrayed in the play.

¹¹⁴ All quotes and references to the play are from Frank McGuinness: *Dolly West's Kitchen* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999).

¹¹⁵ Frantz Fanon quoted in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds): *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, p. 151.

Neutrality and the difficulties, if not impossibilities, involved in advocating it, are perhaps the main obsessions of the play through its focus on an Irish family torn between love and hatred for each other, their country, the nations at war around them and the people they meet as a result of this inescapable situation cast upon them, destined to bring change with it for all involved. As Ireland had recently gained independence, and had recently established its own constitution, official neutrality was generally welcomed and seen as ‘a final confirmation of a nationality.’¹¹⁶ It was, however an ambivalent neutrality, as many people thought it especially pleasing that Britain as a result was cut off from using Irish ports and air space, and it is clear that many silently gloated whenever Hitler’s armies made advances that were a drawback to the British. Many did so, though, without necessarily hoping for a German victory, but the years of being subjected to British rule made confusion and ambivalence rife.

As the island of Ireland was divided in the north, and the British were seriously impaired by the lack of access to Irish territory, there was at one point a threat of yet another British invasion looming over Ireland, and so much so that ‘the Irish army was put into a state of alert and troops were moved from Athlone to the border with Northern Ireland.’¹¹⁷ That the play is set in Buncrana, only miles away from the very same border, is certainly no coincidence, and together with the historical background the setting confirms and makes real the gravity of the impact Irish neutrality had on the war and in particular the already fragile British-Irish relationship.¹¹⁸

The Irish West family is at the centre of the play, and their lives are evidence of the effect the outbreak of war has on ordinary people. Because this is an ordinary, ‘normal’ family whose lives are not exceptional in any particular way, and because McGuinness has chosen to focus on ordinary people, the appeal of the play is also universal to the

¹¹⁶ Robert Kee: *Ireland – A History* (London: Abacus, rev. ed. 1995), p. 219.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ The perhaps most striking evidence of how thorough the Irish government was in maintaining political neutrality, came in 1945 when de Valera offered his condolences on the death of Hitler to the German ambassador in Dublin. More recent studies, however, have revealed that Ireland was more positive towards the Allied forces than those of the Germans, and the neutrality policy was not as rigorous as previously suggested. One study that is particularly good for this purpose is Joseph T. Carroll: *Ireland in the War Years 1939 – 1945* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1975). Bernard Share: *The Emergency: Neutral Ireland, 1939 – 45* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978) and Tony Gray: *The Lost Years: The Emergency in Ireland 1939 – 45* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1997) are more memoir-based and anecdotal, but they also offer a good insight into the ambiguous realities of Irish neutrality.

effect of uniting the audience in a sense of identification with, and recognition of, the problems the play's family face in the shadow of a war. They are all affected by the war, and Rima, the sole head of the family, has a lot to watch over as her three grown children are gathered in the family home. Dolly, the second child, reluctantly returned to Ireland from Italy when Mussolini came to power, leaving her flourishing restaurant behind, while Esther, the eldest daughter, is married to Ned, who cannot afford to buy a house of their own because he is a low-paid sergeant in the neutral Irish army. He is under the command of the higher ranked Justin West, the youngest and most fiercely nationalistic of the siblings.

There is no father present; he died shortly after Justin's birth, but even before that he was an absent father figure who left his wife and children so as to live his own kind of life away from his responsibilities, eventually coming home only to die. There is a sense here that this absence of the father, both before and after his death, corresponds well to the process of decolonisation in Ireland. The case of the absent father suggests an absence of patriarchy within the confines of the family, and though it does not include a similar absence in public life, where patriarchy remains strong and present, the absence in the private sphere could be seen as a parallel to the independence gained by Ireland after the coloniser withdrew and the legacy of colonialism remained. The absence of patriarchy within the family suggests the immediate absence of colonisation if one sees the relationship between patriarchy and colonisation as inseparable.

The idea of a relationship between patriarchy and colonialism brings us back to the idea of 'double colonisation' as discussed previously in the chapter on *Mary and Lizzie*, though it seems that the development in historic time in the century separating the setting of these two plays is such that in the West family they are no longer under the direct influence of patriarchal or colonial forces. The indirect influence remains, however, and it is still strong and substantial. The West family is one of long-term internal matriarchy, with Rima West as the decision-maker and head of the family, but they are still under the influence of (Irish) patriarchy (and the effects of colonisation).

Family and war are intertwined aspects of the play, both in the sense that the Wests, like most families, have unresolved conflicts within the confines of their family that need to be solved, and in the sense that they are faced with the actual forces of war through the contact with British and Allied troops stationed across the border that they live in the immediate vicinity of. The possible consequences of Ireland's neutrality are immediately made clear in the play through the comment Esther makes on the situation:

‘Our beloved leader, De Valera, has warned this part of the country they might invade us for our ports, coming at us from all sides, the English, the Germans and the Yanks’ (p. 5). The threat of being invaded again is of course a major challenge to the confidence of the people and their recently reclaimed country. It certainly poses a danger to the anti-colonial struggle of the past, and especially so in a country like Ireland, where the struggle to reclaim land and history was so intrinsic to the national consciousness: ‘The search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history, for a new pantheon of heroes and (occasionally) heroines, myths, and religions – these too are made possible by a sense of the land reappropriated by its people.’¹¹⁹ The dismaying prospect of possibly losing control over their own future once again after experiencing some two decades of independence is naturally rather dismaying, so the reactions of the West family are understandable.

However, Esther also makes rather obvious her share in the looming conflict within the confines of their family when she talks of her army husband’s situation in a way that is very revealing of the state of their clearly troubled marriage: ‘An excellent man. An excellent soldier. Defending Ireland from invasion, a neutral man in a neutral army protecting his neutral wife’ (p. 4). There is obviously an effort on the part of McGuinness to create a parallel between the private and public sphere of these people’s lives, and to show that they are inevitably intertwined and mirror each other. As the play develops, the parallel becomes more obvious and the actual political part of the conflict (the world war) becomes a force of exposure, confrontation and even resolution of the private conflicts each of the Wests are faced with. On a basic level, the problems that the family members face in their relationships with each other are more or less the same as those facing Ireland in the situation of world war. Neither can be neutral, they have to face realities that include failing and troubled relationships, the necessity of making crucial decisions and the consequences of these actions.

The family is faced with invasion from the onset, though it is not literally a military one as feared. Rather, three people who all formally represent the Allied side in the war invade the West household and subsequently all aspects of their lives. Justin is taken aback by finding three Allied soldiers in the kitchen, and his somewhat naively witty comment is a clear sign not only of his fear of invasion, but also of the implications the interaction will have for the family and their supposed neutrality: ‘What are you doing

¹¹⁹ Edward W. Said: *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 273.

here – has the invasion begun?’ (p. 28). The outside world that the Irish tried to avoid by claiming political neutrality from 1939 – 1945 invades the West family in a manner that prevents them from simply viewing the raging war as something in the distance, something that does not concern them directly or acutely, or in a way that forces them to take sides and abolish their neutrality.

The conflicting feelings towards the Allied are made especially poignant by the fact that two of the soldiers are Americans while the third is British. Irish attitudes toward the Americans were naturally positive. After all, America was the country to which the largest number of Irish emigrants went to, and it was the land of great opportunity and success. The negative attitudes towards the British are therefore matched, and in this case, outweighed, by the American presence. The Allied presence in the West household, therefore, could also be seen to represent the reality of Irish neutrality, which was (as mentioned on p. 72) an official policy that unofficially, discreetly and indirectly was more inclined to support the Allied over the Axis nations.

The invasion (or rather arrival), represented by two American soldiers and their British liaison officer, Alec Redding (who is Dolly’s former lover and old friend of the West family), forces the family members to question their lives, morals, values and relationships in a way that makes neutrality appear foolish and inadequate, troublesome and even damaging. Their family conflicts become a metaphor for Ireland’s conflicts, and neutrality becomes an impossibility that only stresses the need for engagement instead of a refusal to take sides. Initially, the focus is on the troubled relations with Britain after the partition of the island in 1922 and the intensely nationalistic refusal in (some circles of) Irish society to accept this separation. Justin West is fiercely opposed to the British as a result of partition, and the prospect of welcoming Alec Redding into the house is to him inconceivable:

Justin: No man will be welcome here wearing the uniform of the British army. If you all want to meet, take the train to Derry. Meet him across the border in the so-called Northern Ireland.

Dolly: So you’re now decreeing who sits in this kitchen?

Justin: 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. (pp. 9 – 10)

Justin’s words here echo those of Fanon, when he claimed, quite accurately, that ‘National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced,

decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon.’¹²⁰ For Justin, the decolonisation of Ireland is not complete until Northern Ireland again is part of the Irish state, and he is more than willing to use armed force and resistance similar to that of the War of Independence two decades previously to achieve his goal. Justin’s view is representative of that of many Irishmen at the time who found it difficult to swallow the partition of Ireland as lined out in the 1922 Treaty with Britain. Indeed, when Eamon de Valera and Fianna Fail came to power in 1932, it was the anti-Treaty people and losers of the civil war (1922 – 1923) that suddenly found themselves in charge, and their refusal to accept the partition became definite in the 1937 Constitution, with Article 2 stating that ‘The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas.’ Article 3 was no less explicit in its aspirations for a future united Ireland with a wording that certainly provoked Ulster Unionists: ‘*Pending* the re-integration of the national territory (...)’¹²¹ (my italics).

The inherent threat of war against Britain to regain the lost territory naturally created tensions between the two nations, and the massing of Allied troops in the North during much of the war, was probably a move that was supposed to protect the province against Hitler as well as any possibility of an Irish army invasion at a time when Britain was engaged in crucial military operations elsewhere. The notion of a British invasion of Ireland might seem rather unlikely, but as Joseph Carroll points out, British disappointment arising out of Irish neutrality threatened ‘at various critical times to lead to war between Britain and Ireland, strange as this may appear today.’¹²² Justin’s self-confident words are not just empty words that are evidence of nationalistic assertive-

¹²⁰ Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 27.

¹²¹ *Constitution of Ireland* (Dublin: Government Publications Office and Dundalgan Press, [1937] 1992), p. 4. Articles 2 and 3 were amended as part of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, and both are now considerably less provoking: ‘It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland (...) to be part of the Irish nation’ and ‘It is the firm will of the Irish nation (...) to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland (...) recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people (...)’ From *Constitution of Ireland*, July 1999 amendment slip (Dublin: Government Publications Office, 1999).

¹²² Joseph T. Carroll: *Ireland in the War Years*, p. 24. Carroll also notes on p. 26 that Winston Churchill in his war memoirs was still visibly angry at the Irish for refusing the British access to their ports: ‘A more feckless act can hardly be imagined – and at such a time. It is true that in the end we survived without the ports. It is also true that if we had not been able to do without them we should have retaken them by force (...)’

ness, they also have the potential to become reality, and that prospect is a confidence-boost for the youngest member of the West family. His outburst is of course also an attempt to assume (patriarchal) power in the decision-making in the house and turn himself into the man of the house, a position that is denied him because he is the youngest and because his mother is still strongly assuming her natural role of mother over her children. Justin's attempt to subdue the others only makes the women of the house defy him and his biased intolerance:

Justin: Are you going to defy me?

Dolly: Defy you? Who do you think you are, pup?

Justin: The man of this house who chooses not to let an enemy soldier into his house.

Esther: His house –

Justin: An Irishman who does not want the English anywhere.

Dolly: I didn't know you'd signed your house away, Mother.

Rima: I haven't. (p. 10)

It is obvious that Justin has no power in the house, which best explains why he has joined the army, where he has the rank of officer and obviously thrives on being able to, for once, give orders and, importantly, be listened to and obeyed. As Fanon points out, the 'militarization and the centralization of authority in a country automatically entail a resurgence of the authority of the father.'¹²³ There is also the aspect of liberating, so to speak, the North through his involvement in the army, and again this violent aspect of nationalism that is especially advocated by Fanon, seems to accurately describe Justin's conscious, though also unconscious, feelings on the subject. It is a chance of empowering himself in a way that can help him get rid of his inferiority complex: 'The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor. The symbols of social order – the police, the bugle-calls in the barracks, military parades and the waving flags – are at one and the same time inhibitory and stimulating: for they do not convey the message "Don't dare to budge"; rather, they cry out "Get ready to attack."' ¹²⁴

What Justin fails to acknowledge in his fiercely nationalistic attitudes is the fact that thousands of Irish men and women volunteered for the British Army during World War

¹²³ Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 141 – 142.

¹²⁴ Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 41.

II (like they did in World War I, as pointed out in chapter three) and thereby participated actively and substantially on the Allied side of the war.¹²⁵ Justin is not alone in disregarding this fact, however, as Irish attitudes toward the Irish who joined the British army have been troubled and marked by dissent on how to deal with their contribution to history ever since the two world wars. The colonial legacy of Ireland is clearly visible in the ambivalent and perplexed attitude that the Irish seem to struggle with when trying to decide on a way of coming to terms with and accepting Irish voluntary participation in the army of the former coloniser, even today.¹²⁶

In relation to Justin's failed attempts at assuming patriarchal power in the house, it is also significant that most of the play's action takes place in the kitchen, which traditionally is the domain of women and the arena where they are always in charge. The kitchen, then, is also a symbol of the matriarchal rule in the West house. As the only man of this house (apart from Ned, who has no power there because it is not his house), Justin stands little chance of making a mark being so thoroughly dominated by women ever since birth. However, he has the chance to prove himself a man through serving in the army, and proving himself in this way turns out to be another possible and more unconscious reason why he has signed up, as the suggestion that he is gay starts leaking out early on. Dolly makes the first suggestion, when she observes the change in him: 'What way is the army hardening Justin? What is he becoming? He was the gentlest boy. We were worried he was too soft' (p. 12).

Undisguised homosexuality soon enters the house through Marco, one of the American soldiers that Rima brings back from town. Marco is an outspoken homosexual who confesses to bringing 'one taffeta dress and a change of high heels' (p. 25) in his bag. He is provocatively open about his sexuality, so much so that Esther comments 'They let a man like you into the US army?' (p. 25), which stresses the discrimination and stigma attached to homosexual men's ability to fight in a situation of war (which was also an important point made in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*).

¹²⁵ Joseph Carroll puts the number of Irish people serving in the British Army during World War II at a considerable 60.000 (see pp. 108 – 109).

¹²⁶ The strict censorship during the war clearly did not help any official acknowledgement of Irishmen in the British forces, as the censors suppressed 'any news item or even death notice which revealed the presence of Irishmen in the British forces.' See *Ibid.*, p. 162. The silence has continued to this day, with the commemorations of Irish deaths in the world wars still being the source of public dissent.

Society's prejudiced image of homosexuals as weak and somehow less manly than other men is stressed by McGuinness, and it is a subject he has strong opinions on himself: 'I hate the coyness, the lack of honesty, the misrepresentation. It is as if a gay man is not capable of courage, which is wrong. A gay man has to always prove himself.'¹²⁷ Marco's words are similar when he describes his reasons for fighting: 'I will be able to look into the face of every man who fights beside me, and I will be able to say that in this war we fought on the same side against Hitler' (p. 60). Joining the army at a time of war would perhaps qualify as the ultimate test of manhood, even though being openly homosexual would not normally be socially (or militarily) acceptable. Marco is not a man to be ignored, however, and he confronts the attitudes of the others constantly and repeatedly. He does not hide, and it is very noticeable how Justin cannot take his eyes off Marco once they have been introduced to each other (see stage directions, p. 28).

Homosexuality turns out to be no more acceptable after the colonial period than it was before colonisation occurred because it was never legitimised by either power. The consolidation of the Irish nation in the decades following the 1920s (excluding the North), then, did nothing to integrate this and other marginalised groups of people into society. The national resistance and subsequent nation-building based itself on a broad platform to secure the necessary support: 'Although the myth of the nation might function as a valuable resource in uniting a people in opposition to colonialism, it often does so by ignoring the diversity of those individuals it seeks to homogenise – created out of gender, racial, religious and cultural differences.'¹²⁸

As the nation of Ireland settled into the new era, homosexuality continued to be banned (it was finally decriminalised as late as in 1993) as before because Ireland kept the two Acts prohibiting homosexual conduct imposed by the British, and anyone with a sexuality that did not fit into the standard 'family picture' still faced hard times. Ania Loomba has noted that when 'nationalist thought becomes enshrined as the official dogma of the postcolonial State, its exclusions are enacted through the legal and educational systems, and often they simply duplicate the exclusions of colonialism.'¹²⁹ In the case of homosexuality, it was condemned by both Irish and British alike (and likewise it

¹²⁷ Eileen Battersby: 'The Tomes of Donegal', interview with Frank McGuinness in *The Irish Times* (30 September 1999), p. 13.

¹²⁸ John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 103.

¹²⁹ Ania Loomba: *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, p. 198.

was also condemned and criminalised by the rest of the world at the time). The banning of homosexuality was continued by the Irish through the legal system as well as the educational system after independence, and as such it is an example of duplication of British and colonial law. When one considers that prior to the British colonisation the ancient Gaelic Brehon laws were still in operation, the continuation of principally British law after independence clearly reflects Loomba's words, even though the distance, in time and practice, between Brehon and British law is considerable.¹³⁰

Later in the play, after an argument during dinner where Justin ends a long nationalistic speech with the provocative words 'Germany will win the war. The might of Hitler's army will win the war' (p. 37) and Alec points out that Justin will not be present at the battlefield fighting the might of Hitler, Justin is all too ready to interpret that as an accusation of cowardice. Cowardice is, as pointed out by McGuinness himself, unfortunately a term all too often used to describe gay men and their supposedly unmanly personalities.¹³¹ Significantly, it is to Marco, therefore, that Justin turns to deny that he is a coward, with Marco reassuring him that he is indeed not, and it finally enables Justin to admit openly his sexuality:

Justin: What would you know about me?

Marco: What you've told me.

Justin: What have I told you?

Marco: Everything.

Marco touches Justin's face. Justin kisses Marco's hands.

Justin: You'll tell no one else?

Marco: Come back to the house. After me. I'm there. (p. 38)

Earlier, Justin asked Marco if he knew what 'the Nazis do to men like you' (p. 33), a comment which is proof of Justin's ambivalence towards the Germans and the British. On the one hand, he wants the British out of the North, while on the other, giving his support to Hitler would in fact mean sanctioning his own death. Ambivalence on many levels is inevitable for Justin, and ambivalence also enters his life through Marco, who

¹³⁰ Brehon law was actually attempted re-established by the 1919 – 1921 Dáil, but they soon resorted to essentially British law because this was, after all, more practical after centuries of experience with it. See John O'Beirne Ranelagh: *A Short History of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 1994), p. 215.

¹³¹ See Eileen Battersby: 'The Tomes of Donegal', interview with Frank McGuinness in *The Irish Times* (30 September 1999), p. 13.

is Italian-American and therefore can be seen to represent both the Axis nations and the Allies. This Italian connection is not entirely negative, though, as Italy surrendered to the Allies after Benito Mussolini's fall from power in 1943 and from then on fought against Hitler's forces. Later in the play, Justin dreams, perhaps unrealistically in light of his homosexuality and Italy's position as centre of the Catholic world, about a future in Italy with Marco. His dream of an idyllic life is probably rooted in images of a romantic, classical Italy that are far from reality. Marco seems much more realistic, though, as he clearly has the perhaps more open-minded and diverse, and certainly crowded, Little Italy in New York in mind (see *Dolly*, p. 61).

The invasion of the West home is clearly one that creates imbalance, conflict and confrontation, and causes new and old relationships to be established or resumed. Immediately, though, there is a comic moment of culture clash occurring as silent Jamie O'Brien, Marco's Irish-American cousin, demonstrates that despite his Irish heritage, his knowledge of Irish reality is completely outdated and reminiscent of the image tourists to this day might have of the country:

Marco: Well, Jamie, are the Irish as you hoped to find them?

Jamie: No.

Rima: Enlighten us why?

Jamie: I thought you might dance and sing, and have the neighbours in to play music. (p. 32)

This idyllic and witty vision is of course far from reality, and troubles begin to surface for each of the characters as they interact on a regular basis with the three newcomers. As we have seen, Justin is encouraged to admit to himself his sexuality through his meeting with Marco, while Dolly's ambivalent and unsettled romantic feelings for Alec, whom she broke up with after he had an affair with a man, are brought up to the surface again after many years. Esther, who is unhappy and unfulfilled in her marriage to Ned, starts flirting rather openly with Jamie, who also finds himself being the object of the young house servant Anna's affection. The impact of the foreign invasion is one of mainly emotional turmoil and uncertainty, and it becomes impossible for the West children to hide from a confrontation with themselves or with the others involved.

Rima West seems to be the only one not seriously affected by the changes around her, but that is because she's the mastermind behind it all through her bringing Marco and Jamie to the house: two men that respectively are responsible for Justin's acceptance of his sexuality and also for testing Esther's loyalty to her apparently dull and

disappointing husband. Rima also persists in urging Alec to ask Dolly to marry him, and it becomes obvious that she is constantly, cunningly and most affectionately watching over her children and trying to lead them in directions that can enable them to make the right decisions the day she is no longer there to look after them.

Rima is reminiscent of a matriarchal figure as she enjoys the power she still has in her own house over her offspring. As a mother and woman, she also occupies a special position in the Irish state, whose 1937 *Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland)* gave particular attention to the position of the family and the woman's place within it: 'In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.'¹³² There is a sense that this glorification of the woman as indispensable homemaker is a reinvention of the Mother Ireland myth. The goddess that is militant and aggressive for the cause of national independence must, however be said to be replaced by a notion of woman as gentle and made to stay in the home, being revered and admired only as long as she stays within her assigned space. The assigned space provided is made very clear through the Constitution: 'The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.'¹³³ Rima, therefore, is clearly still under the influence of patriarchy (the same could be said about Esther, who gave up her job to stay home, even though she can't cook), and has limited power outside the confines of her house.

The West family don't seem to be too influenced by the words of the Constitution or social expectations, however, as Dolly got her education at Dublin's Trinity College before setting up her own business in Italy, and Esther used to work as a part-time teacher. All three West women are certainly rather strong and independent women who hardly ever have experienced the 'luxury' of relying on a man's income alone. They have, therefore, never been a standard family as such because of the father who was absent even before his death, but nevertheless they are a family unit with great significance to all its members.

It is noticeable that when Eamon de Valera came to power in 1932, one of his first projects was to frame a nation-defining constitution for the independent state of Ireland. The Constitution based its fundament on what Gerry Smyth identifies as two different,

¹³² *Constitution of Ireland*, Article 41, §2.1, p. 136.

¹³³ *Constitution of Ireland*, Article 41, §2.2, p. 138.

even opposing, nationalisms: ‘cultural nationalism (based on custom, language and communal memory)’ and ‘civic nationalism (based on citizenship, social rights and obligation).’¹³⁴ It was a document that was supposed to be unifying, defining and nationalistic in its establishment of a national code based on a sovereign right ‘to develop its life, political, economic and cultural, in accordance with its own genius and traditions.’¹³⁵ It was also a document deeply rooted in the resistance movement’s glorification of national myths and distinctive Irish symbols. These symbols came to be prime signifiers of what constituted the Irish nation, as these included, for instance, the green, white and orange tricolour flag, the Irish language, the Constitution itself and also a national anthem. The first two of these national symbols are actually mentioned specifically in the Constitution under the definition of the State (Articles 7 and 8), something which emphasises their importance.

Nationalism was of course an essential force in that ‘its continuing appeal, lies precisely in its ability to successfully speak on behalf of all the people’¹³⁶ even though, as we have seen, exclusions soon appeared. The Constitution was of course heavily influenced by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland since well over 90% of the population was Catholic;¹³⁷ the Constitution therefore relied very much on strong moral values and allowed little room for dissidence among the people in its serious effort to establish a united and as homogenous a nation as possible. Importantly, the family as an entity was given special status in the definition of the state as ‘the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.’¹³⁸

The assumption that the family is incorruptible and necessary for the upkeep of morality is certainly an ideal that is impossible to perfect and make real, something that is most visible in the family history of the Wests, where strong fatherly morality was broken early on, and two of the children are either tempted to stray or are sexually incompatible to the homogenous ideal. So can any family really be said to live up to the ideal? The Constitution is, one should remember, a document of pure idealism in many

¹³⁴ Gerry Smyth: *Decolonisation and Criticism*, p. 11.

¹³⁵ From *Constitution of Ireland*, Article 1, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Ania Loomba: *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, p. 198.

¹³⁷ According to the 1926 census, 92.6% of the Free State population professed Catholicism. See John O’Beirne Ranelagh: *A Short History of Ireland*, p. 230.

¹³⁸ *Constitution of Ireland*, Article 41, §1.1, p. 136.

respects when one ignores the necessary political technicalities of it, and as always ideals and good intentions are seldom possible to realise fully. I think it is one of McGuinness's intentions with the play to stress this fact through his focus on a family who live in a time where the state was characterised by idealism and visions of a strong and substantial national identity that had to rest on a solid fundament, with the result that individualism or difference was not wanted. Moreover, the unity of a nation is, as pointed out, necessarily based on a broad range of general symbols, images, assumptions and not least idealistic ideas of the nation, which means that 'forging the idea of a unifying past collectivity involves careful *selection* from multiple histories.'¹³⁹

Religion, another important aspect of Irish life and the Constitution, also plays its part in the lives of the West household, though they are evidently not regularly attending church. Justin is perhaps the only one who can be said to have religious leanings, as it surfaces that he once contemplated becoming a priest. We learn that Dolly went to Trinity College, even though it officially was for Protestants only,¹⁴⁰ and that she, according to Justin, has to be 'the first Irish Catholic who lived in Italy and came back a heathen' (p. 12). One would perhaps not expect an Irishman moving to Italy to come back to Ireland no longer concerned with religion when, after all, Italy is the religious metropolis, so to speak, of Roman Catholicism. Dolly's lack of interest in religion, however, was probably present long before she went to Italy since she chose to go to a Protestant university.¹⁴¹

The moral and social aspect of religion, however, is represented by Anna, their young servant who grew up an orphan in a convent, something Ned rather cruelly and arrogantly reminds her of when he notices that she is attracted to Jamie: 'I hope I haven't to remind you why you were reared in a convent in the first place. It was the only place who would take you in. Your mother didn't want you. Your father didn't want her. Don't end up like that, Anna. You'll be barred from every decent house in this

¹³⁹ Ania Loomba: *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, p. 196.

¹⁴⁰ The ban on Catholic students, though never actually enforced, was not formally lifted until as late as in 1970. Interestingly, it was a ban put in place by the Catholic Church itself in 1871 as a reaction to Trinity's non-denominational practice. Since its establishment in 1592, Trinity College itself never imposed any such bans, though Catholics had to take an oath to receive degrees. See John O'Beirne Ranelagh: *A Short History of Ireland*, pp. 51, 59 and 126 for further details.

¹⁴¹ There is also a point to be made about Rome as a colonial metropolis, ruling Ireland through religion. This is something that will be dealt with in the next chapter, however.

town' (p. 42). The threat of social stigmatisation is obvious in these words. Anna's memory of the convent upbringing, meant to prevent her going down the same road as her mother, is not one filled with joy: 'Dear kind nuns? More like mad women' (p. 42). These few but blunt words contain a strong critique of certain aspects of the Catholic Church and its special status in Irish society. They are a reminder of the tragic stories of child abuse suffered at the hands of priests and nuns that have surfaced in Ireland over the last decade. These children were social misfits because of their situation, and suffered because of courses of events that they had no control over, never asking to be born. People that are labelled misfits and outsiders by society are always included in McGuinness's plays, and *Dolly West's Kitchen* proves to be no different.

The Church's strong stance against homosexuals is of course also under fire in the play:

Justin: (...) What was I like before I met you? Twisted, miserable git.
I'm so ashamed –

Marco: Shut up your shame.

Justin: But what was I like?

Marco: A Catholic bigot.

Justin: Not all Catholics are bigots.

Marco: They are where we're concerned. (...) All I want from the Catholic church is an apology. A long apology. And I hope they will understand when I refuse to accept it. (p. 59)

Again strong social forces are behind the ostracism, and these forces make it difficult in every way to be accepted as equal to the rest of the group that (more or less) fulfils the demands of conformity. Justin and Anna are both victims of this, though Justin is in no imminent danger of being marked as different as long as he suppresses his sexuality or keeps it private and secret. In order for both of them to be rid of their potentially destructive outsider status, however, they have to leave Ireland for good or face the grave consequences that will inevitably affect their mental health and social status. For Anna, marriage to an eligible foreign soldier represents the ticket to freedom, anonymity and a fresh start. For Justin, a life in a less transparent society would be necessary to be open about his sexuality and at the same time remain anonymous and thereby relatively safe from intolerance. Neither of the two have the prospect of a rich life in the small town of Buncrana or the small and (striving to be) uniform country of

Ireland in the 1940s. The two American soldiers Marco and Jamie represent an opportunity to get away for both.

Despite its many comic and funny moments that bear evidence of the strong bonds holding the West family together, the play rapidly grows darker as the war progresses, the soldiers' departure approaches and the West family finds it impossible to hide from the outside influences and the turmoil these influences have created in their everyday lives. Signs of confrontations between the different interests in the family are apparent, and a number of arguments take place. But the course of the war still overshadows any major outbursts that necessarily must come before there can be any resolution. Rima, wise as ever, is concerned about Irish neutrality and the passive effect of it, and clearly sees the ambivalence inherent, as well as the consequences facing the people most affected by the raging war. Her words are evidence of the shortcomings of neutrality:

Rima: (...) If any country should have opened the door to any people facing what they are facing – Ireland –

Alec: It might not be as bad –

Rima: We did nothing to save them.

Alec: Ireland's a neutral country.

Rima: Do you believe that?

Alec: No.

Rima: Neither do I. (p. 49)

There is a strong suggestion here that Ireland, as a former colony, formerly under foreign occupation and hardship, should have made a clear statement, taken sides and, as Said puts it, pulled away 'from separatist nationalism towards a more integrative view of human community and human liberation.'¹⁴² Rima's words also make a poignant parallel to the present, with Ireland today facing an influx of refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants from crisis-struck parts of the world, an influx which has not been dealt with only positively by the Irish public. McGuinness, though, here seems to suggest that as a nation that has provided the world with millions of immigrants, Ireland should open its border with the same matter of course as its people have crossed other countries' borders. Anything else would be hypocrisy.

Then tragedy also hits the West family when Rima suddenly dies shortly before the three Allied soldiers go off to participate in the final and decisive stages of the war.

¹⁴² Edward W. Said: *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 273.

Fears of imminent death and lost reunions of love and affection if the Allied offensive fails overwhelm the already mourning West siblings, and a flood of anger, confrontations, arguments and bitterness for a while takes over the West household. Dolly and Esther argue over Esther's obvious interest in Jamie, with Ned enduring the pain of hearing Esther confessing to temptation. The result is that Esther calls Dolly a witch and tells a forgiving Ned she'll never leave him. Dolly and Alec confess their lasting love for each other, though it is with some remorse since Alec may well die at war and the shadow of his bisexuality is still present. Justin and Marco consolidate their bond through memories of difficult childhoods and coming to terms with their sexuality, while Anna grabs hold of the rejected and certainly terrified Jamie as a storm erupts, promising yet more turmoil and uncertainty.

As the third act begins, reconciliation between the siblings takes place before the actual military war descends on the family. The second scene of the act is then set immediately after the war. The house is now about to be a solitary place as Dolly, Justin and Anna prepare to leave Esther and Ned behind to pursue their lives elsewhere with Alec, Marco and Jamie respectively. The consequences of war are uncomfortably obvious as the men returned from war are alive but marked inevitably by the horror of their experience. Nightmares, hatred, passiveness and inability to speak about the war especially affect Alec and Marco, who now need their partners to lead the way for them rather than the opposite, which was the case before they went out to fight. The confrontations are not completely over, however, as Ned is still in turmoil over Jamie. They have a fistfight in the garden that only stops when Esther intervenes, though her presence only makes Ned beg her for reassurance that their little baby daughter is actually his child:

Ned: Tell him. Tell me.

Esther: That is my child.

Ned: And mine – is it mine?

Esther: You tell him, Jamie.

Silence

Tell him the truth.

Jamie: The child's yours. (p. 80)

Ned overlooks the double meaning in Jamie's last comment that could as well be addressed to Esther as it could Ned. It is rather obvious that the question of fatherhood

has not actually been decisively answered,¹⁴³ but Jamie does not contest Esther. After all, he's been rejected by her and is now engaged to the lively and young Anna, who is fully aware of what feelings Jamie had for Esther. Esther reconciles herself with her marriage, and even recognises that because of Ned's forgiveness and loyalty, 'I had married the best of men. I didn't love him, I still don't. But he is still the best of men' (p. 75).

There is definitely resolution, fulfilment and survival towards the end of the play then, even though the atmosphere is not filled with joy and sheer happiness. As in so many Irish families, emigration is on the agenda. The West siblings and their maid are ready to spread their wings and follow their men abroad. They are leaving Ireland behind to seek happiness elsewhere. There is a sense that Ireland cannot possibly provide them with what they need; it is too restrained and judgemental, and the three who leave don't perhaps possess the necessary strength to change a society that is very set in its doings, even after only a few years of independence. The prejudice against people that don't fit in with the national ideals is too difficult to confront, and as such subjugation continues, though on a different level than during the colonial period. It is now the colonised themselves who make judgement on their fellow countrymen and women. Independence, therefore, came with a price for many individuals.

As the play ends, it bears with it the dark forebodings of a less peaceful future for Ireland, and it clearly points to the fact that only some twenty-five years after World War II ended, Northern Ireland would see the terrible consequences of war, horror, violence and turmoil again:

Dolly: Buncrana.

Alec: That's never known a war. That's never lost its young. I hope it never does.

Dolly: If we ever do, it will be our own doing.

Alec: Would you do that to each other? (p. 83)

(...)

Alec: Is the war over?

Dolly: I said I hope so. (p. 85)

¹⁴³ In the original Abbey Theatre production of the play that premiered in October 1999, Esther's comment 'that is my child' was emphasised to such an effect that the suggestion was she doesn't know which of the men is in fact the father of her daughter.

The family conflicts have encapsulated the Irish conflict, and though the outcome is one of life for the West family, the violent outcome for a part of Ireland is all too well known by now. As will be made evident in the next chapter on *Carthaginians*, the consequences of the continued presence of a colonising power in Northern Ireland are grave and depressing, and certainly stand in stark contrast to the peace, reconciliation and (relatively) successful process of consolidation in the South.

Carthaginians

Through the previous chapters, colonialism in Ireland has been exposed and explored from the beginning of British colonisation in the 16th century through to Home Rule demands that finally lead to partition and independence for twenty-six of Ireland's thirty-two counties. After the partition of Ireland in 1922, Northern Ireland, consisting of six Ulster counties, remained a part of the United Kingdom, with a local Northern Ireland government ruling the province from the Stormont buildings for almost exactly fifty years until 1972, when direct British rule again was imposed. *Carthaginians* (1988)¹⁴⁴ is a play that looks at the situation in Northern Ireland for the Catholic nationalist minority after 1922, and specifically the desperately grave and chaotic situation that arose in the late 1960s and was intensified in 1972 with the re-implementation of direct rule and thereby what can be said to be the creation of a renewed colonial situation where all affairs were administered from the colonial metropolis.

Carthaginians is also a play that can be seen as a companion piece to *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. According to the playwright himself, the two plays should unquestionably be seen in relation to each other,¹⁴⁵ and the connection between them is undoubtedly fruitful in pursuing a broader, more complete, understanding of the Northern Irish situation. *Carthaginians* explores the (Northern) Catholic, nationalist consciousness similarly to how *Observe the Sons of Ulster* explored the Northern Protestant mind through a setting of war. The historical frame of *Carthaginians* is likewise a tragic, decisive moment in Irish history: namely that of the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, a most violent event that took place in Derry on January 30, 1972.

As pointed out, this was the event that proved crucial to the British decision to return to direct rule again after fifty years of devolved Ulster government and almost no British interference. This was of course a terrible blow to the Protestant majority, who were suddenly in a position that was uncomfortably colonial and restrictive. Ulster, and

¹⁴⁴ All quotes and references to the play are from Frank McGuinness: *Carthaginians*, in *Plays One* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 291 – 379.

¹⁴⁵ See Richard Pine: 'Frank McGuinness: A Profile', p. 29.

particularly its Protestant population, was reduced from ‘the proud position of a “self-governing state” to the frustrations of being a “direct rule colony”, one whose fate, moreover, is in British hands.’¹⁴⁶ Even more serious to the Protestant majority was the feeling that the British people could ‘no longer be counted as Protestants’ natural allies.’¹⁴⁷ In this play, however, it is not the Protestants who are at the centre, but the Catholics who not only had to accept being ruled by a fundamentally discriminatory Protestant state, but who after the 1972 Bloody Sunday atrocities also faced being subjected to further (administrative and military) colonisation by the British government. All this of course added to the feeling of isolation and abandonment after being involuntarily excluded from the Irish Free State (and later Republic).

The seven characters we meet in the play are all extremely marked by the sudden deaths on Bloody Sunday of 13 civilian Catholics (one more died later, making the actual number fourteen dead) at the hands of the British army, the old symbol of imperialism again present in Ulster after the renewed surge in violence in the otherwise internally self-governed province. Though Bloody Sunday is a very recent event, it has quickly gained status as a mythical moment in Irish history and is frequently used as a nationalist means of emphasising the wrongfulness and injustice of Northern Ireland’s inclusion in the UK.¹⁴⁸ The strong historical importance of the 1972 Derry bloodshed is also made painfully obvious through the naming of the day itself as Bloody Sunday, which is already the name of another painful event in Irish (nationalist) history, as the first Bloody Sunday occurred on 21 November 1920 in Dublin, when twelve innocent people were killed by British soldiers at Croke Park.¹⁴⁹

Two fatal events coming to share the same name and a very similar course of events clearly constitute a powerful image of Irish suffering at the hands of an unwelcome

¹⁴⁶ Pamela Clayton: *Enemies and Passing Friends*, p. 160

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161. See also Liam O’Dowd’s new 1990 introduction to Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* for a good outline of the Ulster Protestants’ situation after 1972. Jonathan Bardon’s *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992) undoubtedly gives the best historical survey of the entire situation.

¹⁴⁸ Currently, the Saville Inquiry is underway in Derry to try to establish exactly what happened on Bloody Sunday. So far, the inquiry has, through interviewing witnesses, concentrated very much on establishing ‘who did what, where and when’ and especially the question of who fired the first shot (the British Army, as presumed by most people, or in fact the IRA?).

¹⁴⁹ The Croke Park killings were repercussions for the killings of fourteen undercover British intelligence officers earlier that day by Michael Collins’s men.

foreign power, and that the first of these Sundays should be repeated in similar circumstances some fifty years later, is unquestionably a good reason to be overcome by grief, shock and a certain degree of rage at the unending violence suffered as a result of long-standing colonialism. Colonialism was far from over for Northern Catholics once Northern Ireland also gained internal self-rule from 1922. What happened was that 'Northern Ireland sought to legitimate its separation by appeal to the values of civil society. Yet since these values were explicitly derived from Protestantism, this appeal succeeded in constituting a violently sectarian state.'¹⁵⁰ The violence was relatively contained only until the late 1960s, when the 'sectarian repressive state apparatuses sanctioned by permanent emergency laws'¹⁵¹ came under increasing pressure from Catholics who no longer could accept obvious discrimination in areas such as employment, housing and certainly local government. What followed was an increasing number of peaceful (Catholic) demonstrations that escalated into repeated violent clashes between demonstrators and Protestants and often also the RUC.

To the play's seven characters, who, unlike the all-male *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, are a mixed gender group made up of three women, three men and a socially marginalised homosexual man with transvestite and/or possibly transsexual tendencies, therefore, the escalating violent reality of Northern Ireland that resulted in the terrible deaths of thirteen innocent civilians in Derry amounts to a terrible personal blow after experiencing renewed violence and terror after more than forty years (from 1922 to the late 1960s) of relatively peaceful, though unfair, coexistence in Northern Ireland. Therefore, they all have, in some way or another, resorted to repression of the whole incident in order to avoid complete breakdown and even greater pain. Their despair is ample evidence of the problems of living with and coming to terms with a colonial situation, since 'the colonial experience is a *live* experience in the *consciousness* of these people (...). The experience is a continuing *psychic* experience that has to be dealt with and will have to be dealt with long after the actual colonial situation formally "ends".'¹⁵²

Repression of memory and amnesia, both individual and ultimately collective, are central themes in this play, and are of course closely related to the experience of colonialism and especially the consequences of (colonial) violence and war. Notably, as in

¹⁵⁰ David Lloyd: *Ireland After History*, Field Day Essays (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), p. 81.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁵² George Lamming, the Barbadian novelist, quoted in Ania Loomba: *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p. 185.

Observe the Sons of Ulster, McGuinness does not describe the actual horrors of Bloody Sunday, nor does he involve himself in a discussion of the reasons behind the terrible killings. Rather, he moves away from this perhaps more conventional approach and focuses on the complexities of the suffering and pain the experience of sudden death and violence has inflicted on people whose only means of response left is confusion, incomprehension and temporary denial of the knowledge that something ferociously cruel has taken place. It is therefore the consequences of violence that constitute the main aspect of the play, and the disturbing images of these consequences haunt the characters in various degrees of intensity throughout the play.

Death is an ever present factor in *Carthaginians* through the graveyard setting and the fatal Bloody Sunday, and thus grief is also an integral part of the play and is essential in working towards a full understanding of it and its complex subject, so that the play 'not only dramatises the difficulty in finding a mutual occasion in which the characters can grieve, but the process through which a collective moment can be worked towards.'¹⁵³ It is notable that the characters who occupy the graveyard are not in fact primarily united by grief over the terrible Bloody Sunday deaths, but united by a belief in a specific and mutual vision. The vision is spectacular and fantastic: the miraculous resurrection of the dead. Their underlying reason to believe in their vision is, of course, Bloody Sunday, but as long as it is not outspoken, their grief cannot be mutual, communal or publicly commemorative, as is made obvious through this conversation between the three women:

Greta: What's wrong, Maela?

Maela: Talking about it.

Greta: About what, Maela?

Maela: What I've seen.

Greta: What the three of us have seen, Maela.

Maela: Aye, the three of us. First I'm living in the graveyard. Then Sarah came to it. Then you, Greta. And all because we believe in the same thing. 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. (p. 298)

An equally integral part of the play must therefore be the question of how to achieve release, resolution and an imperative collective moment, which in the play is brought forth through the actions of a go-between character who is both outside and inside the

¹⁵³ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 73.

space of society present in the play. Significantly, this character also occupies a gendered space in between the men and women through his transvestite leanings.

Again we see that McGuinness has placed a homosexual in a prominent and crucially important position, and again homosexuality itself is not the main concern of the play. It is also quite evident from the outset that the homosexual man in this play is not seemingly as marked by his sexuality as one would initially presume of someone from a Catholic-influenced background, and that an identity conflict is not explicitly present or thematically explored because that is not the objective of this play. The outsider status of any homosexual is, however, again used as an effective device to bring forth the sought after solution, where the dispossessed and marginalised character manages to create a much needed common ground for the dislocated memories of a group of people who need to be freed from internal captivity.

The setting of this play is immensely important and is the main factor that is responsible for creating a strong atmosphere of death. The Derry graveyard where the play takes place is like any other graveyard in the world: a burial ground for dead corpses, dead souls and lost lives. However, the specific setting of Derry especially works as a poignant reminder of the frequent deaths in Northern Ireland caused by a violent conflict that not only culminates in the graveyard for far too many victimised and innocent (as well as a number of actively involved) people, but also the conflict sometimes actually takes place in graveyards and thus adds a rather bizarre and surreal element to an already distorted situation.¹⁵⁴ A graveyard is also basically a public, open place in which to commemorate the dead and in a consolatory way visit those who are lost to us, so that 'the graveyard is simultaneously an intensely private and public space, a place of transition, a transitory point between the living and the dead.'¹⁵⁵

Six of the seven characters in the play have gathered in the Derry graveyard for personal reasons that are all related to the overwhelming pain of death, only their pain has, as pointed out, developed into a fantastical vision of the resurrection of the dead who rest in that graveyard. Their vision is the result of their inability or unwillingness to cope with and accept the tragic deaths that occurred on Bloody Sunday, a fantasy which

¹⁵⁴ In Belfast's Milltown cemetery, three people were killed by a Loyalist gunman's wild firing at the funeral of three IRA activists who had been killed by the British SAS in Gibraltar. This shooting occurred in March 1988, six months prior to the premiere of *Carthaginians*. See Robert Kee: *Ireland – A History*, p. 259.

¹⁵⁵ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 73.

substitutes for the grief they cannot even begin to express to themselves or to others, privately or publicly. Their minds are unquestionably disturbed, though insanity is not an effect of their consciousnesses being twisted. Their lives have lost meaning to them in the light of violent events, and they need a miracle to release themselves from the numbness that in different ways has seized them all. There is a shattered community in urgent need of restoration, and this restoration must include acceptance of (though not compliance with) a colonial, discriminatory and violent reality.

The six characters that have taken the decisive step to live in the graveyard; all have backgrounds that explain or bring into focus the less visionary reasons behind their frantic commitment to deny death. Maela lost her daughter to cancer, coincidentally on Bloody Sunday, and finds it impossible to cope with both terrible events. So not only does she cling to the hope of resurrection for her daughter, she also suppresses her awareness of the thirteen other deaths that occurred that fateful day in order to survive the pain and agony her loss has inflicted on her: 'She's not dead, you know. She's not' (p. 300). Greta, on the other hand, wants her old self back: 'I would like to be what I used to be' (p. 350), because she was young and fertile then and not barren, now having to realise she will never have children of her own. She is as barren as Derry, city of violence, and as barren as the graveyard where she hopes a miracle will take place to restore her fertility and cast away death.

Self-destruction, on the other hand, is the path that Sarah chose, drowning her sorrows and pain in drugs, prostitution and aimless wandering, thus alienating her lover Hark, who turned to anger and yet more violence by taking part in IRA activities. Likewise, Seph, who like Dido is still in his twenties, also filtrated his anger through IRA violence and finally complete silence, depriving himself of language as a punishment for informing on his nationalist (and terrorist) comrades before finding release in the graveyard to speak again: 'But you see, I talked because I lived with what was done here one Sunday. I was here that Sunday. I saw it. I was in Derry on Bloody Sunday' (p. 346). Anyone informing on their people is of course considered a traitor, and in Irish nationalist history the informant plays an important part as scapegoat and traitor and is a symbol of disloyalty to the cause. Secrecy is a crucial element of resistance, and as David Lloyd points out, 'In Ireland, the culture of secrecy that has emerged in large part from the habits of a colonized population is a familiar and enduring phenomenon; in the

racialized sectarianism of the Northern Irish state, the conditions for secrecy and the impenetrability of communities to the state have been intensified.’¹⁵⁶

Paul is the only one of the six who admits to madness playing an important part in his graveyard waiting as he simply states that ‘I went about mad’ (p. 312), and seeks to bring back his sanity as well as the dead through building a pyramid from trash and rubbish where ‘the dead will find their way back to this world. When I’ll finish, they’ll rise, the dead. So I’ll keep going’ (p. 320). Building a trash pyramid can hardly be said to be a sane activity, but at least Paul is aware of his somewhat questionable sanity, and it is a historical fact that the Egyptians built their pyramids because it was believed they were the place where resurrection of the dead would take place. The question is, of course, how long the group can keep up their waiting before their unconsciousness catches up with them and forces them either into a world of madness, or into an acknowledgement of facts and through that the possibility of returning to a relatively normal state of mind.

The seventh character, the homosexual Dido, does not reside at the graveyard with the others, but supplies them with necessary goods and news every day. He is moving between the real world that the six others find impossible to inhabit anymore, and the borderland world at the graveyard where the group of six are waiting patiently for what they believe must come. Dido is in a messenger position, a visitor from the world of the living, bringing Derry to the six others, and vice versa providing Derry with news from the graveyard through acting as a spokesperson and propagandist: ‘My media bombardment is starting to pay off. Page seven’ (p. 306). Dido is an interesting character, not only because of his obvious, outspoken homosexuality in a Catholic community, but also because he seems less marked or traumatised by the events of Bloody Sunday and the conflict in general.

It could of course be argued that since he is one of the youngest of the seven (in his twenties) and since he is different through his sexuality, he has not been so fundamentally marked by the conflict because he has faced other major troubles and challenges in his social and personal life. For instance, Maela reveals that she met Dido at a time when he was thinking of killing himself out of heartache:

¹⁵⁶ David Lloyd: *Ireland After History*, p. 48. Informing has been covered by several Irish authors (among them Lady Gregory and Sean O’Casey), but the perhaps best-known Irish novel on the topic is Liam O’Flaherty’s now classic *The Informer* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, [1925] 1999).

Maela: Dido was fasting to death.

Dido: In protest. I'd been abandoned by this beautiful stranger. It was a form of suicide. (p. 304)

Maela talked him out of the suicide attempt, however, and got Dido involved in local quiz-shows to keep his mind preoccupied. It seems clear that Dido has had much to deal with in his personal life. That being said, he also finds time to express his opposition to the British, though his involvement in anti-British activities seems entirely individual and based on a joking approach, as his great ambition in life is 'to corrupt every member of Her Majesty's forces serving in Northern Ireland. (...) It's my bit for the cause of Ireland's freedom' (p. 302). The seriousness of his ambition is obviously questionable and is hardly seriously intended, but it does target British soldiers, something that is significant in terms of Dido's resistance being non-violent and directed towards the foreign military presence in the north, and not against the Protestant community as such. This shows that despite fifty years of discrimination suffered under Protestant rule, the importance of an essentially foreign British military presence is essential as a concrete image of colonialism to the Catholic population in Northern Ireland. This focus on military presence as specific colonial presence also offers a glimmer of hope of some kind of reconciliation between the two divided communities in the future.

Dido, then, uses (or claims to use) seduction and sex to combat war, a practice that undoubtedly is hilarious as well as unlikely to succeed since his non-violent sexual stance prevents him from causing any actual harm, though he once touches upon the sexually darker subject of sadomasochism that would indeed involve him in more violent sexual activities, and he does point out that 'You fancy somebody, you take them to bed, you beat the shite out of them' and 'there's pleasure in sado-masochism' (p. 325). Dido clearly has a darker, more volatile side to his personality that threatens to break forth in certain circumstances. He is not, however, unstable or disturbed in the same way as the others. He has faced his problems and now appears to be a resourceful, caring and energetic young man who defies society's informal exclusion principle and crosses the rigid gender boundaries in a most playful manner. He is gay in all meanings of the word without being stigmatised as abnormal, and displays a sound attitude to the awful events surrounding him, as he survives and moves on without denying to himself the bad aspects of life and history in Northern Ireland. This is essential, as violence in this period started to become the norm of Northern everyday life that it still is today,

and as Davis Lloyd puts it: ‘the phenomenon of violence (...), though cumulative, daily and generally unspectacular, is normalized precisely by its long duration and chronic nature.’¹⁵⁷

Carthaginians is also a play that relies heavily on the classical, historical relation between ancient imperial Rome and the city of Carthage, with the relation functioning as a metaphorical parallel to the present, contemporary struggle in Northern Ireland between the Irish Catholics and the Protestant and British rule in the province. An interesting element of intertextuality presents itself as Virgil’s classical text *The Aeneid*¹⁵⁸ is incorporated into the play through a quiz show where imperial Rome’s destructive rule over Carthage and the suicide death of Carthage’s Queen Dido is highlighted and linked to the destruction and foreign (imperial) rule of Derry city. Thus the Catholic citizens of Derry, out of whom we meet seven especially traumatised individuals in the graveyard, can through the awareness of this part of history easily perceive themselves as being in a situation like that of the ancient Carthaginians, whose culture and history were repressed by the Roman conquest and subsequent rule.

Elizabeth B. Cullingford most interestingly points out that the use of the history of the relations between Romans and Carthaginians is not at all new in an Irish context; for centuries a parallel between Ireland and Carthage has been drawn on by Irish writers to explain the colonised Ireland’s situation and relation to the British Empire.¹⁵⁹ Cullingford also points out that the parallel is used as an effective anti-colonial metaphor, and that (in contemporary Irish literature) ‘the Rome-Carthage motif functions in complex and variable ways: as origin myth, colonial parable, and site of intersection between nationalism and sexuality.’¹⁶⁰ In this context, it is worthwhile looking at the power structure supposed to be present in a colonial relationship, with the coloniser as masculine and aggressive, and the colonised as feminine and thereby passive.

¹⁵⁷ David Lloyd: *Ireland After History*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Virgil: *The Aeneid*, ed. Frederick M. Keener, trans. John Dryden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), books I-IV.

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford: ‘British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anticolonial Metaphor in Heaney, Friel and McGuinness’, pp. 222 – 239. In addition to Frank McGuinness, Cullingford mentions other contemporary Irish writers like Seamus Heaney, Brian Friel and Anne Devlin who all have touched upon this Rome-Carthage subject, often as a parallel to Ireland.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Ancient Rome was, of course, an aggressive conqueror of land and cultures, and though Carthage was a substantial power in the Mediterranean and North African area prior to Rome's expansionist interests getting hold of it, history soon portrayed the Carthaginians as inferior and attributed them with feminine characteristics. Virgil's epic *The Aeneid* is completely in line with this destructive and negative image of a subdued people, as a main power figure in Carthage is, significantly, a woman who commits suicide. Dido, Queen of Carthage, the city's legendary founder, is abandoned by her beloved Aeneas in Virgil's text, and curses Rome before she dies, predicting war between Rome and Carthage.

The feminine is traditionally a weak attribute, thus the defeat of Carthage and its queen can easily be included in the Irish history of colonial struggle where the British colonial power is 'masculine' and the suppressed Irish culture is rendered feminine in its defeat and supposed submissiveness. The parallel to Ireland is obvious; up until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Ireland was still seen as a fatherland in the Gaelic bards' poetry, though when the British finally got a grip on the country, the notion of the fatherland was gradually transformed into connotations of a motherland. Richard Kearney points out that from a psychoanalytic point of view, 'the mother has always been a powerful unconscious symbol for one's forfeited or forbidden origins,'¹⁶¹ and it is therefore not surprising that the myth of Mother Ireland was to establish itself so strongly in the Irish Catholic minds that not only were deprived of their language, but also of their precious land.

Sexually, womanhood was to be deprived of any power or overt influence as the motherland was not only seen as being raped by the masculine conquerors, which in itself is an obvious expression of the oppression imposed on the once great Gaelic nation, but also womanhood was turned into a mythical, and thus non-real, ideal. In relation to the play *Carthaginians*, the traditional tropes of masculine and feminine polarities are subverted in a most complex way through the use of the Dido character. Dido was, in historical and legendary terms, a woman with power, and a woman who was defeated. Not so in McGuinness's play, where Dido is not only a man, but also a homosexual and sometime drag-queen who proclaims himself to be 'Dido, Queen of

¹⁶¹ Richard Kearney: *Myth and Motherland*, p. 20. He talks quite extensively about the shift from the notion of an Irish fatherland to a motherland in this essay. It could also be useful to look at his essay 'Faith and Fatherland' in *The Crane Bag* (Vol. 8, No. 1, 1984), pp. 55 – 66.

Derry' (p. 364). He is above all a survivor who manages to restore other victimised people's faith in themselves and life.

Traditional gender barriers are thus subverted and overturned to demonstrate that the Rome-Carthage situation is incomplete and inadequate to function as a credible and accurate parallel to Ulster. Carthage's greatness was after all obliterated by the expansionist Rome and subsequently completely extinguished from the face of the earth. Language, culture, the people: everything ceased to exist in the hands of another power. Interestingly, though Celtic Ireland was never conquered by the Romans, the great Julius Caesar was well aware of the Celts through Roman wars against Celtic tribes in Europe, and has provided history with a detailed account of the then-existing Celtic society in his *History of the Gallic Wars*.¹⁶² Ireland could as well have been conquered by the Romans had it not been for the incipient decline of the Roman Empire by the time they reached England. However, the British colonised Ireland with less annihilating success than Rome did to Carthage, and so in Northern Ireland the complex situation is that two cultures exist side by side without either one having been obliterated, and moreover, the British Empire is gone, so that ancient Rome doesn't quite fit into the traditional colonial framework anymore.

This does not mean that the colonial situation is completely over, however, as the settler colony in Ulster, the Protestant majority, are still determined to maintain the close ties with Britain, even though direct rule was a setback. As Pamela Clayton asserts, 'Britain is no longer an imperial power, but the dwindling of imperialist aims in the metropolis does not imply a parallel decline in the colonialist attitude of settlers. On the contrary: in areas faced with a combination of native inhabitants demanding power and a metropolis which has lost the imperial urge, the settler mentality is likely to come to the fore.'¹⁶³

In another sense, the image of Rome is a very strong factor in all this, not as a parallel to Britain, but rather as a symbol of the Protestant fear of 'Rome Rule', or a reverse colonialism where Ulster would be reunited with the Republic and subsequently dominated by Catholics. Rome does indeed play a most significant role in Irish Catholic life as a religious power, and it is here that the complication of the old trope can best be seen, as the people of Derry 'inhabit a city that was enslaved by the [Roman Catholic]

¹⁶² See John O'Beirne Ranelagh: *A Short History of Ireland*, pp. 9 – 11.

¹⁶³ Pamela Clayton: *Enemies and Passing Friends*, p. 227.

church long before it was invaded by British paratroopers.’¹⁶⁴ Derry, then, is indeed part of a Roman empire in much the same way as Carthage was, a reality that is clear to at least one of the seven characters in the play, the former quiz-show host Paul, who makes the others remember this fact of history through his questions:

Greta: British Empire?

Paul: The British Empire is dead.

Greta: The Roman Empire?

Paul: Roman Catholic Empire. This city is not Roman, but it has been destroyed by Rome. What city did Rome destroy?

Greta: Carthage. (p. 310)

The criticism of the power and vast influence Rome and the Vatican have on the Catholic Church in Ireland is quite evident, and the playwright himself has emphasised this aspect of religious imperialism in an interview with Richard Pine, where he points to the destructiveness such a power can have, and the similarities to the imperialism that Carthage experienced: ‘(...) and you are shaped physically and spiritually far more by that simple authority of Rome, which can be an exceptionally destructive force. *Carthaginians* looks at the acceptance of that authority in Ireland, at what happens to a people who move the centre of authority away from their own country to another organization, a much broader organization that spreads through Europe, and inevitably that can lead to the shying away from responsibility for one’s own life. When you do that you are handing authority to an empire which will destroy you ultimately unless you can confront what’s being done to you.’¹⁶⁵

This control of religious faith by the (Roman Catholic) church suggests there is a lack of personal freedom among Catholics; a shortcoming that is destructive to the extent of being partly responsible for the graveyard people’s torment and desperation, grasping the vision of a miracle as the only way out of their devastation. Another important factor in their devastating situation is, of course, also their lives in a society still very much marked by colonisation and British rule. There is a suggestion that the irrational Protestant fear of ‘Rome Rule’ and ‘Popery’ perhaps isn’t as irrational as it seems when one considers the influence the Catholic Church has had on Irish society. The

¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford: ‘British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anticolonial Metaphor in Heaney, Friel and McGuinness’, p. 232.

¹⁶⁵ Richard Pine: ‘Frank McGuinness: A Profile’, p. 30.

dangers of religious teachings and zeal certainly are evident in Northern Ireland, and the characters in the play have a rather cynical and sardonic view of this themselves:

Hark: Catholics shall stand with Catholics, Protestants with Protestants –

Maela: Should it not be ‘Catholics will stand with Protestants.’

Hark: I speak of dreams, sister, not of insanity. Let us be like the asshole and let us be apart. (p. 323)

Lack of personal freedom is not the sole responsibility of the Catholic Church though, as these Northern Irish Catholics are also victims of fixed cultural stereotypes shaped by colonisation. These include not only such stereotypes as seen in the previous chapters (for instance, assumptions of laziness, unreliability, stupidity, immorality and cowardice), but also, particularly in the case of Northern Ireland, paranoid and generalising notions of all Catholics being terrorists, fanatically devoted to Ireland and the Pope, forever plotting to kill Protestants. Stereotypes of this kind are not only difficult to get away from, but also difficult to overturn and reshape, something that is a necessary process in a situation like the one presented in *Carthaginians*, where the past and present are merged into a space in which amnesia, denial and fear of the future dominate together with fantasies, visions and hopes for a more positive outcome. A change is necessary to free the troubled characters of their inherited, self-experienced, and self-inflicted pain, and this process comes to include a carnival play, interpersonal dialogue and games in which the characters gain release.

It is the little parody play-within-the-play called ‘The Burning Balaclava’ that is the device most responsible for triggering off the change that eventually does occur. Dido is the mastermind author behind it, and as well as a release factor, the little play also functions brilliantly to highlight not only the media’s minimally diversified presentation of Northern Ireland, but also the different stereotypes that have grown supposedly to fully represent the province. Through the carnival play, criticism is directed at representations of the troubled province and Ireland in general. In particular, there seem to be an element of critique of Sean O’Casey’s very successful and popular play set during the Irish Civil War (1922 – 1923), *Juno and the Paycock*,¹⁶⁶ a play that is critical of sacrifice in the name of nationalism, but contains stereotypical characterisations that could complicate any representational changes of Irish (in this case Catholic) people. An extract from

¹⁶⁶ Sean O’Casey: *Juno and The Paycock* in *Three Plays* (London: Papermac, 1994), pp. 1 – 73.

Mrs Tancred's speech in *Juno and the Paycock* is slightly rewritten and used to great melodramatic effect in 'The Burning Balaclava':

Mrs Tancred: O Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets, when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets! (*Juno*, p. 46)

Hark: My Sacred Heart, son. My Sacred Heart. Son, son, where were you when my Sacred Heart was riddled with bullets? Where were you? (*Carthaginians*, p. 342)

The criticism of O'Casey's stereotyped characterisation and plot could also represent a warning to authors who, in their attempts to portray the conflict in Ireland and Northern Ireland accurately, often (unintentionally) create cultural stereotypes such as those found in Dido's parody play (and O'Casey's play) in the process. A full range of more or less familiar personalities or stereotypes, then, are present in Dido's ridiculously exaggerated play, and everything in it works to turn the tide, so to speak, for the graveyard squatters and their confused minds. The distribution of roles is also most notable, as Dido assigns female roles to the men and male roles to the women. Again, he is in-between, playing one male and one female role, as well as being the author of the play under the assumed female name of Fionnuala McGonigle.

The function of this role-play and dressing up is important here, as the switching of gender roles and the costume props allow the characters to assume new identities and open up the possibility of getting out of the isolated and solitary state they have entered into. Dido's play offers a way of 'reinforcing social order and (...) promoting feelings of communal or corporate solidarity.'¹⁶⁷ Their estrangement from a collective is destructive because it hinders the healing that a wider supportive network such as family, friends and community can provide. Carnival, or role-play, here also crucially provides the opening up to a re-entry into such a necessary social network because it 'reawakens and strengthens feelings of solidarity among persons who will actually benefit from it. (...) since the needs of each individual are presumably best satisfied when he or she is identified with and supported by the collective.'¹⁶⁸ (The fact that Maela talked Dido out of committing suicide here makes an appropriate example of the importance of collective support.). Carnival is also a ritual that 'given the presence of sharpened political

¹⁶⁷ Michael D. Bristol: *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 27.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

antagonism, (...) may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*.¹⁶⁹ This catalyst function is evidently present through Dido's play and, equally important, it also offers a temporary (though therapeutic) refuge from the real world, as 'one might say that carnival celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order' and likewise one can also say that carnival is for *Carthaginians*' troubled characters 'the true feats of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal.'¹⁷⁰

Dido's constant focus on the feminine in his play also effectively works to question the traditional gender binary of masculine power versus feminine weakness, as seen in a colonial relationship. It is the women that are focused on in his little play, and his delegation of female roles to the men can be seen as an attempt at promoting non-violence, which is generally associated with women and femininity. His survival tactics must, therefore, be seen as an indication of the 'feminine way' as the stronger, more realistic way to survival and problem solution. At any rate, his homosexuality, that culturally is more associated with femininity and non-masculinity, also contributes to the subversion and rejection of the traditional male ways of conflict solving. The non-violent stance is certainly emphasised by Dido.

In his 'Balaclava' play, we are presented with a middle-aged Irish mother who is the heroine of the play (the one, played by Hark, whose lines resemble those of Mrs Tancred), her patriot son and his Protestant girlfriend, Mercy, whose father is an RUC man. Then there is a Catholic priest, an unemployed Derry man, a pious spinster who cherishes her Sacred Heart and her little dog, and finally we have the working-class British soldier who has ambivalent feelings about oppressing other working-class people (something that can also be found in O'Casey's play). The use of violence in the play is excessive to the extent of being ridiculous and humorous in one, and the clichés are so frequent it is obvious that this play exaggerates the Northern Irish slaughter, despite Dido's believing it to be 'just like real life' (p. 344) when the others recognise it as 'shite' (p. 344). The exaggerations and clichés, however, are based on real-life events, and therefore the play cannot be as completely unrealistic as the others seem to think, and, as we shall soon see, it later becomes clear that the action of Dido's play in fact has had positive influence on their troubled minds.

¹⁶⁹ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White: *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 14.

¹⁷⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 7.

The farcical elements in Dido's play and the characters' engagement in role-play can be closely related to Homi K. Bhabha's emphasis on mimicry as an important survival strategy in a colonial environment. The characters all take part in a mimicry of (supposed) roles present in Northern Ireland, and through this they manage to expose and thereby subvert these roles and create a space where stereotypes are rejected. Stereotypes are an important factor here, and Bhabha especially emphasises the falseness and hence destructiveness of stereotypical representations that Dido has so accurately adopted into his play. According to Bhabha, 'The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations.'¹⁷¹ As discussed in the introduction and in more detail in the chapter on *Mutabilitie*, mimicry can be seen as the main strategy of a disempowered colonised people, and in *Carthaginians* this becomes especially evident through the deployment of the farcical 'Balaclava' play where stereotypes are ridiculed and colonial authority disrupted (for instance, the British soldier is killed after much ado). As Bhabha points out, 'If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce.'¹⁷²

What the 'Balaclava' play sparks off is a transformation in the minds of the six, and a change takes place almost immediately as a result of the exaggerations of the play, and especially the death of all the tormented 'Balaclava' characters at the hand of the British soldier. What finally happens when the 'dead' characters then rise to kill the soldier in a last, violent, though significant on the real-life level, gesture, is that the dead do rise, even if it is only through fiction. On one level, they have symbolically obliterated, so to speak, the colonial threat, though it is not a moment of triumph, as Dido's soldier's last speech clearly emphasises the total lack of meaning of the reality of Northern Ireland: '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' (p. 344).

On the other hand, the question is can the visionaries still believe in their vision after labelling the action of the play 'shite'? Eamonn Jordan points out that 'ironically, the only time the dead rise is at the end of 'The Burning Balaclava'. We can read this detail

¹⁷¹ Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, p. 75.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

as saying that the visions are most definitely fictitious.’¹⁷³ The visionaries do not stop believing after acting out the play despite the realistically improbable resurrection of the dead that the British soldier killed. What happens instead is that they finally are able to find common ground to express their feelings about Bloody Sunday and what it did to them. Their initial retreat into denial is reversed by the mixture of laughter and murder in ‘The Burning Balaclava’, and their way of response is similar to that of a confession. The carnival and drag performance in Dido’s play is only one playful way of release, as they themselves turn out to be the dead people in need of resurrection. As Michael Bristol subtly states: ‘Clowning, devilment, abusive and summary popular injustice, hospitality and entertainment, and the deployment of Carnival artifacts such as masks and giants, are the tactical instruments of a resourceful collectivity with an active and independent will to sustain itself. Carnival is put into operation as resistance to any tendency to absolutize authority, and to the disruptive radicalizations of social life proposed and implemented by powerful ruling elites.’¹⁷⁴

The group’s recovery happens rather rapidly after their performance as each individual gradually opens up and tells the others of his/her life. Soon the individuals gather into one united group of mourners that sing songs, recite rebel poems and most importantly, recite the names of Bloody Sunday’s thirteen dead in a final gesture of acknowledgement (which is very similar to what the men in *Observe the Sons* do moments before they enter the battlefield). Their recovery is achieved, then, through personal interaction and finally recognition of a collective memory that needs to be appreciated as part of the continuous reality of life in Northern Ireland, no matter how painful. They must remember the dead and seek peace.

That these characters are living dead, visionaries and firm believers in the resurrection that eventually happens to them rather than the actual dead, is also underlined by the presence of quite a few obvious religious images in the play. Again, the fact that it is the living that are resurrected points to a critique of the church and religion in general as a sometime fictitious substitute for reality, though it also works to celebrate the idea of resurrection itself through the positive outcome for the characters in the play who believe so strongly. Ultimately, though, the play celebrates life through the commemora-

¹⁷³ Eamonn Jordan: *The Feast of Famine*, p. 85.

¹⁷⁴ Michael D. Bristol: *Carnival and Theater*, p. 213.

tion of the dead by the living who have successfully returned to life from a dormant state.

Biblical and religious connotations appear regularly throughout the play, and perhaps the most striking is that structurally, the number seven seems crucial, as there are seven characters, seven scenes, and crucially the play ends on a Sunday, the seventh day of the week (in most calendars, and certainly in the Irish one). Sunday, of course, also refers to the day of death in Derry, and it is important that the Sunday that the play ends with is not a fatal day for the people, but a transformational and triumphant one. The images of death that have dominated the play up until the final, seventh scene, are transformed into images of life: instead of a dead, black bird, birdsong is heard as morning light takes the place of night and darkness, and dead flowers have become dried flowers. The graveyard six 'lie down and sleep' (stage directions, p. 379) in the illuminating light, something which is similar to the Biblical version of earth's creation. The creation was completed on the sixth day, and on the seventh day God rested, just as the six people do in the play. Sleep, therefore, does not signify death, passivity and inability to manage reality in this play; rather, it signifies how the tormented characters have come to terms with reality, and peacefully have accepted it through a crucial process of rehabilitation.

The desperate, passive situation experienced by the six characters in the graveyard obviously needs to be changed in order for them to move on and come to terms with certain crucial realities. In their final chant together, they repeat such phrases as 'Sunday', 'Bury the dead', 'Raise the dead' and 'Forgive yourself' (p. 378), and as the light breaks, they are given peace and release. Not death, but life and survival emerge as their triumph in the end. Dido is the only one left awake since he did not need that kind of survival. His survival is to leave Derry behind: 'If I meet one who knows you [the six others] and they ask, how's Dido? Surviving. How's Derry? Surviving. Carthage has not been destroyed. Watch yourself' (p. 379).

Carthaginians turns out to be a play about survival more than anything else. It was always the characters themselves that were the dead in need of resurrection, and their painful journey culminating in release is ultimately a victory that also provides hope for the shattered society that is Northern Ireland. Survival instead of denial is their triumph. Throughout the Irish experience of colonialism, survival has been the main issue, and as *Carthaginians* comes to a close, this notion is upheld through McGuinness's strong emphasis on life itself and remembrance of the dead rather than revenge and retaliation

in the name of the dead and history. The colonial situation with its inherent notions of the difference between the coloniser and the colonised is proved false, unjust and dangerous to the individual and the collective. As Bhabha so accurately describes it: ‘the disavowal of difference turns the colonial subject into a misfit – a grotesque mimicry or “doubling” that threatens to split the soul and whole, undifferentiated skin of the ego.’¹⁷⁵ In *Carthaginians* the characters clearly manage to overcome this danger and come out of their horrible experience not completely destroyed, but personally and collectively united. That surely provides hope for the future.

¹⁷⁵ Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, p. 75.

Conclusion

It is obvious that Ireland's colonial and post-colonial legacy is a historical fact that cannot be ignored when dealing with aspects of Irish history, society, politics or indeed literature. This legacy has definitively been demonstrated throughout this thesis, and the legitimacy of seeing Ireland as a postcolonial nation should seem evident and unquestionable. There are, however, critics who, quite rightly, question the notion of colonialism as the sole factor responsible for Ireland's past and present experiences. Stephen Howe, for instance, is a historian who points out that certain historical changes and facts cannot be attributed to a colonial legacy alone. For example, he points out that isolationism after independence was not solely an Irish phenomenon, but, at the time, rather a world-wide one that affected many other countries that did not share Ireland's colonial past.¹⁷⁶ Howe does, however, concede that Ireland has a colonial past that is a most important factor of Irish development to the present, but 'only as part, and not on all levels the dominant part, of an extremely complex and unusual set of historical legacies shaping the Irish present.'¹⁷⁷

Colonialism is perhaps not the sole factor responsible for Ireland's past and present state, but in this thesis this important aspect of history has been emphasised because of its prominent and overwhelming presence in the five plays by Frank McGuinness that I have chosen to look closely at through a postcolonial analysis. Colonialism is a presence that has not received much critical attention previously, and this thesis is therefore, hopefully, a contribution towards a further expansion of postcolonial criticism of and attention to McGuinness's career. The focus in this thesis has been on more general postcolonial theory and colonial discourse theory applied to the Irish situation as presented in the plays. Central Irish postcolonial theorists such as David Cairns and Shaun Richards, Declan Kiberd, and David Lloyd, have not been given a very prominent place here because they are usually very author-specific in their postcolonial works (Lloyd, for instance, is very detailed on the postcolonial aspects of Yeats, Heaney and Beckett, but is more general in his supplementary comments on Ireland and postcolonialism as such), just as this thesis is also very specific on McGuinness.

¹⁷⁶ See Stephen Howe: *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 147 – 148.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

As has been made apparent through the chapters so far, the psychological impact of the colonial experience on the Irish mind as seen through the characters on display in McGuinness's plays, is severe and certainly a persistent factor that constitutes the most predominant presence in the plays. The strong reliance on accurate historical facts acts as a convincing (and necessary) framework that emphasises the psychological trauma that is at the centre of attention, and in the end it seems that survival is the basic factor that arises as triumphant in all the plays that I have looked at.

In the five plays I look closely at in this thesis, what seems to predominate in the applied postcolonial frame is essentially the journey that McGuinness's characters undergo before they can face and/or release their pain, anxiety, uncertainty, and other colonially inflicted forces (such as violence and terror) that threaten to tear them apart. This amounts to a tug-of-war, always closely related to personal versus public demands and expectations, and the tug-of-war also works to force the audience to question what they believe in and to face their own prejudices, suppositions and values.

Remembering the past, accepting the pain that always follows it in an Irish context, and being able to reevaluate their position in society without cutting the necessary ties completely, are all transformational strategies that strengthen the ability to go on living in an environment of uncertainty, chance and change. The characters one encounters in these plays mirror not only the time they live in, but also the time we live in at present because their experiences are subtly made into parallels to what many people might be experiencing now. The changes in Ireland are not of a kind that makes history distant and unfamiliar, as the violent consequences of colonialism are still present in the troubled Northern Ireland.

Frank McGuinness is probably a playwright somewhere in the middle of his career, still contemplating the directions he can pursue, the subjects he can utilise and the histories he can employ. He is, as shown, never afraid of focusing on sensitive areas of Irish history and society, and has distinguished himself in approaching the less acknowledged and indeed latent sides of a more diverse, yet less known and hidden, Irish culture. His lack of the expected inhibition against touching upon subjects such as the portrayal of the old enemy, the Northern Irish Protestants in *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, and his imposition of homosexuality upon the unsuspecting audience, has often caused quite a stir in Ireland. As McGuinness himself put it, 'Even in *Observe the Sons*, the first time, (...) people weren't comfortable with this possibility between brave men – it shows you

what they know about soldiers...'¹⁷⁸ In light of this, and in light of McGuinness's constant use of homosexual characters, it would certainly have been interesting to look more closely at the aspect of gender, sexuality and perhaps particularly homosexuality in relation to McGuinness and Irish attitudes to this often controversial subject. Unfortunately, this is an aspect of McGuinness's career that is (potentially) too substantial to be considered in any great length in this thesis. It is, however, a theme that certainly should be explored further elsewhere.

Causing a stir is usually a good sign that a playwright has managed to capture his audience, and the stirs that McGuinness consistently has caused through his career are testimony to his ability to make the audience think for themselves and consider in new ways aspects of life that they perhaps find unclear or know little about. Fear of the unknown is something that is challenged in every single McGuinness play, and the courage to challenge old prejudices and traditions is always emphasised as a main source to promoting survival, evolution and diversity. McGuinness is, as a result of his confrontational approach, a well-known and (mostly) popular playwright in Ireland. He is usually met with positive (and also positively startled) receptions by critics and audiences alike, simply because he dares challenge deep-rooted notions of what is right and wrong, true and false, good and bad.

It is probably because of the strong emphasis on Irish history that his plays have not reached a wider audience outside Ireland. Abroad McGuinness is best known for *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* and the less Irish-themed *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*. He has, however, reached a wider audience in Britain (both *Mary and Lizzie* and *Mutabilitie* were first staged in London) and North America (for instance, his version of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* was staged on Broadway) through some of his plays, and there have also been performances of a number of his plays in non-English countries such as Germany, Japan and Israel.

McGuinness's extensive work on versions of other internationally recognised playwrights such as Ibsen, Chekov, Brecht and Lorca also deserves critical attention. McGuinness has, for instance, been responsible for new (and mostly successful) versions of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and *A Doll's House*, Chekov's *Three Sisters* and Lorca's *Yerma*. It would certainly have been useful to look at McGuinness's versions and translations of plays by these famous playwrights, as these might reveal much about

¹⁷⁸ Mic Moroney: 'Coming Home', p. 16.

non-Irish influences on McGuinness's career and thinking as a playwright. It is, for instance, interesting to note that the translations that McGuinness has conducted, are all new versions of plays by authors who, in their time, were controversial and certainly confrontational, aspects that are clearly visible in McGuinness's own career.

As mentioned in the introduction, one very important source of influence on McGuinness's career is clearly Brian Friel, who is a contemporary of McGuinness's who also shares his Irish, Ulster and Catholic background. Friel started his dramatic career in the late 1950s and is today seen as not only the most prominent and successful contemporary Irish playwright, but he is also among the most internationally accomplished English-speaking playwrights. In interviews, McGuinness has acknowledged that Friel's works are a very important source of inspiration to his own career, and the fact that McGuinness directed a revived version of Friel's 1971 play *The Gentle Island* (a play that dealt openly with homosexuality) in 1988 and wrote the screenplay for the 1998 filming of Friel's acclaimed 1990 play *Dancing at Lughnasa* are clearly evidence of McGuinness's own preoccupation with Friel.¹⁷⁹

The similarities that exist between the two (such as the focus on marginalised people and colonialism) have been pointed out by a few critics, but there are no lengthy studies into this relationship, and I would suggest that there is clearly material available for such a comparative study to be conducted. For instance, it would probably be useful to look at Friel's 1973 play *The Freedom of the City* in relation to McGuinness's *Carthaginians* since both plays deal, in similar as well as different ways, with the events of Bloody Sunday. This would be an extensive project, however, and therefore it falls outside the necessarily more limited scope and length of this particular thesis.

Another aspect of McGuinness that has not been touched upon at all in this thesis is his poetry. It was as a poet McGuinness started his writing career, and though playwriting soon took over, he continued writing poetry. To date, he has published only two collections, though, and both came well into his career. *Boosterstown* (1994) and *The*

¹⁷⁹ See Richard Pine: 'Frank McGuinness: A Profile', pp. 29 – 30, Joseph Long: 'New Voices in Irish Theatre: An Interview with Frank McGuinness', pp. 9 – 19, and also Helen Lojek: 'Brian Friel's Gentle Island of Lamentation' in *Irish University Review* (Vol. 29, No. 1, Spring/Summer 1999), pp 48 – 59. The latter is as much an essay on the importance of Friel on McGuinness's career as it is about Friel's 1971 play *The Gentle Island*.

Sea with No Ships (1999)¹⁸⁰ are clearly very intimate and personal collections, which perhaps explains why McGuinness waited for many years to publish these poems. There is a passion about them that further exposes the empathy towards other people that is so evident in his plays, and many of the poems are dedicated to persons of private importance to McGuinness. I have not come across any critical assessment of these two collections of poetry, and this is obviously another part of McGuinness's career that probably should be properly assessed and given critical attention.

The appeal of McGuinness's plays, the presence of exciting themes and experimental techniques, will undoubtedly fascinate for many years to come and these aspects will probably make sure that the playwright can be recognised as one of the great of his generation. Since McGuinness is a (relatively) young and contemporary playwright, his plays have perhaps not received the critical attention they deserve, in Ireland or certainly abroad, and therefore there remains much to be said about his career so far, and there are high expectations for his future plays. Most certainly, there are still many challenges and opportunities available for critics interested in the works of Frank McGuinness.

¹⁸⁰ Frank McGuinness: *Boosterstown* and *The Sea with No Ships* (Oldcastle: Gallery Books, 1994 and 1999 respectively).

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